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"DON'T! You'll make him the laughing stock of the place"

but when he started to play the piano . . .

WHAT a glorious night! Henri's quaint restaurant was crowded with joyful parties. Tonight, John Brent was giving a party for eight in honor of Helen Thompson's engagement. Dick Peters had recommended Henri's as a splendid place to dine and dance. And Dick was right.

"What's that in your pocket, Dick? Your will?" asked John.

"No, that's just some sheet music I bought on the way over," returned Dick.

"What in Heaven's name are you doing with sheet music? Going to use it as wall-paper?" exclaimed John.

"Why, I'm learning to play the piano. Didn't you know?"

"Oh boy! Listen to that! You couldn't learn to play in a thousand years."

Dick looked at John with an amused smile on his face.

"What would you give to hear me play?" he asked calmly.

"A ten dollar bill if you'll go up there right now and play that piano. What do you say?" exclaimed John with triumph in his voice.

"You're on," replied Dick, quick as a flash. "I'll take you up on that little dare. But not here—wait 'til we get home tonight."

"No, sir, you'll win or lose that bet right now. Come on, fellows, let's take him right up to the piano and we'll settle it here."

"Don't be foolish, boys, you'll only make us the laughing stock of the place," begged one of the girls.

Heedless of Dick's pleading, they dragged him to the platform and placed him at the piano. By this time the unusual goings on had caught the attention of everyone in the restaurant. Now Dick realized that he had to go through with it. So summing up all his courage and with a sudden burst of confidence, he broke into the chorus of the latest Broadway hit.

John gasped. He couldn't believe his ears. Everyone at the table sat in open-mouthed amazement as Dick sat there playing one snappy number after another. It wasn't until the regular orchestra returned that they allowed Dick to rise from the piano. Amid the din of applause, he went back to the table, only to be swamped with questions. But Dick refused to tell them the secret of his new-found musical ability, in spite of all their begging.

Going home that night Dick finally gave in.

"Well, John, I've put one over on you. I learned to play by myself, without a teacher."

"What? That's impossible! Tell me more."

Dick Tells His Secret

Dick then explained how he had always longed to be able to play some musical instrument. One day he chanced to see a U. S. School of Music advertisement offering a Free Demonstration Lesson. Skeptically he sent in the coupon. When the Free Demonstration Lesson came he saw how easy it was. Why, it was just like A-B-C. He sent for the entire course and almost before he knew it, he was playing real tunes and melodies. And the lessons were such fun, too. Almost like playing a game.

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Fortune Grabbers

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Cast Iron," etc.

CHAPTER I.

GRANDFATHER BRAWLEY'S JUNK.

THE friends and relatives of Tad Brawley could give fifteen reasons why he would never amount to much. First, he believed everything his Grandfather Brawley had ever told him. Secondly, he was confident that the old gentleman was not slightly crazy when he continued to perform sufficient assessment work to hold certain placer ground he had worked nearly fifty years ago. Thirdly, Tad was inclined to believe all the gold had not yet been mined, and so planned to follow his grandfather's footsteps. Fourthly, he was in love with Marie Westover.

Marie was eighteen. No man could keep his mind on Marie and on his work at the same time. As a result, the twelve or more young men who had lost their heads over Marie had also lost their jobs. Between the age of sixteen and eighteen the little blond riot had been engaged five times. Sooner or later the fiancé of the moment had to devote less time to Marie and more to looking for a new job, with the result that the engagement had been broken.

At the present time no particular young man had the inside track, and it looked as if Tad was leading the field. He believed that the way to win Marie, and then hold her, was to get her interested in him and his future rather than to interest himself in her future. Grandfather Brawley had once told him this was the most successful method of

winning a girl. The old gentleman must have known what he was talking about because among his possessions had been found the photographs of some forty belles of the period during which he was a maverick. Then the reigning beauty of the State had roped and branded him.

In the eyes of the socially prominent Brawley family any one of the four reasons given were sufficient to brand Tad as a failure at the start. The eleven other reasons why he was doomed need not be given, though they were mentioned to Tad frequently enough when the family lectured him on his ways. Grandfather Brawley had defended Tad as long as he lived, but since his death two years ago Tad had to defend himself. As he was doomed to failure anyway, the family could see no reason why the youngest member should not be given the worst of the deal when it came to splitting up the estate.

The old man's will had contained a peculiar clause, which read:

As my said family is showing signs of having too much money anyway, I leave my estate to them to split up as they please, well knowing that those who get the worst of it will be benefited in the long run. However, I give and bequeath to my grandson, Tad Brawley, what the rest of the family term, "my junk." As Tad seems to have a sentimental streak in his make-up, I believe he will appreciate this bequest.

The division of the estate was to be made on Tad's twenty-first birthday, when he would be of age and could decide for himself and not be hampered by a guardian. The family gave him a birthday party, and so that there would be no hard feelings on this great day it was agreed the division of the estate would take place the following day. As a matter of fact, the family had agreed months before on the division. And this without including the youngest member in the discussions.

The following day the family gathered in the big living room, and Conrad Brawley, the oldest brother, read the will. By sheer force of character he had managed to dominate every member of the family except Tad.

"We are gathered here," he said dryly, "to distribute the estate of our dear grandfather."

"Yeah," Tad thought to himself, "I can remember when you gave dear grandfather the bum's rush upstairs when swell company arrived because he used to murder the English language." Tad glanced up at the huge oil painting of Grandfather Brawley. While the others could only see a cold, stern face in the painting, Tad always sensed a friendly nod of approval when he studied it. Now, the stern lines of the pictured face seemed to relax slightly.

Conrad Brawley continued: "Sister Alice will retain the home and its furnishings, except grandfather's junk. She will also be given sufficient income to care for herself and mother as long as the two shall live."

"Fair enough," agreed Tad. The others nodded.

Then, beginning with himself because he was the eldest, Conrad read off the awards to the different members of the family according to age. Tad waited patiently for his turn. He was surprised to find himself more interested in the way the others planned to treat him than in the amount of money that he would receive.

"We now come to Tad," Conrad said. He glanced toward his young brother. "You have managed to get out of hand, Tad," he explained. "You don't seem inclined to follow the course of other members of the family, and for that reason we have tried to award you that portion of the estate most suited to your inclinations." He paused and his eyes narrowed. "Different provision might have been made for you had you shown an inclination to listen to my ad-

vice. Your love for the Westover girl is one thing. Mind you, I'm not inferring she is not a nice girl. She is merely brainless, fickle, and unstable. Her social position is considerably below ours, and——"

"Granting she's fickle, brainless, and so forth, which I don't," Tad interrupted, "she's far ahead of most of the girls I've met in our crowd."

"We'll not argue the point," Conrad Brawley continued, "but the fact remains that you, yourself, don't know your own mind. Eventually, you will steady down and become more practical. Then the rest of us will gladly give you a start and——"

"I get the idea," Tad interrupted; "you're sort of holding out on me now because you think I'm going to go through everything in a year or so and be busted. Is that it?"

"Not exactly, but we know that if you win this Westover girl it will be largely because of the wealth she thinks you have and that she will leave you the moment she finds you are poor," Conrad explained.

"That's not much of a compliment to my peculiar style of beauty," Tad observed cheerfully.

"Miss Westover is not interested in any man's beauty or character, my dear Tad," the elder brother explained. "If I were your age, I might have fallen in love with her——"

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," Tad cut in, "You always were too dignified and conservative to see the merits in a peppy little blonde. The clinging-vine type for you every time."

"I have judged the girl through the eyes of a mature man," Conrad Brawley said with some dignity; then, feeling that he was getting the worst of it in the exchange of words, he resumed: "As I was saying, we divided the estate with your inclinations in view. The placer claims on the Tulameen Creek are yours."

"Mmmmm!" said Tad thoughtfully. "And just what value did you place on the claims?"

"Grandfather Brawley's own valuation—a hundred thousand dollars, Tad," Conrad answered.

"How much will you give me for them?" the youth countered. "They may be worth millions—but there's the gamble. What you are taking is sure-thing stuff in dollars and cents, but you're passing the gamble to me."

"Well—er—ah—your faith in what Grandfather Brawley used to say——" faltered Conrad. He was disturbed and slightly red in the face as a result of his brother's intent gaze.

"Don't stutter," Tad interrupted; "you're an honest egg at heart. You've just kidded yourself into thinking this is the thing to do. Let me think a minute. I may take you up on it. Let's see, what did that clause in the will say? The one about getting the worst of it."

Conrad read:

"'As my said family is showing signs of having too much money anyway, I leave my estate to them to split up as they please, well knowing that those who get the worst of it will be benefited in the long run——'

"Is that what you want, Tad?"

"That's it! There's plenty of food for thought in that paragraph. Grandfather was a wise old owl. It was hard to figure him at times, but in the end he was usually right—even if he did sometimes murder the English language. Hmmmmm. Shall I take a chance and accept?"

The family grew silent. The young man's eyes lifted to the oil portrait of Grandfather Brawley. Somehow, the eyes seemed to twinkle. Of course, it was pure imagination, but the head seemed to nod, the lips to say: "Go ahead, kid, take a chance. I did!"

"Well?" said Conrad, when he could no longer stand the silence.

"I'll accept, but there's a string to it. I know you're holding back some of the money that's my due, even if you figure the claim's worth a hundred thousand dollars. You figure I'll smash, learn by experience, then be of some value in the world. Instead of getting peeved," Tad continued, "I'm going to think you mean well. That's a poor compliment, about the poorest I know —to tell a man he means well. The trouble with you, Conrad, is that you judge everybody according to your own standards. You forget some men were intended to dig ditches; some girls meant to pound typewriters or handle telephone calls—like Marie Westover; some young fellows to learn trades, and others to head for the frontier. You forget all kinds of people are necessary to keep the world going. I'm cut out to be a pioneer, I guess. If I'm wrong, I'll have to start over again—busted. But I'm going to take the chance. I'm going to keep my faith in what Grandfather Brawley said about those claims, and I'm going to risk everything on his judgment. We had this in common: We looked alike and we understood each other. I was never ashamed of the old gentleman. You were. Here's what I'll do. Give me the claims and fifty thousand dollars cash, and I'll sign a paper for satisfaction in full and will never ask you for another dime as long as I live. Yes, and there's one more thing I want."

The family, about to heave a mighty sigh of relief over the ease with which they were settling with the headstrong cub, again grew tense. The last demand was probably something they did not want to satisfy.

"Yes?" Conrad managed to say.

"I want that oil painting of grandfather included in my share of the estate."

"Take it," said Conrad, almost fainting from relief.

"Yes, take it," said Alice; "I was going to put it in the attic just as soon as I took possession of the place."

"Just what do you plan to do with the claims?" Conrad asked. He was glad to get rid of the claims and keep the proved securities for himself. And yet, he could not forget Grandfather Brawley's years of faith in the claims. If they were of such great value, why didn't he mine them himself? That thought had occurred to Conrad more than once. The thought came again, and with it doubt. Suppose he was letting go a fortune? Suppose, after all, he was wrong, and this kid brother with the careless laugh was right? Suppose, as Grandfather Brawley's will had suggested, the man who got the worst of it benefited in the long run? Nonsense; thought Conrad Brawley. He had been right too many times not to be right in this instance. Nevertheless, he repeated his query: "Just what do you plan to do with the claims?"

"Work 'em," Tad answered.

"But you know nothing of mining. People who do know will make a fool of you," Conrad protested.

"Maybe so," Tad agreed, "but Grandfather Brawley said that when a man makes an enemy of Jones he makes a friend of Brown, and when some bird tries to cheat you, somebody else will come along and help you beat the cheat. It looks like a better life for a young man than sitting in a stuffy office, clipping coupons, getting fat and short-winded. What if I do lose everything, look at the fun I'll have! So long, folks, for the present. I'll see you all before I go."

Tad Brawley climbed the stairs to his grandfather's room. The rest of the house might show evidence of considerable wealth, but this room had been kept strictly to the simple tastes of the occupant. The room overlooked a pond bordered with small jack pines. The pond and ridge of pines were a reproduction of the view from the old man's

cabin window up on Tulameen Creek. A Winchester rifle hung over the door. This weapon had kept the Brawley cabin supplied with meat for many years. An old Colt .45 completed the firearms. His hunting knife, as sharp as the day he had last used it, was thrust into a sheath. In a cluttered closet Tad found more of his grandfather's "junk." There were the gold pen that had felt the weight of the family fortune, the sleeping bag, and the cooking utensils.

Tad next opened a very old trunk. It was made of hard wood, covered with leather and well banded and protected. The tray was filled with old letters, bearing stamps that would have thrilled a collector. Some of the stamps were fifty years old, and many bore the postmarks of foreign nations. Old Pat Brawley had formed friendships all over the world. The letters, too, were often addressed in a feminine hand. Pictures of girls in poke bonnets, and men wearing fierce mustaches and beards were numerous. There were pocketknives and pipes that Tad had never seen his grandfather use. These, probably, were gifts he had kept for sentimental reasons. Tad smiled as he realized the source of his own sentimental streak.

He dug deeper into the trunk, hoping, perhaps to find something that might hint at Grandfather Brawley's reason for keeping up the assessment work all these years. The last article he examined was a buckskin poke. Within the poke with two smaller ones. Tad spilled the contents of one into his hand.

"Gold!" he whispered. "Gosh, but it thrills a fellow! This kind of gold looks different than when you see it made into rings, watches, and money. Smooth, too, and flat. That indicates it's traveled far, according to what he used to tell me. Wonder what's in the other poke."

This metal was different. It was dull, yet not dull. It suggested silver, but it was heavier than gold. Few metals were that much heavier than gold. It was placer metal, too, and was of enough value to be hoarded away in a poke. Why hadn't his grandfather mentioned this before? Why hadn't he showed him the metal during those long confidential talks they had had during the months the old gentleman was fighting death? Did this explain why he had kept up his legal interest in the claims? Was this the reward to that member of the family who would follow the trail the old pioneer had blazed?

Tad pocketed the poke and hurried downtown. He located an assay office and dumped the metal on the counter.

"What's this?" he asked.

The assayer did not even make a test. His eyes lifted in surprise. "Where did you get it?" Then, without waiting for Tad to answer, he continued: "That's a foolish question. People who have placer platinum don't go around talking about it."

"Is that platinum?"

"Yes!"

Tad groaned. "I didn't know what it was, but I had hoped it was some kind of gold, or something."

The assayer gave every evidence of astonishment.

"My dear young man!" he exclaimed. "Don't you realize that while gold is worth from sixteen to twenty dollars an ounce, platinum is worth from sixty to ninety dollars an ounce—depending on the market and the condition of the metal?"

"You don't say?" Tad gasped. "I guess I'm like most people—to me gold is the most important metal in the world."

"Important, yes. It is the standard of values, but it is not the most precious. It is a good thing you came to me. I'm honest. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be as poor and happy as I

am. Take it from me, if you know where there's more of that, keep it quiet until you are sure of the title to the property and——"

"I'm sure of the title to the property," Tad interrupted. "It's been in the family for years."

"Then see that the property stays in the family. And when you do any mining, young man, see that you are on the job during the clean-up. This is placer platinum of the finest quality. There's not much of it comes just like this. During the war, when the Russian supply was cut off, both the British and American governments made a very careful search for platinum. Too late to be of use some was found, among other places, on a stream known as Tulameen Creek." Tad's heart skipped a beat. "But with the coming of peace there was less need of platinum. The governments were too busy with other things, and private capital seems to have been spent elsewhere. There's not as much money spent in mining as there should be, anyway. A fellow can locate a good prospect, then starve to death before money comes to help him develop it. People are suspicious of mines—there've been so many fake schemes. But, young fellow, hang onto that."

"I'll sure watch my step," Tad promised, as he paid the assayer for his information.

The young man left the office in a daze. Platinum! He could hardly believe it. But why hadn't his grandfather, who knew the value of all metals, taken more of this from his claims if it existed in paying quantities? Tad answered the question after several moments' reflection. Wealth had already caused certain members of the family to turn up their noses at less fortunate people. This sort of thing did not suit the old gentleman, who had known what it was to be hungry, broke, down, and almost out. More wealth would have made matters worse. Then there was the thought that possibly the grandfather had wanted whatever followed in his footsteps to profit by his act, but he did not want to hold possible profits as an inducement to any one to take the trail he had blazed. He wanted them to come of their own accord, as he had done.

Tad returned home to prospect further in the ancient trunk. Perhaps he might find a notebook or diary. But in this he was disappointed. The trunk yielded nothing except a small box containing rusty nails, and the notation:

These nails were packed into Tulameen Creek by me and removed from the sluice boxes forty years later.

The nails were square and entirely different from the nails used by recent generations. Tad eyed them with interest. These nails had gone in on his grandfather's back; served their purpose; helped him take a fortune in gold from the ground, and then had been brought out again, years later, for sentimental reasons.

"I'll keep 'em, too," Tad impulsively declared, little dreaming just what they would mean to him in the months to come.

The following day Tad was still prospecting when he heard his brother's voice just outside the door of his grandfather's room. It was thin, rasping, the voice of a man who was sure he knew the world and would not listen to argument from those he believed knew less than himself.

"No doubt of it, Alice, we'll have Tad on our hands in a year or two. But I'm giving him rope enough to hang himself. This thing will beat him one way or another. Then when he's properly humbled, when he's seen this Westover girl in her true colors, perhaps we can do something with him."

Tad flushed but made no retort. The words were not intended for him. "I'll show 'em," he growled, "I'll start now."

Then he changed his mind. Once his grandfather had told him never to put too much money into a mine until he was sure it was a mine. He waited until his brother and sister were downstairs, then he jammed on his hat and walked out. Without hesitation, he headed for the telegraph office, where he sent a telegram to one of the leading mining journals. It read:

WANTED: An expert in placer values to examine a property immediately. Wire the undersigned. TAD BRAWLEY.
5747 Ambleside, Seattle, Washington.

This done, Tad decided to spend the immediate future in putting his personal affairs in order so that he could leave on short notice if the engineer's report proved favorable. And part of putting his affairs in order was the inducing of Marie Westover to become tremendously interested in him and his affairs.

CHAPTER II.

PROSPECT HOLES.

THE day following the publication of Tad's advertisement he received twenty telegrams offering to examine his claims. Two days later he received three letters, and the fourth day a man called in person. It looked as if most of the mining engineers were either out of work or looking for a vacation on pay. The man who called was a tall, handsome individual. He was as straight as the proverbial arrow. His shoulders were broad, his voice deep and rich, his slow smile was decidedly winning, and his manner won confidence instantly. His name was Joe Meade, and had Grandfather Brawley been living he could have told Tad that Meade devoted his life to profiting by the romantic inclinations or the misery of others. He could have told him that on several different occasions he had blocked Meade's little games and, as a result, had won the man's undying hate. But, unwarned as well as inexperienced, Tad naturally accepted the man at face value.

"Brawley?" said Meade, after he had introduced himself. "A very dear friend of mine of that name died several years ago. He showed me much that I know of the mining game. I owe him more than I can ever hope to repay. His name was Pat Brawley. I don't suppose you were related, by any chance?"

Tad smiled all over. "Say, this is great!" he exclaimed, "Pat Brawley was my grandfather. His claims, which I have inherited, are up on Tulameen Creek."

"Well! Well! Well!" boomed Meade, shaking hands again. "The world is a small place. I just tingle all over to think I can, perhaps, in my small way serve the grandson of the man who did so much for me. Now listen, Tad—I'm going to call you Tad because I feel as if I had always known you—you were the old man's favorite, you know. What? You didn't know? I'm glad to be able to tell you that you were. You were the only one who really understood him. You're like him a lot, too. But, as I was saying, just wire all other applicants the place is filled. I'll go up there, look the property over, let you know what it is worth, and it won't cost you a dime."

"Nothing doing!" Tad said quickly. "I appreciate your motive, but you owe me nothing. No, you'll get your usual fee for the work."

Meade turned on his most winning smile. "My feelings are going to be hurt if you don't let me do something for you. I'll do it for expenses. Now, Tad, don't deny me the chance to do this little service. Think how you'd feel in my place. Why, hang it, I loved that old grandfather of yours! Everybody who really knew him loved him." Again he smiled. "Shake on it, kid, and do me a favor as well as yourself."

Tad did not know just what made him hesitate, but he shook hands on the deal against some mysterious inner warning. But this man, apparently, was so eager to do something that Tad's considerate streak got the upper hand. If Meade noted this brief hesitation, he ignored it.

"Now, let's go over the papers covering the claims, and I'll light out in the morning," he said eagerly. "I'll put on several good men to drive prospect holes, and in a month at the outside we should know whether you have a mine or just a hole in the ground. Well, good-by, Tad, I never expected a break like this." He patted the young man on the shoulder and again turned on the winning smile. In his pocket he carried a fair-sized check to cover expenses.

Joe Meade went directly to his room in the Olympic Hotel. A man as large as he, but lacking his handsome features, lay sprawled on the bed, his boots hopelessly smearing the snowy linen spread.

"How'd yuh come out, Joe?" he asked.

"The fool kid fell for it like a ton of brick. I knew he would. It pays to know the ins and outs of a situation; then it's a cinch. I gave him a song and dance about my love for his dear old grandfather. It happens he admired the old coot, and the rest was easy. We're going to get onto the Brawley claims at last and see what's at bed rock. I've never been fully satisfied in my own mind whether old Brawley was touched in the head and was kidding himself and others along, or whether he really had something. Now get your feet off that bed, Muller, and help pack up. We're hitting the northward trail to-night. The less we're seen about these parts, the better."

"Yeah, I suppose so," Muller grumbled; "the suckers we've hooked different times is everywhere, and they still yowl. It's music to my ears——"

"But the music isn't so sweet, Muller, when the sucker yowls to the police," Meade pointed out. "If we got on the front page of some newspaper, or even the back page, I don't think I could convince young Brawley that his grandfather and I were such bosom friends."

"There's something in that," Muller agreed; "but I hate to leave a soft bed like this for the ground, spruce feathers, or some hard bunk in a leaky cabin."

"We'll be sleeping in soft beds the rest of our lives," Meade said, "if this proposition works out."

The pair left that night and several days later shed their heavy packs on the bank of the Tulameen. Meade smiled as he looked over the ground.

"I get as much fun out of walking on this ground," he observed, "as I would tramping on old Pat Brawley's grave. The last time he chased me off he said I'd never live to see the day I'd walk on his ground. Well, here I am! They did plenty of work here in the early days. Look at the piles of tailings."

"Plenty of the old flumes and sluice boxes here too," Muller said. He kicked at a ten-foot section of sluice box. As the heavy boot struck, the box, the lumber splintered. Several pieces broke off along the nail holes, leaving the nails half exposed. Muller pulled out one with his fingers. It was almost black with rust.

"Used square nails in them days, eh? Say, this box was built a long time ago if they used square nails."

"Old Brawley came into this country before the chinks did," Meade said, "and he packed the square nails in with him."

The two men cleaned out a cabin and put in the remainder of the day making camp. They pumped out the water of an old shaft, built new ladders, and

spent a week driving down to bed rock. The bed-rock muck was scraped up and placed in a gold pan, then Meade hurried down to the stream. He dipped water up and poured it into the gold pan, then with a circular motion he began washing off the muck, pausing frequently to toss aside a lump of gravel. Almost immediately small nuggets of gold lent a splash of color to the dull shade of the pan. But it was not the gold that held both men breathless. They were glad to see it, for it is the standard of the world's wealth and no man can look upon it in a gold pan without feeling a chill of excitement. What gripped both men in a trance was the platinum that showed among the gold. The pieces were smaller but heavier. Meade lifted them up again and again and dropped them.

"No doubt of it. Each piece falls hard," he said. "It's platinum, and there's more of it than gold. It runs about two to one. Old man Brawley crazy, eh? Yes, crazy like a fox."

"The next question is," Muller said, "how're we going to get our hands onto it?"

"Don't worry about that. After old Pat Brawley got through mining gold," Meade said, "he abandoned the claims. Platinum wasn't worth much in those days. It once got as high as four dollars an ounce, I believe; but with gold running from sixteen to twenty dollars an ounce, platinum was about as popular as a poor relation. Then when platinum increased in value old Brawley did some thinking. He hadn't forgotten the platinum, so he restaked the ground and since that time has been holding it by doing a little work each year and paying the lease fees. A mile upstream there's a stretch of hungry ground. There's a cabin on the property, some old flumes and sluice boxes. Young Brawley don't know one piece of ground from another. He's never been in the Tulameen country. If we go down to this hungry ground, fix up the cabin, sink a shaft or two, and 'salt' the bed-rock muck, he won't know the difference. He'll start working the hungry ground and when his lease on this stuff expires, we'll restake the property."

Muller grinned. "That's pretty slick, but are you sure there won't be some slip-up?"

"How can there be if we keep him out of the country as long as possible, then watch him when he's here? If he's got much of old Pat Brawley's blood in his veins he'll spend all of his time digging gravel off bed rock and sending it up to the sluice boxes. He won't be wandering around the country, exploring old ruins or listening to what others may say about us. When he wakes up, it'll be too late." Meade's handsome face had changed slightly. It appeared to be leaner, there was a predatory gleam in his eyes—like that of a wolf on the blood scent.

Muller, less intelligent, a follower, never a leader, stood ready, as usual, to obey orders. But even he seemed to have been lifted from his ordinary stolid attitude. He was quicker to respond to Meade's suggestions; more alert and responsive to conditions as they developed. With the gold and the platinum they mined from the Brawley claims during the following week, they headed for the hungry ground, which was known on the Tulameen as Gregory's Place—a man by that name having been the original locator. It was an ideal location for the purpose. In an effort to find some values, numerous prospect shafts had been sunk to bed rock. Rains and high water had partly filled some of them, making it easy to salt the ground. The cabin was in a fair state of repair, the sluice boxes almost in condition to start shoveling in.

They fixed up the sluice boxes, installed new ripples, repaired and strengthened the flume, then rebuilt the

intake and dam, thus assuring a permanent supply of water until the freeze-up in the late fall. When all this was done, Meade seated himself in the Gregory cabin, brought out pen and paper, and wrote a letter to Tad Brawley.

CHAPTER III.

A GIRL BECOMES INTERESTED.

WITH nervous hands, Tad Brawley opened Meade's letter. His brother, Conrad, watched him with interest. He knew that the young man had sent a mining engineer to examine the property, but that was all, except that he had observed Tad watching the mail and had often seen his face cloud with disappointment when there was nothing from the north. The letter was carefully worded, to disarm all suspicion. It read:

DEAR TAD: Mr. Muller, my partner, and I have been working so hard lately that I haven't had time to write before. Besides, I hoped to put off writing until I could give you some good news. I have good news. We have deepened a number of old prospect holes and reached bed rock. In each case we have found exceptional values. It is my opinion that if the remainder of the ground makes as good a showing, at least one million dollars will be taken from the claim. There is some gold, but the clean-up ran mostly platinum of the finest quality. As my work is completed here, I suggest that you come up as soon as possible. You have the entire summer ahead of you, and will, no doubt, wish to make the most of it.

Congratulating you on your good fortune I am, Your friend,

JOSEPH MEADE.

Conrad Brawley saw his brother's face set with unbelief, then with a rush it flushed with excitement.

"Hey, folks!" Tad yelled. "I've got my report on the claims. There's platimum in the ground. A million dollars' worth of it!"

Conrad experienced a queer sensation. Again the peculiar words in old Pat Brawley's will came back to him forcefully: " . . . well knowing that those who get the worst of it will be benefited in the long run." These claims were taking his brother into a rugged country, a high country it was, too, where the air was like wine. Here he would pit himself against the obstacles of nature, and his character would strengthen as his body strengthened. At the critical time of his life he was going into work that would benefit him most physically, and, probably, mentally. A million dollars! Of course, that was an overestimate! Grandfather Brawley would never have permitted a million dollars to remain idle in the ground.

Again Conrad looked searchingly at his brother. There was no sense in a young man's being carried away by excitement. It smacked of lack of self-control.

"What of it?" he said. "Don't go wild, Tad, take the news calmly."

Tad whirled on his brother. He was about to retort angrily, instead, he smiled.

"You poor old prune, Conrad," he said, "I feel sorry for you. You never had a thrill in your life. And you wouldn't know what to do with a thrill if you got one."

"Young, inexperienced," Conrad retorted, "but you'll lose that enthusiasm as you grow older."

"No, I won't," Tad insisted, "it's losing enthusiasm for life that makes a man grow older. I'll be going as strong at eighty as my good old grandfather was."

"Let me remind you that grandfather caught his death of cold on his mining claim because he had to sleep all night in the open. That is why he died so suddenly," Conrad said.

"Well, that's the way I'd like to die —in harness." Tad's face was serious. "I have no desire to rust away in some musty corner. I may go broke in this, but I won't lose my enthusiasm for liv-

ing, old son. See you later. I'm off to break the good news to Marie."

Conrad Brawley shrugged helplessly. "Poor lad," he said, "he must learn by bitter experience. Grandfather would never have permitted a million dollars' worth of metal to remain in the ground when the family needed it so." He did not mention just what the need was. "Oh, well, when Tad is broke and has come to his senses I'll make a place for him in the office—a clerkship. It won't pay much, but at least he can dress like a gentleman. How I hate the 'tin pants,' calked boots, and mackinaws he persists in wearing!"

Ted began shedding his rough clothing about the room when a happy thought struck him.

"Grandfather Brawley once said the way to get a girl interested in a fellow was to be different. Never let yourself get in the mob paying court at her feet. That's all you'll be—one of the mob. Stand apart and she'll become interested because she'll wonder why you're not at her feet. Be different! Stand out!"

Tad ran his fingers through his mop of black hair, then reached for the telephone.

"Hello, Marie," he said when his call was answered, "I'm coming over tonight."

"Oh, but you can't, I have an engagement with—Bill," she said.

"To-morrow night, then?" he suggested.

"No. I'm sorry, Tad, honest I am, but I have an engagement every night this week," she exclaimed.

A twinge of jealousy shot through the young man, but he fought it off. A girl popular enough to have an engagement with a different young man each night in the week was worth winning. She had character with her looks, because no girl can get by forever on looks alone.

"Then I'll run over now," he said. "I've got to, Marie; you see, I am leaving. I'll be gone for several months at least."

"Leaving?"

"Yes. I'm going up to my placer mine on the Tulameen. It's my share of the estate, and I've got to make the most of it. I'm coming right over. Be there in a half hour." He hung up before she could argue the point.

He started once more to change his clothes, then decided against it. No, he would go dressed as he was, ready to hit the trail. Exactly on the minute, Tad knocked at a modest bungalow in the Ravenna district. The door opened and Marie stood framed in the doorway. Usually it was she who attracted the attention, but this time it was the man.

Tad was quite aware of the fact that Marie was looking as beautiful as he had ever seen her. In her eyes there had been a brief hint that she expected to be admired as usual. Then he saw that she had forgotten herself and was interested in him. He tossed his hat down and seated himself at the table. His impersonal manner was a challenge, but she did not realize it at first. Grandfather Brawley in his prime could not have done better. He told her the story of the claims from start to finish.

"And," he concluded, "the engineer I sent up says the values are there, but mining is a gamble. It will be a fight against the elements, and maybe against other men; I don't know. I'll keep you informed, Marie, of what is going on. I'll write once a week, maybe oftener."

"Tad, that is the most thrilling thing I've heard of in a long time. It's different to what the other boys are doing. I'm going to be interested in your progress. And I like it because you are taking a chance instead of taking less money and playing a sure thing."

"Do you?" Tad lost his impersonal attitude. He became rather tense.

"Of course I do," she answered. As

yet, thrilled as she was by what he planned to do, she did not detect the signs of what was coming.

"Then, Marie, if you enjoy the taking of a chance, come along with me. I don't mean to go into the Tulameen country now. But take a chance on my future by promising to marry me when everything seems against me."

She was very thoughtful. The beauty remained; but the light, careless manner, the frivolity of her nature, seemed to have vanished.

"Tad," she said seriously, "I don't know whether or not I love you. You—oh, I hate to say it!—you don't thrill me. Five times in my life, Tad, boys have swept me off my feet, given me a great thrill just to look at them; then they suddenly became just ordinary and I wondered how I ever came to like them. It wasn't fair to them, Tad, and I realize it. But you are so nice, and so sincere, and considerate, that I don't want to hurt you. You always seem to me to be so dog-goned dependable."

"Like a—brother?" he suggested. His heart, soul; and happiness seemed to be in his eyes. But as he put the question and awaited her answer, his face became drawn as though he were suffering.

"No," she said, "not like a brother."

"Thank the stars for that!" he said with feeling. Neither saw anything to laugh at, though the relief in his words was evident.

