Western Story

Every Week Magazine Apr. 20, 1929

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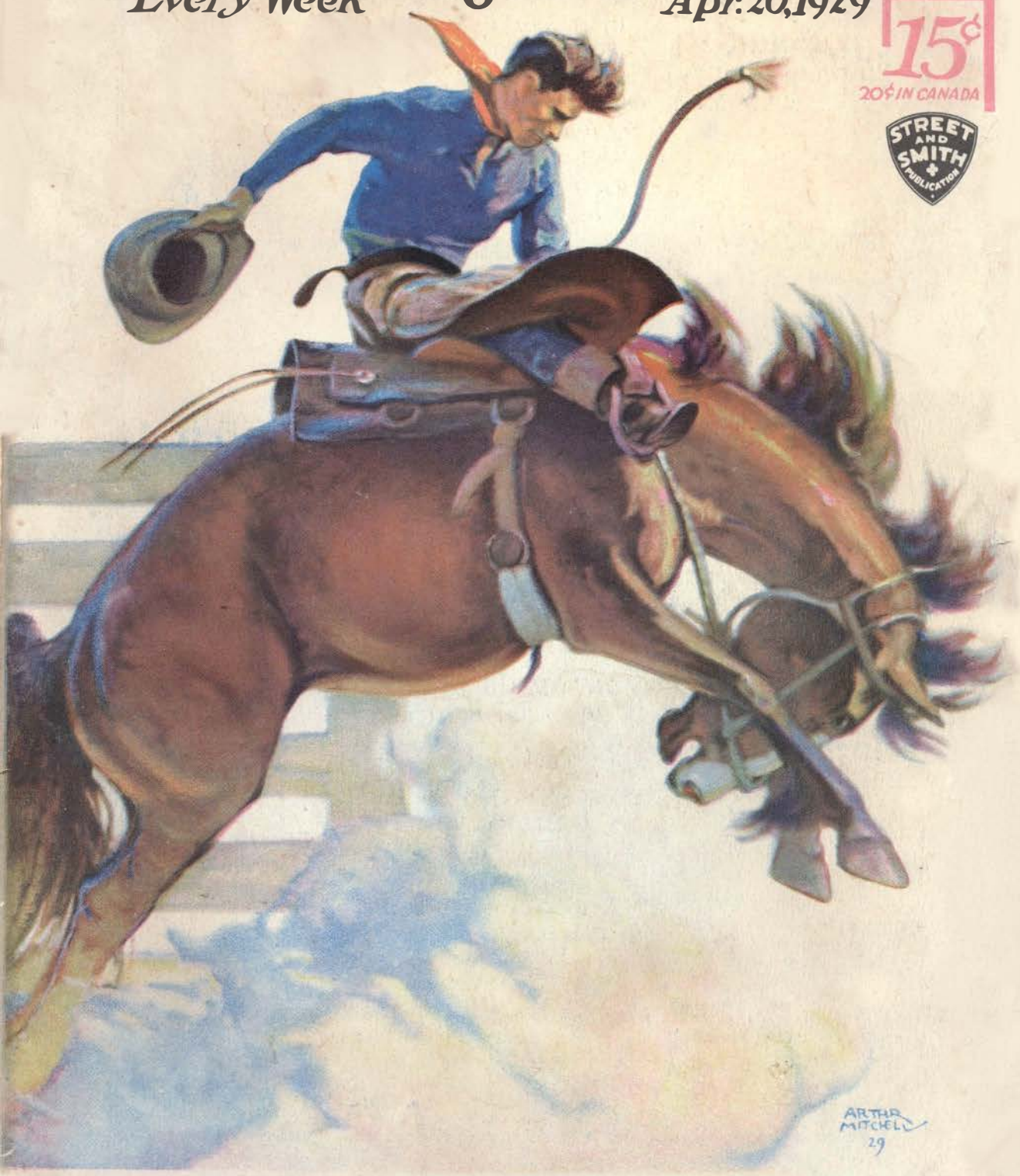

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WESTERN STORY
MAGAZINE

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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXXVI Contents for April 20, 1929 No. 2

ONE NOVEL

TWO SERIALS

SIX SHORT STORIES

TWO ARTICLES

MISCELLANEOUS

DEPARTMENTS

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

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I am going to give away, absolutely free, an 8 cyl. Studebaker Sedan to someone who answers this ad. It will be delivered thru the nearest Studebaker dealer, or winner may have its full value in cash, $2,250.00. This offer is open to anyone in the U. S., outside of Chicago, and is backed by a Big Reliable Company, which has already given away thousands of dollars in cash and prizes to advertise its business.

Solve This Puzzle

There are many objects in the picture of the circus above. See if you can find 5 that start with the letter "C." When you do this, write them on a piece of paper together with your name and address and send it to me right away.

$550.00 Given for Promptness

I am also giving away a Chevrolet Sedan; Victrola; Shetland Pony; Seven Tube Radio; Gold Watches and many other valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, including $550.00 for promptness. First prize winner will receive the Studebaker Sedan and $550.00 cash, or $2,800.00 cash. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded. Find 5 objects in the picture above starting with the letter "C" and send them to me right away with your name and address plainly written. $5,000.00 worth of prizes. Everybody rewarded.

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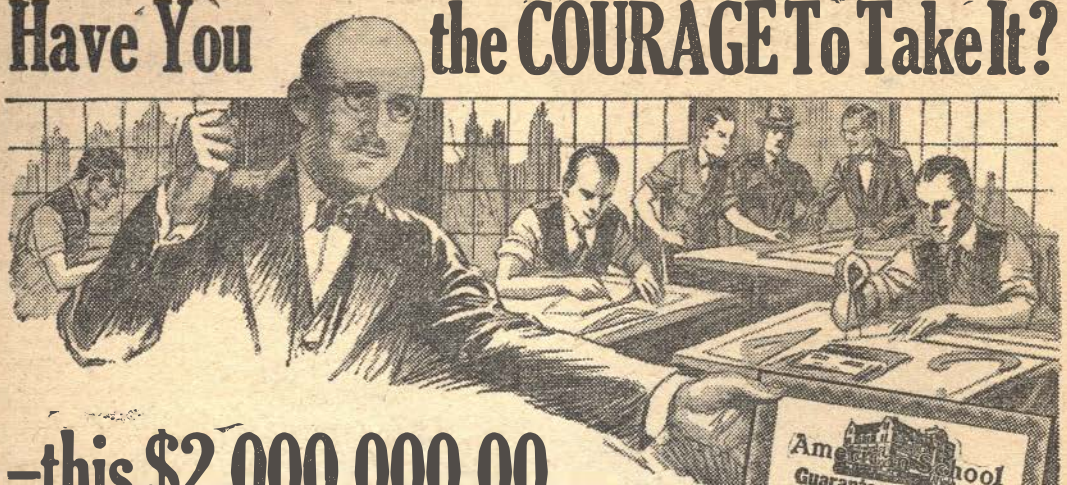

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"Only one other man and I, of six taking California State Board examination for Architect passed. Then I realized the thorough and practical training given by American School. In 18 months I have gone from tracer to Chief Draftsman, in charge of all architectural and engineering work in one of the oldest offices here." R. L. WARREN, Los Angeles, Cal.

"When I started American School training in the Spring of 1915 I was working 14 hours a night, seven nights a week for $1.83 a night. That fall I got a job in the Engineering Department of a large firm near here. Today I work 5½ days a week and my salary is larger than I ever dreamed of when I began that course in Mechanical Drafting." B. H. SEAVERNS, South Bend, Ind.

If you have been thinking of "taking a course" but have held back because you were afraid you didn't have education enough to learn better-paid work—if you have hesitated to take the risk that it would actually land you in the better position and increase your salary—*then here's the best news you ever heard in your life!*

I want to tell you about DRAFTING, and show you that it offers you everything in pay and opportunity that you ould hope for. I want to show you that a fine Drafting job is now easily within your reach. And I want to set before you an amazing plan which we have worked out with the co-operation of some of the biggest employers and engineers in America, to prepare you at home, in spare time, get you the job and raise your pay—absolutely without risk of a penny on your part.

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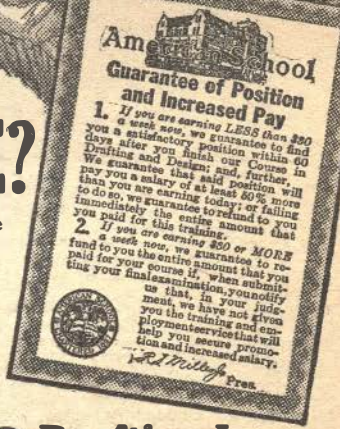

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This lighter in your pocket will pay you big profits daily. Just show it and make big sales and profits on sight. Get started at once! Send 50c for sample and selling plans, or better yet, order a dozen at our regular dozen price of $6.00. Send $1.00 deposit—will ship C. O. D. for balance. The dozen comes packed in a colorful self-selling display box. You make $12.00 clear profit selling to consumers, or use sample box to take orders from dealers. You take no risk ordering the dozen. Money refunded if you do not find them quick sellers.

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Send NO Money. Send postal and pay when your watch arrives. **FREE TRIAL.** Wear 10 days at our expense. Money back if not delighted.

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BRADLEY, A33 Newton, Mass.

Send Watch, Knife and Chain. *I Risk Nothing.*

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"but when I started to play the laugh was on them!

"WELL, folks, I guess we'll have to lock up the piano and make faces at ourselves."

Helen Parker's party was starting out more like a funeral than a good time.

"Isn't Betty Knowles coming?" an anxious voice sang out.

"Unfortunately, Betty is quite ill tonight and Chet Nichols is late as usual," replied Helen gloomily.

"I know some brand new card tricks," volunteered Harry Walsh.

"Great!" said Helen. "I'll go and find some cards."

While she was gone I quietly stepped up to the piano bench, sat down, and started to fumble with the pedals underneath. Someone spotted me. Then the wisecracks began.

They Poke Fun at Me

"Ha! Ha! Ted thinks that's a player-piano," chuckled one of the boys.

"This is going to be a real musical comedy," added one of the fair sex.

I was glad I gave them that impression. So I kept fiddling around the pedals—making believe that I was hunting for the foot pumps.

"Come over to my house some night," said Harry, "I've got an electric player and you can play it to your heart's content. And I just bought a couple of new rolls. One is a medley of Victor Herbert's compositions—the other . . ."

Before he had a chance to finish I swung into the strains of the sentimental "Gypsy Love Song." The joking suddenly ceased. It was evident that I had taken them by surprise. What a treat it was to have people listening to me perform. I continued with "Kiss Me Again" and other popular selections of Victor Herbert. Soon I had the crowd singing and dancing, and finally they started to bombard me with questions . . . "How? . . . When? . . . Where? . . . did you ever learn to play?" came from all sides.

I Taught Myself

Naturally, they didn't believe me when I told them I had learned to play at home and without a teacher. But I laughed myself when I first read about the U. S. School of Music and their unique method for learning music.

"Weren't you taking a big risk, Ted?" asked Helen.

"None at all," I replied. "For the very first thing I did was to send for a Free Demonstration Lesson. When it came and I saw how easy it was to learn without a teacher I sent for the complete Course. What pleased me so was the fact that I was playing simple tunes *by note* from the very start. For I found it easy as ABC to follow the clear print and picture instructions that came with each lesson. Now I play several classics by note and most all of the popular music. Believe me there's a real thrill in being able to play a musical instrument."

• • •

This story is typical. The amazing success of the men, women and children who take the U. S. School of Music course is largely due to a newly perfected method that makes reading and playing music—*actually simple!*

Even if you don't know one note from another now, you can easily grasp each clear, inspiring lesson of this surprising course. You can't go wrong. First you are *told* how a thing is done, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and *hear* it.

Free Book and Demonstration Lesson

Our wonderful illustrated Free Book and our Free Demonstration Lesson explain all about this remarkable method. They prove just how any one can learn to play his favorite instrument by *note*, in almost no time and for just a fraction of what old slow methods cost. The Booklet will also tell you all about the amazing new *Automatic Finger Control*.

Forget the old-fashioned idea that "talent" means everything. Read the list of instruments to the left, decide which you want to play, and the U. S. School of Music will do the rest. *At the average cost of only a few pennies a day!* Act NOW! Clip and mail this coupon today, and the fascinating Free Book and Free Demonstration Lesson will be sent to you at once. No obligation. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3594 Brunswick Bldg., New York City.

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Please send me your free book "Music Lessons in Your Own Home" with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane. Free Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your easy payment plan. I am interested in the following course:

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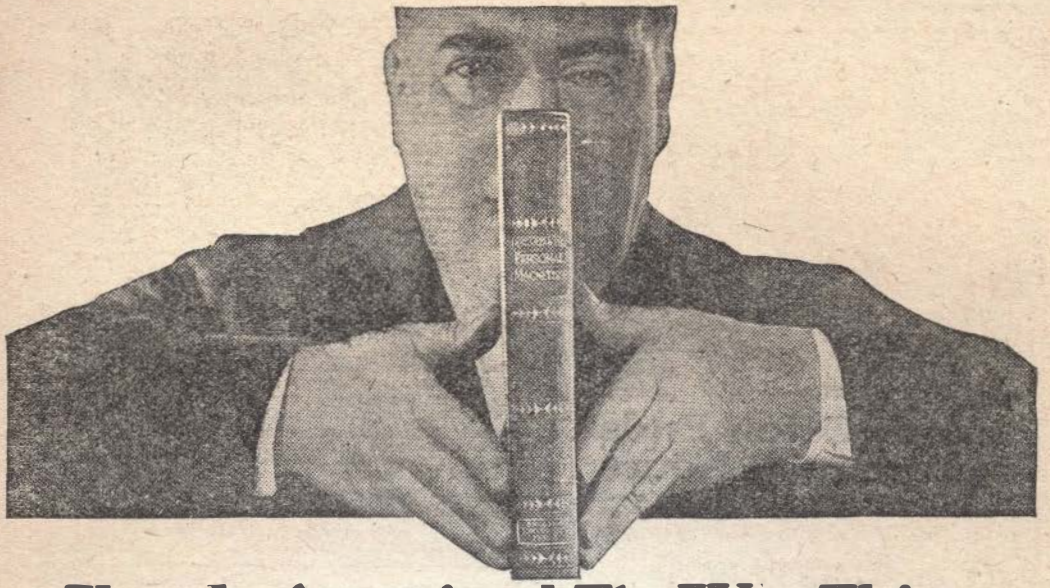

Utterly Amazing! The Way This Singular Book Can Give You

MAGNETIC POWER

IN 24 HOURS...OR NO COST!

IMAGINE how a man who has been struggling along in obscurity *feels* when he suddenly becomes a magnet of popularity—a dominating personality with hosts of friends—almost overnight!

Stop a minute and think how *you* would feel if you suddenly discovered a strange, new power that enabled you to attract influential friends at will and win quick success in any business or profession. Picture the amazement of everyone if you unexpectedly *changed your entire personality,* banished all self-consciousness and embarrassment forever, and quickly became a vibrant, fascinating and magnetic being!

It would be the most thrilling experience of your entire life—and if you doubt for one minute that such a thing CAN happen, listen to this: No matter *who* you are—no matter what handicap has been holding you back—I'll PROVE to you that I CAN GIVE YOU MAGNETIC POWER as described above, IN EXACTLY 24 HOURS or no cost! . . . Yes, I'll even go farther than that! I'll send you *all* details of my secret method (nothing concealed or held back) and let you examine them in your own home for 5 DAYS ABSOLUTELY FREE! Then you can see with your own eyes exactly what I am talking about.

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Almost before you finish the first page of this curious book, you become aware of a subtle "something" you cannot describe. In the days that follow, you are conscious of being guided by an unseen force. Somehow you seem completely changed. You find everyone looking at you in a new light—regarding you with new importance.

But the most surprising thing is the fact that even your closest friends cannot understand the change that has swept over you. They see you forging ahead in society and business, dominating situation after situation, always winning out without apparent effort! They marvel—utterly baffled—while YOU, secure in the possession of your newly-acquired power, sit back and smile at their bewilderment.

Examine These Secrets 5 Days FREE!

- See how to develop a Magnetic Personality
- See how to use certain Oriental Secrets
- How to make face appear 20 years younger
- Find out how to read people's feelings by watching their mouths
- See how to attract the opposite sex
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Right now—under the terms of a special loan offer—you can read and absorb the full benefits of Shaftesbury's singular discoveries for 5 days absolutely FREE. Merely mail the coupon below *without one penny* and we'll send you a copy of this remarkable volume—extra large size, 400 pages—gold embossed and handsomely bound in rich burgundy cloth. When it arrives, delve into its illuminating pages. See exactly what eye-opening facts it contains. Then if you are not amazed and delighted at the end of 5 days, return it and pay us nothing. Otherwise keep it as your own and remit the special price of only $3 in full payment. Act at once! You risk nothing. Mail the coupon now!

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Address.....

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Special cash price $2.00 if payment accompanies coupon. This saves heavy bookkeeping and clerical expense. Money refunded if dissatisfied and book returned within five days.

If I Can't Give It to You....
I don't want your money

By Alois Merke

To Those Afflicted With Thinning Hair, Dandruff, Itchy Scalp

YOU want HAIR . . . plus quick relief from scalp troubles! And in seeking both these things you demand:

Reasonable assurance that you won't be fooled out of your money or take chances on injury to your scalp!

Oh, I know what you're up against. For years I've been in touch with thousands of scalp patients. They all said the same thing: "We don't want rosy promises; all we ask is reasonable assurance of scalp safety and new hair."

Now follow me closely! I give you *infinitely more* than reasonable assurance. I give you this iron-bound *guarantee*—

New Hair On Your Head in 30 Days . . . Or You Keep Your Money

And I give you this guarantee in writing! Besides, I positively assure safety to your scalp.

I leave it to your good judgment. How could I make such a guarantee if I didn't have absolute confidence in my treatment? Why, I'd be out of business in a week! I'd lose my reputation. I'd ruin the professional standing of the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York, a scalp research bureau established 13 years ago, and known from Coast to Coast, but I can *safely* guarantee new hair . . . or no cost. For patient research showed me what others either purposely ignore or just *don't know*.

Falling Hair Cannot Be Stopped By Ordinary Surface Treatments!

Leading dermatologists agree with me on that. Years of investigation taught us all that scalp troubles originate *below the scalp!*

Simple as A . . B . . C

Modern habits rob the hair of normal nourishment. Dandruff appears, itching begins. Soon roots weaken and hair falls out. But in countless cases those roots, far from being dead, are only temporarily inactive. Ordinary surface treatments can't reach them.

But my scientific treatment wakes these sleeping roots to active life. I get down BELOW THE SCALP, stimulating little blood vessels, rushing nourishment to the roots themselves. That's why I can safely GUARANTEE NEW HAIR . . . OR NO COST!

Don't Buy a "Pig in a Bag!"

What a shame that so many dollars and hours are wasted on useless surface treatments. *Not only that.* Hair is actually removed and scalps injured by doubtful salves and tonics. If a man came up to you in the street and said, "Here's a tonic that'll grow hair!" . . . would you buy it? Of course not. You wouldn't know the maker, the ingredients, nor would you have any redress in case of injury.

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The Throwback

By Cherry Wilson

Author of "Empty Saddles," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A THROWBACK.

SOME one had told Jess Trailor that he could not live honestly on Big Smoky range. Here, where his father, Ute Trailor, had lived and died by violence—a rustler; where his brother Dan had followed in his father's crooked footsteps to the tragic last. For back of the community's hate for the Trailors were years of crime, and the memory of a good man slain.

But Jess, last of his name, had been undaunted. He would live down the past, of which he had never been a part, and make his name as good as any man's, now that no one was responsible for it but himself. So, a year ago, he had vowed, and now——

But, to go back. In the beginning, and on a day no man marked, Ute Trailor, with his two infant sons, had drifted into Big Smoky range. High in a wild and lonely canyon, that ran like a blue vein in the stern face of the loftiest mountain in that lofty mountain chain, he established headquarters. And,

while his boys grew up—in an environment as favorable for physical growth as it was for bringing out the worst that is in even the best of men—Ute pursued his lawless calling. He lived, like the buffalo wolf, on the fat range lands below, and, like the wolf, outwitted pursuit in the wilds above.

Many times in the years of his wolfish sojourn here, Ute had taken to the hills. But that September day one year ago, he had started just a fatal shade too late. The posse of angry ranchers, determined to halt the depredations of the rustling Trailors, had overtaken and eternally stopped old Ute.

Three weeks later, Dan—then just turning twenty-one—had been surprised and killed in a cattle raid. And Dan, in dying, had greatly enhanced the black luster of the family name by taking a popular young deputy with him "over the range."

Thus the boy, Jess, had been left alone in the little blue canyon, with nothing but the old log cabin and corrals, bitter memories, and the unbeatable handicap of a hated name. That it was unbeatable, Jess had not known last September, and he had resolved above all else to keep his feet on the highroad of life.

This he confided to Ford Cruze, an old pal of his father's, who rode down often to see how "Ute's boy" was getting on and to insist on Jess coming to live with him. A plea which the boy had to refuse, since he knew—though Big Smoky did not—that Ford Cruze was a rustler. Neither could he avoid Ford, as he did the other men who had hung about the cabin in Ute's time, for the genial old rascal was the only friend he had on earth. And it was Ford who told him that it was impossible for a Trailor to live honestly on Big Smoky range!

Now, a year later, it was a mystery to Ford how Jess had lived. Honestly, he knew, for in all his twenty years of life the boy had been as straight as the proverbial string.

But to the range at large it was no mystery. When a man lived with no visible means of support, it meant but one thing to cowmen, when rustlers were abroad, and meant it beyond all shadow of doubt when that man was the dead Trailors' kin!

Only Jess knew how terribly hard that year had been. Often he lived on straight venison for weeks—the lucky weeks! Hunger lost all novelty for him. He hunted his living, when he was not hunting work—and with more success. Though he persistently hunted work on every ranch that hired men, there was not room on Big Smoky's pay roll for a Trailor. And Jess had not drawn a day's wages in that year.

Now and then, however, he went down to Salitas with a few coyote ears or cougar scalps, on which he collected the State bounty, and so bought the supplies or clothing of which he stood in greatest need.

But the strain of this existence, the constant temptation, unmerited suspicion and ostracism, loneliness and shame, might well have broken the strongest spirit. And Jess, facing winter penniless, was dangerously near agreeing with Ford Cruze, when the tide seemed to turn.

The Salitas Stampede, for which that range lived from year to year, announced its gate-crashing event—a bucking-horse contest, in which Big Smoky cowboys would ride for the local championship and a purse of five hundred dollars in gold. Then, for the first time, Jess dared hope. If he won, he would have not only a winter stake and a start in the spring, but some small claim on the community's respect.

To-morrow was the last day of the stampede!

To-day, out in the corral in the cottonwoods, Jess prepared for his ride. Entirely surrounded by twine, rivets,

and lace leather, he was putting repairs on his saddle, when a booming voice from behind startled him:

"Howdy, son! Cobblin' up ol' Three-in-one?"

Jess swung to see a blaze-faced black in the trail. Its rider's amused gaze was bent on the old jigsaw puzzle of pieces and patches that passed for a saddle.

"Yeah, Ford," Jess grinned. "It'll be brand-new, when I get done."

Ford Cruze chuckled. He looked like anything but a rustler, leaning ahead in the saddle, watching Jess. A big man, easy in manner and movement, with genial eyes, a kind, lined, old cinnamon face, and hair that showed touches of frost under his black sombrero.

"Waal," he said, with a twinkle, "you can't disguise that ol' shell but what I'll know it! One of them stirrups was Dan's. T'other was Ute's. The tree's about all that's left of your ol' original. When you goin' to pension it an' get a regular one?"

Quietly, taking his breath away, Jess said: "To-morrow—if I'm lucky, Ford."

Over the old rustler's face broke a startled gleam. "How come? Some hombre turned human an' give you a job?" he cried.

The boy denied that, and went on wrapping a strip of soaked rawhide about the naked steel of the saddle horn.

"What then?" Ford pressed.

The boy turned, and leaning back against the fence looked full into the eyes of his friend. "I'm ridin' in the contest," he said.

Ford released a long-held breath. "Waal," he predicted, with odd finality, "you won't be lucky!"

"Why not?" Jess flashed, for, without vanity, and barring accident, he knew he stood every chance. "I ain't such a slouch of a rider as all that!"

"No,"—and in Ford's slow admission there was singular, almost personal pride—"you can ride, Jess. I'd say you could ride rings around any man in Big Smoky. You ought to—it's all you ever done. While the other boys who'll ride to-morrow were growin' up with games an' such, you was up here in the hills ridin' wild ones for fun. Why, I mind," and his eyes smiled down, "gettin' the scare of my life once, when I run across you up on Baldy a-straddle of a wild mustang which you'd roped yourself. You—just a spindle-shanks, Jess, an' bareback to boot! An' him runnin' wild through the trees, fightin' loco! I thought you was a gone coonskin for sure, but you rode him to a standstill."

"Then," insisted Jess, "why won't I be lucky to-morrow, Ford?"

The man hesitated. Jess waited, dread in his dark, eager, sensitive face, his slim body tense. And, as he was then, against the silvery trunks of the cottonwoods, Ford never forgot him. At that moment he felt more deeply than ever that something different, compelling, about Jess Trailor, a suggestion of unusual strength to be unleashed for good or evil, as the course of his life would run; strength, not of body alone, but of spirit.

And this spirit looked out of his eyes. They were of a peculiar, burning blue, under straight, black brows, the eyes of a fighter. Slightly and attractively oblique, they were the one feature Jess had shared with Dan and inherited from Ute, the one feature noted by Big Smoky range—Trailor eyes.

"What I meant, Jess," said Ford, and those eyes burned on him as he spoke, "is—you'll lose, if you win. This range ain't apt to give the decision to a Trailor!"

"They can't help it!" fiercely declared the boy. "They've got to play fair. If I put up the best ride——"

"They can't be fair!" soberly Ford struck in. "They're only human, Jess. An' human nature's a mighty inhuman thing. Allow as how the judges want to act fair an' square, an' suppose, for

example, that Met Fergus is ridin'. Will they just see Met's performance? Or will they be seein', too, the Seven Star Ranch, the obligations they owe his dad, an' Jim Fergus hisself in the grand stand? It'll work like that for every favorite son. An' it'll work the opposite for you, who ain't a favorite son—by no means, but the son of the despised Ute Trailor!"

And the boy cried, "I don't care!" his tremor proclaiming how much he cared. "I ain't askin' no favors! All I want is a square deal."

"All you'll get," Ford said coldly, because it was the cold truth, "is a raw deal. Jess, Jim Fergus won't be in the grand stand to-morrow—like we was supposin'. He's slated for the king row!"

Jess flinched as from a physical blow. Jim Fergus one of the judges to-morrow. To judge him—a Trailor!

"But," he faltered gamely, "he's only one."

"He's the one!" Ford reminded him grimly. "As Fergus goes, so goes Big Smoky range."

Because it was the truth, and none knew it better than Jess, there was despair in his heart as he turned back to the saddle and mechanically fumbled the rawhide strips.

"Son,"—full of sympathy, Ford got down and went up to him—"I feel sort o' responsible for you since Ute cashed in. Most like you was my own. It sure hurts to see you wearin' yourself out on a losin' fight. Boy, throw in with me. Collect a few of the wages of sin——"

"Like dad an' Dan?" broke in the boy, tight-lipped.

"Like me, Bart, Seminole, an' the rest!" Ford passed a long arm about Jess. "Son, what's wrong with you? I don't savvy you a bit! Neither did Ute, an' you worried him a heap. Dan was a chip off the ol' block, but you—a throwback, Ute always said. A queer chick for a Trailor to hatch. Where did you get these holy notions, Jess?"

"I—don't—know," the boy said slowly. Nor did he, yet.

Ford's arm tightened in sheer affection. "Son, I've watched you this last year. Believe it or not, I hoped you'd make the grade. But you can't—not here, you can't—with folks r'arin' to push you back two steps for every one you gain. You're just layin' up grief for yourself to-morrow; but," said the old man persuasively, as, restlessly, Jess stirred—"if you're dead set on it, let me help. At least, let me buy you a saddle that will stand the gaff."

"No!" the boy cried sharply, tempted almost beyond restraint.

Hurt by that refusal, Ford's arm dropped. "Tainted money, huh?" he suggested.

"That ain't why!" earnestly protested Jess. "I'd take it like a shot, if I could pay you back. But I can't, unless—Ford, don't get me wrong! I ain't no plaster saint. I—I don't know what I am! But I'm tryin' hard to win out this way, because I seen enough to know the other way don't pay!"

"Has this way paid?" Ford's eyes swept Jess from shapeless hat to leather chaps, as patched and in need of patches as the ancient saddle on the fence, seeing—the boy felt—all his poverty and shame, even the hungry days, in that one glance.

"Has this way paid?" Again, mercilessly, Ford asked, and in very mercy answered himself. "You know it ain't! Why, folks ain't even the respect for you they had for Ute! They had the respect of fear for him—an' that's something, Jess. They paint you black as him, whisper about you, an' gang up against you. Why can't you get a job? Good men are scarce her. An' you're good. You know the cattle game from A to Z. There's your answer: You know the cattle game, an' you're a Trailor. Oh, I've heard talk!"

The boy had a desperate, hunted look, and Ford urged: "Come on, Jess—be yourself. You can't be guiltier than folks think you are. Get the game, as well as the name. Come on up to my place, an' let me put you in the way of easy money."

A shudder swept Jess Trailor from head to foot. "Not your way, Ford—not yet!"

Ford said no more then. But when he was in the saddle again, with shortened rein and Blaze's head turned up the trail that climbed the ridges—now blazing with autumn's fiery hues—to the bluer heights of his own canyon, he lingered, loath to leave. For he knew all the torture in store for Jess on the morrow. Hot anger rose within him that such things could be; and, also, the wish to leave some word with Jess, something that would be with him then—let him know he was not alone.

"Son," he said huskily, "you're in a blind alley. Some day you'll see that. To-morrow, or a year from to-morrow—no matter. When you get to the end, I'll be there!"

And his sincerity did what no persuasion, starvation, nor heartache had done—wrung from the boy his fateful promise.

"Ford," Jess cried, sudden tears quenching the fire in his eyes, "I'm goin' to ride in the stampede. But if they give me the deal you say they will, I'll give up! I'll go Trailor!"

CHAPTER II.

MEMORIES.

JUST as the sun went down behind the black peaks, Jess finished with the saddle. But the thoughts Ford had set in motion still raced through his mind. And sitting down on the cabin steps—too discouraged to think of supper—Jess let them race. He sat on for hours, while twilight drew a violet veil over the canyon, and darkening night closed in.

Why was he different from the other Trailors? That was the question Jess asked his heart, had been asking since Ford Cruze put it straight up to him. Ford said it had worried his dad. Well—the boy's lips twisted oddly—it had hurt him, put a barrier between his folks and him, so he couldn't get near them, though he loved them, couldn't even be pals with Dan.

"Heaven knows I never meant to be!" tensely he told the dreaming dusk. "Heaven knows I never felt superior to them. Anything but that!"

Then why hadn't he just drifted into their way of doing before he got big enough to see it didn't pay? Before his dad and Dan got killed? When they were coaxing him to ride with them? For the first time in his life, Jess wondered that. And, on the eve of the battle that would decide his life, the truth burst on him in a blinding flash.

Memory tracked it down, followed the lonely corridors of his heart back, back to the time when it was the heart of a lad, and flung a vivid scene from boyhood on the screen of his mind. Time: Four o'clock. Place: The schoolhouse at Salitas. Big Smoky kids bursting out the door like stabled colts. And among them, Jess saw himself, a boy of twelve, and before him, "Chuck" Saunders, the tow-headed tattler of the class, jumping up and down, and chanting:

"I know something I won't tell—
Three little darkies in a peanut shell!"

Across the years, Jess heard the instant clamor of the rest for what Chuck knew, and his telling them in that fiendish chant: "Jetta Fergus likes Jess Trailor! I saw her give him that big apple in her desk!"

Then they were all shrilling like young coyotes, as they circled him and Jetta: "Jetta likes Jess! Jetta likes Jess!"

And instantly, Jetta's brother, Met, had the tattler down in the dusty road,

was on him, thumping him like the bully he had been even then, panting between blows, "You take that back! Take it back, or I'll kill you, Chuck! My sister wouldn't wipe her feet on that rustlin' scum!"

Then, while he had stood there, paralyzed with shame that burned him now, remembering, Jetta cried with scorn that silenced all, that stayed her brother: "Shame on you, Met Fergus! He's as good as we are! He can't help it what his folks does!" And, throwing back her head like the little queen she was, Jetta defied her world: "I don't care what any one says—I do like Jess!"

Kid stuff? Yes. But it is in the plastic years that things strike deep, when a word may make or mar a life. Clay molds best when it is fresh. And, though the scene faded, Jess felt again the same warm glow he had felt in childhood, the same blind adoration, worship, and even reverence for Jetta Fergus.

And he knew with a shock that had a kind of horror in it, that this was why! This was why he had held out against his own flesh and blood—set himself apart from them, as people had put him away from them. This was why he had held out against Ford Cruze, why he had gone hungry rather than live on "easy money." Because, long ago, a girl had had the courage to stand up for him, and the only way he could vindicate her was to live up to her faith in him. He'd done that for—"a Fergus!" Incredulously he whispered the words, then began to laugh—a bitter, most unhappy laugh.

For Jim Fergus, of the Seven Star, had done more to make it impossible for the boy to do what his daughter had inspired him to do than any one—than every one! Fergus was Big Smoky's cattle king. As such, he had suffered most from the steady rustling of the Trailor gang. And he was an uncle of Sid Hollis, the young deputy whom Dan had killed. Fergus had cause to hate the Trailors, but——

Leaning forward, every nerve and muscle tense, Jess cried in a choking tone, "He ain't got no monopoly on that!" And, with natural, instinctive hatred, as his Trailor eyes glowed phosphorescent in the night, he added: "Jim Fergus was in the posse that killed dad!"

He crouched there in the dark as memory threw other, awful pictures before his eyes: Of the posse returning triumphant from its kill—bringing his father, like a slain wolf, home! Of his wild gallop through storm and night to the lonely siding where they told him he would find Dan. Of finding his brother—dead, in the reeking gramma grass, and of sitting close to Dan until dawn came, that his slicker might shield the dead boy from the rain. Memories that roused every drop of Trailor blood in his veins!

Now, Fate had left it to Fergus to decide what was to become of the last Trailor. He would be one of the three judges to-morrow. But if he said black was white, any other two men in the country would sprain their tongues agreeing with him. The boy's jaw set. All right! It was up to Fergus. He would do his best to win. If he did, he would be on the highroad. If not—well, he had to live.

"But if he makes me go Trailor," the boy solemnly vowed, "I'll make him sorry to the last day of his life!"

Hours after he went to bed, Jess lay awake. The suffering had burned out in his blood, and hope in the coming contest was restored, but he could not sleep for thinking of Jetta. She had sure been sweet to him. Always taking his part. Telling him they couldn't lick him, if he kept his head up, and he always had. Fergus had taken her out of school right after that, and sent her to a girls' school down in Spokane. She just came home for holidays and

summers. He had hardly seen her since—just a far glimpse, now and then, in Salitas or on the road, with one or another of the Big Smoky boys. They were all crazy about her.

And he had not spoken to her since. She had been so good to him, he could not shame her. And she would be ashamed of it—now that she was grown, now that folks had pinned the rustler sign on him. He wondered if she would be there to-morrow and see him ride. She might—most every one came home for the stampede. But she would not know the stakes he was riding for—know that but for her he would have gone Trailor long ago!

The blue canyon ran like a black river. Coyotes howled in sad, wild, quavering cadence from its lonely brinks. And—resultant of his thoughts, or prophetic of the morrow—Jess Trailor dreamed of a courageous, black-eyed slip of a girl defying all her friends:

"I do like Jess!"

CHAPTER III.

"LET 'ER BUCK!"

A RECORD crowd packed the Salitas Stampede Grounds. The arena was a tangle of color, and ropes, and hoofs, and dust. Throbbing tom-toms and blaring bands. Hiving, excited buckaroos in dizzy chaps; cowgirls in sunset scarfs; blanketed buck, and beaded klootch, rancher, trapper, trader, and what not? All festive in rodeo togs, all keyed to the last notch. Hundreds of cow-ponies—they lined the infield fence the whole mile around—snorting and stamping as they caught the contagion. Prisoned, bucking horses, peering with murderous eyes through their bars—waiting!

Preliminary to the big event for which the throng had crashed the gates, man and beast went down the track in cyclonic action. The grand stand rocked with cheers, and waddies hooted or yipped from the corral tops. For this was the time for which that range lived from year to year—when excitement and danger walked hand in hand, when thrills were thrills, and the voice of the megaphone was raised in the land!

Through this wild tumult Jess Trailor rode his line-backed buckskin, rode with his burning eyes straight ahead, in his faded old shirt and bandanna, his frayed leather chaps, and hat that was—just a hat. He crowded through the seething mass until he came to the entrants' stand. Here, he slid down and, laying his entrance fee on the counter, asked the clerk to sign him for the big contest, scheduled to take place soon.

The clerk blinked in surprise, started to say something, but swallowed it and complied. Having seen his name enrolled for his fateful ride, Jess turned away, hearing behind him the clerk's answer to some protester: "Sure! I know he's Jess Trailor, but he's a Big Smoky product—you can't rule him out!"

An anxious bystander asked: "Can he ride?"

"Search me—but they say he's handy with a rope," was the reply.

A titter broke out. But Jess gave no sign of hearing the speech, which, in range parlance, plainly accused him of rustling cows. He only carried his head a bit higher, as he rode off, stabbed in the back by curious eyes.

Finding room for Bucky, his pony, among others at the infield fence, just across from the grand stand, Jess settled at the rail to wait and watch alone. Alone in a crowd—the worst kind of loneliness! More alone in this gathering of home folks than any stranger. Big Smoky had a word and smile for the stranger—but no use on earth for a Trailor! Eyes he knew looked straight through him, or turned away with a betraying swiftness. And a frantic cry rose in his heart:

"Oh, Lord, let me win! So folks will forget I'm a Trailor! So they'll think of me as a rider—not a rustler!"

To still his nerves, he made a game of searching each pretty sombreroed face that went past, telling himself he might see Jetta. That this girl was she—no, Jetta's eyes were twice as black and bright. That one—going by? No, she wasn't pretty enough by half. But how did he know Jetta was pretty? It wasn't likely he would recognize her. Not in eight years had he seen her plain. Eight years was a long time. She'd be changed.

And he wistfully watched the merry groups of punchers on stilt-heeled boots, scuffling and joking their way down the track. Gee, it must be fun to pal up like that, be one of a bunch of regular fellows! He never had. But maybe he would be after to-day! If he won, they'd look on him differently, maybe.

Five hundred dollars wouldn't mean much to the others. But to him—what wouldn't it mean to him! He tried not to think—he was nervous enough—tried to concentrate on the bulldogging, steer and calf roping stunts being pulled off, to applause that crashed like thunderclaps. But he was in a high fever of suspense when the cowgirls' race was announced, with the big feature next.

"Ridin', Chuck?" A spectator yelled at a stalwart puncher hobbling past.

"Sure am," grinned Chuck—that same Chuck Saunders who had been the tow-headed tattler of Jess' class. "We all are, I reckon—but Met. He's tendin' chute. You know, his ol' man's a judge. Good alibi!"

And most of those in hearing laughed. Met Fergus had far more fame as a bully than as a bronc-buster on his home range. But Jess did not laugh. It meant grief when his turn came at the chute. Met never missed a chance to take a slam at him. He had taken many before, and since, that time when they were kids and Met had called him "scum." And he would have to take it, as he always had. With Jim Fergus in the king row, he couldn't risk a run-in with his son!

"So here's where you're hidin' out!" At last somebody spoke to Jess! And, at a moment when every one else was intent on the track, where a score of cowgirls were jockeying for a start.

Strung, quivering, as any racer at the wire, Jess looked at the man who had spoken to him—a wizened, watery-eyed cowhand, who had a sneaking coyote look about him and walked with a limp. It was "Spike" Travis, whom Jess did not like nor trust. And he could not believe that Spike liked him any better, in spite of this overture—not when he carried right with him, as he would to his grave, a constant reminder of his old grudge against the Trailors. For that limp of Spike's was the result of a bullet from the gun of Ute Trailor. They used to "work" together, and they had had some trouble. But Spike had reformed—or, anyhow, wormed himself into the good graces of Jim Fergus, and for a year now he had been working out at the Seven Star.

"I ain't hidin'," coldly Jess told Jim Fergus' man. "I dón't have to hide."

"No?" drawled Spike, with fine sarcasm. "Well, that's a fine feelin'!"

And Jess shot back, "You ought to know!"

But as Spike dissolved into the crowd—now straining to follow the pounding horses in their neck-to-neck race around the track—Jess stared at the spot where he had been, suddenly afraid, and for the first time. If he got a raw deal, he had promised to go Trailor. And just seeing snakes like Spike——

His eyelids narrowed, and hate blazed through. For there, so close he could have reached out and touched him, passed Jim Fergus, the prosperous, vindictive old cattle king! He was going up to the judges' stand, going to

decide if a Trailor could "live honest" on Big Smoky range; going to decide if the last Trailor would go straight, or, maybe, wind up like his father and brother!

Dully, Jess heard bedlam break out, as the winning horse passed under the wire, saw the winning cowgirl acknowledge the ovation they gave her, and the track being cleared. Then, while dust settled to dust, over the vast assemblage a hush fell.

"Ladies an' gentlemen," boomed the man with the megaphone. "Nex' event is the buckin' horse contest for the championship of Big——"

A roar from thousands of throats, and wild hubbub. For now the range was divided against itself. Every Big Smoky man, woman, and child had picked a favorite son to win. From friendship, kinship, or plain policy, each had come to back his choice to the extreme limit of purse and lung.

"Five hundred bucks goes with the title," rolled from the megaphone over the grounds. "Whoever gets it—he'll earn it, folks! This is goin' to be a real contest. We've brought in some of the toughest buckers in the West. Some has never been rode, none intend to be. One has been the despair of a hundred riders, an' the death of one, just six weeks ago on the Chetah track——"

"I know that baby—tough bronc!" shouted a voice from the throng.

"Every name is known to fame! Cowboys, hear 'em an' weep: Loco, Last Laugh, Hay-maker, Whiz-bang, Fidgety Dan an' the notorious man-killer, Hell-gait!"

Enthusiastically, they applauded that name, as wildly cheered the contestants, rushing to the stand to draw their mounts. As Jess had been last to enter, so he was last to draw his horse. And his hands shook so that he could hardly open his slip. All about him the other boys were comparing theirs, thanking their stars, or bemoaning their luck. The more vicious the horse drawn, the luckier they considered themselves. For the chance that it could not be ridden was offset by the almost certain prospect of winning if it could.

"Last Laugh!" disgustedly snorted a pink-shirted waddy. "Aw, heck—an' I wanted to *ride!*"

"Not so bad—mine. Whiz-bang!" Chuck Saunders congratulated himself. "But who got Hell-gait?"

They all wondered that, but nobody spoke.

"Speak up, you lucky stiff!" urged Chuck.

And in his elation, forgetting himself, Jess said eagerly, as he held out his slip, "I did!"

He remembered, then, with searing humiliation, just who he was, and what! For they stared right through him—these boys who had gone to school with him—till Chuck put an end to it at awful length by grabbing the pink-shirted waddy, and hauling him around with, "Come on, Dave—you open the show!"

They moved toward the chute. Jess, trailing behind, could not help hearing Chuck's bitter complaint: "I'd 'a' give my eye teeth to have drawed that hoss!" And he was not spared Dave's fervent: "So say we all! But the devil sure looks out for his own!"

Jess stumbled, half blind. But resolutely blinking the blindness away, he stopped by his horse, and stripped the pathetic old saddle off, then waited with what patience he could for his name to be called, hearing, above the crowd's loud rumble, the loud voice of Met Fergus, directing the saddling of the first outlaw. Then came the announcer's bawl:

"First rider, Dave Martin, of the S Three Bar, on Last Laugh!"

To the frantic cheers of his friends, Dave climbed the fence. Followed a few seconds of frenzied finance, as bets were laid down and snapped up again, then Dave, jauntily waving his som-

brero, eased into the saddle. The blindfold was jerked off, the gate swung, and Last Laugh shot onto the track. But Dave's adherents had barely time to see that he was aboard, when he was spinning over the outlaw's head. Even as he picked himself out of the dust, to wave at the grand stand with a foolish grin and groggily limp back to the chute, the next contestant was called:

"'Coot' Hall, of the Triple Dot, on Fidgety Dan!"

And Coot climbed the fence to the rousing cheers of his partisans, who as feverishly gambled on him. Odds rose, as Fidgety Dan plowed up the dust before the grand stand, and Coot sat him through several terrific bucks. Then, to the groans of his backers and the jeers of the others, he, like Dave, bit the dust!

"Chuck Saunders, of the Ace of Clubs, on Whiz-bang!"

A storm of cheers greeted Chuck's appearance on the fence, for the Saunders family stood high in the range, and, as Ford predicted, human nature was working overtime. The cheer rose to a roar, as Chuck was catapulted out of the chute, and Whiz-bang went weaving, sunfishing, bucking, all over the track, with Chuck sticking like a bur, slapping his sombrero about Whiz-bang's ears at every jump.

"That's ridin'!" yelled a man who had every cent in his pockets on Chuck.

"Stay with him!" shouted another in the same plight.

"Ya-a-ah! Boy, you got 'im!"

And Chuck was still aboard when the whistle blew for the pick-up man to lift him off. This was done to a veritable thunder of applause.

"Mint Wade, of the Fiddle-back, on Loco!"

One by one, like the roll of Fate, names were called and their owners rode, inexorably nearing the moment when Jess' name would be put to the test. What if Hell-gait threw him, relieving Jim Fergus of all necessity of sitting in judgment on him? A probability that Jess did not even consider. He was as sure he could ride the killer as he was certain of putting up a better ride than Chuck, whom he saw as his only competitor.

He watched Mint climb the fence to the cheers of his friends. Cheers sure helped! Let you know folks was back of you. H'd sure be mighty proud when—— Slowly and sickeningly, the boy's heart turned in his breast. They wouldn't cheer for him—not for a Trailor! Panic seized him, horror of the moment when his name was called. Vividly, he pictured himself mounting that fence in dead silence, in shameful contrast to the reception accorded every other rider. It did not seem as though he could bear it. He wanted to run—bolt from the grounds!

But corral men were hazing Hell-gait into the chute, handling him with the utmost respect, holding him with taut ropes, while they prodded him along through the bars. Hell-gait, the Waterloo of a hundred riders, and the death of one! A great, red-eyed, red-skinned demon of a horse!

While the crowd roared at the short, sweet battle between Loco and Mint, Jess carried his old saddle up to the fence and handed it to Met Fergus, bold-eyed, blond, and insolent, so surprising Met by his presence there that he accepted the saddle without comment. But, as Jess turned to look at his horse, he heard a jeering laugh above, and Met's lordly voice:

"Hey, boys! Here's the saddle Ol' Man Noah rode onto the Ark!"

It looked so likely, as Met held it out, that every one laughed. Encouraged by that, "Say, Trailor," Met bawled, "I'd have thought you could have rustled a better saddle than that!"

Every eye turned on Jess, for Met's inflection made that remark an open insult. But there was no sign the boy

took it as such, except a burning look in his eyes that awed Met into saying, more civilly:

"It'll last quick on Hell-gait."

And Jess answered him quietly. "It'll last longer if I put it on myself. I'll saddle my own horse."

Taking old Three-in-one from Jim Fergus' son, Jess dropped it on Hell-gait's twitching back, cinched it carefully there, while men still held the blindfolded brute, and carefully inspected every part. Then he stood back, outwardly cool, but in actual torment, as cheers for Mint subsided to deepen the hostile silence that would greet him. He waited slow ages of torture in which the announcer lifted the megaphone to his lips, and curtly—coldly, it seemed to Jess—announced the last rider:

"Jess Trailor, on Hell-gait!"

The crowd's acclaim for the ill-famed horse was strangled in outrage at his rider's identity. So, as, mechanically, Jess climbed the fence, there fell the silence he had dreaded—a ghastly, hate-filled silence, that deafened him, smothered him, took all the confidence, the heart right out of him, and he wished the ground would open up and swallow him! That silence lasted while a brand-new pulse in his throat set up a furious throbbing; so long, that he could have counted each face in the multitude of faces before him; so still, that he heard the hoarse breathing of the killer below him.

And then — incredible joy shot through him! His head lifted. His glowing eyes sought that for which all eyes were seeking—Met Fergus, cursing by the fence; Jim Fergus, rearing up in the judges' stand to see if what his outraged ears told him was true; the great crowd, straining, craning, fighting to see the person who dared to publicly cheer Jess Trailor!

They saw no stranger, as they had expected, but—one of Big Smoky's own! A slender, vibrant, black-eyed girl, prettier than any picture, in scarlet blouse and short, fringed skirt. A girl who stood out from them all at the grand-stand rail, waving her white sombrero, and cheering, in defiance of the crowd:

"Ride him, Jess!"

And exaltation sang in the boy's veins. Oh, he could ride Hell-gait—anything—with Jetta back of him, standing up for him! She wasn't changed—nor ashamed!

Jauntily as any rider there, Jess waved his shapeless old hat to her. He dropped to the killer's back, and, signaling the gateman, sang out with fine disdain:

"Let 'er buck!"

CHAPTER IV.

"A COLD-BLOODED FREEZE-OUT!"

OH, Big Smoky had to watch Jess Trailor! Eyes could not look through and not see! Eyes had not the power to turn away! They had to watch and, watching, forget for moments together that he was not a favorite son—but the son of Ute Trailor!

Jess had given the word. The blindfold was whipped off. Ropes were loosed. The gate swung. And, with a blood-curdling scream, Hell-gait launched his thirteen hundred pounds of quivering fury into the arena, snapping into the vicious, double-headed buck that had lost a hundred riders their seats and killed one. It was a buck that brought the crowd to its feet. The great, red brute seemed to simultaneously hurl himself high in the air and whirl, changing ends as he landed with a frightful thud on all four feet. Then, bawling, baffled fury, as for the first time this trick failed, he tried it again and again, while the boy on his back goaded him, fanning his ears with the old hat, his spurs flashing to the outlaw's shoulders at every jump.

Abandoning this method, as his satanic brain devised a new murder plan, Hell-gait summoned all his brute strength, and began back-jumping with a force and fury calculated to dislodge anything from his back. It seemed that no rider on earth could sit it out. It brought despair even to Jess, until, over the pound of hoofs, the roar of blood in his head, cut that shrill, girlish cheer:

"Jess, you ride him! I'm with you, Jess!"

Jetta was with him. What mattered those against him! Jess rallied to ride. Though the killer sunfished until the boy's boot heel touched earth; though he pitched in terrible snaps, when it seemed that the intrepid rider had not a chance to escape being thrown and kicked to death; though he spun and spun, till the watchers dizzied, and they, the blue sky, the yellow earth, were an indistinguishable blur to Jess——

"You ride him!" she cried.

And Jess rode! He rode until the audience gasped, straining for glimpses of his white face through the swirling red tail and mane, the all-enveloping dust. Even the Ferguses, father and son, who most hated him, must watch, and hate him more bitterly in their chagrin! And from corral tops, spellbound, they watched—these boys who had gone to school with him. While a lone voice cheered, they watched Jess ride, and an official-looking stranger in the grand stand hoarsely besought his neighbor:

"Who is that nervy kid?"

"A two-legged skunk!" The Big Smoky man just remembered. "One of the cow thieves who are stealin' us blind! Nervy—yeah! To be here—ridin' agin' decent men! He's a Trailor. We got his father an' brother—an' we'll get him in time!"

"You mean," with fresh interest pressed his inquisitor, "he's the son of Ute Trailor, the rustler killed here last fall?"

And, savagely, the Big Smoky man retorted: "That's what I mean!"

"But are you sure this lad's a rustler?"

"Waal," was the sarcastic answer, "he may be livin' on heavenly manna, but if I lose many more cows, I'll be needin' a little of that myself. A rustler? He couldn't be anything else with that blood!"

"Or with that feeling against him!" said the stranger grimly.

"What's that you said?" sharply demanded the Big Smoky man.

But the authoritative stranger was staring in horror at the impending tragedy on the track. And horror was in the dark eyes of the girl who had long ceased to cheer, but gripped the rail with a frantic prayer. For the red, rearing beast was toppling back, back—deliberately throwing himself over to crush his rider! They saw Jess' legs twist, his spurs savagely rake at the killer's flank, bringing him down in the very nick of time to save himself from a horrible death.

Then, bellowing his rage, the thwarted horse pitted his unlimited strength against the boy's power to endure, leaping straight up and down unceasingly; awful, stiff-legged bucks, that brought blood trickling from the boy's nostrils and ears; terrible jars, that no flesh and blood could long bear, but which Jess must bear, so he would not have to go on alone, so he could be a man among men—*honest* men!—jars that seemed tearing muscle from bone, but which he must stand, so folks would not keep tearing the heart right out of him; killing shocks that he must take in order that his life might be free from the kind of shocks he had got when they brought his father home to him—and the night he had found Dan!

Fogging pain made all dim and unreal but the stakes he was fighting for. He could not lose—now he had seen Jetta again! He could not go Trailor—

and shame her for what she had done for him. He must just ride—everything came to an end some time. Just take that *thud, thud, thud,* and hold together——

Then, to the relief of every one, the whistle was blown. The first time a whistle had ever been blown for a rider on Hell-gait. The pick-up galloped alongside to lift Jess from the horse, but, weakly, the boy waved him back. He must not stop—Hell-gait must stop! There must not be any doubt. He must ride to a finish—so Jim Fergus could not help but give him the prize!

And, to Jim Fergus' great satisfaction, Jess did! Though he remembered little more of that ride, only knew, after an eternity of torture, that the horse had stopped bucking.

Painfully, then, he got down, and, somehow, to the fence. He hung to it, dusty, dazed, and bloody, until things quit going around, hearing, as he wiped dust and blood from his face—cheers! Far-sounding, through the roar in his head; faint and few, but wonderful as celestial music—cheers for him! And they made him strong. Folks would have to be a little proud of him now—champion rider of Big Smoky range!