"No, not like a brother, but—— Oh, Tad, I don't know how to describe it, but if I didn't know that I could always see you and be with you whenever I wanted to, I'd feel something big had gone out of my life." She looked up at him with eyes searching for an explanation.

"I guess," Tad said, "you've told me what I've wanted to find out."

"You're not going, Tad—not angry?" she quickly asked.

"I should say not, Marie. True love, as Grandfather Brawley once said—and he sure knew something about it—is not a mighty thrill that explodes like a rocket, but it is something enduring that grows with the years until suddenly each realizes his or her life as a part of the other's." He slipped an engagement ring on her finger. "Will you let it stay, Marie?"

"Yes, Tad," she said in a contented tone, "I will let it stay because I want to feel that it is going to stay forever. Gee, Tad, it's always been great to see you around, even when the others were about me! You never were one to disappear into the mob."

Tad smiled and mentally thanked Grandfather Brawley. "Now that the others don't count any more," he suggested, "you might call Bill up and tell him that date to-night is all off. This is my evening."

A week later Tad Brawley stepped from the train at a remote station and was met by Joe Meade.

"Glad to see you, Tad," the latter boomed in his deep, rich voice; "things are going great guns at the mine."

Tad flushed with enthusiasm. The news pleased him, but the country pleased him more. There was something about the air that made a man want to get up and get. He rubbed his hands briskly together as he looked about. Rolling mountains with timber almost to the peaks. Some of the lower peaks, in fact, were timbered. In the distance, lost in the haze, he could see sharper peaks that were much higher.

The country, his grandfather had told him, was formed by the glaciers. Twice—or was it three times?—the ice had come down from the North. It had dug Puget Sound and the inland passage to Alaska, and it had gone as far south at Tenino, Washington. But a glance at the seams and markings in the rocks told the experienced miner that the country had once been just as hot

as it had been cold. Far below the placers, there were veins of coal and copper. All this Meade pointed out as they drove over a narrow mountain road to the mine. The road itself was little more than a series of pitches and sharp turns that wormed their way through the mountains. There were sheer drops of several hundred feet where the river roared below them. Here and there were piles of tailings marking the spots where the Chinese had mined. But it was his own mine that interested Tad most. He grew impatient as the miles seemed to drag.

Presently, Meade left the main road and followed a hogback down to the stream. He pulled up at the Gregory property and leaped to the ground.

"Here we are, Tad! I want you to meet my partner, Muller. He's one of the best miners that ever cleaned out a sluice box. What do you think of young Brawley's property, Muller?"

Muller shook hands and expressed pleasure at meeting Tad—as well he might in view of all he had planned to do! "The mine, Mr. Brawley, is one of the best I've seen in years, and I've seen 'em all. She's great!"

Muller had dinner waiting for them. There's nothing so good as a hot meal to lull a man's suspicions. As yet Tad had none. They lowered him into the shaft and let him shovel up the salted muck at bed rock. This was later dumped into the sluice boxes and the water turned on. With shovel they worked the muck up so the heavier rocks and the mud would wash away. Gold gleamed up at the youth, and mixed with the gold was the heavier metal that is platinum.

"How big a lease have I??" Tad inquired.

"The usual amount for a creek lease. She runs from bank to bank, high-water mark, and is a half mile long. Easily a million dollars at to-day's showing." Meade made it his business to know all there was to be known about mining. Nothing is more convincing than an immediate reply to an important question.

The pair watched Tad as he inspected the property. The old sluice boxes in particular held his attention. He cut up a strip of the wood and examined it with interest.

"Not badly rotted considering the time it's been in here," he observed. "The nails, too, are——" He stopped and pulled out a rusty nail. It was a round, sharp-pointed, circular-headed nail. He pulled several more out before finishing his statement. "The nails are in fair shape, too," he concluded. "I figured they'd be rusted through."

"Oh, no," Mead said, with a note of relief, "it takes fifty years or so to rust through the nails in this country. It's the air. Doesn't it give you a kind of a thrill to pull out nails you know your grandfather drove in?"

"Yes," Tad said, "it does." Then he seated himself at a table and began to separate the gold from the platinum. The gold was placed in a small bottle, the platinum in a larger one, because he hoped there would be more of it.

Some distance away, Muller chuckled. "If ever a goofy kid came into a mining country, Tad Brawley's the one! He stands six feet three inches, yet I'll bet he don't weigh an ounce over a hundred and sixty pounds. He's all skin, bones, black hair, and curiosity. One good sock in the stomach would break him in two. A couple of good socks would send him home to mother, bawling at the top of his lungs. And did you see the beaming face he had when he saw that salted gold and platinum in the sluice box!" He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously. "Well, 'Slim,' enjoy that mineral while you can—that's the last you'll take off this claim." He turned to Meade. "When does the lease expire on the Brawley ground?"

"Thursday!" Meade replied. "And

we're going to ride hard on this bottle baby until Thursday. Then we don't care who tips him off."

"And if he gets rough?" Muller rather hoped that he would. It had been several months since he had enjoyed any trouble.

"We'll take him apart and see what makes him tick. I've owed the Brawley family a grudge for a long time, and I'm going to make the most of this chance." Meade shot a glance of hatred at Tad, who was working his way along the top of the bank inspecting the old workings. "One of us, without seeming to do so, had better watch the road. Go up there on the ridge and cut wood or something. Stop anybody who comes snooping around. The other can help Brawley with his mining."

Tad continued upstream for several hundred yards, then he hastily returned and unpacked a fishing rod.

"Why didn't you tell me there were trout in the stream?" he demanded.

"Oh," muttered Muller under his breath, "that's the cause of the excitement, eh? Well, fish and be hanged! For a minute I thought——"

"Sure," Meade was saying, "there's plenty of fishing on this creek. Help yourself."

Tad had a dozen fine trout in a flour sack before he had gone a half mile; but he continued along the stream, stopping frequently to inspect the workings. And presently he came to an old cabin. As he entered the log structure and looked about, he felt as if he had been there before. The two rooms, the position of the stove, and the long bunk across one end were familiar. Two men could sleep in that bunk; but to do so they must sleep "heads and tails." Feet and legs overlapped so that it was quite possible for the sleepers to kick each other in the stomach. Two years had passed since a fire had burned in the rusty stove. There was a musty smell about the place. Tad walked over to the sluice boxes and flumes. The nails could readily be pulled out with his fingers. Each nail was square and black with rust.

"This place is plenty old," Tad mused, "old enough to be grandfather's. Look, trees have grown up through the old tailings!" He peered into the ancient shafts. Some of the cribbing consisted of small trees in a fair state of preservation; other parts were of rock. "Sure an old place," he repeated. He climbed the bank and noticed where the Chinese had mined. They had tried their luck on the bench and must have found gold, if the tailings meant anything. But it was evident they had carried their gravels down to the water for panning, as there was no evidence of flumes or sluice boxes. They had worked hard, those Orientals, but it surely had been worth it.

Night was falling; the shadows flitting through long-abandoned cabins seemed to take form. Mysterious mutterings came from half-filled shafts, as if voices long silent were attempting to convey a message. The sky was splashed with gold—a favorable sign. Then it changed as darkness swept over the land. The sky grew dull, almost leaden, the color of placer platinum. A friendly breeze lazed through the pines. The song of the stream was musical, almost intoxicating. To this song young Pat Brawley had been lulled to sleep fifty years ago. To this song young Tad Brawley, his grandson, would be lulled to sleep. And during that time nothing had changed, except that the trees had grown through the tailings heaped by tired hands long since called to rest.

Tad found an empty lard bucket. He cut a hole on one side and thrust a candle up through the hole. This he lighted. The bucket not only prevented the wind from blowing out the candle, but also acted as a reflector that gave ample light to find the faint trail. With

this "bug," as men call it, he lighted his way home.

Two very suspicious pairs of eyes met his as he entered the old Gregory cabin.

"What luck?" Meade asked.

Tad dumped the trout onto the table. "Best fishing I ever had," he admitted. "I'm going to like this country. If you don't mind, I think I'll go to town in the morning."

"Yeah?" Muller queried sharply. Meade kicked him under the table.

"Forget something?" Meade inquired pleasantly. Again his smile was disarming—winning.

"No," Tad answered, "just think I'll send this platinum and gold out. I'd like to see how it assays before I shoot my money here."

CHAPTER IV.

PANHANDLE CARSON.

THE agreeable Meade personally conducted Tad Brawley to town. Together they watched an assayer make the usual tests of both the gold and platinum. He pronounced it of very fine grade. Tad was pleased, at it proved that the gold and platinum found in his grandfather's old trunk came from the same source. The values were the same.

"I'm going to order a lot of supplies shipped up to the mine, Mr. Meade," Tad said; "perhaps you won't mind ordering just what I'm going to need."

"Certainly," Meade said. He concealed a smile. He had a hunch that these same supplies could be bought for a song when Tad discovered just what the Gregory ground contained. For that reason, Meade ordered with the needs of the old Brawley ground in view. If all went well, that ground would be his within a week. He, too, had naturally been pleased with the assayer's verdict—the gold and the platinum originally having come from this ground.

"Like taking milk from a baby," he chuckled; "never in all my experience have I found any one so easy to hook. The trouble is, the kid hasn't been out in the world long enough to get any experience in the grand old game of grab what you can, but he's getting it now."

It was well after dark when they reached the Gregory cabin. Tad went to bed, the partners went into a brief conference.

"Anything doing?" Meade inquired.

"Yes. 'Panhandle Pete' Carson is hanging around!"

The effect on Meade was startling. His face paled slightly, then he swore with feeling.

"What's his game? I wonder if he's next to what we are up to?"

"Search me," Muller replied; "he didn't break down and confess anything to me. He just came into the cabin in that quiet way of his and said he guessed he'd have a cup of tea. I gave it to him. There wasn't anything else to do." Muller shuddered. "He always did give me the creeps. He's the same long-geared, hatchet-faced, red-headed Texan. He packs that gun, and while he keeps his hands away from it, I always have the feeling he could get it in a hurry."

Meade swore some more. "I can't understand how he always shows up and mixes into some game I've started. It's happened so many times, now, that I'm getting suspicious."

"Maybe he just happened along," Muller hopefully suggested.

"Huh!" Meade snorted. "He's got next to my game in some way and figures to cut in. I'm wondering if maybe I hadn't better give him a cut instead of risking the loss of everything. A fifth interest should net him fifty thousand dollars. That's more than he's ever had at one time. Still—I'll wait until he shows up again."

Meade was hopeful the man would not show up, but he did. He put in an appearance on Wednesday afternoon about three o'clock. He nodded at Meade and Muller, then peered down a shaft in which Tad Brawley was laboring. He eyed Tad with interest, but without observation. When Meade introduced them, he grunted a brief "Howdy" and extended the biggest hand Tad had ever seen.

Everything about the man was large. His feet appeared to have run along the ground for some distance before he started shooting skyward. His nose was long, and the expression about his big mouth suggested he had just taken a healthy bite out of a lemon. He constantly shifted a huge bite of tobacco, and appeared to talk first from one side of his mouth, then the other. He commented on the weather, the amount of water running in the stream, the size of the trees, and the condition of the sluice boxes. He almost made a nervous wreck out of Meade before Tad wandered beyond earshot.

Then Meade blurted out, "What's your game?"

"Yours," the Texan said shortly.

Silence fell between the two men. Each challenged the other with a steady gaze; each waited for the other to make the next move. Panhandle Pete Carson jerked his head toward Tad.

"How much have you told him? Does he knew he ain't on his grandfather's claim at all?"

"I guess that wins, Carson," Meade answered. "Tell you what I'll do. You clear out, and I'll give you a fifth of what I make on this deal."

"I figure I can do myself more good workin' alone," Carson replied. "That's why I came around. I like to give a man a warnin' when I figure to trim him. I'm warnin' you, Meade, I'm going to trim you plenty. That's all!"

He shot a final glance in Tad's direction, then moved on up the trail. Long after his figure had been swallowed up in the gloom of the trees they heard the aggressive, *clump-clump* of his heavy boots on the gravel.

Tad Brawley woke shortly before dawn. He knew instantly that he was alone. He lighted the "bug," and by its flickering flame saw that the bunks on the opposite side of the room were empty. He reached over and felt the blankets. Each bunk was warm.

"They got out quietly enough, but it wasn't so long ago," he observed. "Guess I'll trail 'em!"

He pulled on his clothes hastily and followed. There had been a light fall of frost, and he had little difficulty in following the footprints. The two men had gone straight, and at times hurriedly, for the Brawley claim.

With the aid of the first streaks of dawn Tad broke into a steady run. He splashed through small creeks several times, scrambled over old tailing heaps, and finally fought his way through a bench covered with timber. As he looked down upon the old claim, he saw the huge outline of Meade in the act of erecting a monument on one corner of the claim. Almost at the same moment, Panhandle Pete Carson climbed up the bank near the opposite corner and erected a monument of his own. The two men saw each other. Each went for his gun, then changed his mind. It was evident that they did not want the law to step in on account of a shooting affair and thus spoil their chance of getting a lease of this nature.

A broad grin spread over Tad's face.

"I guess I'll get in on this myself," he chuckled. "Here goes!"

He did not see Muller lurking in the shadows. The prospects of a fight about to take place below attracted his full attention. Muller's fist drew back, and then shot out. He hit the youth with all his strength. The blow caught Tad in the ribs and sent him staggering.

"That for you," Muller jeered. "You keep out of this!"

The blow had gone deep into Tad's thin frame. He doubled up in agony and for a moment could not lift his hands in defense. Muller measured him carefully, then smashed a blow over the youth's heart. Tad dropped like a log. When he regained consciousness, Muller was dashing down the hill to lend Meade a hand. Panhandle Pete Carson had just knocked Meade down. Meade got up only to be sent down again. This time he stayed down. The raw-boned Texan regarded his unconscious enemy for several moments, then, with a short laugh, began to climb the bank to the road above. He led a horse from a cache in a thicket, mounted it, and galloped away at a furious pace. Again and again he took short cuts that threatened disaster.

Tad was still half paralyzed from the hard blows he had received, but his mind was clear. He lay for a moment and admired the Texan's horsemanship. "He may be the worst cuss in the world," the boy observed, "but I'd give anything to ride like that. And what a horse!" Tad picked up a club and started for Meade and Muller. He, too, had no desire to become involved in gun play at this stage of the game.

"Get off my lease!" he ordered.

Meade was rubbing his head, wondering what had hit him. Muller was inclined to go after Tad again. Meade stopped him.

"You're crazy! You've got to beat Carson to town," he shouted, "or he'll win this claim."

"Get off my lease!" Tad ordered as he advanced.

"Your lease?" Muller sneered, "Huh! I can't beat Carson to town this late in the game, but one thing's certain—the Tulameen is rid of the Brawley crowd for all time. Your lease? Huh!" Then he laughed.

"Yes, my lease. Listen, Meade," Tad added, "I took you at face value. It was only by chance I discovered you were playing a game. I noticed that the sluice boxes on what you said was my grandfather's place were nailed together with round nails. I happen to know they used square nails in his day. That afternoon that I went fishing, I fished half the time for trout, the other half for sluice boxes containing square nails. I found the old place right enough. I could tell the instant I came into the cabin. I felt as if I had been there before. And I guess I had—in the stories the old gentleman used to tell me when I was a little boy. I saw your game then—to keep me off the ground until the lease had expired. There was one way to beat it. That was to go to town and pay up the lease money. I did it that day you took me to town and had the assays made—the day I bought the supplies. You see, I'm green at this game, and I didn't mention it before because I wanted to see just how you went about cheating me. Now, clear off the lease. Both of you." Muller gave his partner a hand. "And as for you, Muller, I'm waiting for the time when we can finish this fight you started with me personally. You sneaked up behind me and——"

"I'll be ready," Muller promised. "I'd come right now only I have Meade on my hands."

The two men finally reached the road.

"Well?" queried Muller.

"He outsmarted us," Meade admitted, "but you'll notice he said he was green. He is. There's other ways to get him. I don't figure to stand by and let a cool million slip through my fingers."

Tad trailed the others up to the road. It was easier to return to the Gregory property that way than to climb over the boulder-strewn creek bed.

As Meade recovered from the effects of Carson's blows he walked faster. Tad kept them in sight.

"What wouldn't I give to be a real man," he muttered, "instead of a gangling kid so thin that a hard blow nearly breaks me in two! I hate myself. It seems like I've always been half baked. Come to think about it, every little kid in school used to lick me. A pop or two in the kitchen and down I'd come. Then a wallop to the jaw and I was finished. What a washout of a man I am!" He scowled at the well-developed, powerful men ahead of him. "In spirit, I'd like to take both of 'em on right now, but I know what would happen. But then, Grandfather Brawley used to say it was the spirit that counted."

The youth's reflections were bitter as he recalled his life. He had grown tall and lean. While he was growing too fast, other boys were growing more normally and were stronger. Thus it had been rather easy to whip him. Tad never considered this. All he knew was that smaller boys could beat him in a fight, and nothing is more humiliating than to be beaten by a smaller boy. Now he was taking on men.

His reflections were interrupted in a startling manner. Panhandle Pete had stepped unexpectedly into the road. His long six-gun was ready for business as he confronted the two cheats.

"Line up, gents!" he ordered. "There's been a change in my plans. Gettin' that ground ain't as important as it was, but I don't figure you two jaspers gettin' it."

"I've already taken care of that, Mr. Carson," Tad said. "When I found Meade had planted me on the wrong claim, I investigated and discovered he hadn't paid the lease money as he agreed to do when he came into this country to work for me. The lease money is paid, and the claim is mine."

He regarded Carson with challenging eyes. They might all be able to beat him, but he wasn't backing up for any of them. And that included Carson and his long-barreled six-gun.

To Tad's surprise, Carson grinned.

"That suits me fine, kid," he said, "and I'll tell you about it later." He waved the gun at Meade and Muller. "Light down the trail to old man Pardo's mine." Then he shoved the gun into the holster. "Move faster! Come on, Brawley. Old Pardo got caught in a slide this mornin', and if I hadn't heard his woman yellin' no tellin' what would have happened by now. Men his age shouldn't be minin' like that. I claim that a man who's spent his lifetime on the frontier blazin' the trail for the rest of us is entitled to comfort in his old age, even if he didn't make a dime durin' his lifetime. But there's a lot of 'em scattered along the creeks. Not only here, but other places."

"You don't mean to say you have to make Meade and Muller help a man in distress, do you?" Tad demanded. "Why, I should think they'd naturally want to do it!"

"Naturally nothin'!" exploded the Texan. "You don't know 'em as I do."

"I'm getting acquainted," Tad suggested dryly.

"Yeah. But how did you come to get mixed up with 'em in the first place?" The Texan shot him a hard glance, blinked, and shifted an enormous chew of tobacco to the other side of his mouth.

"Meade claimed he and my grandfather were sort of playmates," Tad explained.

A twinkle came into the Texan's eyes. "I did see 'em playin' right festive one time. Your grandpap was tickling Meade in the ribs—with the muzzle of that old .44 you're carryin' there."

"Did Meade giggle?" Tad inquired. He was beginning to like the Texan.

"Well, he didn't giggle out loud, but he did squirm a lot; yeah, come to think of it, he squirmed right smart." He looked ahead and spoke to the unlucky partners. "Get a run on you, gents!" As the pair quickened their pace, Car-

son added: "Of course, what happens on this creek ain't none of my business, but what Meade and Muller does is my business. They robbed a friend of mine once, and I'm devoting my life to upsetting whatever schemes they plan. I've upset three of 'em already. This is the fourth. They've had their eyes on this lease for a long time, but couldn't get a toe hold until your grandpap died." He scowled at the pair. "I wouldn't be on their side even if they was doin' somethin' honest. I hope you'll believe me when I say I weren't trying to beat you out of your claim. I just intended gettin' hold of it so they couldn't, then if you turned out to be like your grandpap, I figured to turn it back to you."

"What's the verdict?" Tad asked. His grandfather had once said that in making an enemy he usually made a good friend also. It looked as if Carson could be a mighty good friend.

"What's the verdict? Well, you don't see me sheddin' tears over your hangin' onto the ground, do you?"

They had reached a point now where the Pardo claim was visible. Carson and Tad Brawley began dropping down the mountain at top speed. The slide had completely blocked the stream. Several small boulders had pinned an old miner to the ground. A white-haired woman was standing waist-deep in the icy creek, holding the old man's head above water. The chill of the water had taken a deep toll of her strength. Only by sheer nerve had she managed to hang on so long. As Tad reached her side, she collapsed. With one hand, he held up the man's head; with the other he kept the woman from going under. The Texan splashed through the stream, lifted the woman in his arms and carefully placed her on the bank. The he turned to Meade and Muller.

"Dig, you hounds! Dig as you've never dug before!"

CHAPTER V.

OVERWHELMING ODDS.

BEFORE the others succeeded in checking the water, Tad was actually stretching Pardo's body and neck. They dug a ditch along the top of the slide, but it kept two men busy shoveling out the earth as it slipped into the ditch.

"You'll have to use powder, boys," Pardo gasped. "But first, take my wife to the cabin. She'll catch her death o' cold lyin' on that frosty ground soaked to the skin. She's a good, brave woman, and I'm sorry I ain't been able to do better by her."

Tad felt a lump come into his throat at that display of affection. Pinned down by a rock, the water almost reaching his chin, yet thinking of his wife!

"No wonder the West is being won against everything," he growled.

Panhandle Pete Carson was one of those men of indefinite age. But regardless of how old he might be, he caught up the frail figure of Pardo's wife and ran up the bank to the cabin. He rolled her in blankets and placed her near the stove; then, with several sticks of powder in his hand, he ran to the lower side of the slide. His calculation was brief. A few sticks here, to blow out the toe of the dam; several there, to clear away the remaining stuff. Once the water started through it could be counted on to keep additional earth clear. But the entire operation must be done without danger to Pardo or Tad Brawley.

"How much nerve have you got, kid?" Carson inquired, as he made ready to light the fuses. "I'm tellin' you there's no danger—much. But you don't know it yourself; you've got to take my word for it. How much nerve have you got?"

"I don't know," Tad answered. In his inexperienced eyes powder was a thing to be dreaded. He did not know

the skill with which an expert can handle the explosive. "I don't know, Mr. Carson, how much nerve I have, but let's find out?"

"I'll trade places with you, kid, if you're worried," Carson offered.

"Let her go," Tad answered. If he were ever going to have faith in the ability and skill of those with whom he had cast his lot, it was time to begin.

He could not hear the fuse sputter, but he saw the grayish smoke rise. His heart beat faster, he grew a bit tense. Old Pardo could feel the youth's grip tighten. He smiled despite his pain.

"Don't worry, sonny, Panhandle can handle powder."

Even as he spoke, the earth shuddered. Rocks shot downstream like bullets. Then the earth nearer at hand heaved upward. Brush kept the rocks from flying toward Tad and Pardo. Muddy water licked outward, fell as the earth washed away, and the next moment the backwater roared through the cut. The slide continued to slip into the cut, but there was no denying the stream now with all the backwater behind it.

As Tad lowered the old man to the mucky ground, Panhandle rushed in. Again the skill of a miner came into play. He blocked the rocks so they could not tumble farther, then sluiced out under Pardo. As the old miner was lifted to safety, then and only then, he collapsed.

When Tad and Panhandle had put the old couple in their bunks and covered them with warm blankets, they took stock of the situation. Meade and Muller had silently departed. Tad was inclined to think the men would have aided in the rescue without resorting to arms, but Panhandle held a different view.

"Never knowed either of 'em to go out of his way to help anybody. No, sir, like as not they'd 'a' waited for the old man to die, then figured some way of gettin' the claim away from the old woman. Three times, now, I've fought those jaspers to a finish, and whipped 'em. Yet not once would they do anything that could be pinned on 'em. I want to see 'em behind the bars, then I——"

"Then you'll be ready to settle down, eh?" Tad suggested.

"Heck, no! A man's a fool to settle down and be tied down by some woman. Oh, I know there's fine wimmin in the world, but none of 'em would ever fall in love with a red-headed scarecrow like me." He regarded the freckles on his hands. Some of them were as large as Canadian silver five-cent pieces. "But I ain't thinkin' about wimmin right now. I don't worry about 'em anyway, as they ain't one of 'em fast enough on her feet to catch me. I'm thinkin' about people like the Pardos. They're livin' over a fortune, yet they're livin' from hand to mouth."

"Why?"

"Lack of money. It takes money to handle this ground. Once you get down to bed rock there's plenty of money, but it's the gettin' there that costs," the Texan explained. "You've prob'ly got enough money to work your claim in the right way. Thirty or forty thousand dollars should start you off with a bang and you'd get it back in the first clean up; but people like old man Pardo, they——"

"Why don't they borrow it?" Tad suggested.

"Try and do it! People won't lend money on minin' propositions unless they get control. Once they get control, they freeze the miner out. It's better to hang on, starve, and hope than to be out in the cold. And so for lack of money, the miners go ahead; try and reach bed rock; take chances, as Pardo did, and the first thing you know they get it. Pardo was lucky. He was only caught in the slide. He might have been been covered up. Or we might not

have been around to give him a hand." He looked in at the old couple in the cabin.

"Feelin' better?"

"Yes, Panhandle," Pardo said. "Leg hurts, but it ain't broken." Mrs. Pardo smiled weakly.

"You stay in bed the rest of the day," Panhandle advised, "and keep warm. We'll be back in a few hours to see how you're gettin' on."

"I really can't afford to lay off," Pardo said.

"Better lay off to-day than to be down and out for a week or so," Panhandle insisted. "You obey orders, and we'll be back."

Panhandle led the way downstream. "As I said, he's just one of several," he explained.

"Why don't the miners get together," Tad suggested, "and all work on one; then, when money is reached there, take it and go on developing the next?"

"All suspicious of each other. And the wolves that figure to grab this fortune—and there's a fortune in this ground—keep the fires of suspicion burnin' year in and out. The wolves are eatin' regular and figure to win in the end. I guess they will; the miners can't hold out forever."

Presently, they stopped at another claim. A man nearly ninety years old was engaged in "coyoting" some exposed rock.

"Howdy!" he said, as he got stiffly to his feet. "A stream o' water came a-roarin' down this morning. Figured there might be some mineral. They's always pay in this dirt, whether it comes from stream or bench. Been coyotin' around here for quite a spell. Get enough to pay my lease money and buy a piece of side meat now and again. What with a little fishin' and a deer when the snow drives 'em down, I make out. I'm foolin' them buzzards." He mentioned several men who had tried to freeze him out of his claim. "Each year they expect to find I've kicked off durin' the winter, but out I come with the b'ars and squirrels as chipper as ever."

The old fellow resumed his work. Tad watched him a moment as he carefully cleaned out a crack with a knife blade and brushed the sand and metal up with a small broom. This was dumped into a gold pan. A seventy-five-cent piece of platinum brought a shout of delight.

"That's the second six-bit piece I've found this morning!"

Panhandle shook his head sadly as they walked away.

"Thrilled by a six-bit piece of platimum, and there's five-dollar nuggets on bed rock. Want to see more? I'll show you another claim." Some distance downstream he stopped where two men were working on opposite ends of a claim. Each worked without help of the other when it was apparent that if they worked together considerably more would be accomplished.

"They ain't spoke for two years," Panhandle said. "Nobody knows what started it. Like as not, they got into a row over the way to make a bannock, or skin a deer, or build a sluice box. They live in the same cabin. Each gets his own meals, each goes to his part of the claim in the morning and works till night. 'The Silent Pardners,' we call 'em. You can't coop any two men up where they don't see others and not have a bad case of cabin fever. But the wolves take advantage of it. Each is suspicious of the other, and one will do just the opposite of what the other will do."

Panhandle stepped over to one. "How goes it?" he asked cheerfully.

"Not very well," the miner answered. "We're all working under overwhelmin' odds on this creek. But nobody's goin' to cheat me out of my ground. Leastwise, not when I'm alive and kicking."

He shot a glance of hate at his partner, then lowered his voice. "I think that yellow coyote tried to poison me last night. I found a spider in my tea."

"You don't say?" exclaimed Panhandle. "It don't seem to me he'd do a thing like that."

"You don't know him," the miner said.

Panhandle walked over and greeted the second man. The miner looked up.

"See that boulder?" he asked. "That skunk of a pardner of mine tried to murder me with it. He picked away the gravel so it would roll into the pit on me this morning. If it wasn't I know him and was always on the lookout, he'd have got me. Remember how sick I was a year ago? I've been figuring plenty since then. It ain't natural for a man to be sick. He prob'ly poisoned me that time."

"If he's crooked, why don't you get rid of him?" Panhandle suggested.

"I can't!" The miner frowned. "And another thing, I ain't going to have no man say he's crooked. I've lived with him too long. He'd probably knife me in the back and roll a rock onto me, but he wouldn't cheat. No—he wouldn't cheat."

"And that," Panhandle said as they went on, "is what comes of too close association. 'Overwhelmin' odds' is what he said it was, and he's dead right. We'll go back upstream now. Pardo and his wife are the only ones that ain't fighting. Mrs. Pardo belongs to some kind of a religion—she won't fight."

As they neared the Pardo claim, Panhandle snorted with a mixture of admiration and disgust. Old Pardo had dragged himself to a network of boulders. Here he had spread out a blanket to keep the chill from working through his body and was now engaged in scraping out the crevices and cracks among the boulders.

"Look!" he exclaimed hoarsely, "there was plenty of pay in that slide off the bench. When you blew the slide out, you started somethin', and the water done the rest!" He displayed a gold pan containing forty or fifty dollars' worth of platinum, and some two dozen nuggets running around thirty-five cents each. "Best clean-up in weeks! I'd get slid on any day for that."

"How is your wife?"

"She's still in bed. I made her stay there. She went through a lot," Pardo explained. He continued his work for several moments, then Panhandle reached down and placed his hand on the old man's forehead. It was burning up.

"And you're going back to bed, too, Pardo," Panhandle announced. "The first thing you know, you'll be getting pneumonia." Riding rough-shod over Pardo's objections, the Texan hurried him off to the cabin.

Mrs. Pardo was now up. She was taking things easy, though.

"He wouldn't listen to me," she complained. "He must go out and look for gold. Darn his gold!" She grew angry. "Gold! Gold! Gold! How I hate it! It has brought us only trouble. We'll never get it. The buzzards hovering about won't permit it. We'd do better raising chickens or rabbits."

Panhandle let her finish her protest. He understood. She, too, had reached the breaking point.

"We'll sleep out in the shed to-night, Mrs. Pardo," he said, "and we'll finish cleaning up the dirt that's scattered around."

Panhandle and Tad did not eat until long after dark. There had been much to do. The old folks, Panhande hoped, would sleep soundly throughout the night. The Texan and Tad sat before the embers of a camp fire, each deep in thought. It was Tad who broke the silence.

"Can't something be done about all

this?" He indicated the Pardos and the others on the stream. "Can't they be brought together and beat the opposition?"

"Who'll bring them together and not demand the lion's share of the clean-up?" Panhandle countered.

"There should be somebody," Tad insisted.

"Yes, there should," Panhandle agreed. Another period of silence followed. It was the Texan who broke the silence this time. "I'm going to suggest, Tad, that you bring them together. Put all the claims into a group, pay each man in stock, then all dig in. With your money you could make a big enough start on a large scale so that additional money could be obtained from some bank at a fair figure. It means, Tad, that the dreams of these old folks along the creek will come true. It means that the wolves can howl elsewhere."

"What makes you think I can get away with it?" Tad inquired. Grandfather Brawley had taught him to be practical.

"Old families mean a lot to the people back East. The same is true here. If a man came into the country a couple of generations ago, as your grandfather did, and made a reputation for square dealing and ability, that reputation is inherited by others of the same name—until they prove themselves five-centers. Old Pat Brawley's grandson could bring these people together on the strength of the name alone. After that, it would depend on the ability of the grandson. I think he's got the stuff."

"Is that straight, Mr. Carson?" Tad asked.

"That's straight. You'd make plenty of mistakes. There's no doubt of that, but in the long run you'd win out. And now, to show you I'm a friend of yours as well as theirs, I'm going to say that you're a chump if you do it. With what money you've got, you can make a sure thing out of your own claim. That's what I'd tell you or any other young fellow. You owe these people nothing, so why risk your own chances? You'll get no more in the end, and you'll bring a lot of trouble on your own shoulders, and probably lose everything you've got!"

Tad looked at Panhandle in amazement. Was this some challenge shrewdly thrown into his face?

"That's the truth, Tad, you're a fool if you tackle it," Carson repeated.

"I can't see how I can get a kick out of playing a real thing, Mr. Carson. I'm young, and if I risk everything and lose I can start over again. But the Pardos and the others are playing their last card. I'm going to sit in the game with them to the finish, providing——"

"Providing?" said Panhandle quickly.

"Providing you'll sit in, too. You can give me your mining experience, and that's what I need," Tad explained.

"You're a chump," Panhandle said with feeling, "one of the biggest I've met in the West. I guess I'll have to go along with you to the finish—on account of you bein' so foolish. Here's my hand on it!"

Over the dying embers a partnership was formed. It was one of the most effective combinations that it is possible to form on the frontier—the enthusiasm and strength of youth with the experience and wisdom of maturity. Panhandle had seen all of life there was to see from the Panhandle section of Texas, where he was born, to the arctic ice. He believed, or at least tried to believe, that money meant nothing to him beyond three square meals a day and a place to spread his blankets. And he could find many places to spread his blankets without cost. At present, he was having a whale of a time upsetting Meade's pet schemes. Tad's aid was all he desired in the present instance; but he believed in placing the cards on the table, then letting the youth judge

for himself. The embers were black as Panhandle pictured the future. Well, if Tad lost all—and there was a chance that he would—they'd light out together for the arctic and do something there.

As for Tad, he thought only of the help he would get from Panhandle's experience in the days to come. If, out of the storm and strife, he could emerge able to hold his own, the reward would be ample even though he lost his claim and his fifty thousand dollars.

Their reflections were interrupted by Mrs. Pardo's frightened voice.

"Panhandle! Come here quick!"

Panhandle ran to the cabin.. His alert ear caught a peculiar note in Pardo's breathing. He turned to Tad.

"Pneumonia," he whispered. "Light out for town and get the doctor."

CHAPTER VI.

MEADE PUTS ONE OVER.

ALTHOUGH Tad did not know it, his horsemanship was almost as amazing as Panhandle's as he galloped to town that night. Mounted, as he was, on the Texan's horse, everything was in his favor. The doctor asked one or two brief questions while he dressed.

"Old Pardo's pretty old for pneumonia," he commented, "but sometimes those old fellows fool us. He'll have to be brought into town if he's as bad as you say. Wonder where the money's coming from. I'm not worrying about my fee," he hastily added, "I never worry about it." This, perhaps, explained why the doctor was poor. "But there'll be hospital bills."

"I'll help out on that," Tad said.

By morning there was no doubt Pardo was in a bad way.

"End of the trail," he whispered, "but don't tell the wife. So much we've planned to do when we struck it. That what she said about hatin' gold yesterday. Remember? She didn't mean it. She's a miner, too. If somebody would only buy the claim off us! I mean, give us enough to live on."

Tad was impulsive enough to offer to do that, but Panhandle guessed his thoughts and laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"You haven't money enough to do that right now," he whispered. "We'll look out for 'em."

It was tragic to watch the old wife hover over her lifelong partner. When he had been pinned down by the boulder, she could hold his head above the water. She could do something. Now she was eager to fight just as hard, but there was nothing she could do but watch and wait. There was a hard, defiant glitter in her eyes as if she were defying enemies they could not see. It affected Tad deeply.

That afternoon they managed to take Pardo safely to town. Tad and Panhandle returned to their own claim and sent word to the miners up and down the creek.

"You talk to 'em, Panhandle," Tad suggested, when the men had gathered at the old claim. "I'm afraid to."

"No," Panhandle answered, "it'll look better coming from you. You might as well get used to talking to 'em, because you'll have to talk plenty hard and fast before the season is over. Some of those old pack rats are sure to start trouble, and you'll have to set down on 'em hard. I'll introduce you."

Panhandle got to his feet. "Gents, this is a miners' meetin', and I'm going to call it to order. This is Tad Brawley, old Pat Brawley's grandson. He's the first man to come into the country with money who's our kind. Old Pat was out to lick the wolves. Tad's here to finish the job. But he ain't going to do it single-handed. It'd be far cheaper for him to look after his own ground and let the rest of you get along as best you can.

"You've tried to get money before,

and you haven't had much luck. The jaspers that would put up the money wanted control. Tad's willing to put up some money and leave the control to the group. But you've all got to throw your claims in and come in yourselves. It's got to be all for one and one for all, as the feller says. It's no coyotin' proposition, it's real minin' on a big scale. What do you say? Are you going to come along, or are you going to play tag for the rest of your lives? Young Tad's going to throw a small dam across the gorge at Peterson's claim, bring the water along the bench. He'll use a monitor on the bench claims and, with the clean-ups, put in machinery to go after the stuff that's below the surface of the creek. In this way he'll miss nothing, and before he's through you'll take twenty-five million dollars out of this district. Gents, this old Pat Brawley's grandson, Tad. He'll tell you his plans."

As Tad stood up everybody began to laugh.

Panhandle's hand instinctively reached for his gun. "I don't aim to have him laughed at by you yaps," he growled.

"They're not laughing at me, Panhandle," Tad said; "they're laughing at you. You made the whole speech and outlined the proposition. There's nothing left for me to do but to take a bow."

Panhandle grew a deep red. "Gosh, I never thought of that!" But he was quick to grasp the situation. Everybody was laughing and in a good mood. "Come on, gents, let's sit down and discuss details. Every claim is represented here except the Pardos', and we'll get that."

"You'll have to get that," one of the miners observed, "or the group will be busted up and the lower claims will be out in the cold. There's no way of getting water across the Pardo lease."

The conference continued for the rest of the day. Some had to make concessions, but for the most part they looked ahead and saw immediate profits. It didn't make any particular difference whose ground was worked, they decided. Even the Silent Partners came into the field. Panhandle managed this nicely. He got one of them to publicly commit himself while the other was absent. Then he went to the other and said:

"There's no telling what your partner will do, but if you'll come into the company we're organizing we'll handle him some way. It's a fine time to get rid of him."

"I'll come in," the man agreed, "but I don't want to get rid of that cuss. I've got too many old scores to pay off first. Fix it so I can keep an eye on him. But you'll have to watch him. He ain't above poisonin' the whole crowd. He's danger near got me several times."

"We'll watch him," Panhandle agreed.

So rapidly did the miners work that the organization was completed before the news reached the ears of outsiders. They knew that Panhandle was strictly honest; that he was devoting his life to upsetting various schemes advanced by crooks. They knew that he regarded a victory over such an outfit as far more precious than gold. Hence they believed in him. They also knew his ability as an all-around placer miner. He could handle it all, from shovel and gold pan to rocker, and from rocker on to monitor and dredge. They liked Tad at first because he was old Pat's grandson. But now they were beginning to like him for himself. His long, lean, under-developed figure amused them, and his enthusiasm renewed their own youth and fire.

Tradesmen in town were highly pleased with the new organization. It looked as if the creek was at last coming to its own. A steady flow of gold meant new life for them. They talked about the plan, and in time Muller

heard the news and sent for Meade. Meade came on the run.

"Why didn't you tell me about this sooner?" he demanded.

"They kept it dark. And they moved fast," Muller explained. "And the deuce of it is, they're not going to need any money from outsiders. There's no way we can get our fingers into it."

"If I could get one finger into it," Meade said, "I could smash everything. Not going to need a cent, eh??"

"Not a dime. I've looked up everything. The kid's tossed his fifty thousand into the pot, and that's enough to take care of 'em until the first clean-up. After that, they'll just have to coast. They won't have to ask anybody for favors."

Meade's handsome face was thoughtful. "Fifty thousand will do it," he admitted. "There's no doubt about that. I don't see how he got that crowd to agree on anything. He wouldn't have, if I'd known. A few seeds of suspicion will wreck the best outfit." Presently he seemed to take hope. "I've never seen armor yet that couldn't be penetrated. Let's take another look at it."

Meade examined the records, and a slow smile spread over his face. "They haven't got the Pardo lease yet," he said.

"I looked into that. Pardo's in the hospital. He probably won't live. Brawley and Carson are these birds with fine feelings. They don't want to bother the old couple with business details at a time like this. But the Pardos will stick."

"The outfit that holds the Pardo claim will stop the whole business. He can whip the lower claims into line. We've got to get that claim." Meade had been lifted from the depths of despair to the heights by this discovery.

"The Pardos hate us," Muller insisted.

"Sure, let 'em hate us. We don't have to do business direct. I'll put 'the Judge' on their trail."

The Judge had been used by Meade on several occasions to advantage. His manner was fatherly and inspired confidence. He never appeared to want anything for himself or anybody else. He would make a beautiful gesture, then stand aside for the good of the cause. When he did this, it was fairly certain the Judge was winning. He was a lawyer, and it was said he had once been a judge; but men were inclined to think his judicial authority extended no farther than an ability to judge good whisky.

"The Judge will turn the trick," Meade continued. "If he doesn't get the property outright, he'll force Brawley to spend most of his fifty thousand dollars to get it. Then Brawley will have to borrow money to complete his plans. That's where we'll step in. Man! The way this is shaping up there's millions in it."

Meade and Muller worked as swiftly and quietly as Tad had done. The Judge appeared and, hat in hand, told Mrs. Pardo he hesitated to intrude. He had previously learned the doctor's verdict. If Pardo did recover, he must leave the country for a warmer climate and stay there at least a year. He was taking advantage of this. "We come to buy your claim outright," he said. "What is your price?"

"We hadn't thought of selling," she said, "now that Mr. Brawley has come we——"

"Yes, I know Brawley is here," the Judge said. "A very fine young man is Mr. Brawley. I have every confidence that he will succeed. But it will take time—a lot of time. Mining is a gamble, and I thought if you received a definite sum—a sum sufficient to care for you for the remainder of your lives—you might be willing to sell. You would thus be relieved of future worries." A crafty glint lingered in

his eyes a moment. "And worry, my dear lady, is an important element in complete recovery when a man is as old as Mr. Pardo is. I would pay, say, thirty thousand dollars. At six per cent, that would insure you a lifetime income of one hundred and fifty dollars a month."

The figures rolled easily off the Judge's tongue. As a matter of fact, he was practically broke. Meade and Muller could not raise ten thousand dollars between them. The pair had visions of flashing five thousand cash on the couple and giving their note for the rest. Once in this situation they would find ways and means of avoiding the note.

The old lady considered. She looked at her exhausted husband, still half conscious, still in danger.

"We should give Mr. Brawley first chance," she suggested.

"By all means," the Judge said quickly. There was nothing else for him to say. Very cleverly he later tried to maneuver the old lady into a sale; but the determination that had made her a pioneer now served Tad Brawley well. She believed he should have a chance to match any price the Judge might offer, and she stuck by her guns.

The Judge was dejected when he reported to Meade. "I couldn't put it over. She's going to give Brawley a chance," he said.

"I'm not surprised. All right," Meade spoke with a snap, "let 'em bring the kid in. Then bid it clean out of sight. Bust him at the start if you can. He's got to have the Pardo lease, and he knows it!"

Mrs. Pardo sent word by the doctor, and Tad came on the run. Panhandle was with him. The Texan's alert eyes caught sight of the Judge.

"Kid," he said, "you're now bumping into some real trouble! That slick-looking jasper that's bubblin' over with the milk of human kindness is Meade's 'man Friday.' They're out to get that claim. You can thank your lucky stars Mrs. Pardo gave you a chance."

"Where's the money coming from? I don't blame her for wanting to sell. Better be sure than take a chance at their age. But it's going to raise the deuce with our account."

Tad had figured everything carefully. He could pay for all the equipment necessary to begin operations and still have ten thousand dollars over for an emergency. In the mining game, there are always emergencies.

"Don't know where it's coming from," Panhandle admitted; "that's a bridge that's got to be crossed, but you've got to get that Pardo claim. And I've a hunch that in doin' it you're playin' into Meade's hands. He knows you'll have to borrow money to keep going. Well, let's go up. This is going to be a great day for the Pardos."

Mrs. Pardo presented a paper showing full authority to sell.

The Judge was introduced, and he beamed, but the beam did not deceive Tad. "We find ourselves rivals, young man," the Judge said, "but that is life." He turned to Mrs. Pardo. "We offer you twenty thousand dollars cash for your claim."

"But yesterday you mentioned thirty thousand!" she said.

"True, but you have put us to the trouble of bidding. We now feel that we must get it as cheaply as we can," he explained.

"Thirty thousand," said Tad without hesitation. And when Panhandle saw the relief on the old lady's face he could have hugged the youth.

"Thirty-five," countered the Judge.

"Forty," snapped Tad, and Mrs. Pardo gasped.

"Forty-five!" The Judge was enjoying it now. There was no chance to buy, but he would force Tad's bid up to the sky. He could tell by the

youth's face he was doing considerable inward worrying.

"Fifty thousand dollars," Tad said.

And Mrs. Pardo in a daze calculated that the interest on fifty thousand dollars was three thousand dollars a year. She closed her eyes a moment and tears came slowly.

"Dear God in heaven," she said softly, "we've struck it. We thank Thee for this blessing."

"Fifty-five," growled the Judge. He wanted it to appear that the going was getting tough for him.

"That claim's value is unknown," Tad said, "except that we have reason to believe there's money there. No one will go much higher than this without further investigation. Most would not go as high. Here is my proposition. We will pay you seventy-five thousand dollars for the claim, Mrs. Pardo——"

"Eighty thousand," cut in the Judge.

"Just a minute," snapped Tad. "We will pay you seventy-five thousand dollars, Mrs. Pardo. Twenty-five thousand dollars in cash, and our note for the balance. I suggest you make the Judge match us in cash. I think he's forcing up the price." Tad looked quickly at Panhandle. The latter nodded. "I don't think the Judge has the cash. He'll want you to take a note for the whole business. He's doing business on a shoe string."

Mrs. Pardo lifted her faded eyes to the Judge's face. To him she was merely an old woman—a miner's wife with no brains. But he reckoned without her knowledge of the frontier. She might be deceived in numerous ways, but one thing she knew—she knew when a man was bluffing. She had seen it too many times. She had seen them attempt to bluff when facing a gun; in card games; holding mining claims; and in the arenas filled with the dust of the round-up.

"Eighty thousand dollars, half cash," said the Judge.

"Sold," she said, "to Mr. Tad Brawley for twenty-five thousand dollars cash, and the balance whenever he wants to pay it."

Panhandle watched the Judge depart. "There's no doubt of it, Tad," he whispered, "the old cuss is highly pleased with himself. He's got you in a financial hole. But you've got a good claim. I know you'd sooner the Pardos had come along with us, but what they need now is the cash."

"Sure," Tad agreed. "But the last claim has come into the fold. I didn't buy it, you understand; the company bought it. Every cent I've got has already gone into the company. I guess the only thing we can do now is to go ahead, stand off what creditors we can, and pay for bed rock and a quick clean-up."

"That's about the size of it," Panhandle answered, "that and a little guessing between times as to what move Meade will make next."

CHAPTER VII.

THE INNER MAN.

BOTH Tad and Panhandle were down to the train to see the Pardos when they left.

"We've talked it over," Pardo said weakly, "and we're all through with mining. We've put in our time. The rest of our lives are going to be spent where it's warm—thanks to you boys. Good-bye and good luck!" He gave a last look at the timbered mountains as they lifted his stretcher aboard the train.

"Just like a boy singing in the dark," Panhandle observed; "he says he's glad to go because he hates to go. Just trying to cheer himself up a little." They planned to stop a day or so and pick up a crew to follow the supplies up to the leases. "And that makes me think," Panhandle added, "here's some mail for you."

He gave the young man a quick

glance as Tad opened a letter from Marie Westover. "Girl in the case, eh?" he reflected. "Might have known it. That makes it bad. Wimmin are so danged fickle. If they don't get behind a fellow and help, it takes his mind off his work. I'd hoped there wasn't a girl."

It was evidently the sort of a letter the youth hoped to receive, for it appeared to brighten him considerably. Next he opened a letter from his brother. This one brought a cloud, Panhandle observed. The last paragraph read:

I am told, Tad, this Westover girl is running around with this man and that. She is still wearing your ring. I am not surprised. She doesn't propose to let go of you if you develop into a good thing. Failure would be the best possible thing that could happen to you. It would show up this girl in her true colors.

Tad's face flushed with anger. He tore up the letter and dashed the bits into a waste basket. "I don't believe it," he growled. "Say, Panhandle, give me something to do."

"I sure will," the Texan said. "It'll take your mind off your troubles."

"I hate all my family except my mother," Tad cried. "Grandfather was the only one who understood me."

"And I've heard him say you were the only one to understand him," Panhandle replied. "Here's something to do. There's a red-headed woman called to see you three times. Find out what she wants. But say 'no' to everything —that's the only safe way with a woman."

The visitor was buxom and motherly. Her face was flushed as though she had just come from the kitchen. Her eyes were serious now as she studied Tad, but he guessed they could flash with fire or humor on occasion.

"I am Bridget Mulcahy," she informed him. "I hear you are opening up a camp. You'll be needing a cook, my lad. The most important thing about a mining camp is the inner man. Feed them well, says I, and you'll have no labor troubles. I'm an expert, if I do say it myself. If you want references I can get them. I can take care of fifteen or twenty nicely, and if you'll give me a helper I'll feed thirty and not bat an eye."

"I've never hired a cook before," Tad said, "and——"

"Then suppose you try me. I cook by ear, so to speak. That is, I don't read any books in my cooking. The best thing I can say for myself is this: When I make a pie the men eat the crust. They don't sluice out the filling and leave the crust staring at you like a piece of bed rock. Come on over to dinner to-night and bring your men with you. How many will there be? The proof of the pudding is the eating."

She was a vigorous woman and no fooling, Tad thought.

"I've only one man here. He's to be the superintendent of the mine," Tad said; "but he's probably an expert on testing a two-handed cook's product."

"Bring him along," she said. Outside, her confident manner vanished. "I've got to have that job," she muttered desperately, "what with my sister's kids needing the doctor's care, and sis herself too weak to work. I've got to have it, and I'd like to see anybody stop me from getting it." She peered cautiously into the window at Panhandle. "So that's the superintendent, eh? Well, I'll be getting no help from the likes of him! He's a hatchet-faced woman hater with an ingrowing disposition. Lives on lemons, from the expression of him. Ugh!" She grunted in disgust. "Well, here goes every cent I've got. Nobody ever said Bridget Mulcahy was afraid to take a chance!" She crossed over to the butcher shop, then went from there to the grocery store. This accomplished,

she started for home vowing to cook the meal of her life.

Unconscious of what his new helper was doing, Tad had returned to the Texan. "She turned out to be a woman cook looking for a job," he reported.

"My gosh!" yelled Panhandle in great alarm. "You didn't hire her, did you?"

"No!"

"Thank your stars! A man's what you want. With a woman in camp, you've got to shave; you can't swear, and what's more important, if you want to sneak out to the pump in the morning with nothing on but an undershirt, you can't do it with wimmin in camp. You've got to dress before you can wash up. Besides, they're always settin' their cap for somebody. She's red-headed, ain't she?"

"Yes," Tad admitted.

"I know the kind. No man in camp will dare call his soul his own. On a cold morning if you sneak into the cook tent to get warm, it'll be 'Clear out all of you until I beat the triangle! And wipe your feet before you come in or you'll track up my clean floors. 'Be a good boy and fetch me a bucket of water.' Or, 'Who'll fill the wood box?' No, I'm agin' 'em. I'm glad you didn't hire her."

"But I did agree to go down and have dinner this evening," Tad said, "and you're going along, too."

"Up here it's supper. Count me out!"

"If you don't go, I'll hire her anyway," Tad said. He was enjoying the situation. Obviously, Panhandle's pet aversion was women.

"Well, I'll go then," the Texan said grudgingly. "I knew somethin' could happen to spoil my fun."

The remainder of the day was devoted to picking up a crew. In this, Panhandle was given a free hand. It was with some misgivings that Tad approached Mrs. Mulcahy's cottage that evening. Panhandle had scrubbed his face until it glowed. Even his huge freckles seemed to gleam like nuggets.

"Mrs. Mulcahy," Tad said in his best manner, "I want to present Panhandle Pete Carson."

"Howdy," grunted Panhandle.

Something in his manner aroused Mrs. Mulcahy's ire. "How do you do, Mr. Carson?" Then something came into her mind and she knew she must say it, even if it cost her all chance of a job. "Carson? That's Swedish, is it not?"

"Swedish! I'm as much Irish as you are, Mrs. Mulcahy. Where'd this red hair come from? Ahhh! And you got your name by marriage at that. I'll bet it was Brown or Jones or——"

"It was O'Toole!" she interrupted. "And what do you think of that? You never married, of course."

"No woman is good enough for me," Panhandle muttered. He felt he was getting the worst of the encounter. And Tad was looking on. "And Mr. Mulcahy, of course, pulled his freight." That instant Panhandle was sorry he had made the comment. Mr. Mulcahy might have been a fine man who had lived his time and died. Panhandle had no wish to hurt any one's feelings. I'm sorry," he said quickly.

"It's quite all right, Mr. Carson. He pulled his freight—with my help. He was red-headed. No red-headed man should ever marry a red-headed woman. I knew that by July first. We were married June twentieth."

"June is an unlucky month for red-headed people to marry. The other unlucky months are July, August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April, and May," Panhandle observed. "There's some talk of having thirteen months to the year, but that won't help any—thirteen's an unlucky number."

With sparks still flying, the three entered the dining room. Panhandle sniffed at the soup, but emptied the

bowl. The cook then placed a pot roast before them that tasted as good as turkey. And though she smiled outwardly, inwardly she watched them with concern.

"The big boy," she thought, "wouldn't I like to have a chance to put some meat on his bones this summer! Grew too fast, just like my brothers. And I'll bet all the boys picked on him because he was overgrown and awkward. I've always wished I had a boy like that, too. And look at that scarecrow of a Panhandle! I notice he's eating everything in sight. I'll have to ask them if they'll have some more, as a matter of politeness, though Heaven knows there's no more in the kitchen!"

She smiled upon them. "Please let me fill your plates again—there's plenty." Tad refused out of politeness. She had expected that. She did not urge Panhandle too strongly. They ate a whole apple pie. It was beautifully browned, and the apples had a flavor that neither man had tasted before.

Bridget's great moment came as they prepared to depart. The suspense had almost driven her crazy, but she did not show it. Tad stood in the doorway thanking her for a pleasant evening as though she were some friend he had dined with.

"It's bad form to talk business after a social evening, Mrs. Mulcahy," he ended with a smile, "but we are leaving at nine o'clock in the morning. Do you suppose you could have a stock of kitchen utensils, including a range and the necessary grub, ordered by that time?"

Could she? She could do it in half the time if need be. "I'll be ready," she said, "and—thank you, Mr. Brawley." She heard their footsteps on the walk outside and pinched herself to be sure it was not a dream. "Right now I could almost fall in love with that scarecrow of a Panhandle Pete Carson. But come, Bridget Mulcahy, this is no time to be dreaming. There's plenty to be done. Yes, plenty to be done by everybody between now and the fall."

Time and money vanished all too quickly to suit Tad in the weeks that followed. He had as loyal a crew as could be found anywhere. Mrs. Mulcahy's cooking had much to do with this. Even the natural drifters decided to remain a while and enjoy real food for a change. Tad worked until he dropped each day, yet the following morning he was as good as ever. Gradually he began to take on weight. His muscles became steel bands, and loads that he could hardly roll over when he first came on the job were now lifted with ease. What pleased him most was the hardness of the network of muscles over his stomach. Never again would a blow in the stomach almost break him in two and cause him agony.

Confident of the outcome, Meade and Muller watched the progress. The pair knew the money must be melting away. And as Tad was going at the matter on a large scale, building for the future as well as the present, the first clean-up was several months away. Each made a fairly close estimate of what the work had cost, then compared notes. They were only eight hundred dollars apart.

"They've got less than three thousand dollars left," Meade said, "and there's a lot of flume to be built; a monitor and hose to be installed; sluice boxes to be finished. After that, they'll have to find bed rock. We'd better lay the proposition before 'Sandy' Crane. He'll have to have a big cut, but we can't help that. There's enough in this for a big cut for several of us."

"Crane, eh?" Muller mused. "I was afraid it'd come to that. It can't be helped."

Sandy Crane was a banker who

loaned, at his own terms, money on propositions other bankers would not touch. He inserted plenty of teeth in every agreement he made and, as a result, he had never lost a dime. While the larger banks had little to do with him, he controlled, in various ways, many small ones. No dishonest act had ever been committed by Crane. He merely maneuvered less fortunate people into tight situations, and then made the most of his opportunity.

Crane listened to Meade as he gave details. He then asked a number of questions, and said: "Very well, I will offer to lend them the money."

"And you can count on us to prevent Brawley from paying the note when it's due," Meade said.

"I'm not interested in that detail," Crane replied.

"Oh, no, you're not," Meade thought, "oh, no! You're pretty sure we'll do our part or you wouldn't listen to us."

Three weeks later, when Tad knew he must get a loan in order to reach bed rock, Crane appeared. A brisk wind was coming down the canyon at the time. Crane's trousers flapped about his long, thin legs. His flying coat tails gave him a birdlike appearance. His large, hooked nose completed the suggestion of a sand-hill crane. Panhandle saw him first.

"Old 'Sand-hill' Crane, Tad," he warned. "Don't have anything to do with that bird."

"Crane, the banker?" Tad inquired.

"Yeah," Panhandle answered.

"But we need the money, Panhandle," Tad insisted. "We're sure to clean up big. If we just get money enough to reach bed rock——"

"I know," Panhandle replied, "but Crane, or somebody, will see that you don't reach bed rock on time. Here, I'll take care of this." Without waiting for an answer, the Texan advanced on the banker. "Do you know me, Crane?" he demanded.

"Yes. You're Panhandle Pete Carson," Crane replied.

"Good!" exclaimed Panhandle. "Then you know that I know you. And you'll understand why I'm running you off this lease. Now, clear out! We don't need any money, and if we did we wouldn't take a chance on you. I'm a man of mighty few words and plenty of action, and I've used up all my words now."

The banker looked at the Texan as a sand-hill crane might regard a choice morsel of food. The fact that he did not reply was significant. Instead, he turned on his heel and walked away. Tad sensed that Crane was not through with them.

"You've made an enemy, Panhandle," he said.

"Prob'ly," Panhandle admitted, "but at least he hasn't got that long bill of his into our business."

"We might as well devote a little time to figuring where we can get some more money," Tad suggested.

Mrs. Mulcahy poked her head from the cook tent at that moment. "Mail's just arrived from town with the groceries," she cried.

Panhandle set his teeth at that. Every time the mail arrived it contained bad news for Tad. The Texan hurried to the cook tent.

"If there's a letter in that pile for Tad from that cussed girl of his or his infernal brother, give it to me and I'll throw it in the river. He's got troubles enough as it is. Why some men will fall in love——" He snorted. "Women are a curse on the land!"

"Is that so?" flared Mrs. Mulcahy. "And for that you'll get nothing to eat." She picked up his plate of food and dumped it out. "And what's more, you'll clear out until you have apologized to women in general. Not that the better sex needs any apology from the likes of you, Mr. Carson, but because apologizing is going to hurt you

a lot. You are going to apologize, and I'm going to make you like it."

"You two fighting again!" Tad said as he entered the tent. "You've been at it all summer now. Don't you ever get tired of it? Hello, letters from home, eh?"

Mrs. Mulcahy saw an expression of hope come into his eyes as he picked up two letters. His fingers trembled slightly as he opened the letter from Marie Westover. She saw his mouth set in grim lines, then with a gesture of impatience he thrust the letter into his pocket.

"I wish I didn't love that darned girl," he blurted. "Panhandle's right. Girls are the bunk. Oh, Mrs. Mulcahy, I'm sorry. I didn't include you. You're one in a million. But this Marie. Here I am up in the wilderness getting bow-legged from the load I'm carrying, and all I hear from her is stuff about going to a dance with 'Puggy,' and enjoying the theater with 'Buck.' Of a thousand kids in town, she'd have to select the two I hate most; the two that used to beat me up regularly! Why can't a girl get behind a fellow? Or why can't a fellow love the sort of girl who will get behind him?"

"There ain't no such kind!" shouted Panhandle from the safety of the next tent.

"There are millions of 'em," Mrs. Mulcahy snapped. "But they're not for old pelicans like you. Never mind, Tad," she said in a motherly way, "it'll all come out in the wash. You'll get the right one——"

"But, hang it, I don't want the right one!" he exploded. "I want Marie."

She watched him open his brother's letter. She noticed he crumpled this letter up and tossed it into the stove. There was nothing about it that he wished to save.

"Queer how a kid will love his folks even when they do everything to make him hate them," Tad muttered. "Right now if Conrad would back me up, well —he'd be the greatest guy in the world." He started to eat, then decided he wasn't hungry. "Panhandle," he barked, "you can run things here. I'm going home to see if I can't raise some money."

"Yeah," Panhandle thought, "that's only part of it. You want to see that cussed girl." Aloud he said, "I'll do my best. Any orders?"

"Yes, make a part payment on that monitor and give 'em a note for the balance. Have the note come due November first. We should have cleaned up by that time. You're the boss here until I get back!" He hurriedly jammed some clothing into a suit case and was off.

Presently, Panhandle stuck his face into the cook tent. "You heard him? I'm boss! You're taking orders from me, Mrs. Bridget Mulcahy. Hah-hah! Ha-a-a-a-a-a!"

She reached for the nearest object, what happened to be a coconut cream pie. Then it was Panhandle learned that woman can move more swiftly than man. He jerked his head from sight, but he was a split second too late.

"Oh, lands!" the cook groaned. "There, I've gone and wasted a good pie!" Outside one of the miners was leading the pie-blinded Panhandle to the pump.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK HOME.

HOME!

Tad's heart pounded as he ran up the front steps.

"Hello, mother!" he shouted.

His mother looked at him in surprise. Was this well-built, bronzed man her boy? She smiled, then took him into her arms.

"What do you weigh?" she asked.

"An even two hundred, thanks to Mrs. Mulcahy's cooking and a lot of hard work. I'm only hitting the high

spots this time. But I'll be home all winter. Where's Conrad?"

"He'll be home at dinner time." She clung to him in a way that made him reject any thought of leaving to see his brother just then.

Later, with dinner over, Tad faced his brother in the room serving as a home office. In clear terms he explained the situation.

"I've got to have twenty-five thousand dollars, Conrad. I'm not asking it as a brother, but as a business proposition. You can buy twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of my interest outright and you will get back ten for one in the years to come. Or you can lend the company the money at interest."

"I will on one condition, Tad. That is, that you give up Marie Westover. She's hanging onto you because she thinks you're going to make a fortune. She has followed your progress in your letters. If you fail, she'll drop you in a hurry, Tad. I know you love her and that is the part that hurts me most. Better to have it over with now than to be dragged out later. She's not the sticking kind. Think it over."

"I don't need to, Conrad. I'm sticking to Marie."

"Then my answer is no. I hope you fail. I will do all I can to make you fail, beccause I think it is for your future happiness to fail." Conrad was determined. Tad could see that. So he wasted no words. But he was bitterly disappointed.

"I'll go down and send a wire to my superintendent," he said. "I'll stay here to-night and light out for the mine in the morning."

The wire was brief:

No luck here stop see if you can figure a way of raising the money.

"Right now I'm pretty low," Tad growled, "but I know somebody who will cheer me up. I'm going to surprise her." Tad's heart began to pound excitedly as he neared Marie Westover's house. It was strange, he thought, that a heart could take him to a mountain top without effort would pound climbing a flight of ten steps. He pressed the doorbell button and waited for a light step.

The door opened and Pug's huge figure filled the doorway. Pug was surprised, but only for a moment. He closed the door and stepped outside. Yes, he was the same old massive, domineering Pug. He had gone from the first grade to college without being whipped. He smiled confidently.

"My dear Tad," he taunted, "your sense of the drama was always highly developed. The big he-man of the open spaces sweeps the little maid off her feet. But absence makes the heart grow fonder—for the other fellow. I'm the other fellow. You're out of the picture. And so, big boy, on your way! On your way!"

"I think," Tad said, "I'll see Marie, anyway. And don't try to stop me or I'll——"

"You and who else?" rasped Pug. He caught Tad's shoulder and sent him spinning down the steps. Tad came back with a bound. He drove his fist into Pug's shirt front, and never had Pug been so jarred in his life. Pug decided to grapple and overcome this upstart by sheer brute force. Tad grasped his arms and twisted them around behind his back. He was fed up on Pug. He had been getting a paragraph or two about him in every letter Marie wrote.

"You cheese hero," Tad growled, "I always knew you were a big bag of wind!" He gripped the collar of Pug's shirt and ripped it off. Then he slapped the other's cheeks with his open hand. This done, he picked him up and threw him into a mass of potted plants. Then Tad rang the doorbell and stalked away without looking back.

He heard Marie's voice cry: "Oh, Pug! What happened?"

"I was attacked by three burglars," Pug said.

Tad stopped. "Hey, Pug, you yellow dog, tell her the truth or I'll come back there and make you!"

"Tad!" The girl's voice was filled with amazement. "Tad! Is that you?"