Drawing himself up, Jess looked across to the judges' box. All three men were waving their arms, arguing—why, there was not any argument! No—for even Jim Fergus nodded assent. And now, as the announcer stepped out in front, lifting the megaphone, Jess did not dread hearing his name. This time he could not wait.

"Ladies an' gentlemen,"—oh, why go through all that red tape!—"the judges have found it hard to reach a decision." What was hard about it—giving it to a Trailor? "You have just witnessed a remarkable ride, but"—no buts about it!—"the judges regret"—oh, sure, they'd regret it, but they would have to, wouldn't they?—"that they are forced to disqualify Jess Trailor. He ignored the signal, an' refused to be taken from his horse. Therefore, they have no recourse but to award the prize to the next best rider, Chuck Saunders, of the Ace of Clubs!"

Rare, unconscious tribute to Jess, the long, long silence that fell then, for the crowd was stunned by the verdict. At last Chuck's admirers set up a cheer, and others, recovering, joined in, glad to see the highest honor in their power to bestow go to any one but a Trailor. And the rest, thinking, perhaps, that Jess had been fairly discriminated against, reluctantly added their plaudits for Chuck.

But, here and there, as love of fair play triumphed over hate for the rustling Trailors, a voice rose hot against the decision.

"Rotten!"

"A cold-blooded freeze-out!"

"Contest—bah! The rawest deal I ever saw pulled off on this—or any track!"

But cheers, jeers, all were alike to Jess, standing by the fence, white, stricken, like a man slowly bleeding to death. One thought cut through the whirl in his brain—they would not have dared hand out that deal to his father, Ute Trailor!

And all of him seemed, then, to die but his eyes—his almond-shaped eyes. They lived—were intensely alive, with blue fire. His head came up higher. His shoulders set straighter. Before them all, the boy of the canyon changed sinisterly, subtly—he was now all Trailor! And things did not hurt—any more than the rain had hurt Dan that night. In fact, he had a sense of relief, as of long strain over. He was done with a losing battle. They had repudiated him. Now he would have the game with the name! And they would have the respect of fear for him—which Ford had said was something! He was deaf to the great buzzing that went on about him. He had come to the end of

his blind alley, and Ford was there—up on the Little Jack Pine, waiting.

Indifferent to the curious eyes upon him, Jess crossed the track, and took his saddle from the rider who had retrieved it from the outlaw's back. Then he hunted up Bucky, and was cinching it on, when the boys reached him.

"A danged shame, Jess!" Chuck cried, in that tone of companionship for which Jess had once hungered.

But, without a word, he turned from these waddies who would have consoled him, mounted, and rode down the track to the judges' box. Jim Fergus was coming down the steps. But Jess swung his horse broadside, barring his path.

"Fergus," the boy's blazing eyes underscored the threat in his cryptic speech, "for this—an' other things—I'll pay you back!"

And leaving the rancher choking with wrath, he whirled and deliberately rode over to the grand-stand rail, where the scarlet-bloused girl waited in suspense. Before her, before them all, Jess dismounted, and swept off his hat. His face was totally devoid of color, but there was about him, more markedly than ever, that something that made him different, compelling—all that unusual strength of body and spirit, unleashed now that the course of his life was decided.

"Thanks, girl," he said to her alone, "for what you done. It wasn't the first time. I ain't forgot that old time!"

Her black eyes haunted his, and her hand fluttered to her throat. "Jess!" she said.

So for the first time since childhood they met, man and woman, with the old attraction fusing into something beautiful and deathless between them.

"It ain't likely," Jess said tensely, "that I can ever do anything for you. But, if ever I can—Jetta, I'd give you the linin' of my heart for moccasins!"

And she cried, oblivious of prying ears and eyes: "Oh, Jess, you look so—I'm afraid for you, of what you'll do! Don't let this embitter you, Jess. It just goes to prove you'll have to leave here—go away. Go so far nobody will know, or care, who you are!"

And he said, simply, "It's a day too late for that!"

Then he rode to the watering trough just beyond, where he heard Met Fergus loudly upholding his father's decision to Spike Travis and some other Seven Star men.

At any other time Jess would have waited till he came to the creek just outside the gate to water his horse. But not this new Jess. Swerving sharply, he rode up to the trough, crowded back the nearest horse, and, getting down, slipped Bucky's bridle. Then he stood back, waiting for him to drink, and saw Met's eyes fall on him, as he knew they would, with an ugly gleam.

"See here, Trailor," bawled the Seven Star son and heir, wedging through to Jess. "I saw you talkin' to Jetta. I won't stand for any low-down son of a rustler makin' up to my sister! You steer a wide path around her from now on—savvy!"

For once in his life, Jess answered Met as he wanted to, not in word, but act—an act swift as lightning, and as unexpected. In an amazing burst of strength, he seized the bull, by shoulder and waist, lifted him high, and plunged him head-first into the watering trough. Then he waited coolly by, until Met scrambled out, sputtering, amid water and oaths. "You—you——"

"Don't say it, Met!"

And there was that in Jess' low-voiced command, his smoldering glance, that made Met afraid to. Nor had any one else a word to say, though Jess looked hard at Spike Travis and each Seven Star man. Then, leisurely mounting, he rode away, just as the official-looking stranger who had evinced such interest in him in the grand stand pushed through.

"Where's young Trailor?" the newcomer demanded of Met, who stood open-mouthed still, dripping wet, an ungodly halo of green scum and water weeds on his blond head. "I thought I saw him come this way. Did you see him?"

Somebody tittered. Met glared. But an accommodating bystander promptly answered:

"Just left, stranger. Take my hoss, here, you can catch him before he leaves the grounds."

But it was hours before the obliging waddy got his horse back. For the stranger, overtaking Jess, had ridden with him, questioning, probing him, shrewdly sounding him out. And, at last—when it was a day too late—Jess was offered a job! He could not take it—now that he was a Trailor.

And he rode alone into the crimson sunset, where, high up in one of the timbered notches, the Little Jack Pine flowed, and Ford Cruze waited!

CHAPTER V.

THE RUSTLING TRAIL.

UP on Ford's place, the endless rest of that September! Rest, while the last leaf fell, withered and sere, and to naked whips of brush clung the red berry of the mountain ash and white snowberry; while the wild geese flew over with high honking, and, in every desolate grove, birds assembled for southern migration; while cattle losses drove Big Smoky ranchers to desperation!

Up on Ford's place, where othing was like Jess had expected, but much the same as in his own blue canyon. It might have been his own place lifted high in the mountains, except for the presence of Ford, and of Bart and Seminole—two gaunt old range wolves, who had ridden with his father. Just another such an unkempt, run-down litter of buildings and corrals and insecure pastures, of wild sod that had never felt plow, nor burgeoned a harvest.

A "horse ranch," Ford called it, and got away with it because of the small band of fast, blooded saddle-stock that he ranged on it, because it was so far from any one, so hard to get to, that few ever came to it; because Ford could get away with anything—could tell you that the moon was made of green cheese, and you'd believe it, or, anyhow, believe that he believed it! Just as he had got away with his rustling for years and was not suspected as much as men who were straight because he looked like anything but what he was, with his honest, cinnamon face—the old rustler!

Up on Ford's place Jess was crazy for action! Crazy to rustle every cow in the country, starve out every rancher—beginning with Fergus! Crazy to start paying back Fergus! And with the old-new, devastatingly hopeless worship for Jetta, crazy to plunge so deep into iniquity that he would have to forget her, have to put out of his heart forever something she had put into it with that fluttering "Jess!" As her eyes haunted his, then and thereafter, he had some crazy idea that if he had gone away, and made good, some day——

Up on Ford's place Jess was wild to be a holy terror—show folks it wasn't safe to hand out that deal to a Trailor! Yet, he was idle, committing no sin to collect wages on, making no money, easy or otherwise, still wearing the old clothes, more out at the elbow than ever, still riding old Three-in-one, but wearing, too, Ute Trailor's old guns. Jess was wearing himself out—waiting, burning himself out—remembering; breaking horses for Ford to kill time, and feeling himself breaking, feeling things closing in—dreadful things, that were closing!

Even Ford's welcome had been disappointing. The old rustler had been glad to see him, and fighting mad at the

way they had treated him, though it was just what he had expected. But, considering that for a whole year he had begged him to join the gang, Ford might have shown a little enthusiasm. Jess got the impression that the old fellow was none too happy about his coming, and saw how Ford kept putting him off from day to day, when he begged to accompany them.

Something had happened to Ford, since that day he had ridden down to the cabin. He went around with a long face, and a deep crease between his eyes, like a man with a load on his mind. What was wrong, Jess wondered? Why didn't Ford tell him?

And he had wondered, too, breaking horses for Ford to kill time, where Ford's gang was, and why it wasn't mentioned. He was greatly surprised to learn that this was the size of it! How could Bart and Seminole and Ford get away with stolen cows on the wholesale scale with which they had been disappearing on Big Smoky? How did they work, anyway? And where did they ride off to every day, coming in at all hours, with themselves in a stew and their horses all lathered? Why didn't they take him?

"You kept at me to join!" impetuously he broke out on Ford one night, when the old fellow rode in alone. "Now I'm in. Put me to work. Name how many cows you want, an' I'll rustle 'em!"

Fords' weary face had lighted with a smile at his fervor. "Now I know you're a Trailor! You sound just like Ute. That was his style, an' Dan's—ride down an' rustle! But times have changed. With ranchers on the lookout, like they be, we wouldn't last two days workin' that a way!"

"How do you work?" Eagerly, Jess seized this opening. And while, still undisturbed, they had supper together, Ford told him.

"Son, there's rustlers an' rustlers. Ute was a raider. I'm what you might call a trader. His way was quick, but too risky. But I've worked out a scheme which adds considerable to the longevity of the profession. I picked out a man I could trust an' planted him down on the range. For ten dollars a head, he delivers cattle to a certain place. I don't know where he gets 'em. The brands they wear don't belong to any rancher in Big Smoky—an' I ain't supposed to ask are they worked over. I take 'em to a safe place in the hills till I can sell 'em to buyers who ain't no more curious about brands than me. I'm the middleman, see? The man I buy from——"

Into Jess' mind flashed the image of a wizened, coyote face, and he cried: "That's Spike Travis!"

Ford's eyes met his hard. "How'd you know, Jess?" he asked.

"Just guessed."

"Waal," Ford admitted, "between us two, you hit the nail on the head. Spike's in on the ground floor. Workin' for Fergus, he ain't suspected. I picked him because he looks so simple, but he ain't nigh so simple as he looks."

Jess did not doubt that. "Does Spike know I'm here?" he asked.

"Nobody does—but Bart an' Seminole, an' you can trust them."

"Which I sure don't Spike!" The boy's eyes flashed his dislike.

Ford nodded. He did not blame Jess. And he had a better understanding of the old grudge Spike bore the Trailors than ever Jess had. Ford believed that old feud had died with Ute. But he was glad he had not said anything about Jess to Spike.

"What I don't savvy," Jess mused, "is how you can operate on such a scale, with only one man——"

"Holy Smoke, son! You don't think we're gettin' away with all the cattle that's missin' around here!"

Blankly, Jess stared at him. "Who is, then?"

And the old rustler cried feelingly, "I wisht I knew!"

This conversation gave the boy something to think about and help to kill time. For, as days passed, Ford still kept him champing the bit, almost beside himself with impatience. And each day deepened the crease between Ford's eyes. His shoulders settled, as if with the weight of a nation. Jess knew from the talk, that ranchers were making the range hot. And he began to think that Ford was holding him back, so he would be out of the crash that was bound to come. And he did not like that. If his friend was in trouble——

"Ford," he pleaded, dropping down on the porch beside him one day, "what's on your mind?"

He expected only evasions, and was dumfounded when the old fellow flared: "Rustlers, dang 'em! There's too danged many of 'em. They're drivin' us ol' vets out of the business! An' the low-down, thievin' layout is rustlin' my cows!"

"Your cows!" the boy gasped.

"Cows which I bought——"

"At ten a head?" interjected Jess, grinning.

"Which sure counts up!" declared the outraged old rustler. "They've about cleaned me out."

"You mean"—it made Jess somewhat dizzy to follow—"that the other rustlers are actually rustlin' the cows you rustled?"

"The cows which I bought from Spike," Ford was explicit. "Son, the last three herds have plumb disappeared. My safe cattle cache—— Safe! They found it—cleaned me out. But," and his eyes blazed with indignation, his voice shook with it, "if ever I find the two-legged coyotes what stole my cows——"

It was too much for Jess, and he burst into a ringing laugh. It was funny to hear Ford cussing rustlers like a regular rancher, as mad at the idea of somebody stealing cows he had stolen as even Jim Fergus could be.

"It ain't just their stealin'," Ford pointed out glumly. "They're overdoin' it. What I swiped ain't a drop in the bucket. An' the way we do, a rancher can still make a profit. But this gang is bleedin' the range! I hear Fergus ripped Sheriff Carey right up the back, an' that Carey's imported outside help. Already, there's deputies sproutin' in every bush! Son, the man takes his life in his hands who rides down the range of nights."

"Is that," Jess asked steadily, "why you're makin' sure I don't ride down?"

Ford's eyes fell from the direct gaze of Jess Trailor. "I——" he began. Then, abruptly, "Jess, is them the best boots you got?"

The boy looked down, his face flushing hot. But he said honestly, "They're all I got!"

"Great snakes!" Ford was overcome with remorse. "Here I planned to do so much for you—an' I let you go barefoot!" He went down in his chaps and dug up a roll of bills which he tossed to Jess. There was fifty dollars. But Jess handed it back.

"Not when you're short, Ford."

"Short?" Ford chuckled. "Son, you can't keep a good man down. I'll have plenty to-morrow."

But much as Jess needed the money, he could not accept.

"I ain't earned it." He stuck to that.

"You will—before you have a chance to spend it," was the thrilling promise.

Wildfire swept the boy's soul. "Then I'm goin' to ride?" And his dark eyes glowed.

"To-night." Necessity, only, dragged the reluctant words from Ford. "I've scraped up money to buy a new herd. I'm to meet it at dark, an' I need you to help me get it to the hills. I got a new hidin' place, an' I aim to make it safe by ridin' herd on them cows with a gun till I sell 'em!"

They sat on in silence together, each busy with his own thoughts, until the two old wolves hove in sight on the trail, and Jess inquired: "Is Bart an' Seminole goin' to help?"

"You bet! We wouldn't get far without their help. They cover trail. Why, they're the only reason we ain't been tracked down—so far," and Ford gave the porch rail a tap with his knuckles by way of "knocking wood," and so propitiating the gods. "They work alone. To-night when we slip the herd away, they'll drop in behind with a bunch of range cows they've gathered up in the neighborhood an' follow us to the ford, blottin' out our tracks. We drive into the river an' through the gorge, while they just drive in an' out on the opposite bank. So any sherlockin' waddy on the scent don't notice that there was twice as many cows went into the water as what came out, an' he keeps on the trail of them cows till he finds 'em grazin' peaceful somewhere, allows they're just strays, an' he's got on the wrong trail."

Jess was more impatient than any of them for night to come. And, as day waned, he was as restless and strung as a soldier on the eve of battle. Well might it be battle. Big Smoky cowmen were as apt to strike at any move, any sound, as a skin-shedding rattler! And, up on Ford's place, all were preparing for battle.

Guns were cleaned, oiled, and tried. Jess, with the rest, cleaned, oiled, and tried the old guns of his fathr, nervously wondering if he would be the dead shot he had always been, if he had occasion to use them to-night. It was one thing to put a gun in shape to hunt game for a living, and another to test it out with the thought that man might be the next game sighted on.

He was relieved to see that his nervousness was shared by the three old veterans. They grew moody, morose, as the sun sank. Supper was got through without an unnecessary word being said. And, in silence, soon after, Bart and Seminole took their departure.

As for Ford, Jess hardly knew him. Now, with the time for action nearing, Ford looked what he was—a rustler! All his good humor had been put off like a mask. Under it his face was stern, his eyes like granite. His easy-going demeanor became one of grim purpose. And it occurred to Jess that Ford might have gone far had he turned his talent into legitimate channels. For it took brains to handle three units of men, each working independently of the other.

With a glance at his watch, Ford went outside, and Jess followed. The purple shadows of the Big Smokies were on the plains that spread so far below into infinity. Together the men saddled the blaze-faced black, and Ford mounted.

"Wait here an hour," he bade Jess, "no more an' no less. Then take the trail down the ridge past your place till you come to Hangman Creek. I'll be there with the cattle."

He rode off through the stunted jackpines. And Jess followed him with his eyes until Blaze's black legs disappeared and the little trees came together.

"I shouldn't 'a' watched him out of sight," he worried, "they say it's bad luck."

He grinned at the fancy. But, as blacker and blacker fell the shadows about him, more deeply dark—waiting his hour out by his saddled horse—fell the black shadow across the boy's heart. A premonition of worse than bad luck! And in it fear had no part.

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

Silvertip Spills the Bees

By Austin Hall

Author of "Herds and a Hurricane," etc.

YARRUP! Hey! Dog-gone! Whoop! Hey!"

A tangle of rolling humanity bounced out of the brush, leaped into the air, and tumbled down the mountainside, arms waving and cuss words flying—all to the tune of a swarm of yellow jackets that clustered and pecked at an old man's neck—straight down toward the deep pool of the river. *Kerplunk!* And a shower of crystal spray arose in the bright sunlight.

For several seconds John Harper Adams remained out of sight, while the puzzled hornets buzzed around over the trembling waters and waited for a new attack. Then the man's head bobbed up again, gasping for air; but at the same second an old hornet, still on guard, hit like a rocket and landed on his nose. The head went down like a stone and remained under water until it had reached the shelter of some overhanging willows, where old John clung with his face just above the surface, waiting until the hot-tailed yellow jackets should get over their fury. One minute—two—ten and then he crawled up the bank and vented his wrath against the cause of his misfortune.

"Dog-gone yer ole hide!" he cried, shaking his fist at a big bear on the hillside. "Next time yuh dig out a yellow jacket's nest, be careful of what you're doing! Of all the danged, ornery, impudent critters! Holy Moses! Yuh threw the whole durn bunch on my neck. But I guess it serves me right for owning a bear. Here I was on my way tuh town, all dressed up and prepared fer business. And now I've got tuh go back tuh the cabin and get some new clothes. Yeh, look at me, will yuh? I've been stung from head tuh foot. Nice shape, ain't I?"

Once more he shook his fist. The bear on the hillside merely blinked through the hazels and went on chewing his treasure of grubs and refuse honey. The yellow jackets had streaked back toward their hole and were pecking at the bear; but—well, a grizzly's hide is almighty tough, and Silvertip

scarcely noticed them. Old John began sneaking into the woods on the other side of the stream. A blue jay flew to the top of an old snag and let out a raucous call; an eagle swooped its silent way across a mountaintop; then all was still. The time was deep summer—as perfect a day as a man could wish.

Five minutes later, John Harper Adams was up at the old cabin, changing his soaked dungarees and spreading a soft layer of mud about his tortured face and neck; after which he walked over by the door and surveyed himself in a nailed-up piece of looking-glass.

"It's just one happy moment after another," was his grimacing comment. "John Adams, yuh sure look like a beaut. Yuh're so durned ornery-lookin' right at this 'ere minute that, if I wasn't plumb out of grub, I wouldn't take yuh tuh town at all. Nossir, I wouldn't. W'at am I going tuh tell 'em with a mug like that? Hey? That ole bear! Of course! I've been kidded and laughed at until I'm sick of it. If I'd do right by myself, I'd take a gun and plug that pesky bruin right now. And it would sure save me a peck of trouble. As it is, I suppose he'll follow me halfway tuh town and mebbe sock me with another yellow jacket's nest. That's about the size of it!"

But, as it turned out, the old man was only half a prophet; the bear took up his trail and stuck with it, but at the outskirts of the town he returned to the hills.

"Dog-gone," spoke John Adams musingly, "Silvertip never did like the city, did he? Got tuh have the wide-open spaces. Still, he never come up close, and he didn't get fresh. That helps some. And these bee stings have stopped smarting so much. So I'll wash off the mud and go intuh town like a gentleman."

But the swelling remained, although the creek water did away with the dirt and left his face a strange pink. When he entered "Hardpan" Thompson's general store, he was prepared for a great kidding. But it did not come. Instead, he was greeted by a crowd of excited miners.

"And here's John Adams!" one of them exclaimed. "Yeh, John Adams himself. Heard the news, John? No, I bet yuh ain't! Well, the news is plenty, if yuh want tuh ask me. Yuh remember old Con Jensen, huh? Sure yuh do! Yuh and him used tuh be pardners way back there w'en yuh was young fellers. Well, Con's struck her. Yep! Over on Wolf Creek back of Salmon Mountain. Nuggets as big as goose eggs. It's a pocket, of course; but it'll sure make him rich. Yeh! The news jus' got in. Yuh ain't seen the sheriff, have yuh? Well, he's been askin' fer yuh. As soon as he got the news, he begun wishing fer John Adams. I don't know why. Better see him."

John smiled reminiscently; the mention of an old friend was always pleasant news to his heart; he hadn't seen Con Jensen for years, and he was glad to hear of his luck. Outside the store, a crowd of men had gathered, talking wildly; one of them was gesticulating, too.

"You bet!" John heard him saying. "Well, it's pretty rotten. I hope some one gets 'em. I'm ready tuh go on that posse any ole time. Tough bunch, I'll say. They gotta be hung up. Straight shooting and no mistake. Dirty dogs!"

John only caught the tail end of the conversation; but it was enough to warn him that there was more than a gold discovery in the wind. Sounded like murder and sudden death.

"Yeh," he murmured. "Well, I guess there is some news. Lots of it. And I suppose the sheriff now—dang

his hide, w'at does he want? Yeh, I'll have tuh see him."

He was just in time to find the sheriff strapping on his six-gun; but, at the sight of the old man, the officer sat down.

"John Adams!" he exclaimed. "Of all the men in the world, just the one I wanted tuh see! Yuh're old Johnnie on the spot, ain't yuh? So! Now then, let's get down tuh business. I suppose yuh've heard about old Con Jensen's luck. And——"

"Yep," interrupted the bear man, drawing up a chair. "I've heard of that; but not of the other. W'at I listened tuh out there sounded like somethin' violent, and I suppose yuh are aiming on setting me tuh work. Well, I'll warn ye that yuh ain't a-goin' tuh succeed. I've had enough excitement tuh last me fer a lifetime already. See? So, if it's sheriffin' that yuh wants me tuh perform, yuh'll have tuh do it yourself. But—excuse me, sheriff—what's happened?"

But it was plain that the sheriff had not accepted John's dictum as final.

"Listen, John," he said. "You ain't heard me out. It's—it's—well, it's as important a case as ever come into this office. There's a bunch of bad men up in those hills behind you that have been raising the very dickens. We don't know how many; but they're bad—as bad as they make 'em. They've been hitting through the mountain like a forest fire, striking first here and then there. Their game seems to be to find some isolated miner, rob him of his stake, and then kill him. At least, I'm pretty sure that they do the killing. And, after the poor fellow is dead, they put his body in his cabin and set fire to it. That, of course, is to make it look like an accident. Only, it's almighty funny that every prospector with a stake should get caught in a similar fire. Understand? Well, it's happened four times in the last two weeks; and we haven't caught up to 'em yet. They're working fast; always ahead of us. As fast as we return from one spot, some one seems to have met with a similar fate, and we have to start out again. And now comes this news about Con Jensen. He's up behind Salmon Mountain a long time, ever since he quit that little bee farm down in the valley. You remember, he liked bees; but——"

"Bees!" old John snorted. "I've got enough of 'em. If they's bees—but yuh say he quit raisin' 'em, and went tuh prospecting. All right, go on."

"Humph! Say, what's the matter with your face, John? Looks like bee stings, hey? Some more yellow jackets, or mebbe some wild honey? Well, keep a-listening. Here's the layout. Con Jensen's struck it rich, and the news has spread all over the mountains. Understand? And Con is way over behind the Big Salmon—sixty miles. And those fellows will get wind of it and go after him. He's got to be warned, and I'm thinking about sending you and that old bear over to give him word. How about it? You two make the sweetest and neatest pair of deputies I've got. Of course, I can deputize you and make you go, anyway; but I'm leaving it up to your own wishes."

But John shook his head.

"I ain't a-wishin'," he returned. "Yuh got plenty of good men right here in town. Lots of 'em! And—well, as far as Silvertip and me is concerned, us two has fallen out. And, besides, I'm thinking that if those fellers come across old Con Jensen, they'll learn something about a shooting eye. Old Con has lived a good many years, just like me, and he's accounted for many a bandit. Better get some one else. I'm busy."

"He's got to be warned," the sheriff insisted.

"Well, all right, warn him! Go yourself if yuh have tuh. Sheriffin' is your business, ain't it? I'll take care of myself, and wait fer 'em up at the claim. Otherwise, I'm merely a private citizen."

However, on his way back to the mountains, John found himself thinking differently; the bee stings had lost their severity, and with the coming of moonlight his feelings began to be soothed.

"Dog-gone!" he muttered. "I done give the old sheriff a curt answer. He must think I'm a heck of a fellow. But how could a man do better when he's full of stingers? Yeh. But Con Jensen! Many's the time him and me has hit it out together. I ain't seen him in years. Nossir, I ain't! And it would be kinda nice tuh drop in on him like this. Dog-gone—I've a notion tuh go over."

But John could not go very far that evening; along about midnight, he selected a sheltered spot behind a huge boulder, lit a fire, and lay down to sleep. Next morning he set off, heading toward the pink dawn of the eastern mountains, hitting up a long ridge, until he came to a spot parallel to his own claim. There he cached his groceries and sat down for a smoke.

"I ain't a human being unless I go," he mused. "Old Con might get killed. And then wouldn't I feel pretty? I wouldn't be nothin' less than a dog-gone murderer. Why, say—hello! Just see who's here!"

He had been looking through a group of firs, where an opening gave him a view of the silvery river, when a sudden movement caught his attention—a flutter, and then a pair of feet. Silvertip was standing not sixty yards away, waiting, and as silent as a cat. Evidently, the big bear had been trailing him for some distance.

"Yeh! I simply can't get away from him," said the old man. "He hangs on like a leach. Well, I guess I've simply got tuh go now. Silvertip couldn't know about it, but things are turning out just as they should. And so, John Adams, I guess it's up tuh yuh tuh do your duty."

It was a long trip up the mountains to the summit, among the lakes, and then down the other side into the region of the Devil's Canyon. All forenoon the man and bear went along, taking short cuts, and heading toward the peak of the River Salmon. Not a thing happened until along in the afternoon, as they were traveling up a high ridge that lay between two mountains; then, like a flash, the grizzly suddenly disappeared—and when Silvertip did that, there was usually a mighty good reason. John stopped and scratched his head.

"Mighty funny!" he muttered. "I've known that old bear for years, and I come pretty near understanding his ways. First he's here, and then he ain't. And w'en Silvertip leaves the earth like that, something's up. Yep, sure is! I wish I had a nose like his. It certainly would come in handy. Wonder what he smells?"

However, there was nothing that John could do except go on carefully now, and with his rifle ready. It might be anything—a cougar, another bear, a bandit! Bandits! John was prepared for them; only he would rather have known just when they were coming. He was still twenty miles from Con Jensen's; but by fast walking he would be able to reach his destination by dark. He began wondering—perhaps, after all, he might be too late. Come to think of it, it would be just Con's luck to make a big strike and then lose it. Con had always been unlucky. Old John was still musing, when suddenly a report sounded from the parallel ridge, and a bullet pinged above his head. In a fraction of a second John was inside the brush.

"Yep," he muttered, "that's them! But are they coming or going? I wonder which. By golly, I'm either just in time or just too late!"

For some minutes he lay still, listening to a hopping wren and the twittering of a bird on a high branch; then he crouched on his belly and sneaked through the cover, worming his way until he had gained the shelter of a long lane of small larchwood, where the going would be safer, and from which, ever and anon, he could get a good view of the opposite ridge. But no one appeared; evidently, they had either waited for him, or else they were going in the opposite direction. Neither was there any sign of his old bear, Silvertip; but John was not worried about that.

"Dog-gone!" he mumbled. "I certainly hope they ain't heading out of the country; that would mean that they've already done for Con Jensen. Sneaked up on him and slugged him while he was at work, most likely; and w'en I get there, they won't be nothin' left but ashes." Then, as if to cheer himself up, he added: "John Adams, you're a fool! Yuh ain't killed yet, and neither is Con. We'll fool them fellows aplenty."

And straightway he began putting the words into effect. Instead of continuing along the ridge, he turned down the side into the most difficult country imaginable, hoping to throw the assailants off the track and as well cut off several miles. Presently he gained a foaming current and then struck up the rocky slope on the other side, following the ravines and at times climbing around the dizzy heights until he came to a second crest. From here he descended to another stream. When he reached a third creek, he turned about and began following it toward its source, holding to the shelter of the alders and taking care that his tracks were concealed as much as possible. Up ahead of him lay the great shoulders of Salmon Mountain. Wolf Creek ran straight up toward its crest. Con Jensen's claim was somewhere along its banks; John did not know just where. The afternoon sun had by this time fallen behind the western mountains, and the soft shadows had begun to spread along the gulches. Night was not so far off.

And still John heard no sound of man nor beast; merely the pulse of the forest, mingled with the rippling of the water; a bird sang his evening lay, and up on a treetop a robber jay proclaimed the fact of a successful looting. It began to look as though John would walk right into Con's camp without being announced.

But, apparently Con Jensen was not as unwary as he thought. John had just left a slump of willows and was wading across the stream, when, stepping around a big boulder, he found himself peering into the muzzle of a gun held by a steady hand. Then came a voice:

"Up with 'em! Stick 'em up! Up! Up! Higher, until I kin see who ye might be!"

By that time John's head had come into view. A second more, and he would have been shot, or shooting. The voice behind the gun let out an exclamation.

"John Adams! By jingoes! I thought yuh was one of them bandits I been hearing about. Seen yuh heading up the creek; but I couldn't make out just who yuh was. John Adams! How be ye?"

There is nothing like a meeting between two old friends; in no time they were rolling about like two pebbles in a sluice box, comparing stories and getting the lie of the land, and what was up. The bandits! Con had not seen them; but he wasn't taking any chances! However, he had heard

about them three days before, when he was over to Conner's Creek.

"And the strike?" John asked.

"She's a wonder," Con replied. "John Adams, I'm rich! I was just driving a trial shaft when I run across a bit of fool's fortune. After all these years of wise mining, I don't strike nothin' until I just trust tuh luck. Why, say, yuh know how unlucky I've allus been? Well, it's changed now, and plenty! Everything I do turns just right. And gold—it simply lays in there in big nuggets—yuh'd think they was placed there just on purpose fer an old fool like me tuh pick 'em off. I'm rich!"

There was no doubt of that. By the light of a candle, John was able to look at the most remarkable ledge he had ever seen; it fairly took his breath away; and when he had gained the cabin, he saw still more—a poke of nuggets that would have startled the oldest miner. The cabin was built up against a hill, but it was too dark for John to make out more of the location; besides, the gold had taken up all his interest.

"By jingoes!" Jensen was running on. "I guess you're ready now to say I'm lucky! And they's lots more. I've got enough hidden tuh start a college. It's just been raining metal. But I guess you're hungry. How about some venison?"

The old fellow had so much to say that it was almost impossible for John to get a word in; but at last, between mouthfuls, he related what he had seen up on the ridge, how his old bear had disappeared, and about the shooting. But Con Jensen refused to be frightened.

"I know all about it," he announced. "Leastways, I know that those fellers have been working. But when a fellow has been waiting all his life for a strike, and he gets it in his old age, he don't have tuh worry. Yuh see, it's coming tuh me. And it ain't a-going tuh be taken away. I've got gold, and they'll be after it; but Con ain't lost his shooting eye—yet. Just the same, I'm a-goin' tuh let yuh do the sleeping to-night, while I watch. I can't afford tuh take no chances."

In face of a confidence like that, John could not help feeling reassured; when the light was blown out, he crawled into the bunk, leaving Jensen sitting in his leather-thonged chair by the door. Soon John was snoring, and when John started at that, nothing could stop him. Perhaps there was something soothing in the sound, for, before long, old Con had joined him. Two prospectors asleep and some crooks in ambush! The night drifted on toward morning.

And then—John Adams opened his eyes; or rather, he was shaken awake. Some one was pulling at his beard; and that particular some one was not Con Jensen. The intruder was laughing, a cold, blood-thirsty chuckle that sent a chill up the old man's spine. He did not have a chance; a twist, and he found himself helpless.

"Huh!" came a voice. "This is the old bird we saw on the ridge. Give us the slip, he did. Most likely he was coming over here tuh head us off. Well, he sure beat us. Hey? How's that old coot over there. Yuh two got him tied up? All right. Throw him on this bed, where we'll have them both together. All set?"

Somebody had lit a candle and was holding it against Con Jensen's face. John could see that his companion had been bound just like himself. Just then the bandit brought the flame against the miner's whiskers. Con Jensen let out a yell. One of the three men began laughing.

"That's the stuff, Buck," he barked. "That makes 'em talk. It ain't failed yet. And this old codger has got more gold than any of 'em. It'll be our last

haul. We'll soon have enough tuh last us fer ten years. Pretty soft pickings, eh? All right, sling him in beside this felluh here."

John was thinking fast; but, so far, he had been unable to figure anything out. Evidently, the bandits had slipped up and found his companion asleep; consequently, they had merely to walk in and take possession. Without his gun and with a two-hundred-pound bully on his chest, John was helpless; but he knew enough to hold his tongue. But not so with Con Jensen; the old man was mad all over.

"All right," he was saying. "But it's all the good it will do yuh. Burn my whiskers off, if yuh wants tuh! Yuh ain't a-goin' tuh get nothin' out of me. Sneaked up w'en I was asleep, didn't yuh? Yuh yella curs."

A coarse laugh was the answer. One of the men had procured a chair and was bringing it alongside the bed; he was a great red-headed fellow with a scar under his right eye.

"Huh!" he gloated. "Well, mebbe we are, but that don't hurt us none. We're after the goods. And we didn't come over these high mountains fer our health. Get me! We're after the stuff and nothin' else! Savvy? Yuh better dig up, because we ain't got no time tuh be a-fooling. The sheriff of this county is hot on our trail, and we gotta make a get-away. We're bad—all bad. Here, mebbe this will help yuh some more?"

He had been lighting a cigarette, and, with the match at full flame, he reached over and touched off what was left of Con Jensen's whiskers. Another yell went up. At the same time, the match descended into John's beard; but John twisted against the pillow and smothered it out. The man grunted.

"Pretty foxy, ain't yuh?" he sneered. "Well, yuh've got a lot tuh learn. We'll tend tuh yuh next. Are yuh ready tuh dig up?"

And still John was thinking; daylight was coming, and the light was streaming through the windows; through a back one, he could see some square objects on the hillside. He was wondering what they were. Then, suddenly, he saw something standing out in the soft daylight; it seemed to filter out of the square boxes and rise up toward the sky. Then he thought of his bear—where was old Silvertip? The big bruin was behind him somewhere, and now that it was morning, he ought to be wabbling along. And—until the bear was tied up, John still had one arm free. But where was Silvertip? And in the meantime, what would they do? These men were killers. They were after gold, and once they had it, they would go on. Anyway, it would be a good idea to gain a little time. And, besides, there was more metal in the ledge—plenty of it. John raised himself.

"Looks like they've got us, Con," he said. "So what's the use? Better let them have it. I ain't aiming on dying." But, at the same time, he gave Jensen a nudge with his bound foot. "Tell 'em where it is."

"I'll tell 'em nothing," came the stubborn answer. "I ain't no coward, even if yuh are. Not me!"

But just then one of the bandits discovered the poke; the contents were spread out, in broad display. The robbers' eyes lit up. One of them picked up a gun and held it at Jensen's ear.

"Yeh," he snapped. "Well, we want the rest of it. We've heard all about the stuff, and we've come tuh get it. Where's the rest? Out with it!"

But still it did no good, for Jensen would not speak; that is, until the bandit had shifted the gun against the head of John Adams. Apparently, that was a horse of a different color. Con Jensen blinked; a brave man himself, he was, evidently, too generous to allow his friend to get hurt. Besides,

he was thinking of the nudge that John had given him a few minutes before! perhaps John had something up his sleeve; anyway, he spoke now:

"All right," he cried. "I'll tell, only yuh've gotta leave John out of it. It's me you're after—not him. He's only my guest. Understand? Yeh. Well, the gold is under the floor over there behind the stove. Take it, and turn us loose."

And still John was thinking; he remembered suddenly that in each of the other cases of robbed prospectors, the cabin had been burned down on top of the miner. No doubt—— He was wondering what had become of his bear—he would welcome any help in a moment like this! Looking over his chest, he could see the men taking the pokes from the hiding place and carrying them through the doorway. When the last one had been disposed of, one of the bandits returned to the bedside with a small keg.

Powder!

The fellow was grinning wickedly.

"Yep," he announced, "we gotta thank yuh fer helpin' things along so fast, old fellow. And now we're going tuh finish the job. Yuh see, we never leave no evidence. Nary a bit! We're finished workers. Here we are. Come on, Buck, with that fuse. Hey, Joe! Hey!"

But John was hardly noticing them; instead, he was peering through the back window at the objects on the hillside; and at something that had come out of the woods just above them. Silvertip! And with Silvertip around, his chance was at hand. He could let out a yell, and the big bruin would come a-running. But—John did not call out.

He had seen something that had set his heart to jumping. The daylight had brightened so that he could make out the objects and distinguish what they were. And Silvertip! He was among those objects, now nosing around and knocking them over. Instantly the whole hillside was in a hum. Bees! Honey bees! Ten million insects were swarming over the bruin and pecking their vengeance. And—Silvertip did just what he always did, when he was cornered in a yellow jacket's nest! One sweep of his mighty paw, and a beehive went sailing. Another! Then a third one came straight through the window, breaking open and spilling a hundred thousand mad warriors on the surprised bandits. Yells! Groans! Shouts! The light went out—choked off by the fighting honey bees!

But John acted instantly. He had seen them coming. With one heave he shoved Con Jensen off the bed, and then he rolled over behind him, cuddling under the falling quilts. Bees hummed around them and tried to get inside; and some of them did; but it was far better than being blown to atoms. The yells and the tumult went on for a minute or two, and then all was still. Ten minutes went by; half an hour. John looked up; the room was fairly cleared.

No, not quite; for there was some one standing in the doorway. He heard a voice say:

"Hey! What the deuce has been going on here? Hey, you! Well, I'll be durned, if it ain't John Adams. I thought you said yuh wasn't coming. What the dickens——"

It was some time before John could understand just what had really happened.

"You see," the sheriff was explaining, "I arrived just at daybreak and was coming down the ridge on the other side, when I spotted the bandits. First, there was a noise like a lot of men getting killed. Then I saw these fellows tumbling out of the cabin. And believe me they was coming! You bet! Rolling head first for the

creek. And I guess that old bear of yours thought it was all a game, 'cause he was right after them. And into the water! Did I get them? Say, those fellows was so done for, that they couldn't have stood off a kitten. It was a hot time for them, and a funny one for me. I ain't got through laughing yet. And so they were going to blow you up, hey? Well, that accounts for some of our mysteries. And from the looks of things, I guess it's a good thing we both come over."

Then it was John Adams' turn to talk.

"Honest, sheriff," he began, "I thought we was done for—that is, until I saw what those things were on the hill. Beehives! And then I remembered that old Con never could live without his bees. But we had been so busy the night before that I hadn't mentioned it. Then I spotted old Silvertip. And when old Silver hits a hive of bees, he acts in just one way. I knew what was coming! It wouldn't have mattered whether the hive landed against the window or not; old Silver would have put it right through the wall. How about it, Con?"

But Con Jensen was hunting bee stings.

"Dog-gone!" he was saying. "I never was stung so many times in my life. But it was worth it! I knew my luck wouldn't fail. Still, I don't know—mebbe it ain't luck, either."

FOREST FIRES FROM BOTTLES

DURING the past summer, according to the annual custom, a small army of uniformed fighters took up its position in the forests of the Northwest to guard against the menace of fire. More timber is annually destroyed by this scourge than is cut down by man for utilitarian purposes.

In national forests each camp has a fire guard, and the sites of these are limited to places where water and help are available. Every large timber owner has a crew of fire wardens watching his precious acres. All forest fire wardens are under the leadership of the State fire warden, and in case of emergency all unite for the common good.

Needless to say, precautions are taken to keep public campers from the national forests, unless they are under the direct supervision of fire guards. Other precautions are very amusing as, for instance, that taken in regard to glass bottles. Forest rangers throughout the Northwest have instructions to bury such trophies whenever they find them. For, while the theory is discredited by many scientists, the State fire warden believes that glass bottles, focusing the sun's rays, will start fires.

By such careful watchfulness as this, and the use of thousands of sign warnings, last year's forest-fire loss was the smallest in history. Lightning was responsible for most of the fires that did occur, especially in the semimountainous regions.

Riding Raiders

by Harrington Strong

Author of "No Horseman," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST RECRUIT.

AS they neared the little border town of Praderia through a series of short, rocky defiles, Fernando Martinez became yet more alert.

Here were some excellent spots for an ambush, and Fernando Martinez had no desire to be shot down by some foe he could not see. He fully expected to die some day because of a bullet. But he wanted to pass out facing his man, and, if possible, taking his enemy with him into that Mysterious Country the geography of which no man has charted.

His rifle already was loose in its scabbard and prepared for instant use, and now he unfastened the flap of the holster which contained his six-gun. That particular six-gun had a history, a sinister and vivid history, as the notches carved into its stock recorded. For Fernando Martinez was of the old school of violence, and believed in keeping a faithful tally on his homicides.

Fernando Martinez was squatty as to form, mean as to visage, and vindictive as to nature. Black eyes glittered malevolently in a swarthy face on which a black mustache bristled. He wore, just now, the nondescript garb of a range man not much given to sartorial elegance. But that was only a costume for the dusty trail. On proper occasion, he could be downright foppish.

As he rode, he swayed gracefully in the saddle like a man who had spent a large portion of his life there. The horse he bestrode was an excellent animal, and was his own, purchased and paid for in the regular manner. This, however, was because Fernando Martinez was superstitious rather than honest. He held the belief that to indulge in a nefarious enterprise while riding a stolen horse would bring him disaster.

It was mid-morning, and the sun was

commencing to sting, though Fernando Martinez scarcely noticed it where many another man would have sweltered. He had camped in the hills the night before, with nothing to drink except water, which he detested as a beverage and seldom used for ablutions. He had eaten only some cold food which he had carried from the last town he had visited.

Hence, Fernando Martinez was in a warlike mood as he rode slowly and cautiously toward the little village of Praderia. In his present condition and state of mind, he was a mean man to affront. He knew well that he had many enemies, and that some of them would not hesitate to attack from the rear, that being the safest angle of attack upon the person of Fernando Martinez.

His little black eyes glittered now as he surveyed the terrain, and now and then he stopped his mount for a moment to listen. But he saw nothing, heard nothing to cause him alarm. And after a time he emerged from a tiny canyon, ascended a sharp slope, and stopped his horse on the crest, from which point he could view the distant town.

Praderia was only a small cluster of adobe huts scattered around a sun-baked and sand-swept plaza, with the inevitable cantina on one side of it and little chapel on the other. But there were ranches in the vicinity, and a few of them were of some consequence.

Praderia did not look like a scene of violence, seeming to be half asleep, basking in the hot sun like a lazy dog. Its citizens were few and of low grade. But its transients were of quite a different sort; for through Praderia ran the trail that led to the border and beyond.

On this trail there traveled, going South, certain gentlemen wanted badly by sheriffs in the States. Over this trail also, going toward the North, went many a man sought ardently by the *rurales* below the line. The little town of Praderia was a stopping place for both, a place to eat, and drink, and rest, boast, and gamble, and fight before continuing the journey.

Fernando Martinez looked over the country with eyes accustomed to viewing such sights and reading the signs. No telltale puff of dust on any of the trails leading to the town told of horsemen approaching. The village slumbered in the heat. Martinez knew that there would be men in the cantina and around it, and numbers of flea-infested dogs, and dirty women and children scattered around the huts. Perhaps even the little old padre, who served chapels in half a dozen towns such as this, would be there to-day, to admonish his erring children and be laughed at kindly.

Fernando Martinez touched his horse lightly with the spurs and rode on down the slope. In the shade cast by a ledge, he stopped long enough to remove his sombrero and wipe the perspiration from his face, clearing his eyes particularly. He knew of a man who had died because a trickle of perspiration in an eye had spoiled his aim at a critical moment.

Not that Fernando Martinez expected any particular foe to be waiting for him in Praderia. Such was not the case. He doubted whether more than one man knew of his approach and the reason for it. But his flaming guns had caused such enmities that he was on guard continually.

It had been several years since he had been in Praderia, his last visit being on his journey North, at which time he had seen fit to terrorize the little town. But Praderia had heard plenty of him meanwhile, he did not doubt. He had done some things that had been related up and down the border line.

When he came to the bottom of the slope, he rode in a lazy fashion and fol-

lowed the dusty trail into town. Barking dogs heralded his approach. Women looked from their huts, and children stood beside them in the doorways, fingers in mouths, gazing wide-eyed.

Down in the cantina, a peon witnessed the arrival and darted inside to spread the news and so earn a free drink. Fernando Martinez saw these evidences of his prominence, though not seeming to do so, and felt slightly elated.

But he did not relax his vigilance in the least when he finally dismounted in the scant shade in front of the adobe cantina. He was prepared to curse, draw, and shoot if the necessity presented itself. However, there did not seem to be any immediate need for hostilities.

A frightened peon advanced quickly when he beckoned, and stood looking up at him.

"You know me?" Fernando Martinez demanded.

"Oh, yes, señor!" the peon humbly replied.

"Then you will care for my horse properly, rubbing him down and seeing that he has just the right amount of water and feed. You will guard him well, also, and likewise guard the saddle and bridle and rifle. You will have him ready here beneath this tree if I should need him quickly."

"Yes, señor!" the peon agreed, his teeth flashing in a smile.

"Here is a peso for you. Earn it, else——"

"Everything shall be done as you wish, Señor Martinez," the peon interrupted hastily.

"Ah! So you do really know me?"

"Yes, señor! I was in Praderia when you were here last, and had the honor of one of the bullets you fired entering my heel. For a month, I got free wine from strangers by showing the wound."

"Be careful that you do not some day get such a wound that only others can point it out," Martinez said.

Then Fernando Martinez strode to the open door of the cantina, from the interior of which came a cool breath of air laden with odors of stale liquor and rank tobacco smoke. But he did not enter the place hastily. None knew better than Fernando Martinez that there was a sort of gloom in there, and then he would be blind for a moment if he entered quickly from the bright glare of the sun. In that moment, some foe might even a score.

So he stood just to one side of the doorway and peered within, his eyes narrowed until they became partially adjusted to the semigloom. Then he strode through the doorway and stood quickly to one side against the wall, his right hand resting lightly on the butt of the gun he wore.

A few rapid glances revealed to him that there was no cause for alarm at present. Pedro Mendez, the proprietor of the place, was behind his battered bar, and four men were standing in front of it. Two of them were lazy townsmen, the third was an old cowpuncher who worked on a near-by ranch, and the fourth was a stranger to Fernando Martinez, but did not look especially formidable.

Fernando Martinez strode to the bar.

"So you still remain here, Pedro Mendez?" he said. "Nobody has shot you down or cut you up? You must love this place, and you must have as many lives as a cat."

"My business is here, and it is all that I have in this world, señor," Pedro Mendez replied, quaking inwardly and hoping that he was not showing his fear outwardly.

"Then attend to your business!" Fernando Martinez commanded. "The dust of the trail is in my throat, and I would wash it down. I also ask these gentlemen to drink with me." He tossed some money on the bar.

Pedro Mendez served quickly, and the five drank. Martinez looked them over. He curled his lips at the townsmen, gave the old cow-puncher a single hostile glance from force of habit, and regarded the fourth man with severity.

"It occurs to me," Martinez said, "that I never have seen you before, señor."

"I reckon not. If it comes to that, I've never set eyes on you before, either, and it ain't any great treat now that I do," the stranger said.

"I am Fernando Martinez, señor! Men speak to me with courtesy, and do not forget it."

"Yeah? That's all right with me. I'm Ted James, and I dont' care who knows it, either. Men walk high, wide, and handsome around me, too."

"So? Is it that you are a bad man, Señor Ted James?"

"Well, now, that depends on what you call bad," Ted James replied. "I've seen a lot worse. I'll bet that I'm lookin' at one now."

The eyes of Fernando Martinez glittered a bit. "Is it true," he observed, "that the most dangerous organ in the human body is the tongue. Dangerous to its owner, I mean."

"Shucks! Are you aimin' to scare me, Martinez?" Ted James asked. "I don't scare worth a cent."

"Can it be possible, señor, that my name is utterly unknown to you?" Martinez asked.

"I've heard tell of it, I reckon. You've been cuttin' up considerable the last two or three years. I heard tell about a little visit you made to Mexico once—your last one there, I reckon. They sure do appreciate you down there, and they're simply yearnin' for you to come back."

"So?" Martinez questioned, his mustache twitching, which those who knew him best would have recognized as a danger signal. "Is it that you are trying to annoy me, señor?"

"Oh, that wouldn't be polite, since you just bought me a drink. Now I'll buy one, and then we'll be even, and then I can speak my piece any time I've got one to speak." He motioned to Pedro Mendez, who was half crouching behind the bar, fully prepared to dodge down the rest of the way.

Pedro Mendez served them mechanically, like a man whose heart is not in his work. He knew war talk when he heard it, did Pedro Mendez. He was hoping that not much of his stock would be damaged if hostilities commence.

"Are—are you passing through?" he asked Fernando Martinez, as he put out bottle and glasses, hoping thus to shunt the conversation onto a track less dangerous.

"And do you happen to be a *rurale,* that you ask such a question?" Martinez demanded.

"I—I just but wondered, señor. I desired to know whether you would stop long enough for food. It will have to be prepared."

"That is different. Order me an ample supply, remembering that my appetite is that of a strong man."

Pedro Mendez bowed and retreated along the bar to hurry through a little door and into the kitchen, where he shouted orders to Señora Mendez, who merely blinked at him and refused to hurry. Mendez was glad for his momentary escape from the zone of danger. He felt that he would be safer in the kitchen just now.

So he loitered there, but there came no high words, no crashing shots, screams of pain, sounds of falling bodies. He peered through the door. Fernando Martinez, Ted James, and the other men were taking their drinks.

"Now we are even, señor, and the laws of hospitality have been served," Martinez said. "Is there something, now, that you wish to say to me? That little piece, for instance, that you desired to speak?"

"I ain't lookin' for any trouble, Martinez, and I ain't goin' around any corners to dodge it, either, please understand."

"You are a very sensible man, señor, and perhaps a brave one. And possibly, also, just a bit reckless."

"And I ain't to be scared."

"It appears, señor, that you have a desire to taunt me and to tickle my nerves," said Fernando Martinez. "Men have taunted me before. And where are they now? Some sleep the long sleep beneath tombstones, and some do not. It depends on where they fell and in what respect they were held while living."

Pedro Mendez had crept furtively into the room again, and was standing behind the bar, ready to dive beneath it if trouble came. Martinez beckoned him.

"Pedro," said he, "tell me straight—have there been any reports in this neighborhood that Fernando Martinez has turned into an old woman?"

"Certainly not, Señor Martinez! Had anybody intimated as much to me, he now would be dead!"

"Quite true—but not dead by your hand," Martinez replied. "I should have attended to that personally. And have there been any reports that I have changed, am soft, and no longer can shoot or use a knife?"

"I have heard of none such, señor."

"Ah! Then the conclusion is that this Señor Ted James, as he names himself, is indeed a courageous man. Señor James, you appear to know certain things concerning me. May I ask for a few facts concerning you?"

"Well, there ain't many," Ted James replied. "I'm a cow-puncher—been in this locality for a year or so."

"And with what outfit, Señor James?"

"I'm ridin' for the Cross L, which is the outfit owned by Diego Lopez, him as they call El Diablo."

"Ah! That explains it! You are associated with men of iron, señor," Fernando Martinez told him. "You must indeed have courage, or you'd not remain long with Diego Lopez. He has only real men around him, tried and tested men. I beg of you, Señor Ted James, do not annoy me, do not anger me to the point of combat."

"Are you tryin' to poke fun at me?" Ted James demanded, belligerently.

"Certainly not, señor! It is only that I do not wish to fight with you. It would not be proper under the circumstances. We should not be foes, but comrades."

"How's that?" Ted James asked.

"Is it so very difficult to understand? You ride for the Cross L, the outfit of Diego Lopez."

"And Lopez is your friend, huh?"

"Ah! He is to be my employer, Señor Ted James. He engaged me some time ago, and ordered me to report at Praderia to-day, saying that he would meet me here and give me further commands. I, too, am to ride for the Cross L outfit!"

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND ROGUE.

POOR Pedro Mendez gasped, gulped, gurgled. It was quite bad enough to have this Fernando Martinez passing through Praderia with only a short stop for refreshment and possible excitement, but it would be nothing less than a calamity to have him remain. He would wreck the place! He would frighten everybody in the town. And what could be the meaning of this? Since when had Fernando Martinez been an honest cow-puncher working for honest wages?

"You—you are to be one of us?" Mendez asked.

"I am, Pedro, my friend, from this moment. I belong to Praderia and its district."

"You are—are going to work?"

"I am going to work for the Cross L outfit—yes!"

"That is—you mean that you are going to work here, on the ranch itself?"

"Where else, fool?" Fernando Martinez demanded. "I am very proud to be associated with Diego Lopez. He is a man after my own heart. They have named him El Diablo—the devil—and he is well named."

"You are to remain for just a short time?" Mendez persisted, hopefully.

"For as long as it pleases me to remain," Martinez replied. "You do not like the prospect? You possibly have some objections to it?"

"But certainly I like the prospect!" Mendez lied. "We need new men in this vicinity, new blood."

"Ha! Blood?" Martinez wanted to know.

"I do not mean blood to be spilled," Mendez hastened to say. "I mean——"

"You are chattering like a magpie! Stop it!"