"Yeah!" he answered. "it's me. And what of it?" Tad kept right along going. "I'm leaving the whole works behind me, and I'm glad of it. I suppose Conrad would lend me the money now, but he can go to thunder, too."

Panhandle was on hand to greet Tad. It seemed great to see his homely face again. These were real people. It made no difference who a man was in love with, or whether he was a success or failure—he was liked for himself.

"Been fighting with Mrs. Mulcahy, I suppose," Tad suggested.

"Fightin' like cats and dogs. We're all out of money and the boys haven't been paid yet, but they're all sticking—thanks to Mrs. Mulcahy's food."

"So you admit she can cook?" said Tad.

"If she were only a man, Tad," Panhandle replied, "what a paradise that camp would be! I've got some money lined up. I went to Hollister Standish. He's a small-town banker and always will be. He's lost all the money he ever made trying to help others develop the country. Come over and meet him."

Ten minutes later, Tad found himself facing a little, dried-up man, whose expression was that of a crusader. One might imagine him, face alight with glory, climbing a mountain and planting a banner while the enemy hurled lead and fire upon him.

"My proposition was this," Panhandle said. "We know that Mr. Standish will do the right thing by us. If we have a run of hard luck, he won't press us. He's interested in developing the country, and, as I said, he's put more into it than he'll ever get out. We get the loan at the usual rate. We pay it off November first. In addition to that, Mr. Standish gets a thousand shares of stock at ten dollars a share as a sort of bonus. With that ten thousand dollars, we can work day and night. The twenty-five thousand will cover the work we had already planned. What's your opinion, Tad?"

"A mighty fair deal. Trot out the papers, Mr. Standish, and I'll sign."

"The money will be available at once," Standish informed them. He watched the pair as they walked briskly up the street. "At last the tide of fortune seems about to turn," he sighed. "Maybe I'll get some of the money back that I've invested in this country. Ah, but it's a great country! It challenges development. It is a privilege to accept such a challenge. It is a joy to see such young men as Tad Brawley come into this land. Yes, I think I'll make a little money at last. But—I've thought that before. The propositions have always failed. Sometimes it seems that my money is a curse on development rather than a blessing."

As he turned from the window, the office boy admitted Crane's lean figure.

"I am here," Crane informed the banker, "to buy up the note Brawley just signed. You are not adverse to making a profit, I imagine. I'll pay you twenty-six thousand dollars for it."

"It is not for sale at any price, Mr. Crane," Standish informed him. "I think I know your methods."

"Perhaps. Every man has his price. I'll pay you thirty thousand dollars for that note."

"I tried to make myself clear," Standish said firmly; "the note is not for sale at any price. I don't propose to have those people annoyed. There are too many—er—ah—buzzards sitting around waiting for somebody to create something for them to swoop down upon. Good day."

Crane made no threat. He merely

bowed and left the office. But he wired his bank to get control of all the Standish paper they could lay hands on. He would teach this small-town banker a lasting lesson. He took the next train out of the city and visited the dealer who had sold Tad the monitor, pipe, and other equipment.

"I would like to buy the note they gave," he said. "Yes, I am buying it for friends of mine—Meade and Muller. Yes, we will pay face value. No discount is expected."

When Crane finally reached his own bank he was in a pleasant frame of mind. "All will be well if we can just buy up sufficient Standish paper," he said, "and that should not be difficult. That man will be taught a lesson he will remember." He drummed on his desk for several moments with long, thin fingers. "And now to give Meade and Muller final instructions," he mused. "The stage will then be set for my most successful drama."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WINGS OF WINTER.

EVERY mining man thrills to the pride of accomplishment. Bit by bit, he watches his preliminary work take form. Yet again and again comes the stab of doubt. Is all this work useless? Will he find the vein pinched out or the values at bed rock worthless—that he has been lured to his financial ruin by the siren call of a pocket?

Tad dare not think of failure with so much at stake. He knew that in the end the ground would prove out. There were too many claims in the group. If one failed, there was certain to be money in the next. The old Chinese and white miners had found uniform values wherever they had been able to reach bed rock. But did those values continue at greater depths? As gold worked downward, it seemed logical there should be more rather than less at the depths. But it is well to remember that gold is where you find it. Yes, in the end there would be many great clean-ups. But would the present group be the owners? Or, as had so often happened, would some group of wealthy men reap the harvest others had made possible at the sacrifice of their all? Every old miner was thinking the same thoughts as time passed. Mrs. Mulcahy thought then; so did the Silent Partners, who were on no friendlier terms than when Tad first met them.

Then, to prove that hope ever died hard, they began telling of their plans for the winter.

"After the clean-up, I'm through with minin' gold," one of them said. "I'm goin' to get out of this cussed country. I'm through. I'll have enough to live on."

The others nodded in agreement. They were through with mining; through with the country. They were going to do as the Pardos had done, clear out and stay away. The Pardos were happy, they had written. Pardo had recovered and was enjoying life in the sunshine.

All hands were present when Tad Brawley opened the great gate at the dam and watched the water move down the flume. It followed the winding flume along the upper bench, spanning canyons on high trestle work, and twice was tunneled through the mountains for a short distance. It came to a stop in a small basin from which it was taken as needed by the monitor. As Tad came down the steep bluff from the basin and took his place at the monitor, the crowd grew tense. He shouted a command, and from the monitor's nozzle came a mighty stream of water. Small rocks were knocked high into the air. The dirt and gravel melted away. The clear water below grew tinted, then muddy. A great cheer went up from the crowd.

Day and night it worked, reducing

what had once been a great slide, in order that the gold-bearing gravel could be reached. Bed rock, they felt sure, was not far away. Even the ambitious Chinese had not felt it worth while to move a mountain to obtain what lay below. Boulders were blown apart with powder, and the conveyor carried them to the dump.

A shout late one afternoon brought Tad and Panhandle on the run. Panhandle was getting the worst of it in an argument with Mrs. Mulcahy and was glad to escape. The water had been turned off until only a small stream spurted gently from the nozzle.

"We're uncovering one of the old workings," a man explained. "The Chinese tried to follow bed rock into the slide. But I guess additional slides got the upper hand."

The water washed away the earth and exposed timbers made of heavy trees. The timbers ran for nearly seventy feet and ended in an old Chinese pump. The stream had evidently been diverted in order to turn the old wooden wheel. The wheel was still in an excellent state of preservation.

"Wait!" Tad ordered. "I'm going to take that out as a souvenir."

"Well! Well! Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Mulcahy, running up and wiping her hands on her apron. "Many's the time I've heard your grandfather describe the likes of a Chinese pump. A water wheel in the river supplied the power. A wooden shaft turned with the wheel, and on the other end of the shaft ran a canvass belt into a sort of flume. Strips of wood nailed crosswise on the belt, sort of hauled the water up through the flume. In this way they could pump out a hole. And a sight he said it was—each claim a hundred feet wide and each having a wheel of its own. And they didn't have any grease to put on the axles and so each wheel squeaked a different tune."

Tad closed his eyes and pictured the old days—a wheel every hundred feet; Chinese and whites toiling in the muck; red-shirted miners heading for the dance and gambling places in the log houses on the high bench; pleasure, fights with men, fights with Nature. Those were the days, and yet—— He stopped to think. The old-timers had nothing on him. He was taking up where they had left off. He had carried water along a mountainside until it was so high above the ground that tremendous power had been created. And with that power he was tearing the mountains apart. And fight? Yes. The fight was still on. Love? Well, he still loved Marie Westover, though he fought back the feeling desperately. That was one thing he could not seem to master.

The men brought the old wheel out. It was held together with wooden pegs and square nails. They cleared out the hole, pumped out the water, and went to bed rock while the pump held the water in check.

"I'm down to bed rock," Panhandle yelled.

But his voice had hardly died away before the mountain began to tumble again.

"Get out quick!" Tad shouted.

And there was something in his tone that made Panhandle leap to obey. He came from the depths, smeared with muck. In one fist he clutched mud and black sand. Without attempting to clean himself, he walked down to the stream, washed his hands in a gold pan, and then panned the contents.

"Kid," he cried, "look at that! Gold and platinum, but mostly platinum. Just a fistful, but what a fistful!" The mountain continued to tumble, but the monitor hissed defiantly as the mighty stream of water ate each slide away.

The wings of winter were already spread. The southward flight was on before they began shoveling in. The monitor was stored until another moun-

tain must be faced or another bench be washed away. Everything was going into the sluice box now. Much from bed rock itself began to appear. There was a strong temptation to pan it, but there wasn't time. Let the sluice box take care of it. Once there it could not get away.

Hollister Standish came out late in September. "Think you'll make it?" he inquired. "There's icicles on the flumes these days, and it won't be long until the gravel starts to freeze. Then you'll have to quit unless you thaw it."

"We'll shut down," Tad answered. "It'll cost too much to thaw it. Next year, we'll jump in as soon as the spring sun thaws things out."

"That's fine. It's going to be great for the country. We'll get better roads and some of this land will be settled up. Your pay roll will help the merchants, too. They've held on through some pretty lean years hoping this very thing would happen. I hear other outfits are going to organize. Some of the old fellows down below have given options on their leases. They're afraid they'll be skinned out by some slickers. That's what's holding things back."

"I never saw him so nervous," Panhanle whispered to Tad. "I'll bet pressure is being brought to bear to get our note. But he wouldn't worry us with his troubles. He's here to make himself feel better. Poor little stiff, he's lost weight, too!"

Tad walked over to the little dried-up banker. "Things going right?" he demanded.

"Oh, yes," Standish said. "I can't complain. Country's getting ahead and——"

"Never mind the country. How about you? Is Crane getting tough?" Tad's hand was on the little man's shoulder. He was looking him squarely in the eyes.

"Well—yes. But I don't want to bother you with my troubles. I had some paper outstanding, demand stuff, like most banks have. He's collected it and brought it in. He demanded payment in full. I paid. I paid without batting an eye, but I didn't fool him. Things are pretty shaky right now. If there should be a run on the bank ——" He paled at the thought. "Well, people have confidence in me. In the end they'd be paid off dollar for dollar, but it'd probably wipe me out. And I couldn't give you an extension on that note. You see, they'd sell me out; Crane would bid in, and then he'd force your hand. I hope——"

"Yes?"

"Maybe I hadn't better say it. But I only hope that you fellows have a big clean-up. I think there's some kind of trickery afoot, too. Meade has the note you gave the machinery man——"

"The deuce you say?" exploded Tad.

"—and his having it means something," Standish continued.

"What? You seem to know all the tricks that can be played on a man," Tad said.

"I should know 'em. They have been worked on me at different times—some successfully. They could appear at the proper time and through an officer seize your clean-up. Of course, you'd get all over the amount of the note, but there might be something lost along the way, and the delay might hurt me. Twenty-five thousand dollars is a lot of money to a bank of the size of mine."

"Don't worry," Tad assured him, though inwardly he was worrying badly himself. "We'll be on hand with the money. We'll have to start our clean-up, though, a little sooner than I intended."

"Don't do that. Just go on. I'm all right," Standish said. "But, young man, you've certainly made me feel better. You see, so many of my mining schemes have failed that I have commenced to believe I'm jinxed."

"You've shaken off the jinx, Mr. Standish." Tad watched the old fellow hurry off. Crane and his pack had aged Standish the last month. There was no doubt of that. He was afraid there would be a run on his bank. If the bank went under, even temporarily, he would feel disgraced.

The conversation moved Panhandle to talk to himself. "I suppose they'd call it murder if I went gunning for a few pelts," he growled. "Speaking of pelts—— There's more than one way to skin a skunk. Mmmm! And that makes me think of several things."

He clumped away in his heavy boots and sized up the sluice boxes. The steady flow of gravel had worn down the ripples.

"Think they'll stand the gaff until November first?" Tad inquired.

"They'll have to," Panhandle said. "We've got a lot of good bed-rock stuff to go in, too. It froze last night, but I turned some water over it and thawed it. We'd better keep the water going in the sluice boxes all night from now on. It'll keep things from freezing up. And it'll keep people from snooping around, too."

Tad left him working away under the box at the point just below where the men were shoveling in. They worked until dark that night, and shortly after dark they heard Panhandle shouting for somebody to turn off the water. Tad ran and shut off the water, then he joined the Texan.

"Too many big boulders weakened the box where we've been shoveling in," Carson explained, "and she came apart. We'll have to rebuild this part tonight."

"Could the gold have washed out while it was apart?" Tad asked. "It could if it had run all night, I suppose?"

"I got the jump on it," Panhandle informed him.

They worked all night in making the repairs and the next day Panhandle announced he was going to town on a personal matter.

"I've put it off long enough," he explained, "and in another week we'll be through."

He returned that night, and, true to his prediction, a week later Tad ordered the clean-up. Most of the crew were laid off, but they hung around, eager to see the result. Tad kept the Silent Partners to help Panhandle. Several others who owned stock were kept on the job. But one and all vowed to clear out of the country as soon as the clean-up was over. They had served their time at mining and were through. The example the Pardos had set was good enough for them.

The main volume of water was shut off and the small group of men climbed into the sluice boxes with spades, brooms, and gold pans. Mrs. Mulcahy peered in with interest. She seemed to be disappointed.

"All I can see is gravel and sand just like you've been sending to the tailing dump all summer," she said.

"That's because you are a woman," Panhandle said, "and few women know much."

"True, and the men know less," she retorted. "I guess I'd better get back to my pies."

"The first sensible thing I've ever heard you say," Panhandle informed her.

A small quantity of water was turned on. With picks the men forced up the worn ripples and washed them off. They threw them aside and loosened up the gravel, washing away the larger pieces and the lighter sand. Presently gold nuggets began to gleam brightly under the water. As more of the sand was washed away, a darker metal was revealed.

"And that's the platinum the women used to pick out of the gold pans in the early days," Panhandle muttered.

"Is it what you'd call a good clean-up, Panhandle?" Tad nervously inquired.

"Can't tell yet. Run on to the cook tent and ask Mrs. Mulcahy for a sieve. We can save some time here." Tad returned in a few minutes with one of the cook's prized utensils. Panhandle dumped the contents of a pan into the sieve and let the smaller stuff wash through into another pan.

"Not much big stuff, is there?" Tad observed.

"But plenty of small stuff," Panhandle countered. "And plenty of square nails. Here's a bullet, too. Fired in the old days. She's from a six-gun."

One of the Silent Partners rushed up and whispered hoarsely:

"Meade's coming. There's another man with him. No! It ain't Muller. Muller's trailing behind them. Shall we get our guns and——"

"We'll wait and see," Tad said.

Meade approached. "How's things coming?" he asked. His eyes lighted as he saw the gold in the pan.

The other man broke the silence that followed.

"Proceed with your clean-up, gentlemen," he said, throwing back his coat and displaying a shield. "I have here an order seizing this clean-up on a note given for material furnished. Proceed!"

"Now, hold on," Tad protested, "you don't want it all. Take enough to satisfy the claim and——"

"The order covers the entire clean-up. You have nothing to fear, gentlemen," the officer said, "what is left over will be returned to you after the law has taken its course."

"Yes, after it's taken its course," Tad said bitterly; "that won't help us out much."

Mutterings among the men became a storm of protest. They dived into their tents and emerged with various kinds of arms.

"We've as much to say about that gold as you have, Tad," one of them cried. "We don't propose to stand by and be robbed, law or no law!"

Meade and Muller grew nervous, but the officer shot a glance at Tad.

"It's up to you what happens," he said.

Tad stepped between the men and the officer.

"This is a trick of Meade's," he said, "but we'll be playing into his hands if we start fighting the law. Let 'em take the clean-up. We'll keep an eye on them. There should be enough for that note and several more like it. You know I'm with you to the end. Go back to camp, cool off, and think it over."

Slowly they retreated. Tad hurried with the clean-up. He wanted the officer and the others to clear out before the men changed their minds. Gold, platinum, and black sand were hastily made into packs and loaded on the backs of the three men.

"Now, clear out," Tad directed, "before the boys get riled up again!"

The officer hurried because he did not want to be in the position of shooting good men in carrying out his duty. Meade and Muller hurried because they did not like the mood of the men. Perspiration poured down their faces before they were halfway up the bank. They slowly dropped back.

"There's enough gold in here to cover everything," Meade panted.

"What I was thinking," Muller replied. "The officer or nobody else don't know how much there's here. When we reach the cabin we'll—" He lowered his voice so that the officer could not catch his words. Meade nodded. Presently, Muller lifted his voice. "Say, officer, let's rest at our cabin a few minutes. I'm all in!"

"Certainly," the officer answered.

They crossed a mucky field and stopped at the cabin. The packs were shed at the front entrance.

"I'll go out and get a bucket of water," Meade said; "you fellows take it easy. It's a hard pack up to where we left the horses."

He disappeared out the back door, cut around the cabin, and emptied a part of the contents of each pack into the water bucket. This he in turn dumped into a box in the woodshed. He covered the box with wood, washed out the bucket, filled it, and presently returned to the cabin.

As the officer squirmed into his pack ten minutes later he laughingly observed:

"There's nothing like a little rest to make a man's pack seem lighter."

"Mine feels the same way," Meade replied, as he struck across the muddy field and picked up the trail leading toward the horses.

CHAPTER X.

A GENERAL CLEAN-UP.

THE two friends finished a few odds and ends incident to the clean-up, then Panhandle said:

"Let's go to town?"

"We'll trail 'em, eh?" Tad suggested. "That suits me. Of course, with the officer along they can't do much. Honest, Panhandle, how much do you figure was in the clean-up?"

"We'll find out when we get there," the Texan answered. "Can't tell offhand."

They arrived in town almost as soon as the officer did. They went directly to the bank to see Hollister Standish. Through the frosted glass that divided his private office from the main room they could make out his agitated figure moving back and forth. Standish seemed to be bristling like some bantam rooster.

"Here's the situation," said a second voice, which they instantly recognized as Crane's. "We've picked up enough outstanding bills against the Brawley people to take practically their entire clean-up, unless it is unusually large. That leaves you and your twenty-five thousand dollars out in the cold. If a run on the bank should start——"

"It won't!" Standish snapped. "The people have confidence in me. They know my bank is good, and so do you. Now get out! You've tried to ruin me, but I paid every demand you made. I had to sell some paper at a loss to do it, but I paid."

"I'll have that note, Standish," Crane said heatedly, "if I have to break this bank to get it."

"We'll slip outside," Tad said; "it's just as well Crane doesn't know how much we've heard. We've got that much on him in case he starts something."

They left just in time. Crane passed down the street, where he met the officer, Meade, and Muller, on their way to the bank. The men, because the officer insisted, prepared to make the final clean-up in the presence of witnesses.

The larger bits of gold and platinum were placed in big bottles. Quicksilver was poured over the remainder. This picked up all the fine gold and left the platinum. The assayer departed with the quicksilver, promising to report in the morning. He was honest, they knew. His report would add some to the value of the clean-up, but they could almost estimate it now.

"Just about enough to cover our claims," Meade said. "Take that much gold and platinum, Mr. Standish, and credit our account accordingly."

Crane fished in his pocket for a paper. "This will take the rest of the clean-up," he said.

Tad Brawley was stunned. The crooks had moved fast and had thus prevented a dime being paid over to Standish, and the note was due November first. Hardly had he time to think of that when Crane produced a second

paper. It was a court order preventing Standish from granting an extension of time on the Brawley note.

"I did it," Crane smugly explained, "to protect my interests as a depositor in this bank."

"It stops me from granting an extension," the little banker snorted defiantly; "but you'll have to go like the deuce to make me force the collection."

"We'll manage that," Crane promised.

"Is this all?" Panhandle inquired. "No more claims, either trick or otherwise. No more bunk?"

"It is all," Crane said, "and it is enough."

"Let's go," said Panhandle. "We've still got a day left."

"Come on," Tad suggested, "let's light out for the mine."

Meade, Muller, and Crane left the bank together. Some distance down the street Crane encountered an acquaintance who cried:

"Hello, Crane, what are you doing in town?"

Crane smiled and lowered his voice. His thin lips whispered.

"Don't want this to get out, of course, but the bank is in pretty bad shape. Standish has loaned too much money on bum mining property. The Brawley claim is an example. The clean-up hardly paid wages. It's a gigantic flop. If you've any money in the bank, pull it out, but keep this matter quiet. We don't want a run on the bank."

To each acquaintance Crane met he said the same thing. Meade and Muller were doing similar work in other parts of town. It was all done in whispers; each man was warned not to repeat the information and possibly start a run on the bank. But the three knew what would happen. Every man had a friend he felt should know about conditions. And such friends had other friends. By night it was common gossip on the street.

Back at the mine, Tad Brawley expressed a desire to be alone.

"Right now I'm licked," he growled. "I've got to figure some way out of this—if there is a way. I don't matter so much. But the old-timers are up against it. I've lost out all along the line—girl, family, except mother—everything."

He seated himself on the empty sluice box. What wouldn't he have given just then to have known that his family would be sorry, not glad, when they learned of his failure! A fellow just naturally loved his own folks and wanted them behind him. Tad could tell himself he hated them, but he knew otherwise. He could tell himself things, but he could not deceive himself.

Darkness came early. The frost was in the air. The ice that had formed on the pools last night had not melted during the day. Winter had at last gripped the land. A cold moon would soon look down on the mine—the same moon that had seen red-shirted miners trooping toward the log-cabin saloons on the bench; that had seen the ceaseless turning of Chinese water wheels, and that had watched men drive square nails into sluice boxes years ago.

"Tad!"

At the sound of that voice Tad nearly fell off the sluice box. This thing was getting him. He was going crazy—hearing things. He turned, then blinked.

"Marie?" he managed to ask.

"Yes, Tad. Don't look at me that way, I'm not a ghost. Aren't you glad I came?" She stood there smiling at him—the carefree little girl he had always loved and always would love. But there was a new seriousness about her that caught his attention.

"Glad!" he cried. "You're just what I needed! But, Marie, I made a terrible mistake. This mine didn't pan out. I'm licked."

"That's why I came," she said, "be-

cause I knew you were beaten and broke. I'm glad it turned out that way because now they can't say I was playing a sure thing. I suppose they had a right to call me fickle, Tad, but I couldn't help it. I was always looking for some boy I couldn't find fault with; one who didn't always turn out a terrible flop at the last moment. Then just as I realized you were the one you left for the North. I guess I was jealous, Tad," she confessed, "I was afraid somebody up here would get you, so I wrote you a lot about the good times I was having just so you would keep interested and worried about me. I know it wasn't fair, but I paid for it—paid for it that time you beat up Pug, dumped him into the potted plants, then walked off without even looking back. Gee, Tad, I wanted you to come back, but—I had some pride. Now I'm here, so let's forget all about it and start all over again. Mining or anything."

"Mining," Tad said; "it won't be anything else for me." She saw him glance at the work he had created and knew it was breaking his heart to let go. "But, say," he suddenly demanded, "how did you know I was going broke? I didn't know it myself until this morning and then——"

"Panhandle Carson sent me a wire. He must have known and did not tell you," Marie explained. "I swallowed my pride and went to your brother Conrad. I told him you were going broke, and that I felt it was time somebody who loved you hurried up to the mine to pat you on the back. What do you suppose he did?"

"Ordered you thrown out, I suppose," Tad growled.

"Nothing of the kind. He looked at me for a long time, then he muttered: 'I guess I was wrong. Yes, I was wrong. Miss Westover, I have misjudged you. You are right. Somebody who loves Tad should go to him now!' And then he lent me the money to make the trip."

Tad turned away. He was glad it was dark so she could not see the tears in his eyes.

"Conrad always was a good old egg," he muttered.

Panhandle joined them at that moment. "Mrs. Mulcahy says she can't keep supper hot much longer," he announced.

As they made their way to the cook tent, Tad grabbed the Texan's arm.

"How come an old woman-hater like you would send for a girl?" he asked.

"Huh! You seemed to be sensible in every way but that," Panhandle answered. "They say all of us are crazy on some subject or other. I figured Marie Westover was your delusion. And what with your brother knocking her and everything I decided to test her out. That day I went to town on private business I sent her a wire. And as long as you are fool enough to want to get married anyway, I'm glad I did."

Marie laughed as she broke the ice in the water bucket and poured sufficient into a tin pan to wash her face and hands. Mrs. Mulcahy rushed out with a teakettle filled with hot water, but the girl waved it aside.

"I'm going to try and get a complexion like yours," she said.

"And it's a darlin' you are," said Mrs. Mulcahy. "Too good even for such a nice boy as Tad. I hold all wimmin are far too good for the men they marry."

"Yahhh!" snorted Panhandle loftily. "You're wrong——"

"I'm never wrong," the Widow Mulcahy snapped.

"Quit interruptin' your betters," Panhandle retorted. "As I was sayin', you're wrong, exceptin' in two cases. One's Marie and the other is your pretty self."

"Panhandle!" yelled Tad. "You've complimented a woman!"

"Yep! She's the first I ever complimented. We talked it over, Bridget and I, and decided we've had so much fun fightin' all summer we might as well fight all winter, and to make it legal, we're goin' to get married."

The widow beamed. "It is true, Tad, and I'm telling you now he'll be eatin' out of my hand long before spring or I'll lay the old pelican low with a rollin' pin."

"I've been eatin' practically out of your hand all summer," Panhandle said, "and the eats had somethin' to do with me decidin' to honor you with marriage."

"Honor me eye!" snorted Mrs. Mulcahy.

Supper over, Panhandle got to his feet. "I suppose you'd like to bill and coo on such a grand night, Tad? Well, I would myself, but there's no time for it. To-night we make the real clean-up."

"What's that?"

Tad leaped to his feet so suddenly that the table nearly upset. With speed born of much practice Mrs. Mulcahy swung from under it and over the bench just in time to miss a cup of hot tea cascading toward her.

"Maybe I should have told you," said Panhandle, "but in case you was sworn in by a court or somethin' I wanted you to be able to truthfully say they had taken all of the clean-up. You see, Tad, I was afraid they might grab the whole business by some trickery so I tried to outfox 'em. The time the sluice box parted? Remember? Well, I made it part. And I got into the stream with a bar and loosened up the gravel plenty. For five minutes nuggets just rained down through the opening. Then I yelled for help and you came and we repaired the damage. Now we'll see how much rained down that night. It couldn't get away. It had to fall among the boulders under the box. And from the thuddin' I heard there was plenty of heavy stuff there."

The Silent Partners and several others came rushing into the tent. They had heard Panhandle's voice.

"Good old Panhandle," Tad exclaimed. "I might have known it!"

"Then you really forgive me for the worry I caused you?" Panhandle asked.

"Sure! Look what it brought me!" He glanced at Marie. "It looks like we'd eat regularly this winter after all, Marie."

"And it looks like we could get out of this cussed country, too," one of the Silent Partners said.

"You two going together, eh?" Tad said.

"We have to keep together in order to watch each other," one of them explained; "we might poison each other otherwise." And Tad knew that association with others had, as usual, cured a bad case of cabin fever.

All night Tad and Panhandle labored, while the two women held lanterns. And when the dawn at last broke, with a thicker film of ice on the ponds, every gold pan in camp was filled with gold and platinum. The cook-tent table groaned under the weight, and there were still several hundred pounds of black sand running heavy to values.

As they relaxed from the hard night, one of the miners who had been in town came in.

"Some big excitement!" he yelled. "There's a run on Standish's bank. Old Standish always get it in the neck. They've been lining up all night long. But I've got to hand it to the old boy. Instead of closing the bank like most would do, he hung out a sign saying the bank would open an hour earlier, in order that all could be paid off by noon."

Tad saw in it a pathetic bluff to stave off the crash.

"I guess, boys," he said, "there'll be

no rest for us yet. We've got to get our gold down to the bank."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars won't do Standish much good now," the miner said; "there's too many of them wanting their money."

"Who said anything about twenty-five thousand dollars?" Tad retorted. "There's nearly a hundred thousand in gold and platinum, here, not counting the black sands and square nails scattered through each pan. The whole business goes to help Standish out. He stuck by us, didn't he? Let's make it snappy before it's too late."

The gold and platinum were hurriedly transferred to pack saddles and the pack train headed for town. They did not follow the road, but took the old trail of the Chinese and white miners. It was bad in spots, but it was shorter. Marie's heart stopped several times as her horse stepped along a narrow ledge. A hundred feet below them the river roared over a boulder-strewn bed.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the pack train emerged from the timber. The excited town lay below them, two miles away.

A mob was storming the bank. Police officers were keeping the depositors in line with some measure of success. Relieved men emerged from the bank with money in their hands and passed the line of anxious ones. Again and again came the query:

"Will there be enough?"

In the bank, Standish helped his tellers. He knew there would never be enough. People were coming in from the back country. It was strange how news spread. Standish staggered from the vault with a bag of gold coin. He heard a depositor say:

"He must be gettin' pretty low. The gold's coming out now."

"That's the last," Standish muttered to his teller. "Get the police in here. No telling what will happen when it's gone! I've tried to tell them that if they'll give me time I can pay off every man dollar for dollar. But if they force me I'll have to sell what's left of my paper at a loss, and it'll be their loss." He was ashen in color, and back in his mind he thought of killing Crane, Muller, and Meade. He had never considered killing any man before. He was surprised at himself. No man knows what may crop out in his character in an emergency.

"That's the last!" a teller said.

Something like a cry of anguish came from those at the head of the line. Watching in the distance Crane heard it and smiled.

"Standish goes under," he triumphed. "The Brawley claims will be mine inside of thirty days. Now I'll step in and take over things. A bank in a growing mining community won't be half bad, and I'll get it at a song. Wonder how much it'll cost to get rid of Meade and Muller? Hello! What's that!"

Tad Brawley rode beside a galloping pack horse, which he lashed again and again. Other horses followed. They came up to the bank and stopped. Crane saw Tad and Panhandle stagger in with heavy burdens. They heaped the gold in a great pile on a table behind the cashier's cage. Men stepped out of line and pressed their anxious faces against the window. The pane shattered to bits from the pressure. Some were cut by the glass, but others pressed forward.

"Gold!" a man cried. "Millions of it from Tad Brawley's mine! Millions! Look at it!"

Let them think there were millions. Standish could not speak, but Panhandle answered his unspoken question.

"You're in the money at last, Standish. We all are. I held back until the wolves got through. I didn't want them to get this. Tad's throwing it all in to help you."

"Help me?" Then Standish turned away. He dropped into the chair in his private office and collapsed.

Gold scales, dusty from many years' storage in the dark vault, again saw the light. And for several hours that day the old times returned. Gold—virgin gold!—was the medium of exchange. Dollars were forgotten, ounces became the standard. And long after the last man had been paid, the crowd lingered, looking at the heap. It was mostly black sand of only modest value. Here and there a black, rusty, square nail protruded, but to them it was a symbol of wealth.

On the morrow men would return in ones, twos, and small groups. They would bring the wealth they had guarded nervously during the night and again give it to the keeping of the man who had served them so faithfully for years. And that man, understanding, would forgive and forget all but the big youth who lashed a pack train over a dangerous trail to the very doors of his vault.

"Well, Panhandle, we licked 'em," said Tad; "but, at that, you didn't land the slippery skunks behind the bars like you hoped to do."

"No?" Panhandle drawled the word. "This afternoon we'll all take the train. But we'll drop off at the first station and double back. I've fixed it up with the officers to join us a mile below the cabin that Meade and Muller have been occupyin' the last few months."

"What's up?"

"Wait and see!"

Tad waited with impatience.

"Lightin' out of the country until next spring," Panhandle told the crowd. "Glad to go, too."

"You talk like all the miners," some one remarked.

"I'm a miner," Panhandle said.

The train pulled out. Hours later, the friends approached the Meade cabin.

"Remember when we followed them from the mine that day, Tad?" Panhandle inquired.

"Sure!"

"They crossed the muddy field and their footprints were sure deep. When they left the cabin again their footprints weren't so deep in the mud, and I knew they'd lightened their load so there wouldn't be enough to pay off everything. What they dumped is right here. And—— Shhh! I wish the officers would hurry along. Somebody's sneaking out the back way. By heck! It's Crane! Get him!"

"You get him, Panhandle," Tad whispered; "I've got an old score to pay off. Muller once nearly killed me with a blow to the stomach. All my life I've been licked by somebody, but now—well——" Tad grinned in the darkness as he felt the strength of his muscles.

Panhandle dashed into the timber after Crane. A yell of protest from Crane, as Panhandle suddenly landed on him like a ton of brick, warned the others.

They came out, guns in hand, but Tad had flattened himself against the wall. He rapped Meade smartly on the head as he came out. Meade dropped, and as Muller turned, Tad kicked the gun from his hand.

"You, eh?" Muller sneered. "Didn't get enough the last time, eh?"

"Nope," Tad replied.