"Yes, señor!"

Ted James entered the conversation again. "You'll be with a he-man crowd, Martinez. Tough babies! And Juan Torillo is our foreman," he said.

"At present," Martinez admitted. "But there may be a few changes in the outfit later."

"I didn't hear that you was comin'."

"And does Diego Lopez tell you of all his affairs?" Martinez wanted to know. "Perhaps he is wise in that he keeps some of them to himself."

"I did hear him say that he had three new men comin'. It's understood what that means, o' course. Lopez is fixin' to clean out the Z Bar bunch."

"So?" Martinez queried. "And how is that?"

"Diego Lopez is the big man around here already, and he wants to hog it all. He don't want any competition. Understand? He's bought up or cleaned out all the outfits that amount to anything—except one."

"And that one——"

"It's the Z Bar, owned by old Sam Blerman. They are sayin' that Lopez offered him a lot more than his place was worth, but Blerman won't sell, just out o' pure cussedness. Well, he had his chance to do it."

"I believe that I understand," Martinez said. "Three new riders. Ah! Additions to the army."

"Somethin' like that," Ted James admitted. "It'll be a merry war, 'cause the Z Bar have got some good men. Well, welcome to Praderia and the Cross L, Martinez. And here's hopin' that we see some action."

"Yes! Too much inaction is bad for a man. It causes him to grow stale," Fernando Martinez announced. "It also causes him to grow careless, which is fatal in some cases. I, too, know that three new men have been hired. I am one, but I do not know the names of the others."

"I don't, either," Ted James admitted.

"I am quite sure that I'll like it here. Praderia is not such a bad place. Pedro runs an excellent cantina, even if his wine is half water."

"You shall always have the best when you trade here, señor," Mendez hastened to say.

"That is well. And my friends also, Pedro Mendez. I do not like to have my friends swindled," Martinez explained. "Is the food ready? I would eat."

The food was ready, and Pedro Mendez put it upon a little table in the rear of the big room, and Fernando Martinez went there and sat down with his back to the wall and his face turned toward the front door. He tossed his sombrero to the floor, adjusted his gun belt so he could get at the weapon swiftly, and attacked the food.

And, as Fernando Martinez ate, the

second recruit approached the town of Praderia.

This second recruit was known well and unfavorably, in some places, as Buck Slager. He was tall and thin. His age was about forty. His face was a maze of fine wrinkles and was the color of weather-stained leather.

It is highly probable that Buck Slager could not have exhibited a bill of sale for the horse he rode, for he was not so superstitious as Fernando Martinez where stolen horses were concerned. The animal was not an ordinary cow pony, but a beast of breeding. It bore a marred brand.

Buck Slager came into the town over the same trail that Fernando Martinez had followed. He, too, was cautious while passing through the little defiles. Buck Slager also had reason to fear certain men who might be inclined to take vengeance for past wrongs.

He slowed his horse to a walk as he neared the dust-swept plaza, and eyed the town critically. Buck Slager never had been in Praderia before. But it was not unlike many other towns that he had visited, some in friendly fashion and some not so friendly. Yet every town was a problem to be solved, Buck thought.

He saw the horse of Fernando Martinez being held and guarded by the peon, and he regarded the animal carefully as he dismounted, but the brand it wore told him nothing. He tethered his own horse to a stunted tree at the end of the cantina wall, slapped the trail dust from his shoulders, hitched at his pants and adjusted his gun belt. Buck Slager also had the flap of his holster unfastened, and that holster was tied down, which was in itself a threat.

As Martinez had done, Buck Slager prepared his eyes for the semigloom of the cantina's interior. Also, he beckoned to a peon.

"Whose horse is that?" he asked.

"I am not quite sure, señor. It is the mount of a man who arrived less than an hour ago."

"He ain't a law officer, is he?"

"I am quite sure not, señor."

"And he's in the cantina now?"

"Yes, señor! He eats."

"With his back to the wall, yeah?"

"Yes, señor!"

"Like that, huh? All right, hombre!"

Buck Slager approached the open door slowly. Those inside had been warned of a stranger coming. Fernando Martinez continued to eat, but he kept his eyes on the doorway. A stranger always presented possibilities.

Buck Slager swaggered inside, blinked a few times and surveyed the interior and the human beings there, and then trailed across the room to the bar.

"I'm a weary pilgrim," he told Pedro Mendez. "I crave refreshment, and I want it pronto! Understand, hombre? I'm a mild-mannered man except when I'm crossed, and then I'm a wolf!"

Pedro Mendez made haste to set out a bottle of his best stuff, and a glass that was reasonably clean. The eyes of the cantina owner were bulging. He wondered whether this man was another of Lopez' recruits. Praderia was going to be a bad place in which to live and do business, Mendez commenced thinking.

"Serve everybody in the room," Buck Slager commanded. "Gents, everybody up to the bar! I'm Buck Slager, if you yearn to know my handle."

The other introduced themselves, and Ted James and Buck Slager surveyed each other with evident interest.

"I said everybody!" Buck Slager announced, glancing across the room at Fernando Martinez, who had remained sitting at the table. "If there's anybody here who refuses to drink with me——"

"Señor!" Martinez cried. "Do not take it amiss that I do not respond to your so kind invitation. I have been famished, and am eating. Nor am I yet

finished with the food. At another time, I'll be more than glad to drink with you."

"All right! I'm a considerate man," Buck Slager declared. "Drink hearty, gents!"

They drank, and Pedro Mendez refilled the glasses when Buck Slager motioned for him to do so.

"You just make a note o' this here deal, barkeep," Slager said. "I'll be payin' you later, unless I happen to forget it. And you be right sure that you don't overcharge, too. I recollect once up in Montana where a barkeep overcharged me. I walked right up to him and shot him square between the eyes."

Fernando Martinez approached the bar, wiping his mouth with the back of a grimy hand.

"Señor Slager, I heard of that episode," Martinez declared. "It was a neat shot, and the fellow merited it. It reminds me of a little incident in Arizona."

"Yeah? And what might that be?" Slager asked.

"The little incident of which I speak, señor, happened on the evening of a range pay day. I had been drinking too much, and a certain barkeep decided that I was so intoxicated that I did not know what was going on. So he overcharged me a little."

"That's a dirty trick!" Slager said.

"It was, señor. I drew my gun, and he cringed back against the wall. And so I let him have it, señor—two shots through his eyes. The right was a clean shot, but the left was maybe half an inch off."

"Yeah? Fair shootin'," Buck Slager admitted, eying Martinez carefully as he spoke. "It's funny how a gun will throw off half an inch sometimes. I had a gun once that acted that way for no reason at all. I was funnin' in a town in New Mexico one afternoon, and I tossed a two spot o' clubs into the air and took a couple o' shots at it. I knocked out one spot, but I only nicked the corner o' the other."

"A man should have a gun in which he can have full confidence," Fernando Martinez observed.

"I notice that there's somethin' the matter with the butt o' the one that you're wearin'."

"How is that, señor?"

"It sure looks like a coyote had chewed it, or somethin'. What are them—teeth prints?"

"Oh! It is a quaint little hobby I have, señor," Fernando Martinez explained. "Whenever I slay a man, I whittle a notch in the butt of the gun with which he was slain. I have seven notches on this gun, señor—and there is room for more."

"Is that there just a statement o' fact, or are you tryin' to make war talk?" Buck Slager demanded. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I am only Fernando Martinez, señor."

Buck Slager's eyes narrowed quickly, and his countenance bore the expression of a man who knows that he has made a grave error. But he covered his confusion instantly.

"Martinez, huh?" he said. "I've heard tell o' you. And so you heard of that little episode, huh—where I shot the bartender? Now that's right down funny, Martinez—'cause it never happened. I was just lyin'."

"Why, that is all right, señor, with me. I was lying also when I spoke of the bartender in Arizona."

"Yeah? I've got a few true ones I could tell."

"No doubt. I, also, could tell a few true ones. But why do it here among friends?"

"Can I be right down sure that I'm among friends?"

"Before I can reply to that, señor, you must reply to a few questions of mine. Do you intend to become a fixture here in Praderia?"

"I won't ever be such a fixture that I can't move sudden!"

"Uh-huh! But you do not gather my true meaning. I mean, are you only passing through, or do you intend to pause? Can it be possible that you are going to work for the Cross L outfit, owned by Diego Lopez?"

"And just why do you want to know?" Buck Slager asked.

"I desire to know whether to greet you as a comrade."

"So you're one of 'em?" Slager asked.

"One of the three," Fernando Martinez admitted. "So we are to be comrades. This Señor Ted James is of the Cross L outfit. He is a fiery young man itching for a fight. But El Diablo would be angry if we fought among ourselves. There are plenty of outsiders."

"What's the game?" Buck Slager wanted to know.

"I believe," Martinez replied, "that Señor Lopez wishes to buy a ranch from a man who will not sell. If that man is annoyed enough, perhaps he will depart from the country and bother Señor Lopez no longer."

"Yeah? I was told that there were to be three o' us. Who's the third?"

"I do not know. Señor Ted James, here, does not know. Whoever he is, he has not yet arrived."

"Who's the foreman o' the outfit?" asked Slager.

"Juan Torillo," Ted James replied. "And he's one mean hombre, take it from me. He's got an idea that a puncher ought to work a lot every day."

"What a quaint idea!" Martinez said.

"Yeah! He must be right down foolish," Buck Slager added, grinning as he spoke. "I don't aim to work much, except maybe with a gun."

"Juan Torillo yearns to be Lopez' son-in-law," Ted James explained. "Lopez has a daughter, Maria. She's a lot worse than the sun glare for a man's eyes. Only child, too—gets the Cross L some day."

"We'll have to look this Juan Torillo over," Martinez said. "Perhaps we shall decide that the señorita is far too good for him, and should wed such a man as—say myself."

"Yeah! Or me!" Buck Slager added. "If she's right down pretty, and the ranch goes with her——"

"You're forgettin' Juan Torillo, and he ain't exactly a man to be forgettin'," Ted James declared. "Don't make any bad mistake, gents. He's worth sizin' up before you come to any decisions. He's comin' into town this afternoon with Lopez."

"They're to come in this afternoon, huh?" Slager asked.

"Yeah! You c'n play around until they come. I was sent in to tell you that. I reckon that Lopez wants to explain things, and maybe give you some instructions before you go out to the ranch. The third man ought to be comin' along almost any time now."

"I am eager to learn his identity," Fernando Martinez declared. "Ha! Three brave recruits for El Diablo! Mendez, serve us another round of your very best stuff. And, since this so wise Señor Slager has set the example, just make a note of the charge in your memory. And I trust, Perdo Mendez, that your memory is rather faulty at times."

Pedro Mendez shuddered like a man who looks into the future and does not like what he sees. But he served the wine promptly. He did not feel like running the risk of refusing, or of putting up an argument. A couple of bullets in vital spots would not be profitable, he decided.

They drank and smacked their lips, and turned away from the bar to sit at tables against the opposite wall, a thing for which Pedro Mendez was grateful. Perhaps, he thought, they would get to talking and would not drink so much at his expense.

And then an excited peon rushed into the cantina from the dusty street.

"Another stranger rides into the town!" he cried. "He is even now approaching the plaza."

CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD ARRIVAL.

THE third recruit for the private army of Diego Lopez came riding into the town of Praderia from the east. The trail there was across fairly level country, and resembled nothing so much as a dirty yellow ribbon that twisted and curved as though uncertain of its destination.

This rider was no more than twenty-five. He was tall and lean, rather handsome in a manly way. A single glance was enough to inform a knowing man that he was used to the saddle, to long hours in the sun and wind, and that he was inured to hardships of weather and the trail.

He rode at a leisurely pace, easing his mount. And the mount was worthy of notice, a spirited black of generous size in whose form were lines that indicated a partial thoroughbred.

This rider carried a rifle in a saddle boot, and wore a six-gun at his hip. His entire outfit was in good taste. His clothing was neat, and rather verged on the spectacular. The tops of his soft boots had ornaments of brass, his neckerchief was of blue silk, and his Stetson bore a gay band of colored, braided hair.

Dropping the neckerchief from his face, he manufactured and lighted a cigarette, and puffed with evident relish. Then he addressed himself to his horse.

"We're ridin' into a new game, Centipede," he murmured. "But we've looked on now and then, and maybe we know how to play it. Huh? What do you say, Centipede? Oh, very well! O' course we'll get along. I ain't at all pessimistic, Centipede. But I got a funny feelin' at that, somethin' like a hunch, and I don't know whether this here jaunt is goin' to be a lucky one or not."

He rode and puffed and finally extinguished the cigarette and tossed it away. Evidently, he was the sort of man who took care not to start fires in the wilderness.

"Let's get goin', Centipede," he said. "Shake some o' your feet, horse! We might as well get to this here town o' Praderia and get acquainted with folks."

Centipede seemed to understand, for he quickened his stride without touch on rein or spur. He covered the ground easily and speedily. Passing over a wave in the ground, the rider could see the village in the near distance.

"Same old stuff, Centipede," he said. "Huts, plaza, chapel, cantina, and store. Some day, Centipede, they'll build a town without a plaza and folks will come for miles just to take a look at it. Get goin', Centipede."

As he entered the outskirts of the town, this rider out of the east wiped the travel stains from his face, replaced his hat at a jaunty angle, slapped some of the trail dust from his clothes, and acted a great deal like a swain hurrying to a rendezvous with some maiden fair.

His manner was alert as he neared the little plaza. He stopped his horse in the scant shade of a scrawny tree, hooked one leg around the pommel of the saddle, and regarded the scene with a smile twisting his lips.

He looked at the horses in front of the cantina, and then glanced toward the little public corral, where a lone burro flapped his ears at flies.

"Centipede," he murmured, "I reckon that the other two hombres are here ahead o' us, and I'm wonderin' as to their handles. But I reckon that I can guess one of 'em, Centipede. Now,

you keep your eyes and ears open, horse, until we get settled some. We sure don't want to make any mistakes. You just recollect what I said—we're sittin' in a new game, and maybe the deck is stacked, and maybe they'll deal off the bottom."

A boy had been approaching him a step at a time, ready to turn and run if this stranger became hostile. But the latest arrival in the town of Praderia smiled at him and motioned for him to come still nearer.

"Are you," the newcomer asked, "a citizen of this bustling little city? What I mean is, do you live hereabouts?"

"Yes, señor!" the boy replied. "In that small hut over there, with my mother and father and two brothers and three sisters. My aunt is also with us, señor."

"Don't worry, son. I don't yearn to rent a room," the rider told him. "Is this place called Praderia?"

"Yes, señor!"

"Uh-huh! I thought as much. And to whom, son of evil, do those two horses belong? They look like right nice steeds."

"Two strangers have ridden into the town within the hour," the boy replied.

"You happen to know their names?"

"No, señor," said the boy, though he lied when he said it. "But one gave a friend of mine a peso to care for his horse, and the other promised as much to another friend of mine. For a peso, señor, I will see that your horse gets water, and I'll rub him down until he glistens, and I'll stand guard over him, never sleeping, so that he will be ready for you at any moment."

"You'll do all that for a peso?" asked the latest arrival in the village of Praderia. "And what would you do for twice that amount?"

"Señor!" the boy gasped. "Do you want somebody slain?"

The rider laughed. "If I do, I'll do the slaying myself," he informed the boy. "Do your work well, and you'll have a peso, and maybe two of them."

He dismounted and stretched his limbs, and the boy took the horse.

"That horse can talk to me," the rider said. "He will tell me if he ain't treated right, and then I'll attend to you."

"You need have no fear, señor. Can he really talk?"

"Can you talk, Centipede?" the rider asked.

Centipede bobbed his head to indicate that he could, and the eyes of the boy grew wider. There was a certain inflated self-respect in his manner as he led the horse away.

The rider paused just outside the door of the cantina, to look back across the little plaza. Half a dozen women and children were in sight, but only one man, and he was an ancient hobbling along as though about to stumble and fall.

He moved away from the cantina door, followed the wall, and so came presently to a fly-specked and dust-streaked window, through which he peered. He had a fair view of the interior, and a few rapid glances served to fix in his mind all the exits, the location of the articles of furniture, the positions of those inside.

Now he walked around to the door again, and entered the place briskly, his arms swinging easily at his sides. He strode to the head of the bar and slapped his hand down upon it.

"Drink!" he snapped at Pedro Mendez.

"Dios!" It was Fernando Martinez who breathed the word to Buck Slager and Ted James.

"Who is he? You know him?" Buck Slager whispered.

"It is Señor Joe Dallway!" Martinez spoke the words as though making an important announcement. Buck Slager's eyes opened wide. Ted James sucked in his breath sharply.

"You suppose that he is the third hombre?" Ted James asked.

"Wait and listen!" Martinez ordered.

Joe Dallway had taken his trail drink. He offered a coin in payment and waited for his change. The look he gave Pedro Mendez caused that worthy to shiver.

Turning from the bar, Joe Dallway stood with feet placed far apart, and calmly manufactured another cigarette, peering across the room at the others as he did so. Martinez, Slager, and James remained sitting at the table, but the others moved swiftly away, scarcely knowing what sort of drama to expect.

Having the cigarette going to his liking, Joe Dallway stalked across the room and stopped within six feet of the table, his fists planted against his hips, a smile upon his face, squinting one eye because of the cigarette smoke that assailed it.

"Howdy, Fernando Martinez!" he greeted.

"It is Señor Joe Dallway, isn't it?" Martinez asked, politely.

"You know danged well that it is," Dallway said. "I've chased you enough."

"And never caught me, eh, señor?"

"Well, Martinez, they never let me chase you alone. I was always hampered by the presence o' others. However, that's all past and done now."

"So I understand, Señor Dallway."

"Just what do you understand, Martinez?"

"I only speak what I have heard, señor. And I have heard that a certain Joe Dallway, a young ranger, saw fit on a certain evening to forget his duty for a few minutes and have a good time. He went into a cantina, and there he did drink and gamble, and dance with the cantina girls. And while he was doing that, some bad robber he was supposed to be watching ran off with certain horses, under his nose, let us say, señor."

"Go on with the story!" Dallway snapped.

"This Señor Dallway, for that, was kicked off the force, so it has been said. For that one moment of pleasure he was tossed aside like a sucked lemon. Because he showed that he was a normal man and wished his recreation, somebody high in authority had him disgraced."

"Well, you seem to have the right of it," Joe Dallway said. "A little fun—and out they threw me! Broke regulations, o' course, so it was right for them to do it."

"And you have no hard feelings, señor?" Martinez asked.

"I didn't say I had no hard feelin's."

"Ah! Perhaps the chance for revenge will come to you, señor. It is no man's game to wear the uniform of the rangers. But to stand against them—that is a man's game."

"I won't have you runnin' down my late buddies, understand!" Joe Dallway snapped at him, his eyes suddenly aflame. "They're all right. So we'll drop that. And here is Buck Slager, too, huh? Howdy, Buck!"

"Howdy, Dallway!" Buck growled.

"You don't seem to like me much, Buck."

"I can smell the policeman, that's why."

"Am I tainted for life because I was a ranger once?" Dallway demanded. "I am not a ranger now. The whole border knows o' my disgrace, I reckon. So I might as well cash in on it. I suppose that you two hombres are goin' to work for Lopez?"

"Yes, señor!" Martinez cried. "And you——"

"That's why I'm here. So we are the three! Huh! Three bad men! Three hired gunmen, I reckon. He didn't explain the game to me, but I can make a wild guess. We're one tough bunch!"

"Señor, you have said it!" Fernando Martinez declared. "The three of us

might form a band and have our way. We might even go over into Sonora and——"

"You'd want an army with you if you went there, Martinez," Joe Dallway declared. "They're sure waitin' for you there with wide-opened arms. And you're wanted in spots on this side o' the line, too. What a bunch we are! A Mexican murderer——"

"Señor!" Martinez cried.

"Well, ain't you, and proud of it? And a renegade——"

"You meanin' me?" Buck Slager cried.

"I am, Slager, and don't start for your gun. I could draw and get you while you're thinkin' o' makin' a start, and you danged well know it. Sure you're a renegade! What of it? If you're goin' to be a renegade, be a good one! A Mexican murderer, a renegade, and a busted and disgraced ranger. All goin' to work for the same outfit. Gents, our enemies better take to cover!"

"A man after my own heart!" Martinez cried. "You must be bitter, señor, against the forces of law and order. Perhaps you shall have a chance to feed that bitterness."

"Who's this other man?" Dallway quickly asked.

"Ah! He is Señor Ted James, of the Cross L outfit. He is here to meet us, to tell us to play until late this afternoon, when Diego Lopez himself will be here to instruct us."

"Good enough! Glad to meet you, James."

"I'm commencin' to feel like a baby around here," Ted James complained. "Me, I've got to go out and get me a reputation for bein' bad. I'm just an amateur in this crowd."

"Evil must be acquired," Dallway told him. "Pattern after us, James, and you'll be a fit follower of El Diablo. By the way, any of you know the game?"

"We're to tease a man who won't sell out to Lopez," Buck Slager said.

"And Lopez thinks it will take the three of us? Who's the man?"

"Sam Blerman, who owns the Z Bar outfit," James explained. "He's got Lopez fit to be tied by refusin' to sell. We may have a hot time, but it won't last long, I reckon."

"I'll do the honors," Dallway said, waving a hand toward the bar.

They followed him there, and Pedro Mendez served them. Dallway started to pay, but Slager prevented.

"I've already explained to this here hombre that he's to make a note of all our drinks," Slager said.

"And he is not to have too good a memory," Fernando Martinez added.

"Suits me! I can't see why such men as we are should be obliged to pay for anything," Dallway declared.

"A man after my own heart! I drink to you!" Martinez tossed off his wine, smacked his lips, put the glass down upon the bar.

They laughed as they drank, the others, laughed in the face of Pedro Mendez, who dared not betray by look or speech the rage which seethed within him.

Then Martinez led the way toward the door, declaring that he wished to look out and see if his horse was there and in proper condition. Joe Dallway was the last to leave the bar. He flashed a look at the others, to find that they were not watching, and then turned and deftly pitched Pedro Mendez a coin.

"*Gracias,* señor!" Pedro Mendez' lips formed the words, but he had too much good sense to speak them aloud. He did not pretend to understand; but he realized the fact that this Señor Joe Dallway wished to pay, though he did not wish the others to know that he did it.

"Somebody's comin' in the south trail," Ted James cried, as he reached

the door. "Looks like half a dozen riders, and maybe more. That'll be Lopez, maybe, with Juan Torillo and some o' the boys. It may be that the boss has some scheme up his sleeve. He'd better find us actin' natural, I reckon."

Martinez, Slager, and Dallway made sure that their horses were at hand and ready if they wished to use them. Then they turned back into the cantina and went to one of the tables, calling to Mendez to fetch them glasses and a jug of wine.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS BLERMAN SPEAKS.

BUT it was not Diego Lopez and his crew advancing upon the town of Praderia along the dusty trail. Heading the cavalcade was Sam Blerman, master of the Z Bar ranch. Riding beside him was his daughter, Jane. Behind them were an even half dozen punchers of the Z Bar outfit.

They rode at a good rate of speed, sending up a huge cloud of dust behind them to settle anew on rocks and tufts of dried vegetation. And so they came to a treacherous gravel slope and eased their mounts to a walk, to give them a breathing spell and to discount the possibility to a slip that might mean a broken leg.

"You reckon that they've arrived, dad?" Jane Blerman asked.

She was a delicious bit of femininity, this Jane Blerman, a girl of twenty, tall and lithe, with black hair, and black eyes that snapped, and manner generally vivacious. She was the idol of her father and the entire Z Bar outfit.

"How do I know?" Sam Blerman growled at her. "We just got the tip that they're due. And we know that Lopez ain't gone in yet to meet them. James is there, but he don't count much."

"And what are you goin' to do, dad?" Jane asked.

"Cuss and dang it, honey, how do I know until I get there and see how they talk and act? You're pesterin' the life out o' me!"

"You needn't snap my head off," she told him.

"Now, honey, I don't mean to be cross. But your old dad is worried a lot these days, what with that scoundrel of a Diego Lopez up to his tricks. I wish that I'd had sense to hire a few gunmen myself, if that's the kind o' thing Lopez wants. He won't buy me out, and he won't run me off—I c'n tell him that!"

"I should say not," his daughter agreed.

"When we get there, honey, you stay back behind and don't get into trouble."

"And let you go right in and face it?"

"Shucks! I've got half a dozen o' the boys with me, ain't I? There won't be much trouble at this here stage o' the game. But I want to see these three hombres and learn who we're goin' to stack up against. Let's ride, now."

They were at the top of the slope, and before them stretched good trail into the town. So they went forward at a better rate of speed now. Sam Blerman still led the way, with his daughter riding beside him, and the punchers who followed grouped closely to avoid the dust, and also in the fear that their employer would get ahead of them and ride into danger.

The Z Bar men were loyal to their boss and to his daughter. They were not noted gunmen, but they were good fighters. They resented Diego Lopez and the antics of his men, and they knew that Sam Blerman's cause was just.

They came to the edge of the town and dashed up the street, with the intention of arriving before those in the town, and particularly the cantina, knew of their identity. They dismounted in front of the cantina in a cloud of dust, and stormed to the door.

Those inside heard the horses stop, the jingling of bits, the stamping of hoofs. They continued sipping their wine, waiting for Diego Lopez to appear before them, ready to greet him as a man of his position in the world should be greeted.

Dark forms entered through the doorway, moving with speed. In an instant, it seemed, half a dozen men were scattered about the interior of the cantina in positions of advantage. The men took charge of the place.

"It's the Z Bar crowd!" Ted James hissed at the other three.

But there was no time for Martinez, and Slager, and Joe Dallway to readjust themselves now. Before they could sit up straighter, they found themselves covered.

"Easy, gents!" said one of the Z Bar men. "No hostilities intended, hombres, unless you make hostile moves yourselves. We ain't on the warpath. We just want to make sure that you won't start anything and catch us off guard."

"Dios!" Fernando Martinez cried. "What sort of town is this Praderia? Cannot a stranger stop for a moment for a drink of wine without having ruffians cover him with guns?"

"Silence, you!" one of the men snapped.

And now Sam Blerman stepped forward, his eyes blazing, making every effort to retain his self-control. He stopped a few feet from the table and looked them over.

"Keep your hands on the table, gents," Blerman said. "I just want to have a look at Lopez' hired gunmen. I want to see the kind o' men that'd hire out to El Diablo to help him do his dirty work."

"You can make a big talk when your men are coverin' us," Ted James snarled at him.

"I know you, James, and you don't worry me much," Blerman said. "It's these other three hombres I want to take a look at. But maybe they ain't right down eager to tell their names."

"Why, señor, I am rather proud to tell mine. It is Fernando Martinez!"

"Yeah? Lopez must be payin' mighty good wages, Martinez, to get you. Stopped banditin' to work for him, have you? And what kind o' company are you in?"

"You will shiver, no doubt, señor, when I tell you," Martinez replied. "This gentleman is Buck Slager."

"I've heard of you, Slager," Blerman said. "Especially have I heard that tale of how you shot a harmless boy in the back because he didn't get out of your drunken path quick enough."

"Say, you——" Slager raged.

"Make a move, you skunk, and my men will pump lead into you. I'm havin' my little talk now, before the war starts. Who's the third hired bad man?"

"Ah, señor, there we have the great surprise for you. He is Señor Joe Dallway," Martinez reported, his eyes glistening.

"Yeah? Never saw you before, Dallway, but I've sure and certain heard something about you. Ranger, wasn't you, and got kicked out for forgettin' your duty and drinkin' with the men you should have been arrestin'? Nice specimen!"

'I c'n remember your words, Blerman," Dallway said.

"Go right ahead and remember them. Well, you three, I suppose you know why you're hired. Diego Lopez wants to run this end of the country for some reason, and he's bought off or run out every man of consequence except me. He's found that the Z Bar ain't for sale. You'll get orders, no doubt, to snipe at my stock and men, raid, burn hay and buildin's, and undoubtedly ambush me and shoot me down. That's the kind o' game Lopez wants to play. He's payin' you well, o' course, or you wouldn't be here. Three bad men like

you must come a bit high. He's done me the honor to get the worst on the border, anyway, so I reckon I should feel flattered."

"You are quite an orator, señor," Fernando Martinez said.

"And I've got the floor just now!" Sam Blerman snapped. "So you'll listen. I know that there ain't any sense in appealin' to you men's sense o' justice and fair play, 'cause you ain't got any. But I've had my eyes on you, and these men o' mine have, too, so we'll know who to go after. It's understood, gents, that as soon as we leave Praderia, the war is on. And wherever you're seen, gents, my men will start shootin'."

"Do you, by any chance, believe that you are frightening us?" Martinez wanted to know.

"Just tellin' you," Blerman replied. "You ain't got sense enough to be frightened."

Fernando Martinez would have spoken again, but Jane Blerman suddenly appeared at her father's side. Her eyes were flashing as she looked at those sitting at the table.

"Recruits for *El Diablo!*" she said scorning them with her glance. "Recruits for the devil! Hired gunmen! Going to war for money!"

"Señorita——" Martinez began.

"You! Murderer, beast! And you, Buck Slager—the same! And you—Dallway! Disgraced your uniform and badge. Turned bad, have you?"

"I ain't denyin' it," Joe Dallway said.

"We can't expect much from Martinez or Slager. They were always scoundrels. But you held a position of trust once, and mingled with honest men. Are you going to do this thing?"

"Well, I've hired out to work for Lopez, and that's all that I know."

"You'll ride and raid for him, I suppose. Hide behind rocks and take coward shots at Z Bar men. The brave ranger probably will shoot steers and calves on the range, if they wear the Z Bar brand. What a brute you are!"

"You get back now, honey, havin' had your say," Sam Blerman commanded.

She flashed another look of scorn at them, and retreated toward the door. Blerman took a step nearer the table, and drew his own revolver.

"Naturally, I can't trust you hombres," he said. "I didn't come here with the intention o' shootin' you up. I'm waitin' for Lopez to make the first bad move. But I don't want to be shot in the back while I'm gettin' away from here. So I'll just have my men take your guns, and we'll leave 'em for you down by the blacksmith shop."

He waved his hand as he ceased speaking, and five of his men came nearer the table, while one remained at the door with Jane. Two of the five deftly removed the guns of the three bad men and Ted James, and searched them for hidden weapons, finding only a wicked knife on Fernando Martinez.

"You'll regret this affront, señor!" Martinez declared.

"Not worryin' a bit," Blerman replied. "Now, you gents sit right pretty there for a few minutes, or the regrettin' will be on your side."

Once more he waved a hand, and two of the Z Bar men remained standing there on guard, while the others followed Sam Blerman to the bar. The master of the Z Bar outfit purchased drinks for them, had the two guards relieved so that they could come to the bar and drink also, then had the man at the door relieved for the same purpose.

"Now we go," Blerman said. "When we meet again, it'll be war."

"Bitter war, señor, after this!" Martinez said.

"Yeah! I'll make a special point of gettin' you, Blerman," Buck Slager declared.

"And how about you, Dallway?"

Blerman asked. "You got any threats to make?"

"I don't do much talkin'," Dallway replied.

"You're the most dangerous man of the three."

"Thanks for the compliment," said the former ranger. "Are you really leavin'? Give my regards to Miss Blerman and all the boys."

The Z Bar men backed swiftly to the door, where two remained while the others got into their saddles. Blerman and his daughter mounted also. Then the guards made a rush, vaulted into their saddles, and the Z Bar cavalcade dashed out of the town and took the home trail.

Inside the cantina, four enraged men sprang to their feet, howling and cursing. They knew that this little episode would be related the length of the borderline, and that men would laugh at them. They rushed to the bar, shouting for weapons. Ted James ran to the door and looked after the disappearing Z Bar riders.

"Can you beat it! They're throwin' our guns down by the blacksmith shop," he reported.

"To horse, and after them!" Martinez cried.

"Don't do that," James protested. "Wait here for Lopez! That's the orders!"

CHAPTER V.

LOPEZ EXPLAINS.

IT was two hours later, and within an hour of sunset, when Diego Lopez came riding into the town with his foreman, Juan Torillo. They dismounted and hurried into the cantina.

Fernando Martinez had been drowning his disgrace in wine. He was at the mean stage, but refrained from getting into trouble with Dallway and Slager. Slager had been bullying Pedro Mendez. And Joe Dallway was silent, drinking only a little, seeming to be making an effort to remain normal.

They cheered Diego Lopez when he arrived, had the trail drink with him, and then retired with him and the foreman to a corner of the room, where nobody else could hear.

"You're on time," Lopez said. "That's good! We'll ride right out to the ranch, as soon as I've paid a visit to the store. Your bunks are ready for you."

"We don't know much about the game we're to play," Dallway intimated.

"It's an easy game to understand. I want Sam Blerman run out of this country. If he's killed, I won't shed many tears. When a man opposes me, he must be removed."

"Allow me, Señor Lopez, to be the one to do the removing," Martinez begged.

"What's the matter with me bein' the one?" Slager asked.

"It is better to understand at the outset, señores, that I have certain plans to be carried out," Diego Lopez said. "You will kindly obey orders as they are given you."

"And who's to give the orders?" Martinez asked.

"This is Juan Torillo, my foreman. When he speaks, it is the same as though I were speaking myself."

Fernando Martinez regarded Juan Torillo with open hostility, and all the others noticed it. They noticed, also, that Juan Torillo did not seem to be influenced greatly by it. He looked at Martinez coldly, glanced over Buck Slager, and allowed his eyes finally to come to rest on Joe Dallway.

"Former ranger, huh?" Torillo said. "I never did think much o' the rangers."

"I ain't a ranger now, but I've got some good friends with 'em," Dallway informed him. "And don't go to cussin' them out unless you want trouble with me."

"It is not proper that you talk so big,

now that there is no badge on your breast," Juan Torillo said. "Get ready to ride in half an hour, señores. Señor Lopez will be ready to return by that time."

The foreman turned his back and followed Lopez from the cantina. Through the doorway, those who remained behind watched the pair start across the sun-drenched plaza toward the general merchandise store.

"Somethin' tells me," Buck Slager said, "that I ain't goin' to get along well with this Juan Torillo."

"Ha! He is a countryman of mine," Martinez put in. "So I should know best how to estimate his character."

"Well, what do you think of him, Martinez?" Dallway asked.

"My heart fails to overflow with love for him, señores. My first look at him convinced me that some day we shall clash, we two. If he tries to lord it over me——"

"Yeah, or me!" Slager said.

"I won't take much off him, either," Dallway put in. "Thinks that he's goin' to marry Lopez' daughter, does he? Tryin' to act already like he owned the Cross L."

"This Maria Lopez has not seen me yet," Martinez declared. "A real man might interest her."

"She'd sure interest any man," Ted James told them. "But I can't get a smile out o' her."

"She shows rare judgment," Martinez observed.

"Are you goin' to get fresh with me?" Ted James wanted to know.

Dallway begged for peace. "The first thing we know, we'll be fightin' among ourselves, and not gettin' paid for it," he said. "We got sense, ain't we? Let's concentrate on this Blerman thing."

"Yeah! And maybe on this Juan Torillo," Buck Slager added. "I don't like that hombre at all."

"None o' the men do," Ted James offered. "He'll be found out on the range some day shot in the back. He don't even live at the bunk house. He's got a room at the big house, and he eats there, too. You'd think the punchers were dirt under his boots."

"I've heard tell o' them dude foremen before now," Slager said.

"It might be advisable," Martinez put in, "to pick a quarrel with him, and so have him removed. Then I could get Señor Lopez to appoint me his foreman. I should remember my friends, as to salary and work."

"Well, my stars! What right you got to elect yourself?" Buck Slager demanded. "Wouldn't I make a good foreman myself? And how about Dallway? He's used to handlin' men."

"We quarrel for a job that is not open," Martinez observed. "Let us talk of other things for the present. The Señorita Maria Lopez, for instance."

"You go to pesterin' around Maria, and Lopez will start gunnin' for you," Ted James said. "He's right down particular where his daughter is concerned."

"Now you're startin' to quarrel about a woman, and that always means trouble," said Dallway. "I never did see such a quarrelsome bunch o' men. Let's fight where we're paid for it."

"True," Martinez admitted. "But I do not care to have this Juan Torillo issuing me orders. If I catch him with his nose up in the air, I shall bring it down!"

"James, how about this here Torillo?" Dallway asked. "Is he a bad hombre in other things? Like Lopez?"

"Yeah! He hates Blerman because Blerman bawled him out before a rodeo crowd once, and accused him o' cheatin'. There ain't anything too dirty for Juan Torillo to do."

"We'd better be gettin' ready for the trail," Slager said.

They tormented Mendez once more, and then left the cantina. They claimed

their mounts, cursed the peons who had been caring for them, and got into their saddles. They looked to their guns, recovered long since from the dust in front of the blacksmith shop, where the Z Bar men had tossed them. And then they waited.

In time, Lopez and Juan Torillo came across the plaza toward them. It seemed that Torillo was sneering about something, and Lopez looked shocked and surprised.

"What's this we hear about the Z Bar outfit making fools of you four?" Torillo asked.

"They came in here and caught us off guard—half a dozen of 'em," James explained. "What could we do?"

"Will you ever get a better chance to get Blerman out of the way?"

"All o' us would have got ours before we could have got our guns out," Ted James declared.

"Señor Lopez believed that he was hiring men who were afraid of nothing, and who never could be caught off guard."

"Are you directing that remark at me, señor?" Martinez asked. "Let me tell you something, Señor Juan Torillo —we are going to have trouble if you are not very careful."

"Kindly remember that I am foreman of the Cross L outfit!"

"There is no doubt of it, señor. But foremen have been changed before now, when a better man came along."

"Are you trying to pick a fuss with me, Martinez?"

Diego Lopez, in his saddle, swept them apart by urging his horse forward.

"Enough!" he cried. "We have a common enemy, if you wish to fight. We ride!"

It was after nightfall when they came to the Cross L ranch buildings. They ate a hasty meal and repaired to the bunk house, where the three newcomers met the other men and were assigned bunks and told to make themselves comfortable.

They were out at dawn in answer to the clarion call of the ranch cook, to wash faces and hands in cold water from the well and rush to the breakfast table.

Diego Lopez believed in feeding his men well. They could find nothing there about which to complain. After they had finished, Juan Torillo faced them.

"Orders for the day!" he snapped, like an army officer. "Martinez, you will work at mending the fence of the horse corral."

"What is this?" Martinez cried. "Is that any sort of work for Fernando Martinez? It is an insult to suggest it."

"You came here to work, didn't you?"

"To fight, señor, if you please."

"There'll be plenty of fighting. You do not have to break your back at the corral. It is the intention of Señor Lopez to have you near at hand, and that will serve as an excuse. You will find hammer and nails by the gate."

Martinez glared at him and walked slowly away.

"Slager, there are a couple of colts with wire cuts on their legs. The colts are in that little corral beyond the bunk house, and the salve is at the gate of the corral. Take plenty of time at the work."

"Do I look like a doctor?" Slager demanded. "I can sling a gun better'n I can sling salve."

"Orders!" Torillo said, looking him square in the eye.

Buck wandered away, muttering things that were not at all complimentary to the foreman of the Cross L outfit.

"Dallway!" Juan Torillo exclaimed.

"Well?"

"Señor Lopez wants you near at hand also. He may want you three men at any moment. Also, he wishes you

near the house, to guard him and the señorita if the Z Bar men should raid."

"Shucks! They won't raid," Dallway declared. "They're waitin' for us to make the first move."

"You will go down to the well, Señor Dallway, and work at softening the lariat you find there."

"Uh-huh! I understand, Torillo. I'll be near at hand, all right."

"Really work on the rope, though. I desire it softened well."

"Whose rope is it?"

"It is mine," the foreman said.

"Ain't it the custom for a man to fix his own rope?" Dallway asked. "I didn't hire out to fix ropes for anybody, especially one o' your breed!"

As he finished speaking, Joe Dallway prepared for what might come. Torillo's face went white for an instant.

"Who do you mean by that remark?" he asked.

'You know without me askin'. I'll go down there and fuss around, so I'll be handy, but I don't work over any rope for any greaser!"

"Señor!" Torillo cried.

"You forget that I'm a Texan, don't you?"

"Perhaps you consider Señor Lopez a greaser also?"

"Ain't he"

"If I should tell him this——"

"Do it, Torillo, and see how long you last! You're the foreman, all right, but I didn't come here to do ordinary ranch work. I'm takin' my orders from Lopez, and that's bad enough."

"I perceive, señor, that we are not going to be friends."

"You can danged well believe it!" Dallway told him. "We may be in the same dirty game, but I don't have to pat you on the back, foreman or no foreman!"

"For this——" Juan Torillo began.

But he ceased speaking and gulped, for Diego Lopez himself had come suddenly around the corner of the bunk house.

"Juan, I want to talk to Señor Dallway alone," Lopez said.

The foreman went away muttering curses. Diego Lopez sat down on a rock and looked up at the former ranger.

"Of course, I heard," said the owner of the Cross L. "I can understand how you Texans regard one of my race. It is something born in you. But you should make some allowance now and then, Señor Dallway."

"I ain't takin orders from anybody like Torillo," Dallway said. "It ain't necessary. He rubs it in on a man that he's over him."

"Juan has many faults, it is true. Perhaps, Señor Dallway, I should take you more into my confidence. You are a man of intelligence as compared to the other two. Would it not be better, say, if I delegated to you the leadership in this fight?"

"Then there'll be a row with Martinez and Slager," Dallway said. "You just give me the low-down on the situation, Señor Lopez, and I'll give you any advice I can. Havin' been a ranger, maybe I can help you out."

"Ah! That is kind of you," Lopez told him. "When I engaged you to come here, I hoped to benefit by your experience. As you know, I want the Z Bar ranch. Blerman refuses to sell, even at a big profit. It is for sentimental reasons, I believe. He came here without a penny and made considerable money. His wife died on the place. He loves it, no doubt."

"Yeah! I c'n understand that."

"So we must run him out," Lopez continued. "I do not care what happens to him. There is little law in this small corner of the country, save that which I make myself. I'll be complete master here when Blerman is gone and I have the Z Bar."

"Say, Señor Lopez, did you ever

think of the advantages that might give you?"

"As which?"

"Boss o' this stretch o' border. Man! Contraband, if you care for that sort o' thing. A fortune in lettin' the liquor and dope runners through and maybe hidin' them. Chinese smugglers, too. You could dodge the air patrol, easy enough, if you're careful."

"There is something in what you say, Señor Dallway."

"Didn't I fight that kind o' thing when I was in the rangers? Don't I know all the tricks?"

"Ah! Perhaps we could have some sort of working agreement. You could be of great value to me. As a matter of strict fact, Señor Dallway, I have been doing some of those things. And this Señor Sam Blerman stands in my way. He is a fool—an honest man!"

"That's just what I thought," Dallway said, grinning. "I knew there was somethin' behind it."

"But perhaps you do not guess at the magnitude of it, señor. Stolen stock can be pushed through the Cross L and so over the line. Both directions, señor."

"You'll have millions, Lopez!"

"And power!" Diego Lopez breathed. "I shall be as a king in this corner of the country! It is the dream of my life. I can gather men, drill them, arm them slowly and carefully——"

"And step over the line some dark night and start a revolution that'll really amount to somethin'," Dallway continued for him. "Man, what an idea! Men would flock to you. Lopez, you could be president of Mexico in a month."

"Not president, señor, but dictator!" Diego Lopez said, his eyes glistening with visions. "I need a man like you, Señor Dallway. You could go far in this enterprise. But you hate my race."

"And didn't my own race step on me?" Dallway asked. "Didn't they kick me out o' the rangers for just havin' a little fun? I'm in the game o' life for profit only from now on, Lopez!"

"Play the game with me, señor, and you can travel far. I will have wealth and power. You are a skilled soldier. You can have power and wealth also."

"Yeah? That sounds right down nice, Lopez, but you're forgettin' a few things. Martinez and Slager——"

"I'll deal generously with them, so they will have no objection to offer."

"And this Juan Torillo?"

"Perhaps, Señor Dallway, I consider that this Juan Torillo is presuming a bit too much. He would wed my daughter, but not for herself. He is a cold fish who could not make any woman happy. I can dispense with him easily—when the time comes."

"If I'm to be your right-hand man, Lopez, that's what I've got to be. You'll have to explain to me how you're workin' things now, and all that. There may be some flaws that I can point out. You don't want some little mistake to wreck the plans of your life, do you?"

"The first thing is to be rid of Sam Blerman," Lopez said. "I shall make plans for that. And I shall tell Martinez and Slager that I have special work for you in the military line, since you have been an officer and know of such things."

"You might be suspected, Lopez. The authorities know that liquor and dope is bein' run across, and Chinese, too. But that kind o' thing happens all along the line. This revolution thing, though——"

"The dream of my life, señor."

"Yeah! That's big!" Dallway admitted.

"At the first opportunity, you shall come to my little office in the ranch house. I have plans drawn up, and they are in my desk. Others are with me in this, Señor Dallway. Men of influence on both sides of the line——"

"Yeah! But we'd better not be standin' here talkin' so long, Señor Lopez. I'll be workin' on a lariat, if you want me."

Diego Lopez hurried away, and Dallway found the rope and made a pretense at working on it. He sat in the morning sun with his hat pulled down low over his eyes, and he whistled softly as he worked. Dallway always whistled softly when he was doing some deep thinking.

"Is it that you are happy, señor, that you whistle so?" a soft voice asked, suddenly.

Dallway lifted his head. Before him stood a ravishing creature that he knew instantly must be Señorita Maria Lopez.

CHAPTER VI.

TO RAID THE Z BAR.

HE rose and bowed before her, sweeping his hat in an arc as he did so. She smiled at him, revealing engaging dimples in either cheek, and her black eyes flashed bewitchingly.

"I am Maria Lopez," she said. "I have been interested in watching you, señor."

"I am flattered, señorita," Dallway replied.

She sat down a short distance from him, and beamed at him again.

"You like me?" she asked, with a directness that often is found below the line.

"Well, at first sight, I'd say that there's a lot about you to like," Dallway replied.

"I have been educated, señor. My father sent me away to school in Mexico City. But I am a care to him now, he says. He thinks that a girl is but a nuisance. He would be rid of me quickly. Señor Dallway, he would marry me off!"

"And don't you want to be married?"

"Yes. But not to Juan Torillo."

"You don't like him?"

"You have seen him, Señor Dallway, and have heard him talk. Could any girl like him? His eyes are like those of a snake. He plans things, I think. If I were my father, I'd not trust him."

"Now that you mention it, he don't make any great hit with me, either," Dallway admitted.

"I—I want a husband something like you," she said. "I want a tall, thin, handsome man."

"Oh, I say——"

"With blond hair like yours, señor."

"Well, you ought to be able to find one somewhere," Dallway told her. "Do you know anything of your father's plans? If you do, you know that he'll want you to marry well."

"Oh, I know all of them!" she replied. "He is going to be king of Mexico some day, and then I shall be a princess. I shall like that, of course."

"How old are you?" Dallway asked.

"I am fifteen, señor. Quite old enough to be married. My sainted mother was but fourteen when I was born."

"Uh-huh! When you're a princess, you'll have a chance to pick almost any man you want," he told her.

"I—I like you."

"Kinder sudden, ain't it?"

"Oh, but, señor, I liked you the moment I saw you!"

"Juan Torillo will be getting jealous."

"Let him!" she snapped. "I do not think that my father likes him much. And I know that he rides away at night and meets men of whom my father knows nothing. He acts like a traitor, Señor Dallway."

A shrill voice called from the front porch of the house.

"That is my *duenna*," Maria Lopez said, giggling a bit. "She is furious because I am here talking to you. I shall make faces at her when she rebukes me. But I must go now."

"Good-by, señorita!"

"Señor Dallway, it is possible that I shall be at the end of the front veranda this evening when the moon comes up. I often slip out alone to look at the moon."

And then she was gone. Dallway began fussing with the rope again. And once more he was whistling, which meant that he was thinking deeply.

A moment later, Juan Torillo appeared beside him.

"You were talking to Señorita Maria," the foreman accused.

"Yeah!"

"When her *duenna* was not present."

"That's right, Torillo."

"Such a thing is not permitted in these parts, señor."

"Well, what about it? The señorita came down here and talked to me. Want me to tell her to go about her business? Would that be polite? I ask you!"

"Señorita Maria is to be my wife," Juan Torillo said.

"That's what you think. She might have different ideas on the subject," Dallway said.

"Do you presume, señor?"

"To marry her? Nope! She's just another girl to me, Torillo. I ain't much interested in her at all. And I don't like to have you pesterin' around me, either."

The foreman's eyes blazed. "Señor Dallway, we might as well have an understanding," he said. "You are to pay strict attention to orders, and do nothing else. There can be but one foreman here."

"Maybe you'd better talk to Lopez. He's been suggestin' to me that I might be pretty valuable to him in a military way."

"Ah! If that is the case, Señor Dallway——"

"It is, Torillo! So you just keep your hands off me. And don't worry about me tryin' to steal your girl. But there are others."

"What is the meaning of that speech, señor?"

"Fernando Martinez thinks that he's quite a man, Torillo. The heiress of the Cross L outfit might appeal to him. And he's a fighter, and Lopez might consider that."

"So?" Torillo said.

"A man ought to watch his own interests, Torillo. Lopez would ditch you in a minute if it would serve his ends. Are you runnin' around blind? Just what has he promised you, if he puts across this revolution thing?"

"In so many words—nothing."

"There you are, Torillo!"

The foreman appeared to be thinking deeply. The seed of suspicion sown in his mind was germinating already. Joe Dallway whistled softly again as he worked at the rope.

"Señor Dallway, I thank you," Torillo said. "I believe that we understand each other. We are of different races, and you say hard things about mine, but men can put aside such things when there are greater things forward."

"You've said it, Torillo."

"You need not play with that rope more, señor. Wander about, if it pleases you. Talk to the others, if you so desire."

Juan Torillo went away, and after a time Dallway got up and dropped the rope, and strolled down by the corral, where Fernando Martinez was supposed to be mending fence.

"That's a fine job for a bandit!" Dallway snorted. "What a tale to run up and down the borderline—Fernando Martinez mending a fence, hammering with a hammer, smashing his thumbs, and getting splinters in his fingers."

"I could slay that Juan Torillo, señor, and laugh when he died!"

"Yeah? He was just talkin' to me."

"I observed as much," Martinez said. "What was the burden of your conversation?"

"Well, I gathered that he's got his

eyes on you, Martinez. I reckon that maybe he's a mite afraid o' you. If I were you, Martinez, I'd be on guard. One shot will kill a man if it hits the right spot—and many shots have been fired from the dark."

"So?"

"That's just a tip, Martinez. Men like us should stand together."

"I thank you, señor."

"I see that Buck Slager is still puttin' salve on colts," said Dallway. "I'm goin' down to tease him about it."

"And how does it happen that you have left your own task?"

"I told Juan Torillo that I didn't intend to do any work, that's what! So he let me off. He's got an idea, I reckon, that he can still order you and Buck Slager around."

Dallway walked away after that, and directed his steps toward the spot where Buck Slager was taking his time about anointing the cuts on the colts' legs. Behind him, he left a Fernando Martinez who seethed and boiled and yearned to take the lifeblood of Juan Torillo.

Slager looked up as he approached.

"Slager, you're a fool!" Dallway said. "Now, don't go for your gun, 'cause I can prove that I'm right."

"What you meanin', Dallway?"

"If I was you, I'd sure keep my eyes peeled."

"Yeah? Who's liable to be comin' after me?"

"This here Juan Torillo don't like you much. And Martinez thinks that, if he had us two out o' the way, he might be able to get ahead with Lopez. Slager, you and me are white men!"

"I been thinkin' o' that."

"We ought to have more brains than this gang, hadn't we? I got an idea that Lopez has got a pretty nice thing here. If he gets this Blerman out o' the way, he'll be fixed even better. His punchers ain't anything for us to worry about."

"Just what do you mean, Dallway? Don't be afraid; you can talk right out with me."

"Uh-huh! With Torillo and Martinez out o' the way, we might be able to handle Diego Lopez. Why not cut in on the profits? Why do you suppose he wants honest Sam Blerman out o' the way? Because then there won't be anybody at all around here to get the goods on him when he helps run liquor and dope and Chinamen. And he can plan to start a revolution over the line——"

"So that's his scheme!"

"Yeah! Why not get in on it and be his right-hand man?"

"I'll do some thinkin', Dallway."

"That's sensible. But you want to watch out for Torillo. That hombre don't like the idea o' you bein' around, or me either. And Martinez is right down jealous o' you, and you should know it. He'd pump you full o' lead the first chance he got."

Having said that much, Dallway wandered from the corral and back to the bunk house, where he loafed and smoked. The day passed, and men came in from every corner of the ranch to eat the evening meal.

Then there was the usual hilarity in the bunk house, games of cards going, musical instruments tinkling, soft song, loud jest. Fernando Martinez was in a card game, eying his opponents carefully. Buck Slager sat in a corner, pretending to mend a shirt, and glaring at Martinez' back.

Joe Dallway went to the bunk-house door and stood leaning against the casement smoking for a time. Then he tossed his cigarette away and strolled out into the moonlight. From shadow to shadow he went, slowly, unobserved even by the night guard at the horse corral.

He finally gained the deep shadow cast by the ranch house, and slipped quietly along beside the building until

he came to the end of the moon-drenched veranda.

"Señor?" a soft voice asked.

"Señorita?"

"It is very naughty of me to meet you like this. But I shall stay up here on the veranda, and you must remain on the ground. But it is very romantic."

"I reckon," said Dallway.

"I wish that I might see you better, but the bright moonlight is such a poor thing."

Now Dallway was hoping that a certain thing would come to pass, and it did. He had no interest whatever in this girl, but he did have an interest in Juan Torillo. And, as he expected, Torillo was watching.

The foreman suddenly appeared from the shadows.

"What is this?" he demanded. "You dare, you Americano, to compromise the señorita so?"

"What's it to you?" Dallway asked gruffly.

"For this, señor——"

The hand of Juan Torillo made a swift move. But the former ranger had been watching for just that. Two guns roared at one. Joe Dallway felt the breath of a bullet fan his cheek. And he saw Juan Torillo lurch and then crash to the ground.