Fists began to fly. For three minutes they fought toe to toe, then as Muller began to weaken under the pace, Meade revived. Meade got to his feet and reached for a club, stone, or anything. Tad smashed a blow to Muller's jaw and while he was shaking off the fog that followed, Tad rushed at Meade. That worthy's handsome face underwent a sudden change. Tad's hard fist shifted the nose a full half inch, then hung a knob under his left eye. He drove a blow into the stomach with

all his strength, and Meade folded up and called it a day.

"Too bad he didn't last longer," Tad growled. "It's sport winning a fight for a change. Muller's up and about again."

Tad waited for Muller to open the battle. The big man did so because Tad had him cornered. But it was apparent he did not relish the fight. Tad slammed him in the stomach and received a few lusty wallops in return. Gradually, the powerful Muller began to sag at the knees. Tad straightened him up with a blow to the jaw, then with a left hook slammed him flat on his back. This done, he seated himself on the cabin steps and waited for his enemies to revive. Here Panhandle found him. The officers, delayed by a horse going off the trail, arrived a few minutes later.

"Put 'em under arrest," Tad directed. "Charged with stealing a part of the clean-up from our mine. The stuff is in their cabin now." He turned to Crane. "You're going over the road, too, old sport, for starting a run on Standish's bank."

With the officers present, some of Meade's old defiance returned.

"Brawley," he said angrily, "this is false arrest, and we'll sue you for damages. That stuff came from a lease we bed rocked this summer, and you know it. It came from ground that's never been worked before, that's why it's so rich. If you're wise, you'll turn us loose right now."

"I'm not wise," Tad retorted. "You're going to stand trial for robbery, and that black sand, gold, and platinum are going to convict you, too. Let's hurry, officers, so we can catch the train to-morrow morning. Everybody's going out on that. And we're really going this time. We're not going to double back for three crooks, because we got 'em."

Another day had dawned. Most of the town was at the railroad station. This was the end of the line for the local. It came in and went out again. The dividend had been paid and everybody was in the money.

"Yep," said one of the Silent Partners, "everybody's getting out. Most of 'em say they're going for good, just like the Pardos. They're enjoying life down in the sunshine."

"Panhandle and I are coming back," Tad announced. "Marie wants a church wedding, with ushers and everything. She's going to have it, and I'm going to select the ushers—they will be Pug and the rest of the gang that were sweet on her."

"How do you know they'll act?" Standish asked. "Watching the successful man marry the girl isn't much fun."

"Oh, they'll act," Tad grimly predicted, "and they'll like it."

"Here comes the train," Panhandle shouted, gathering up his bags as well as Mrs. Mulcahy's. They were going to help Tad get married; then Tad was to help them tie up for life.

The train came to a stop. Two familiar figures climbed down the steps, looked around, and sniffed the air.

"By gosh, it's great to get back again to God's country!" one of them exclaimed. "The sunshine is all right when a man's old and his blood's thin, but for a young colt of ninety years like me, too much is plenty."

"Pardo!" yelled half a dozen men at once. "What are you doing here? Thought you were through with mining?"

"We were, for a little while. Then we got to hearin' the call—the wife and me—and we answered. We'll get ourselves located this winter, and next summer we figger to do a little coyotin' here and there."

"'Board!" yelled the conductor.

Tad and his crew clambered aboard

and settled themselves. One of the officers lightly tapped Tad on the shoulder.

"Are you sure you can convict Meade and Muller? You'd better be sure. They're talking of suing you for five hundred thousand dollars damages."

Tad chuckled. "You couldn't damage either one of 'em five dollars' worth, let alone five hundred thousand," he said. "Convict 'em? It's a cinch. They claimed that stuff came from a lease that hadn't been worked before, didn't they?"

"Yes"

"Well, that clean-up has nearly a dozen square nails mixed in with the gold and platinum. Square nails are found only on Grandfather Pat Brawley's ground. Figure it out, officer. But don't tell them. We're going to spring it on them at the trial."

DANE COOLIDGE, a Famous Western Story Writer, Gives Us "MAVERICK MAKERS," in Next Week's Issue.

PREHISTORIC TREASURE UNEARTHED IN ARIZONA

ALTHOUGH delving into the past has become such a popular exercise nowadays that "finds" of even unusual interest cause little excitement, the jar recently discovered in Arizona is of such a rare character that it has aroused the enthusiasm not only of excavators but of the public generally. This treasure is a large-necked black-and-white storage jar of exceptionally large size and in fine condition. It was recently uncovered in the Navajo National Monument, but as there is as yet no museum in this monument, the jar has been placed temporarily in the museum at Mesa Verde National Park.

This precious treasure was unearthed by Harold Glawin and Mrs. Winifred MacCurdy, of the Medallion Museum of Pasadena, California, who for several years past have been engaged in the interesting and public-spirited task of establishing "wayside museums" in the Southwest. It was while they were working under an archæological permit from the department of the interior, and under the guidance of the government representative in charge of the Navajo National Monument, that they "struck" this rare find. When measured, the capacity of the jar was found to be eight and one half gallons, dry measure; but its actual contents were no more than five kernels of corn. Nevertheless, its historic interest and value are possibly immeasurable, and those in charge of the monument at Navajo look forward to the time when a museum will be available on their own ground wherein this unusual treasure may be at once properly safeguarded and worthily displayed.

Soft And Low

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Monkey Dice," etc.

"OH, my good gosh!" yelped "Biffalo" Bull, staring pop-eyed out of one of the windows of the R Bar R bunk house. "Look what 'Shorty' Nolan's totin' home!"

We all flocked up and looked out, and everybody groaned when they saw him riding through the gate from the county road. The little smelt had a guitar case almost as big as himself under one arm.

"If that little pest is fixin' to sing him some songs around here with that big horse fiddle, he's going to go broke trying to keep strings on it," Biffalo vowed.

"Why?" asked "Red" Johns.

"Because I'm going to keep cuttin' 'em with a pincers, that's why," the old cow-punch growled.

"I wouldn't do that, Biff," "Hungry" Hosford put it. "Encourage him. I got a idea that he's so rotten he's real entertainment."

"Maybe you're right," Biffalo said, "but I'm going to keep a bath towel handy to shove down his craw on a moment's notice."

"'Lo, men!" Shorty said noisily, as though he expected some kind of an argument and was willing to snap up anybody that opened it. He tossed his guitar case on his bunk.

"Why throw it there? Why not throw it on the woodpile?" snarled old Biffalo Bull sourly.

"It won't be long before you'll be glad I bought that guitar," Shorty answered seriously. "It'll be nice to sit around and listen to singin' on long, cold, winter evenings."

"I'd rather listen to the wind howlin'," Biff snorted.

"Go ahead and play something, Shorty," "Slim" Evers suggested. "We'll yell quits when we got enough."

"Oh, my voice ain't good to-night," the little coot complained modestly.

"Or any other night," Biff added.

"Don't be bashful, Shorty; sing us something," I egged him on.

"Well—if you insist," our artist surrendered.

"Nobody's insisting; it's just been suggested," Red Johns put in.

Shorty Nolan slipped the strap of his guitar over one shoulder and plunked a few chords.

"Terrible!" Biffalo groaned. "Please don't go on. I can't bear it."

"Don't pay him no mind, Shorty," Hungry said. "Biffalo ain't got any stomach for art."

"What do you want to hear—'You Dragged, and Dragged, and Dragged Me Down; I Hope You're Satisfied,' or 'She's More To Be Pitied Than Censured'?" our songbird asked.

"Make it easy for yourself," I told him.

Shorty gave his guitar a few more plunks and then asked: "Everybody happy?" like he had heard professionals do.

"We was until you came in here with that bull fiddle," Biffalo mumbled.

Shorty Nolan took a deep breath and sang:

"She is more to be pitied than censured,
  She is more to be helped than despised,
She is only a lassie who ventured
  On life's stormy path ill advised;
Do not scorn her with words fierce and bitter,
  Do not laugh at her shame and downfall,
For a moment just stop and consider,
  That a man was the cause of it all."

The way Shorty tore that ditty to shreds was something awful. About every other note was sour, the time was terrible, and his roaring a fright.

Hungry Hosford, sitting behind him, was laughing fit to bust, with a handkerchief stuffed in his mouth. Hungry started a wild wave of applause in which everybody joined but Biffalo Bull, who sniffed: "Sounds like a sick and heartbroke calf a-bellerin'."

"I thought it wasn't bad, myself," Red Johns lied.

"No, it wasn't bad; it was awful," Slim Evers laughed.

Then Shorty sang "She May Have Seen Better Days," and "She Was Happy 'Til She Met You," and the way he murdered them two numbers was also misery itself.

"Don't you know anything except songs about gals plungin' into perdition and meetin' up with the wrong sort of boy friends?" Hungry asked. "Give us something lively and cheerful, like 'Break the News to Mother.'"

Shorty took him up on his word and sang the song.

Unnoticed by the singer, Slim had dipped one end of a towel into a water pitcher, and when Shorty's last note died, Slim held the wet towel to his eyes, wrung it out so water dripped on the floor, and boo-hooed like the sad song had affected him terribly.

"If you don't quit right now, I'll call the county humane officer," Biffalo Bull warned the bunk-house entertainer.

"I was going to quit anyway," the half-pint puncher announced. "Do you think I want to overdo it and ruin my vocal cords?"

"If you think it'll ruin 'em for good, why, for Heaven's sake sing on," Biff pleaded.

Some time later, when Shorty and I were alone, I asked how come him to take up yodeling and guitar plunking.

"Oh, I don't know," he side-stepped. "To be able to sing is nice. Everybody likes good singin'."

"Are you sure this ain't got something to do with Alberta Pritchard?" I asked, meaning the pretty little Snake Hollow school-teacher that Shorty and Slim Evers are all smoked up about.

The little shrimp blushed and scraped one foot with the other.

"Oh, I might sing her a ditty once in a while," he said bashfully.

"Hmmm," was all I was able to answer to that.

Shorty studied for a time with a

frown on his face. I could see something was troubling him.

"Al, I've always looked on you as a friend," he told me, "and I value your advice."

"Why shouldn't you look on me as a friend?" I pointed out. "I've always tried to be your friend."

"I don't mean just a friendly friend, but an honest-to-goodness friend that you can trust and rely on," my friendly friend raved on.

"What are you getting at, Shorty?" I demanded.

"Well, you see, Al, it's like this," he beat about the bush. "You know, Alberta likes books, and flowers, and art, and music, and the finer things of life. I always feel that she'll like me a whole lot better if I like them and—uh—show an interest in them and—uh—— Well, darn it all, I was just wondering if it would be safe for me to—I mean I wonder if it would be a good gag, so to speak, for me to sing to her and serenade her. I want your honest opinion. Don't be afraid, Al, of—umm—wounding me."

"Well, Shorty, since you want my strictly one-hundred-per-cent honest opinion," I said, walking carefully over the thin ice, "I'll tell you. I wouldn't do it. To be brutally frank, you aren't the best singer I've ever heard by ten thousand sharps and fifty thousand flats. Music, old man, is something that must be born in you to begin with, and must have lots of study and practice to reach perfection."

"Ye-a-h," the poor parsnip sighed, "I think you're right. I don't guess all these guys in grand opera suddenly parked their banana carts in the woodshed and went to work howling 'Rigoletto.' I sure would like to serenade her, though—for more than one reason."

"Such as——" I drew him on.

"Well, Alberta is going to have an entertainment at the Snake Hollow schoolhouse in a couple of weeks, and she's looking for talent," he said.

"And you were fixing to thump the guitar and chirrup a few ballads, hey?"

"Well, I was hoping she'd find me good enough," Shorty admitted with dejection. "There ain't anything else I can do—card tricks, recitations, or play the pi-anna." His face brightened up. "Slim's in the same boat, though. The teacher hinted to him that if he could contribute any kind of entertainin' it would be welcome. He can't do nothing, either."

Shorty was gloomy and downhearted the rest of that day and all evening, too; but next day he was chipper and smiling.

"What's the change for?" I inquired. "Have you become a songbird over night?"

"I have for a fact," he told me happily. "Al, I got a wonderful idea. I got me a portable phonograph and a half a dozen records of a guy singing ballads with a guitar. He's a tenor. I guess that's what I would be if I could sing well, don't you reckon? Yeah, that's what I thought. Anyway, since serenading is done at night when people can't see much in the dark, it'll be a cinch. I'll sneak in among them rose bushes not so far from Alberta's second-story bedroom window, set up my phonograph, put on a record, and stall with my guitar in the faint moonlight. Moon's in the last quarter now, you know."

"Supposing she asks for an encore?" I inquired.

"It's a cinch, Al," he predicted. "With all that shrubbery there, it'll be easy to slap on another disk. Gee! I got some swell guitar numbers. A Spanish song, 'Come, My Love, the Stars Are Shining,' and a Eytalian song called 'Santa Lucia.' Boy, I'll mow her down."

"Sounds like it might not be no bad idea," I told him. "I guess it's worth

trying, though. Supposing she asks you to sing at the entertainment. Then what?"

"Why, I'll accept, and then a little later beg off with throat trouble or something," he announced, settling the whole problem easily. "I'm just anxious to put myself across with the serenade."

"But, Shorty, she's liable to be asking you all the time after that when you call on her," I reminded the enterprising Mr. Nolan.

"Then I'll beg off again on the grounds that I can't throw myself into my singin' with somebody watching me. I'll promise to serenade her. Then I'll be safe in the darkness again. I tell you, Al, I've got it all schemed out."

"Well, if you've got it schemed out air-tight, why, I guess it's all right," I laughed. "When are you fixing to serenade the lady?"

"Maybe to-night," he confided. "I happen to know she's going to be home all evening on account she's got a lot of examination papers to correct and grade."

That afternoon I saw Shorty Nolan sneak out of the bunk house with his guitar and a cardboard carton all tied up that looked to me like it contained one portable phonograph. He disappeared down the county road, and a few minutes later I noticed Slim Evers, who seemed also to have been noticing things, stroll down the road, too.

Ha! Nosing around to see what the hated rival's up to, I laughed to myself.

Was I right? Oh, plenty!

Just before sundown Slim got hold of me, laughing fit to crack his face.

"I wish you could have seen what I saw," he told me. "It was a scene! I thought Shorty had gone cuckoo at first, but in the end I figured out what he was up to."

"What is it?" I asked, playing innocent.

"Well, promise me first you won't tip Shorty off," Slim demanded, "because I want to frame up a joke on him."

I promised, because I always get a kick out of the jokes them two are forever framing up on each other.

"I saw Shorty sneakin' out this afternoon with his guitar and a box," Slim told me, "and I followed him, and when he stopped I hid where I could watch him. What does he do but get a portable phonograph out of that box, put on a record of a guy singing to guitar music, and then stand up next to it and move his jaws and make guitar-playin' movements with his hands, without singin' or playin' a note! I tell you, Al, I thought he had gone daffy. He went through these monkeyshines for a half an hour, sometimes standing on his toes and heaving his shoulders when the guy on the record hit a high note and held on. Do you know what he was doing?"

"No," I answered.

"He was getting ready to fake a serenade on Alberta," Slim roared. "It dawned on me all of a sudden when I saw a shrub noddin' in the wind. I remembered about all them shrubs near Alberta's window, and just happened to think what a swell setting it was to hide a phonograph in the dark and claim you was a serenader."

"What are you planning to do now—set a bear trap in the shrubs?" I asked Slim. "Or hide near by and turn a focusing flash light on him and his box?"

"Better than that," Shorty's despised rival chuckled. "You know what a rabid old prohibitionist Ma Dooly, with whom Alberta lives, is, don't you?"

"How can I help but know it," I reminded him.

Ma Dooly is one of the finest old critters on earth, but she's cracked on the subject of the Demon Rum. She's not only against people who drink it, but she's opposed to people even approving

of other folks imbibing from the cup that cheers.

"You see this flat package under my arm?" Slim asked, pointing. "That's a phonograph record—a tenor with a guitar singin' 'The Little Brown Jug.' I'm going to slip that in among Shorty's disks—second from the top—and then sneak over there to-night and watch the fun. Want to go along?"

"You bet," I said, laughing, "but merely as a spectator."

"Oh, I'll make an oath, if necessary, to convince Shorty it was all my doings and not yours," the tall cow-punch promised me. "Man, this ought to be good! You see, Ma Dooly has a crazy hunch that Shorty's a hypocrite and drinks like a fish, although you know he don't touch drinkin' liquor. Nobody knows where she got that fool notion. Bosh! Wait till she hears that little coot singin' a drinkin' song outside her house. She'll be seein' red for fear somebody passin' on the road will be scandalized, thinkin' there's a party on in her house."

That evening after dark Slim came to me again, said he had found Shorty's nice little package of records, made the substitution, and all was in readiness.

"He's just hidden his guitar and phonograph in the harness shed so he can sneak out without being questioned after a while," the plotter giggled to me.

Well, sir, when Slim and I noticed Shorty fidgeting around a little bit later and acting anxious to fade out, we beat it and took a round-about path to Ma Dooly's home, where we hid behind a hedge. We hadn't been any too soon, because pretty soon Shorty showed up.

Our mocking bird looked around cautiously, but failed to see us, of course. Lighted windows indicated that Alberta was at work in her room, and Ma puttering about in another second-story room.

All of a sudden the Spanish guitar song began coming out of the phonograph.

Honest, I had a big struggle to keep from laughing as we watched Shorty pretending to be the party doing the singing and playing.

Pretty soon Alberta's window sash went up and then Ma Dooly's. When the song was finished, both clapped their hands.

"To whom am I indebted for this lovely serenade?" the school-teacher called.

So Shorty stepped into the light from the window and bashfully and sheepishly said: "Me."

"Why, Mr. Nolan!" Alberta said, delighted. "I never suspected that you could sing and play so exquisitely. And you told me you had no talent to offer for our entertainment! Shame on you! Please do play some more and sing another song."

"Yes, do, Mr. Nolan," Ma added. "It was lovely."

"Oh, all right," Shorty said—and I knew from the tones of his voice he was fit to bust with satisfaction and pleasure.

He stepped back in among the bushes where it was dark; there was a pause, and then came:

"Little Brown Jug, you and me;
Little Brown Jug, don't I love thee?
It's you that makes my friends and foes,
It's you that makes me wear old clothes,
Seeing you there right under my nose;
Tip her up and down she goes!"

The darned thing played through to the end. Shorty, I guess, was so paralyzed with surprise that he couldn't turn off the record.

Alberta didn't say a word, but Ma said plenty.

"Mr. Nolan!" she screeched. "How dare you sing such a low and sinful song under my windows? I always knew it! I knew you were two-faced. I'll see to it that everybody——"

Her window was banged shut. Al-

berta also withdrew. Shorty stood still like a statue. I'll bet a few moments later he was sorry he hadn't beat it, because Ma came busting out of her house, rushed up to him, and grabbed him by one ear, which she twisted till he grunted.

"Come into my house, you little sinner!" she snapped angrily. "We're going to have a talk. I won't have you calling around here on a fine girl like Alberta any more, and you can wager your boots that——"

The closing door shut us off from the tirade.

"This seems to be a good time to scoot out of here," Slim suggested, getting up.

We beat it as quickly and quietly as possible.

"All I want now, Al, is to be up when Shorty comes home later on, so that I can have a good laugh," he chuckled to me.

He waited up, but he didn't get the good laugh.

While waiting for Shorty to come back to the bunk house, Slim told the rest of the boys between spasms of laughter—theirs and his—all about the serenade. Two hours passed and no Shorty.

"Wonder what's keeping him?" Slim remarked.

"I guess Ma crippled him up," Biffalo answered him.

Everybody, like Slim, was determined by then to wait up for Shorty and hand him the razzberries.

Just before midnight we heard him turn in from the county road, singing at the top of his voice:

"You dragged, and dragged, and dragged me down,
You fooled me from the start——"

"He don't seem much upset," Hungry Hosford observed.

"Just whistlin' in the graveyard," Slim snickered.

Shorty kicked the door open, threw his guitar on his bunk, set down his phonograph, and jovially shouted: "Hello, men!"

"Hello, Shorty. Where you been?" Red Johns asked.

"Quit stalling, quit stalling," the little guy laughed sarcastically. "You know where I been. You know what happened. Some guy—and I'm not mentioning any names—has told you all about it. That is, he thinks he told you. He hasn't told you nothing yet! You want to know where I been? I been rehearsing with the school-teacher.

"The story for you guys ended where I was catching merry heck from Ma. Of course, my whole stunt was exposed. First, Alberta was put out and kind of mad, and then she gave me a big smile and said: 'Why, Mr. Nolan! This is a wonderful idea! We can use it at the school entertainment. You can pretend to sing and play, and we'll have the phonograph concealed behind the drop curtain. Then we'll take the audience into the joke and everybody will have a good laugh. We'll have a rehearsal right here to-night.'

"You ought to see the change that came over Ma. She apologized all over the place and put out angel cake and lemonade. Some guy in this room made an awful mistake."

Shortly stuck his hands deep in his pockets and teetered on his heels.

"I believe you had a date to take the teacher to a movie to-morrow night, Slim," he said.

"That's right; I have," the defeated Lochinvar said glumly.

"That's wrong; you ain't," Shorty cackled. "You did have, but you haven't now. 'Mr. Nolan,' she said to me, 'please ask Mr. Evers to excuse me to-morrow evening. He'll be glad to, I'm sure, when he knows we want to rehearse for the entertainment.' Look at him, fellows! Tell me, don't he look glad?"

"Maybe if I went along we could get up something together," Slim said hopefully.

"Nothing stirring," Shorty Nolan announced firmly. "Do you think I want an amateur to crab my act? Say, another thing the school-teacher said was: 'What a pity that Mr. Evers can't do anything!' For the entertainment, she meant. Ma! Mr. Evers already did do something. He done himself dirt!"

And Shorty went to bed singing, winding up with:

"You dragged, and dragged, and dragged me down;
I hope you're satisfied——"

One of Next Week's Features, "COMMON OR GARDEN SENSE," by SETH RANGER.

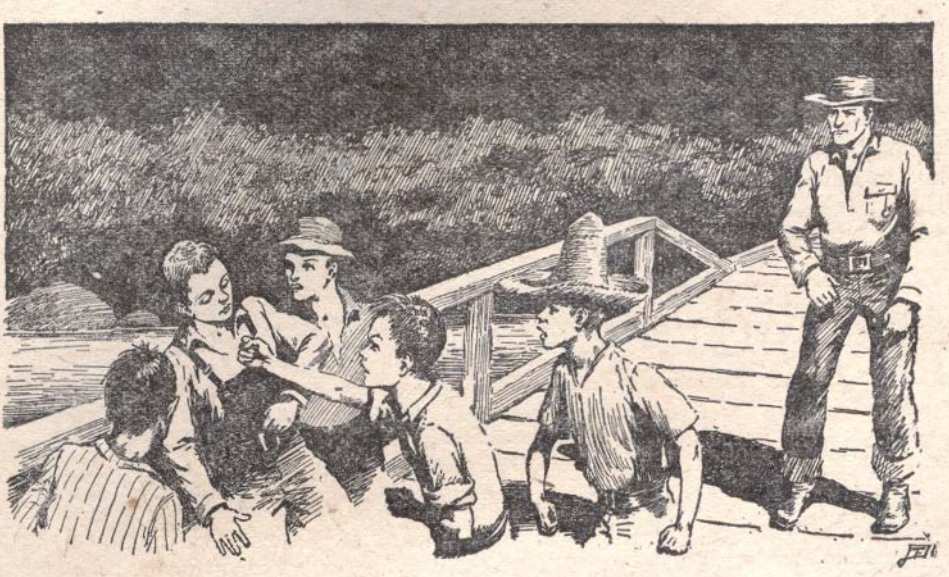
INDIAN TO TRANSLATE LANGUAGE

THE last full-blooded member of the Peoria tribe, George Washington Finley, with the aid of Smithsonian Institution and Columbia University, will endeavor to translate his language so that a dictionary may be compounded. Already, thousands of words used by the Peorias have been translated into English and are carefully guarded in the government archives. There are only four members of this tribe left who speak the Peorian tongue.

Finley is now seventy-two years old. He weighs two hundred pounds, and is a perfect specimen of Indian manhood. His Indian name is Ta-wah-quah-ke-nough, which means "path of the storm." He was born near Paola, Kansas, in 1853, the first home of the Peoria tribe, which originally came from Illinois in about 1850. Finley educated himself, and when he was thirty years old became a bareback rider in a circus, and married a white woman in New York. In later years he returned to Oklahoma and now he is enjoying life there as a farmer.

THE POLAR BEAR EXONERATED

THE police and explorers of the northern portions of Canada have recently come to the defense of the polar bear who has been always represented as one of the peculiar terrors of the great white wilderness. To those who know how to read the vast book of Nature there are more meanings than appear on the surface, just as the astute human reader can detect an author's subtly conveyed information "between the lines." To hunters and explorers wise in the ways of the North, the presence of bears along the routes they intend to travel comes not as bad but as good news. For these skilled readers of sign know that where the bears are found there also will seals be plentiful, and that an abundant food supply for themselves and their dog teams can therefore be counted upon. Although it is the policy of the Canadian authorities, as it is of all enlightened governments, to conserve wild life as much as possible, there are occasions when the wild things must yield to the needs of man, the master. There are two sides to every question, and the polar bear may show up whiter than most of us when the score is counted, and good and bad are balanced.



The Stingaree

By Max Brand

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

JIMMY GREEN, thirteen, training the husky, Mishe Mukwa, in Fort Anxious woods, meets the fascinating "Alabama Joe." Policeman Charlie Dyce and Jimmy's new acquaintance instantly dislike each other. Stanley Parker, who has shot Bob Dillman for robbing the Tyndal safe—and been adopted by Tyndal in consequence—is also hostile. Only Paula Carson, Parker's fiancée, and Mishe share Jimmy's admiration for Alabama. The latter gets a job at Carson's grocery, where he draws a crowd, and Carson prospers. Joe tells Jimmy he is "The Stingaree," come to avenge his friend Dillman. He declares that Parker double crossed Bob, whose confederate he really was. At a dance the two men quarrel. Outside, they fight, and Joe taxes Parker with his guilt. Parker is knocked out. Dyce is now on Joe's trail. Jimmy promises to get Awaskees, his Cree friend, to guide him to safety. Joe returns to the hall for the dance Paula has promised him.

CHAPTER XXII.

AWASKEES AGREES.

THE lodge of Awaskees was back toward the verge of the trees. He had a bit of land which he called his own and which nobody cared to challenge his right to at that moment. So that was his home.

It was the cleanest and best-kept lodge that Jimmy knew about. Awaskees, the great hunter, kept the meat pot filled with the best and in the utmost plenty. He had one wife, though he was plenty rich enough to support three or four, and had enough work in the dressing of his pelts and the making of his robes to have employed that many hands, at least. But he preferred one wife, and even was known himself to work like a woman—or a white man!—in order to keep his pelts in good order. He had been seen doing work as degrading as the fleshing of new hides.

Perhaps the Indians had sunk from their old grandeur—particularly those

around the Fort—or perhaps the white man's example was his excuse. At any rate, Awaskees did not seem to have lost much ground and dignity by these proceedings. He was more looked up to than any other red man within five days' march. And that was true not only among the whites but among his own kind.

Awaskees was twenty-five years old, and since he was twenty, he had killed one man each year regularly. Not because he was quarrelsome, but because he often possessed things which the lawless envied.

Once it was his handsome young squaw, as tall as Awaskees, and with a grip of iron, as unlucky Jimmy very well knew. Once it was a pair of his best bear traps. At another time one of his winter caches had been opened and the food not replaced before the fall of the year. For every killing of which Awaskees was guilty, there was a very good excuse. Charlie Dyce was in the habit of saying that a couple hundred men like Awaskees would be enough to police all Canada, from San Juan de Fuca to the Thousand Islands, and the Mounted Police could be dispensed with.

Red men feared and loved Awaskees. White men feared and respected him. His word was as strong as a file of soldiers, and his gun shot as straight as a beam of light.

Jimmy he had taken as a sort of younger brother in the former's infancy, and ever since that moment, he had been unfailing and true to the white boy. He had opened his pack of most intimate hunting secrets. And he thought so much of his pupil that it was he who had said that "Jimmy Green can hunt moose!"

That is the highest compliment to be heard in the Northland.

So Jimmy went confidently along until his swift step took him off the street, and down a twisting little lane, crooked as a cattle trail, and so to the inlet of meadow among the trees where he could see the fire glowing in the tepee like the flame of a lantern behind a thick and sooty parchment.

When he came to the entrance, he knocked on a board which hung there. He knocked very softly, for he could hear a voice singing inside. Then he pushed aside the entrance flap.

Opposite him was a very old Indian, called altogether Flashing Hail in the Dark of the Night, though most even of the Indians shortened this to Flashing Hail.

His long hair, thick and glossy as the locks of a youth, tumbled down far beneath his shoulders, which were bare, and withered and shrunken with excessive age. Men said that Flashing Hail in the Dark of the Night was at least ninety years old. Certainly he remembered a time when no white face had ever been seen in that Northland, and when only rumors of them came in from the Far West, the far East. It was Flashing Hail who sang, regardless of the two-year-old son of Awaskees, who hung onto the hair of the old man as though onto a rope and jerked and struggled with it with all his might.

The mother, now and then, mildly, attempted to free him from this annoyance; but she was afraid, obviously, of making the youngster start to shrieking, which was its habit when its will and high overlordship was in the slightest questioned. It was apparently better to let him tug at the hair of Flashing Hail than to interrupt the chanted story of the old man.

So only now and then she put out her strong hand tentatively. The rest of the time she was devoted to her beadwork, which she worked with the finest and brightest beads that she could get. This design was almost entirely red. Sometimes it seemed that her hands were filled with fresh, shining crimson fluid.

As for Awaskees himself, he sat in his usual manner, bolt erect, his arms folded, no pipe to fill his hands. He was naked to the waist, his legs being covered with trousers of the finest and the softest of deerskin, cured by his wife in her own peerless fashion, after a method two thousand years old. His eyes were fixed before him. He saw the past.

Jimmy, entering, side-stepped hastily from in front of the withered arm which old Flashing Hail was stretching out toward the images of his story. Covertly the boy made the signs of greeting, and sitting on his heels, listened to the concluding phrases.

It had to do with a war excursion of his youth against the villainous Ojibways, thieves and murderers! On this occasion the valor and the cunning of the old man had taken a whole canoeful of furs and trophies from an Ojibway village, to say nothing of a very neat pair of scalps! To the words of the tale, the boy listened hardly at all, but kept his attention fixed upon the enchanted face of his friend, Awaskees.

There was no folly in Awaskees, he knew. That man well understood that there is little glory in taking another man's hair, and that the magnificence of the old Indian days was chiefly a thing of imagination and nonsense. However, he was listening to this story with the eyes of one who believed, and of one who yearned. Young Jimmy Green hardly could believe his eyes.

The tale ended. Still, Jimmy dared not speak until Awaskees had withdrawn his eyes from the past and brought them down to his young guest with a frown and a sigh. Some great dream had vanished, and this was the awakening.

"Brother?" said he to Jimmy.

The latter hastily motioned the brave to follow him from the tepee, but the long, strong arm of the squaw darted out and her hand fastened on the best available hold, from which the boy could not wriggle—his hair, in short! There she laid her grip.

"What mischief are you up to now?" she demanded. "Some day you will put my husband in such trouble that he will have to leave a foot or a hand in the trap to carry his life away."

Awaskees, smiling, lifted his finger at her, and she let the youngster go, though she kept an anxious eye on the brave as he left the tepee.

In the open, Awaskees took a few paces from the lodge, and then looked back toward it with another sigh.

"What is it?" he asked. "How has he come into trouble?"

"Who?" asked the boy.

"The big man—your new man, Jimmy."

"Why," asked Jimmy, "do you think that I've come for him?"

"If you had come for yourself, there would have been others at your heels."

Jimmy grinned in the darkness. To cover the eyes of this hunter was impossible.

"Also," said the Cree, "it is a bad thing for a man to go out of his range, to the south, or to the north. Your friend has come too far north!"

The truth of this, the youngster could not deny. He remembered the step of the tramp in the woods, and the crackling of the twigs beneath his feet.

"He's fought with Stanley Parker," said Jimmy. And he explained briefly what had happened, together with his desires, which were that Awaskees should take it upon himself to guide big "Alabama Joe" safely out of Fort Anxious and through the wilderness to the south.

The Indian listened patiently, nodding his head from time to time.

"He will kill, my young brother," said Awaskees, when he had heard the whole story, "and because of the killing some one else will have to die. If I go with him, perhaps it will be I!"

Jimmy caught an impatient breath.