"Quick, señorita!" Dallway hissed at her. "Into the house! Say nothing. I have rid you of him forever! Say nothing, else men will talk."

"I understand, señor. Thank you!" she whispered.

Then she disappeared. Dallway ran quickly back into the shadows and along the house to the rear. Out of the bunk house men were pouring. The corral guard was shouting at them. Dallway came forth into the moonlight and ran toward the spot, joining the others. Diego Lopez came from the house, holding a lamp high above his head.

"It's Torillo, and he's dead!" Ted James exclaimed.

"Who did it?" Lopez demanded.

"There were two shots, I think," the corral guard testified. "I heard somebody talking, and then the shots came."

"Who was out of the bunk house?" Dallway cried. "I was, for one—walking toward the cook's shack."

"I was in a game," Fernando Martinez declared, as though afraid that suspicion might fall on him.

"Maybe it was some Z Bar man," Buck Slager suggested.

That suggestion met with ready belief among the punchers of the Cross L. The Z Bar was resorting to assassination, and their first victim had been the foreman! Any of them might be the next!

"Take the body away," Lopez ordered. "Arm yourselves and be ready. Double the corral guards. At dawn, we ride for the Z Bar, to raid!"

A chorus of cheers greeted the announcement. The men did as they had been ordered. Guns were examined and quantities of ammunition made ready. Saddles and bridles were put near at hand.

Joe Dallway entered into the thing with enthusiasm. He roped Centipede, led the animal from the corral, put on saddle and bridle, and tethered his mount at a corral post.

"Centipede, old boy, we're goin' on a ride mighty soon," he said. "You want to be ready to pick up your feet, Centipede, 'cause we're goin' to travel some. Yes, sir!"

Then he helped some of the other men get rifles ready and break out ammunition.

"Where is this here Z Bar outfit?" he asked Ted James.

"Matter o' five miles to the ranch proper," James replied. "Good trail all the way—straight north. We'll probably scatter when we get there and hit 'em from all sides."

"I reckon," Dallway said.

"It won't take us long to clean out that gang."

"They that easy?"

"They're just about a match for us, I reckon, except that we've got you three hombres. They'd make a stiff fight of it if they were expectin' us. Their buildin's are mostly adobe. But we'll get 'em just before dawn, when they're asleep, all except maybe a corral guard."

"Yeah!" Dallway agreed. "Five miles ain't far to go. I suppose Lopez will be startin' soon. Will he go along?"

"I reckon, now that Torillo is dead. Good riddance!"

"Who do you suppose shot him?" Dallway asked.

"Maybe it was a Z Bar spy, and maybe it wasn't. There's some men with this outfit who'd have done it gladly if they got the chance. But we've got an excuse for raidin' the Z Bar anyway. It's what Lopez wants."

Joe Dallway left him and wandered back to where Centipede was tethered. He rubbed the horse's nose and talked to him again.

"I told you that this was a sort o' new game, Centipede," he said. "What do you think o' it, huh? Did you see this Maria girl tryin' to make up to me, Centipede? Well, you don't have to get jealous o' her! I'm tellin' you that much."

He made certain that none of the other men were near, untied the horse, and slipped the reins over the pommel. The men were shouting to one another; the horses were prancing. Fernando Martinez was announcing in stentorian tones just how a raid should be conducted, speaking from a full experience, and Buck Slager was disagreeing with him as a matter of principle.

Dallway slipped into the saddle, talking to Centipede soothingly to keep him quiet. He rode slowly through the deeper shadows around the corral, and managed to get behind a store shed without his movements being observed.

"Easy, Centipede!" he cautioned. "Don't make any more noise than you c'n help. We want to make this here disappearance as mysterious as possible."

There was a row of big trees along the lane that ran to the distant highway, and Dallway gained the line of shadows they cast. He kept his mount walking, though. Behind him, the din grew fainter. He passed a gate that had been left open, came to another which he had to open himself and went through that—and closed and fastened both of them behind him.

Then he was out on the main trail, and turned his horse toward the north—and the Z Bar ranch.

"Get goin', Centipede!" he cried, and drove home the spurs.

CHAPTER VII.

BALKED AGAIN.

THROUGH the night he rode, following the trail that looked like a silver ribbon in the bright moonlight, urging Centipede to do his utmost.

The trail ran down the valley over level country, so there were no tiring grades, no treacherous slopes to be encountered. On he rode, grim and determined.

"Step along, Centipede!" he shouted as he bent over the horse's neck. "Can't you do any better than this? Are you gettin' old and stove up, Centipede?"

Mile after mile flew beneath the horse's hoofs. And finally he saw some white spots in the distance that he knew were the buildings of a ranch. Then he commenced passing fenced land, a pasture where breeding stock grazed, stacks of hay for winter feeding.

He turned from the highway to follow a curving road that ran to the

buildings. And now he whipped out his six-gun and fired rapidly three times into the air. And he began shouting, too, at the top of his voice.

"Z Bar! Z Bar!" he yelled.

His horse thundered down the hard-surfaced lane toward the buildings. He saw lights gleaming. He heard men shouting in reply to his cries.

Dallway could make out the main ranch house now, and also the bunk house. A lantern gleamed. The dark forms of men were rushing about.

"Z Bar!" he cried. "Raid comin'! Cross L men comin'!"

He had accomplished his purpose, which was to awaken them, get them up and out into the open where his story could be told quickly. And now he jerked Centipede to a stop near the group of men, just as Sam Blerman came running, half dressed, from the ranch house.

"It's Dallway!" some man shouted, one who had been with Blerman in Praderia.

"What you want here, Dallway? What trick are you playin' now?" somebody else shouted.

"No trick! Torillo has been shot. The Cross L men are comin' to raid."

"What's that?" Blerman cried.

"Torillo was shot, and they're usin' that for an excuse to come and raid you."

"And why are you warnin' us?"

"Does that make any difference?" Dallway asked. "You'd better get ready for 'em."

He suddenly found a six-gun covering him.

"You ride to the porch and dismount!" Sam Blerman commanded. "We ain't takin' any chances with you. Get busy, men, and be prepared for trouble! I'll investigate this hombre!"

Dallway rode as directed, and got down out of the saddle. He tethered Centipede to the corner post of the porch.

"Into the house!" Blerman commanded. "You come along, Tims."

The man addressed was a puncher belonging to the outfit. He followed Blerman and Dallway into the house, holding a weapon ready for instant use.

"Now, what's this mean?" Blerman demanded. "You're one o' Lopez' hired assassins!"

"He thinks so," Dallway said. "But I don't stand back and see a lot o' men raided in their sleep. I'm tellin' you that Torillo was shot in the dark, and they think that some Z Bar men did it. So they're comin'. They were ready when I left."

"How'd you get away?"

"Sneaked," Dallway replied.

"Why?" Blerman persisted.

"Didn't want to see you shot up, confound it! Get busy, Blerman—get ready for 'em. Maybe they ain't missed me. If they have, they won't know where I've gone. Have your men ready, but put out all the lights, so the Cross L hombres will think that everybody is asleep."

"Thanks for the warnin', if it's the right thing, but I don't think much o' a man who'd turn traitor, even against a bunch like them Cross L scoundrels. With Lopez payin' you——"

"He ain't paid me anything yet," Dallway interrupted. "Don't stand there like a dolt askin' questions. Get your men ready. I've warned you. Now I got other work to do."

"Yeah? Just what?" Blerman asked.

"That's my business!"

"And maybe it's mine," Blerman said. "I ain't trustin' you any."

"Not even after I've warned you?"

"And that may be some sort o' a trick. You'll stay right here until the fuss is over—if there's a fuss."

"There'll be one. And you'll have Martinez and Buck Slager to contend with, remember."

Jane Blerman came into the room. "What is it, father?" she asked.

"This man, Dallway, says that the Cross L men are comin' to raid. Torillo has been shot, and they've got the excuse that they think a man of ours shot him."

"This man? One of the recruits for El Diablo?"

"Don't stand here talkin'," Dallway stormed. "Get busy, Blerman, and have your men prepared. You want to be caught off guard after I've risked a lot to warn you?"

"But you'll stay here!" Blerman told him.

"I've got to go, I tell you. I've got some business that won't wait."

"You'll stay here, just the same. Got your gun, Jane?"

"Sure, dad!"

"Watch him, then. And shoot if he makes a move!"

Before Dallway could utter another protest, Sam Blerman rushed from the room with the man Tims at his heels.

"Why, confound it!" Dallway snapped. "Of all the ingratitude——"

"You can't blame father for not trusting you."

"My work ain't done."

"What work?" she asked.

"Serious work. I'm tryin' to help your dad."

"One of the Cross L gunmen trying to help my dad?" she scoffed at him. "Think that I ain't got any sense? What made you change so quickly?"

"Maybe it was you," he said. "You did some pretty straight talkin' in town. You showed me what I was gettin' to be. I ain't lyin' to you, Miss Blerman."

"Likely story," she said.

"I've always known that I'd meet a girl like you some day, and then——"

"That's enough!" she interrupted. "I'm not a silly to listen to you. And you are Joe Dallway, kicked out of the rangers for conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman! Do not forget that, please. If you really deserted the Cross L to warn us of a raid, I'm thankful, and dad will be, too."

"I wish you'd let me go," he said.

"Where do you want to go, and why? Oh, possibly I understand! You've played traitor, and don't want to be caught here. You don't want them to see you. Possibly you'll join them again and take part in the raid——"

"Now, is that a nice thing to say?" he asked her. "I thought that I was goin' to like you a heap, but if you're this kind of a girl——"

"I'm this kind of girl!" she told him.

"All right!" he said. "Have it your own way! Anyhow, I've warned you, and I ought to have some credit for that. But that's the way—let a man make one little mistake and everybody kicks him. There ain't any use in tryin' to reform!"

He looked straight at her and then turned away to pace the room.

"You got any objections if I smoke?" he asked.

"Certainly not," she replied.

So he started the manufacture of a cigarette, walking back and forth as he worked at it, seemingly thinking of something deeply and paying not the slightest attention to her. After a time he came to a stop almost directly in front of her, and lifted the cigarette to his lips to moisten the paper, looking over the little tube at her.

Suddenly he sprang, and knocked the gun away. He clapped a hand over her mouth and hustled her toward the door.

"Sorry, Miss Blerman!" he said. "My word o' honor that I ain't doin' anything against your dad. But I just simply got to get away from here, that's all there is to it."

He pushed her aside as gently as possible, dashed through the door, slammed it behind him, and rushed out of the house. His horse was still at the end of the porch. Dallway vaulted into the saddle, tore the reins free, bent over

the mount's back, and rode like the wind.

He heard her cry of warning behind him, heard guns crack, and bullets whistled past him. Then he was safe, and neither he nor Centipede injured.

Once more he took to the main trail, and this time he rode back toward the Cross L ranch. He rode with speed, but cautiously. He peered ahead through the moonlight, and finally he pulled rein where there was a wild jumble of rocks, and left the trail.

He had seen them coming in the far distance, and knew that they would soon be there. So he dismounted and prepared to hold the nose of Centipede, whose whinny might betray his presence. And there he remained while the Cross L men rode by, with Diego Lopez at their head.

He caught sight of Fernando Martinez and Buck Slager, and he counted the riders. He knew, when that was done, that there remained at the Cross L only the old Chinese cook, one cowpuncher, and the women.

And now he took to the trail again, and after he had traveled for a short distance he gave Centipede the spurs once more. But he slackened speed when he neared the Cross L ranch house. He knew that the man left on guard might be loitering anywhere near, and he might have special orders to be alert for the arrival of Joe Dallway.

Dallway, keeping to the shadows as much as possible, rode to the house and dismounted. He dropped the reins over Centipede's head and crept to the side of the house. An instant later, he was upon the veranda.

The front door was unlatched, and he opened it and slipped inside. He could hear voices in the rear of the building, the voices of women.

It did not take him long to find the little room that Diego Lopez used as an office. He worked in the moonlight, opening the desk and searching it rapidly for papers, examining them as well as he could in the moonlight that streamed through one of the windows.

But he wanted a better examination than that. So he pulled the shade at the window, struck a match, and lighted the lamp. He was working swiftly, feverishly now. He stuffed some papers into his pocket, bent over the desk to look for more.

"What are you doing there, señor?"

Dallway whirled at sound of the voice. Maria Lopez was standing in a doorway. Her face was the picture of suspicion.

"Ah, señorita!" he said. "There are some papers that your father requires."

"He has gone with the men to raid the Z Bar ranch," she said.

"Surely! But he needs the papers."

"They do not know that you shot Juan Torillo, for I did not tell them."

"It makes no difference now, señorita, if you wish to tell them the truth."

"I am sure that he was a traitor to my father, señor, and I am glad that I do not have to marry him. But I am not quite sure that you should take my father's papers away."

Joe Dallway stepped swiftly to her side.

"Señorita Maria," he said, "you are a sweet and wonderful girl. Locked up in a school, fortunately you were kept in ignorance of many of the world's evils. By the way, have you an uncle or an aunt?"

"How funny you talk, señor! But certainly I have an aunt in Mexico City. She has a big house and is wealthy."

"That is good, señorita. You should go for a visit with her."

"But I do not understand."

"And I can tell you nothing now, for I must hurry. These papers must be delivered."

"Something tells me, señor, that I should not let you go. I am afraid that you mean harm to my father."

"I could tell you many things about

your father, señorita, that you would not like to hear, but, I assure you, shall not do so."

Joe Dallway was commencing to wonder whether women were to hinder him continually this night. He walked across the room to her side and smiled down at her.

"I must go," he said. "And remember this, señorita—all o' us get some hard knocks in this life. It ain't a bed o' roses by any means."

"You talk so peculiarly, señor!"

"And I—I'm right down sorry for you," Joe Dallway said.

Before she could make reply to that, he brushed her aside and hurried from the house. He rushed across the veranda, dropped to the ground, and hurried toward his horse. A man stepped from the darkness.

"Just a minute—you!" he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO CONVINCE A LADY.

DALLWAY stopped abruptly.

"Who's that? What do you want?" he demanded.

"You're Dallway, ain't you?"

"Yeah! Lopez sent me back to get somethin'."

"He did, did he? Lopez went away tellin' me to keep an eye open for you. And here you are comin' out o' the house."

"I've got to hurry, man!"

"Not so fast. I want to know what you're doin' here. And be careful, Dallway, 'cause I've got a gun trained on you."

"You'll get all that's comin' to you when Lopez sees you again, for stoppin' me like this. What do you want?"

Señorita Maria Lopez and her *duenna* appeared at that instant at the end of the veranda.

"He took some papers from my father's desk," she called. "I do not know whether it is all right."

"I'll bet that it ain't all right? Stand still, Dallway!"

"You're makin' a fool mistake," Dallway said. "Got a horse ready? If you have, ride with me."

"I got orders to stay here and guard the place. Can't leave the little señorita alone."

"That's right; you can't leave here. It wouldn't be safe. What are we goin' to do?"

"What are those papers?"

"I don't know all about 'em, man. It's Lopez business, ain't it? Maybe he's goin' to make Sam Blerman sell the Z Bar outfit to him. But I'm in a hurry."

"I don't know about this," the guard said. "I don't want to make any mistake."

"Ain't there any other man left behind?"

"Nope! And where did you go to?"

"Thought that I saw somebody prowlin' and went after him," Dallway declared. "The men caught up with me."

"Well, I——"

"Enough o' this! Do somethin'," Dallway begged. "You're goin' to get blamed, and I'll get blamed, and both o' us will probably get merry heck from the boss."

Dallway had walked slowly forward, and was almost beside his horse. Centipede moved toward him a couple of strides. Dallway continued to talk.

"Make some sort o' decision, man!" he said.

"What do you think o' it, Miss Maria?" the man asked. "You heard what Dallway said."

"I am not quite sure, señor. There must be no mistake."

"Do you reckon that I should let him go?"

He was off guard a moment as he spoke, giving her a share of his attention. Dallway vaulted into the saddle and kicked Centipede in the ribs. The

horse lurched forward and knocked the guard sprawling.

And then Dallway bent low and rode again. It took the guard a moment to get upon his feet, to find the gun that had been knocked from his hand. He emptied it, but failed to hit the target. Dallway rode like the wind down the lane and out into the main trail, and once more turned toward the distant Z Bar ranch.

"Get goin', Centipede!" he called. "I'll sure find you a nice mess o' fine oats for this night's work. You knocked that hombre over right handsome. And now we've got to be careful not to get knocked over ourselves, by bullet or otherwise. Seems to me, Centipede, like we've got both outfits against us now. Between two fires, a gent might say."

Half the distance to the Z Bar, he stopped Centipede to look ahead and listen. In the distance he could hear gunfire. He went forward again, but at a slower rate of speed, straining his eyes to find dark spots moving along the trail.

He went forward for another mile. The distant firing had ceased now. Joe Dallway came to a dry wash that was deep in sand, where any horseman would have to slow his mount to walk for a distance of a hundred feet or so. And here was a bunch of huge rocks that afforded a hiding place and cast a shadow.

Dallway rode behind the rocks and dismounted. He trailed the reins, and took his rope from the saddle. He cut off several short lengths and thrust them into his coat pocket, and then he crawled up among the rocks until he was directly above the soft trail.

He listened again. The beating of horses' hoofs came to his ears. Joe Dallway prepared a loop.

And now he could see the black dots that he knew were men on horseback. There were not many, and they were scattered. One was far in advance of the others, so far that Dallway thought he could do as he had planned.

The horseman struck the soft trail and his horse slowed to a walk. The rider turned to look behind. Dallway identified him in the moonlight. He was Diego Lopez.

On he came. The rope swished through the air. It fell true and was jerked taut. There was a grunt from the victim as he was jerked from his horse.

Dallway went down the rocks and at him, covering him with his six-gun as he started to struggle to his feet.

"Back in the shadows, Lopez!" he ordered. "One move, one sound that I don't like, and you'll get it!"

"What—what does this mean, señor?" the master of the Cross L asked.

"No talk! Shuffle along!"

He hurried Lopez behind the rocks on the other side of the trail, and just as they reached the darkness he deftly cracked his man behind the ear with the heavy barrel of the six-gun. Lopez toppled to the ground.

"Hate to be rough, but there's no other way," Dallway said, as he lashed the man's wrists behind his back. "Can't have you making a fuss, either." He gagged him with his neckerchief, rolled him up against a rock, and darted out into the trail.

It did not take him long to capture Lopez' horse and get him behind the rocks, but he was only just in time. He got back to his post to see two of the Cross L men riding slowly over the soft trail. Just two of Lopez' cowpunchers, nobody to attract Dallway particularly.

"Somebody tipped 'em off!" he heard one of them say. "We're sure ruined."

"Lopez got away and he's gone ahead.'

"Yeah! And we've left a lot o' dead and wounded behind. I'm goin' to clear out o' here."

"Me, too," said the other. "They got that Buck Slager right off. Martinez got a slug through the shoulder, too, but he'll be comin' along."

They rode on. Dallway knew what he wanted to know. Once more he searched the moonlit trail. He saw a moving black dot approaching slowly.

He hurried back to Diego Lopez, to find that he was groaning. So he bound the man's feet together, too, and went away again. And now he took up his former station among the rocks, and got his loop ready once more.

On came the horseman. He struck the soft earth and the horse reduced its pace to a walk. Before the man was near enough to be identified properly, Dallway knew that he was Fernando Martinez. He was cursing in two languages.

Again the rope sailed through the air, and again it fell true. Fernando Martinez struck the ground as he gave a cry of fear and rage. Dallway was upon him before he could draw a gun.

He fought his man a moment, and then subdued him, fastening his wrists behind his back, gagging him, this time with one sleeve of his shirt, and getting his horse behind the rocks.

Dallway got his own mount then, and led him across the trail to where the others were standing.

"We're havin' right good luck, Centipede," he said. "I'm hopin' that she holds. Don't want anything to go wrong now, do we?"

He got ropes from the other two saddles and used them to fasten the two horses to his own saddle, so that they could be led. Then he went up among the rocks again, to watch the trail.

Two riders went by, one half supporting the other, men who had met disaster in the raid. Though he waited for half an hour longer, there were no more. The Z Bar men had taken a terrible toll, he knew.

Dallway went back to his prisoners.

"Gents, we're goin' to take a little ride," he announced. "I'll get you into your saddle first, Lopez, you bein' the rankin' member o' the captives. I'm goin' to unfasten your ankles and help you. Make a wrong move and I'll help you all the way to eternity."

He compelled Lopez to get upon his horse, and he fastened his ankles again, this time under the horse's belly. Then he removed the gag.

"You—you will suffer for this, señor," Lopez mouthed. "What is the meaning of it? You wish money?"

"No money!" Dallway snapped. "Save your breath, Lopez, for you'll be needin' it later."

He went to Fernando Martinez now. Martinez was ill, weak from loss of blood, in no condition to put up an argument. Dallway got him into the saddle with some difficulty, listening to a round of original curses as he worked. He lashed Martinez' legs also.

"Now we'll travel, gents," Dallway said. "It's a nice moonlight night for a ride. It's romantic and everything like that. I'll make a bet that you never took a ride like this before."

Martinez howled curses at him, and Diego Lopez implored release and offered to pay generously for it. He saw that Dallway was heading down the trail toward the Z Bar.

"They'll kill me!" Lopez cried. "Not there, señor, for the love of the saints!"

Dallway whistled.

"I'll give you a fortune, señor! You may be my lieutenant in my enterprises."

"You maybe ain't goin' to have any enterprises worth mentionin'," Dallway told him.

"Like a dog I'll kill you!" Martinez yelled.

"I ain't much afraid o' that, either," Dallway said. "You can't scare me, Martinez. If you're makin' faces behind my back, I can't see 'em. Step along, Centipede."

The journey was a slow one, for Dallway was compelled to handle the three horses. But he came, in time, to the spot from which he could see the Z Bar ranch buildings. Once more he fired his six-gun into the air and shouted, for he did not want to approach in such a manner that they would take him for a foe and perhaps open fire.

Mounted men rushed toward him, Sam Blerman with them. They surged around him, filling the night with their shouted questions.

"Easy, gents! Let's get to the house," Dallway begged.

"We can take these hombres off your hands," Blerman said.

"Now, now, Mr. Blerman! I've caught 'em, and I want to handle 'em. But you might tell me how the fight went."

"We were ready for 'em, and we cleaned 'em out—thanks to you!"

"Ah! Traitor!" Lopez shouted furiously.

"Aw, shut up!" Dallway retorted.

They came to the house, dismounted, and the prisoners were helped from the saddle and escorted inside, half the Z Bar men crowding into the house after them.

"A couple o' ropes will be good here," Blerman declared.

"Now you just wait a minute, Mr. Blerman," said Dallway.

"Give me some explanation of this, then!"

"Sure and certain! You're entitled to one," Dallway replied. "I ain't goin' to have these here two men lynched, though. They're goin 'to jail. Fernando Martinez is long overdue there, I guess. And he c'n go now for takin' part in this here raid. He'll get quite a stretch, I reckon."

"And Lopez——"

"He's got plenty comin' to him, too. I'm sorry for his little girl, though, but she's got a rich aunt in Mexico City, so she'll be all right. She was due to lose her father anyway, him conspirin' to start a revolution. He'd ended in front of a firin 'squad, probably."

"We'll take 'em to the nearest jail in the mornin'," Blerman offered.

"Yeah! That's the idea," Dallway said.

"And this ought to do you some good, Dallway," Blerman continued. "The authorities can't overlook this work. Maybe you'll get reinstated in the rangers."

"Well, I reckon that's likely, if I want it," Dallway said. "But I've got a better job than that just now."

"What's the job?"

"Well, you see, I'm a special assistant United States marshal," Joe Dallway replied.

"You're what?"

"Yeah! We always wanted to catch Buck Slager and Fernando Martinez, but somehow we couldn't. And there were some funny things happenin' in this locality, too—liquor and dope bein' smuggled in past the customs men. Then there was a hint o' trouble brewin' for our sister republic to the South, and it's against the law to go fomentin' revolution against a friendly power."

"Get to the point!" Blerman begged.

"Why, we thought up a trick, that's all. So it was pretended that I was a bad boy and got kicked out o' the rangers. That was so I could take the special government job. And most folks seemed to think that I'd turn bad after that, to get even. I pretended to do just that, and talked it, and cussed out the rangers and officers o' every kind. So, when Diego Lopez went out to look for bad men to fight you, he picked me up for one o' them. He wanted you out o' this country, Blerman, 'cause you'd maybe interfere with his projects. He didn't want an honest man around to bother him and maybe tip him off to the authorities."

"So that's the game you played?"

"I reckon!"

"Let everybody think you was disgraced——"

"Shucks! That wasn't anything if we could get the men we wanted," Joe Dallway declared. "That was the first thing to be considered. And now I'll ask you for a couple o' men to help me get these jaspers to jail."

"You c'n have the whole outfit!"

"A couple o' good boys will be enough, Blerman."

"You had a pretty big job for one man."

"Shucks, no! Not for a man who'd been a ranger. Were any o' your boys hurt?"

"A couple—but only slight wounds."

"That's good. Did the thing up quicker than I expected. You got Slager, and I got Lopez and Martinez. That settles it, 'cause the others are small fry. I reckon that you'll have it quiet and decent around here now, Blerman."

"And I'll be glad o' that," Blerman said. "Maybe I can make some sort o' deal to buy the Cross L, and run this end o' the country myself."

"Ten thousand demons!" Diego Lopez cried. "If ever I get out of jail I'll——"

"Look me up!" Dallway snapped. "I'll be glad to see you. And you, too, Martinez! So don't waste any time now makin' threats."

"If there's anything you want, Dallway, just speak up," Blerman said.

"Well, I'd like a cup o' strong coffee."

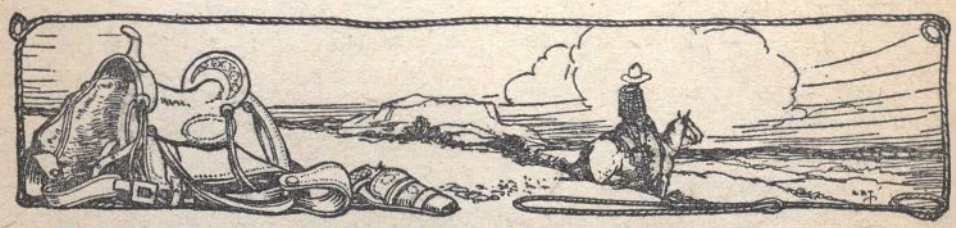
"You'll have it in five minutes. Anything else?"

"Yeah! I'd like to have about ten minutes alone with Miss Jane Blerman. She thinks that I'm a right bad hombre. And I like her, and want to change her mind."

Blerman grinned. "She's in the next room," he said. "You go right in and talk to her. There's enough o' us here to watch these two men."

"You treat 'em gentle! I want 'em to hold together until I get 'em to jail!"

And then he went into the adjoining room to find Jane Blerman.



TRAPPING THE TURKEY THIEF

ONE of the annoyances that Texans have lately had to combat is the theft of their turkeys. According to report, the thieves are particularly on the alert in Dewitt County, where they have formed organized rings for their dishonest efforts and have made away with many hundreds of the fowls.

After their first weeks of inactive dismay, however, turkey owners seized upon a fairly novel plan for the protection of their flocks. Every turkey in the county has been tattooed or branded. And turkey owners who apply to the county agent's department to have their birds marked are given a number which is registered at the county's agent's office. The tattoo is placed on the web of one wing. The mark is known only to the owner of the turkey and the county agent. So ultimately the turkey thief stands a very good chance of being trapped as he goes about his doubtful business.

Hungry's Feed Bill

By Roland Krebs

Author of "The Shotgun Shell Game," etc.

"I'LL trade you my own revolver and throw in——"

"Ba-a-ah!"

"I say, I'll trade——"

"Bah-ah-ah-a-aah!"

"Aw, for the love of mud! Can't you make your darned goat shut up?" "Hungry" Hosford suddenly howled to "Natural" Neely. "How can I make you a offer if that critter bellers all the time?"

"I don't want to hear your offer," Natural answered. "My gun ain't in the market. I'm tired of telling you that. I'd rather hear the goat than listen to your offers. Go on and yodel some more, Butter."

"Ba-ah-ah-ah!"

"Now, listen here, Natural, why do you——"

"Louder, Butter! Louder!"

"Ba-ah-ah-ah-a-a-a-ah!"

"Humph!"

Hungry gave it up. There wasn't no competing with that goat. He threw a handful of gravel at the animal, which let loose one more bleat of defiance and then trotted off to the cook shack, where it nibbled experimentally at a shirt hanging on a line there until the R Bar R's chuck wrangler came out and chased it with a pan of water.

"Can't see whatever made you pick out a goat for a pet," Hungry mumbled.

"Brings me luck—all the time," Natural Neely explained, tossing a pair of dice back and forth between his palms.

"Yeah—and brings everybody else around here botheration," Hungry Hosford grumbled. "When he ain't buttin' somebody, or raising a racket, he's poking his nose into where it ain't got any business. That reminds me—he chawed holes in a new pair of socks of mine."

"I hope they was good material," Natural sighed, rolling his dice and turning up three sevens in a row. "I don't want Butter eating no second-rate stuff. They weren't dyed, were they? I don't want him to get sick on dye."

"From now on, I get nothing but colored socks. I'm going to get me purple ones—and orange socks if they make them. I never saw such a pest."

"Say, look at here!" Natural blazed up. "Butter ain't half as much of a pest to you as you are to me with your everlasting nagging about me trading you my revolver. Shut up!"

Yes, and Natural wasn't exaggerating much, either. Hungry at first just wanted Natural Neely's revolver in a general sort of a way. But, when Natural refused to trade or sell, Hungry got his obstinacy up and getting that heater away from Natural got to be a mania with him.

It was a swell gun, all right. It was a .38 Special, single-action, firing a military cartridge that had a projectile weighing one hundred fifty-eight grains propelled by twenty-one grains of powder. The barrel was six inches long. The handle was ivory, with a mermaid carved on either side. The ivory was in one piece and grooved so that the two pieces forming the backstrap and trigger guard held the solid chunk of ivory in place without any screws being necessary. You never fired a sweeter-shooting, more accurate gun in your life.

"I'll give you seventy-five smacks for it—and that's my top price!" Hungry exclaimed suddenly.

"You won't give me nothing for it!" Natural snapped. "You must be crazy. Seventy-five dollars will buy you as good a gun as this new—and leave you some dough left over for popcorn and cigarettes besides. It ain't worth any seventy-five dollars."

"It's worth it to me," Hungry insisted stubbornly. "I don't want a new gun. I want that .38 Special. I'm used to it. I like the feel of it. I like the weight. I know it like a book. I'm used to it, and I'm crazy about it."

Natural got the revolver in question out of his blue denim jumper pocket. He unwrapped the slightly oiled cloth he had wound around it.

"Here, Hungry," he said. "Shoot at targets with it any time you want, as often as you want, and as long as you want. Here's a box of cartridges. Use all you want. Use 'em all if you want. It's a nice gun, like you say. I'm glad to see you enjoy yourself with it.

"But, that gun ain't for sale. You're just one of these rockheads that's determined to show how stubborn he can be. Any time I go up against a guy like that I'm going to show him that he can't outobstinate me. Now, quit botherin' me."

Instead of putting up a target and shooting, Hungry Hosford, being just such a rockhead as Natural described, laid the revolver on the ground next to him and got out a bill fold. He fished out a fifty-dollar bill, a twenty, and a five, and dangled them tauntingly under Natural's nose.

With a grunt of disgust, Natural first snatched back his firearm, then grabbed the bills out of the other puncher's mitt and threw them in his face.

"Do I look to you like I'm starved?" he growled. "Do you think I never saw seventy-five bucks before? Take a look at this bundle, Stupid. There's better'n five hundred grunts there. That makes your seventy-five look like piffle!"

He got to his feet and stamped into the bunk house.

"Natural, what'll you take for that gun of yourn?" "Biffalo" Bull—Ferdinand C. Plummer, but don't call him that—asked, with mock seriousness.

Natural snatched a heavy shoe out of the hands of "Shorty" Nolan, who was just about to fit it onto his foot, and threw it at the head of the laughing old dean of the bunk house, who dodged it nicely.

"That guy makes me sick," Natural complained. "He's just determined to get me to part with that gun. He's offered to trade guns, rifles, boots, hats, saddles, and bridles—everything but the Panama Canal, almost."

Natural, who I suppose you can guess gets his nickname on account of the way "naturals" come up on the dice for him,

got his cubes out and made a few rolls on the table top.

I watched the numbers turning up: Seven, seven, seven, eleven, seven, five, five, six, three—not so good—seven—got it right back—snake eyes—rotten—seven—got it back—seven, seven.

"I guess Dame Fortune is smiling in my direction to-night, all right," he chuckled. "Want to go to town with me, Al?"

"Yeah, I'll go—but just as a spectator," I said.

Natural was counting on taking a lot of boys to the cleaner. The Angle H and Circle T outfits got paid that day, which meant that there would be a nice, quiet game on a blanket in the basement of Hannegan's Broadway Restaurant in town like usual.

Natural ought to like that basement. He's won more dollars down there than cups of coffee have been served upstairs—and business at the Broadway is usually pretty good, too.

"Don't get our Mr. Neely wrong. When I say the dice do tricks for him, I don't mean that he places them or uses doctored bones. He'd just as soon drop them out of a leather shaker as out of his hand. The boy's got uncanny luck, that's all. And, with inveterate gamblers like him he sometimes has blue streaks of bad luck.

When Natural and I got to Hannegan's basement a couple of hours later, the game going on under a drop light suspended over a blanket got considerable of a setback as soon as Mr. Neely took a hand.

It looked like Natural was never in better form. It wasn't long before he had run his bundle of about five hundred dollars up to one thousand, three hundred and seventy-two dollars and fifty cents, the fifty cents being accounted for by Natural accommodatingly shooting a half to give a break to a cow-puncher who was down to four bits—and down to zero after that shake.

Then, just when Natural was riding the crest of the wave, Dame Fortune suddenly fell in love with the iceman or something. She quit Natural Neely cold.

It began when an ambitious guy from the Circle T faded him an even hundred. Natural rolled out two ones. The Circle T boy let the money lay. Natural covered the two hundred, then rolled a five and next a seven. With that he started to go backward at a dizzy pace, occasionally having little winning spurts—enough to make him hopeful of a comeback—but as a whole losing first his winnings and then his original dough fast.

It wasn't, I guess, more than half an hour later when he stood up and sighed to me, "Clean!"

"Too bad," I answered him.

Natural looked at me long and earnestly, and pleadingly.

"Lend me a dollar, Al," he begged.

"No."

Maybe you think I was hard-hearted. Well, as Columbus told Ferdinand and Isabella, it wasn't the money, but the principle of the thing.

There wasn't a guy in the R Bar R outfit that wouldn't have split his last dollar with Natural if Natural needed the necessities of life. But he's such a gambling fool that we all made an agreement never to lend him a red for gambling.

"Shucks! I just somehow got a hunch that my luck's about to flop back as suddenly as it flopped away," Natural moaned.

"Sorry," I told him. "I got a hunch that nothing of the kind would happen."

Sorrowfully, Natural rode back to the R Bar R with me, complaining every so often that he could bust up that game if he just had a little dough for a starter.

Next day Natural tried hard to borrow from the rest of the bunk house boys, but everybody turned him down.

"I got a hunch like I never had a

hunch in my life before that I can go back there to-night and bust the game wide open," he pleaded. "All I want to borrow is a dollar. That ain't so much to lose. If I lose it, I'll quit. But I know I can build it up."

"Nothing stirring," said Biffalo Bull decidedly.

"Just one buck, Shorty."

"Uh-uh," replied Shorty Nolan.

While this was going on, I noticed a gleamy glint in the eyes of Hungry Hosford. Of course, Hungry would have liked to have lent Natural something, but he knew the rest of us wouldn't stand for it.

Natural moped around all morning, fiddling with his dice and acting nervous. He knew he couldn't scrape up a loan, because our agreement not to lend him gambling money was no secret from him.

Natural suddenly smiled. He got a big box out from under his bunk and took out a new hat that he paid easy fifteen smacks for and had worn only once.

"All" he said to me, holding up the skimmer, "you fellows ain't bound by any oaths or anything not to buy from me, are you?"

"No."

"That hat fits you. It's yours for five bucks."

"Thanks, Natural; but I'm well supplied with hats just now."

So was everybody else, of course. Then Natural tried to sell somebody a pair of leather boots, a couple of fine blankets, a beautiful saddle, and even a heavy, short jacket that was ideal for riding range in raw weather. He offered all of them for ridiculous prices, of which nobody wanted to take advantage.

Finally, when Natural Neely was convinced nobody would take his bargains, Hungry spoke up.

"If you're hankering so to sell something," he said, "I'll pay you not a cut price but an even better than fair price for your——"

"You make me sick!" Natural snapped, giving Hungry such a shove that the pest flew over backward into his bunk. "That gun ain't for sale to anybody, but you mostly."

Natural, wrapped up in gloom, walked out of the bunk house and over the brow of the little hill behind the corral, and then down into the pasture, where there was a clump of trees.

Some time later, Hungry walked up to the hilltop and looked down. Then he came back, studying.

"What's Natural doing?" I asked him.

"He's taking a nap under the trees," Natural told me, studying more. "Say, Al, can you give me five ones for a five-dollar bill?"

"I guess so," I said, making the exchange. "What do you want them for?"

"Never mind; you'll see," Hungry said with a chuckle.

Then he got Biffalo Bull to give him ones for a ten-dollar bill. "Slim" Evers and "Red" Johns broke some big bills for him, too.

Finally, he counted out seventy-five one-dollar bills and then rumpled them up into an uneven heap.

"Don't seventy-five bucks look big and important when it's piled up in ones?" Hungry laughed.

"What's the idea behind all this?" Biffalo pinned him down.

"Ever hear of a 'stump bar,' Biff?"

"Can't say as I have."

"Well, in bygone days in the Southern mountains the moonshiners who were selling liquor used stumps to get around the revenue men," Hungry explained.

"You'd put your money on a stump and go away. When you went back some time later, your money was gone, but there was a bottle of liquor on the stump for you.

"Natural's napping right where

there's a tree stump in front of him. I'm going to pile all this money on the stump and weight it down with Natural's gun. When he wakes up, he won't see me, because I won't be there. He'll fight a big battle with hisself all alone. Finally, he'll see the light of reason and put two and two together and sell me the gun. I'm using a bit of psychology, that's all."

"What's that? Dope?" Biff asked.

"I once read a book on psychology. Psychology means—well, it's like this. Seventy-five dollars in ones looks bigger'n seventy-five in twenties and fives. Look at this pile. When Natural sees how much money seventy-five dollars is, he's going to realize that it's a fair price for that revolver."

"Psychology! Mulishness!" Biffalo snorted. "It's a wonder to me that Natural don't bust you in the nose. You're the stubbornest critter ever I seen."

"Me, stubborn? It's him that's stubborn," Hungry claimed, as obstinate people will.

With that, Hungry got Natural's gun out from the ditty box under the dice addict's bunk and sneaked over to where the owner was asleep. That was late in the afternoon.

As we sat down to chow that evening, I noticed Natural was missing. Hungry and I happened to look out a window at the same time and saw Natural riding his pony furiously out to the county road.

"Hot dog! It worked! He's going to town," Hungry said, rubbing his mitts together with deep satisfaction.

At midnight, when I fell asleep, Natural still hadn't come back.

But, when I woke up next morning, he was snoring in his berth.

After breakfast, Natural began pulling bills out of his pockets. I've never seen pockets stuffed like hisn were.

"You seemed to have mopped up on them dice fanciers," I remarked.

"Got back every cent I lost and three hundred and eleven bucks to boot," Natural laughed.

Hungry, too, laughed.

"Well," he said to Natural, "I see you finally softened up and decided to part with that gun."

"You're crazy," Natural told him with a frown.

"Didn't you take that money off the stump where I left it for you?"

"Oh, so it was you left the money there! Thanks. It came in handy. Put me back on my feet."

"You kept my money and you ain't giving me the revolver?"

"I didn't keep your money. Since somebody was careless enough to leave his dough lay around loose like that, I did use it, but first thing when I got home early this morning I put back on the stump what I'd taken away from it. If it's yourn, go out and get it. It's there."

Without a word, Hungry got up and went out. Ten minutes later he was back.

"Hey! What kind of a swindle is this?" he asked angrily. "There was only one silver dollar there."

"Yeah, I could have put a paper dollar there like other darned chumps would have done, but I left you a silver dollar instead. A goat ain't so apt to eat a silver dollar, it being big and metallic and all."

"What do you mean?" Hungry inquired suspiciously.

"I mean that when I woke up yesterday afternoon, I saw Butter just about to chew up the last bill on the stump. How much had you laid there, Hungry?"

"Seventy-five dollars!" Hungry gasped, sitting down weakly.

"I wish you wouldn't be so careless with your paper money," Natural went on. "It ain't that I mind you losing seventy-four bucks. I don't want my pet goat eating bills. Everybody knows

paper money's got germs on it. It don't make sanitary feed for a goat."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roared Biffalo Bull, pounding the stupid-looking Hungry between the shoulders. "Haw! Haw! Natural, why don't you lend Hungry your gun for a few minutes?"

"What for?" Natural Neely asked.

"He looks like he wants to go behind the barn and blow out his brain."

"If he does, he don't need my .38," Natural answered. "Considering the size of said brain, he can use an air rifle with one BB shot."

"Bah-ah-ah-ah!" agreed Butter, poking his head in through a window.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Tufted Puffin

(Lunda cirrhata)

THE tufted puffin is one of the oddest-appearing birds in existence. When one is first confronted by a flock of these birds, they are so unusual looking as to provoke a feeling of unreality and then of laughter. For, as if to make up for his ridiculous headgear, the puffin takes himself very seriously.

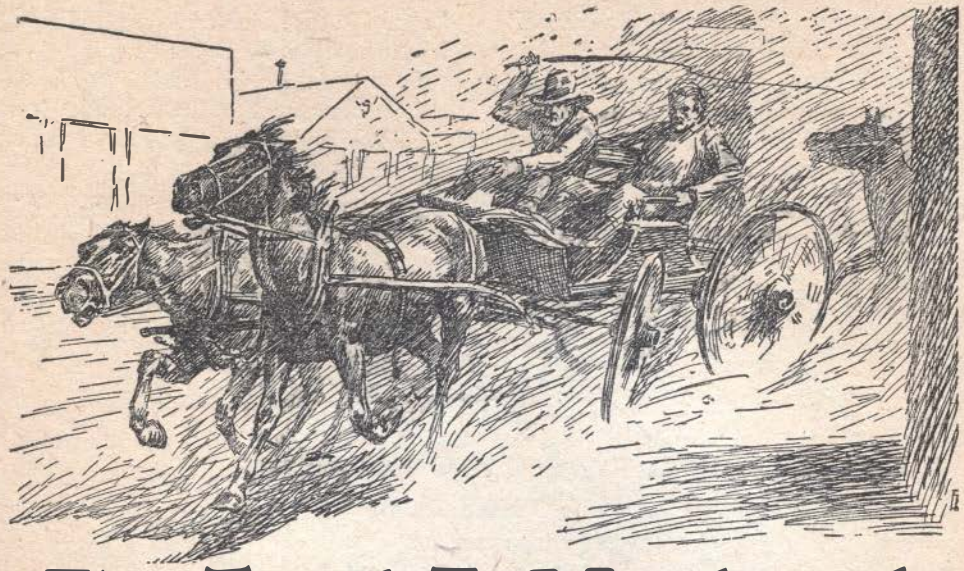
Males and females wear a white facial mask, on either side of which flow long feathers of a deep-straw color. The eyelid is a brilliant red and the beak is large, rounded somewhat like that of a parrot and is also a bright red. The feet and short legs carry out this same color note. The body is covered with dark-brown feathers. After the mating season is over, the color gradually pales and the white mask is replaced by dull-black feathers. The beak becomes smaller, for some still-undiscovered reason, and is replaced by scales of a brownish hue.

On the coasts and islands of the Arctic Ocean, Bering Sea, and the north Pacific as far south as Japan and Southern California, the puffins abound. They prefer to keep far out at sea except when forced ashore by severe storms or during the nesting season.

Along the sloping hillsides of the rocky islets the puffins make their homes either by renovating the old nesting burrows or digging new ones. Almost any spot that can be burrowed is satisfactory for a nest. But crannies or crevices suffice as well. When it is necessary to dig a cavity it is done with the bird's feet, which are provided with very sharp nails. One egg is laid, whose white, brown-spotted exterior is soon the color of the earth, for the lining of the nest is scanty.

The baby puffins are, indeed, nothing more than puffballs in appearance. They are of a slaty-black color and covered with down at least an inch thick. It is not until the approach of their first spring that they begin to take on the white face and the straw-color side tufts.

Natives of the North Pacific islands depend largely upon the puffins for food and clothing. Small nets mounted on poles serve as a sort of butterfly net, by means of which the birds are caught. As a rule, white men do not care for the taste of puffin meat. The skin of these birds is tough and is employed in making parkas. From forty-five to fifty puffin skins are required to make a parka, and these, used with the feather side in, are considered unsurpassed for warmth.



The Trail To Manhood

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

TOM FULLER, an honest lad of extraordinary strength, owner of a savage mustang, finds his strength a drawback. He is constantly dismissed by his employers, of whom the last, a blacksmith, finds that he is the son of the late Washington Fuller, a renowned gun fighter.

Oliver Champion, whose horses are being shod, seems interested in Tom, and follows him as he rides away downcast to seek another job. Champion invites Tom to ride in his buckboard and draws him out on the subject of his mustang. The boy extols the ferocity of the wild creature, which he has cleverly tamed, and Champion offers to buy the animal. Tom refuses to part from his mount, Rusty, and Champion thereupon offers to take him, too.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW JOB.

AT this, the boy straightened. He looked with a flush of anger at his companion, who said, with a smile: "Hire you, I mean. Unless you are traveling toward another job just now?"

"Hire me?" echoed Tom Fuller.

"Yes, that's what I mean. Good pay, and work that would not be hard, I take it."

"Are you makin' a joke out of me?" asked Tom huskily.

"I am speaking to you," said Champion, "as seriously as ever your father could have spoken to you."

"There's nothin' that I could do," said Tom. "You seen me get fired!"

"What of that? There are other things in the world than handling horses and hammers in a blacksmith shop!"

"I've tried the most of 'em," said the boy. "I've even been a baker, for a month. I mean, I helped around, and tended the fires. I did things like that. But I couldn't even be a baker."

"Neither could I, I'm sure," said Champion.

"You?" cried Tom. He looked at his companion with wide eyes, and then he nodded, assured.

"Why, you could do anything!" said he.

"Do you think so?" said the other, with rather a bitter intonation. "Well,

I can't. But even if you have failed in other jobs, I think that you're the man for me."

"You got a ranch, I suppose," said Tom. "But I can't manage even that. I used to try plowing, but I was always running a crooked furrow. I used to try at riding herd. I couldn't do that. I'd get to thinking of something else, and the cows would make a break, the first thing that I knew. They seemed to know, somehow. I mean, that they seemed to know that I wasn't clever. They got more inside of my mind than I ever could inside of theirs! Hosses the same way!"

"You broke one hard horse," said his companion.

"You mean Rusty? Well, I happened to get my hands on Rusty."

He looked down at his hands and spread them palm upward, as though he was wondering at some special intelligence and capability concealed in them.

"Have you failed everywhere, Tom?" asked Champion.

"Well, yes. I always have."

"When the cream-colored mare, here on the near side, tried to break away, to-day in the shop, you handled her."

"Well, I got my hands onto the rope, you see. That was all. Of course, that length of rope gave me a leverage, and she wasn't expecting a hard jerk, just then."

"That may be, of course. At the same time, you handled the tall young fellow, a moment later."

"He was just a kid," said Tom.

"How old are you, Tom?"

"Me? Oh, I'm twenty-one," said Tom. "I'm twenty-one years old and——"

He broke off with a sigh, and his retrospective eye seemed to be passing down the list of those years, which seemed to him so endlessly long.

"I've never done no good," said Tom.

"That kid, as you call him, was very quick with his gun," said Champion, "and I'll wager that if he'd got it out in time, he would have drilled a hole through you, my friend."

Tom considered. It was not his habit to make offhand judgments of people or of events.

"He had a straight-lookin' eye," said Tom. "Yes, he can shoot a good deal. I mean, he could shoot a little."

"Could? Won't he be able to again?"

Tom frowned, for he felt that his imagination, or his intuition, or some buried sense which was in him, had caused him to speak too much upon this point.

"I mean to say that I don't know," confessed Tom, "but I reckon that he won't be very apt to reach for his gun, again. I would reckon, even," he said slowly, "that that boy, he won't ever reach for a gun again, if they's a man opposite to him."

"What makes you think that?"

Tom started to speak, paused, and then went on hesitantly.

"You know the way that dogs are? If one licks another, then he's always the boss. He's always got the upper hand."

"But you won't always be around."

"Not that. I mean, sometimes, one beating is enough. The dog thinks that every other dog has got stronger jaws and quicker feet than him. This boy was young, d'you see? He hadn't hardened into himself."

"What do you mean by that, Tom?"

"Well, you take iron. When the fire has melted it down a bit, one hard smash will put the whole print of the hammer face into it. But when it's cold, it's able to break the hammer, before the hammer can hardly so much as dent it. Well, young boys, they're in the fire, or just out of it. They ain't been tempered yet. It's easy to knock sparks out of 'em. Those sparks, you might say, would be likely to set the house on fire. That fellow might have set a house on fire, some day. But while

they're hot, they're easily worked. And after they've been shaped, they gotta be tempered. That young feller, I'm afraid he was dumped into the ice water too quick. I reckon that he'll always be brittle."

Oliver Champion looked sharply and for a long moment at Tom, and then he squinted down the road.

"You never got on with any sort of work?" he said.

"Some say that I got no mind," sighed Tom. "Some say that what I got, I can't keep on my job. I guess they're right."

"You're not proud, Tom?"

"Oh, a man like you, you'd see right through me. You might as well know, before you've wasted a week's pay on me!"

"They call you 'Honest Tom'?"

"Sometimes I've been called that."

"Now, Fuller, I'll tell you what! Like a certain celebrated Greek, I've been looking through the world for an honest man. I've been looking for an honest man, with a strong pair of hands, with a fearless heart, and a familiarity with weapons. Do you understand?"

"Yes?" said Tom, rather bewildered by this explanation.

"And I think that I've found what I want! I don't quite agree with the opinions that other people have about you! I think I could use you, Tom!"

The boy shook his head.

"I never could do but one thing. I could swing the hammer for Charlie Boston, pretty well. But—I couldn't even hold down that job. I don't know why. I thought that I was doing pretty good!"

"Tom, did it ever occur to you that you might be thinking too much, instead of too little?"

"Thinking? Me?"

"Most people," explained Champion, "use their brains to tap away at big things and turn them into small things. Well, I think that you may have been doing exactly the opposite. You've been taking the little things, and rolling them around with mystery, and making them greater and greater, until pretty soon, you're stumbling over your own imagination. The only thing that you don't appreciate may be your own talent."

"I don't just follow that," said Tom. "It—it sort of sounds to me like long division!"

The other laughed.

"What were you last paid a month?"

"Thirty, by Charlie Boston."

"I'll give you sixty."

"Sixty dollars a month?" said Tom, and turned sharply in the seat.

For those were the days when dollars had a meaning, and they were not scattered rashly. Sixty dollars raised one from the ranks.

"Sixty dollars, and find myself?" asked Tom humbly.

"Sixty dollars, and found. I'll pay all your expenses, and you'll live well."

"Sixty dollars and found," said Tom. "Why, I ain't worth——"

Champion interrupted with some show of irritation:

"Do you refuse the place?"

"No!" said Tom.

"You don't know what it's to be about, as yet?"

"I'll take a chance on that!"

"Suppose I wanted to rob a bank?"

"Rob a bank!" laughed Tom. "I guess you wouldn't do that!"

He glanced at Champion and then quickly away, for, all at once, he was not half so sure of the virtue of his companion.

"Well," said Tom. "I've always kept the law."

"I hope that we'll be able to keep the law, still," said Champion dryly. "However, I might as well tell you what our task is."

"Yes?" said Tom Fuller, rather in dread after all of this preparation.

"I want to find this."

He took a fold of paper from his inside coat pocket, and from the paper he sifted out a snapshot of mountains.

"Look at it!"

Tom took the picture and stared.

There was what appeared a pair of tall mountains in the foreground, one of them leaning outward at such an angle that it appeared as though it were about to topple over! And between the mountains a long valley began, heavily wooded, and ran straight down into the foreground, where a horse stood beside a storm-blasted stump of a great tree. The horse was the reason of the picture, no doubt. But at any rate, it was an indistinct picture, and not at all a success.

"You want to find that?" asked Tom.

"Yes. Ever see a place like that?"

"About ten thousand of 'em!" said Tom. "Except maybe that that mountain leans out in a sort of a dizzy way."

"We've got to find that place," said Champion. "And you're to help me."

"I'm not a very good eye for remembering things like that!"

"Then I'll do the looking after the mountains, and you do the looking after me."

"After you?"

"You understand, Tom? I'm not paying you something for nothing. But much as I want to find the place which is in this picture, just so much do other people want to keep me from it. And if they found me on the trail, they'd kill me, Tom, with as little compunction as you'd step on a poisonous spider! However, that is where you come in—with a gun in your hand, I have no doubt!"

CHAPTER IX.

ENTER BUD CRESSY.

TO have found a job was in itself enough, but to have found a job at such a price as this was something to take away the breath of Tom Fuller. It made fair visions leap before his eyes—silver-mounted saddles, and blooded horses, and pearl-handled guns, and altogether, such magnificence that all eyes would gaze after him as he passed, and admiration would arise behind him as dust rises behind a wind.

He was half blinded by these dreams, so that he failed to put succinctly to himself any question concerning the other and darker half of his present position. He had been assured that the place meant danger, and sixty dollars a month is a poor salary—so is six thousand—if the hired man dies before he can use the money.

However, Tom was not as other men, and his fear had been so long that of starving, or being without employment, that he had lost all talent for fearing danger. A seasick man is never frightened by a storm. He is too busy with his equilibrium and a sense of nausea to care a whit about the danger of death. So it was with Tom Fuller. His mind was filled with fear of scorn, fear of mockery, fear of failure as he had failed before, and there was no room to worry about his personal safety. Suddenly, he was intrusted with a labor in which he could use the gifts with which nature had filled his hands.

The joy of that possessed him; songs formed in his throat and dreams misted his eyes; and he fell into a profound silence.

Oliver Champion did not disturb his thoughts, for his own mind seemed occupied fully. The sun hung higher in the sky and then burned directly down upon them. It burned the wind out of the heavens; it burned the road to a white dust; it turned their hatbands into circles of fire, and soaked like scalding water through the backs and shoulders of their coats.

The mustangs jogged on endlessly. Where the reins flipped their backs and where the hip straps danced, appeared lines of white froth. Sweat streaked their bodies; then they were all sleek

with water. The dust settled and whitened them; the sweat washed the dust away. But still they jogged on as wolves dogtrot without ceasing. Only, as the day grew older, their steps shortened until they were traveling not very much faster than a brisk walk. But the driver did not hurry them. The distances before them were so vast that one was not inspired to try to cross them at a burst, and the long road which toiled through the hills was to be nibbled at bit by bit, and so consumed by degrees.

Twice they saw, in the distance, little villages, half lost behind the heat waves which constantly washed up from the surface of the earth; but they went on past the towns. They came to a creek, or rather, a little runlet of water, and here they stopped and, without a word of consultation, watered the horses, and dashed some water over the legs and the bellies of the mustangs. They allowed the pair to breathe, and when the labor of their flanks became less rapid, then they climbed again into their places.

"Look at Rusty," said Oliver Champion. "He hasn't turned a hair!"

"He's only been pulling himself along," said Tom.

"He's been eating all the dust, though," answered Champion. "That horse is solid iron."

The boy looked back and nodded. Rusty was iron, that was true; and perhaps there would be a need for his durable strength before long.

The sun wore lower down into the west, and as its strength abated, and the sky was less pale with heat, Tom began to find questions rising into his mind. Far before them he saw a little town, like a figure of smoke among the hills, and they were doubtless to stop there for the night; it would be almost dusk before they reached it.

"Suppose that some of the people that are after you should come along, how would I know them, Mr. Champion?"

"What people?" asked the other.

And he turned to the boy a face wan with dust, and with circles of weariness beneath his eyes.

"Why, I mean people who are apt to make trouble for you. You were saying something about them. If you could tell me what they look like——"

"They might be old, and they might be young," said Champion. "They might be negroes, Mexicans, whites. I don't know. We might have no trouble at all, as we cruise about, but, on the other hand, we might find it any moment. A man might shoot at us from behind that cactus; or a dozen scoundrels might charge down on us when we get through that gap—I don't know who they'll be. I can't suggest any one to you except——"

He paused, and then, shaking his head, he added: "There's no use telling you about him, because he'll never appear. He'll keep behind the smoke!"

He said this with a new note in his voice—a quiet, metallic murmur, as it were; and the boy knew that Champion was speaking of some great enemy.

They talked no more as the day wore on, and they came into the town at dusk. It was a village at a junction of two lines of railroads, and the roundhouses and other railroad buildings made a great heap in the center of the town. There was an eternal taint of coal smoke in the air, and always the sense of grinding wheels, somewhere in the distance, and of engines panting strongly and too fast for human lungs to imitate. On the outskirts of the yards, the town houses began. There was a crooked Main Street and a disordered lot of short alleys. It was a place of fifteen hundred inhabitants, say. The railroad supported its life, and not the naked brown hills around. As they drove in, they passed under a big sign—"Orangeville." Beneath the large letters of the name appeared a legend: "For homes and home lovers."

They went on, hunting for the hotel. Presently they had to slow the mustangs to a walk, so pitted and rutted was the street; it was like rowing through a choppy sea in a small boat. It was as ugly a town as well could be. There were no gardens, and there were no trees.

"Orangeville! Orangeville!" said Oliver Champion. "That's the trouble with these people. There's too much imagination; there's no sense of proportion. That's the trouble, I tell you! Orangeville! For homes and home lovers! Bah!"

He seemed almost childishly violent, and the boy was startled. Then he remembered the fatigue and the heat of that day's journey. Champion had driven every inch of the way, and he was struck with a pang of remorse. He really should have offered to take the reins.

"There's not a blade of grass in the place, is there?" asked Oliver Champion.

"They's been so much coal smoke over the town, that the rain couldn't get through," suggested the boy. "Maybe they been trying for oranges instead of for grass."

He laughed a little. It was easy for his spirits to rise, now. So they turned into the main street, and saw the hotel sign on the left, a little distance before them.

"Looks like hard beds and bad food to me," said Oliver Champion. "Well, I gotta take this, and a lot more!"

He said it through his teeth, but it was apparent that he was very tired, and that his patience had worn thin.

"Is that a crowd of fool cow-punchers celebrating?" he asked a moment later, as a cavalcade rounded a corner before them.

"It ain't that," said Tom Fuller. "They're going too slow. They're going as slow as bad news, I'd say!"

The riders came closer, and presently it was seen that they were grouped around a central figure of a man whose horse was led on a lariat hooked over the pommel of another saddle, and that the central form, furthermore, had bright new handcuffs holding his wrists together.

"Ah ha!" said Champion. "A sheriff's posse—and it looks as though they've actually caught their man! That's an unusual thing, isn't it? I thought that sheriffs in this part of the world were chiefly employed in galloping wildly and bravely across the hills and galloping wildly and bravely back again! But here, by Jove, something has been caught! I'll wager that the fellow was drunk!"

He seemed to take a great deal of pleasure in sneering at the rest of the world, at this moment, and the boy made no reply. The cavalcade, at the same time, began to go past them, and they could see the prisoner very clearly, in spite of the dimness of the light. He was the very type of the criminal, with a pale, broad-jawed face, little eyes, bright as the eyes of a pig with greed, and a shower of greasy black hair cascading over his forehead and seeming to thrust into his very eyes.

He was a man of some note. People were running out onto their front porches and letting the screen doors slam behind them, while they stared after the captive, and a murmur ran up and down the street. His importance was reflected in the attitude of his captors.

They tried to be free and easy, and casual, and careless, but every man of them rode a little straighter than usual, and squared his shoulders, and stole glances from the corner of his eye to collect admiration like a deacon collecting contributions for the church.

"A low-looking ruffian," said Oliver Champion, as the procession went by.

At that moment, the captive jerked his head to the side and stared fixedly

at Champion. It seemed as though he had heard the remark—though that would have been impossible at such a distance—and now he glared back with a wild malice, until his horse had carried him past.

"Not drunk, I guess," said Tom Fuller. "But crazy, I suppose. He looked like he knew you and wanted to cut your throat, didn't he?"

Champion did not answer at once.

Then Tom glanced sharply at him, and saw that he was frowning, and that the fingers of one hand were working nervously.

"He does know me," said Champion. "And what's more to the point, I know him!"

He pulled up the team in front of the hotel, at this point, and gave the reins to the boy as he climbed quickly out of the buckboard. "You put up the team," he directed, "and I'll get the rooms."

Tom obeyed the orders.

He had to wait a moment at the barn behind the hotel before the stable boy came back from the street.

"Who've they got, there?" asked Tom.

"Why, they've got Cressy—that's what they've got."

"Who's Cressy?"

"Him? Bud Cressy? Why, that's the murderer and the stick-up man!"

Tom Fuller bit his lip in bewilderment. How had Bud Cressy known Champion, and how had Champion known him?

CHAPTER X.

RED FLANNEL.

BUT no matter how odd might have seemed the recognition which had passed between Cressy and Champion, the boy determined that he would take no notice. It was not his problem to solve the relations between Champion and other people. His task was more precise—he was simply to guard the safety of his employer.

So he tried to push the problem out of his mind, and he went back to the hotel after he had watched the team and Rusty put up. Two rooms had been taken by Champion, in the rear corner of the second floor of the hotel. They were small, wretchedly furnished, with thin grass mats on the floor, and a section of paper taking the place of a broken windowpane.

"But they're away from the rest of the house," said Champion. "That's what counts about 'em! They're away from the rest and—I hope you sleep light?"

"I sleep pretty light."

"Fix your mind on my room. Then you'll waken if you hear a sound in it."

They went down to supper and ate a large meal. But Champion was nodding before he finished his coffee. He rose with a great yawn, and fairly fumbled his way out of the room, like one walking in his sleep. Tom went behind him, and Champion yawned again as he said good night.

"I'm going to sleep—the first good sleep in a year! The first sleep with both eyes closed——"

He disappeared into his room and presently the boy heard Champion fling himself heavily onto his bed.

The man was plainly exhausted and, standing at his own window, Tom looked out over the roofs of Orangeville, and saw the dark cloud of the coal smoke from the yards climbing the sky and making the stars disappear, or fade; and he listened to the restless panting of a locomotive which was busily sorting cars on the side tracks to make up a train. There was something of the tone of a manufacturing center, with all this noise and the confusion and the smell of soot in the air. But the thoughts of the boy were with Champion.

That man was haunted with fear,

Tom now knew. For a year, according to his own words, he had not really slept himself out; and perhaps as a sort of last and desperate move, he had clutched at Tom for safety—a mere straw which would go down with the first whirl of the water!

Very insufficient Tom seemed to himself, and yet he felt that he was a little happier now than he had been for a long time. He was happier than he had been in the employ of Charlie Boston, for life was not only busy, but he himself was respected. In a sense, Champion actually looked up to him and his skill with weapons, and the strength of his hands.

Then Tom turned back to his bed and undressed, shaved by a smoky light in a cracked mirror, took a cold sponge bath, and lay down to sleep. He had only to straighten himself and draw a single long breath before slumber fell over him; there were no nerves in Tom Fuller!

He took into his mind one last thought—which was to keep alert to any sounds which came from the room of Champion, and it seemed to him that he had barely fallen to sleep when such a sound reached his mind, and waked him suddenly.

He was halfway to the door, gun in hand, before he was thoroughly roused. Then he looked about him, blinking, and saw a smear of gray sky at the top of his window, and black roofs pricking up above the sill. It was the earliest dawn, and yet he was confident that the light had not wakened him. Something had sounded in the room of his employer.

He scanned the door, anxiously. There was no glimmer of light around it, and no eye of light blinking through the keyhole. This reassured him, but still he went closer and leaned his head by the door jamb. Then he was aware of a murmur of voices in Champion's room. He could not break up the flow of sound and distinguish the meaning of the words, but he waited, uncertain what to do. If there was a noise in that room, he was to enter. That had been agreed. But surely this sounded like a quiet, private conversation!

However, his first orders had not been changed. He found the knob, turned it softly, and let the door fall open of its own weight. Silence followed, and then the faint fluttering of a piece of paper. No voices spoke, and the chamber was a deep well of blackness into which he could not see at all. Shapes seemed to move vaguely within that blackness, but he guessed that the forms were only in his own eye.

Then he heard a gasping voice which he guessed came from Champion:

"Tom! Tom Fuller!"

"Here!" said Tom, with caution.

"Thank Heaven!" said Champion. "It's all right, Bud. There's nothing to fear."

Two forms drew closer to Tom, in the doorway. Instinctively, he raised the muzzle of the Colt which he was carrying.

"Who's this bird?" asked a muttering voice.

"A friend of mine. Perfectly safe."

"What's he know?"

"Nothing."

"Does he know you?"

"He saw you to-day; that's all."

"I'm gunna beat it out of here," said the voice of the stranger in answer. "You couldn't spare another hundred?"

"No. I've told you that."

"You've told me, well enough. Telling don't make it go, though."

"I've told you the truth, Cressy."

"Darn it, you could leave that name out!"

"He's safe, I tell you."

"What's safe for you might be poison to me. They got a price on me, now. Darn 'em, they'd as soon shoot me down as to shoot a pig that had broke into a field of wheat. Well, I'm gunna

leave. I need a hoss, though. You see a good hoss there in the barn, old son?"

"I didn't go into the barn."

"The kid did, then? Fuller, did you see a good hoss in that barn? A hoss that could pack a hundred and eighty pounds for a hard run?"

"There's a big roan gelding," said Tom. "He'd cost you a good deal, I think."

"Would he?" chuckled Cressy hoarsely. "Maybe I could borrow him, though!"

It sent a tingle through the blood of Tom. He had been raised to look upon the violence of his own father as a pardonable thing. His father had killed many a man; his list was long, in fact. And yet he never had stolen so much as a crust of bread, let alone a horse. It was the last crime, the unpardonable act. The whole West had been raised in that creed, and yet Bud Cressy proposed to steal a horse this night!

Somewhere down the main hall of the hotel, a door squeaked, and thereafter, they heard other small sounds.

"They're after me," said Bud Cressy calmly. "You better get me out of this, partner!"

Champion fumbled in the dark until he found the arm of Tom Fuller, and into that mass of rubbery sinew and muscle he dug his fingers.

"Tom, get him out of this!" he exclaimed.

"How can I?" said Tom.

"You got a rope?" demanded Cressy.

"No."

"No rope? What kind of a puncher are you, then? Well, you got a blanket on your bed. You can lower me down on that, I guess."

"I can do that."

"Get out of my room!" said Champion nervously. And he pushed them before him.

"Might leave your hands covered with tar, though, old-timer!" reminded Bud Cressy. "Now, kid, step lively!"

Yet there was a drawling lack of haste in his voice.

The door closed softly, and Champion turned the key in the lock. In the meantime, Tom had snatched a blanket from his bed, and Cressy caught it from him and gave it a twist which brought it into a more narrow compass. Then he slipped through the window and caught hold of the blanket.

"Can you hold my weight?" asked Cressy.

"Yes. Easy."

"So long, kid. I'll have the roan in two minutes."

He slid down the blanket as he spoke, and at the same time, a heavy hand fell upon Tom's door. Once and twice the noise was repeated, and then the weight disappeared from the blanket.

"Yes?" said Tom.

"Open up this here door, stranger."

"What for?" asked Tom, snatching up the blanket and peering out the window.

He saw that Cressy had succeeded in dropping safely from the end of the blanket to the ground, and now he was slinking down the side of the building.

"Open up the door pronto," commanded a voice which was suddenly harsh, "or I'll bust it down!"

"I'm comin'," said Tom.

He tossed the blanket back on the bed and went to the door, unlocked it, and opened it wide.

Suddenly, three or four strong shafts of light blazed against his eyes as lanterns were quickly unhooded, and he saw behind the lights stern, eager faces, and the gleam of weapons. Quickly, they shouldered past him into the room.

"Jack, try the room of that other gent—that Champion."

"Jack" and a few others went to do as they were ordered. In the middle of Tom's room, the man of authority paused and swept a hand of light around the walls, and beneath the bed. He jerked open a closet door, and examined

the contents of that, also. Then, with a scowl, he walked straight up to Tom.

"Who's been in here with you, to-night?"

"No one," said Tom, blinking.

He was frightened, not by the man, but by the law which the man stood for, and by the gleaming of the star on the breast of the stranger.

"No one?" said the other savagely. "You're lyin'! Come out with the truth!"

The door to Champion's room opened.

"Nobody in here, sheriff," said the searcher.

"Look here!" called another who stood by the window, lantern in hand. "Here's a chunk of red flannel stuck on a splinter, and Cressy was dressed in a red flannel shirt!"

CHAPTER XI.

A TALK WITH THE SHERIFF.

THE heart of Tom dropped like a stone when he heard this announcement. It threw the others of the group into confusion. The sheriff, shouting to two of his men to remain and guard Tom, dashed off in front of the rest, and though he was by no means young, yet he led them all out of the hotel.

Their footfalls crashed down the halls, mingled with the jingling of their spurs. It was a sound rather like the roar of a cataract, and it left echoes behind it, as men throughout the hotel woke and jumped to their feet from bed.

The two captors of Tom were furious because they had been detailed to this ignoble business. They looked bitterly on him, in contempt of his pale face and his big, staring eyes, while they listened, far off, to the sound of the pursuit. There were money and glory, yonder, and they were held here helpless. They could only gnash their teeth and curse their luck, and the boy.

Tom made no answer to them. In the first place, he had a great sense of guilt. In the second, he could not see that his employer was much involved in the affair, and thought it was better to let the blame rest entirely upon his head.

Guns crackled behind the hotel, a horse squealed as though in pain, and then there was a vaster outroar of voices, and more gunshots mingled with the sound.

The guns ceased. The shouting continued. A score of men seemed to be shouting at the top of their lungs, demanding something from some one.

"Hosses!" said one of Tom's guardians. "They're yellin' for hosses, and that means that the skunk is in the saddle."

"They'll never catch him then. Maybe——"

"Aye, if we'd had our crack at him. We had to stay here and take care of this kid, instead. You know what's gunna happen to you?" said the man to Tom.

"No," said Tom, blinking, "I don't."

"He's pretty near scared to death, ain't he?" sneered the second guard.

"He ain't gunna have time to die of a scare," said the other. "They're pretty apt to string him up to a tree, ain't they?"

"Yes, I suppose they are."

"Hang me?" echoed Tom. "Would they do that?"

A leer of tremendous, cruel satisfaction appeared upon the faces of the two.

"They're a hard crowd to deal with, the crowd here in Orangeville. They like nothin' better than the hangin' of a skunk, now and then, and I dunno but that you'd fit into the bill, all right! Who are you, kid?"

"My name is Tom Fowler."

"Tom Fowler, here comes the sheriff. Maybe he'll be able to save your neck for you and get you into the jail, and maybe he won't."

The sheriff returned and came into

the room with a pale face and compressed lips. When he spoke, it was as though the words bubbled and burst up out of him with an explosive force of their own.

He went straight up to Tom and glared into his eyes.

"You helped Cressy out of that window," said he.

Lies came hard to Tom, for it was not an accident that he had been nicknamed "Honest."

However, he managed to shake his head and say, "No."

"You lie!" declared the sheriff. "You helped Cressy get loose!"

Tom was silent, beginning to wonder. And the keen faces of the other men as they surrounded him, panting from their run, looked to him like the faces of dogs, eager to tear a prey.

Here the door opened from the adjoining room and Champion, fully dressed, came in. He seemed ready for the road. His duster was already on and his hat was in his hand.

"We'd better leave this madhouse, Tom," said he.

Then he came closer and appeared surprised to find the youngster in the hands of the sheriff's men.

"What does this mean?" asked Champion, with authoritative dignity.

The sheriff whirled on him in a fury.

"It means that that scoundrel Cressy is loose again. It means that the pair of you helped him to get away!"

Champion's face was a study. He looked straight into the sheriff's face, and then the smallest and the coldest of sneers formed gradually on his lips. He turned away.

"Who's in authority here?" said he.

The sheriff seemed to go half mad with fury. He shouted: "I'm in authority. I'm in enough authority to throw the pair of you into jail, and by heck, I think that I'll do it, too!"

"What are you?" asked Champion.

Here, in a moment, he had fixed all eyes upon himself. The others stood back a little, and their glances passed between Champion and the sheriff, as though to see who might win the struggle. The sheriff had numbers and all authority with him, but he did not seem to have a road before him that was by any means clear.

"I'm the sheriff of this county," said he.

"It appears," said Champion, "that I've mistaken you."

"It appears that you have. But it don't appear yet that I've mistaken you! I accuse the pair of you of passin' Cressy out of the window, there!"

"Cressy?" said Champion, and he frowned a little, not indignantly, but as one striving to place a name.

"Why, you can't bluff me! I ain't such a fool!" said the angry sheriff.

He went on: "The scoundrel is loose again. He's dropped Pete Myers with a bullet through his right shoulder. I dunno that poor Pete's arm will ever be worth anything again. And Sammy Strand is gunna be in bed with another bullet through his neck. A mighty lucky thing for him that an artery or the backbone or something wasn't touched! That's what Cressy done in this here one night—and it was you that got him clean away. I'll bet that you got him out of the jail, too! You passed in the tools to him!"

"I begin to understand," said Champion, with a wonderful calmness. "I am accused of helping a criminal to escape from jail. And then——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I helped him to escape and brought him here to my room in the hotel. Is that the idea, sheriff?"

The sheriff blushed. Certainly, this suggestion seemed most unlikely.

"He was here. We traced him here —to these here rooms. I dunno why he should come here. That's between him and you!"

"By gad, Tom," broke out Champion,

as though suddenly inspired. "Suppose the fellow slipped in through this room while you were asleep?"

Tom Fuller said nothing; his mind was still a blank, and the chill of the shadow of the law was still cast upon his very soul.

"The pair of you'll rest pretty easy in the jail," said the sheriff. He whirled on the two who had guarded Tom.

"What did this kid say or do while you had him here?"

"He didn't do nuthin'. He froze in his tracks. Plain scared to death!"

The sheriff grinned faintly.

"If my young friend," said Champion, with his usual calm, "had thought that there was actually a serious charge against him, do you think these two could have held him?"

The sheriff glanced sharply at Tom. But there was very little impressive in the appearance of that young man.

"I reckon they could have held two brace like him," said the sheriff.

"Throw those two into a corner, Tom," directed Champion.

The two who were guarding that youngster freshened their grips upon his arms, but Tom, flexing his muscles, felt their fingers spring wide. A single shrug, and their hands fell away as rain from an oiled surface. Guard number one, recoiling a little, sprang at him with a hoarse shout. But Tom picked up the second fellow by the nape of the neck and the seat of the trousers and fairly flung him at his charging friend.

They went down with a yell and a crash, rolled half stunned, and only slowly picked themselves up again.

At this, the ill nature of the posse dissolved. They might well have been more irritated than ever by this sight, but instead, they burst into a roar of laughter. The sheriff, struggling with a native grimness for a moment, finally joined in with the loudest shout of all.

He said to young Tom Fuller, still chuckling: "And they said that you were frozen stiff, kid, did they? You couldn't move out of your tracks?"

He laughed again.

"I guess you're all right, the two of you," said he. He looked again at Champion, with an additional respect.

"I might've knowed that you were straight enough," said he. "But I couldn't be sure. Cressy has made me trouble enough before, and it looks as though he'll make trouble enough again. I suppose that he sneaked out through your rooms after he'd helped himself to some ready cash that he found in the pockets of some of the gents in the hotel. Boys, get out of here! We're on a cold trail!"

He led the way from the room; the two discomfited guards followed, their heads hanging, and their eyes bewildered, as though they could not quite make out what had happened here.

In another moment, the boy was left alone with Oliver Champion. There were no lighted lamps in the room, now. And the gray of the morning light came coldly through the window, so that it illuminated merely the outline and the suggestion of Champion's features. But of one thing the boy was sure. Champion, in this half light, was smiling, and there was something wolfish in his pleasure.

Then he came a little closer, and his voice, lower and controlled, barely reached the ears of Tom.

"You want to know what Cressy was doing in my room. You'll never know. It's the beginning of a lot of things that you'll never understand. But in the meantime, the thing for you to do is to concentrate on the future, and realize that you haven't any eyes and you haven't any ears except when I tell you to see and to hear. Do you follow that?"

Tom nodded. He would have been glad, just then, of more light upon the face of the speaker, but he could use his own intuition and guess at many un-

pleasant truths. And among them was this unhappy fact—that between the murderer and ruffian Cressy and his employer there existed a close intimacy.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOOT AND RUN.

"OUR next step is to move and move fast," said Champion.

"That may make them follow," said Tom.

"It's better to be followed than to be lodged in jail," said Champion. "And that's where we're apt to wind up."

They gathered their belongings at once and went down to the ground floor, taking the narrow, steep, rear stairs of the hotel. Champion left on the clerk's desk an envelope containing money sufficient to pay their bill, then they went on to the side entrance of the hotel and out into the alley which ran back to the stable.

Down this they started, and passed a lighted window inside of which they saw two men seated at a table. One was the sheriff, a cup of coffee at his lips, and the other, facing him, was a round, rosy-faced fellow who smiled as he talked.

The sight of this couple seemed to affect Champion powerfully. He stopped, and clutched the arm of Tom, leaning his whole weight on the boy, as though he had just received a staggering blow. For a moment he stared through the window, and then gasped hoarsely: "There he is! Tom, put a bullet through that smiling scoundrel's head!"

Tom, amazed, did not stir.

"Do you hear?" groaned Champion. "He's on our heels already. He'll have the sheriff baying after us in another moment. Do you hear me? Shoot, I say!"

"That's murder!" said Tom slowly. "How can I harm a man that's never harmed me?"

The hand of Champion trembled violently on the shoulder of the boy.

"You young simpleton!" said he. "You've come to the wishing gate, and you don't know it! There'll never be another chance like this. There he is—in the palm of your hand—now, now!"

As he spoke the fat man, still smiling, rose from the table, and Tom was so far persuaded that he actually drew out a Colt.

"Shoot!" groaned Champion.

But the fat man stepped back from view as the sheriff rose in turn. And the bullet remained unfired.

"I couldn't do it," Tom managed to say.

Champion drew in a breath which was like a moan.

"Go on, and go fast!" he commanded. "They'll be going up to have a look at our rooms, now, and when they find we're not there, they'll look for us in the stable, next. Hurry, Tom. The horses——"

His voice failed him, but they ran forward together.

There was a single lantern burning just inside the door of the barn, but the stableman was not there. Undoubtedly, he had run to the hotel to find out the result of all the excitement. The entire town of Orangeville was up. Lights shone in the windows; doors slammed, screens jingled here and there; and rapid voices went up and down the streets.

In the stable, they worked with frantic speed.

If any spur was needed for Tom, he received it from the terse remark of his companion as they entered the stable:

"If they catch us, it means a necktie party!"

That was more than enough. He fairly jerked the pair of mustangs into their harness, flung the saddle upon Rusty, and, leading the horses out, found that Champion already had drawn the buckboard out from the wagon shed.

It took interminable seconds to back the unruly horses into their places on either side of the tongue. Then the stiff new breast straps refused the buckles; and the cream-colored mare began to kick as the traces were about to be fastened.

"The supreme young fiend!" groaned Champion. "I wish her throat were cut——"

But Tom ended the kicking by a rough trick which he had learned long before. A lifting punch in the ribs jarred a grunt out of the mare, and before she had recovered from the surprise of meeting a man who struck with the force of a kicking horse, her traces were fastened.

The stableman came out, at this juncture, carrying a lantern with him.

"Hello!" said he. "Who's here? Who's pullin' out?"

There was a suppressed oath from Champion as the man raised a lantern above his head and the light fell strongly upon them.

"Making an early start, ain't you? You've got a bill to pay for these hosses, strangers! I hope you ain't forgettin' that!"

Champion, grinding his teeth, jerked a five-dollar gold piece from a vest pocket and tossed it to the stableman.

"This here is too much," said the stableman. "I'll get you change in a minute."

"Darn the change," said Champion. "Get out of here, Tom!"

Rusty had been fastened behind the wagon, again; Tom in the driver's seat slackened the reins, and the mustangs stepped out.

"What you got on your minds?" asked the stableman. "Now look here, you ain't——"

His voice stopped. The lantern was lowered to the ground and presently the stableman disappeared toward the hotel with flying legs.

"Seven thousand fiends are giving me bad luck!" said Champion. "Whip up the horses! Let 'em run——"

He snatched the whip from its holder and laid it with a hearty smack on the back of each mustang.

The result was a furious burst of running. They went down the rough surface of the alley with the buckboard leaping like a galloping horse behind the rushing pair of bronchos. They swung out of the passage with a furious skid that kicked up a great cloud of dust, and behind that dust they whirled on down the street. Voices wakened behind them, pealing forth like trumpets. And Tom told himself grimly that they had not ten minutes grace. There were plenty of saddled horses standing before the hotel, and on these mounts, the breakneck riders of the range would soon overtake them. So he pulled the two from a gallop to a trot.

"Go on!" shouted Champion. "Faster! Don't pull up!"

He swung the whip, and the mustangs began to scamper, but Tom held them down with a mighty pull that made the footboards groan beneath him.

"We can't outrun saddle hosses with this outfit," said he, and as the pair slowed to a jog, he turned them into the mouth of the first alley to his right.

Plainly, they heard the rushing of horses down the street, and the clamor of excited voices. The people of Orangeville had missed one prey on this night, and they would fight hard before they relinquished a second. But, in the meantime, the boy was not even trotting the horses. He dared not allow the rattling buckboard to make so much noise until he had bent around two corners. Then he let the stamping pair break into a fast trot once more.

It was still between dark and dawn. The windows of the houses facing east glimmered like deep water with the morning light, but outlines were still dim and uncertain. However, they made an object which could not fail of

recognition. A buckboard with a led horse could hardly be missed! And though noisy horsemen seemed to be flowing through all the streets of the town, yet no one headed for them! Tom could not understand it, unless it were that the Cressy alarm already had brought the majority of the men near the hotel. The resources of Orangeville were pooled already, and that was why new men did not appear, saddling their horses and cantering out into the street.

Behind them, a bell began to beat from the steeple of a church, and its rapid clangor washed in waves through the dim air of the morning. An alarm bell, no doubt, which could call men to pray or to fight, according to the manner in which it was rung. Its beating now had the very pulse of danger in it. It hurried and made faint Tom's breathing.

They turned from a bending lane onto a broad street.

"Halloo!" yelled a voice behind them, and Tom saw a rider cutting for them like mad.

He knew there was only one thing to do, and he did it. Handing the reins to Champion, he picked up a rifle from the floor of the buckboard and put a shot whizzing just above the head of the stranger.

The latter jerked flat on the back of his horse, with a cry like a frightened cat, and pulled his horse aside, darting from view into the mouth of a side street.

"They're after us now," said Champion. "Boy, if it comes to the worst, we could cut the cream-colored mare out of the harness and I could ride her! We could make better tracks, that way!"

"You couldn't stand it," said Tom. "It'd wear you out in a few hours. And you'd wear out the mare. We gotta carry on the way that we've started."

He was surprised and rather flattered that the older man accepted this advice without further hesitation. And now the swiftly trotting team turned a gradual bend of the road, drawing out from Orangeville, and they saw before them the long embankment of the railroad. They drifted closer, and saw that the shadowy arm of a bar was stretched across the way. Champion started up from his seat, with the last of his patience and his courage, as it seemed, exhausted by that stroke of ill-luck.

"Turn back, turn the buckboard, Tom!" he exclaimed.

"We can't turn back," said the boy. "They'll be out after us as thick as hornets, in another five minutes. That last fellow has gone to get help, and I reckon that he won't have to go far."

"But the road's barred!" exclaimed Champion. "Are you blind, boy, not to see that?"

"Then we've gotta go through the bars," said Tom resolutely.

He pulled up the team, and leaped to the ground.

It was a long balance pole, weighted at the butt end and raised and lowered by a mechanical device. The lodge of the keeper of the crossing was near by, and he might be persuaded to open the way for them, but they had no time to waste on persuasion. A small iron key projected near the balance point, and turning this, the weight was released, the shadowy rod soared.

"Drive through!" Tom called to Champion. "Drive through, and turn to the left down the far side of the embankment. We gotta chance, that way!"

For he knew, as he looked at the gray stretch of road that ran before them, that they could not proceed far in this direction without being overtaken. The buckboard passed through, and throwing his weight upon the bar, Tom brought it down to the horizontal again, and with a turn of the key lodged it in its proper position.

The rails were already humming with the approaching train, as he ran across the grade, but a louder noise of hammering hoofs rolled behind him from the town. He looked back, and saw twenty riders scooting out of Orangeville onto the highway.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN WHO SMILED.

BUT Champion, with grimly set face, already had heard that noise and understood it. He had the horses moving as Tom went in with a leap over the tailboard of the wagon. They were galloping as Tom swung onto the seat. With a great clattering, they rushed forward, the wheels threatening to smash every instant on the larger stones of the grading which had rolled down to the side of the right of way. Furthermore, they were traveling on a steep slope, and were in danger of caroming from the impact on a rock and crashing into the stout railroad fence.

But Tom, grasping the reins, sent the mustangs into a wilder gallop. He had in mind a spot not far in advance where the right of way widened and a cluster of poplars stood. With that point gained, there might be enough of the trees to shelter them.

When he got to the place, therefore, he pulled up the team sharply, and swung the buckboard in behind the trees. These made but a paltry shelter against any searching eye, and their only hope must be that the posse would not think of scanning the railroad line itself too closely. The pursuers might be interested in pushing on down the highway.

He looked at Champion and saw him, with locked jaws and desperate eyes, climb down to the ground and take a rifle with him. Tom made no comment on this foolish act. But it seemed to him that the actions of this night had revealed Champion as a man not at home in violent physical danger. He did not doubt the essential courage and the strong mind of this man; but he was acting, now, in a strange environment. And Tom was puzzled and alarmed. It was almost as though a child were intrusted to his care and his responsibility!

They had not waited ten seconds before the flood of riders reached the railroad crossing. Half a dozen revolver shots brought the keeper as by magic; the bars swayed up, and the riders poured through. But they did not go straight on. Instead, they gathered about the keeper, obviously demanding what he had seen or heard of a buckboard and three horses.

There they milled back and forth for a time, and they were still hesitant when the throbbing of the rails grew louder and from the east the tall front of a locomotive came swiftly into view around the bend. It came across the road. It thundered on, and whipped past the two fugitives. Scores of faces looked out at them from the windows. Arms pointed and gesticulated. And every pointing hand was to Tom like a pointing gun.

How simple a matter, then, for the engineer to stop the train, and then from a score of the passengers to sweep back down the tracks?

But the train did not stop. It whirled away with undiminished speed, sucking up a trailing flag of dust and flying cinders in its rear. Then it was gone, and the group of riders at the crossing looked after it. Tom could see every face turned in his direction.

Surely they would see something, now, beyond the interstices of the poplars!

But no; in another moment they were drifting down the highway, at a trot and then at a hard gallop. Only three or four, as though giving up what they felt to be a wild-goose chase, turned back toward Orangeville. But the rest of the posse streamed on, drawing out in length as the slower horses fell be-

hind, until they were lost in their own dust.

In the meantime, the sun rose, making the front windows of the keeper's house appear like so many squares of living fire. The keeper himself retired; smoke began to float above his roof, and now Champion climbed back into the buckboard.

"Are we out of danger?" he asked eagerly.

"I dunno," said Tom. "It depends on where that train stops and sends back word of what it saw."

"The train wouldn't be suspicious," said Champion. "What does it matter if there are some people on a right of way?"

"A buckboard?" queried Tom, with a smile. "And a pile of armed men at the last crossing, and us pulled in behind the trees, and the mustangs all shining with sweat? Most of all, there was you with a rifle in your hand, lookin' back through the poplars!"

Champion flushed. But his eyes did not wander from the mildly accusing eyes of Tom.

"I've played the part of a child and a fool," he admitted tersely. "I'm deuced sorry for it. The next time we're in a pinch, you'll find that I come through it in better style. But some things have happened to-night to upset me. Every nerve was jumping. However, you've proved the stuff you're made of, Tom. From now on, I know what I have beside me! Charlie Boston was right!"

"Right about what?" asked the boy, bewildered by this remark, for certainly it seemed impossible that Charlie Boston should have made any complimentary remark about him on the very day when he was discharged from Boston's service.

"Drive on! Drive on!" said Champion testily. "There's no point in staying here until the posse comes back down the road and spots us!"

So Tom drove on, but he had not failed to add another item of mystery to his strange story.

For three miles they bumped and jarred and grated over the big stone of the embankment, until they came to a level crossing, without a gate, without a keeper, and through this gap they passed out upon the worst sort of an ungraded, unworked country road. It was one of those relics of the earliest days, when trails were laid out as much by the leisure of wandering cattle on their way to and from water and pasturage as to the forethought of man. This road passed into the sea of hills, dipping, twisting, winding without excuse for many of its bends.

There seemed no reason for the very existence of the road, for that matter. It journeyed on for hours, without passing so much as a single house, or another road turning off from it. The surface of it, also, appeared more broken, more heavily grassed, and here and there appeared big stones which had rolled down from the slopes of the hills on either hand and made it a difficult process to get through without breaking a wheel.

"Where will this thing take us?" asked Champion, irritated at last by the long silence.

"It'll take us out of the way, and I guess that's what we want!" suggested the boy.

"Aye. It will do that," said Champion, "and perhaps it'll take us far enough away to give us a fair chance of starving!"

"If you're hungry," said Tom, growing more and more patient as his companion developed uneasiness, "we can stop and bag something."

"Waste an hour hunting?"

"Just as you please, then. We'll keep joggin' on, Mr. Champion."

"You can drop the title!" said he.

"Drop what, sir?"

"You needn't 'sir' and 'mister' me,

Tom. I'm not as old as your grandfather!"

Tom fell silent, since there seemed no way to please this hot-tempered man. But, in a way, he guessed the cause of the other's impatience. He was displeased with himself and the side of his character which he had shown to Tom, and, therefore, he could not speak easily in the presence of the boy.

Again they made an all-day trip, except for a few moments when they paused to let the mustangs eat a ration of oats, and twice to water them at streams which crossed the way.

They were leaving the hills, now, and marching up into bigger country, and the mustangs rarely got out of a walk. The grades were too steep and the way constantly too broken.

Suddenly Champion said: "Tom!"

"Yes, sir."

"Tom, you were a little surprised, this morning?"

"What by?"

"By the order I gave you to shoot that fat fellow who sat with the sheriff behind the window. Is that correct?"

"Yes," admitted Tom. "I never was brung up to shoot at a man that was lookin' another way."

After a moment of thought, Champion went on:

"What did you think of that fellow, Tom?"

"I thought he looked pretty cheerful and good-natured."

"He does," said Champion, half to himself. "He is, too."

Then he said more openly: "You know what makes a great many people happy and good-natured, Tom?"

"No, sir. Just being born that way, I suppose."

"Some of them. They're the lucky ones. But a good many people, Tom, are happy and good-natured, because they use all the force of their minds and of their hands to please themselves!"

Tom nodded, prying into the remote corners of this thought.

"Your smiling man isn't always your generous or your big-hearted man."

"No, perhaps not. I recollect a judge in my home town, now that you speak about it. He was always smiling and joking, but they say that he sure did love to soak on the heavy sentences."

"Now, then," said Champion, "if you suppose that that judge had all his cruelty and his meanness multiplied by a hundred, you'd begin to arrive at some idea of the cruelty in the mind of that same smiling fellow whose face you liked so very well!"

Tom was silent, wondering.

Then a note of profound emotion came into the voice of Champion, as he added:

"Tom, I've been my share about this world. I've known mean men, and hard men, and treacherous men, and cunning rascals, and bloodthirsty brutes. But you don't need to travel very far, if you have a chance to sit down and study that smiling fellow. Because he combines every horrible quality that a man could have—except cowardice and weakness. Everything else is in him!"

Tom hesitated, remembering the bright eyes, and the flashing smile, and the ruddy health in the cheeks of the man.

"You're sure of that, sir?" he asked.

"Sure?" said Champion. "Sure of him? He's the one thing in the world of which I am sure. I've spent my last twenty years studying him, and that's why I'm here in a buckboard driving my thousands of miles through the West, lad, and with a shadow haunting me all the way!"

He grew silent again, and Tom ventured to ask at last: "What's his name?"

"His name is the handiest name that he can pick up. His real name nobody knows. For that matter, what name has the fiend himself got? It changes in

every country. And it's the same with him."

He paused again, laughing a little at his own comparison, but the laughter came through his teeth.

CHAPTER XIV.

IS IT THE GOAL?

THE sun had sunk far enough in the West to make them worry about the oncoming of dark, and Tom suggested that they should prepare to spend that night in the woods, which were now beginning to clothe the sides of the mountains. For the hills were behind them, and real mountains were in their front.

But Champion declared that they should force their way on in the hope of finding a house of some sort. For, as he pointed out, they probably had a great distance before them to travel and it would be useless for him to make a point of camping out every night. The weight of the utensils, and the other articles, and the food supply, would slow down their progress perceptibly, and they must go in light marching order. As for remaining in that order, but simply roughing it as they went, and lying down by the road, he had not the constitution to stand such a life.

"Ah," said Tom, "but if we keep on stayin' where other people are, that smiling gent you say is so terrible is liable to find you again, as he found you out before!"

Champion made a wide gesture, looking up.

"Tom," said he, "if I were a bird, I couldn't fly so high in that sky that he wouldn't follow me and find me. If I were a fish, the sea's not deep enough to cover me from him. If I could walk into one of these rocky mountainsides as though it were free air, he'd manage a way to come after me."

"Are you sure to go down, then?" asked Tom, amazed and alarmed by this point of view and the fatalistic manner of his companion.

"I? Oh, I'm done for," said Champion, almost carelessly, as though this were a question which he had been able to answer a long time before. "But my hope is that I may be able to pull him down with me! Of course, there may be a better chance, later on. I may have somebody beside me, different from you, and I may see him through a window again."

He stopped short and then muttered for a moment to himself.

"I should have tried my hand then, myself," said he. "I should not have trusted to you. But the fact is that I was shaking. My hand was shaking at the sight of him, and my heart was shaking in my body. However," he went on, "I might meet him again with the odds all on my side. One never can tell. One gets the thousandth chance, now and again. I must wait for that!"

It bewildered Tom more than ever. "You're trying to get somewhere, do something, before he arrives. Is that it?" he asked.

"Yes. That's it, Tom. I'm trying to find the hidden place. And, having found it, I'm going to try to dodge my way into it. Let me have five minutes there, and I don't much care what happens afterwards. I'll have laid his work in ruins. His life work!"

He drew in his breath as though the thought were a delicious potion to him.

But such total savagery made the brain of Tom spin. Vaguely, he could fumble at the story which lay behind this, and what the thing was which Champion was striving to reach, and how he could destroy it in a moment—as if with a word, or the mere sight of his face! He fumbled at the story, but failed to guess a probability, and resigned the puzzle. And now the team jogged around the brow of a hill, where the trail almost disappeared, and the

grass grew long among the rocks. First, they saw a wisp of white smoke, then a growing column of it against the dark trees of the mountainside, and next they were aware of a small log cabin laid away among the big boulders, and behind the cabin there was a mine mouth with a windlass above it, and a length of rope, and a big bucket.

"Somebody's sinkin' a shaft," said the boy. "That's as good a place as any to put up for the night, I suppose."

"If the man is willing to take us in," said Champion. "It's hardly likely that he'll have room."

The boy stared at him.

"Why," said he, "what would he do? Turn us out? What sort of a gent would he be to do that? Not in this man's country, I guess!"

"True, true, true," said Champion. "I forget that this is the West. We'll try him, at any rate."

The sound of their wheels on the rocks, and the clicking of the hoofs of the horses, brought into the doorway of the cabin a man of middle size, with a fat paunch, and a face covered with grizzled beard. He had a skillet in his hand, and this he waved toward them. He did not wait for them to draw up at the door, but shouted from a distance: "Get your hosses yonder under the shed, strangers. I got a morsel of hay there. Hurry up! I got some fixings here that's worth any man's time."

"Ah, yes," said Champion. "This is the West, after all!"

And he sighed a little, and looked about him with wide eyes, as though he were seeing the countryside for the first time, but the boy could guess that it was not the mountains, and the rocks, and the trees, which were in the mind of his companion.

They put up the horses in the shed. It was the rose-gold time of the early evening when they came to the door of the cabin again and entered.

All within was misted over with drifting smoke, and the scent of frying meat filled the air. The miner was clouded by the steam of cookery before his stove.

"If you wanta wash up," he called, without turning from his frying pan, "you'll find a hunk of soap on that shelf by the door, and a piece of something that maybe will pass for a towel. Hurry up, old sons. This here is venison steak you're gunna break into, pronto!"

They hurried, at that happy tidings; they found the runlet of water near the door, washed, dried their hands and faces, and came back armed with enormous appetites. Their blankets they threw down in a corner, and Tom made himself busy preparing the homemade table with three places while Champion looked around the room.

It was a solidly built cabin, made of heavy logs, and the chinks stopped with moss and mud. Each corner served as a definite room. One was the kitchen. One was heaped with powder, drills, hammers, and other tools and provisions of the miner's trade. In another appeared a collection of rusted traps, together with some hides on stretchers. And the fourth corner was occupied by a bed of evergreen boughs on which the blankets of the sour dough were laid out.

Presently they all sat down at the table and ate in a great silence, broken by murmurs of appreciation, now and again, for the deer was newly killed, wonderfully tender, and present in quantity. Coffee and corn bread completed the menu, but it was enough!

Over their coffee they lingered, the miner puffing at a pipe, his big, rough elbows on the edge of the table, and his tired, contented eyes watching the faces of his guests.

"You heading for somewhere?" he asked, finally.

Champion took some papers from his pocket, and in the handful appeared a

sack of cigarette tobacco with which he began to make a smoke. The photograph of the mountains, too, was spilled on the surface of the table.

"We're aiming to get across to Porterville," said he.

"Porterville!" said the miner. Then he chuckled. "You couldn't be aimed much worse," said he.

"No?"

"Didn't you ask down there in Orangeville?"

"We asked. I thought we were directed to this road."

"Why, they lied to you. You should've kept on the main road north, and switched off of that two turnings beyond the one that heads into this. Dog-gone careless of the gent that give you the directions. Have some more coffee?"

"I've had enough."

"That a picture of your home country?" asked the miner, as he glanced down at the photograph.

"Picture that a friend of mine sent, a while back."

"That so? Friend of yours?" murmured the miner.

He took up the photograph, and studied it with some appearance of interest.

"Looks sort of familiar," said he.

"Familiar?" said Champion in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Yes. Where is it?"

"Why, I don't know! He sent it to me. He'd simply taken a snapshot while he was wandering about, I suppose. That hill looks as though it would fall down. I suppose that caught his eye."

"Aye. Likely it did," said the prospector.

"Where would you locate it?" asked Champion, still casual.

It appeared to Tom that a faint shadow passed over the face of their host. However, he nodded as he continued to examine the photograph.

"I could tell you, I guess. That's north of the Comanche Desert. Right on the edge of the hills."

"Comanche Desert? That's rather far south, for such trees as those!"

"You take," said the miner, "where the wind hits off of the desert and rises along the face of the mountains, it always lets down a bit of rain. And that's the layout there. Trees? It grows trees aplenty, some part of that country down there!"

"You're fairly sure of that?"

"As sure as I am that I'm sitting here."

"Recognize that leaning mountain?"

"Sure I do. You go down from here to Freshwater. It's about a hundred and fifty mile, I suppose. You go down from there, and you find it. Lemme see. They call that the Leanin' Hoss, that mountain there. You take a good look at it and you'll see why. Like a hoss leanin' into his collar and startin' a mighty heavy load. This back here, this makes his hind quarters. And there's his shoulders, and his neck. You can see where he's stretchin' out his head! Not really much like a hoss. Like a hoss you'd see through a fog, maybe."

He passed back the photograph and Tom, staring, thought that he could recognize the details pointed out by the miner.

"Well," said Champion. "Isn't there a pass ahead of us, here, where we could break through to Porterville?"

"Porterville? Why, sure there is! You could push right on up the valley. It'll be rough goin', but you don't seem to mind that, and you're travelin' light——"

He glanced at their packs in the corner of the room.

"You could make it through," he concluded. "There ain't any snow except a few drifts under the trees where they got south shadows layin' over 'em most of the days. You could make it through all right!"

"We'll try."

"You'll come out through the other side of the pass only about eighteen miles from Porterville."

He began to describe the course in detail, but Tom ceased to follow the talk. He was too busy in his own mind dwelling upon the marvel of this discovery which they had made. Perhaps the goal of their expedition was not far off—that place where the man of the smiles was to be smashed and then utterly ruined.

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

THE SHEEP RUSTLER OF NEW YORK

PERHAPS the sight of the little flock of sheep, reposing so serenely in the midst of the bustling city awoke strange and primitive longings in the breast of the town-bred waiter that early morning; perhaps he simply had taking ways; or, perhaps, as he suggested himself—though a skeptical court refused to believe him—he never did it and was simply holding the sheep they found in his apartment for a friend. At any rate, just about dawn, one morning recently, a rustler crept stealthily into the herd of sixty sheep in Central Park, New York, and made off with one of the sheep. The thief succeeded in spiriting the animal away in a taxicab.

It was not long before the loss was discovered by the amazed shepherd of Central Park, who, in counting his flock after their morning meal, missed a pedigreed, horned Dorset. This sheep, of English extraction, was worth thirty-five dollars, the shepherd told the police, whose aid he enlisted in hunting down the rustler.

But the search was of short duration. While any one of the six million inhabitants of the city might be considered potential sheep-stealers, there are, after all, in a compact community like New York, comparatively few hide-outs where a rustler can conceal his catch. Even while the shepherd was reporting the loss of his sheep, in another section of the city a woman was excitedly telling the policeman at her corner of unfamiliar noises issuing from an apartment in her apartment house. While she was able to identify the sounds as animal ones, they were like nothing she had ever heard before.

The patrolman went along with the woman to ascertain the cause of her fright, and he, too, heard sounds—bleating sounds. They came from a fourth-floor apartment, and, on opening the door, the investigator discovered a man—a waiter, he said he was—vainly endeavoring to feed a loudly protesting Dorset a pan of milk.

The sheep was soon identified by its grateful shepherd, but the waiter, whose story of a friend's irrepressible craving for that sheep did not satisfy the court, was arraigned for petty larceny and held in five hundred dollars' bail for Special Sessions. Such are the wages of sheep-rustling in New York.

Right About Two-face

By Ray Humphreys~

Author of "Grandpa Cracks His Whip," etc.

THE San Luis Valley's most notorious gunslinger and outlaw, "Bear Creek" Charley, had been shot dead in a side street in Monte Vista—shot through the heart, neat as you please, by William Barnes, a short, mild-mannered tourist who had been in town a few days.

"Yes," admitted Barnes, before the coroner's jury that Coroner Doc Healey hastily convened at the office of Sheriff Joe Cook, "I shot that swaggerin' buckarooster—it was my life or hisn! Yuh see, gents, I ain't no trouble seeker, but I heard Bear Creek Charley was gunnin' fer me, so——"

The squat stranger grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll tell yuh gents the whole story! I'm on a vacation in Colorado here. I'm from Providence, Rhode Island. I was in the hardware game thar fer years afore I retired. Waal, when I got in here the other day I begin to hear about this heck-hoistin' Charley Bear Creek, or whatever his name is—or was—an' I was foolish enough to say to the waitress at the Feeney Waffle Shop that I was surprised that one cheap gunman could cow a frontier town like this."

Barnes grinned around at his audience.

"I guess some loafer heard me make that crack. That was day afore yesterday. This mawnin' a stranger comes bustin' to my room, tellin' me he don't know me, an' I don't know him, but to take a tip from a wise guy an' hide fer Charley Bear Creek——"

"Bear Creek Charley," corrected Sheriff Cook.

"Yeh, Bear Creek Charley is in town, havin' heard my wise crack, an' is lookin' fer me to let daylight through me. I thanked the guy who brung the message, but I put my gun in my pocket an' went out lookin' fer this buckaroo-ster, Bear Creek What's-His-Name, an' we meet—I knows him by description an' he knows me by the same, I guess. I'm sure it's him when he starts to draw. I beats him to the draw an' drills him; then I walks away quick

because I don't want no gun battle with half a dozen o' his pals an' cronies, ef they're near!"

"Is that all?" asked Doc Healey, the coroner, as Eddie Owens, his assistant, made elaborate notes.

"Yeh—that's all!" yawned Barnes.

"How come yuh bein' from Providence, Rhode Island, that yuh're such a crack shot?" asked "Shorty" McKay, Sheriff Cook's youthful deputy, who had been a silent spectator at the inquest up to this point.

Barnes laughed good-naturedly at the question.

"I said I was in the hardware business fer years in Rhode Island," the tourist explained. "Hardware stores sell guns. Guns was my hobby, I might say. I had to know 'em to sell 'em. I had a target fixed up in the basement. I spent hours down thar practicin', an' I got to be purty fair with a rod. I claim to be able to draw as quick an' shoot as straight as any Western bad man as ever lived—an' I guess I kinda proved it in puttin' that pest Charley Bear River away to-day!"

"Bear Creek Charley, yuh mean," said Sheriff Cook.

"Yeh, Bear Creek Charley, I mean," agreed Mr. Barnes.

"Waal, personally," said Sheriff Cook, "I say good riddance to bad rubbish. I think the thanks o' the community is due Mr. Barnes here fer puttin' Bear Creek away. He was no good. Always huntin' trouble. Been pretendin' to be quiet an' peaceful an' law-abidin' these las' few months, but he was jus' waitin' fer a good chance to raise the particular dickens, ef yuh ask me. Now——"

Shorty McKay, who had been detailed to the case by the sheriff to help Coroner Healey with the inquest, interrupted.

"We got one more witness, sir," he remarked.

"Yeh?"

"Yeh—'Pappy' Stewart, who happened along jus' as Charley kicked the bucket. Shall I put him on the stand, boss?"

"Sure!"

Pappy Stewart took the witness stand. Pappy was an old man, slightly deaf, near-sighted, bent with age. And now he was all excited, starring as he was before the crowd in the sheriff's office. He swelled up with pride as he took the oath to tell the whole truth.

"Pappy, yuh tell us what yuh know o' this here shootin' o' Bear Creek Charley at Tenth an' Pecos Street this mawnin', at or about eight o'clock, to wit," said Coroner Healey pompously.

"I don't know nuthin' about any to wit," said Pappy, in his cracked voice, "but I was in Max Hill's grocery, samplin' a new barrel o' sody crackers he jus' got in. *Bang!* I hears a gun. I swallered one sody cracker kinda whole an' I has to run to the back o' the store fer a drink o' water, fer I was chokin'. When I comes back, I sees Max hidin' behind a vinegar barrel. He waves me back.

"Bear Creek Charley is out front killin' folks left an' right," Max warns me. "Yuh don't poke yuhr red nose out, Pap, ef yuh're wise."

"Waal, I looks through the winder an' sees a little stranger stoopin' over another gent on the ground. The stranger walks off an' I sees pore Bear Creek spread out daid on the street. I goes out. But he ain't dead. As I leans over him his eyelids kinda shiver an' he says, 'Water!' an' then, almost afore instantly, he says 'Tooth paste!'"

"Tooth paste?" asked Coroner Healey dubiously.

"Yep, that's what he said," declared Pappy Stewart. "His voice was kinda thick, but I heard it distinctly—fust 'water' an' right away after that 'tooth paste,' so I figgered he kinda wanted to brush his teeth afore he went out, but he——"

"Go on, Pappy."