"You don't know that there'll be a killing," he said. "I don't think that there will be one! He flattened that Stanley Parker so hard that you can bet Stanley won't wait if he sees Alabama coming at him again. It was a terrible whang! Well, with Parker keeping out of the way, there should be no killing."

"Why didn't your friend use a gun instead of his fist? That would have finished the matter at once."

"He would have used a gun, if Parker had pulled one. But Parker didn't. And Alabama Joe is square, and wouldn't take advantage of a bobcat even. He gives every one a square break!"

"Ah," said Awaskees. "So does the rattlesnake. He gives a warning, because God put poison in his tooth. Does your friend carry poison also?"

This was giving the thing such an ugly turn that Jimmy felt ill at ease, and shifting from foot to foot, he hardly knew how to continue the conversation.

"Besides," went on Awaskees, "if he does not kill Stanley Parker, he may kill some other man. He is not one to come such a long march and then go back without a scalp. No, no, Jimmy. This is a man who never goes on the warpath without bringing home stolen horses, or scalps, or medicine bags——"

"What are you talking about, Awaskees? He's not an Indian!"

"Ah, no," said the Cree. "He's not an Indian. But he has counted many a coup on dead men and living men, brother. You can be sure of that!"

"What makes you think so, Awaskees?"

"Whoever looks at his eyes is sure to see the same thing. There is no doubt that one who has killed many times has a different eye. He looks through the window and he sees all the house inside."

"I don't know what you mean, Awaskees."

"Well, Jimmy. I shall make medicine, and see whether or not I go!"

He went back into the tepee. Jimmy followed only to the door, where the Cree paused, and scooping up a shallow handful of dust, he blew the dirt away and left the small pebbles only. These he counted, shifting them in his hand so that the firelight which streamed out around the edge of the tepee flap would strike on the bright little stones more clearly.

Then he tossed the pebbles high into the air and hurriedly dusted his palms together.

"Come," said he. "I shall go with you."

"It may be a long time, Awaskees. Are you going to speak to your wife?"

"She would howl," said the Indian, "and that is hard to bear. I have a canoe in the river. That is filled with my pack and everything that I need. Walk on, Jimmy. I only go into the lodge to get my rifle and ammunition and my wife will think that I am going to hunt moose under the stars."

CHAPTER XXIII.

LIFE AND DEATH.

THE adherence of Awaskees to his plan made Jimmy feel much lighter of heart, and he went on up the street with a cheerful swing to his shoulders, as though the battle were already almost ended. In this manner he left the alley, and stepping out into the street, he neared a group of half a dozen men. He stepped into a yellow arm of lamplight that streamed from a window across the street.

"Get that boy!" said the brisk voice of Charlie Dyce.

Two of those shadows sprang pantherlike. Jimmy was seized upon and dragged before Mounted Policeman Charlie Dyce.

In uniform now! And so were the five who stood around him. Six

Mounted Police—more than would be sent out to put down a rebellion in a whole province. Six of those jewels gathered together into one hand. Jimmy had never seen such a sight. The presence of six Olympian gods could not have impressed him much more.

"Is this a joke, Charlie?" asked one of the men.

He wore a beard, and he had a deep voice. He was as big a man as Stanley Parker.

"That's the kid I told you about," said Charlie Dyce. "Keep that youngster under a blanket, and we've taken his eyes away from the tramp. Here, Jolly. Keep this boy for us. Treat him well, but keep a good tight grip on him. He's more slippery than an eel and a good deal cleverer than a ferret or a fox. Don't hurt him, though. Jimmy," he went on, "I'm sorry to do this, but I know that you'd try to help Alabama Joe. You'll hold this against me, till you're a good deal older, but I'll explain this much—I've found out about this new friend of yours!"

"What?" asked Jimmy defiantly.

"He's as bad as they make 'em, Jim. He's wanted all over the United States. He's wanted in Canada, too. If you put side by side all of the safes that he has cracked, Jim, you could pave this street with 'em. He's robbed trains, stuck up stages, and filled up the dull times with a few gun fights here and there. South of the Rio Grande they want him badly. And all through the South they want him. You may even have heard of his best nickname clear up here. He's the 'Stingaree'!"

He made a little pause, but Jimmy said not a word. He was not surprised. He was already contriving desperately how he might be able to break away from this captor and give the warning to Alabama Joe. He would have given his very soul to sprint down the street toward the dance hall.

"Now then," said Charlie Dyce, "if you fellows will let me take charge for a while——"

"Go on, Charlie," said one of the men. "I hope that the next job won't be handling another youngster like this, though."

"We have time on our hands," said Dyce, "since we've got the boy safe. He was the ear and the eye of the Stingaree, believe me! We've got to get to Stanley Parker first. We'll post a couple of men at his house to guard him. Then the rest of us go down and pick up the Stingaree at the dance. I don't understand that dance business, though. Why should he want to waste time at a place like that?"

"Girls at the dance, Charlie. And the hardest of them are likely to soften a little about the women."

"I'm sorry, Jim, old son," said Dyce again. "Stand tight here. Jolly, take good care of him, will you?"

"Of course I will," said Jolly. "Is he liable to try a knife on me?"

"Not in a thousand years! There's nothing crooked about him."

Charlie Dyce went off, and his companions with him, while big Jolly, he of the beard, drew Jimmy off the street and into the brush a short distance.

"Now, son," said he, "we'll stay here quiet, and no matter how much you want to help your partner, you've a pretty good excuse for standing quiet. No use butting your head against a wall, is there?"

"No," admitted Jim and sighed deeply.

"Well," he said, "I don't care. I can't fight six Mounted Police, Jolly."

"No," chuckled the other, "you can't."

Jimmy Green began to whistle, letting his song trill higher and higher until it ended with half a dozen quite shrill and piercing notes.

A hard-palmed hand was instantly clapped over his mouth.

"Are you trying to send out a call for

help?" demanded Jolly. "I'll have to gag you, youngster!"

"That was only an old paddle song," said Jimmy, lying as smoothly as an old practitioner. "And that end is the way the voyageurs yip. It don't mean nothing special."

"I don't half believe you," said Jolly. "I think that you're lying, old son."

"Do you?" said Jimmy. "You're mighty suspicious, Mr. Jolly! Why, that wasn't nothin'!"

"No more whistling then," said Jolly sternly, "and don't talk louder than a whisper. You hear?"

"Sure," said Jimmy Green. "I'll do anything that you say!"

But, nevertheless, he was fairly trembling with eagerness to repeat that shrill phrase at the end of his song. It was the old rallying call of his crowd, which would take any good member out of the warmest bed on the coldest night and bring him scampering. It was the most desperate of their signals. It was the call which meant, to put all its meanings into words: "I am in terrible trouble. All good boys of the band help me. No little ones. This is man's work!"

There was all of this meaning in the signal, but, given only once, it was hardly likely that help could find him.

And, in the meantime, the strong hands of the law were closing in around Alabama Joe. It made little difference to Jimmy when he heard the crimes of which the Stingaree was accused. He was wanted for robbery and for gun fights. He was not accused of murder, of treachery. The man seemed greater and more wonderful to the boy. In this peril Jimmy thought of the big, smooth, smiling face, and his heart was stirred.

"This Stingaree," said he. "Is he a bad one?"

"Him? I'll tell a man!" answered Jolly.

Jimmy turned cold with excitement. For down the street he saw three boys running as teal fly—in a rapidly changing, staggered flight. They were hunting for sign of one sort or another. Would Jolly notice them?

They halted at the corner and one of them dropped flat on his face. He was listening, of course. Ah, to be able to raise that whistle once again!

"What are those kids looking for?" asked Jolly suspiciously.

"Them? They're playin' Injun," said Jimmy Green. "They gotta fool game of Injun. I never seen nothin' in it, but a lot of 'em get out at night and run around like a pack of loons. It's sure a terrible surprise to me, Mr. Jolly, to find out that Alabama Joe is the Stingaree. Why, that's Bob Dillman's partner!"

"Yeah," drawled the policeman. "A mighty good partner, too. And he'll send that Parker fellow where Parker sent Dillman, unless we look alive. A good job that Charlie Dyce is tackling to-night, and I hope that he handles it. It'll get him on in the force. It'll make a name for him!"

"I bet it will," said Jimmy. "Well, I'm sorry for Alabama Joe. But I guess he's got it coming to him."

"Nobody more," said Policeman Jolly. "He's raised the deuce. But he's left a clean trail, I gotta say."

"Clean?" queried Jimmy, only half hearing—for yonder in the brush he heard the softest rustling like that made when a rising wind touches the bushes.

"Clean—no blood on his trail," said Jolly.

"I thought you said that he'd done his share of killing?"

"Crooks and thugs," said big Jolly. "They've backed him against the wall a couple of times and tried to pick his feathers, but he's been able to handle himself. I mean there's no white blood on his trail. No blood of honest men. Have you heard what he did in Taintorville?"

"No. Never heard of that town."

"It's down in Nebraska somewhere,

I think. Three detectives cornered him. He stood their fire and wouldn't shoot back. He climbed over roofs. They potted at him when they could. He wouldn't shoot back, except once high over their heads. Half the town joined in that chase, but he got away."

"How? How?" asked Jimmy eagerly, raising his voice a little to cover the noise of covert approach on at least two sides of them.

"That town backs onto a cliff, with the river underneath. Must be a fifty-foot drop, according to reports. And that fellow he got down along the back of a house and dived from the edge of the cliff, with bullets combing the air all around him."

"Fifty feet!" gasped Jimmy, remembering his own high dive.

"They thought he'd sure broke his neck. But when they looked down into the swirl of the river they couldn't see clearly. It was evening, d'you see?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. "Take him!"

He said it not loudly.

"Take what?" asked Jolly, without suspicion.

But out of the brush around them arose three forms of stalwart lads and dived at Mounted Policeman Jolly at the same instant. He was a big man, and a strong man, but a hundred-odd pounds smartly struck him behind the knees and made his legs sag at the same moment when a husky fourteen-year-old landed on his chest and beat him back. He went down before he could take his hand from Jimmy's neck and get out a gun.

He went down with such a thud that the wind was knocked out of him, and when he got back his breath, he was already tied hand and foot, for the nefarious followers of Jimmy Green carried tiestrings like so many cow-punchers at a round-up.

He was thoroughly tied and lay gasping on his side, while Jimmy Green in person kneeled beside him.

"Listen, Jolly!" said he.

"You dang little traitor!" groaned the big fellow.

"If we gag you, it might strangle you. Will you promise me not to call out for help?"

"I will."

"Then let him lie here. Jolly, I'm mighty sorry."

"You young jailbird!" muttered Jolly through his teeth.

The four boys gathered on the edge of the street. There was hardly time for Jimmy to pant out his words of praise. Then he said:

"Here, Mike. You and Sammy get across the river. There's two mounted policemen at Stanley Parker's new house, guarding him. Find out where they're posted. Spot 'em, and then wait at the entrance. I dunno. Maybe we'd better find out about 'em. Pierre, you made a great tackle. Now hoof it for the dance. This late, they'll let you get up to look in at the dancers from the anteroom door. Spot big Alabama Joe and tell him that I'm waiting for him in the street. Life and death!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WAITING MEN.

YOUNG Pierre ran well. He got so far ahead—for Jimmy jogged on, full of dubious thoughts—that the chief of the band arrived in time to see his lieutenant thrown bodily out from the front door of the dance hall.

They were not allowing small boys to peek in on this night!

Jimmy wasted no time.

Somewhere in the dark of the night Mounted Policeman Dyce was laying his plans and spreading his net. There was only one hope—that Dyce would trust to the capture of Jimmy and take too much time for his work. In that hope, Jimmy now rushed on to give his warning.

He only paused near the door to ask

if big Alabama Joe were still inside, and was told that he was.

It was long-necked, grinning, peanut-headed "Buff" Logan who gave him the wanted information.

"Your friend's a great liar, Jimmy!" said he. "He's told Paula Carson that Stanley Parker had to go home and left him in charge of her; and there he's sitting between dances, talking to Paula on one side, and the Dugommier girl on the other, and everybody else in the hall knowing why Parker went home—but not Paula! Listen here, Jimmy—what was that that Alabama Joe accused Parker of doing to Dillman? Double crossing, was it?"

"Aye—double crossing."

"I never trusted him. He's got too much front, that Parker!" said Logan.

That, Jimmy hoped, would be the general feeling. In the meantime it was his duty to get into the dance hall, no matter at what a risk. So he scampered back to the same tree which had been his ladder to scale the height before.

Up it he went. He dared not recall in his mind the same dangers which had threatened him before in this progress; but, gritting his teeth, blinding himself, he went steadily forward, and so gained the upper and outer branches.

It was a very different matter now. The wind had risen. The bough on which he lay, grasping the outer twigs, tossed wildly and with the perversity of a bucking horse rather than with any regular and reasonable rhythm. Sometimes it whirled in a circle. Sometimes it flipped straight up and down; and, most dangerous of all, there were moments when its sway was a peculiar combination of both that staggered him to his heart's core. He could not so much as think. He was so frightened that he could remember nothing in his life half as bad.

He turned and struggled back to a more secure limb, farther down the trunk, and looking back at the wild swirl of the foliage, with the stars dancing madly in the black sky beyond, he wondered that he ever had been foolish enough to attempt the thing at all.

He rested a moment, getting breath.

Then a great impulse swept over the heart of the boy, unavoidable and irresistible. It carried him straight up the tree, and onto the great tremulous lower branch. His teeth were not locked. He simply was telling himself in a clear-eyed calm that now or never the deed must be attempted. Then he was hanging by two lower boughs—no, twigs they should be called. One moment he swayed out over the ground a dizzy distance below. A man was lighting a cigarette. The flame which he held, cupped between his hands, streaked out in a yellow line. It was like the downward pitch of a long fall, that dangling flight, hitched to the breaking twigs of the tree. Then the roof of the barn leaped up beneath him, seeming to plunge upward.

He loosed his hold and landed by the grace of luck, flat on his back on the roof.

His wind was knocked from his body. His head rang with the force of the blow so that all the stars in the heavens spun before his eyes, and he thought of how he had stood before big Alabama Joe in terror of his life. Now he was risking that life to save the criminal!

This he thought about but did not reflect on long.

He had to be up. He had to get to Alabama Joe quickly, or else all that he had done so far would have been done in vain.

So he crawled down to the eaves to the roof and there he lay. The force of the wind pried at him. He grew weak. Tears of self-pity came into his eyes as he felt the insistent hands of the gale, worrying him, and the scream of it striking into his ears, and half drowning the voice of the orchestra.

He would be estranging himself, to be

sure, from the ways of the law-abiding. Alabama Joe was hunted across and across the continent. He was famous for the distance to which he fled, like a migrating bird. He, if he threw in his lot against the mounted police, would have to lead exactly such a life. They never forgot and they never forgave such offenses. They would strike him with a resistless, punishing hand. They never would leave his trail.

Reform school first. Then a branded, shamed, disagraced life, forcing him toward crime. He thought of Awaskees, erect, high-headed thoroughbred in all the ways of his body and of his thought. He thought of Paula Carson. These people, finally, would scorn to know him. Then poor Jimmy Green bowed his head between his arms and groaned aloud.

Just as a road lures forward the weary traveler to turn the next curve, so Jimmy was drawn on against his conscience and his better sense by the thing to which he had put his hand.

He went over that unsteady roof gutter with a lurch, hung down by his toes, and found the weight of the wind forcing him in like a hand toward the side of the barn. Then he got his grip on the ladder and was again swinging hand over hand along the narrow ledge, fiercely working, swearing to himself that he never would stop again for an instant's thought until the task was ended.

So went Jimmy Green to the window where he had crouched before and found the dance in full progress.

He looked through the window, dazzled. The dance ended. The dancing couples dissolved. He saw the Dugommier girl approach the window first with young Jack Harper, and then Paula with Steve Bennet, and finally there was the big Stingaree himself.

The youngster looked at him with bewilderment. It was a form of courage which he, for one, could not even distantly understand. It was more than he could guess at—that any one man should willingly defy the power of the Mounted Police, the royal force itself, and then linger within the reach of the enemy's hands.

He could not wait to reach the ear of the big fellow by any stratagem. He simply called out, at once, and the Stingaree, waving back the others, who would have crowded curiously forward, got to the window instantly.

He leaned out, pulling the shutters wide enough for his head to thrust between the edges. The gale went screaming into his smiling face and past his wide shoulders. Jimmy heard the girls squeaking with dismay like flurried mice, but the sound of the orchestra came out strongly to him and seemed to draw him into the very room itself.

"Aye, Jim?" asked big Stingaree.

He was most casual. One might have thought that every night young boys risked their lives in his service, clambering in wind-broken trees, dropping onto roofs, working like trained gymnasts for no reward, except the exquisite pleasure of serving his majesty!

And Jimmy almost smiled, when he thought of this. He cried out softly:

"I've got Awaskees. Joe, go fast! Charlie Dyce and five other Mounted Police are in this town."

The other whistled softly.

"Five more? No, no, Jim. They never send that many for one crook like Alabama Joe."

"They're here, Joe! One of them is tied and safe. The boys did for him. Two more are at the house of Parker. Dyce and another are sure to wind up at the dance soon. They think they have plenty of time. That's the only point where you may beat 'em. I've got Awaskees. Hurry!"

"I'll meet you in front in a minute," said the Stingaree. "Don't worry, old son. You and me—half the world couldn't beat us!"

He closed the shutters in Jimmy's face. No questions were asked by him about how the boy could get down from his perilous position, and once more a great doubt of this man came up in Jimmy's mind.

How could he tell that Alabama Joe, besides being a known criminal, was not now using him cunningly, carelessly, as a mere tool?

He got down to the ground as fast as he could climb, and hurried around to the door.

There he saw the tall, stately form of Awaskees in the distance, lost in the darkness like a dim form rudely sketched in the background of a picture.

Nearer the door he saw two other shapes which startled him. It is hard for us to believe in our own prognostications. There was one of his, he felt, about to be accomplished before he had time to think.

Near the door were several men hot from dancing, now enjoying the wind which flared their forelocks above their bronzed faces. But back from the circle of light, ensconced behind two trees, were another pair of waiting men. Jimmy saw the glint of the distant light on their faces and knew them. They were Henri and Simon Lafitte, the gunmen.

Why should they be there, hidden from the sight of men coming out from the old barn, unless they had some sinister purpose? And what purpose was so apt as the very thing which he had prophesied?

He wanted to run forward to the doorway and there warn the big man, but somehow he dared not bolt straight forward. Instead he circled a little, and so came up close behind Henri, who leaned against the tree trunk. Twenty yards away was the other brother, ready to take the enemy at a separate angle. They would enfilade Alabama Joe from two sides.

Jimmy had no time to form a good plan for interference.

At that very moment out of the door came the tall form and the easy step of the Stingaree. He even paused an instant, so great was his calm, to speak a word to men at the door. They answered him with grins. Since this night not a man in Fort Anxious but would be glad to be seen speaking with this stranger, this modest man-handler. But what madness in Alabama Joe! For all he knew, Dyce and his men might be waiting there among the shadows of the trees, ready to seize him with an overmastering force of numbers.

Then, to the left, Jimmy saw Simon Lafitte move his hand, and metal gleamed in it. And a gun was raised carefully by Henri at the same moment.

"Joe! Joe!" screamed Jimmy Green. "Duck!"

Henri Lafitte whirled on him with wonderful agility and, leaping back at the boy, struck for him with the long glittering barrel of his revolver. The force of that blow would have shattered Jimmy's skull, but it would have been as easy to strike a sparrow on the wing as Jimmy prepared to dodge.

He heard Lafitte curse; and then the double crack of two revolvers exploding at almost the same instant.

CHAPTER XXV.

SIMON LAFITTE EARNS HIS FEE.

THAT first side spring of Jimmy's was perfectly successful to elude the rush of Lafitte, but the second step tripped him on a root and he whacked the ground hard.

He was gone, he felt. And so he would have been if Henri Lafitte had not had something else on his mind.

He, swerving toward the sound of the gun shots, could see his brother tilting forward from behind the tree, not so much like a man falling as like a post toppling stiffly.

And near the doorway was the Stingaree, crouching a little, the same pencil-stroke of gun smoke streaked before him which Jimmy had noted on that first day in the meadow. With the naked weapon ready for a second attack, the Stingaree turned a little from side to side, looking among the shadows of the trees.

That was enough for Henri Lafitte. He turned on his heel and fled like the wind, while Jimmy, calling frantically—lest the other should shoot a friend by mistake—got up and hurried not toward Alabama Joe, but toward the wounded man, who now was twisting and writhing on the ground.

All the others were bent in the same direction.

The Stingaree ran in the lead. The men who had been at the doorway behind him lurched out from shelter and followed.

Jim, coming up almost shoulder and shoulder with Alabama Joe, saw what Simon Lafitte was working toward. The man had the vitality of a snake and the treacherous ferocity of a tiger.

The bullet had clipped through the thigh of one leg, and, angling down, it had plunged deeply into the knee of the other.

He was not dead. He was in no danger of dying. And his one purpose was to strike effectively at his foe before he received another shot. In falling, the revolver had dropped from his hand to a little distance. He was dragging himself toward it on his two hands, since he could not move his legs.

Crimson streamed from his wounds. His face was a set picture of wicked resolution, ghastly pale. Jimmy never had seen such a grisly thing in his life.

The wounded man actually had his hand on the gun when the Stingaree kicked the weapon free, and Simon Lafitte, turning on one elbow, raised the battered, broken hand to his mouth and stared balefully up at Alabama Joe.

He was not a man, Jimmy thought at the moment.

He was merely a sad excuse for a man, a beast cast in that form, one who killed for the love of killing. That was his reputation, and it showed clearly in his face now. His lips twitched. His eyes blazed at the victor.

"What started you on my trail?" said Alabama Joe loudly, as he leaned over the fallen man.

Lafitte snarled at him like a dog. Then he could speak words.

"I'll talk to the judge about it!" said he.

"You lie. You'll speak to me, and now," said Alabama Joe.

"I'll talk to the judge," insisted Simon Lafitte. "Attack—intent to murder—that's the charge against you. Where's a policeman? Any good citizens to seize on this man?"

He snarled again.

"Here are six that saw you pull your gun from behind the tree and make the first move," warned Joe. "Is it likely that I'd stand in the light of the doorway and take a shot at you—behind a tree? Lafitte, open up and talk. Maybe I'll not stay to make witness against you!"

"You won't stay!" nodded Lafitte. "Dyce is here for you! He's likely coming now!"

He laughed. The sense of security in the future, mixed with disappointment, and the agony of his wounds made that laughter like a wild howl.

"We saw it all," said one of the witnesses. "You ought to have blown his head off, Alabama Joe! I saw you aim low. On purpose, I'll bet. I'd have no mercy on that rat—that poisonous rat—that Lafitte!"

"I'll remember that!" said Lafitte, glaring up toward the speaker.

"Oh, remember it as long as you please," said the other. "You'll have less spirit when your blood has finished running, you cur!"

They stood around barking at the fallen man like dogs around a hurt wolf, as it seemed to Jimmy.

Alabama Joe kneeled by Lafitte.

"Will you talk?" he asked gently.

"Dang you, no!" burst out Lafitte.

What Alabama Joe did, Jimmy could not tell. He laid hands on the wounded fellow in some way, and a wild shriek burst from the lips of Lafitte.

As it died out, "Will you speak?" persisted Alabama Joe gently, in exactly the same voice which he had used before.

"Take him away from me!" gasped Lafitte, exhausted with terror and with excess of agony. "You brutes, will you stand by?"

They stood by!

It was little wonder, Jimmy thought, that they refused to interfere between big Alabama Joe and his prize. But it was disgusting to see the leers of joy with which they looked upon the suffering of poor Lafitte.

"Again?" said Alabama Joe. "Do I have to ask you again, Lafitte?"

The latter suddenly turned limp. He lay flat on the ground. Perhaps loss of blood was telling on him, as well as fear of that same torturing stroke of pain.

"Parker!" he gasped. "He sent me!"

"You and your brother?" asked Alabama Joe.

"Me alone."

"He lies!" said Jimmy. "Henri was behind that other tree with a gun in his hand, when I yelled out to you!"

"A good job you did it, kid!" said one.

Lafitte was enough stimulated by rage and spite to raise himself upon one elbow again, and now he glared at the boy.

"You!" said he.

And he pointed at Jimmy with a crimsoned forefinger, injured by the kick of Joe which had dislodged it from the handle of the gun.

He would remember, beyond doubt, and Jimmy would as soon have been remembered by a ghost, he felt. The cold went through him and stayed shuddering in his spine.

The witnesses had huddled their heads close around the fallen man and his confession.

"Parker sent him! The yellow dog didn't have the nerve to come back and fight it out by himself," said one. "Him to kill a wild cat like Dillman in a fair fight? I tell you, boys, we've been fooled by a four-flusher. That's all that Stan Parker is!"

They growled assent. Men would rather be physically and financially injured than mentally deceived.

Stanley Parker had swayed them like a king; now they saw that his scepter was a lie, and they raged at the thought.

"Now, then, Parker sent you?" went on Alabama Joe.

Lafitte glowered balefully on him, but he dared not submit to the cruel grip of those hands again.

"Parker sent me," he said, the words wrung out of his twisted mouth. "Parker sent me. Dang him!"

"And Henri?"

"Yes."

He gasped out the word and glanced askance at Jimmy again as he spoke.

"How much money, Lafitte?"

"I've said enough. I'll say no more, curse you!"

"How much money, Lafitte?" repeated the gentle voice of the tramp.

"Five thousand."

"To each of you?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Dang you, is that enough said?"

"And enough paid," said the genial voice of Alabama Joe. "A good price for one murder, Lafitte. I'm honored by Parker."

Suddenly he stood up.

"Friends," he said, turning to the others, "I want to point out to you that my life has been threatened by Parker,

and that he has put gunmen on my trail!"

"We'll run that man out of town!" they said.

"Into a jail!" said another.

"I'm asking you for protection," said Alabama Joe. "I'm not safe. He's tried once. He'll hire four the next time. He has all of old Tyndal's money under his thumb, and he'll spend it on me!"

"He won't have Tyndal's money longer than to-morrow morning," said one of the bystanders. "Tyndal will turn him out when he hears about this. Tyndal's as square as they come!"

"They say that Dyce is in town," said Alabama Joe. "I want to see him. I'm going to hunt for him now. I need protection, my friend. You're witness that that brute of a Parker is after my life?"

They were witnesses. Heartily they assured him.

And then, as they began to take care of the wounds of the fallen man, and as others poured thickly out from the barn, into which tidings of the new excitement had come, the Stingaree melted out of sight among the tree shadows as skillfully as his namesake ever blended itself with the tanned sands of a beach.

Jimmy was at his side. Soft-stepping Awaskees was instantly with them, and pointed off in the direction of the river.

"He means that he's ready for you, Joe," interpreted the boy. "How'd you see that fellow in the dusk of the trees, Joe? How'd you manage to get out your gun so quick on him when he had the first drop?"

"Your yell was the light that I saw by," said Alabama Joe. "That got the gun out for me, and I fired at the first twinkle among the trees. It was luck that let that bullet hit poor Lafitte."

One might have thought that he really pitied the fallen man, so tender was his tone. But it was not pity, Jimmy Green knew. It was simply a vast, controlled malice. The raging and the murderous fury of a dozen like the Lafittes could never make up the cold wrath and the scorn of Alabama Joe, working quietly toward his purposes.

"We'll have to hurry, Joe!" said the boy. "We'll——"

He was suddenly caught up by the strong hands of his companion and planted at his side behind a tree.

As for Awaskees, there was no sight of him. He had vanished into the thick blue-black of the evening.

But there was something else to be seen, and it was enough to fill the eyes of Jimmy Green.

It was the natty picture of two uniformed Mounted Police marching side by side down the center of the street, with their repeating carbines over their arms. They marched in step jauntily. And Jimmy Green knew the tall form and the step of Charlie Dyce as one of the two.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CALL ON CARSON.

THE pair stopped after they had gone half a dozen paces beyond the hiding place of Stingaree. Jimmy Green saw the faint gleam of the drawn gun in the hand of the latter, and he knew that the police lay practically in the hand of the criminal. With such speed and accuracy as he had shown, he could even call out a warning, and still drop his men before they started fighting.

He was tempted, furthermore, to take this chance, as the boy could see in the stiffening of his body and hear in the quick breathing of Alabama Joe. But the big fellow controlled himself, and Jimmy Green almost wondered how. It seemed that he was the forfeit. Sooner or later surely some of his enemies must overtake him. But in the meantime their very enmity left him free, it would seem, to act as he pleased and strike

with no more regard than an eagle of the air, or a hunting lion on the ground. But Alabama Joe kept himself in check. He was held on a leash, and the boy wondered who held the other end of the chain!

"Shall we go straight into the hall?" asked the companion of Dyce.

"Yes," said Dyce. "This Stingaree won't start shooting in a crowd where he's liable to hurt the bystanders. All the same——"

"What? Are you worried?"

"I am a little. I've split the boys up a good deal. That's not the way of Napoleon, eh?"

"Any one of us ought to be good enough to try any arrest," said the other.

"That's the theory, and a mighty fine theory—only I don't know how it'll work with the Stingaree. Mind you, Jack—if he flashes a gun, be braced to shoot. If he draws, one of us will go down. If it's me that falls, don't pay any attention to me. Go on after him."

"I will. The same goes for me, Charlie. Anything else?"

"One thing. Shoot low. He's done that much himself for others. It seems to me that he ought to get the same sort of a break himself. Wing him if you can and stop him."

"That's a long chance, Charlie."

"It's the fair thing, though. He'd have fifty killings on his hands if he'd shot to kill always. But he hasn't done that."

"Too wise, eh?"

"Or too decent. I don't know. Come along, Jack. We'll dive in and try to catch this fish alive."

They went on. The dark closed behind them, opened a little, and finally they were gone.

Awaskees materialized silently beside the friends.

"The canoe is at the head of the lake," he said.

"Let it stay there a while, my friend," said Stingaree. "I have two things to do before I leave Fort Anxious."

"You ain't going to stay here, Joe?" gasped the boy.

"Only a little while. Steady, Jim, and come along with me. I need a queer sort of help for this next job. Awaskees, we'll meet you at the canoe in a little while."

The Indian said nothing. And Jimmy went on at the side of big Alabama Joe with a growing fear.

Two things still to be done, as though that night had not been filled with enough action already!

They went to the Carson store, and going back to the living quarters, the tramp lifted Jimmy so that he could look through the window. He could report that old Bill Carson sat in the room with his chair tilted back, and his slippered heels resting upon the edge of the table. The room was thick with pipe smoke, and Bill, as usual, was studying his paper.

So Alabama Joe led the way to the rear door and entered, for the door was unlocked. As they stepped into the presence of the grocer, he did not look up, but grunting out a cloud of smoke, he said:

"Here's a fine thing! Listen: Gent in Skagway has got two daughters. They fall in love with a pair of crooks, rope the old man, and let the crooks in to get the coin—whacha think of that, Alabama?"

"Every man loses a good deal by a daughter," said Stingaree.

Carson looked up.

"You, there, Jimmy Green, you plunderin', worthless young rascal, what trouble are you makin' here to-night?"

He looked ready to rush at the boy, but Jimmy Green merely smiled. He was sure of the strong arm of his protector.

"Just dropped in. I thought it was your birthday, maybe!" said Jimmy.

"I dunno how you can take to a brat

like that," said Carson to Alabama Joe. "Worse'n a bunch of nettle and mixed barbed wire. Get out of here, Jimmy Green! What's the news, anyway?"

He grinned at the boy, and Jimmy answered promptly:

"Pierre Legros, he's threatened to take old Still Wind's scalp."

"He's a drunk fool. Still Wind will eat him."

"Mrs. Chiswick, she's gunna get married again."

"Get out, Jimmy! How come that? It can't be! Scat! Marry again with Bud Chiswick not more'n three months dead!"

"Well," said Jimmy, "I seen her ordering Tom Dexter off of her place and never to come back again, or nothing!"

"Ain't that what you'd expect?"

"Well, maybe. But, Tom, I don't guess that he would've gone there at all if he didn't think that he'd be able to come back again when he felt like it."

"Why, she's ten year older than him!"

"Yeah, but she's got a bad liver or something like that."

"What's that gotta do with it?"

"Well, Tom, he wouldn't have to wait very long for the money, I s'pose?"

Bill Carson grinned more widely than before.

"You're a bad un, Jimmy Green," said he. "The whole town knows what a bad un you are, but they dunno what a bad un you're gunna grow up into. Anything else new?"

"Sure. Old Les Johnson, he's traded his gray mule and fifty dollars boot for young Dickinson's bay mare."

"Hey, hold on! That ain't a mule. That's only a skin stuffed with meanness and old age."

"Yeah," said the boy, "but he gets fifty dollars, Dick does."

"That ain't any price for a fine upstanding bay mare, like that."

"Ain't it?"

"No, old Les Johnson is a skinflint, I tell you. Confound a man like that, making things hard for boys like Dickinson!"

"That mare has gone and broke her wind," said the boy quietly. "If she so much as pulls her own weight up to the top of a hill, she'll never be able to walk down the other side. Les Johnson is gunna do some of the finest cussing that ever we heard around Fort Anxious. I'd mighty like to be there and learn something when he busts the dam."

Bill Carson lay back in his chair and rolled like a ship in a storm. Laughter tormented him, and made him groan.

"You, Jimmy. What else is happening?"

"Well, Alabama Joe has come home early from the dance. That's one bit of news that you'd see if you was to look at the clock."

"Hey!" said the grocer. "You get tired of the dance, Joe?"

"I had to have a talk with you, Carson."

"Well, son, fire away."

"You were saying something about daughters."

"Yeah? You wanta talk about Paula? You gunna complain? Lemme tell you, son, that I've seen for a long time that you got no use for Paula, and she got none for you. All the same you gotta fight your own battles with her. Understand? I ain't able to handle her. I'd rather take giant powder and a burning fuse in my fingers than Paula when she'd made up her mind about anything. You gotta fight the thing out with her, Joe. Get up your courage, boy! But maybe things would be better right away if you didn't tease her so much."

"Tease her?" said the tramp.

"I mean, askin' her all the time how she's gunna lay out the garden at the Parker house, and that kind of things. That gets her pretty hot. She's gunna marry Parker and——"

Alabama Joe lifted his hand.

"I've only got a few minutes to talk to you, Carson," said he. "But I can give you some news. She won't marry Stan Parker."

The grocer, starting to speak and checking himself, was like a fish biting at the air.

"Whatever she does, she won't marry him," insisted Alabama Joe.

"The young fool!" shouted Carson, crashing his fist down on the table. "Has she gone and had a fight with a brace of millions on toast?"

"She won't have him. He's a yellow streak, and a murderer, Carson."

"Hey?"

"He went partners with Dillman and then double crossed him, and that's the true story, Carson. Fort Anxious believes it. I proved it to-night."

"Proved it? You? How, man?"

"I haven't the time to tell you, Carson."

"You ain't got the time? Then you're mighty badly rushed. What you wanta tell me about, son?"

"About Paula's husband."

"Eh? What about him? You tellin' me that she's married?"

"As good as."

The door opened softly. By a sagging outward of the smoke, which flowed down from the ceiling like water, Jimmy had his attention called, and looked to find that Paula Carson herself was standing in the entrance of the room. She must have heard the last words. Her face was very pale, and her eyes wonderfully brilliant. She made to Jimmy a gesture demanding silence, and his lips were sealed.

He was amazed that Alabama Joe, hair-trigger as his senses were, should not be aware that another person had entered the room. As for Carson, he was nearsighted. But the two faced one another oblivious of all else.

"Her!" exclaimed Bill Carson, staggered by this information. "Her as good as married—my Paula! Hey, young feller, what in Heaven's name d'you mean?"

"It won't be for a good while," said the tramp.

"Get out of here, Joe! Paula about to marry?"

"I mean that the man's found her who's sure to marry her," said Alabama Joe.

"Has he? What's his name? Somebody been sneakin' around and——"

"No sneaking. But he's been seeing her morning, noon, and night!"

"I'll knock him down and throw him to Mishe Mukwa!" roared Bill Carson. "What's the name of the puppy?"

"Alabama Joe," said the tramp.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STINGAREE MAKES A PROPOSAL.

IT was good to see the confusion, the astonishment, and then the laughter of the grocer.

"You—you—you!" he shouted.

Alabama Joe stood smiling and nodding, as though he appreciated the joke, too.

Suddenly Carson barked: "You ain't serious, man?"

"Yes, I am," said Joe.

"Well, I'll be danged," boomed Carson. "You—Alabama Joe——"

"Tramp and all that," nodded Joe, still smiling.

"Crook, for all I know!"

"Oh, I have been, all right," said Joe. "Bank breaking, train stopping, a little in the way of sticking up stages, too, back in the hills, and a whirl at footpadding in the towns, with a little second-story work to freshen things up—nothing like going into rooms that may hold guns on you, eh?—or let's say some plain gun fighting, now and then. A crook of all those kinds, Carson. I've rustled cows. I've even rustled sheep. I've taken a whirl at running off horses, though I didn't like that——"

"Go and tell Paula what you've done, and then ask her what she thinks!" shouted Carson.

"I've told her already," said Alabama Joe.

"You have?"

"Yes."

"And she told you to come and talk to me?"

"She told me nothing at all."

"Then what the dickens—what made you think—are you crazy, Alabama?"

Bill Carson half rose from his chair, as though he were going to hurl himself at the other, but he restrained himself at what Jimmy could see was a great price.

"Don't attack me," said Alabama Joe. "I've got Jimmy here as a witness if you get violent."

"You low cur," yelled Bill Carson, "I dunno what you're drivin' at. You want me to kick you out of the house? Or shall I leave Paula to whip you out?"

"If she did, she'd ask me back, I think," replied Alabama Joe. "I've simply had to come here to ask your permission before I ask Paula if she'll marry me."

"Crazy? Why, crazy as a loon!" said Mr. Carson to himself. "Go on, Joe, and tell me anything more that you got on your mind! Give my daughter to you, eh? Give Paula to you?"

"I'd make her a good husband," said Alabama.

"Yeah. Juggling the teacups to keep her amused, eh?"

"I can work," said Alabama.

"At what?"

"Selling groceries, for instance," said he.

Carson snorted. "Did you seriously talk to Paula?" he asked.

"I did a little."

"Tell me what she said, and then I'll know how much remains for me."

"For you to do?" asked Alabama.

"Yes. Because if you've got her interested in you, I'll take your hide off in strips, I will, and toast you at the fire!"

He got up as though he intended to attack that moment, and then Jimmy, looking back at Paula, saw her step a little forward.

"Daddy," said she.

Old Carson reeled. "Hey, where'd you come from, Paula?" he cried.

"Through the door," said she. "I wanted to introduce you to Joe before you take his hide off, daddy. He's the Stingaree."

Old Carson did not appear to be greatly staggered by this. He stood straight and still for a moment, so that Jimmy Green wondered at him; but then he slumped into a chair with a force that made its legs creak.

"Stingaree!" said he, and rubbed his hand across a very wet forehead.

It was the Stingaree himself who seemed upset by Paula's coming. She went past him with a grave face and stood by the edge of the table, resting a hand upon it, and flexing the knuckles in and out in an almost absent-minded manner. Alabama Joe stood fast, but he looked troubled.

She quickly rehearsed what had happened.

"It seems that Stanley Parker after all murdered Dillman. But, anyway, I'd made up my mind that I couldn't go on with him. He fought Joe, was knocked down, and went home. I've just found out the details. No one would tell me while Joe stayed at the dance. Then he hired the two Lafitte brothers to murder Joe. Joe drove them off."

"How d'you know that Parker hired them, then?"

"Because Simon was left on the ground—and Joe tortured him until he confessed."

When she came to the word "torture," she turned to Joe, and he winced visibly.

"Everything's topsy-turvy," muttered Bill Carson. "I don't understand——"

"Joe is in a hurry," said she in the same calm manner. "He's been guilty of all the crimes he's just confessed, I suppose. At least, you've heard of the Stingaree before. Everything—except murder! But when he talked to me at the dance, I found that I didn't care about what he'd done in the past, so long as he could change for the future. It's pretty square of him to come here and talk to you so frankly. Daddy, what do you advise?"

Bill Carson mopped his brow again.

"Paula," said he, "if he was an ordinary man, I wouldn't take any time. I'd tell you that I'd rather see you dead than married to him. But the Stingaree has made a name that's gone from one end of the country to the other. He's a man. He might be a bad man. But he ain't the kind that's turned out nowadays by the hundred dozen. His kind, they're made one at a time. Paula, tell me: Are you fond of him?"

"More than of anybody I've ever seen," said she.

Jimmy Green saw his little romance fade and blow, as it were, upon the smoke. But he was too interested in this affair to regard his own state of emotion very keenly. Only, with a wonderful vividness, he seemed to see Alabama Joe swinging throttled at the end of a rope, and Paula in black, looking up at the horror.

"Fond of him, fond of him——" muttered the grocer. "Well, I guess that that answers me all right. You'll marry him then."

"Unless he's put in prison first," said Paula, "or—is guilty of murder, daddy!"

Big Alabama lurched toward her and then was stopped by her last words.

"There are six Mounted Police looking for him in Fort Anxious now," she went on, "but he remained here, you see, for two things. One was to talk to you. The other is to reach Stanley Parker, and kill him!"

Bill Carson could not answer. And it was the Stingaree who stepped into the breach now.

"I'm trying to understand you clearly, Paula," said he. "You'll have me if I keep my hands clean from now on?"

"Yes," said she, her voice suddenly failing her.

"Parker's a cur!" he told her with great excitement. "I've trailed him for three thousand miles. I've run him down. He belongs to me, Paula. I tell you, there would be no charge laid against me. Everybody in Fort Anxious knows that he's hired men to kill me. Everybody knows that he's probably trying to kill me now! Don't you see how simple it is? I've gone to his house to try to persuade him to give up his enmity. I've talked hard and fast to him, but he makes a sudden movement to attack me——"

His face hardened—hardened on a smile that made Jimmy Green tremble.

"Why, that's murder, Joe," said the girl.

"Not murder. Duty, honey. Duty as white as sunshine. Bob was the straightest friend that any man ever had!"

"Stanley Parker will have a dog's life. Worse than death, really!"

"Justice is justice, and if I don't take it, the law will never touch him!"

"Listen to me," broke in Bill Carson. "If you're hounded by the law, how could you ever give my girl a home, Joe?"

"By turning into a different man with a different name," said he. "Paula, you don't doubt that?"

"No," she answered. "I'd marry you anyway, if I knew that you had to go to prison the next minute with clean hands. No blood on them, Joe! You've fought fairly before. You couldn't make a fair fight against a broken fellow like Parker to-night."

He threw back his head with a groan. "Paula, are you tying my hands for me?"

She did not answer. And Jimmy Green knew that there was no need of an answer.

But big Alabama Joe turned on his heel and, without any other farewell than another stifled sound in his throat, ran out of the room and across the kitchen and leaped to the ground outside.

Jimmy would have followed, but the girl caught him by the shoulders.

"Stay with him, Jimmy!" said she. "Stay with him and save him. Keep him from Stanley Parker, Jimmy! Save him for me, for me!"

She began to weep. She had been so wonderfully steady before this, and such a mistress of the situation that Jimmy was terribly upset. He thought of himself as a miniature creature, a little picture in a little book, attempting to keep a giant from striding on his mountainous way.

But he said:

"I'll try, Paula. I don't know what I can manage—but I'll sure try my best——"

"Why are you staying here?" she asked him almost angrily in her impatience. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!"

She hurriedly pushed him toward the door and Jimmy went through it staggering.

He stood in the open dark. The task before him seemed as hopeless, yes, a thousand times more so, than that which he had undertaken in getting to the post of vantage at the barn.

His way was as blank before him as the flat face of the night.

"Hey, Joe, Joe!" he called softly.

He had no answer.

There was not a stir, not a sound near him. And he knew then that the Stingaree was already on the way to do his work. Not even his love for the girl would stop him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JIMMY GOES TO PARKER.

THERE was no bright thought to come to Jimmy then.

He could think of only one possible solution, a highly dangerous and dubious one, and that was to go straight to Stanley Parker and give the man warning.

So he bolted from the grocery store, flinging one glance over his shoulder and back at the gleaming, golden face of the lighted window.

A sad night for old Bill Carson, no matter how it turned out. A sad night for Paula, too, unless he could accomplish a miracle and prevent the Stingaree from executing his task.

He sprinted out into the roadway, across it, and then down a twisting cowpath, and from that through a tangle of brush, and so by this very short cut he came out into the region of the bridge.

Frantically he looked up and down the street, but there was no sign of the looming shoulders of Alabama Joe.

He dashed on across the bridge. He ran with all his might. It seemed that his knees were made of lead, and that he could not possibly jerk them up fast enough in obedience to his will. Hard he ran, hopeless and resolute, like a dogged mastiff.

And, all the while, he saw pictures and heard sounds out of the future, and none more grisly than Stanley Parker begging for his life. Beg he would. Jimmy had seen him fall and rise again, and somehow he knew very well that the courage had melted out of the heart of the big man. Nothing but a strange freak of fortune would ever restore that bravery to him which he had had before the fist of the Stingaree loosened his limbs and spilled dust and darkness over his soul.

Jimmy crossed the arch of the bridge and he was speeding down the farther

slope when he saw half a dozen shadows run out at him from either side.

He had forgotten that this was a night of festival for the opposing band.

Suddenly he forgot Paula Carson, and the Stingaree, and Stanley Parker, who stood so near to death. He forgot them, and remembered that he was a king, who now imperiled his empire.

He could not turn back. They had too much impetus in dashing out toward him, and they would be sure to swarm over him as he swerved.

Instead he dodged toward the side, for he had taken the desperate resolution to break though, if he could, to the rail of the bridge, and dive over the edge of it to the rapid water beneath. That water was both swift and shallow. But anything was better than the prime disgrace of being made a captive by the enemy. They could then extract their own terms from him, or at the least they would torture him with all of a boy's devices, almost as wicked as the ways of the wild Indians.

He saw the dark, savage face of Jeems, the half-breed. He could not dodge. Jeems was faster than a streak of lightning afoot. He could not dodge, but he could try the weight of a hard-driven fist in the center of that snarling face.

He drove the punch home, his running weight behind it, and his arm went numb as Jeems toppled head over heels.

The rail of the bridge was only two strides away, but the shock of the punch had sent Jimmy spinning.

Still he staggered toward the rail, and had a hand on it, ready to fling himself over, when they reached him in a mass.

They climbed over him in a wave, and Jimmy, turning to fight, found himself mastered and dragged to the ground. In the very excess of their shrieking triumph they lifted him again and jammed him against the rail. They shook their fists in his face. They raved and raged at him. It was a victory to be dreamed of but not expected.

He was as a king should be.

He was composed. His eyes was steady and fierce as ever, and the heaving of his chest and the quivering of his nostrils were the signs of his running only.

They had various proposals, with which they filled the air. They would duck him, as a beginning. Or roll him down Saunders' Hill—also as a beginning.

"I'm done for!" said Jimmy to his heart.

But he sneered in their faces.

Then he saw a tall, long-striding form on the farther side of the bridge, and the dark silhouette of the biggest of dogs behind him. He knew that it was his friend, Alabama Joe, and that the wolf dog Mishe Mukwa was at his heels.

If he saw Joe, it was certain that the latter must see him. He yearned to cry out. But pride restrained him. If Joe cared to, his arms would soon part that heap of tangled boyhood and set him free.

But Joe went on, swiftly, softly striding, and Jimmy was left alone with his fate.

So it seemed to him. Not death, but to be beaten, shamed, dethroned. He wondered if he would be able to endure the torment without a cry. He wondered if he would be able to keep his head high when they insulted him and made their threats. He wondered if he would weaken and beg for mercy. The thought broke him, sickened him.

They had decided in favor of the ducking when another boy ran up, twisted through the little crowd, and stood close to Jimmy Green.

It was Dugan.

"Jimmy," he said, "honor bright, what brung you over the bridge?"

"To fish for suckers," said Jimmy fiercely.

"Was you scouting?"

"On your night? Is it likely?" asked Jimmy scornfully. "You take me for a fool, Mickey?"

Mickey snorted with anger. But he controlled himself and his pride, answering:

"Tell me! You come across the bridge on business, Jimmy?"

And the boy at last could answer: "Aye, life-and-death business, Mickey!"

"I b'lieve you," said Mickey. "Turn and turn about. Old-timers, he goes loose!"

They wailed, they raged. But Mickey faced them down. He was not quite a king, like Jimmy, but among these lads he was at least a powerful prince. They gave way. They loosed their holds a little, and while they still were discussing, Jimmy suddenly wrenched himself free and bolted.

He had half a dozen yards headstart before they could get under way, whooping.

They ran well. They ran for revenge and other urgent motives. But Jimmy was running for his life! And another life as well!

The very bitterness in his heart gave him strength. That bitterness was the calm defection of the Stingaree, and he prayed that the big man might be punished for it.

A thought of horror nerved him, too. Why was Mishe Mukwa brought along? Was the dog to be loosed like a snarling fate at Stanley Parker?

All these things steeled him.

In a hundred yards he had gained three. In a furlong they were rapidly dropping away behind him. Jeems would never have given up, ordinarily. He would have clung to the trail like a venomous greyhound, until he wore down the prey. But Jeems was not fit for running, just now, except to hop in a circle, grunting, and holding both hands over one rapidly swelling eye.

The rest gave up, and Jimmy Green plunged ahead, victorious, and alone. The very sound of the jangling riot behind him was dying out in the distance when he turned in at the gate of the big Parker house.

He stopped there, gasping out his signal, and his two clansmen instantly were before him.

Did they know what was happening in the house?

Yes, they did. There were two Mounted Police in the front room, playing seven-up. And in the library behind them was Stanley Parker himself, with a bruise along the side of his jaw.

Had a big man and a dog come through the gate?

No, nothing like that had come their way.

Jimmy had heard enough. He thanked and dismissed them, breathing a warning about the hostile outfit.

Then he went ahead.

He did not try to go softly or with any care. Speed was his one thought, and the promise which he had made to the girl.

He crashed the knocker against the front door.

It was opened at once, but only an inch or two, by a gloomy-faced old half-breed serving man. Jim could see that the door had been left on the chain. They were cautious in the house of Stanley Parker on this night.

"I wanta see Mr. Parker!" he gasped. He was reeling from his hot run.

"Can't," said the servant, and started closing the door.

"Gotta see him."

"Can't."

"You one-eyed, snag-toothed, lantern-jawed nut head!" shouted Jimmy. "Lemme in, or he'll break you in two to-morrow, if he lives that long."

The servant, with an oath, unchained the door and jerked it open, for above all, he wanted to get his hands on Jimmy.

He succeeded, too, for Jimmy did not budge.

His steadiness seemed to unnerve the servant. "I oughta horsewhip you!" said he.

"You take me to your boss. You hear me talk? I mean business! Life or death is what I mean to him!"

And the other, suddenly, was convinced. He growled a threat over his shoulder, but he led the way into the house, and knocked at the library door.

"Who's there?" demanded an impatient voice from the inside.

"Me, sir."

"What you want?"

"Nothing. It's Jimmy Green that wants you."

"He wants me for no good then. He never wanted anything for good in his life, and he'll wind up on a gibbet."

Jimmy was enraged, and his shrill voice sang out:

"That ain't the way that you'll finish. The law ain't gunna have time to get its hooks into you! And that's just exactly what I've come to tell you, Parker!"

There were hasty steps, the turning of locks, and then the door to the library opened.

Big Stanley Parker loomed there with the flicker of firelight playing treacherously around his head and shoulders. A mountain of a man was he, and Jimmy wondered that any fist had been able to topple him.

"Come in!" said Parker.

He gathered Jimmy's arm in his grip, looked anxiously up and down the hall, and growling at his servant to keep his eyes open, he took Jim into the room.

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

EARLY AMERICAN HUNTERS

ACCORDING to evidence found by the Holmes-Moore expedition, which recently unearthed some interesting remains in Florida, the early Americans must have been clever hunters; and to hunt twenty-five thousand years ago when firearms were unheard of, the only weapon being the trusty flint arrow, must have taken great skill. The evidence that Doctor Moore offers is a flint arrowhead that he found in some dirt between the teeth of a half-grown mammoth, which he believes indicates that some early American had lain in wait for this stealthy beast and, at the psychological moment, sent out the arrow which eventually brought the animal down.

The Everglades must have been a veritable chamber of horrors, as the great sheet of ice which covered most of the North American continent forced herds of all kinds of animals into Florida. As this was the age of the mammoth, the mastodon, the giant sloth, the progenitor of the bison, the giant leaf-eater, and the giant glyptodon, it is believed that great herds of these animals infested this section and found there pleasant pastures.

Doctor Moore has also added to his collection a skull and a large portion of the remains of what he believes to be a first American. As broken bones with the marrow removed were found near the skeleton, it has been decided that this first American must have been a meat eater. Marrow, it seems, was considered a great delicacy. Otter, muskrat, snakes, turtles, and fish were also his fare.

Dog Heroes

By Kenneth Gilbert

Author of "Hooked Deep!" etc.

SURELY, truth is stranger than fiction. What writer of dog stories would, for example, dare have his canine hero swim a roaring mountain stream with one end of a rope in his mouth, then wind it around a tree on the opposite side, and hold it snubbed, while his master crossed in safety? Or, at a command, move forward to certain death in the jaws of a huge grizzly? Or stand fast and refuse to fight when another dog is slashing at him? Or permit another dog, whom he hated, to hold him down by the throat, thus obeying the will of a master whose wish is stronger than his own natural inclinations? Truth is so much stranger than fiction that it would be a hopeful author indeed who expected his readers to believe such situations possible.

Yet they are not only possible, but they may be proved, not by hearsay, but by the evidence of one's eyes. Two such dogs, Arnold von Minkelreid and Dawn, trained by a Seattle man—A. T. Sanderlin, called "Ace" by his friends—will do these things, and many more feats equally astounding. Nor are the dogs freaks in the canine world. Fourteen other dogs, owned by a group of boys to whom Sanderlin is gratuitously giving his time and skill, are already masters of many of the tricks which Arnold and Dawn perform. It all lies in proper training—and in this I believe Sanderlin has hit on a secret which has been heretofore overlooked. It is psychology—an understanding of the dog mind. More than once, persons who have seen Sanderlin work with dogs have declared that he used some form of hypnotism; but this, of course, is absurd. Psychology, and a knowledge of dogs—that is the answer. I will later try to explain just what I mean.

In any event, his system works. It works so well, in fact, that I am hereby willing to make a controversial statement; I'll say that the most distinguished dog in America is not one of the moving-picture dog actors, nor one to be found on the vaudeville stage, but he is Arnold von Minkelreid. And a close runner-up is Dawn, his understudy.

I make this statement if for no other reason than that Arnold is the only dog who has ever been awarded the Abraham Lincoln medal "for distinguished service to humanity," an honor heretofore reserved exclusively for human beings. For Arnold has served humanity, and well. He has found the bodies of twenty-two persons who had been lost and had died, and he has made four rescues. Those facts in themselves seem to justify my claim.

Arnold is a Doberman Pinscher, while Dawn is a German shepherd—both of the type loosely termed "police dogs," although Arnold, of course, is black, short-haired, and with sharp ears; while Dawn is reddish brown, with black muzzle and ears, and long coat. Dawn is three years old, and Arnold is about six. Neither dog is owned by Sanderlin. Needless to say, they are not for sale.

The Seattle men who own the dogs have dedicated them to the cause of humanity. The dogs have never been trained to track criminals, and never will be, their owners say. Both are fond of children, as intelligent dogs should be.

Arnold was called Minkelreid because, when it was time to register him, the registrar of the American Kennel Club discovered that a dog already bore the name of the famous Swiss patriot. So Arnold was given the name Minkelreid, instead of Winkelreid.

For thirty-five years now, Sanderlin has trained dogs. When he was a boy, he used to train dogs for his own amusement. It was not until twelve or fifteen years ago that he began taking it up in a serious way. Since then, he has practically retired from it, however, devoting himself to business pursuits. Yet in that period he has not only contributed something to dog lore, but has been the means of saving four lives, and bringing comfort to the families of twenty-two persons who were lost, and who died on the trail. To recount the history of Sanderlin's exploits with his two famous dogs would fill a large volume. One day Arnold, for example, may be up in the Cascades, hunting a lost person, and the next he may be rushed to California on a kidnaping case. Familiar as I am with Arnold's history, there is one incident which seems to typify the character and fidelity of the dog, and, understanding it, one may understand how this marvelous dog will always conduct himself.

Arnold had returned from an unusually hard hunt for an old hermit who had wandered from his cabin, fallen, injured himself, and then died. Arnold later found him, by the way. But on this night—it was nearly ten o'clock—Arnold was lying before the fire in the Sanderlin house, which is on the Pacific Highway, north of Seattle. Sanderlin was sitting on the floor with his little girls, telling them of Arnold's exploits that day. The dog, his feet worn raw from the rough ground over which he had traveled, was sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion. Then, suddenly, in the midst of his dreams, he heard The Call!

Instantly he stood up, padded over to the window, thrust the shade back with his nose, and growled. Sanderlin watched him, wondering. At that moment the man did not understand. He merely waited, listening, realizing that the keen senses of the dog had detected something beyond the power of human comprehension.

A minute passed in silence, for the children were waiting and listening, too, and watching Arnold. Then, to Sanderlin's ears came the throbbing wail of the siren on a police car. Arnold, his eardrums infinitely more sensitive than those of his master, had heard the sound from afar, and, having ridden in many police cars while on trips in search of lost persons, he understood its call!

Two minutes later, the car, brakes squealing, ground to a stop before Sanderlin's house. Two men pounded on the door. As Sanderlin opened it, he saw that one was an officer, and the other one of his close friends.

The latter's face was lined with worry, and without preliminary, he asked:

"How's the dog? I've just learned that my kid brother, on a fishing trip in the Cascades, has been missing for two days!"

Sanderlin turned to the dog, who was listening, as though trying to understand this tense, excited human speech. As Sanderlin faced him, Arnold pricked his ears expectantly.

"Want to go, Arnold?" the trainer asked.

Instantly the dog reared on his hind legs, whining eagerly, trying to tell his master that, footsore though he was, he was willing to tackle another grueling job. A few minutes later, they were bound for the hills.

They found the place where the boy was last seen, and there Arnold was given the scent, by means of an old shoe which had belonged to the missing lad. Limping, despite his eagerness, Arnold whirled, and was off.

But in the forty-eight hours that the boy had been missing, he had wandered far. He had repeatedly crossed and recrossed creeks. At other times, he had floundered through swamps. It was a difficult trail that Arnold was following and, superdog though he was, it was plain that he was up against a tough problem.

The hours wore on. Now and then Arnold would return to his master, in order to keep the latter located; then off he would go again. By this time his feet were in terrible condition, yet he stuck gamely to his task throughout the long night. At last, when dawn was graying the eastern hills, Arnold did not return as promptly as before. Then Sanderlin, leading the searchers, came to a creek, and knew that he had found a clew.

He caught his friend by the shoulder, as he pointed to a track in a sand bar. It was the imprint of a boy's foot. And, right on top of this footprint was another track—the track of Arnold! But the thing which made Sanderlin's throat tighten and his eyes burn was a crimson stain in the sand, where his dog had stepped. Arnold, although his feet were blood-raw now, was carrying on!

And now the story switches to the lost boy himself.

Gaunt with hunger and half dead with exposure, for nights are bitter in the Cascades, even in the summer, he had fallen asleep in the lee of a log. He did not even have matches with which to light a fire. Throughout the hours of darkness he had lived in a state of terror, for he was in wild country. Stealthy rustling in the brush, which might indicate the nearness of a hungry cougar, but which probably denoted the presence of some small and harmless forest dweller, had kept his nerves on edge. Yet his exhausted body demanded rest, and so at last he slept, although lightly.

Then, abruptly, he was awake, to find the forest, misty and chill, lightening with the new day. Yet instinct told him that it was not daylight which had aroused him. Some sound——

Suddenly, he started to his feet, almost screaming. For, less than twenty

feet away, was a coal-black animal, fairly large, peering at him from the brush!

His first thought was that it was a bear. He caught up a club—his only weapon—and hastily climbed on the stump of the tree beside which he had been sleeping. Then he saw that it was no bear, but a large, black dog.

He wondered at this, for he had never heard of Arnold von Minkelreid, "Hope of the Lost," as the dog has been called. As the boy stood there, undecided, the dog came up to the foot of the stump, and wagged his tail in friendly fashion.

The boy descended, reassured. Then the dog trotted away a short distance, paused, and looked back. Still the boy did not understand. Again the dog returned, wagged a friendly tail, and again started away. Once more the dog stopped, and waited invitingly.

But the boy failed to grasp what the dog was trying to tell him—to follow. Then it was that Arnold lost patience. He would waste no further time in coaxing. He wheeled, came back with a rush—and leaped!

Startled, the boy staggered back. But Arnold achieved his objective, the boy's cap, and, with this in his mouth, flashed out of sight in the brush. And a few minutes later, half a mile away, there was enacted a dramatic scene.

Out of the tangle of salal, vine maple, and devil club, came Arnold, still carrying the cap. Straight to his master he went, and Sanderlin snatched the cap from him. Quickly, Sanderlin pressed the sweatband of the cap to his own cheek.

It was soft and pliable—almost warm!

He turned to his friend.

"Your brother is still alive!" he said feelingly. Then he knelt beside Arnold and threw his arm around the dog's neck, to hide his own emotion and the sight of his friend's unmanly tears.

But Arnold, even though his exploits have on more than one occasion landed him on the first page of the principal newspapers of the country, is not infallible. He cannot do the impossible. Yet so far as a marvelously keen nose and an alert, trained brain will carry him, there he will go.

So he might have solved a kidnaping mystery in San Francisco if he had been allowed to work out the thing in his own way, and the kidnapers had not become frightened and returned the child.

Events came fast upon each other for dogs as for men, and it happened that Arnold had just come in from one hunt for a lost man—whom he found, dead—when an enterprising San Francisco newspaper telegraphed Sanderlin to fetch the dog there. Sanderlin, by the way, accepts no fee for the services of himself or the dog.

It was a rush order, and there was no time to be lost. A little girl had been stolen from an apartment house. When Sanderlin arrived with the dog, he found the apartment-house corridors jammed with police, reporters, photographers, and a curious crowd. The thing to do first, of course, was to establish the child's scent so that the dog would recognize it. So Sanderlin showed Arnold the baby's crib.

The parents of the child had been away from the apartment all day, engaged in the search. This fact is important in view of what later happened.

Arnold sniffed briefly at the bedclothes, for he is a veteran at this sort of work, and knew what was required. Then he padded out into the hall and stood there for a moment, undecided, while the gaping crowd watched. Then, confidently, he trotted down the hall a few doors, stopped before another apartment, and scratched on the door.

A man appeared. Arnold pushed by him, went inside, and, a moment later, came leading a little girl out into the

hall. He had her by the dress and, while he was gentle, he was nevertheless firm in his decision that she must be taken to his master.

Sanderlin, nonplused for a moment, for this was not the missing child, suddenly understood.

"Has that baby of yours ever been in that other apartment?" he asked the father.

The man hesitated for a moment; then he replied:

"Well, yes. She was in there to-day. The doors were open, and she crawled into the crib of that other child, and went to sleep. We found her there."

So it was that Arnold's amazingly sensitive nostrils had led him on a blind trail. He had found the wrong child. But Sanderlin quickly established the scent of the missing child, and Arnold set off once more.

Yet the kidnapers foiled him by using an automobile. However, he was working on a new clew when the criminals, evidently fearing the combination of the usual unrelenting vigilance of the police and the almost unbelievable powers of the dog, suddenly decided that the risk was too great, so they let the baby go, unharmed. I shall always be of the opinion, however, that if given time, Arnold would have found the child of his own accord, no matter if he had had to face a storm of bullets to do so. For his courage seemingly is without a flaw. Sanderlin once proved this when he unexpectedly faced a grizzly bear.

On a search for a missing man, Sanderlin and the dog were compelled to spend a night at a rock-quarry camp up in the hills. Now, grizzly bears are no longer common in the State of Washington, yet infrequently one may be encountered on the higher slopes. At dawn the following day, while fog lay over the heights, Sanderlin struck out with Arnold on a new hunt for the missing man.

They toiled up the mountain along the edge of a steep rock slide. Suddenly, in rounding a shoulder of rock, they came face to face with an enormous grizzly.

Had the bear been warned of their presence beforehand, he would, doubtless, have taken pains to efface himself quickly. But, coming on them suddenly, and finding them barring his trail, his anger was stirred. He stood there, lowering, his head rolling slightly, a sure warning sign that he was aroused.

Sanderlin had a light belt gun—worse than nothing under the circumstances. To retreat down the trail was impracticable, because just below Sanderlin was a short ledge, up which he had climbed with some difficulty. He did not fancy trying to back down there with that grizzly almost on top of him.

To the left was the rock slide, dangerous footing, but more accessible. Moreover, he did not believe that the grizzly would follow him over it. He chose the slide.

Meanwhile, Arnold stood there facing the grizzly. The dog was intelligent enough to know that he would stand no chance with the giant bear, hence he would not foolishly attack. So he turned to follow Sanderlin down the slide.