"But he didn't have time—he died right away."

There was a momentary silence as Pappy Stewart left the witness chair. Coroner Healey and Sheriff Cook exchanged significant glances. The coroner nodded his head, and Sheriff Cook got to his feet.

"I got a few words to say afore this inquest," said Cook. "I wanta remind the coroner's jury o' intelligent citizens that this here Bear Creek Charley has been a scourge in this valley fer a quarter o' a century—gunman, hoss thief, robber, rustler, troublemaker, ex-convict, an' what not, mebbe includin' murder, an' his departure fer beyond the Jordan don't bring no complaint from me. I think Mr. Barnes here should be vindicated in jig time, should be accorded the grateful thanks o' the community, an' should oughter have a gold medal fer his work in removin' one o' the county's worst liabilities—Bear Creek!"

Shorty McKay produced a hat, a yellow-silk shirt, a cartridge belt with a pair of holstered six-guns attached. He laid the articles on the table in front of the jury.

"The clothes o' the deceased," he said coolly, "which is generally examined by the coroner's jury in such cases. Ef yuh want I should be sworn an' testify as to the position o' the body when——"

"Ain't worth while goin' inter all that routine stuff, Shorty," said Coroner Healey, consulting his big watch carefully. "I echoes the profound sentiments o' the sheriff here—this ain't no murder. I declares the inquest ended an' the case referred to the jury fer their speedy consideration. Black, yuh act as foreman, will you? An'—has the jury about made up their minds on a verdict?"

The jury men whispered to each other, nodding and nudging.

Foreman Black consulted with his five colleagues for a moment.

"We, the jury," he began, having had previous experience in heading coroner's juries, "find that the deceased, one Bear Creek Charley, came to his death by means o' a accident. Said accident havin' been caused by the carelessness o' said deceased. We recommends that Mr. William Barnes be congratulated an' absolved o' all blame an'——"

"Lissen!" cried Shorty suddenly, but the sheriff, the coroner, and several spectators had already started for Barnes. They shook his hand warmly, and Shorty hesitated. After the jury had passed in front of the smiling Barnes and officially "mitted" him, Shorty stepped to the front and began again:

"Lissen!" he said. "I think the suggestion o' Sheriff Cook that Mr. Barnes should oughter have a gold medal is well took. I am glad to appoint myself a committee o' one to arrange to obtain said medal by popular subscription in town here, an' to arrange fer the formal presentation to Mr. Barnes in gratitude fer him havin' removed the valley's worst outlaw, gunman, an' no-account——"

"Good fer yuh, Shorty!" cried Coroner Healey.

"Fair enough," said the sheriff.

"I was figgerin' on leavin' on the noon train fer Denver," said Mr. Barnes slowly. "I must get back home. I have stayed longer than I meant to stay, anyhow. Besides, if this Charley Bear River——"

"Bear Creek Charley," interposed the sheriff.

"Yeh, Bear Creek Charley," agreed Mr. Barnes, "if he should have a lot o' pals around here it might be unhealthy fer me to roost here too long. I appreciate the sentiment behind the suggestion o' the gold medal, but I should git the noon train."

Shorty stepped forward and patted him on the shoulder.

"Think o' the feelin' o' justified pride that will swell up in yuhr chest when yuh show that medal to the folks at Providence, Rhode Island, Mr. Barnes," he said genially; "an' it really won't be a lotta delay. Yuh kin ketch the eight fifteen train fer Denver tonight—fer I kin arrange the medal business this afternoon. What do yuh say?"

Sheriff Cook cut in before Barnes could answer.

"Barnes, yuh wait fer the late train. I think Shorty's idear is a whizzer bang, ef yuh ask me. It's a big compliment to yuh, an' a boost fer the public spirit an' law enforcement o' Monte Vista. The presentation will advertise the town an' show the whole world o' crookdom that we don't tolerate no nonsense from outlaws like Bear Creek Charley in this town—no, indeed!"

The assemblage broke into a cheer.

"Waal," said Barnes, seeing the demonstration, "I'll wait!"

From then on Barnes was the hero of the town. The news that Monte Vista was to present him with a fine gold medal for shooting Bear Creek Charley spread like wildfire through the town. The ceremony was arranged for the station platform at eight o'clock that evening, just before the arrival of the Denver-bound eight fifteen train. Shorty hurried away to make arrangements for the medal after Sheriff Cook and Coroner Healey had contributed a dollar each to the hero's medal fund. The hero—Mr. Barnes—went to lunch with the sheriff and the coroner, and the assemblage broke up.

Shorty went first to the pretentious jewelry store of Mark Moses, the leading jeweler. There he carefully inspected a gold medal that Moses had had in stock ever since the school board had ordered it five years before to present to a retiring veteran teacher. When the teacher died before the medal could be engraved, the school board rescinded the order.

"Yuh gotta present it at eight o'clock to-night, eh?" said Moses, after hearing Shorty's explanation. "Waal, yuh'll want a lot o' high sentiments engraved on it, I suppose, an' it kain't be done in that time. It would take me three days to git a good engravin' job done on the back o' that medal, something like—'With elegant best wishes, coupled with the profoundest tokens o' respect an' honor, this medal is awarded hereby to——"

Shorty shook his head.

"The medal don't have to be engraved, ef yuh ain't got time," he said. "I'll take it plain. Now, what's yuhr price on it, Mark?"

"It cost me fifty-one smacks, includin' postage," said Moses, "interest on that, fer five years, at six per cent, is fifteen dollars; insurance, office space, wear an' tear, an' polishin', we'll say two dollars. Yuh kin have the medal fer forty dollars cash, Shorty, ef——"

"I'll have forty dollars in here inside o' two hours," said Shorty, "an', meantime, put one more polishin' job on it, will yuh?"

The collecting of the forty dollars from the public-spirited citizens of Monte Vista was not a hard task. "Red" Feeney, proprietor of the John C. Feeney Waffle Shop, gave fifty cents as a starter, and only one contributor failed to follow Feeney's lead. In a little over an hour Shorty had the forty dollars in his pocket, but he did not rush right back to the Mark Moses jewelry store. Instead, using an alley route, he returned to the sheriff's office, peeked through a window, saw the sheriff and other admiring cronies entertaining Hero Barnes, and then made for the stables, where he got his pony.

Then Shorty rode away, a troubled frown on his face.

"Ef ol' Bear Creek Charley actually called fer tooth paste as he was breathin' his last, as Pappy Stewart swore to the inquest, ol' Bear Creek was crazier than I ever thought he was," muttered Shorty, as he rode. "O' course, yuh never kin tell about these ol' hard-boiled aigs that die in their boots. They do funny things in the end—but I reckon it won't hurt nobody none ef I go tell 'Whiskers' Langer, Charley's ol' pal, about Charley's passin' on. Somebody has to arrange fer the funeral, anyhow!"

Whiskers Langer was surprised when he saw the deputy ride up to the doorway of the isolated cabin, but still more surprised at the news that Shorty brought—bad news.

"What?" shrilled the old man, staring through faded, bleary eyes. "Yuh tell me Bear Creek is daid, Shorty?"

"Sure enough daid, Whiskers."

"Er—natural—or sickness?" asked Whiskers.

"Natural," said Shorty. "He died with his boots on, o' course. He tried to draw on a stranger, an' the stranger beat him——"

"Beat Bear Creek to the draw?" cried Whiskers in unbelief.

"That's the dope," said Shorty.

"I don't believe it," snorted Whiskers. "Yuh know, me an' Bear Creek's been pals fer years. Lately he's been goin' straight, but nobody could beat him to the draw. Who kilt him?"

"Feller name o' Barnes—from Rhode Island."

"Never heard o' him," said Whiskers sadly. "So pore ol' Bear Creek's turned up his toes at last, eh? Too dang bad! I suppose I kin claim the remains, as his best friend, an' bury 'em?"

"Sure," said Shorty. "But what I come to see yuh about, Whiskers, is this: Did yuh notice, lately, that Bear Creek was goin' batty, or gettin' awful particular about his appearance?"

"Nope—not him," said Whiskers softly. "Why?"

"Waal—he was shot bad through the heart," said Shorty; "but, as happens in some such cases, he lived a few seconds, an' when ol' Pappy Stewart reached him, Bear Creek fust called fer water, an' then almost immediately demanded tooth paste, too!"

"Tooth paste?"

"Yeh—tooth paste," said Shorty, looking at old Whiskers closely. "Now, do yuh suppose he wanted to spruce up a bit, kinda prepare to meet the angels, an' brush his teeth?"

"Brush his teeth!" reared Whiskers indignantly. "Why, bless yuhr soul, Shorty, Bear Creek ain't had a ivory left fer years! He had his las' two yanked a long time ago by that 'painless' dentist in Alamosa, an' then he beat up the dentist fer tellin' untruths—cost him thirty dollars in court, it did. Why?"

"I saw Bear Creek had no teeth when I looked at the body," said Shorty, "but I thought he might have a false set——"

"Not him!"

"Good," said Shorty, nodding. "Now, ef yuh wanta ride into town with me, Whiskers, I'll be pleased fer yuhr company. I got to get back thar by seven thirty to the latest. Thar's a—a doin's on at eight o'clock. They're—waal—they're presentin' a gold medal to Barnes fer—fer removin' Bear Creek as he did, an'——"

The old man swore furiously.

"I wanta see the hombre that beat Bear Creek to the draw!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Gold-medalin' him, eh? I jus' wanta lay eyes on that cooky, I does. Beat Bear Creek to the draw, eh?"

"Yuh kin see him," said Shorty, "but I gotta have yuhr solemn promise that thar's no funny doin's—no revenge on yuhr part."

"I'm not gun fighter, Shorty," said

Whiskers in an injured tone. "I run with Bear Creek fer years, but I never was in no trouble. I did my ranchin' while Bear Creek was raisin' Ned. I raised crops so I could raise the fines when Bear Creek got in court——"

"Come on, then," said Shorty.

The ride back was uneventful. Shorty pumped old Whiskers for intimate details of Bear Creek's misspent life, and got them. When they reached town, Shorty wore a wide grin. Accompanied by Whiskers, he went to Mark Moses' place and exchanged his forty dollars for the gold medal, explaining to Whiskers that he was doing so only because he was delegated for the job by Sheriff Cook.

"Ain't a dime o' my dough goin' fer that medal," he said.

"I'm glad to hear that," grunted old Whiskers forlornly.

After that, Shorty took Whiskers to supper at an out-of-the-way Mexican café. The old man ate heartily, but Shorty merely sipped a cup of black coffee. The frown was back on Shorty's face again. He kept consulting his watch. It was promptly eight o'clock when Shorty escorted old Whiskers to the C. & S. depot, where the gold medal presentation ceremony for Mr. Barnes was to be held. Mr. Barnes was there, smiling and complacent. Sheriff Cook was there, as was Coroner Healey, the members of the coroner's jury, the county commissioners, the mayor, the town board, the reporter for the Monte Vista *Clarion*, and about five hundred citizens. The Monte Vista Drum Corps was on hand, awakening the evening with crashing melody.

"See that short feller in the brown suit an' the straw hat?" asked Shorty, as they reached the edge of the crowd. "Waal, that's Brother Barnes, Whiskers, the bozo that beat Bear Creek to the draw!"

"Him?" cried Whiskers suddenly, and he pulled Shorty closer. "Say, he looks a heap like a bird by the name o' Patterson I knowed once, but, shucks, couldn't be he! Why, dang-hang it——"

"Hey, Shorty!" whooped Sheriff Cook from the platform. "We been waitin' fer yuh. Whar the heck yuh been all afternoon?"

"Arrangin' matters," said Shorty loudly, and he jerked away from old Whiskers and started for the platform. On the way, however, he took from his breast pocket a little worn, leather-covered notebook. He peered hard at it when he got under the bright lights on the station platform. Then he grunted and put it away. A moment later he took the little case containing the gold medal from his pocket.

"Yuh got the medal, Shorty?" demanded Sheriff Cook.

"Yes, sir," answered Shorty promptly.

"Waal, give it here," said the sheriff nervously; "we ain't got all night. That train is on time. An' we're late gettin' started. I'm makin' the presentation speech, an' thar's no time to be wasted."

"In that case," said Shorty, "yuh'd better not make the speech, boss; an' yuh, Brother Barnes, put up yuhr hands!"

A six-gun glistened in Shorty's hand.

"Wh-a-at?" cried the excited guest of honor.

"Put up yuhr hands an' quick!" whooped Shorty. "I'll drill yuh ef yuh make a move. I know yuh, 'Two-face' Patterson, an' I know yuhr game. That's it! Now, keep 'em up. Somebody close to him frisk him fer a rod. Thanks, Jimmy, hold onto it——"

The platform was in an uproar. The startled sheriff was choking on his own protestations. Coroner Healey was staring at Shorty as if the latter were a madman. The band's drumming and

tooting had dwindled away to nothing. The crowd was spellbound.

"Here, Patterson, alias 'Barnes,' stick out yuhr mitts," invited Shorty, stepping toward his man with a pair of bright handcuffs. "Oh, don't make such a face! I ain't takin' no chances with yuh, yuh sneak. Two-faced Patterson, an' yuh thought we was all fools here!"

The sheriff thrust Shorty to one side roughly.

"What yuh got the bracelets on him fer?" he demanded. "Yuh gone loco entirely? What's yuhr racket?"

"I'm arrestin' him fer murder," cried Shorty, but the sheriff cut in on that explanation.

"Murder? Yuh idjut, didn't the coroner's jury decide that the shootin' o' Bear Creek Charley wasn't murder? Why, yuh boob——"

"I'm arrestin' him fer the murder o' Dick Wilson, fifteen to twenty years ago!" yelled Shorty above the uproar. "This hombre ain't no Barnes from Providence, Rhode Island; he's Two-face Patterson from parts unknown—that's who! Hey, Whiskers Langer, whar the heck are yuh? Come here, Whiskers, up here!"

The old man pushed through the crowd.

"This is Two-face Patterson, ain't it?" cried Shorty.

"I thought it looked like him down in the crowd, as I tol' yuh, Shorty," roared Langer vehemently, "an' now when I gets close I sees fer certain that it is him! He's dyed his hair to look younger, an' he's dressed funny—but it's him. I'd know them gray, shiftin' eyes anywheres. It's Two-face—yep—sure!"

The sheriff hesitated.

"But how come——" he began doubtfully.

"Lissen to me, everybody!" roared Shorty. "I got my say now, I guess. This bird, Two-face here, figgered we was all hicks in this town, I reckon! I tried to get a word in edgewise to the inquest this mawnin', but as soon as I saw which way the wind was blowin' I kept my mouth shut fer fear o' spoilin' things. I saw it was all set to turn this cooky loose jus' because he had kilt a ol'-time bad man—but I figgered Barnes, as he called hisself, wasn't tellin' the truth.

"How did I know? Waal, lissen! I tried to get the jury to examine the clothin'—thar was a powder burn on the dead man's yaller shirt. That meant Barnes was right on Bear Creek Charley when he fired. Ef Bear Creek was lookin' fer Barnes, as Barnes claimed, he never would o' let Barnes git so close before attemptin' to draw; an' further, how could a hardware man from Providence beat Bear Creek to the draw? That sounded blamed fishy to me!"

Shorty, face flushed, paused for breath.

"I smelled a rat, but I pretended not to after I saw the inquest was all set to turn Barnes free with thanks," said Shorty. "I suggested the gold medal presentation to-night jus' to gain time an' keep Barnes here until the late train so I could have time to make a thorough investigation. I've made it. Yuh all know Whiskers Langer here, who has been Bear Creek Charley's partner fer years? Waal, I talked to him. Remember Pappy Stewart said that Charley had called fer tooth paste as he died. Funny, wasn't it? I knew Charley had no real teeth. Whiskers informed me he had no false teeth, either. Whiskers also informed me that Charley was left-handed, when I asked him about it; an' yet, when Charley's body was found——"

Shorty grinned at the glaring Patterson, alias Barnes.

"He had a gun stuck in his right hand," went on Shorty, "it was planted thar. Two-face fergot that Charley

was a southpaw! I figger Two-face walked right up to Charley, mebbe holdin' out a hand, then whipped a gun from his shirt or sleeve an' kilt him, takin' him by complete surprise. Why should any one kill Charley like that, I reasoned? I looked up all the ol' cronies o' Charley's in the ol' files o' the *Clarion,* lookin' fer some one with a name that sounded like 'tooth paste.' I guess Two-face ain't so far off! I brought Whiskers in, an' he recognized Barnes as some one who looked like Patterson. I refers to my list in my notebook an' finds that Patterson's first name was 'Two-face' here years ago, an' that he disappeared after Dick Wilson was mysteriously slain!"

"Hooray fer Shorty!" yelled some one in the crowd.

"Is that all true?" asked the sheriff, confronting Patterson, but old Whiskers Langer interrupted suddenly.

"Yuh all ain't got the whole story yet!" he cried. "I recalls the whole thing now. This rat, Two-face here, was the guy that kilt Wilson. He beat it, but he was always scared that Bear Creek Charley, who was suspected o' the crime, might tell who the real killer was! He wrote Bear Creek several times in the past years, never signin' no name but always warnin' Bear Creek that he'd get him ef he ever opened his trap. Bear Creek didn't like to tattle, an' didn't, but about five months ago, when Bear Creek really repented fer his sins, this Two-face hears o' it some way or other an' writes form Portland, threatenin' Charley ag'in."

The sheriff smiled wanly.

"In view o' what has occurred," he said sadly, "I guess we won't need this gold medal, after all. It kin be tooken back."

A loud and pathetic voice broke the silence.

"Oh, lissen—lissen!" cried the man, and the crowd recognized him as Mark Moses, the jeweler. "I beg o' yuh don't turn back that medal—when—when yuh got such a fine feller up thar already on the platform who should be awarded it now fer his good work in catchin' a two-time murderer. Shorty McKay is the feller I mean. When it comes to speakin' o' gold medals—I say, the only just thing to do is to present it to Shorty!"

It was a timely, popular suggestion.

"Give it to Shorty!" roared the crowd enthusiastically.

So they did—and Mark Moses was hoarse for three days from cheering, while those who stood near him in the crowd were slightly deaf for twenty-four hours following the celebration.

A GLACIER HOUSE

EVEN glaciers serve their purpose in this practical age, for they can be converted into natural cold-storage plants. At Elephant Point, Alaska, this feat of adaptation has been most successfully undertaken, and the natural cold-storage plant, centuries old, has been a great boon to the reindeer industry in that place.

A hundred-foot tunnel was cut into the old blue ice by means of picks and axes, then a shaft was sent up through the top to insure the circulation of air. After that, it was not difficult to gouge out of the ice several individual chambers or rooms, where the meat may be held in storage.

Sometimes as many as five thousand reindeer carcasses are kept in this naturally iced plant, pending the arrival of refrigerator ships to transport the meat to Seattle. It is said that this huge natural-ice house is a source of inestimable boon to herders, since it enables them to slaughter their deer much earlier than usual and, thus, spread out their work.

The Old Snake Fence

by Cristel Hastings

I'M only an old gray country fence,
And they laid me long ago
In zigzag lines across a hill
Where weeds and brambles grow.
My rails were new and sturdy,
Full of strength, and I was brave
As any fence that faced the wind,
And swift defiance gave.

At storms and scorching suns alike,
I laughed through many years,
Until old age caught up with me—
Then came a time for tears.
My rails, now weary and forlorn,
Began to sag and hang,
And no one cared except, perhaps,
An oriole that sang
At dawn and brought me memories
Of other dawns long past.
Then brambles grew and thrived about
Until it seemed, at last,
I could not live with moss that choked
And took away my breath.
I sank into a nameless void
Of weeds—it seemed like Death.

I wonder why they leave me thus?
Do mortals understand
That fences sag from weariness
And need a helping hand
To carry on among the hills
Through years that trail along?
I'm weary—old—but I still hear
My oriole's sweet song!

Whisky Goes Dry

By Charles D. Cameron

IT was not merely that his head ached. Owsley felt sadly conscious of a general discomfort. But he had known such sensations on other dark mornings. To-day that aching head had one suffering center of sharper soreness. He touched this with a numb hand, and found a contusion behind the left ear. The upper lip was painfully taut, and there his stiff fingers located another bruise.

Shooting pains quivered all over his body as he lay half waking. Never before had a bed been so uncomfortable. He reached hopefully toward the wall and fumbled about for his bottle. He could not reach it. Really, the bed was far from restful. Owsley aimlessly rolled over and tumbled with a heavy crash to a paved floor, in a fall which awakened him completely.

He realized that the hard floor was not that of his decrepit mine cabin. He glared up at the comfortless bed from which he had tumbled. It was not his homely, wooden bunk, but a narrow cot of iron, let down from the wall by chains, the inner side attached to the wall by hinges. In sharp dismay he stared round and caught sight of the sickly gray of dawn through a square window, grimly barred.

"Jest like the jail!" he muttered. He was awake, though his senses were groping in a painful mist. He turned away from the window and saw the iron door with its upright bars and crossbars, also the scant aperture in the middle for passing in food. It was the jail, indeed.

Owsley knew that interior. That hall on the left led to other cells. On the right the corridor extended to the main outer door of native wood, fastened

by a stout lock and an auxiliary bolt, reënforced by a crossbar of iron. How well Owsley knew that entry! For at one side was the sheriff's office, where he had modestly presided when the mining county dedicated the new jail. That, of course, was before a succession of periodical sprees, manifesting his only weakness, had hurled him out of office and rolled him toward the gutter.

Now he, once master of the jail, was a prisoner. He stirred his hands and his feet, noting with slight relief that he was not handcuffed or fettered, but puzzled by another fact. He was fully dressed.

He must have been intoxicated the night before. Yet he had been intoxicated every night without suffering molestation. The town drunkard of tolerant Goldfleece had been endured as a harmless sot. In fact, it was usually when he was sober that Owsley became formidable. He recalled that "Faro" Finch had given him whisky the day before. But Faro Finch had given him whisky every day. He began when Owsley was sheriff. Owsley recalled that he had been given drink, as usual. He assumed that he had drunk too much, as was his custom. These commonplace acts did not explain the unprecedented humiliation of arrest.

Owsley realized that he was still seated on the floor where he had tumbled. In bewildered misery he peered about to find some other human being. Now beyond the barred door loomed a bulky shadow, which seemed to waver in the dusk of the hall, so that Owsley could not discern clearly what it was. Then he heard a familiar grunt and the heavy voice of "Lame Pete," the town's only Indian resident. Pete was a lost wanderer from some tribe in the remote North.

"How do, Owsel? How do, like the dickens, eh?" he growled.

"Gosh, Pete!" groaned Owsley, climbing slowly to his feet in a tangle of wrinkled clothes, and clinging to the bars. "Am I arrestid, my Injun brother?"

"So must happen to get in jail," Pete replied. He appeared neither friendly nor angry. But Owsley, feeling for the first time in many days some painful sensations of sobriety, was likely to have emotion enough for two.

"W'y am I arrestid?" he moaned, struggling with his memory. "I never hurt nobuddy on'y myself. Was there a fight or suthin'?"

"Like the dickens you made a scrap," Pete informed him. "Owsel never fight before if drunk. Men tell he fight if sober. Las' night sher'ff explain big word about you, 'drunkasboiledowl.' You was that 'drunkasboiledowl' when Faro Finch hit tenderfoot an' say tenderfoot had murder pardner an' mus' have jail. You all asleep on table for Finch to hit tenderfoot and knock him top of you. You wake up for that. You hit Finch. You hit bartender Tom Taggles. You hit whole city of ever'body till cowboy throw noose-rope for your arms an' all men like horses pull it. Now of all that you don't think? Forget it, like the dickens?"

"Gimme a drink!" snarled Owsley. By this means he strove, each day, to escape sobriety, which was so painful and revealing.

"Whole full bucket for Owsel," Pete thundered. He lifted a pail and a tin cup.

"Darnation! I want a real drink!" Owsley roared. His words rang so loud that a muffled voice from a rear cell uttered a protest: "Aw, stop the auction! Let a man sleep!"

"Injun," exclaimed Owsley, ignoring the protest of the unseen tenderfoot, "if I don't drink a horn I'll either git worse or I'll come cold sober, an' both ways I'm a fightin' man!"

Pete appeared unmoved. "Hope of those two things it will be sober," he said. "Take now out of pail. Water you should swallow like the dickens!"

He thrust the brimming cup through the aperture. Owsley grasped it in his right hand, clinging with his left to the bars. The cup was emptied, refilled, emptied again.

"That puts out some o' the blaze," grunted Owsley. "Come on, now, Pete. Slip out an' fetch me a quart. Lively, now!"

"Not, if could," Pete stubbornly replied. "Not, like the dickens!"

Owsley thrust a feverish hand through the bars and gripped the man's rough sleeve. "You Siwash! Refusin' orders, eh? Yo' never afore refused orders fr'm nobuddy. Do wot I tell yo' an' git me a quart, or w'en I git out I'll teach yo' manners with a club! Jes, fer yer danged sass, gimme two quarts!"

Lame Pete was a downcast tramp drudge and the meekest of men. Yet he resisted. He jerked himself sharply from Owsley's clutch. He could never have done this if Owsley had exerted all his strength. The Indian looked steadily at the furious prisoners, and steadily repeated:

"Not!"

"Then why not?" demanded Owsley. He glared in the growing light at the dark, implacable face. Owsley found it hard to realize that he was actually denied drink. "Better hustle it before I need it so bad I'll wreck the jail!" he threatened. Then he changed from threatening to pleading. "Wot's the matter, Pete? Wot makes yo' so unaccommodatin'?"

"Accommodate him with a gag," sounded from the rear cell. The voice was less muffled. Neither Owsley nor Pete replied.

"Owsel know dasn't tote whisky in jail," said Pete. "Me deputy like the dickens!"

He struck his hand on his left breast. On the rough coat shone a silver-plated star. Such a badge Owsley in better days had loved to affix to the breast of a brave man. Now and then he had snatched the insignia from an unworthy one. He stared at the star with wonder, then snarled with the irritability of shaken nerves:

"You a deputy! You miser'able savage. You belong somew'eres to a nation of Eskimos. Gimme three quarts o' w'isky. Wot right has a sheriff got to gin yo' thet badge?"

"Sher'ff give, for he know diff'rence from Eskimo," Pete replied, without anger.

He talked heavily on. "Sher'ff with whole deputies ride up mountains. Look find body of pardner, tenderfoot kill him. Sher'ff need whole deputies. Sher'ff stick star on Pete. For Injun, star can be totem. Other Injun have totem—bear totem, wolf totem. You know those about Injun?"

"Part o' their heathen superstitions. Gimme my w'isky!"

"Lame Pete live always with white men, so Lame Pete never have Injun totem," replied the new deputy. "No understand totem business to tell you what means it. But shaman in Alaska tribe know all totem like the dickens. You know what is shaman?" he asked. His leisurely explication merely intensified the prisoner's thirsty impatience.

"Shaman is med'cine man, like preacher for wild-Injun church. Long time ago in Alaska I saw tribe with shaman an' big chief, head man. Sher'ff come take chief for jail. Chief had hunderd wife. All yell horr'ble for shaman to stop it. Shaman say never can possible stop it. Shaman say sher'ff have star totem fr'm top of sky. If hunderd wife kill sher'ff, star totem bring soldiers an' shoot all wife if they yell or not!"

"Pete!" Owsley spoke more clearly. "I warn yo' thet I'm gittin' sober!"

Again he lapsed into pleading. "Lemme git drunk an' fergit ever'thin'. I won't harm nobuddy. Lemme git drunk!"

"Star totem won't let," replied Pete.

"You say there was a fight?" Owsley's mind was slowly, painfully clearing. "Then w'y ain't the other fighters in the lockup? Gosh! I'll fix some o' yo' fellers ef I git out sober!"

"Other folks fight to lock murder boy in jail for sher'ff," Pete explained. "Owsel fight to keep tenderfoot in s'loon to drink an' kill bartender."

"Gosh! How my head aches!" groaned Owsley, sobering and shaking. "Pete, you're a queer redskin, with your totem foolishness. I don't remember no fight. I had fights w'en I was sheriff, chasin' out blackleg gamblers an' claim jumpers. Those fights come w'en I was sober. Then I'd git drunk fer a rest."

"Sher'ff here say you always sober judge with star on you," remarked Pete.

"How my head does split!" Owsley moaned. "Funny about that, my totem friend. I'd be sober, an' wearin' my badge, an' fightin' like a hull tribe o' youse Injuns. Then I'd feel a drunk comin'. I'd lay the badge away an' start drinkin', an' quit fightin'. I guess Finch an' his gang allus helped me to git sprees an' git 'em often. W'en I was sober I was death on card-markers, an' druggin' drink fer a tenderfoot, an' shyster claim lawyers, an' all kind o' tough plays. Finch loved to gimme drinks, 'cause w'en I was drinkin' I didn't care. They took the badge fr'm me an' arter thet I got drunk fer good. I've tried to stay drunk ever since, to fergit it!"

"Star must stop those quarts for you," mumbled Pete.

"Funny red," Owsley spoke more mildly, though with suffering. "But they is suthin' square about yo' at thet. Fust time I ever knowed Finch to be wantin' anybuddy arrestid, though. Wisht the kid sheriff was hyar so's I could talk to him."

A sudden knocking on the outer door resounded through the hall. A sharp voice called commandingly, "Open up here, quick!" A dull murmur of other voices announced the arrival of a posse, or a crowd, or a mob.

Lame Pete limped hastily down the hall. The door was now shaking under heavier blows:

"Never must opin!" the Indian called. "Sher'ff say door must keep closed like the dickens!"

"Open up, I tell you!" the sharp voice ordered. More blows fell upon the door, as if many fists were beating at once. Now a different voice, thin and shrill, cried out, "Let us in this minute!" From farther back another threatened: "Unlock, or we'll tear it down for you!"

"We're coming in, so you might as well open!" the first sharp-toned speaker warned.

"Finch!" snarled Owsley, recognizing the voice. "Is thet tinhorn runnin' the county? An' Tom Taggles out thar screamin' like a chicken hawk! Are they movin' the bar over to the jail?"

The knocking ceased for a moment. The sharp voice of Finch was heard again. "Hello, in there! Hello, Mr. Sheriff! Deputation of citizens wish to call on you, to discuss public affairs. Let us in, please."

"Sher'ff all gone!" responded Lame Pete, while Owsley cursed him for betraying this information. "On'y me to hold on jail. Cit'zens go home breakfast this time. Bimeby sher'ff talk it!"

"Hooray!" squealed Tom Taggles in high delight. "Lame Pete's there alone!" A general burst of laughter rose from the gangsters. "Ever'thin's our way, Finch!" Taggles exclaimed.

"We can't be kept waiting, Pete," Finch called. "We can't stay here all day for an Indian."

"I camp inside. You should be always out," Pete growled. This brought an ear-piercing outcry from Tom Taggless:

"Do as you're told or I'll break in an' bust yer head!"

"Now, say, Finch," a different voice spoke up, "isn't bustin' into a jail kinda serious?"

"Our whole business here is serious!" scornfully answered Finch, adding some remarks about "white-livered cowards." Those within the hall heard him call to his gang:

"We're nearly in, boys! We've only that lame Siwash and 'Whisky' Owsley to tell on us. So bring up that log. Get it right into position."

Then Finch called through the door again, "Lame Pete! Listen to me a minute!"

"I keep jail, talk or not." Pete replied. He turned as a loud whisper from Owsley called him. In low tones the latter demanded, "Why are they here? What do they want?"

"They want me!" broke in the voice of the tenderfoot, speaking low but clearly from his cell. It was the first remark by the stranger to which the ex-sheriff gave heed. Owsley pressed close to his door to listen while the stranger spoke crisply:

"Finch is finishing what he started yesterday. My partner and I struck it. Finch was spying on us. We saw him. He shot my partner dead, and tried to shoot me. Then he raced back to town and spread a report that I had murdered my pal. He did this before I could get in and charge him with the killing. Last night he didn't dare to talk lynching. He had to let the sheriff take me to jail. But he was urging the sheriff to take his deputies up into the hills to-day. Finch wants the sheriff to go away so that he and his thugs can get rid of me before the sheriff comes back. Then he'll have wiped out both my partner and me, and can jump the claim. That's all Finch wants. Let him have those few things and he'll be satisfied."

Owsley and Pete listened in utter silence to this revelation. The young stranger was calm, direct, and simple in his statements. He showed no outward sign of fear.

From outside the sharp voice of Finch was heard again, showing greater impatience.

"Pete!" he called, "are you at the door?"

"I come at it!" Pete responded. He was turning away from Owsley's cell. The giant prisoner thrust both hands through the bars and caught the Indian's arms in a powerful clutch. Pete struggled, bracing his shoulders against the door, stamping with his powerful right foot, twisting his arms, but he was almost helplessly pinioned. He writhed like a wild creature to break loose, but Owsley clung with the hold of a wrestling bear. As they strove together, they heard Finch call to his men:

"Ready with the log, boys! This will be the signal." But those within could not know what signal was meant.

"Now, Pete," Finch called through the door, "in sixty seconds more, in one minute, by my watch, you'll open this door. Otherwise, we'll just break in, and then you can take the consequences. There's only one other thing you can do—you can send that murderer out to us. Whatever happens, we're here to get him and do our duty. We're going to stop the murdering of prospectors in these hills!"

Hearty applause from the gang greeted this sentiment. Lame Pete did not reply, but made a sudden spurt of effort to break away from Owsley, who had allowed his hold to relax slightly. The Indian tore one arm free and turned to the task of liberating his other arm from Owsley's clutch. At that moment a revolver was fired with-

out. Pete groaned and dropped limp on the hall floor, the dead weight of the fall tearing him loose from Owsley's grasp.

"Got him!" shrilled the voice of Taggles, as the groan of the wounded man and the crash of the body were heard. At that moment the outer door shook with the thundering impact of a log battering-ram driven against the lower panels with a great shivering and groaning of the planks.

"That shot was the signal, and it hit yo', Pete!" exclaimed Owsley. He knelt by the door and found the jailer unconscious, though groaning as he would never have groaned in any conscious suffering. Owsley, thrusting his hands through the bars, worked feverishly, searching the body for keys and weapons. He heard the battering-ram driven repeatedly against the door, the blows echoing like thunder. Then came a blow with a flat, cracking sound. The lower panel had been split. Against this crack new thrusts were directed.

Owsley found the ring of keys and tore them loose. He rose up, thrust the bunch through the bars near the lock, and managed, with many turnings, twistings, and scrapings of hands and wrists, to insert a key, turn the lock, and push open the massive door.

Immediately he dragged the Indian's body into the cell, out of danger of any renewed gun fire. He noted blood on the thick, black hair. The Indian's groaning had ceased. But Owsley could not stop to ascertain whether the faithful deputy was dead or living. He reached for the man's holster and drew forth a better weapon than he expected to find. In a sudden impulse he snatched the silver-plated star from the rough coat and affixed it to his own breast.

Owsley was tremulous and sick, and even in that crisis longed for a drink to brace him. He hardly knew what step he would take next. But he was again sober, and again a citizen. A mob was attacking the county jail, and he knew that a mob must be resisted.

Revolver in hand and star on breast, he staggered into the hall, more of a man and more of a battler every moment. Then came another crash of the log battering-ram against the split panel of the door. The head of the log was driven clear through, tearing open a ragged aperture. It was clear to Owsley that the door could not hold for long. It was clear to the besiegers also, for as the log crashed in they raised an exultant yell. The voice of Finch, sharp and cold, and confident, was heard exclaiming: "Almost there, boys! Keep it up!"

"You are almost here," muttered Owsley, half to them, half to himself. By this time the mob spirit must have risen so high that the tenderfoot prisoner was in utmost peril. Owsley could not hope to reason with the mob, to beg them, in the name of law and order, to withdraw. Yet Owsley, sober, could not see that mob win without a struggle. The only hope to save the tenderfoot, and incidentally to save his own life and the Indian's, was to hold the jail as a fortress. And in the fortress a breach had already been made.

He must act desperately in a desperate crisis. He leaped back to the tenderfoot's cell. Owsley glanced sternly at the prisoner, who stood with his hands clutching the bars. The young man's eyes were blackened, his fine features bruised, as by heavy blows. The hands gripping the bars showed signs of hard battling with bare knuckles.

"Come out hyar!" ordered Owsley. "I need yo'—an' I hope yo're a fightin' gent, ez yo' lookd to be." He unlocked the door and the prisoner thrust it open with a rush.

"Git down thar to the front!" Owsley ordered, motioning him at revolver point toward the door, where the shouting besiegers were widening the gap

by smash after smash of the heavy log. The stranger hurried forward just as the log swung in again, crashing into the iron cross-bar at the middle of the door, and bending it slightly upward.

"Give me a gun," said the stranger, not pausing until halted by Owsley's hand on his arm, almost at the door.

"Do wot I tell yo' without no gun or nawthin'! Git to the side of the door. See that key in the lock? See that bolt jest above it? Git a hold o' them! Stan' by to shoot the bars back w'en I tell yo'!"

The stranger was already at his post with his hands on the key and the bolt. But he turned to Owsley a face blazing with indignation.

"I'm to open on those cutthroats without a gun, without a chance to fight for my life?" he demanded in a hissing whisper.

"Jest do nawthin' at all ef yo' like it better!" whispered Owsley in return. "Jest stan' still an' let 'em come an' make jerked beef outn yo'. But fer now you do wot I tell yo', and don't talk back a word till I speak with Finch!"

Owsley began creeping closer to the ragged breach in the door just as the log battering-ram swung in again with another sounding impact on the heavy crossbar, now bent upward and quivering.

"One or two more like that!" Finch cried. "Then we'll be in! Then to our duty, and afterward you'll all have breakfast at my place. Get up an appetite, boys!"

"I say, Finch!" Owsley wailed from within. It was not the tone he had used with the tenderfoot, but a husky, whisky-soaked voice. "Finch, ole sport! Hol' on that danged hammerin'! I jes' broke outn my cell. Got any drink, Finch?"

"More good luck—it's Whisky Owsley!" Finch exclaimed, and the battering was checked. "Let us in, old friend! That's the good old Owsley!"

"I'll never let yo' in ter lynch me! Wot d' yo' wanta lynch me fer? I ain't done nawthin'!"

"Drunk as usual!" Finch sneered. He added patronizingly: "Why, Owsley! We're not after you at all. Ther's an Eastern gunman in there. He killed his partner up in the hills. We intend to show him some Western justice, and do it before the sheriff gets back, so nobody will blame the authorities. Now, Owsley, don't be silly and delay us. I can't answer for what a lynching party will do to anybody who tries to stop them! Come on now, Owsley. You're drunk, of course, but not so drunk you can't open the door!"

"How kin I be drunk at all?" demanded Owsley, as if wickedly wronged. "Wot was yer purpose puttin' me in jail ef yo' didn't aim to lynch me? W'y don't yo' send an' git me a drink ef yo' want favors? I'm all alone in hyar with a desprit gunman and a tunked Injun an' nobody cares—nobody gits me a drink!" He broke into maudlin sobs.

"Let us in!" shouted Tom Taggles. "Let us in, or you'll kick on the same limb with the gunman!"

"I never do nothin' without a drink, an' Finch an' Taggles knows it," whined Owsley. "W'y are yo' so stingy to-day? You allus ga' me drinks afore."

"You always had free drink from me, and you always will," said Finch. "Now, let us in and we'll drink together."

"Quit bein' so measly-mouthed, Finch!" yelled Tom Taggles. "See here, Whisky Owsley! These citizens is gonna git rid o' that murd'rer. We nearly got the door down, an' we kin git it all down. You decide this minute to let us have that murd'rer alone, or we'll string yo' both up as pardners!"

"Don't risk your life for me," hoarsely whispered the tenderfoot at the door. "Only give me a gun, Mr. Owsley. If I have to go, let me go shooting!"

"Stick to them locks an' shut up!" Owsley ordered.

"The drunken tramp!" Finch burst forth in impatient rage. "Bring up the log, boys, and finish this!"

"I'll unlock!" cried Owsley, answered by a howl of fierce joy from the close-pressing crowd. "Good old Owsley!" exclaimed Finch. "Be quick, then, Owsley."

"But fust I gits a drink!" Owsley wailed. "Right in this here hole w'ich you busted in this nice door. I gits it right fr'm you, Finch! Tom Taggles is a mean feller—he put pepper in my w'isky onct. So I gits it fr'm you."

Owsley glanced up at the tenderfoot. "Work the locks!" he whispered. "Open an' shut again!"

The bolts were noisily shot backward and forward, calling forth ominous cries from the impatient mob. The tenderfoot shut his jaws tightly as he heard these sounds. They were howling for his death as he gave the signal!

"I really get no chance to fight?" he whispered again. The look on his face was half sneer and half defiance.

"Lots o' chanct your pardner had w'en he was shot in the back!" snapped Owsley. "Work the locks again!" As the bolts clicked and rattled, Owsley shouted to the mob leader:

"Yo' can't git in, Finch, afore the sher'ff gits back, unless I lets yo' in!"

"Bring up the log!" shouted Tom Taggles. "Down with the door and hang ever'buddy in thar!"

"You're a'most in, Finch, but not quite," cried Owsley. "Hee! Hee! Hee! This hole yo' smashed is a'most big enough fer a man to creep through, but not quite big enough for all on 'em. You could git through, but not Taggles. Hee! Hee! Hee! Now, dear ole Finch! Ef yo' really wanta git in afore the sher'ff gits back, yo jes' bring me thet w'isky to this here hole an' gin it to me, an' this business kin be finished!"

"We really must be done before the sheriff gets back!" Owsley heard Finch say. "Has anybody got a flask? Thanks. Stand by me, boys, to rush when the door is opened. We can't afford to risk that old drunken bum changing his mind."

Finch raised his voice and called loudly: "Here's your drink, Owsley! Best in the house isn't good enough for you, old friend!"

Owsley was crouched upon the floor, close to the threshold. He saw the feet of Finch as he approached the aperture. At Owsley's signal the locks clicked again. The crowd stirred and pressed close, so that those within could hear the besiegers panting with excitement. Then the hand of Finch, holding a flask, was thrust into the ragged hole in the lower part of the door.

Finch thrust in his hand, farther and farther, reaching to left and right with the flask. All at once his arm was seized above the elbow with a grip like a steel pincers, and he was dragged yelling into the aperture. Other steel pincers gripped him by the left shoulder. Then came a wicked twisting of his body which forced from his lips new cries of dismay and terror. Despite all resistance, Faro Finch was bent round and trussed up in the jagged-edged opening as a pillow is stuffed in a broken windowpane. In the same moment of appalling surprise he was disarmed, and two guns were pressed into his side, with Owsley's stern command: "Keep set whar yo' find yerself!"

Finch dared not move, but he gasped and shouted, then burst forth into wild oaths of fury. "Help me, somebody!"

he howled in terror. "Get me out of here! Taggles! Somebody! Get me out!"

"Bring up the log!" yelled Taggles. "Rush the door! Come on, ever'-buddy!"

Owsley swung up one revolver and fired into the ceiling.

"Try to rush the door, you thugs, you cutthroats," he shouted. Owsley did not whine now. He used a voice which Finch and Taggles knew of old, though newcomers among the toughs in the mob had never heard the tone before. "Here he is, yer boss, right in the hole yo' made in the jail to git him in! He's under arrest fer the attempted murder o' this tenderfoot an' fer the actshooal murder o' the pardner. Now try to help him!"

"Help, boys! The drunkard'll kill me! He's crazy; he isn't responsible! Get me out of his hands!" Finch was pleading frantically. His words were unchecked by his captor, though he struggled no more to work his way out of the hole.

"Don't let the old soak bluff yo', boys!" shrilled Tom Taggles. "Come on with the log!"

"Come on, then!" shouted Owsley in that old fighting voice. "I'm here with two loaded guns. You're all breaking the laws, this minute. You're all responsible fer breakin' the door of this jail. Now jest youse try to help this feller Finch, and I'll shoot, and you kin shoot, an' I'll jest crouch down behind 'im an' let yer bullets go plumb through 'im! He ain't never been no good. He's a cheat; he's a murd'rer; he's a would-be lyncher. He spiled a good sheriff by playin' on his weakness fer drink. But he'll be some use if youse try to shoot, 'cause yo' can't hit me without shootin' straight through his body; He'll save my life an' lose his own!"

"Oh! Oh! Don't shoot, boys!" cried Finch. "Don't fight!"

"Hev we gotta mind a crazy drunk?" cried Taggles. "Kin Whisky Owsley bluff us?"

"Yo' know me, Tom Taggles?" called Owsley. "Yo' know me, ole Tom 'Knockout Drops'?"

"Know you, you old soak?"

"I was an ole soak sence you an' Finch used to pour it inter me to keep me fr'm enforcin' law!" replied Owsley. "Well, Tom Knockout Drops, you an' Finch got me inter jail, so I ain't had a drink sence last night. I'm a cit'zen actin' as an officer in a public 'mergency. An' now I'm no ole soak, Taggles & Co. I'm Gordon Owsley, cold-nerved an' cold sober, with two guns, an' in one minute I'm goin' to start shootin' over the body o' Faro Finch to clean out any unlawful mob that may be hangin' anywhere around this here jail."

An inarticulate howl of terror from the bold Taggles was followed by the clatter of rushing, running, stumbling feet as the cowardly mob scattered in all directions, out of range of the guns of a sober Owsley. After a few minutes of frightened panic the space in front of the hall was empty and silent as a desert.

Owsley glanced up at the tenderfoot, who still stood with his hands on the locks. The giant's glare softened to a grin.

"You're a game one, tenderfoot," he said.

"Coming from you, that's as big a compliment as I ever got," replied the stranger.

"Lend a hand to git the pris'ner to a cell," directed Owsley. "He's plumb fainted at his own danger. Never fainted w'en somebody else was in danger, though. We'll set some kind o' barricade at this door, fer caution's sake, so nobuddy'll be creepin' in the hole. Then we kin tend to the Injun an' wait fer the sheriff."

As they came out of the tenderfoot's

old cell, where they had placed the reviving Finch, a voice from Owsley's old cot called faintly, though in heavy tone: "Owsel!"

Owsley and the tenderfoot hurried into the cell and looked down on Lame Pete, who was white and sick, but fully conscious.

"Funny as the dickens," he said, looking up at them. "Me deputy, you pris'ners. Me in cell, you walk round. An' how have you badge? Is that how my badge gone? Ever'thin' like the dickens!"

Owsley unclasped the badge from his coat and affixed it again to the coat of the Indian deputy.

"We'll take a look at that head," he said, "while we're waitin' fer the sheriff. Yer pris'ners left their cells, Pete, in the interests o' discipline. We jes' had to enforce yer orders keepin' thet mob outn the jail.

"As fer the badge," he added, "thanks fer the loan of it. W'en yo' had it on it kep' yo' fr'm givin' me w'isky. Ef I'd had the w'isky I never wouldn't ha' cared about nuthin'. Then, w'en I had the star on it kep' me goin'. I was like myself. I'm older'n I was, but I'm goin' to ask the kid sheriff fer a badge like thet to wear perpetual. I b'lieve you're right, Injun. It's a star totem."

WHEN THE GREAT SPIRIT SPEAKS

THOSE who are not in sympathy with the various and in many cases ridiculous and undignified performances to which the Marathon seems to be degenerating, might well wish that some spirit of good sense would speak to the record-mad persons who participate in them, and make them see the error of their ways—though not indeed so tragically as the Zuni Indians believe that the Great Spirit has recently spoken to some of their members.

The Indians of the Zuni tribe will no longer compete in the races of the white men, fleet of foot as these tribesmen are, and winners of prizes as well. Their white trainer has been powerless to make them change their minds on this subject, and is compelled to bow to their firm decision.

Three famous Zuni runners are Chimoney, Lutci, and Leekahtee. The first was the winner of the Marathon at Long Beach last year, but, while he was away from home participating in the race, his little daughter died. Fatality followed him again this year, for, when he was competing in the Marathon at Phœnix, his wife died. Chimoney, and the other Indians, unhesitatingly accept these deaths as signs that the Great Spirit is not favorable to their entering these competitions with the white men and they have therefore withdrawn. All efforts to change their decision have proved fruitless.

It is a question in the minds of many whether these Indians would ever have entered for the Olympic Games, as the voyage by water would be repugnant to their desert-bred minds. But there is no need for further speculation on that score. Their Great Spirit has spoken—his children listen and obey.

In Apacheland

By Peter A. Lea

MOST of the Apache Indians live on the San Carlos Reservation northeast of Globe, Arizona. Those who are off the reservation are out with the permission of the United States government, for the Apache has the status of a prisoner of war, but as he pays no taxes whatever and has the right to vote, this scarcely bothers him.

The Apaches are good workers. The labor used in the building of the great Roosevelt Dam, and some others not quite so important, was largely Apache. Indeed, the men have to work, for their women spend money lavishly in playing games of chance such as Mexican monte and cooncan, and for gay calicoes and silks. Thrift is not considered a virtue among this tribe, and a miserly tendency is a fault.

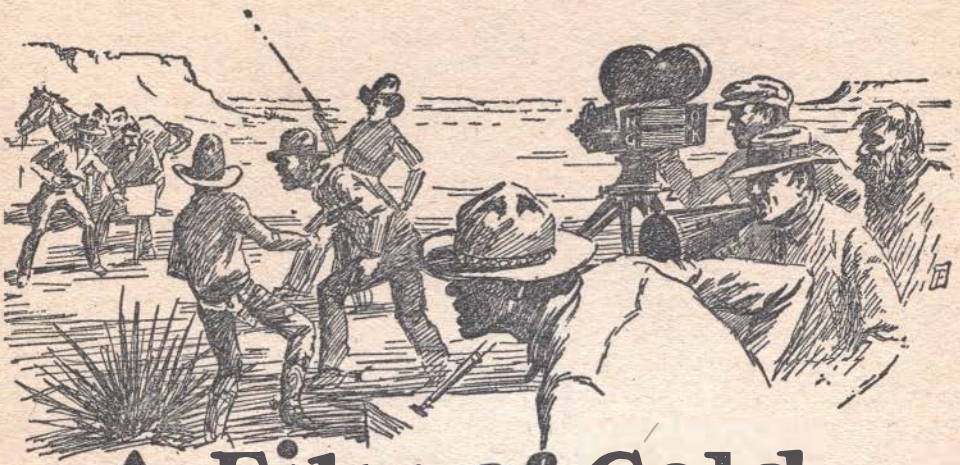
When an Apache marries, he immediately goes to live with his wife's people. His bride is expected to give all her wedding presents to her own relatives, and the Apache social code requires that all gifts must be useful.

Children are never punished, no matter how mischievous they may be or what their offense. This rod-sparing was perhaps halfway responsible for the spoiled, treacherous savages of the old days, who wrought such tragedy and havoc among the early explorers and settlers. However, their patience and extreme kindness to children now make the Apache women desirable nurses.

An Apache man never looks at his mother-in-law! He tries hard indeed never to so much as glance in her direction. He cherishes a legend of his tribe, which says that to do so would cause him to lose his sight slowly and eventually be completely blind. When his wife is away, as she frequently is, for Apaches love to visit and travel, his mother-in-law must stay close to the home fires to do the cooking, but she must leave the wickiup the moment the man of the place enters. He does not eat fish or pork, and he holds that the bear is a very sacred animal.

If an Apache fails as a good provider, he will arrive home some afternoon to find his saddle hanging in the entrance to the family wickiup. In Apacheland, this is a divorce!

When he dies, all his personal property is buried with him. The funeral service consists chiefly of an address to the spirit of the departed in which the ghost is told to go far hence and to please continue going! After death he is entirely out of the picture. It is even considered bad luck to mention the name of the dead. His widow, though, if she wishes to show great respect for his memory, keeps her hair bobbed for one whole year!



A Film of Gold~

by Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "That Meanest Bull," etc.

THE wounded man swayed uncertainly in the saddle. At his side galloped a girl of twenty, dressed in riding breeches and high-heeled boots of the range. She wore a battered Stetson pulled down over eyes filled with anxiety. Her right hand held the swaying man in place. "Maybe we'd better stop, father," she suggested, "the movement might make the wound worse."

The man's face was as gray as his hair. He was hard hit, and he knew it. "Stop?" he gasped. "We don't dare stop until we get to the cabin." Seeing her grow pale beneath her tan, he added, "I'll be all right when we get there!"

They continued the killing pace, while the desert sun blazed down and mocked their efforts. The heat was drying the moisture out of the horses to a dangerously close margin. The girl's mount responded to her spurs with an obvious effort. They might not make it.

Two miles beyond, a lone horseman joined them. His mount also showed the effects of hard riding. "What's the matter, Nan?" he inquired, pulling up.

"Shuman shot father!"

"From ambush?"

"Yes. They've staked the entrance to Bragg's Wash and are keeping people from entering the canyon until their own gang can get into the country and stake what's up there! It's an outrage, 'Bud.' It's almost legal murder, because a man has the right to keep others from his claim."

"Not when he stakes a canyon entrance just to keep others out." Bud shrugged his broad shoulders impatiently. "That's the last straw," he growled, "I'm going up there to shoot it out."

"No, you're not, Bud Beaumont, you're coming with me and——"

Beaumont cut into the girl's protest with a terse, "I'm going to settle it now."

"They'll get you," she warned, "there are too many of them. If they don't shoot you from one angle, they'll do it from another. Those boulders washed down by the cloud-burst four years ago make perfect concealment. They could stand off an army. Please, Bud, don't try it."

As the unsmiling man whirled to go,

she whipped out a gun. "Stop," she ordered, "or I'll shoot! I won't shoot to kill, Bud, but I'll stop you. A leg or arm wound will turn the trick. And you know I can shoot straight."

With a gesture, he admitted defeat. "We've got a right to stake that upper ground," he growled, "and—I'm going to give it a try. If I fail, I'll take somebody with me. That somebody will be Shuman." He eyed her narrowly as they rode along, then said abruptly: "Why don't you give me a chance to prove I love you? Or isn't there a chance for me?"

"There is always a chance in everything—even to staking claims in the upper canyon," she answered. She relaxed somewhat now. He was holding her father in the saddle and was not likely to let go, even to shoot it out with Shuman.

For thirty-five years old 'Dud Winslow had prospected the various sections of the Southwest deserts. Confident that there was pay somewhere within a few miles of Bragg's Wash, he had worked it, canyon by canyon. And then came the strike. Alone, his first thought had been to carry the news to Nan, his daughter, who had kept house for him since returning from school.

A breed youth who had been detailed by Shuman to watch Winslow during the past year had immediately investigated the prospect, dry-panned some gold, and headed for Shuman. And Shuman acted instantly by staking the entrance to the wash and warning Winslow away when he approached with Nan. Fighting mad at being denied his chance after years of futile prospecting, Winslow had opened fire. This was what Shuman had expected and planned for. He shot to kill, and it was only chance that had saved the old desert rat from a more serious wound.

The trio rode on in silence and presently the scene changed. In the midst of desolation stood an adobe structure. The windows had curtains. There was a grape arbor; several date palms, a clump of fan palms; several chickens, a cow and, best of all, a well from which was pumped cold water.

Nan galloped ahead and made preparations to receive her father. Bud Beaumont continued to hold the old man in the saddle. His eyes were blazing with righteous resentment. "Shooting a man in cold blood," he muttered, "goading him to desperation so he'd start something and be killed. That's Shuman. He's done it before and got away with it. The biggest coward in the world is the man who plays safe and puts over his crooked deals from cover."

The wounded man, sensing something of the younger one's fury, shook his head wisely. "Don't play his game, Bud. If I'd used the wisdom of years I might have won out. Shuman knows how to handle hotheads. When it's over, the hot-head is dead and Shuman has killed him in self-defense. Listen to Nan. Women are so often right in this world."

"I'd die for Nan," Beaumont growled.

"Why not try living for Nan?" Winslow suggested. "You'd both be happier."

"I had a chance there until Seagrave came into the picture. He's got what I haven't got—money and looks. Every time I see my homely mug I feel like shooting myself—or somebody like Shuman. Well, here we are!"

As easily as though Winslow weighed a hundred pounds instead of nearly two hundred, Beaumont lifted him from the saddle and carried him into the house. Here the younger man took charge. He had not confined his roamings to the American side of the border. Chance had involved him in a Mexican revolution and he knew plenty about gunshot wounds.

"You fix up father," Nan directed. "I'll be back!"

She stepped outside and gave the exhausted horses a slight amount of water. Too much would have been fatal under present conditions. Then she mounted a fresh horse and set off in the opposite direction from Bragg's Wash, saying to herself: "As long as I'm away from home, Bud won't dare leave father. He can't follow me, nor carry out his threat to start gunning for Shuman." Riding to a ridge she looked across the desert. "There's one of 'em," she mused, "it's a long chance, but worth taking." Two miles away a lone rider moved against the sky line. He was mounted on a horse, instead of the burro so popular with the prospector. But as the girl drew near she noticed he was dressed like a prospector.

Pretty well made up for a motion picture actor, she thought as she rode up. Then, aloud, "Hello, there! I'm needing a man—several of them."

"Heh! Heh!" The other chuckled. "A girl as pretty as you hadn't ought to have trouble raising a whole regiment. What can I do for you? My name's Simms!"

For answer Nan reached up and clutched "Dad" Simms' gray hair. "Let's pull off that wig you're wearing," she suggested, "and find out just how old you really are." Then she gave a jerk.

"Sufferin' malemutes!" bellowed Dad. "Gol' durn yuh, girl, stop it! That's my own hair."

"Oh, then you're not a young man made up to look old! I'm afraid you won't do. I need young men who aren't afraid of anything." She seemed utterly disappointed, but presently brightened. "You are part of that motion-picture company that is making 'The Desert Lure,' aren't you?"

"Yep," Dad admitted, "they brought me along to show 'em how they done things in the early days. I'm playing a part just for the fun of it. Sneaked off to-day for a little ride. Figured I'd do a little prospecting. Now, miss, I see you're disappointed because I'm old. If I was young I'd just as soon draw my sword for you as not. At that—danged if I don't think I might help you out of your trouble. Old heads, you know——"

At that her nerve broke suddenly and she commenced to cry. "Now, now, miss, that won't do!" exclaimed Dad. "If I touched on some sore subject I'm mighty sorry——"

"It wasn't that," she said, "you used an expression my father uses so often. He says it's well to listen to old heads because so often they've taken the long way to get a thing. As a result, they know the short cuts now."

"He's right! Let's hear what it's all about. I might be able to help you out. I don't know much, as the feller says, but I know men and their ways. Most anybody would know 'em that had lived as long as I have."

"How old are you?"

"I was a spry young feller, packing a gun, in the Civil War, and I guess that makes me old enough to run for president. Now, let's have the details."

It was not the first time a young person had been completely won by Dad Simms' kindly interest. And usually from the wisdom that comes with old age he was able really to help them.

The girl told the story from start to finish. At times the old man bristled. Again he smiled. "And so this man Beaumont wanted to go right out and die for you, eh? Any other fellows willing to do that?"

"I don't want any of them to die for me," she answered, "but for father's sake I want to see Shuman whipped. Just shooting won't be good enough."

"I see. I guess you're right. It'll take more than shooting. He must be made a sort of laughingstock, eh?"

"Yes!"

"Wise girl! That hurts worse than bullet wounds. Hummm. Let me think. Let me think."

"What sort of a crowd have you over there taking pictures?" asked Nan. "Are they real or synthetic?"

"Meaning the men?" Dad inquired.

"Yes. Regular fellows or—saps?"

"Most of 'em haven't been tested," Dad answered, "but they'll pan out about as well as any other group of youngsters. Let's look 'em over."

Dunwoody, the director, tossed his hands up in the air. "Worse and worse," he groaned, "do you call that a stampede? It's gold you're after, men! Gold! Not the kind that you draw from a bank, but virgin gold. It's in the ground. Your's for the taking. You're on a stampede, not a Sunday afternoon's stroll. And you, over there, are trying to stop 'em. How would you stop 'em? Slap 'em on the wrists? No! You'd fight, with fists, guns, and clubs. Anything to stop 'em. Ready! Camera!"

The camera began humming. The men and burros started up a ridge. This was about the toughest location the crowd had been on. Blazing heat and a sand storm being kicked up by a wind machine. "Cut!" Dunwoody groaned. "All for to-day. Maybe tomorrow we can get something. Get out of my sight."

Dunwoody dropped his face to his hands, while an assistant camera man held an N. G. in front of the last shot. "They holler for realism," muttered the director. "I come out here to get it. And what do I get? Nothing but grief. They can't seem to arouse themselves up to the pitch."

"Of course they can't," said a voice behind him.

He looked up. "Hello, Dad. Wondered where you'd been." Dunwoody hardly gave the girl a glance. Pretty girls are nothing in a director's life. Dad performed introductions.

When formalities were over, Dad seated himself on a camp stool with his name written across the back. "You can't expect 'em to stampede naturally. Unless a man's been on one, it's hard to understand. You're blood's leaping; your tongue's hanging out, and you're fighting every minute. There's gold ahead. It's any man's gold. You've got to be there first. See? Dog-gone it, Jack, I don't think you can drill it into the boys! It's different from anything they've bumped up against. What's on for to-morrow?"

"To-day's stuff. And it's on for every day until I get what I want!"

"Give the boys a day off. Some adobe houses have to be built. Lend me a camera man or two. I'll pay for the film I waste and I won't need only a few men. I'll pick the ones I want!"

Dunwoody looked at Dad hard. "Darn your old skin, you've got something up your sleeve!" he exclaimed. "Say, I took a chance on you in the Alaska snowslide scene a month ago. Darned if I don't do it again. And, say, I'm going along as atmosphere, if you don't mind. How'll I dress?"

"Like a desert rat!" Dad grinned. "I'll give you a taste of your own medicine."

Details were arranged and several minutes later Dad rode across the desert with Nan Winslow.

A look of relief passed over Bud Beaumont's face as she returned.

"Is father worse?" she asked quickly.

"No. He's getting along fine. It was you I worried about. I thought you might go back and try to talk sense into Shuman. That can't be done." He shot a glance at Dad. The girl introduced them.

"Mr. Simms has a proposition," she explained. "Listen!"

But Beaumont was not deeply impressed at first, but as Dad warmed up

to his subject he commenced to grin. "Say, I'm for it!" he exclaimed. "That'll please Mr. Winslow, too. He's great on strategy instead of plain bull strength. If I ride all night I can have a dozen of the boys here in the morning. I'll start now."

"And be sure to tell Wally Seagrave," Nan said, "he's a good man."

Bud Beaumont flushed darkly, but he was game. "I'll tell him," he promised.

Dad's shrewd old eyes twinkled. "Which is it, Seagrave or Beaumont?" he inquired, when the latter had gone.

She answered him seriously. "I can't decide. It's the one thing I am afraid of. Both are wonderful boys. Sometimes I doubt if I know what love is. Perhaps it hasn't come yet."

"Heh! Heh!" chuckled Dad, "it's come and come plenty, from the look of things."

Dawn of the next day found the entrance of Bragg's Wash in a state of activity. A half dozen well-armed men were concealed behind convenient boulders. Behind them loomed the canyon walls, painted in many colors. The natural silence of the place was sinister in itself.

Shuman greeted the sun with a yawn. "By to-night our boys will be here," he informed the others. "And with them will probably come a deputy sheriff or two with orders for us to set aside ground for a trail. But we'll have accomplished our game by that time and they can have the whole canyon mouth if they want it."

A man who had been perched on a small butte as a lookout came down rather hurriedly at breakfast time. "Shuman, there's something coming," he cried. "Looks to me like trucks. Who'd be crazy enough to come here in trucks?"

"Not any of our crowd," Shuman answered, "I'll climb up and take a look."

But not even several looks explained the situation to him. There were two trucks and several dozen horses. Some of the horses were ridden, but others were running in a string, evidently carrying packs.

In due time, the trucks came to a stop on the bajada, or apron of the canyon. An old man stood up on one of the trucks and made a few remarks.

"There's the canyon, boys," said Dad Simms. "There's gold up there. You saw what Winslow and his daughter had at their cabin. Plenty more like it. The ground is wide open, excepting the ground Winslow worked on. That's his. All you've got to do is to get by Shuman's gang. It can be done without bloodshed. I'll give the word."

Any man's gold!

Dad Simms has used the term repeatedly. The desert men Bud Beaumont had gathered knew what it meant, had felt again and again the thrill of excitement it aroused. And now the moving picture men were experiencing the urge. Within, the flames were blazing brighter. Muscles had grown tense. The newcomers looked toward the Shuman crowd and regarded them as enemies. To each man that crowd was a personal enemy standing between him and what was his if he reached it first —any man's gold.

Ignoring Shuman, the camera men set up their machines at various angles. They were ready to run forward at any moment when the action became unusual. Later on, they could piece it out on the lot.

Dad called two men to him. "You're fighting for a canteen of water," he warned them. "Ready, camera!"

The pair went to it with a will. Dad kept one eye on the fighters and the other on Shuman, who was standing in front of his tent. Presently, he sauntered over, but his men remained on guard. The fight ended with one of the men knocked out and the other

swinging up the canyon with the canteen. Dad called him back. The time was not yet ripe.

"Movin' pitchers, eh?" observed Shuman. He was a massive man with shifty eyes. "Didn't know they hit each other like that."

"They'll do anything to get what they want," Dad answered. "You boys happen to have a mine working? We need a few shots. Maybe you'd like to be in 'em!"

Shuman grinned. His vanity was tickled, for he was completely sold on himself and his looks. Dad chuckled inwardly. He had counted a lot on that. "We haven't a mine in operation yet," said Shuman. "The stampede's just on. In a few days we'll be going full blast!" He looked around and his eyes fell on a young man, heavily smeared with grease paint. Dad's heart skipped a beat, for that "young man" was Nan Winslow.

"Thought I'd seen that fellow before," Shuman said. "Prob'ly have—in pictures."

"Prob'ly," Dad admitted, much relieved. "Well, we've got to get busy, boys." He called a camera man. "We need some long shots showing the crowd coming up the wash. Suppose we can get on that rock?" He indicated a rock well within the enemy's territory. Before Shuman could object, he added, "You and your boys can get in if you want to!"

It was a tense moment for Dad and his crowd. Again, Shuman grinned. "Could I be pretty well up in front?" he asked.

"Sure," and Dad's generosity was so sweeping that Nan almost burst out laughing. "You can lead the boys in if you want to. Take 'em right past the camera, but don't look into it!" Dad picked up a megaphone and gave orders, then he started behind the camera men for the rock.

"Gosh, Dad," one of them whispered hoarsely, "if they get next to our game, we're in a tight place. They're ready for business!"

Men loafed behind every large boulder. Each was armed with a well-oiled rifle and automatic pistol. And a hard lot they were, but the prospect of getting into a picture appealed to the vanity of every one of them. They forgot their weapons for the moment and looked at the cameras.

Dad glanced across at two men and a girl dressed like a youth—a girl whose worried face was concealed by a heavy coating of grease paint.

One of the men was talking in a low tone. He was tall, handsome, and looked capable. He was the sort that would leap into a girl's heart in a single bound. "Seagrave's a handsome cuss," Dad muttered, "and maybe that's the reason I'm favoring Bud Beaumont. I never took any beauty prizes myself when I was a young man."

Bud, lacking the finish of his rival, was utterly miserable. Also, he was at a disadvantage and realized it. He wanted an outlet for his pent-up fury, and that outlet came unexpectedly.

Shuman, swinging along at the head of the stampeders, suddenly felt a change. This was no crowd of actors forcing themselves to do something foreign to their normal lives. There was a deadly quality in the determination of the young man behind him. His eyes were set far beyond the camera; his nerves were stretched to the breaking point.

"We've gone far enough," Shuman cried. "Stop!" he ordered. The men crowded forward harder than ever.

Shuman whipped out his gun. "Back!" he snarled, "I ain't taking no chances. You with the soft hands there are an actor, but that man with the rope burns and busted teeth is a cowpuncher. Stop! Stop, or I'll fire!"

The gun he held was jerked out of his hand by an invisible force. The

crack of a gun filled the canyon. Above, stood Dad Simms with a smoking .44 in his hand.

"You shot his gun from his hand," the camera man cried. "Lord, what a shot!"

"Best I ever made," Dad answered, his old eyes roving about. "So good it was about ninety per cent accident!" He crouched, and waited.

Shuman's men were coming in every direction.

"Easy with your guns," Dad bellowed through the megaphone. "Remember these cameras are getting everything, and it'll be easy to prove murder."

They hadn't thought of that. In a free-for-all it was difficult to prove anything. But with a camera—that was different.

"At 'em!" Shuman snarled. "Shoot it out!" It was easy for him to order that. He wasn't packing a gun just then.

The mass of struggling men eddied about the rock. The cameras were getting the real thing. Hardened as the camera men were, they were thrilled at this. A club came down on Seagrave's head, and he dropped as though dead. Nan rushed to his side with a cry on her lips.

Dad Simms shook his head. "Of course, he'd have to get hurt and win her sympathy instead of Bud Beaumont," he growled. "Luck's sure against Bud."

A camera man was shooting a close-up of the girl and Seagrave. Through the crowd came Bud. Shuman's men had rallied and were beating the others back. Somebody took a shot at a camera and missed. Bud looked at the girl as she hovered over Seagrave. She was crying, and it made him wild. His face changed, and he snarled: "Making her cry after all she's been through! Come on, boys, let's get at 'em."

With heavy fists he rushed in, striking right and left. Whenever his fist struck squarely, a man dropped. Some one grabbed him about the legs in an attempt to bring him down. Bud picked up the squirming figure and hurled it into the mob.

Shuman's men gradually began to give way.

"Get it!" Dad was crying, "get Beaumont's action! He's hog wild. There, he's broken through! Look at the Shuman gang go."

And then Dad saw something else. Shuman, in an attempt to stem the tide, jerked a gun from one of his men. Leaping to the shelter of a boulder before Dad could draw, Shuman deliberately aimed at Bud Beaumont and fired.

Bud's face froze in surprise. The impact whirled him half around before he went down. He dropped behind a boulder, and Shuman began stalking him. Bud's eyes went up to Dad in mute appeal. He could not retreat nor defend himself from Shuman's new attack. Dad tried desperately to get in a shot at Shuman, but the man kept himself under cover. "Bud!" Dad cried, then held up his gun, indicating he was going to throw it.

The heavy weapon went end over end. Bud half exposed himself as he caught it. Again Shuman fired, but this was a miss. Summoning all his nerve, Beaumont lurched into the open, raised his weapon, and fired.

Shuman shot at the same instant and fell forward. Mad with the stampede, the others swept on. One camera man went with them, but another rushed up in time to catch a close-up. Nan had seen Bud Beaumont fall and none was more surprised than she at the shock it gave her.

This was more than grief for the injury of a close friend. It was something else. Something that made her hold the wounded man close in her arms and whisper words in his ears that would have revived any man.

Pain and happiness struggled for a place on Bud's face, and happiness won. "Do—you—mean—that, Nan?" he gasped.

"With all my heart, Bud," she cried.

"Then, by George, I'm going to live!" he gasped.

The camera man backed away. "I got it all," he informed Dad. "If Bud lives, it'll be one of the greatest scenes ever shown in pictures. It was real—right from life."

"And if he should die——?" Dad inquired.

"It'd be sacrilege to develop it. I'll throw the film away and nobody will know it was taken but you and me, Dad."

Dad glanced briefly at Bud Beaumont, then left him to the studio doctor, who was always present on dangerous trips. The old sour dough legged it up the gulch at top speed. Presently he stopped and knocked down some monuments Shuman had erected. "I'm staking this claim for old man Winslow," he yelled. "The next one is for his daughter, and the one beyond that is for Bud Beaumont."

As the men ran up the gulch and staked out the ground that would make any man's gold their gold, the old-timer from Cold Deck erected monuments for others.

"That's done," he grunted at last, "now I'll stake one for myself!" He climbed a ridge and looked about. As far as he could see men were locating ground. "Heck," he exclaimed, "there's none left for me. Oh, well, I'm making enough money as it is."

A monument he had just erected suddenly fell. Dad examined his .44. One shot remained. He blazed away at a clump of brush and a Shuman man broke into the open. "And keep going," Dad roared, "or there'll be a few feet of film showing a hanging!"

Hurrying back down the wash, he ran into Dunwoody. The director was flushed with excitement and exertion. "Staked a claim for myself, Dad," he said. "Say, where's everybody going? I can't do a thing with my men. We've got pictures to take and——"

"Your men are hitting the high spots for the land office," Dad answered, "and if you expect to develop that ground you'd better do the same. Here, take these notices with you and file 'em for Winslow, his girl and Beaumont."

Dad Simms slipped quietly into Shuman's tent. Bud Beaumont was lying on a cot. The girl was seated beside him holding his hand. Bud claimed it soothed him and that his wound did not hurt as much. Perhaps it was soothing. "And," Bud was saying, "I'll get out and work a year or so for money enough to develop those claims. And then we'll get married——"

"Yes, dear," Nan answered, "whenever you say."

"Heh! Heh!" chuckled Dad. "Fine chance you've got of doing that! I may not know my onions, but danged if I don't know my films. When that stuff's developed you're going to find a flock of studio people around here. First, they'll write a story around you two; you'll have to take the leads on account of the close-ups and action stuff they got. And you'll make enough money in two months to develop the whole blamed Wash. Dunwoody's great on realism, and I'm betting he'll insist that you finish the picture by a regular wedding."

"Where is Dunwoody?" Bud inquired. "I'd like to get all that down in writing."

"Heh! Heh!" Dad chuckled again. "He's running a race with his men for the land office. He's got a bad attack of stampeditis, but he'll come back."

And, knowing that three is always a crowd, Dad Simms stepped out and winked at the blazing sun. Perhaps it was imagination, but Dad swore the sun winked back at him.

WESTERN WOODS

(WESTERN YELLOW PINE)

By D. C. HUBBARD

PROBABLY three fourths of the commercial forests of Arizona and New Mexico are composed of Western yellow pine. Much of this wood is shipped to outside markets. It is often called bull pine, scrub pine, and occasionally is spoken of as white pine. The yellow pine of the Pacific slope is of this same species, but is larger, smoother, and has a smaller crown than the tree of Arizona and New Mexico. This is because of the difference in climate.

Before yellow pine reaches a hundred and twenty-five years of age, its bark is dark reddish-brown or black, having narrow furrows. It is then generally known as blackjack, to distinguish it from the mature tree which bears a widely furrowed bark and is called yellow pine. Usually, the older tree is the larger, but not in all cases, as certain climatic conditions allow a blackjack to be fully as large as an adult tree, usually when it has grown in the open instead of packed in a forest.

Although Western yellow pine grows best in rich, deep soil, it thrives nearly as well on gravelly loam, limestone, or malpais. Even on rocky, dry slopes, young blackjack may be found. However, the tree flourishes most prolifically in high altitudes, where there is apt to be more rainfall. In pure stands it is seldom found higher than eight thousand five hundred feet.

In the Southwest, the yellow pine does not attain any great proportions. One standing a hundred feet high and measuring fifty inches in diameter is about the largest. The oldest tree is said to be four hundred and eighty-nine years. Usually, they begin to decline in vigor after they have reached the two-hundred mark.

Trees have much to contend with which delays and retards their growth. Drought, which visits the land periodically, shortens the lift of the hardiest tree. Still, yellow pine, after it has passed the seedling stage, is adverse to shade, seeming to need a great deal of light.

Besides Nature's thoughtlessness in not providing sufficient rain, another and more poignant injury to the Western yellow pine is the Black Hills beetle. Fungi also attack the trees and wreak havoc. It has been learned that blue fungus attacks the contents of the wood cells, but since the cells are untouched the blued wood is not rotten. In the grooves of bark in dying trees the fungus which causes red rot germinates and grows through the cambium and sapwood and destroys the cell walls of the heartwood.

The much-heralded mistletoe which decorates the Christmas board, grows over the pine trees in the forks and lateral branches. The seeds, which are sticky, lodge on the bark, and in the fall when the outer covering bursts,

the inclosed seeds are forced five to twenty feet. When they fall on a sapling pine, roots develop which penetrate the cambium layer and cause the sapling to become deformed.

Sheep and cattle which are given too free rein in certain localities may also serve as a deterrent to the healthy, full maturity of the Western yellow pine. Because the bark is three inches thick, the danger of fire is slighter than to most trees.

The wood of Western yellow pine is heavy, hard, and brittle. The sapwood, which is like the Eastern white pine, is easily worked and used mostly as a finishing wood. It is often called on the market, "Western white pine," because it is light colored. If used next to the ground it will decay, so that it must be treated with a preservative when used for ties, fence posts, or telegraph poles.

Besides timber uses, forests of Western yellow pine offer excellent range for horses, cattle, and sheep. Grass growing where the pine trees are in abundance is above the average. This pine also yields resin and turpentine of good quality.

THE PERILS OF PROSPECTING

ALMOST extraordinary case of unusual hardship sustained in the wilderness was that of a prospector, Thomas Cowan, who almost met death in the wilderness while battling a storm. He and a companion were surveying north of Baker Lake, in the Northwest Territories, twelve hundred miles north of The Pas. They had been taken in by an airplane, which was to return for them in three days. But by that time a blizzard had set in. Fearing that the blizzard would postpone their rescue indefinitely, and with only a small food supply, the two companions decided to start afoot for a trading post fifty miles away. The storm they encountered was so severe that, piece by piece, they had to throw away their equipment in order not to be hampered by it. The strength of the wind was so strong that at times, unable to withstand it, they were forced to crawl along on their hands and knees. On the third day one of the men died.

Cowan, then, alone in that terrifying storm and solitude, continued struggling toward the post. Once he saw the expected airplane circling above him, struggling to locate him. Despite his frantic signals, he was unable to attract the pilot's attention, and once more found himself alone. With heroic courage and persistence he kept on and finally reached the post. Here he was given first aid and word of his coming was sent to Baker Lake. A plane was sent for him, but in attempting to take off from the water, it crashed, and the unhappy Cowan, whom misfortune seemed indeed to have marked for her own, was imprisoned in the cabin. But he and three other men on the plane were reached by rescue boats and pulled from the wreckage just as the plane was sinking. Another plane was sent out and Cowan was safely brought by it to The Pas.

Outcast of the Wastelands

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "The Wrong Tree," etc.

IT had started as a friendly match, this wrestling bout between Jean Patou and Pierre Kagle. But Kagle had drunk too freely of the heady French wine, hence was his vision short and his temper ugly. And, too, the group of noisy onlookers supported Jean Patou to a man. For Jean Patou, despite his "woman's heart," was every man's friend, and Pierre Kagle was loud of mouth, a braggart. And so it was, when Jean Patou, his mighty shoulders bunched, his lips smiling, threw his opponent neatly with a flying hip hold, that Kagle came to his feet knife in hand, and, before any man could make a move to stop him, had thrown himself upon the ever-laughing Jean.

But Jean Patou's head was clear, his body in perfect condition, delicately attuned for instant response to any situation. The smile left his lips, he stepped lightly aside, caught Kagle's knife arm at the wrist, and twisted downward mightily. Kagle cried out with the pain. The knife trickled from his fingers, and he stood helpless before his opponent.

But Jean Patou did not strike. For a long minute he looked into Kagle's bloodshot eyes. Then he smiled and pushed his would-be murderer away.

Always was it like this. For Jean Patou was not a killer. Despite his great strength, he had never been known to seriously harm man or beast. "Jean of the woman's heart" was he called throughout the great Northland. Not that he was a coward. No! But kind. Always kind. Kagle hurried away, urged ungently by many willing hands.

Jean Patou was anxious to leave, also, although he had not seen these men, his good friends, for many long months.

"Eet ees that he would fin' hees Marie," one said.

"*Oui,* for sure, the *petite chérie*—maybe she ees gone wit the captain."

"*Oui,* he ees 'fraid, dat beeg feller, Jean Patou—'fraid!"

In response to which pointed hints, Jean Patou merely shrugged and laughed.

"Eet ees true, my frens. The cabin in the valley ees mos' feenish. Jean, he fin' much gold dees time, over there in Alaska; bettair than foller the trap

line. In the month of the short blue moon, we marry—Marie an' me."

But Grandpère St. Croix, who found clouds on the most spotless horizon, croaked dismally: "Be not too queeck to own the chick before she ees catch, *mon ami.* Dees feller, Captain Martin, ees work hard to collec' dees chick. An' Papa Gironde, he like the brave captain. *Voilà,* eet ees so!"

But Jean Patou laughed loudly. Why should he fear Captain Martin or any other man? He, Jean Patou, was rich and young, with all the assurance and optimism of youth. And, what was more important still, Marie Gironde loved Jean Patou—and none other. And so he laughed gayly, and, amid much slapping of backs and rough jests, departed noisily for the cabin of Marie Gironde.

At the Gironde cabin on the outskirts of the town, however, he found a white-cheeked, tear-stained Marie, who refused so much as a smile to her returned lover.

"Eet ees not dees Captain Martin? Tell me no, *chérie?*"

But Marie nodded her pretty head dolefully.

"Oui, de Captain Martin for sure, *mon ami."* She clung tightly to Jean Patou's strong fingers. "I mus' wed heem. Papa has said eet."

Jean Patou's lips tightened grimly.

"Mus' wed heem? But no—eet shall not be! Me, Jean Patou, say eet——"

"You do not understan', Jean. Nor do I understan'—all. M'sieu the captain breeng the threat to papa. Someting—someting—I do not know what. But eet ees bad. Papa ees scare. All tam scare. De captain say eef I marry heem, everything all right wit my papa."

Jean Patou patted the girl's hand reassuringly and gazed unseeing into the open fire. Palpably, it was time something was done about Captain Martin. Martin was not typical of the Northwest Mounted; far, far from it. He had served with the rank of captain in the Great War; and afterward, through political influence, he had secured this post at Caribou Flats upon the sudden demise of John St. Willoughby. In common with all others, Jean Patou respected and feared the Northwest Mounted. But Captain Martin was different. Hard, shifty, cruel, unscrupulous—it was only a matter of time when he would be removed. The service did not stand for such as he. Pending such time, however, Jean Patou found himself with a problem to face. He thought of Father Maurice, the Jesuit. The good father was Jean Patou's friend, every one's friend. Father Maurice would help. Jean would see Father Maurice. He would get the priest to marry him and Marie, immediately. Then, Captain Martin——

Footsteps scrunched in the snow outside the cabin. A mittened hand thumped on the door.

Marie Gironde gasped and clutched Jean Patou's hand tightly. "Eet ees heem—de captain!" she whispered.

Jean Patou's teeth gleamed whitely in a reassuring smile. He got softly to his feet and threw open the door.

Captain Martin was a big man, lean and dour of face. His forty-odd years rested heavily on his stooped shoulders. His thin military mustache was shot with gray. Just now, there was a deceptive fixedness in the stare of his pale eyes. Jean Patou knew the signs. Captain Martin was drunk.

Martin ignored Jean Patou. He crossed the room and kissed Marie Gironde loudly on the cheek. Patou's long fingers clenched. He swore softly under his breath, stepped forward, cupped his open palm beneath Martin's chin, and, with a single heaving motion, hurled the captain halfway across the room, where he brought up solidly against the log wall.

"Wot you tink? *Canaille,* you would

kiss her, my Marie, eh? Go 'way queeck —or, by gar, I keel you."

Jean Patou's smile was gone. His face was gray. His black eyes gleamed like twin malachite tips in the half light. His gripping hands, outstretched claw fashion, seemed to yearn for the feel of Martin's throat. This was another being quite from Jean Patou of the woman's heart, Jean Patou whose vast sympathy for all living things forbade him even using a whip on his dogs. Another Jean Patou, yes—a strong man crossed, with the will to kill in his flashing eyes.

For a long minute Captain Martin lay where he had fallen. Slowly, the dazed expression left his face, to be replaced with white-lipped rage. He groped to his knees. His numbed lips mumbled:

"Jean Patou, eh? Heard of you. Well, I'll show you how it's done—young fellow. Go for that knife, and I'll——"

Captain Martin seemingly had not moved, yet an automatic pistol had appeared miraculously in his hand; its black muzzle pointed unwaveringly at the Frenchman's heart.

Not by so much as a flicker of his dark eyes did Jean Patou betray his reaction to this abrupt turn in events.

Captain Martin, clutching the gun, groped upright along the log wall.

And then, suddenly, Jean Patou dropped to the floor. Marie Gironde screamed. Martin's gun roared. The next instant, the gun was kicked out of Martin's hand by Jean Patou's upflung foot. The captain cried out, involuntarily, with the pain from his cracked wrist, and grasped it with his free hand. Jean Patou came to his feet, catlike. His clutching fingers sought and found Martin's throat.

"Show me someting, eh? By gar, you have de las' chance—now, *m'sieu.*"

Captain Martin was a big man and a powerful one. But he was as a child in the half-mad Frenchman's mighty arms. Patou dragged his opponent to a kneeling posture, freed his own right hand, and slapped the captain's face, first one side and then the other, with his open palm. So powerful were the blows that blood oozed from the officer's nose and mouth. The Frenchman finally ceased.

"The door, *chérie,*" he called.

Marie threw it open. Lifting Martin's body above his head until it brushed the smoke-blackened rafters, Jean Patou hurled the half-conscious form out into the night.

His eyes still stared with a berserker rage when he turned to the white-lipped girl.

"Maybe—one lesson—ees enough. I do not know. We take no chance. The coat—an' the cap, *chérie.* We go now—to the good Father Maurice. When we return—the captain ees feenish. You weel be my wife."

Two hours later, when Marie and Jean Patou returned to the Gironde cabin, the girl's cheeks were flushed and Jean Patou was smiling.

Father Maurice had listened sympathetically to their story. They were man and wife.

Papa Gironde had returned from his nightly game of cards at the Café Noire.

Jean Patou greeted the scowling Gironde cheerily, kissed his new wife at the door, and departed, whistling blithely, for his own cabin.

Next morning, once again his debonair, friendly, smiling self, Jean Patou paced swiftly along the glittering, snow-lined trail, bound for Grandpère St. Croix's little store. He would tell his friends the good news. There would be much wine. Then—Marie! Jean was very, very happy; as he went, he whistled and sang snatches of old French melodies.

Nearing the town, a commotion be-

fore a new cabin attracted him. A man was swearing luridly, in English. Jean heard the crackling *swish* of a whip, the squalling yelps of a dog in pain. Men came running from many cabins. Jean Patou joined these hurrying ones. Yes, it was a stranger, a chechahco apparently, beating a dog. The beast was tied by a short length of cord to a projecting log at the corner of the cabin. The man, a squat, powerful fellow with a red, bewhiskered face wielded a thick-lashed whip with killing effect. The dog, a beautiful mongrel husky, crouched close to the ground to protect its belly from the curling lash. Ugly red furrows already streaked its broad back. Flecks of red splotched the trampled snow.

Several men stood about, watching doubtfully. It was not for them to judge hastily. Perhaps this dog was a very bad dog, and—— Perhaps Jean Patou would not have acted either, had not the dog's big eyes accidentally found his. The dog did not yelp when next the whip fell. The animal was looking at Jean Patou, and in its eyes there was something beseeching. Patou winced with the dog when the ugly lash again curled about the beast's cringing body.

The next instant, Jean Patou hurled himself upon the man. He caught the whip, snatched it away, and his clubbed fist smashed solidly into the man's red face. It was a terrible blow, with the hurtling weight of two hundred pounds of sheer bone and muscle behind it. The dog-beater's head snapped backward; he stumbled, and fell heavily against a jagged stump uprearing through the crusted snow.

With but a passing glance at the sprawling man, Jean Patou turned to the dog. He slashed the thong that held it with his knife, then knelt in the snow and, murmuring sympathetically, explored the cruel wounds with gentle fingers. The dog struggled to its feet and reached for the man's face with its long red tongue. Patou laughed. His eyes were wide with wonder. Not until the dog stood had he been aware of its great size. Never had he seen such a dog. A chest, broad and full; mighty legs; a wide, intelligent forehead; body thick and muscular, partly like a mastiff, partly like a St. Bernard; silky, black hair, now streaked with crimson, ran along the broad back, tapering to a lustrous gray at the neck; the head was circled by a bushy, gray ruff like a husky's. Only the eyes, large, and soft, and brown, were not those of the husky. They told of a gentler strain, probably St. Bernard. Patou, a keen judge of dogs, estimated that this big fellow weighed in the neighborhood of one hundred pounds.

"Maybe dees *loup-garou* who ees so good wit de wheep, maybe he weel sell yuh, eh, my beauty? Maybe he sell to Jean Patou? An' Jean, he——"

For the first time, Patou was aware that something was wrong. Men—his friends—stood about, whispering and pointing. Puzzled, he questioned them. They did not need to answer. When he turned about, Patou saw at a glance what had happened.

The dog beater was dead!

The blow had loosened his thick fur parka, and, in falling, the back of the man's unprotected head had struck upon the jagged stump. Jean Patou stared down into the dead man's white face. And, during that single, age-long instant, his quick thoughts paraded, in endless review, the inevitable results of this, his first crime. He, Jean of the woman's heart, had killed a man! Accidentally, true; but he was a murderer, nevertheless. He dared not stand trial. They would hang him; Captain Martin would see to that. He must flee. But Marie, his wife—— Ah, Heaven, to leave her now! It must be so. But they would never get him. He knew this North Country. Maybe, some day,

later—when Martin was gone—he would be able to return and——

"He ees dead, Jean," said a bystander.

"Go!" cried another.

"Queeck! De captain comes——"

"Hurry, Jean!"

Jean Patou hesitated, briefly. "My frien's, you will tell her—Marie, my wife—that eet was accident, a meestake. You weel tell her——"

And, as one, a dozen voices promised faithfully.

With his broad shoulders slumping dejectedly, Jean Patou turned away toward the snow-capped hills, just as Captain Martin and two of his men appeared at the thicket edge.

Despite the brain-numbing effect of his desperate situation, Jean Patou set about his flight intelligently. He was wise in the ways of the wilderness, and he knew that it would be suicidal to attempt to go far without adequate equipment. The arctic winter knows no master. It was not yet Christmas. Six months of freezing weather lay before him. He must have a rifle, blankets, food.

And so it was that he made no attempt, at first, to reach the sheltering rock pile that was Mount Hubert. Instead, when no more than a scant mile from the town, he switched off at right angles upon the glassy surface of a frozen stream. This icy mirror left no trail. Martin would not follow too closely. Jean Patou's reputation as a fighter was not to be disregarded, even by such a blustering bully as Captain Martin; none, back there, would say whether or not Jean Patou was armed.

Toward noon, the fugitive climbed a rocky bank and ensconced himself within an ice-hung crevice bordering the stream. This crevice, he soon discovered, led for some distance back into the shale wall, forming a sizable cave. The odor of bear was strong. No doubt, bruin, lost to the world in the midst of his long winter's sleep, was also a tenant of this particular cave. But Jean Patou was not particularly interested in this. He had no intention of investigating. He would not disturb the good-natured old rascal; he would build no fire. With the night, he would return to town, and, under shelter of darkness, get his rifle and the necessary supplies.

Crouching, head in hands, cold and miserable, just within the ice-hung cave, the fugitive was suddenly and unaccountably convinced that some living thing was approaching along the narrow trail just outside. There was no sound of footsteps, but that sixth sense which men of the wilderness oftentimes so strongly develop told him, that some one, something, was there—just outside—drawing near. His first thought was—the bear! Perhaps the tenant of the cave was an old fellow who had outgrown the pleasant youthful habit of holing up for the winter. If so, he would be short-tempered and ugly, a dangerous antagonist indeed.

Jean Patou wasted little time in futile supposition. He drew his hunting knife, his only weapon of defense, and crouched, alert and ready, behind a jagged projection just within the cave.

He had not long to wait. A dark shape crossed the strip of light that was the narrow entrance to the crevice, turned back, hesitated, whined querulously. And Patou sprang forward; dropped on his knees, crying out joyfully. It was the dog! The dog whose master he had unwittingly killed. In some miraculous manner, the beast had followed his trail. After glancing up and down the frozen stream to make certain that his pursuers had not by any chance followed the dog, the man joined his new friend in the cave.

The rest of the day passed quickly. Jean Patou forgot the cold, forgot, almost, his dire predicament, in the joy of finding a companion in his exile. And the dog immediately made itself at home; it sprawled at the man's feet and

licked its hurts. At intervals, in response to Patou's low-voiced, friendly words, the shaggy ears drooped understandingly, and the bushy tail beat an erratic tattoo on the icy floor.

Patou christened his new friend, Mutt. He was not at all sure what this word meant, but, over the border in Alaska, the Americans had coined this name for their dogs. Many, many American dogs were called Mutt. The Americans said it with a smile, hence it could not be bad. And so Jean Patou smiled, and named the big wolf dog most inaptly in the case—Mutt.

With the coming of the early arctic dusk, the fugitive ventured from his hiding place. Before leaving, he went to much pains to impress upon the dog that it was to remain in the cave. As Patou slipped and slid down the icy bank, the dog whined dismally, but made no move to follow its new master.

And when Patou returned several hours later, the big dog lay at the cave entrance, head in paws, waiting, watching. In town, Patou had secured his rifle and complete equipment for a long journey. He had not dared to visit Marie.

Captain Martin and two men had started for Bender's Notch, on the border, assuming that the fugitive would, of necessity, attempt the Notch as the most passable entrance. Two other police had remained in Caribou Flats, keeping close watch on the Gironde cabin. Patou's friends reported that Marie had taken the news heroically, and had accepted, as a matter beyond dispute, their assurance that the killing was accidental.

And Martin had sworn to get Patou. The captain had instructed his men to bring Jean Patou in—dead or alive. Which concerned Jean Patou not at all. He did not fear the police, any of them, all of them. It was for Marie that he feared. Assurance that his girl-wife believed in him, however, lightened his load immeasurably; and it was with head high, eyes flashing, and the accustomed smile on his lips, that he started on his journey into the Great Barrens early next morning, with his willing companion in exile, Mutt, the wolf dog, following close at his heels. He set his course due north, across the frozen Yukon, with Mackenzie Bay as his goal.

But even as the distance between himself and probable pursuit grew, so did Jean Patou's resolution falter. Night after night, crouching before a roaring fire, his thoughts dwelt upon the dark-skinned, sloe-eyed girl, back there in Caribou Flats. He could not go away so far—leave her so wholly at Martin's mercy. The fact that she was another's wife would mean nothing to such a man as Martin. He—he, Jean Patou, must be near to protect her. His reasoning had no basis in logic. Of what use could he, a hunted man, be? But desire, if strong enough, overcomes all obstacles, and so, almost without conscious volition at first, his trail led around and about, tending always back toward Caribou Flats. And, throughout, he gave little thought to possible pursuit. They could never get him. Purposely, he had kept to the hills, where travel with dog team was not possible. And on the winter trail, no man the length and breadth of the great Northland could outdistance Jean Patou.

And so it was that, undecided, longing, ill at ease, he circled aimlessly back toward his loved one. And into this heedless procedure but little thought of the police entered.

One early morning just before Christmas, so early that the coming dawn had as yet brought no faintest glimmer of light to the leaden sky, Jean was aroused by the dog, which crouched close by his side in the oblong hole in the snow, and growled hoarsely deep in its throat. Patou was instantly wide awake and alert. Danger threatened—man danger. The dog, he had early found,

was woodswise and paid no attention to prowling beasts; but, with man, it was different. And, thus early in the morning, no man on a friendly errand would be abroad. Arctic nights are seldom black. Now, the snow-covered valley was bathed in a strangely luminous grayness. At intervals, the aurora borealis cast brief, coruscant flares of light across the sky. An icy wind, promising snow, drifted in fitful gusts out of the north. Jean Patou rightly judged that the dog's warning had come with the wind—from the north. He hurriedly threw his duffel together and struck out swiftly over the crusted snow toward a spruce-clad ridge to the south. Reaching the thicket, he burrowed out of sight among the short-trunked firs, and waited.

He had not long to wait. One by one they appeared—four men in all. Slowly, cautiously, they crept near, until his little camp in the valley, so recently vacated, was completely surrounded. Patou grinned, shamefacedly, in the half darkness, and rubbed the dog's ears.

"By gar, eef you don' warn heem, Mutt, Jean Patou ees gone goose, no? Such a smart feller, dees Jean Patou! Without some brain in the haid, as the American say. Ees ees not the trut'? You do not tink so, eh? You are wrong, my fren'. Jean Patou ees one big fool. *Voilà*, eet ees so!"

Captain Martin, himself, uncovered the empty camp. Jean Patou knew that tall, stoop-shouldered figure even at this distance, and for an instant he fingered his long rifle yearningly. It was lighter now. Silhouetted against the sky line of unbroken whiteness, the captain was a perfect target. A single, well-placed shot, and Jean Patou's troubles would be over. With Captain Martin gone, he would stand trial willingly. His friends would testify. And Marie—— They knew Jean Patou was not a killer. He would not, could not, shoot a man down in cold blood.

"I am glad I don' shoot dat big captain, Mutt. By gar, he ain't 'fraid, dat feller. You seen him, ain't you, *chien?* He walk one, two, mebbe, t'ree hunder' yard in the open to where we camp, an' he know Jean Patou bad feller in the fight. Too bad he like my Marie! Some day I have to keel heem. Too bad."

So it was with Jean Patou; always, he gave every man, even his enemies, their just due. Patou shrugged expressively, and finally slipped swiftly away among the gray shadows toward the mist-blurred mountains; and, close at his heels, so close that the back strap of the man's bear-track snowshoes brushed his black nose, followed Mutt, the wolf dog.

Jean Patou had learned his lesson. He took no more chances. Still, he could not pull himself away, altogether, from Caribou Flats. The holiday season was on. On Christmas Eve he crouched on a sheltered ridgetop overlooking the town and hearkened hungrily to the bursts of music, the shouts of joyous laughter. And his heart was sad. For always Jean Patou was the life of these holiday parties. And the dog, sensing its master's sadness, pointed its nose to the leaden sky and howled dismally. Later in the night, the fugitive stole into town, drifted, wraith-like, through the streets, thieving warmth and comfort from brief glimpses of happy people grouped about open fires. Not until the last light had been extinguished did he go away.

The golden sun and chinook winds of early spring found Jean Patou and his faithful companion two hundred miles to the north in a snug little cabin on the wooded shores of Winijou Lake. These few short months of loneliness had wrought many changes in Jean Patou. His wide shoulders were stooped. His body was thin; cheeks haggard; eyes listless and dull. The

smile had left his lips, to return only at rare intervals in response to the dog's frantic efforts to engage him in play. And this great change had come about quickly. Within a single short week. And it was not due, alone, to his unfortunate situation. There was bad news of another sort. Periodically, during the winter, Patou had visited a friend in the near-by settlement at Cojjer River who was a native of Caribou Flats and heard regularly from a brother there. And from this friend, Jean had learned many disturbing things. Foremost among these was that Marie had apparently, at last, given in to her father and Captain Martin. It seemed that, should he be proved a murderer, their marriage would be automatically annulled. Such was the law. And the police, under Captain Martin, were redoubling their efforts. Rumor had persisted that the fugitive was hiding in the Cojjer River country, which rumor was, of course, the truth. And Captain Martin, in order to leave no stone unturned in his conquest of Marie Gironde, had obtained a transfer to the Cojjer River district so that he might, personally, follow the search for Jean Patou. And this was not all—Marie was accompanying the captain to Cojjer River.

Even now, they were on their way, traveling fast to avoid the spring thaws. And Jean Patou, although his heart was now filled with bitterness and a great hate toward his girl wife, daily haunted the Cojjer River trail. He could not have told why he did this. Forewarned, he should have fled, he knew. But, he wanted to see Marie, even though she was lost to him. And he cared not, now that she was no longer his, for freedom. Life meant nothing to him. Perhaps she had really come to love the captain? If so, it might be best that he allow himself to be captured. This would, at least, mean freedom for her.

Day after day, he stood on a wooded slope overlooking the shallow, treeless valley through which ran the Cojjer River trail, waiting and watching.

On the fifth day, his patience was rewarded. A tenuous, gray blur at the far end of the valley developed into two dog teams. Even at a distance, Jean Patou recognized Marie's white huskies. He watched them pass, a bitter smile on his lips. Marie led the way. She was half a mile in advance of Captain Martin. The watching man wondered at this. Evidently she had maintained this killing pace all the way from Caribou Flats, for both dog teams were about petered out. And Captain Martin himself was in the last stages of exhaustion.

Jean Patou watched the teams out of sight. And—for long after they disappeared—he continued to wonder. It was still a good day's journey to the settlement at Cojjer River. She was hurrying, frantically. Why?

So engrossed was he that he did not notice the sudden change in the weather until he reached his little camp on the lake shore. Then, he knew, abruptly, that the sun was gone. It had turned bitter cold. Black clouds gathered sluggishly. There was no wind. The air was still, and a vast silence reigned, complete and breathless as a night mist. Jean Patou knew the signs. Snow! A blizzard, probably. Winter invariably died hard in this Northland, and these late storms were often terrible ones.

Patou's first thought was of Marie. Skilled on winter trails as she was, she might, ordinarily, be counted upon to look out for herself. But, this was different. In a storm such as this one bade fair to be, the only chance of safety, even to the hardiest, lay in making camp in a well-protected spot and waiting until the blizzard had spent itself. But on the Cojjer River trail, there was no protected spot. Jean Patou knew. A hundred times had he passed over that trail. For fifty miles, not so much as a

cluster of scrub spruce offered shelter from the terrible cold that prevailed at this season of the year.

There was but one path to safety open for the girl and Captain Martin, and that was, to continue on to the Cojjer River settlement. And they could not reach it. Only a strong man, one inured through a lifetime of experience to northern winter trails, might hope to make it. Their dogs were tired. Marie, although well-equipped in every way, was but a woman. And Jean Patou's "woman's heart" broke abruptly through the film of sullen anger that held him, and his quick sympathies resumed sway. He would bring Marie to Cojjer River. What mattered it if she loved another? It was the way of life. She was a woman. Jean Patou was a Frenchman. And he was always ready to assist a woman—any woman.

Huge snowflakes were twisting silently down out of the dark skies when Jean set swiftly out over the Cojjer River trail.

It was snowing hard when night overtook him. A biting wind swept down out of the north. But he did not stop. The trail of the preceding dog teams was still discernible. The travelers would keep on until they dropped; Marie would know better than to stop. And his only chance of not passing them in the storm was to get close enough so that the snow could not hide the trail. Sheets of hurtling, icelike snow soon replaced the big, velvety flakes. It grew colder and colder. Head down into the wind, his body covered with a frozen, white blanket, Jean Patou plodded on, his keen eyes searching, searching this way and that. And close at his master's heels plodded Mutt, the wolf dog, his thick fur snow-plastered, his yellow eyes alert, like his master's.

Suddenly, the dog stopped in its tracks; queried the icy wind with uplifted snout, then howled dismally. Jean Patou mumbled understandingly through his ice-coated beard. A dozen yards farther on he stumbled over the body of a dog. Martin's dog. The beast was dead. Frozen. Bits of harness still clung to the frozen body, indicating that the unfortunate beast had been hastily removed not to hinder the last efforts of its companions.

Within the next couple of miles, two more dogs were found. And then—a tangled, snow-covered mass in a razor-backed drift! A dog team! And even before his half-blinded efforts uncovered it, Jean Patou knew that somewhere in the snow near-by he would find their master. Dogs will never stop, will never give up the struggle, until death overtakes them or until their master stops or gives up. It was Marie! Face down on the sled she lay. She was still conscious. Her eyes fluttered open as Patou gathered her up in his arms. "Fin' him, my Jean," she whispered, "Captain Martin——"

A dull hurt settled about Jean Patou's heart. At the risk of his life he had saved this woman who had once been his wife, and whom—deep in his heart—he still loved with a great love. She knew this. And yet, her first words besought him to save that other man's life. That cowardly wretch who did not deserve to be called a man, for had he not passed her on the trail? Of a surety, the cur had done that very thing. For, when the storm struck, Marie had been leading the way, and, back there, when he had last been able to make out the sled tracks, she had still been leading. He, Patou, had not passed Martin; therefore, the captain had gone on, selfishly seeking his own safety and leaving the woman he loved to perish in the snow. Marie must know this, too, or——

"He has gone on, dat captain, eh?" Jean Patou asked roughly.

The girl nodded. "Yes," she said, "but he cannot go far. He has but three dogs. Most surely will he become

lost. But you will find him, my Jean and——"

Patou shook his head slowly. *"Non,* let him die, that rat," he said. Then, noting the pitiful concern on the girl's white face: "I cannot leave you, *chérie,"* he explained, "I——"

"But no, my Jean, think not of me. For, see, I am warm. It is only that I am so very, very tired. I will rest, here in the snow, until you return."

Jean Patou's frantic thoughts sought for other arguments. But he could think of nothing. It was evident that Marie loved Martin with a great love, a love far greater than she had ever bestowed upon him. Gradually, the hurt about his heart diminished and was replaced by sympathetic tolerance. Who was he to question the ways of Providence? If Heaven had seen fit to instill into Marie Gironde's heart this great love for Captain Martin, what right had he, Jean Patou, to question? On the other hand, by saving the captain's life he would be working hand in hand with that Providence who so beneficially controlled the affairs of men; and, too, the saving of Captain Martin's life would bring happiness to Marie.

After covering the exhausted girl warmly, Jean Patou started away, into the face of the blizzard.

Something less than a mile farther on, he stumbled upon Martin's prostrate body. Literally stumbled. For the captain's team had gone on and, in the blinding snow, Jean might easily have passed that huddled shape. He found the captain's diminished dog team near by. They would have gone on had not one of their number dropped dead in the traces. Bundling Martin's body on the sled, Patou harnessed Mutt in place of the dead dog and returned to the spot where he had left Marie. She was sleeping soundly, buried between thick layers of warm fur.

Much against his will, Patou then turned his attention to Martin. Exposed as he was to the driving force of the blizzard, Jean was unable to determine accurately the true state of the man's condition. The big fellow was still breathing. One unmittened hand was frozen. He was completely exhausted. That was all. Half an hour more, though, of lying there in the snow, and Marie's husband-to-be would have become food for the wolves, Patou told himself.

Sight of that hawklike face, evil even in the repose so closely bordering upon death, filled Jean Patou with vague regrets. Just why had he done this thing? Why had he saved this man's life? For Marie? He shrugged his snow-covered shoulders doubtfully. Maybe, yes. Maybe, no. But it was done, and having thus far so faithfully followed the rôle of good Samaritan, he would see it through.

Although the thick curtain of fast-falling snow transformed the white barrens into a gray-white wilderness with dimmed borders, Jean Patou knew that the settlement at Cojjer River could be little more than a half dozen miles distant. Truly, Marie had done her valiant best. Within another half-dozen hours she would have reached her objective. Scooping a deep hole in the snow, Jean Patou huddled the three remaining dogs together and fed them. Then, he placed Martin's unconscious form on the sled close beside the sleeping Marie, and started away in the storm toward Cojjer River.

At the end of the first two miles, both of Martin's dogs stopped in their tracks. They were dead by the time Jean Patou's had slashed the harness that held them. "Well, Mutt, she is up to me and you now, eh?" said Jean. The big dog's snow-covered body wriggled an affirmative. Jean Patou fashioned a rough harness out of babiche thong, looped it about his own broad shoulders, and, together, he and Mutt drew the heavy sled bearing the uncon-

scious forms of Marie and Captain Martin.

Eight hours later, Jean Patou, a haggard-faced, snow-covered automaton, plodded into Cojjer River. It was early morning. The blizzard still raged with undiminished fury. Patou made unerringly for the little cabin on the outskirts of the settlement where his good friend, André Lalonde, was just rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

Patou pushed on into Lalonde's cabin, hauling the heavily laden sled with him. In short, jerky sentences he told his story; then, even as André Lalonde hurried toward him, Jean fell forward upon the floor in a state of complete exhaustion.

In the days that followed, Jean Patou was a very sick man. The kindly American doctor from the mission was frankly mystified. For Jean Patou was possessed of a splendid body. Physically, there was no good reason for his continued illness. There was something else, the doctor told André Lalonde, something not physical that affected the heart and the head of the sick man. "Perhaps he does not will to live," the doctor finally suggested. "Maybe there is a great sadness in his heart."

And André Lalonde, knowing that this was indeed so, shook his shaggy head dolefully and groaned aloud.

In an adjoining room, Marie lay, slowly recovering from her terrible experience.

While Jean Patou was still a very sick man, Marie was able to be up and about.

It was evening of the sixth day when she took the good doctor's place at Jean's bedside. Although the sick man did not regain consciousness within that dismal span between dusk and dawn, the following morning when the doctor appeared, he was amazed at the great change for the better in his patient. Seemingly, the girl's mere presence had rekindled the spark of life in Jean Patou.

Two days later, Jean awakened weak, but normal at last. He looked up into Marie's white face. Immediately, he closed his eyes. Was it, he asked himself, the pleasure of Heaven to make sport of him? Was it merely to look upon the face of this woman who had proved untrue to him that he had fought his way back into this world of unpleasant memories? For, during those long, black hours some happy person had been at his side, holding him by the hand and urging him to fight, to fight for life!

Yielding to the resistless entreaties of that mysterious presence, Jean had fought. He had won. But to what purpose? Without this woman whom he loved, there was naught to live for. A shudder twitched through his weakened body. He closed his eyes tightly and willed to sleep. But a cool hand brushed his forehead. Warm lips pressed firmly against his stubble-covered cheek. A hot tear fell upon his face, another, and still another. Marie was talking—crooning love words, spanned by little choking sobs. Jean Patou opened his eyes then. But Marie did not see. Her eyes were veiled with tears. Still wondering, and seeking futilely for words to put this wonder into speech, Jean Patou became possessed of a pleasant sleepiness. So it was that, with his head pillowed in Marie's arms, her wet cheek pressed close against his, he went to sleep.

The sun was streaming brightly in through the half-open cabin door when he next woke. Marie, the bright-eyed, red-cheeked Marie of old, sat at his side. Her quick fingers fashioned a shapeless thing out of a skein of yarn. For a long minute, Jean Patou, fascinated, watched the rapid play of those swift fingers. Then he spoke. *"Hola!"* he greeted.

He was startled at the sound of his

own voice; it was husky, unnatural, and seemed to come from a great distance.

At the sound of his voice, Marie dropped her knitting, cried out, a sharp, glad little cry, and drew nearer. Impulsively, she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him. Reluctantly, he pushed those warm arms away. "The captain!" he cried. "He ees daid, maybe, eh?"

Marie jerked upright. She laughed. "*Non,* suspicious one," she said, "he ees not dead. But soon—very soon now—he may weesh that he were dead."

Jean Patou pondered this enigmatic statement. "What do you mean?" he finally asked. "Maybe, you don' marry heem, eh?"

Marie laughed merrily. "Most certainly not, oh foolish one," she said. "He—the Captain Martin—ees now in the hands of the inspector here at Cojjer River. As soon as he ees well enough to travel, he weel be taken back to stand trial for many of the very bad things he has done. No longer weel he trouble you—us—my Jean."

"You do not, then, love him?" Jean Patou asked, incredulously.

"But no, oh most foolish one," she said, stamping her foot; "never have I loved any one but you, my Jean. And yet, you have doubted me. I know."

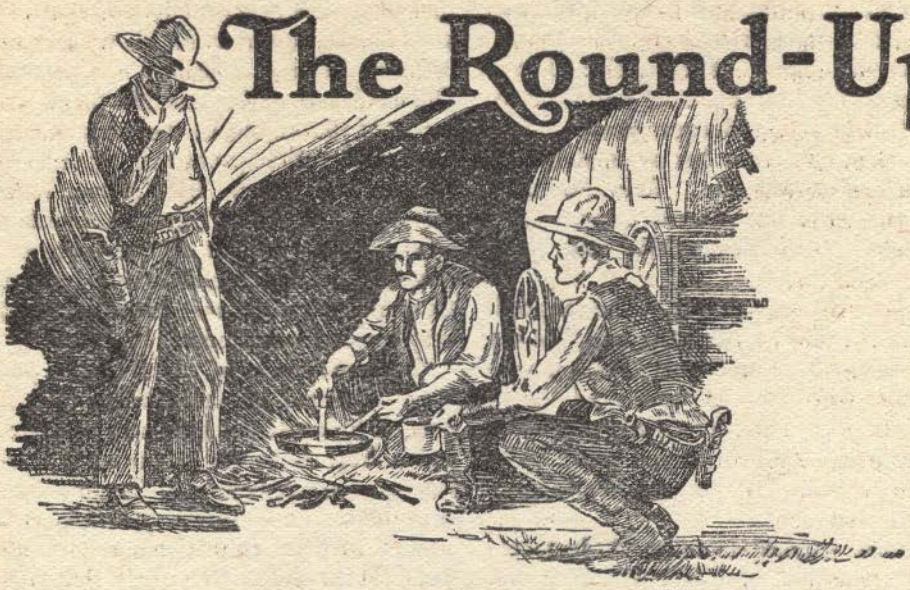
"But they told me——"

"*Ah oui*—I know. And I did promise to wed him, my Jean. But it was all because of you. To help you. And most surely, my Jean, would I have actually married him in order to secure that which I wanted. For, listen closely now: That man whom you killed, my Jean—Cole his name was, Adam Cole—was a murderer. Two weeks before that man Cole accidentally met death at your hands, he had killed his partner up in the Winijou country. Corporal Durward, one of Captain Martin's men, reported the killing to the captain, and presented positive proof that Adam Cole was the guilty man. But Captain Martin was in some way beholden to Adam Cole. So it was that charges were not pressed against the murderer. Instead, Corporal Durward met his death in a very mysterious manner.

"It is no time, now, for me to tell you how I learned of these things. It is enough to say that I did learn of them; and I learned, too, that Corporal Durward's report remained in Captain Martin's possession. It was that report I wanted to get. It was that report, my Jean, which would free you. For, of a surety, it is no crime for a man to kill one who is wanted by the law for murder. This was the reason I asked you to save Captain Martin's life even at the risk of your own. And, as I say, I would have married him—knowing that this marriage would not have been a true marriage before Heaven—in order to secure those papers. But, when Captain Martin was taken by the inspector, those papers came into the inspector's possession. And he has admitted, that very bad man, that he but frightened my father by holding an imagined crime over his head. And so, all is well, my Jean. I am your wife, and, I—I—love you."

During those few short moments, while Marie talked, Jean Patou had found a new strength. He made use of this new strength now. He sat bolt upright on the bunk and took his wife in his arms.

The Round-Up



BEFORE it gets too dark and you folks become too sleepy, let's fork the ponies, let 'em out, and do some antelope huntin'. Somethin' tells us we're a-goin' to have to do *some* ridin' if we rope and tie one to-night. However, we're sure that there's not one of you who's not game to try.

C. E. Harrington, Box 394, Billings, Montana, will lead us off first:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I am a steady reader of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and have something I would like to say in regard to antelope, as I have been listening to the talks in the Round-up in regard to their fleetness.

"While working for the Slaughter Cattle Co. west of Dalhart, Texas, in the Texas Panhandle, the boys I was working with and myself all had good saddle horses; a good many of the boys had horses that some people call steel dust, and others of the horses had fast racing blood in their veins, also. We had lots of chances on good, level ground, but none of the boys could run up on the wily antelope. There were three antelope roped by the boys that fall, by kind of loose herding them or following them into some pasture fence corner and then rushing them. They would dodge back past the boys on horses rather than crawl under or jump over a four-wire fence. I suppose they are afraid of barbed wire and that is the reason for this.

"That was in the fall of 1913. The Slaughter Cattle Co. had sold the brand to the Zimmerman Brothers Cattle Co., and, in the rounding up and rebranding the cattle, it took a good many men and horses, and five chuck wagons. I don't suppose you will have space for all of this, but you can shorten it to tell of what little I know of the fleetness of the antelope, if you see fit. Yours until the cows come home."

And now W. Van Buskirk, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, will show the way:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I am a regular reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Lately I heard some talk in the Round-up, where a man by the name of Frank Pierce claims to have outdistanced an antelope in two miles on a common

horse. I would like to say a word in favor of the antelope, for no common or even good horse can catch an antelope.

"I was raised on the Western plains of Nebraska and can remember when antelope were as plentiful on the plains in the early '80s as sheep on a sheep ranch. I have raced them many times, also seen them by countless numbers on the prairie provinces of Canada. Now I owned one of the fastest greyhounds I ever saw. She could pick up a jack rabbit with fifty yards the start in a fourth of a mile, and I have seen her run an antelope for five miles and not gain an inch on it.

"I wish some real old-timer who has seen antelope when they numbered by the thousands would give his experiences in connection with this noble animal that is the swiftest, either wild or domesticated, in America, if not in the world."

The final sprint will be conducted under the leadership of Harold Kinread, Kinread, Liberty County, Montana. Go it, Harold:

"Boss and Folks: I have been following the arguments in the Round-up regarding the relative speed of saddle horses and antelope. It is my opinion that whenever any one on a saddle horse is able to run up on an antelope it is because there is something seriously wrong with the antelope. He must be either awfully sick or have at least one broken leg.

"I have known antelope for twenty years and have had two for pets, which my sister and myself caught when we used to ride to school. They were not much bigger than lambs, and even then it took a good horse to catch them. I have chased antelope several times in a car, just to see how fast they *could* go. I *know* they can go fifty miles per hour for a short distance, and they can cover a mile at the rate of from forty-five to forty-seven miles per hour. It does not take long to go a mile when you are traveling that fast. I have never seen a horse around here that could go that fast, even without a saddle and rider on his back, and I want to tell you it takes a pretty good car to turn a bunch of antelope on the prairie.

"Another time I circled an antelope for over six miles, and at the end of that distance he was still going between fifteen and twenty miles an hour. Still, some people say they are short-winded. I would sure like to own a saddle horse that could do it."

What'd we tell ye! Had the right hunch, eh? Nothin' doin' in the antelope line to-night. And now that we're all pretty well winded, ponies included, let's back to fire and listen to "Tex" Harrison, Glenwood Springs, Colorado:

"Boss and Folks: You've all read Mr. Clem Yore's letter to Mr. Peter Lathrop, of Newark, New Jersey, and his invitation to Mr. Lathrop to come West and see our boys and girls in their natural habitat.

"Perhaps Mr. Lathrop will find it inconvenient to accept. Therefore, I will add another invitation to that of Mr. Yore:

"I expect to visit some friends near Morristown, New Jersey, next August, particularly a young lady from my home in Texas, who must be included in Mr. Lathrop's group of 'brutes and cowards at heart.' Therefore, if Mr. Lathrop would like to see a demonstration of said cowardice, he is invited to be my guest for a day at his convenience.

"To add zest to the occasion, I make the following offer:

"My young friend, who is just eighteen, will take her horse, which she rides daily, and put him through his paces for fifteen minutes. Then Mr. Lathrop

will attempt to ride him for a like period. If he can remain on that hurricane deck for just fifteen minutes, I will pay him one hundred dollars, and if he cannot do so he will make an apology to the boys and girls of the Rodeo.

"Will you accept this offer, Mr. Lathrop, or have you another plan by means of which you can demonstrate to the readers of this magazine that your fortitude is of a higher assay than your opinion of rodeo riders?

"In conclusion, let me add that, should you accept my invitation, you may bring your friends to see that you receive a square deal, and I assure you that, win or lose, you will be accorded every courtesy and all the respect due an honored guest.

"Please advise me of your decision, care of the Round-up.

"Thank you, Boss, for the time you've given me. Regards to Clem Yore."

Why more of you don't do what D. Bennet Newton, Kansas City, does—subscribe—is more than we can understand. It's so handy to have WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE delivered at your door promptly, when you arrange to get it that way. This is what Newton did:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: Here we are again with three dollars for six months of good ol' W. S. M., beginning with the March 9th issue.

"I hail from Kansas City, Jesse James' old stamping ground. Near where I live is his cave and the railroad which he used in his 'business.'

"Do you know, when I don't find a story by Roland Krebs or Ray Humphreys in W. S. M. I'm soured on the world for the rest of the day, and go around biting hunks out of the furniture."

Haven't had any shootin' here for some time back. Here is an ex-sergeant of the United States army, E. F. Harrison, 1226 Choctaw Street, Dewey, Oklahoma. Pull your trigger, sergeant:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Either make this circle larger or crowd a little, 'cause I want to horn in with a few words. I have been attending these said discussions for about six or seven years, and so far have kept my mouth shut. It has been pretty hard sometimes, especially when 'Miss Mexico' and others of her ilk let off steam. I wonder how they would like a Spanish bit and quirt to cure their own spells of temper and stubborn streaks? They sure get my goat.

"But what I want to say is about Corporal Newman's gun ideas. I took a trip in O. D.s myself—some ten years back—and used a gun some, but I used a gun before that, too. There is lots of game in this old U. S. yet to keep up men's interest in guns. In my section they are sometimes used, even, on men who get outside the law, so why shouldn't a man in 'civies' learn to use them? A Springfield is all right and a hard-shooting gun, but to guarantee a stop—man or game—I would prefer something that uses lead instead of steel.

"As for A. L. Cain's objections to the .45 automatic, well, they will hit just where they are pointed, hit just as hard as a .45 six with the same length barrel, and, if clean, won't jamb—or didn't for me on over one thousand rounds, and with a person unused to guns. I would rather he had a six than an automatic if he pointed it at me.

"As for Corporal Newman, I wore a couple of stripes myself for a while and know just how important he feels.

"So long. Just keep the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE as it is. I couldn't ask for better."

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through the Hollow Tree.

OVER the line and out from South Dakota, near the River Sioux and the Dakota Bluffs, is the stretch of range land in the northwest of Iowa. Here the cattle range begins.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although our home ranch was probably the smallest outfit I've ever broken a colt on, it was one of the best little outfits I've ever run across, and I've seen some outfits, too, for a young hombre. Our outfit was about one hundred and sixty acres, and it was as much of a horse ranch as it was a cattle ranch, with a few sheep thrown in. We ranged our stock up near the South Dakota line, near the Sioux River, and the Dakota Bluffs. I want to say right here, folks, that northwest Iowa, near the Dakota line, is as fine a range as you will find anywhere in the West. It was on my home ranch that I learned to ride the saddle, and ride it hard. I also did most of the breaking of the colts around our little outfit.

Iowa is just on the edge of where the West begins, and there is some pretty good range land just over the line from Dakota. I've been all over the Dakotas—North and South—and have worked on some good-sized outfits over that way. Out from Heppner, in southwestern South Dakota, is a nice little ranch of about twelve hundred acres that I was on about four years ago. Not so long ago I was with an outfit just out of Hermosa, also in the southwest of South Dakota, and for about a month I was connected with an outfit over near Black Hawk in western South Dakota, where I broke about thirty three-year-olds. I also connected up with a ranch over Underwood way, in central North Dakota. Am thinking about joining up with an outfit out of Fort Thompson, in South Dakota, for the spring round-up.

I've been all around through this section of the West—down in southern Kansas and Nebraska, and up through the Dakotas. Been in the Black Hills during the days of the '76 celebrations, and was in a mid-Western rodeo near Elk Point, South Dakota. I've been to the Frontier Days at Cheyenne, Wyoming, but never did any riding there. Was in a powwow at Rapid City last spring. I've met up with some tough horses in my young life, but I sure love the range life—it's the only life for me.

Now, folks, if there's anything you'd like to know about this part of the West, just drop a line to this young hombre of the saddle. I'd like to corral a few lines from Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, and South Dakota.

CLARENCE DUNHAM.

Gardner, North Dakota.

Old-timer, from Montana.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I guess that a lot of us old-timers are disappearin' fast, and when we go we won't come back to this here home range again. That's why we ought to get together,

old-timers, and have a little powwow among ourselves, and mebbe invite the young buckaroos to sit around the old camp fire with us. Yep, folks, I have rode the bucking bronc, I have roped the running steer, and I've wept for the dying cowboy, when he's said the end was near!

I hail from Montana—that's my home range—and I have a ranch in the mountains up in Chouteau County, in the north of the old Mountain State. Yep, up here in Montana we still ride and we still shoot, but we don't use the spurs as much as in the old days, and we keep our guns for the round-up.

SIM DODSON.

Care of the Tree.

In the mountains of Arizona.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is Wagoner, just about thirty-seven miles south of Prescott, the mile-high city of Arizona. The country hereabouts is rough range land, quite mountainous, and very beautiful. Farther to the south, near Phoenix, the country gets rather close to the desert, and in the summer it is pretty hot.

I'm a born Arizonan, and I've spent a good deal of my life breaking horses. I'm not a cowgirl—no—but I guess I might be called a girl bronc buster. I'm also fond of hunting, and in the mountains here are deer, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, California lions, and for small game, rabbits, squirrel, and valley quail. I love the wide-open spaces and would give a good deal to have the days back again when there were no railroads and everything was packed in by freight teams from California. BEATRICE, OF THE SOUTHWEST.

Care of The Tree.

Californian wants a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am building a forty-five-foot sailing boat and want to find a pard who has had a little sea experience in sailing. I'm not much over thirty myself, and want a pard between twenty and thirty—one who is endowed with the fifty-fifty spirit. I've sailed the seven seas since childhood, and have mariner's papers to back up my statement. I know the ins and outs of pearl fishing, and what my pard doesn't know, Ill teach him. Come on, you seafaring pards, let's hear from you.

CAPTAIN CARL SCHULTZ.

General Delivery, Oakland, California.

Oregon's trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've ridden the range, fished the streams, hunted in the mountains, and have done most everything that goes to make a real Western life. I'm a hombre of forty summers, and have spent twenty-two years of my life in the glorious Western country. Folks, I can give you the "inside" on the outdoor life of the West.

Get busy with your pens, folks, including you hombres from down Arizona way.

CHARLES GLASGOW.

Prineville, Oregon.

Canadian prairies.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Just wondering if a brass pounder way up here in Canada out on the prairies would have a chance to corral a few of the pals through the old Holla. I'm twenty, and have traveled from North to South and from coast to coast. I hail from Missouri, folks, so you'll have to show me, pals, that you can write a letter, and I'll sure enough show you that I'll answer.

FRANK J. STARR.

Canadian Pacific Railway, Kerrobert, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Into the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My wife and I and our two girls are planning to trek into the Southwest, either Arizona or New Mexico, this year, and we want to learn something of the economic conditions down that way before we leave our Michigan home. We're asking you Arizonans and New Mexicans to help us corral a little information.

WILLIAM TOENNIGER.

Station A, General Delivery, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Far North.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a hombre of thirty-three who can tell you-all about the lumber camps and the mines of the Far North. Yep, and the trapping in the snow-covered silences up North, too. Come ahead, folks, I've been all over this big domain—Canada. I want to hear from some of you folks down South and West. M. TESLO.

Prince George, British Columbia, Canada.

The lumber country of Alabama.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a lumberman of central Alabama, and I'd like to hear from the timber districts of Arizona and New

Mexico. Come on, you timber hombres, and lumberjacks of the Southwest, I'll tell you about the lumber districts east of the Mississippi. T. W. CHAVERS.

Sylacauga, Alabama.

In the direction of Arizona.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live in the windy State of Kansas, was born and raised in the Ozarks, and have lived in both Missouri and Arkansas. This summer I am planning to trek in the direction of Arizona, and I would like to hear from that part of the country before I hit the trail. Will you make it pronto, folks?

MRS. PAUL GARVER.

Route 1, Portland, Kansas.

North of the Red River.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Texas is my old home, but now I'm over the line into central Oklahoma, north of the Red River. I'd like to hear from my old stamping ground—Texas city, way down in the southeast of that big Longhorn State. I'd also like to hear from some of the chinchilla rabbit ranchers. You ranchers in the near-by States—Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and Colorado—let's hear from you.

MRS. RUTH L. MARTIN.

R. R. 5, Box 90, Tecumseh, Oklahoma.

Hiking southward.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a young girl of seventeen, and my pal and I are planning to hike South through the States, through Mexico, and into South America, where we are planning to make our new home. I have already traveled through the West, know the taste of the desert life, and have been up North through Canada and Alaska. It is the Southwest that appeals to me, and where I want to make my home.

I'm the sort of a tomboy who can box, shoot, ride horseback, and above all things I'm fond of hiking and having the stars for my roof. My pal and I hope to hit the trail before long, and we'd like to greet some of the sister Gangsters along the way. Let's hear from you pronto, girls of the Southwest. BUDDY.

Care of The Tree.

Colorado's trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have covered some twenty-five thousand miles through the South, the East, and the West, but I love the western States best. Of all the trails I've trekked, Colorado holds the biggest lure for me. I've also seen something of ranch life in Colorado, and can tell you what the big outfit is like that is just out of Hayden, in northwestern Colorado.

Just at the present my home is in California, and it's a beautiful country out here. I expect to see the Southwest—Arizona and Mexico—before very long, and would appreciate hearing from folks down that way.

JANE CREED.

2697 Havenscourt Boulevard, Oakland, California.

Over the road to the home ranch—North and South and West. There's always a place for the little badge pin on every hombre's vest.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

"I live in the Bear State—California, although I've traveled in almost every State in the Union, Canada, Mexico, China, Japan, South America, and the Islands. I'd be glad to give information concerning any of these places, also of Hollywood—and the pictures." This Gangster is Mike, care of The Tree.

"As I live on the farm and have a few spare hours, I'd like to have some Pen Pals write to me. I've lived mostly in the West, but can tell some about other States, too, as I've lived in twenty-two in all. I've had some real camping experience, too, folks, and am not quite a tenderfoot, for I can ride a bronc without hitting the dust. I'm twenty-four." Write to Mrs. Nellie Henderson, Waldorf, Maryland, folks.

"I'm keeping house for my brothers here in this big city of Chicago, but

I'm hoping to live on a farm again in some small place, away from the hurry and the crowds. I'm a widow, and I'd ike especially to hear from other widows and women who live on farms." This sister Gangster is Mrs. F. Meyer, 7722 Haskins Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Smiling Bill, Care of The Tree, is anxious to hear from the cowboys, rangers, or timber hombres who'd like a pard for the next several months. Smiling Bill is a good cook, hombres.

"I'm just fifteen, but I've covered a good deal of these United States," says Nomad Kid, 1307 Plum Street, Ottumwa, Iowa. He's hoping that a regular storm of letters hits the Corn State.

"Was a sheep-herder before I started to work a team of horses, and I've done a good deal of riding during my eighteen years," says J. F. Harrison, care of W. W. Fisher, Ranfurly, Otago, New Zealand. This hombre would like to hear from folks his age, from down Texas way.

Jean Latimer, 32 Calliope Road, Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand, is immensely interested in California and the southern States, and will be glad to hear from hombres down that way. He'll tell about his own beautiful country in return.

Charles A. Barlow, 1715 East Evelyn Avenue, Hazel Park, Michigan, is an old-timer who would like to find a pard between thirty and fifty to go on a fishing trip with him this summer. He would particularly like to hear from some one from St. Lawrence County or Jefferson County, New York. Also from the prospectors of the Gang.

Badger Gangster.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Can a loyal Badger join the Gang? I'm planning a trip out West this summer and want to learn a little more about that part of the country than I already know. I'd like to learn something about the trails in Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Oregon, Nevada, and Washington, from the Gangsters who live in these States. I can tell you-all of trips covering twenty-seven States, as well as anything you'd like to know about Wisconsin. Will also send post cards to all who will write.

W. I. STONE.

Care of The Tree.

"All you Gangsters who are well informed on South America, will you tell this home ranger something about the haunted copper mine in Chile? Come on, Gangsters from South America, drop a letter to me," says V. Vee Shattuck, care of S. Irwin, South Zanesville, Ohio.

"Last year the old Holla sure helped me rope a nice bunch of Pen Pals through the Southwest, and now I want to corral some forest rangers for Pen Pals—preferably in the Northwest, as I'm going to make a trip to Boise, Idaho, this spring, and would like to see something of the life of the ranger." This Gangster is A. D. Taylor, 902 Church Street, Nashville, Tennessee.

"I have been in nearly all the States in the Union and many foreign countries during my hitch in the army. I am twenty-five, and I came out West here to make my stake, but I am very lonely. I would like to write and exchange experiences with you-all," says Arthur L. Powell, Northern Pacific Terminal Co., Guilds Lake, Portland, Oregon.

"Have been a silent Gangster for a long time, and now I come with a plea for some Pen Pals from the West. I'd especially enjoy letters that come from large ranches. I'm a high-school girl and live on a farm of one hundred and twenty acres. I love the outdoors, and riding horseback is my favorite sport." This sister Gangster is Beatrice C. Kummrow, R. F. D. 3, Morrison, Illinois.

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.

WE are always glad to hear from our cowboy friends, who are for the most part sort of silent hombres. When they want some information, however, they don't mind speaking right up in meetin', as is proved by a letter we have just received from "Slim" B., of Glacier Park, Montana. Slim writes: "I'm interested in ranching down in the Argentine, Mr. North, and wish you'd open up a bit on this subject. I'm planning on hitting the trail East sometime soon and want to know what the fare is to South America from New York and the best way to get there. I'd also like to hear what the outfits down there are like."

So many chaps have asked for information about the continent to the south lately that we feel that many of our readers will be interested in this topic. There are several steamship lines that sail regularly from New York City to Buenos Aires. The fare varies according to the steamship, but ranges from three hundred and fifty to three hundred and eighty dollars, while the round trip fare is six hundred and eighty-five dollars and six hundred and thirty dollars respectively. If Slim wants to, he can sail from New York to Valparaiso and take the Transandean Railroad to Buenos Aires.

Slim will find that ranching on the pampas of Argentina is conducted on a much larger scale than it is in the Western States. Some estancias or ranches are positively feudal in extent, with thousands of live stock, several hundred riders, shepherds, and laborers. One ranch in Patagonia is as large as the State of Rhode Island. These estates cover from two to two hundred square miles and are further divided into large sections, bounded by wire fencing to limit the wandering of the herd.

In the pampas, ten thousand head of cattle is not considered a large number. In fact, stock raising in South America is carried on to a huge extent. According to the most recent figures, Ar-

gentine has thirty million cattle, fifty million sheep, and three million hogs.

Down in Argentine, Slim will find the old-time rustic ranch house of Montana transformed into a true country house, with beautiful gardens, polo grounds, tennis courts, and swimming pools. Nor will he have to travel far to see these outfits, for it is said that all the herds of Argentine are raised on ranches within one hundred miles of Buenos Aires.

While Slim is thinking of saying good-by to the Treasure State, another hombre is planning to hit the trail for that region. "What can you tell me about sweet Grass County out in Montana, Mr. North?" inquires Oscar H., of Chicago, Illinois. "I'm thinking of going out that way to settle and want all the facts I can collect before making such a move. Is that good country for live stock? What are the industries? Just where is this county located? What crops are raised? Are there any mineral resources? What is the biggest town?

Large areas of Sweet Grass County are naturally adapted to live-stock raising. While this is by far the most important industry, there are other large areas suitable for farming. Development out this way has proceeded faster than settlement, there being a considerable acreage of irrigated land awaiting colonization, and from twenty-five thousand to forty thousand additional acres of land that is irrigable. There has been practically no development of the mineral possibilities.

Sweet Grass County lies in south central Montana. The southern third is occupied by the high and rugged ranges of the Absaroka and Beartooth Mountains. Much of the surface of the northwestern part is covered by the Crazy Mountains, a bold, isolated range. The surface of the northeastern part is broken by the Cayuse Range of hills. These are the chief stock-raising districts and range areas. Both sheep and cattle are carried, the former predominating.

The Yellowstone Valley, which midway crosses the county, east and west, and the valleys of the Boulder, Big Timber, Sweet Grass, American Fork, and Otter Creeks are the chief agricultural areas. Alfalfa is the principal crop in the irrigated districts, winter feeding of live stock providing a market outlet. Wheat, both winter and spring, is the leading cash crop in the non-irrigated districts of the northern part, and occupies more than double the total acreage of hay, the second leading crop. Oats is in third place. Corn is still in the crop experimental stage, but results have been satisfactory. Dairying, bee-keeping, and swine-raising, are indicative of a growing interest in diversification.

Chromite is probably the most important mineral resource. A deposit has been traced from McLeod on the west fork of the Boulder River, southeasterly across the county into Stillwater County, a distance of twenty-seven miles. The deposit has been examined for less than four miles. Some chromite samples assayed were found to be suitable to the requirements of steel manufacturers. Some coal is found, and Iceland spar. Some exploration work on veins carrying lead-silver ore has been done in the Crazy Mountains, but has not been carried far enough to indicate the commercial importance of the prospects.

Big Timber, in the geographical center of the county, is the county seat, the largest town, and the chief distributing point. Considerable irrigated land lying a few miles north of it is awaiting settlement. Melville in the northern district and McLeod in the southern district are the chief interior points. Beautiful scenery and fine fishing are found in both the northern and southern mountainous regions. Sev-

eral dude ranches have been established near the Crazy Mountains.

New country, live stock, and ranches are always interesting to us Westerners, but the topic that Dave G. is keen about just now is prune raising. Dave says: "I've heard, Mr. North, that western Oregon is a fine region for growing prunes. Is this true? Are prunes hard to cultivate? What sort of soil is required? Tell me all you can about this industry, as I'm planning to take it up in the very near future."

Dave has not been misinformed, for western Oregon is a fine spot for prune growing, especially in the Willamette Valley. Nor is the Oregon prune fussy. It will thrive in your back yard or the prairie around Salem, which, incidentally, is the center of the prune-growing industry. It will grow also equally well in the hilly districts and the foothills of the mountains.

Prunes are planted one hundred and eight to the acre, generally twenty feet apart. Clean cultivation is the usual practice. Work begins early in February, due to the mild climate, and by the first of April, the country around Salem is white with blossoms. In early September prunes ripen and fall. Picking is in bushel boxes from the ground, and during the picking season trees are shaken lightly to bring down the fruit that is ripe. Picking continues two or three weeks and the average crop an acre is six thousand pounds of green prunes. The three tons of green prunes produce one ton of dried prunes. Prunes are evaporated in dryers found in every neighborhood. This requires from twenty-four to thirty-six hours. At packing houses the fruit is graded according to size and held for packing, mostly in twenty-five-pound boxes.

There is not space here for more facts, but we are sending Dave an address from which he may obtain additional information, and will be glad to send this same address to any hombre who is interested.

OVER UNTRODDEN TRAILS

MEN have always taken a great pride and zest in being the first to tread a new trail, but the paths which are the subject of this alluring title are for sheep. Thanks to the work of the forestry department of the Canadian government in preparing a path for their woolly majesties, there are thirty-six hundred sheep on pasturage on Hunter's Range, nine miles from Mara, British Columbia, where hitherto the feet of sheep have never trod.

The altitude of the range is about five thousand feet above sea level, and there are twenty thousand miles of range on which the sheep may wander until the snow flies, in late October or early November, when the flocks will be driven down. It is expected that thousands of sheep will annually hereafter have this wide field for pasturage. The only danger to be feared by the flocks are the grizzly bears which haunt the high ranges and which would, naturally, be their enemies.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send 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.

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.

SCARBRAUGH, MARION.—Thirty-two years old. Formerly of El Capon, California. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado. I love you and am still waiting. Please write to Alice, care of this magazine.

LEE, ARCHIE.—Last heard from in Texas, in July, 1927. Information appreciated by his brother, Harvey Lee, Lane City, Texas.

SMITH, ORVAL D.—Twenty-five years old. Was employed near Dean Lake, Ontario, in 1928. Information appreciated by G. L., care of this magazine.

KEANE, DAN, and CONROY, MART.—My foster father and uncle. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. I was born February 26, 1905, and adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Keane. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. T., care of this magazine.

LUNSFORD, CLAYTON.—Thirty-one years old. Blue eyes and light hair. Right leg smaller than left. Left home in Beattyville, for Winchester, Kentucky, August 26, 1928. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Ruth Harman, Dennard, Arkansas.

NEIGHBORS, W. J.—Last heard from in Pecos, Texas, in 1925. Six feet tall and has blue eyes. Information appreciated by Polly care of this magazine.

GARRETT, WILLIAM.—Was on the "Bridge" and lived in St. Joseph, Missouri. Remember the "Angelo"? Suppose you are married now. Let's hear from you. Your old buddy, care of this magazine.

WALLACE, CECIL E.—Blond hair, gray-blue eyes, and short. Has a scar on right hand. Writes with his left hand. Information appreciated by A., care of this magazine.

CECIL.—We left L. R. in 1923 and went out West. Brother is still in L. R. Please write to one who has always loved you. Cat, care of this magazine.

PARKER, FLORENCE D.—Of Denver, Colorado. Information appreciated by an old friend from Ozen Hill, Maryland, care of this magazine.

SCRUBBY.—Several years ago I wandered into Pittsburgh. Scrubby is the only name I remember. The only date I remember is January 29, 1901. Will any one who thinks they know me please write to Scrubby, care of this magazine?

TWING, JOHN WHITLOW.—Born in San Antonio, Texas. Was on the U. S. S. "Vestal," in 1923. Please write to your shipmate, Doggy, care of this magazine.

LINSELL, CHARLES.—Fifty-seven years old. In 1900 was a member of the British South Africa Police. Last heard from in Los Angeles, in 1922. Information appreciated by Samuel Gibson, 190 Duchess Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

GIBSON, FRANK.—Of Playdon, Sussex, England. Important. Please write to Samuel Gibson, 190 Duchess Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

ZIERACH, HERMAN R.—Last heard from in Akron, Ohio, twelve years ago. Please write to M. S. from Canada, care of this magazine.

KEAN, MIKE.—Son of John Kean, of Limerick, Ireland. Last heard of in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ten years ago. Information appreciated by his niece, Margaret, Mrs. William McNamara, Star City, Saskatchewan, Canada.

REYNOLDS, REX.—Do you remember Sandy, the little Jew? If you are still interested, please write to Sandy, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Benjamin Wood, Meyers, and buddies who served in Battery C and Battery D, Fifty-fifth C. A. C., Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1921-22. It is important that I have a sworn statement showing that I was treated in the Fort Scheffer Hospital in the first part of 1922. Please write to Victor Wanters, 318 Cleveland Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

VAN WINKLE, EVELYN.—Formerly of Morning Sun, Iowa. Last heard of in Keokuk, Iowa. Information appreciated by G. B. T., care of this magazine.

GORDON.—We are expecting you home soon. Please write to Mother, same address in Bangor, or care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, EDITH MAY.—Of Buffalo, New York. I have a gift that I have tried to get to you for ten years. Please write to your old chum of 1912, C. B., care of this magazine.

MORRIS, RICHARD.—Was in Company F, Twenty-third U. S. Infantry, in 1914-15. Please write to your old buddy, Henry L. Misamore, R. F. D. 1, Maunee, Ohio.

FIELDER, CHARLES and MAGGIE, and GEORGE TEASLEY.—Please write to Virginia Teasley DeBus, care of this magazine.

MOTHER.—Do you remember leaving me with Mrs. A. J. Wolverton, Ardmore, Oklahoma, in 1909? Please write to Virginia Teasley DeBus, care of this magazine.

LIDELL, ARCHIE.—With Headquarters Detachment of the Eighth Infantry, Army of Occupation, in 1921-22. Please write to Edward U. Canoose, 112 Columbus Avenue, Medford, Oregon.

STRAIT, ADELBERT.—Mother is getting old. No word from you since 1914. Please write to her, or to your brothers, A. W and F. R. Strait, care of this magazine.

HARLAN, FRANK LABAN.—Seventeen years old. Dark hair and blue eyes. Last seen in Wilmington, California, six years ago. Please write to your sister, Leona, care of this magazine.

MORRISSEY, MARY.—Twenty-one years old. Believed to be in Mount Vernon, New York. I lost your address. Please write to Mrs. Ed. Boyer, 637 Gee Street, N. E., Washington, D. C.

WARNER, OVERLTON ROBERTA.—When last heard from, in 1926, was living on First Avenue, Oakland, California. Information appreciated by Pearl McCoy, Route 2, Box 55, Stockton, California.

MARTEL, VIOLET.—Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1921. Information appreciated by an old friend, Pearl McCoy, Route 2, Box 55, Stockton, California.

IRBY, MRS. HELEN, nee WILLARD.—Information appreciated by Mrs. M. M. Watson, 735 Third Street, Clarkston, Washington.

WHITTED, MR. and MRS., and children, JACK, RACHEL, and BLANCHE.—Please write to your old friend, Evelyn Whitcomb, now Mrs. M. M. Watson, 735 Third Street, Clarkston, Washington.

WHITE, HARVEY S.—Five feet, eight inches tall. Dark hair and eyes. Weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Last heard from in Belvedere Gardens, California. Information appreciated by Gerald M. Carroll, Wickenburg, Arizona.

HUNT, DELPHIA MIDDLETON.—Formerly the wife of Frank Hunt, of Walsh, Kentucky. Last seen five years ago, in Portsmouth, Ohio. Important. Please write to E. E. Stidham, Elfort, Ohio.

W. J. H.—I am at Kansing, K. Please write to R. E. A., care of this magazine.

TEMPLE, TOM.—When I last saw him, thirty years ago, he was living in Ohio. Last heard from two years ago, at Sacramento and Belden, California. Information appreciated by his nephew, William Humes, 508 East Fourth Street, Los Angeles, California.

P., EDNA HALE.—Please send for me. Write home to mother and tell her when you have work; she will let me know. Snooks, care of this magazine.

RHIAL, D R. P.—Sixty-two years old. Brown hair and eyes. Weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Last heard from twenty-one years ago. Please write to Mrs. M. L. Paul, Mercury, Texas.

HAMPTON, HARRY.—Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri, eleven years ago. Please write to Ora Stark, 608½ Towson Avenue, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

SHEILER, MRS. NELLIE.—Forty-eight years old. In October, 1899, she was living in Monroe, Iowa. Information appreciated by R. E. S., care of this magazine.

DAVIS, MRS. AGNES.—Last heard from in San Jose, California. Please write to Catherine Ewart, care of R. G. Cranmer, 1509 Fourth Street, Snohomish, Washington.

TURNER, JOE.—Please let us know if you are all right. Everything here is O. K. Please write to your daddy or to your uncle, F. E. Turner, Donovan, Illinois.

GORDON, CHARLEY JOHN.—Brought up in an orphanage at Fargo, North Dakota. Last heard from in Omaha, Nebraska, during the World War. Please write to your brother, Lowell Lee Gordon, care of this magazine.

PACTON, DANIEL.—About eighteen years old. Blond hair and blue eyes. Worked on a farm near Austin, Minnesota. Please write to your sister, Mary Kinann, 1509 Eleventh Avenue, South, Fargo, North Dakota.

HARRISON, CHARLES EDWARD.—Formerly of Hannibal, Missouri. Last heard from at Hot Springs, Arkansas. Please write to your sister, Bellina, care of this magazine.

PURCELL, JOHN E.—Five feet, eleven inches tall. Last heard from at Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in February, 1923. Information appreciated by his brother, M. J. Purcell, Detroit, Michigan.

SHERMAN, FRED; wife, EDITH, and daughter, FRANCES.—Left Fairmont, West Virginia, in 1910, for Goldfield, Nevada. Information appreciated by his nephew, Robert M. Sherman, 158 East Market Street, Akron, Ohio.

PATTERSON, HOIT SELMAN.—Last heard from in April, 1927, at Fort Harrison, New York. Please write to Frances, same address, or care of this magazine.

MEL-O-D-BUD.—Please write to Brown Eyes, same address as in 1925, or care of this magazine.

MILLER, C. A.—I have important news for you. Please write to Edith Koons, same address or care of this magazine.

SPILLMAN, ERNIE.—Formerly on the U. S. S. "California." Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. Please write to Mary E., care of this magazine.

WALTER, JOHN F.—Five feet, eight inches tall, and wears glasses. Last letter written the third of September, 1925, from a Y. M. C. A. camp at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. We are all lonesome for you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

LESTER, HARRY.—An engineer. Sailed from Durban, South Africa, in 1919. Information appreciated by his sister, Hetty Konkle, 98 East Street, Buffalo, New York.

COLLINS, FAY.—Formerly a captain in the U. S. Cavalry, stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, and other stations on the Mexican border. Last heard from at Long Beach, California, in 1928. Information appreciated by J. C. T., care of this magazine.

REEVES, OTIS.—Believed to be in San Angelo, Texas. I need you. Please write to your friend, M. C., care of this magazine.

COX, A. B.—Fifteen years old. Last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by Eleanor French, Route 2, Mount Pleasant, Tennessee.

YOUNG, WILL or BILL.—Information appreciated by his niece, A. R., care of this magazine.

BURNS, SHORTY.—Please write to E. J. R., care of this magazine.

CARLISLE, A. E.—Please come home, or write for letter. Mother, care of this magazine.

SEXTON, MARK.—Twenty-one years old. Five feet, four inches tall. Brown hair and eyes. Last seen in McAlester, Oklahoma, in November, 1928. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. K. S., care of this magazine.

KOLEKOSKA, MRS. STELLA.—An Austrian. Last heard from in Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by her niece, Mary D., care of this magazine.

GRACE C.—If you remember "Stubbie," please write to M. W. S., care of this magazine.

WHITNEY, WILLIAM J.—Last heard from in Medford, Hillside, Massachusetts. Father and mother are dead. Please write to Rose, care of this magazine.

RUBIN, ARCH.—When last heard from, in 1926, was living on Charlotte Street, Kansas City, Missouri. Remember Wichita? Please write to your old friend, Mary, care of this magazine.

ROBINSON, FRANK.—Fifty-four years old. Six feet tall, brown hair and blue eyes. Last heard from at Devil's Lake, North Dakota, nine years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Gar Robinson, Box 84, Effie, Minnesota.

JACKSON, EDMUND.—Last heard from at Detroit, Michigan, in 1919. Please write to Ella Jackson, 1111 Roberts Street, Augusta, Georgia.

BRANOM, R. G.—Formerly of Headquarters Battery, First C. A. C., stationed at Fort Randolph, Canal Zone. Do you know where Shanty Irish Duffy is? Please write to S. of Headquarters 65, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Please write to Gladys, care of this magazine.

CHANDLER, FRANK.—Was fifteen years old in 1909, when he left home with a boy named Solveson. Black hair and blue eyes. Left hand scarred on palm. We are all living here. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Hazel West, 345 East Fifth Street, Emporium, Pennsylvania.

TRIMMER, HATTIE.—Last known address, Halstead Street, Orange, New Jersey. Do you remember the couple who corresponded as Dear Girl and Dear Boy? If possible, please send Girl's address to Friend, care of this magazine.

CLIFFORD, JOSEPH WILLIAM, and wife, **HALLIE ADAMS.**—Left Upper Alton, Illinois, for Colorado, forty years ago. Information appreciated by their son, Roy, 3030 C Street, San Diego, California.

THOMAS, STANLEY, or MELVIN STANDROD.—Twenty-two years old. Five feet, seven inches tall, one blue eye and one brown. Plays a banjo. Left home, in Pueblo, Colorado, December 30, 1928. Wife is ill and needs him. Information appreciated by Mrs. Betty Thomas, 231 East Fourth Street, Pueblo, Colorado.

BOND, CARL.—Lived in the first-floor apartment on the corner of Division and State Streets, Chicago, Illinois, in 1923. Information appreciated by an old buddy, Gordon MacAllester, 1029 Wilson Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

CROSS, JOE H.—Eighty-two years old. Was in Grantville, Kansas, in April, 1872. Last heard from in La-Crosse, Wisconsin, in November, 1875. Information appreciated by his brother, Lester B. Cross, Russell, Massachusetts.

DeFORCE, LAURA.—Of San Francisco. Do you know anything about Joe? Please write to Lester B. Cross, Russell, Massachusetts.

SMITH, GUY W.—Last seen in Port Arthur, Texas. Please write to B. R. Holden, Port Arthur, Texas.

HACKETT, or STANLEY, MRS. CARRIE, and children, **CLYDE, LORA, HESTER, ETHEL, MARY,** and **ALICE.**—The children's ages range from twenty-eight years to fifty years. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary Schwab, nee Stanley, 1205 Lowery Street, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

PHILLIPS, WILLIAM BENTON.—Left Steubenville, Ohio, in 1876. Last heard from in Chico, California. Information appreciated by his sister, M. E. K., care of this magazine.

RANKINS, BENJAMIN.—Fifty years old. Five feet, six inches tall, light hair, and blue eyes. Married Jennie Keppler, of Bridgeton, New Jersey. Last heard from in Altoona, Pennsylvania, thirty years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Georgianna Garrison, 848 South Street, Pottstown, Pennsylvania.

ST. HILAIRE, ROBERT E.—We found your son, Robert, who is very anxious to hear from you. Information appreciated by his nephew, Charles St. Hilaire, care of this magazine.

ST. HILAIRE, EDWARD.—Last heard from in Portland, Oregon, in 1925. Mother is sick and needs you. Information appreciated by his brother, Charles, care of this magazine.

PILKINTON, CHARLIE.—Last heard from at Spear, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Myrtle Slusher, Route 2, Blossom, Texas.

HALL, RALPH WALDO.—Forty-two years old. Formerly of Salina, Kansas. Was employed as cook by the dining-room department of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad Co., in July, 1923. Later employed by the Union Pacific Railroad Co., as chef of their eating house at Green River, Wyoming. Left there in April, 1924. Information appreciated by Relatives, care of this magazine.

BROWN, LEON S.—Thirty-eight years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Left Wichita, Kansas, November 6, 1928. Information appreciated by Wife, care of this magazine.

PERRY, LUM, or C. H. PERRY.—Sixty years old. Dark hair, blue eyes, and six feet, two inches tall. Last seen in Tulsa, Oklahoma, two years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, Ernest B. Perry, Caldwell, Kansas.

HESTER, R. F.—Forty-eight years old. Six feet tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. In 1910 was in Fort Worth, Texas. Sometimes worked as a locomotive fireman. Last heard from in 1911, at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Please write to Jackie, 112 South Mill Street, Ardmore, Oklahoma.

McCORMICK and BOZARTH.—My mother's name was Anastasia McCormick. She was born in Tipperary, Ireland, and came to the United States, on the White Star liner "Teutonic," when she was fifteen years old. Had one brother, Timothy, who was last heard from in Jersey City, New Jersey. My mother married John D. Bozarth, and she died in 1911. I would like to hear from any of my relatives. Please write to Mrs. Bernice Bozarth Hardin, Miami, Texas.

SHEETS, BOB.—Brother Bert is dead. Please write at once to Nellie, Pueblo, Colorado.

KJOREN, EDWARD.—Last heard from in Dryden, Ontario. Please write to William Kjoren, Route 6, Box 17, Sisseton, South Dakota.

SHIER, JOHNNY NELSON.—Twenty-four years old. Five feet, five inches tall, light-brown hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Victor, Colorado, in 1928. Information appreciated by N. A. Rickman, Jr., Box 447, Borger, Texas.

SHIER, FRANK HAROLD.—Light-brown hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Victor, Colorado, in 1928. Please write to your pard of Cardin, Mary E. Rickman, Box 447, Borger, Texas.

LANGFORD, CHARLES.—Sixty-two years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, gray eyes and hair. Has relatives in Oklahoma, California, and Nebraska. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. W. A. Minns, Vineland, Orange County, Florida.

STARK, LESLIE and CECIL.—Children of Robert and Sallie Stark. Last heard from in Olivette, Missouri, twelve years ago. Information appreciated by their cousin, Aurora Wagner Sumners, 2218 Fulton Avenue, Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, Ohio.

TAYLOR, STYNETT.—About thirty-six years old. Last heard from in Blackwell, Oklahoma. Married Myrtle Cynthia Kendall in 1910. Information appreciated by his daughter, Frances Taylor, now Mrs. H. T. Sims, 1307 Gillum Road, Kansas City, Missouri.

TREPANIA, MARY.—Last heard from in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1928. Information appreciated by Russell Bowser, Box 127, Kilbourn, Wisconsin.

BOWSER, WILLIAM.—Please write to Russell Bowser, Box 127, Kilbourn, Wisconsin.

NADIR, JACK MAHMID.—Turkish descent. Dark, curly hair and brown eyes. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, when he was employed by the Dodge Motor Co. Information appreciated by Phyllis B., care of this magazine.

BROYLER, JOHN.—Left Heppner, Oregon, for Missouri, in 1909. Information appreciated by Leona Robertson, Route 1, Box 21, Wilbur, Oregon.

DARBY, CHLOE.—Last heard from in Denver, Colorado. Information appreciated by her father, J. Darby, Puyallup, Washington.

ANDERSON, ALFRED E.—Please write to your sister, Mrs. Johanna Weeks, Box 63, Hobart Mills, California.

HUFFMAN, LEWIS.—Worked for the Hawley Pulp and Paper Mill, Oregon City, Oregon, seven years ago. Left Oregon City for Washington. Information appreciated by I. E. Putman, Toledo, Oregon.

EDWARDS, JESSE.—Worked in the West Virginia gas fields in 1912. Last heard from in Salem, South Dakota. Please write to an old friend, Malta R. Curper, Amma, West Virginia.

SHURM, NORMAN and FRED.—My brother and father. Lived at one time in Sheffield, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by Mrs. Gladys Gowins, Route 2, East Canton, Ohio.

CARTER, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.—My father. Married Lillie Shephard at Harrisbury, Illinois, and later they separated. Last heard from in 1896. Information appreciated by Purl Carter Baker 2412 West Brown Street, Alton, Illinois.

PEARL.—Do you remember Battle Mountain, the party, and Betty O'Neil? Have good news for you. Please write to Nancy, care of this magazine.

BORDEAUX, FRANK J.—Five feet, five inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Believed to be in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Please write to Route 1, Box 141, Anderson, Missouri.

LOFTON, J. L.—I miss your letters very much. Can't we begin again? Lucy B., same address or care of this magazine.

MARTY.—Would like to see you again. Is W. E. Brown still with you? Still living in the same place. Please write to Lucy B., care of this magazine.

HARRIS, EDGAR Z.—I wrote to the old address, but the letter was returned. Please write to your old pal of the Forty-second, Jesse Burklow, Box 845, Wharton, New Jersey.

TICE, HAZEL, EDWARD, LEONARD, and BENNETT.—Were placed in an orphans' home in Marietta, Ohio, about 1900. Have good news for them. Please write to George Phillips, 202 Twenty-first Street, San Angelo, Texas.

BUKEY, AUSTIN.—You are always welcome home. Please write to Mother and Father, care of this magazine.

REID, MARGARET.—Last heard from when at the Peralta Apartments, Fourth and Jackson Streets, Oakland, California. Information appreciated by Earl R. White, 517 East Cleveland Street, Porterville, California.

FISHER.—Will descendants of the Fisher family, early settlers of Virginia, please write to B. W. Melrose, Route 5, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma?

HOWARD, E. D.—Had a leg broken while working in oil fields near Long Beach, California, in 1923. Last heard from in Carthage, Missouri, and Los Angeles, California, in 1924. Information appreciated by J. F. M., care of this magazine.

ATILANO, JUAN and AURELIA.—Information appreciated by Vicente Garcia, Box 832, Apperson, Oklahoma.

McMORRIS, JOE.—Your friend in Kanima, Oklahoma, has a message for you. Please write to A., care of this magazine.

STODDARD, PEARL.—Last heard from in Jackson, Michigan, in 1920. Please write to Bill, care of this magazine.

REED, TONY E.—Information appreciated by Lillian Hilard, Camden, Arkansas.

CRETHERS, or CARRUTHERS, D. O.—Last heard from in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1928. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. J. H. Crethers, 325 North Pennsylvania Avenue, Lansing, Michigan.

CAMERON, HATTIE.—My mother. I was placed in an orphans' home at Saginaw, Michigan, in April, thirty-three years ago, and later adopted from there by a Mrs. John Duprey. I would like to find my mother. Information appreciated by Mrs. Beatrice Bamberg, R. R. 3, Saginaw, Michigan.

POSTLETHWAITE, MRS. NANCY, or MRS. JOHN SAGE.—Left Hamilton, Pennsylvania, in 1863. Married John Sage, at Oquaka, Illinois, in 1867. Believed to have been in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1882. Information appreciated by her son, J. E. Postlethwaite, Box 865, Fort Meyers, Florida.

COOK, GEORGE S.—His mother lived in Illinois, and his father in Kansas City, Missouri. At one time he worked for the Chicago Northwestern Railroad, as a switchman at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and later for the Armour Packing House, in Kansas City. Married Cora Belle Bristol, and had two children, Alice Irene and Robert George. Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1917. Information appreciated by his son, Robert George Cook, R. F. D. 2, Box 345, care of Urban Golf Club, Whittier, California.

HARVEY, F. M.—Last heard from forty years ago. Information appreciated by L., care of this magazine.

PACE, MRS. JOHN, nee LIZZIE WALKER.—Lived in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, about 1921. Information appreciated by J. C. Thomas, Box 642, Brownfield, Texas.

GORDON, VIOLET.—You do not have to come home, but I would like to know where you are and how you are. Information appreciated by Mother, care of this magazine.

TEHCLE, HERBERT.—Formerly of St. Louis, Missouri. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1919. Information appreciated by T. T., care of this magazine.

PLANGOR, or PLASCKE, TERESA.—Of Youngstown, Ohio. Was in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1918 and married C. Atkins there. Later moved to Chicago. Information appreciated by J. C. Atkins, 474 Peterboro Street, Detroit, Michigan.

HEYER, HAROLD, CLARENCE BETTERLY, and FRED W. HAGEN.—Served in Headquarters Company, 362nd Infantry, Ninety-first Division. Please write to Henry C. Quade, Box 227, McCleary, Washington.

WINSLOW, HAZEL C.—Thirty-two years old. Five feet nine inches tall, dark bobbed hair, and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Came to Reedsport, Oregon, in June, 1928, from Pasadena, Maryland. Left Reedsport, December 28, 1928, alone, driving a car with a Maryland license. Last heard from in Phoenix, Arizona, in January, 1929. Information appreciated by Paul Lane, Reedsport, Oregon.

MOORE, HEZ.—Do you remember the girl you met at your uncle's, Dave Moore's, in Pleasant Plain, Indiana, in 1921? I heard Jess was dead. Please write to Dorothy Moore, Route 5, Box 368, Royal Oak, Michigan.

CHAMBER, FLORENCE and LONZO.—Mother and son. Lived in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with Lonzo's grandmother, Deloria Chambers. Left there twenty-two years ago. Information appreciated by his aunt, Josie Usmiller, 1704 South Kelly Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

"Don't be selfish"

CAMELS

Pleasure for all