But as he did so, the grizzly growled, and took a step forward, as though debating a rush which would wipe out man and dog, and Sanderlin knew that there would not be time to reach the rock slide and safety, unaided. So he bluffed—with Arnold.

"Hold him, Arnold!" he commanded.

Instantly, the dog wheeled, courageously baring his fangs, and ready to fight if the grizzly took another step. Indeed, with the short hairs along his spine lifted warningly, his ears laid back, and his glistening teeth showing from wrinkled lips, Arnold himself was a sight to intimidate. And, so unexpected was his show of courage that the

huge grizzly hesitated, while his slow brain groped to grasp the situation.

Seconds counted then. In five of them, Sanderlin was out on the slide, and moving fast. Safe!

"Here, Arnold!" he called. An instant later, Arnold, glad to be relieved of the strain upon his courage, was with him, and they kept moving. But it was Arnold's willingness to die to save his master that had stopped the bear. The grizzly stood there, watching them go, still shaking his head, as though puzzled.

Sanderlin explains that under no circumstances would he have let Arnold get within reach of the bear. The dog obeys instantly his master's slightest command—always given in a whisper when the dog is near—and before Sanderlin would have allowed the dog to get close enough to the bear to have been struck by one of those fearful, smashing forepaws, he would have risked much.

Probably, Sanderlin himself has never stopped to enumerate the tricks Arnold will do—and, for that matter, Dawn as well. But Dawn is a younger dog, and, although marvelously trained, a novice compared to Arnold. The older dog is the more finished in style, although Dawn will practically duplicate Arnold's feats. The outstanding characteristic of both dogs is their implicit and instant obedience. They respond to a whisper, never repeated! This does not mean that they have had obedience beaten into them, but that they seem to understand what Sanderlin says. It is as though the man talks their language.

Suffice it to say that they have enough tricks to fill an evening without repeating. They are eager to "work," and seem to take a delight in showing off their accomplishments. They are living examples of what careful study of dog nature, as well as infinite patience, will do.

But the fundamental tricks which lay the groundwork for all the other feats which these dogs perform, can be taught by any person of average patience and intelligence to an average dog, according to Sanderlin. There is no mystery about it; it is merely a matter of psychology, he points out. In a future article, I hope to reveal the principal points of such training, as well as to sketch some of the outstanding feats in the career of Dawn, kennel mate of Arnold von Minkelreid, "Hope of the Lost."

LIONS TREE LUMBERJACK

UNARMED, and homeward bound after a hard day's work, George Saunders, a young lumberjack of Colorado, was encountered by a bloodthirsty lion. Fortunately, Saunders was woodswise and proceeded to climb the nearest spruce tree. Here he clung to the uppermost branches, hoping that help would come from somewhere, and while he waited, another lion appeared and joined the vigil at the foot of the tree.

Fellow workers at the Fred Bean Lumber Co.'s camp, who became anxious when Saunders did not turn up at the bunk house at the usual time, set out in search for him and about midnight found him still in the treetop, suffering from cold and exhaustion.

Lion tracks were found under the tree and the following day the entire camp laid aside their regular work and went on a lion hunt.

Mr. Bean has announced that all employees working any distance from the main camp must carry firearms for protection.

Guns Of Jeopardy

By Robert J. Horton

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

RIVALRY between Lafe Owens, of the K-T, and Jim Bolten, of the Double B, culminates when Owens seeks reëlection as president of the Cattlemen's Association. Their foremen, Velie and Fresee, respectively, are also hostile. Larry, Lafe's son, chums with a mysterious youth named Jones, who is now staying with him. Jones admires Molly Owens, and Larry loves Jane Bolten. The rustler, Bianco, comes North and robs both outfits, then daringly offers to resell them their cattle. Bolten accepts. The rustlers again raid the K-T; old Lafe is hurt in the confusion. At the Association meeting, the range splits, Bolten leading the east enders. His credit must be renewed elsewhere, and he leaves to arrange it. Jane promises to marry Larry. Lafe anticipates a raid on the bank. He has publicly announced the deposit there of a large sum. Jane rides to town to meet Larry, as she promised.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SURPRISE.

AFTER helping his father to his room, Larry had gone to the barn to see that the horses were all right. He paused to chat with some of the stockmen who were leaving town and waiting for their mounts to be saddled or teams hitched up. As he turned to leave the barn, a rider thundered in the rear door. Larry looked over his shoulder casually, stopped short in his tracks, and whirled.

The rider stopped near him, looking down at him.

"Jane!" he cried, as though he could hardly believe his eyes.

The girl swung quickly from the saddle, her face white, and confronted him.

"Larry! You're—all right."

Slowly the color came into her cheeks, and she looked away, tapping a boot with her riding crop. She looked very beautiful then, trim in her riding habit.

wisps of hair peeping from her cap, her cheeks flushed, lips like cherries, eyes dancing.

He took her hand in both of his.

"You came!" he said, in a tremulous voice. "I was afraid——" He was suddenly cognizant of the curious eyes about them. "Go into the office in front," he said, "while I look after your horse. Hurry!" She left him as he led her mount to a stall and quickly unsaddled and tied it.

Then he hurried to the office and found her sitting on the bunk there. He was beside her in a moment, his arms about her, his lips pressed to hers.

"I was afraid you wouldn't come, an' I guess I couldn't have blamed you if you didn't."

"Oh, Larry, I was afraid something might happen between you and Fresee. I know how he hates you. He wants to kill you. I saw it in his eyes—I've seen it more than once. I——"

"Never mind, Jane, we've got to get out of here. There are too many around, an' your dad or somebody from the ranch might see us. Come on."

He took her arm and led her quickly out of the barn to the rear door of the hotel, where they entered. In the narrow hallway leading to the lobby in front, he halted.

"Just wait till I take a look in front before we try the stairs," he said excitedly.

He walked quickly to the stairs, glanced into the lobby, and beckoned to her. In a minute they were up the stairs and Larry drew her into an unoccupied room and closed the door.

"Jane!" he exclaimed again softly, and for some moments he held her in his arms. "You came," he murmured.

"I made up my mind last night," she said, with her head on his shoulder. "Father forbid me to come and it was late before I could get away from the ranch. Oh, Larry, what are we doing?" She drew back and looked into his eyes. Her fine, long lashes seemed touched with dew.

He put his hands on her shoulders. "When I was riding back from the Falls with our—our paper—I wasn't sure; but now that you're here, I know. I don't care about anything but you, Jane. I want you to-day—now—this afternoon. Was it just because you thought Fresee an' I would have trouble that you came? Tell me, Jane."

She didn't look at him now. He could feel her tremble.

"Was it, Jane?" he asked softly.

"Larry—oh, I don't know! I just came because I wanted to come." She looked up at him suddenly and his arm went about her shoulders as he patted her cheek. She put her lips against his hand.

"I'm just wondering, Larry, if—if we're doing right," she whispered.

"I love you, Jane, an' you said you loved me. You gave me your promise, an' that's a sacred thing. I think it will help things if we get married, although we don't have to let anybody know—yet. Once we're married, we can't lose each other—don't you see? But it's for you to say."

Her arms crept about his neck. "I—I wonder if I'm just afraid? I want you, too, Larry; I wouldn't want anything to happen to—to——" She ceased talking, her lips quivering.

He held her close and kissed her. "Then I don't see how we can be doing any wrong," he said earnestly. "We can go to the justice, an' I'll ride back with you. You can make some excuse at home for being away, or even tell your mother. Maybe it'll help to stop all this trouble, Jane. But I'm not thinking of the trouble, I'm only thinking of you, sweetheart."

Now that he held her in his arms again, the doubts which had assailed him vanished. They loved each other—they could do no wrong. It was their right!

She was stroking his hair. "Do you know where father is?" she asked.

"I think they're having a meeting—the east enders. The association's split, Jane. Your father is starting a new one for the east range. But that mustn't make any difference to us. It's one reason, maybe, why we shouldn't wait."

"All right, Larry, dear, we'll do it!" she said, giving him a hug.

Some moments later, Larry, excited and eager, opened the door and stealthily peered out into the hall. It was deserted. He stepped quickly to the head of the stairway and looked down. The way appeared clear. He motioned to Jane and she was with him in a moment.

They descended the stairway, Larry in the lead, and turned into the hall leading to the rear door. Larry quickened his pace and they almost ran to the rear entrance. When they were outside, Larry looked down at his bride-to-be with a grin of boyish triumph.

He led Jane along behind the buildings until they reached a small, white shack which fronted on the street. He rapped smartly on the rear door. They waited breathlessly, looking at each other almost in fright. Then they heard noises inside and finally the door was opened and two gray eyes and a white beard showed through the crack.

"Hello, judge," Larry greeted. "Are there many people in there?"

The justice swung the door wide. "Come in, the crowd's just left," he said in a querulous voice. He was small, and spare, and old, this justice. "An' if there was a crowd in the front room, we could use the back room, even if there is a bed an' a kitchen stove in it." He closed the door after them.

Jane's eyes were wide and she was rather white. She put a hand on Larry's arm.

"Judge Nelson, can you keep a secret?" asked Larry.

"I've been known to fergit things," replied the justice, fingering his beard. "I reckon I could fergit 'bout you two if I had to."

"That's it," nodded Larry. "Jane an' me want to—get married."

"Waal, thet's no trick a-tall," boomed the old man. "You got the license?"

Larry produced it immediately, and the justice adjusted his glasses and scanned it. "Seem's all right, Larry. You got the ring?"

"The—the ring?" Larry gasped. Jane's hold on his arm tightened as he looked at her blankly. "I—never thought of it," he confessed with a flush.

"Thet's all right," said Nelson. "I learned long ago in this prairie country thet a man's gotta be prepared fer anything. Now, you jest wait here." He shuffled out into the front office, while Larry and Jane stared at each other.

In a few moments he was back with two boxes. "I keep 'em in stock," he grinned. "Now this box has the best ones, an'——"

"Never mind the other," said Larry quickly.

"I thought so," said the old justice. "Wouldn't be like old Lafe's boy to want anything but eighteen carat in a wedding ring. Now, Jane, let me try them on till we get one thet fits." The third ring fitted perfectly and he handed the small band of gold to Larry.

"Now you two want to go out front? Every couple I've ever married in here has hed good luck." He peered back and forth at them out of his watery, blue eyes.

"This is all right," said Larry. "I expect it's just as binding, an' we can slip out the back way again. We're doing this on the sly, judge."

"Thet's just as binding, too," nodded Nelson. "But you got to heve a couple witnesses. Oh, don't git scairt. I'm always able to tend to these things. Hugh Mathieson an' Merle Thomas are out front. I'll bring 'em in. They'd be tickled to death to be in on the secret,

an' they wouldn't say a word so's they could have the laugh on folks afterward. You just wait."

Larry stood holding the ring, looking down at it. When he looked up, Jane's cheeks were rosy red. He kissed her quickly and then the justice entered with the two grinning witnesses. Jane stepped a little behind Larry.

"No, step out here beside your man, Jane. I'm shore glad I'm the one to marry you two, for I've known yore paws an' maws since doomsday."

It seemed hardly a minute before the ceremony was over and Larry was kissing, first the ring on her finger, and then her lips.

"It's alers customary to kiss the bride," the old justice pointed out, and he and the two witnesses kissed Jane on the cheek.

As simple as this, thought Larry; his eyes glowing. He handed the justice a yellow-backed bill. "That ought to cover it," he said.

The two men shook hands with them and went out.

"You'll have to sign," the justice said, "an' I'll give Jane the paper she wants."

This formality was soon over and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Owens slipped out the rear door into the glory of the prairie sunset. Although they could not know it, Jim Bolten was galloping south at the moment, and old Lafe was complaining because Larry did not show up.

"Jane!" exclaimed Larry, taking her hand. "We—we did it!"

To his astonishment, his wife leaned her head on his shoulder and burst into tears. He had no thought of being seen. He just held her and kissed her hair, until she looked up at him and raised her lips.

"Forever's a long time, darling," she whispered.

"It can't be too long for me, Jane," he said tenderly. "An' now we got to fix it so we can eat in the hotel kitchen where nobody can see us an' then start back. Leave it to me."

They hurried back to the hotel and succeeded in getting into the kitchen. Larry "fixed it" promptly, as he had promised.

"You wait here," he then told Jane. "I'm going upstairs to see dad an arrange it so I can ride back to the ranch right away. An' I'll find out if your dad has gone back." He was gone in a moment.

When he reached his father's room he found him eating with Stan Velie, his mother and sister.

"Takes you a long time to get around," growled old Lafe. He was not in good humor, despite his victory. "You look excited. What you been up to, Larry?"

"I did a little gambling an' won," his son replied. This did not sound like lying to him. "I've had a bite an' I'm going to ride on to the ranch—unless you have something for me to do."

"Gambling!" snorted his father, while Stan Velie grinned. "Well, I suppose you've got to learn when to stop so's you'll know when to stay away from it. If you run across Jones anywhere, take him to the ranch, where he belongs."

The youth caught the significant look his father gave him and nodded.

"Where's Mr. Jones been all day?" Molly Owens asked.

"Oh, you want to know," said Larry, raising his brows. "An' what'll you give me if I tell you?" He laughed as his sister shot him an angry glance. "Those easterners' meeting over?" He asked Lafe.

"Didn't have any," said Lafe in a satisfied tone. "Got cold feet, I reckon. Bolten had to go south, so I suppose Fresee's gone home. We'll stay in town to-night."

Larry hastened to the kitchen where

a meal was prepared for Jane and him. "We've got half an hour," he told her. She nodded toward the two women in the kitchen, one of whom came immediately with food and the other with a big pot of savory coffee. Both women wore broad smiles. Larry scowled.

"Kind of edging aroun' old Lafe, ain't ye, Larry?" said the one who poured the coffee.

"What's your name?" Larry demanded.

"You don't have to ask me my name, nor Anna's either, an' I can tell gold when I see it—'specially if it's on a girl's finger!"

Larry and Jane looked at each other in dismay, and Jane hastily put her left hand below the table. Then Larry carefully peeled two ten-dollar bills from his roll and laid them on the table.

"I've heard of folks forgetting things for less than that," he said significantly.

"Oh, we wouldn't have had to have that, Larry," laughed Anna. "Not with you an' Jane. You can lay your last white chip we won't tell; an' we wish you a barrel of luck. Shake!"

"Jane, we better hurry an' eat an' get started before everybody pegs us," Larry grinned.

Shortly afterward they were in the barn. Larry got their horses and saddled them with the aid of the barn man. As they mounted, he pressed a five-dollar gold piece into the man's hand. "Needn't bother to mention that there were two of us," he drawled. "Just me, understand?"

"That's all I saw," grinned the barn man as they rode out the rear way.

They slipped around through the timber until they had left the town behind. Once on the open prairie they let their mounts out and raced in the dying sunset, with a cool, sweet wind freshening.

"Didn't know it cost so much money to get married, Jane," sang Larry, with his flashing, boyish smile.

"Are you sorry?" she flashed back.

"Am I? Just rein in a minute—close."

The horses, anxious to go, bobbed their heads and snorted at the delay. And then they were off at a ringing gallop; over a field of cloth-of-gold, with the purple buttes far ahead, and the shadow of the river to their left. The wind sang in the grasses, and a bridal veil of golden dust floated behind them.

"Who cares!" cried Larry as he threw a kiss to Jane.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN THE BRAKES.

AS Fresee raced through the gathering dusk for the bad lands, the figure on the ridge vanished. It was Jones who cautiously led his horse down the steep slope into the timber at the edge of the plain. The night was falling fast, after the long twilight of the prairie country. When Fresee flashed past, Jones mounted and followed close within the shadows of the trees.

The other men who had returned from town had ridden in daylight and he had been unable to follow; nor had he cared to risk looking for the trail they had taken into the wilderness of the brakes, for fear that a lookout would spot him and perhaps shoot him down or capture him in an ambush.

He had suspected another messenger after the meeting, but had been startled to recognize the figure of Fresee on the big horse. As it was, he did not care if all he discovered was the place where Fresee entered the bad lands. He had no doubt that the Double B foreman was headed for Bianco's rendezvous.

By this time, Fresee's caution, so far as possible pursuit was concerned, had fled. He pushed his horse to the utmost, and Jones thrilled as he realized he could catch the Double B foreman if he wished. For Jones had one of

those mounts that are rarely encountered, even in a region of fine horseflesh.

The mantle of night came down and the first brave stars hung out their signals in the purple canopy of the sky. Jones shortened the distance somewhat between himself and the man he was following; a thing he now could do with safety. And then Fresee slowed his pace suddenly and a few moments later disappeared.

Instantly, Jones drove in his spurs and dashed down the line of naked trees. Fresee had disappeared so suddenly that he could not judge the spot where he had entered. When he thought he was near this place he reined in and brought his horse down to a walk, searching for a trail leading into the wilderness of twisted ridges, gaunt trees, scrawny pine, buck-rush, deadly quicksand soap-holes, and gravel patches.

Then he saw by the starlight what appeared to be a huge rock. Instinctively he cut close into the shadow of the trees and brush, halted, and dismounted. A lookout, if one was stationed at the entrance, would be looking for a horse and rider. Jones was a trailer by instinct. He crept forward afoot, and, as he had expected, he saw an opening behind the rock. He went ahead foot by foot with his gun in his hand and found a worn trail, well concealed from the open plain. Here he hesitated. This might be only one of many such blind trails. Would Bianco spare men for all these trails? Would he expect attack from that direction? With Fresee associated with him, it would be certain the Double B foreman would get word to him if attack were threatened from the other direction. All this would give the rustler chief confidence and a sense of safety. He and his men might have been there for months! Might have hidden there for weeks, anyway. It was open country for miles to southward; a great, far-reaching plain where no cattle grazed. Jones had come up that way. There was no water and no ranches clear to the Missouri.

Jones rose. Nothing happened. He shoved his gun in its holster and strode back to his horse. Mounting, he rode boldly back and around the rock, and proceeded along the hard trail. Except where scrub pine and high ridges made deep shadows, he could see for some little distance ahead, as the cottonwoods, alders, and poplars were leafless. The starlight aided him. But he again kept his gun in his hand.

For some distance the trail led straight toward the river. It widened constantly and many smaller trails led into it. Then, when Jones had concluded it was going to lead to a ford, it turned east. On the riverside, to Jones' left, there was a succession of gravel patches and the deadly soap-holes of quicksand with their alkali crusts. But there were trails leading toward the river, too. On the opposite side, toward the south plain, were ridges, dark ravines, scrub pines, and other timber. It was the the wildest and most dangerous wilderness of the bad lands Jones had ever seen.

And now the trail turned off to the right, climbed around a high ridge, and led through a level stretch of gaunt trees. After climbing another ridge and flattening out again, the trail swung once more toward the river. In less than a minute, Jones reined in his mount with a smothered exclamation.

In the distance fireflies were winking. Lights! Jones drew a long breath. He was nearing the rendezvous. At either side of the trail ahead were dark blotches, denoting ridges or pines. He was a considerable distance from the lights and came to immediate decision. He rode forward swiftly, the lights becoming steadier and more distinct, until he reached the shadows, where he found a ridge on his right, toward the plain,

and a thick growth of firs on his left, toward the river. Here the trail was in complete shadow. He walked his horse. The trail curved to the left and ended abruptly at the edge of a large clearing.

Jones checked his horse just in time to avoid riding into the clearing. Thrills raced up and down his spine. In the open space were a number of cabins and lean-to shacks, corrals, horses, cattle! There were several clumps of firs. The lights came from the windows of the cabins. Jones thought he now knew why he had not encountered any lookouts or guards. From the cabins came a wild medley of sound. Shouting, singing, catcalls. The band was in the midst of a carousal. This was in Jones' favor. But Bianco and Fresee would not be participants in the drinking spree, and they were the two he wanted to find out about.

Directly ahead, between Jones and the cabins, was a clump of firs. There were cattle standing about this clump. While Jones knew he could not approach it on foot, for range cattle are not accustomed to dismounted men, he knew he could do so on his horse. This he decided to do. He put aside the thought of attempting to ascertain the brand on the steers. The K-T cattle had been returned, none had been taken since, no other stock losses had been reported. It followed that since Fresee was associated with Bianco, these must be Double B steers which Fresee had aided the rustlers to steal.

Jones rode forward boldly, walking his horse, and reached the clump of firs without disturbing the cattle. Here he dismounted and found he was at the rear of the cabins. Another piece of luck. The noise seemed to come from the two largest cabins, while to the left was a much smaller one with no window in the rear. There were no cattle in the space behind the cabins. The din of the revelry accounted for that.

Jones slipped quickly to the rear of the smaller cabin. One well acquainted with the youth would have noticed a queer change in his demeanor during the hour. and at this time especially. His moves were catlike, his eyes sparkled with fire, he radiated an intangible alertness and eagerness—a Jones totally different from the youth people ordinarily met.

He stole around the corner of the small cabin on the side away from the larger ones where the celebration was in progress. As he expected, there was a window. He crept along the wall until he reached it. The window was closed except for a space of possibly a quarter of an inch at the bottom where the sill fitted imperfectly. A piece of gunny sack had been used as a curtain; but there was a worn spot in one corner where the fiber was wide apart and through which Jones could dimly see two forms. One was burly, the other slight. That was enough. Bianco and Fresee were together.

Jones whirled about, his gun whipping into his right hand, seemingly of its own accord. He fairly hurtled first to one corner of the cabin and then to the other. No human being was abroad. He returned to the window, stooped, and glued his ear to the crack at the sill. He heard snatches of talk when the voices were raised.

"Don't wait! To-morrow night's the time; before they know what's—have a chance to—hundred thousand cash!" It was the voice of Fresee.

"I'll attend to that." It was Bianco speaking.

"An' I'll—raid on the Katy—draw attention—how do I know——" The rest of Fresee's words were lost.

"Don't be the fool!" Bianco thundered.

Jones straightened, moving to the side of the window, his back against the wall of the cabin. There had been no sound. Perhaps he sensed a vibration in the air. But a man was there before him!

The silence was as complete as the stillness of the air after the vibrating echo of a bell has died away.

"Wha's idear spyin' on chief?" The question was put in a very peculiar thick, throaty voice, which, nevertheless, carried.

An instant later the heavy barrel of Jones' gun crashed against the side of the man's head. He went down, but with a screech that could be heard all through the rendezvous. Jones was running like mad for the clump of trees where he had left his horse. It seemed incredible to him that events could take place with such swiftness. Behind him there was a cracking of guns; bullets whistled past him; the night air was filled with shouts and the thundering voice of the arch-rustler giving orders. And yet, Jones told himself, he might have known that Bianco would have trusted lieutenants who would not be indulging in drink. And men of the stamp that followed Bianco sobered quickly on alarm.

Jones gained the shelter of the clump of firs, dodged through them, flung himself on his horse, and was off at a mad gallop for the edge of the clearing and the trail.

"Major!" he cried in his horse's ear. "Let's go!"

But already he could hear the pound of hoofs behind him. He made the trail and dashed into the protecting shadow. But here he was at a disadvantage. He did not know the ground he was traveling. All he could do was to give his mounts its head and trust to the gallant animal to keep the trail, traversed but once. He could hear his pursuers behind him. On the open prairie they probably could not catch him; but in his present predicament he was fighting two disadvantages: he was on a strange trail, and he could not very well outdistance both horses and bullets. He decided to swerve from the trail when he came to the first open space, which would be beyond the ridge on his right, separating him from the river.

When he thundered into the open at last, he eased his pace and deliberately turned off the main trail to the right. The sounds of pursuit had become more and more distinct. His mount slid down a short gravel slope toward a cleared space. The going looked good and Jones turned in the saddle to look behind. Almost the next moment he lurched forward, with the horn of his saddle prodding him painfully. He nearly had been thrown over his horse's head. A glance showed a creamy sheet stretching from under Major's neck. The animal was vainly trying to get its forefeet out of the mud. Jones' heart stood still. It was not mud nor gumbo. Unknowing, the horse had leaped into a soap-hole!

Already the struggling had ceased. Jones was leaning backward as his horse's head went steadily down. Down! The deadly, sucking sands were drawing the animal to its death, headfirst! Jones could see the whole ghastly surface of the soap-hole quivering as if shivering in glee at the claiming of another victim—two victims.

The hot instinct of self-preservation surged through Jones' mind and body. It was the work of a few moments to secure the rope which he always carried, suspended from his saddle horn. He looked behind and sighted what appeared to be a stump or a large rock. There was no time for delay. The wide loop hissed over his head and shot forth. It settled over its object and locked. He felt his stirrups touch that terrible, quivering surface, and jerked his feet free. There was a queer, sobbing choking in his throat. Holding the rope in his left hand, he pulled his gun with his right. He would not let his horse suffer the most horrible of all deaths in the quicksands.

The tears streamed down his cheeks. "So long, Major!" The gun blazed

twice, sending two bullets into the horse's head.

Jones rose in the saddle, poised on the dead animal's back, leaped, and drew himself a few feet across the shallow sand to the safety of solid ground. Just as he gained it, the rope gave way. He staggered off to a clump of bushes and lay down. The horse's head and shoulders were under. The hind legs in the shallow sands at the edge of the mire were drawn forward swiftly. The sands, defeated of one prey, were not to be robbed of the other. Jones watched, horror-stricken, as the carcass disappeared.

"Down there somewhere!"

Jones squirmed back under the brush as riders, who had heard the shots, came down the slope. He saw them come—five of them. They stopped at the foot of the slope.

"Look!" It was a voice he did not know. "See that soap-hole shivering! That's where he ended up, whoever he was."

The men walked to the edge of the bog. "See that!" cried one. "The last bubbles. An' look! Here's where he roped this rock tryin' to get out, an' the rope slipped on him!"

"Let's get out of this," said a gruff voice. "Gives me the creeps. For one, I can use a drink right now."

Evidently the others of the band felt the same way about it; for they hurried to their horses and were gone up the slope in a short space.

Jones lay still, fascinated by the ghostly gray of the soap-hole; calm and serene now—satisfied! He looked up at the stars, his lips pressed so tightly that they were a thin line of white. He was safe, absolutely safe.

But at what price!

When the sun rose in its glory after the dawn, a figure staggered into the courtyard of the K-T home ranch. It wavered and swayed; hatless, coatless, gun and gun belt gone. It was Jones. His eyes were bloodshot, and when Larry Owens came running out of the house to catch him before he could fall, he failed to recognize him.

"So—long—Major!"

Larry carried him upstairs and put him in his own bed.

It was Molly Owens who fretted about with such restoratives as were at hand. It must have been a subconscious knowledge of the extreme importance of the information which he possessed that resulted in Jones opening his eyes within an hour.

Jones held out his hand, and Molly grasped it in both of hers.

"Get Larry," he said.

When she had gone, Jones turned on his side and buried his face in the pillows. But when Larry and his sister returned, he was lying with his eyes on the ceiling.

"Take this." Larry offered to put the glass to his lips.

But Jones sat up in bed. "I reckon I can handle it. Don't go away, Miss Molly. Go over there by the window where I can see you easy. We've kidded around somewhat, but I like to look at you. You're a square-shooter. What is this stuff, Larry?"

"That's brandy," said Larry. "I was going to look for you last night, but—where was I to look? Tell you the truth, Harry, I didn't know just what to do. I've sent for every man on the north range, including that hard outfit from Canada, to——"

"Never mind," smiled Jones. He looked at Molly, who had flushed and gone to her station by the window. "I reckon you better stay an' hear what I've got to say," he said. Molly nodded.

He downed the brandy, sputtered and gasped for breath. "If that's——" He handed the glass to Larry. "I'm not a weakling," he protested. "The thing

that got me was the way I lost my horse. Now, listen."

Looking through the window into the warm sunlight he described his experiences, told every detail of what had happened from the time he left town.

"Gimme a cigarette, Larry," he concluded.

Larry hastened to comply. "I'll start for town at once," he said in great excitement. If they're going to try it to-night——"

Jones turned on him with an almost ferocious expression in his eyes.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" he cried. "I'll go to town. My part is there. Your part is here on the ranch. Get these men of yours ready. You'll need 'em to-night. I'll sleep till—well, three hours, say; an' then I'll be on my way. I'll have to borrow—a horse," he concluded as an afterthought. "An' Larry, listen." He remained silent for some time. Then: "I knew more of this from the start than I can tell you now."

Larry regarded his friend thoughtfully. "All right," he said finally.

Jones smiled at Molly Owens. "I'm still the mystery man," he said softly.

In another two minutes he was asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SETTLEMENT.

THE old cow town of Pondera lay in shadows. An idling breeze stirred curls of dust in the main street—little spirals that rose lazily and drifted to merge into veils. It was long past midnight. To all outward appearances the town was dead, as indeed it should be at this hour.

A single lamp burned over the vault in the bank.

All about were deep shadows—shadows of buildings, shadows of trees; and in this dead hour other shadows, smaller and moving, appeared. There had been a faint sound of horses' hoofs, and now men were at the rear of the bank, others slipped to the front corners to serve as lookouts, still others formed a cordon about the building. Bianco knew his business and was taking no chances in his attempt to get the rich treasure which Lafe Owens had stored in the vault as a lure.

The men in the rear of the bank were working now. Sounds came from back there but there was no one abroad to hear them. In a short time the sounds ceased; the rear door, perhaps secured none too carefully, had been forced.

A few notes of a night-bird's song trembled on the breeze. Three men quickly slipped into the bank. One form was large and burly—Bianco. The two others were expert cracksmen, and each carried a bag of tools. The night air seemed to be vibrating. The lookouts and guards were tense, ready to give instant alarm in the event that any one appeared. The shadows in the bank moved into the cage before the steel doors of the vault. The sharp notes of the bird floated forth again. Then the clear, still night was suddenly changed into bedlam.

Red flashes of flame spurted from the deeper shadows of buildings about the bank, from the trees behind it, and from the upper windows of a house across the street. The roar of rifles commingled with the cracking of six-guns.

Bianco and his band had walked into a carefully laid trap, and seemed, by the terrific fire directed at them, to be outnumbered three to one. Sheriff Rowan and Jones had outwitted the bandits to a point where it looked as if a veritable slaughter might be in prospect. One of the lookouts plunged forward on his face with a bullet in his heart at the first fire. Three of the guards toppled.

From the rear of the bank came a mighty thunder of hoofs. The horses of the outlaws had been stampeded and were heading in the direction of the

street! They came plunging through the narrow spaces at each side of the bank building, knocking down several guards who attempted to make flying mounts. This momentarily halted the shooting, for neither side could see where to shoot with the frightened animals about them.

In the lull, Bianco, the Bull, could be heard roaring orders as he dashed out of the bank. With the maddened horses plunging into the street, the guns roared again. But both factions now were at a disadvantage, for it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

The rifle firing, which came from the windows of the house, ceased entirely. The bandits had scattered up and down behind the buildings. It was impossible for them to reach the timber for the dense shadows there were fairly alive with the sheriff's men.

Meanwhile, the horses had come to a stop and were milling about or had slowed to a trot. The bandits took a chance to get to them and raced into the street. This brought another withering fire and men went down and horses as well.

Sheriff Rowan came running out of the house, and a slighter figure dashed out of an alley. It was Jones, and, as if it were prearranged, at this moment two other men ran out below the bank and raced toward the horses in that direction. One was the burly form of Bianco and the other was a member of the band.

Both the sheriff and Jones started in pursuit. Rowan, in the throes of great excitement, kept shouting for the outlaws to halt. The order was ignored, for it could never be said that the outlaw leader was a man to surrender. Instead, he whirled in his tracks with a savage yell and deliberately ran toward his pursuers.

For a man of his size he could cover the ground at amazing speed. His companion darted back into the shadows of the buildings. The whole town now was awake and people were pouring into the street.

"Bank robbers!" was the cry. In a short space both ends of the street were crowded by armed men and escape seemed cut off.

Bianco came on, his face, barely discernible in the starlight, distorted with an insane and reckless rage. He realized only too well how he had been tricked. Nothing mattered now except to kill. Thought of fleeing actually left the man's mind. The sheriff loosed his gun, the red fireflies of death playing from its muzzle.

"Watch out!" shouted Jones, choking in the swirling dust.

Bullets sang around them from bandits about the buildings. These in turn were subjected to fire from behind and had to stop shooting to conceal their locations. Rowan, Jones, and Bianco were alone in the street almost in front of the bank. The range was too great, the dust too thick, for accurate shooting; but the sheriff blindly emptied his gun. In a few moments, Bianco's weapon blazed. At the third shot Rowan went down.

Bianco came on toward Jones who was some little distance behind the sheriff. He fairly leaped toward his prey. In the wink of an eye, Jones fired, and fell over to the left on his knee as two bullets whistled past him. Through the veil of dust his gun spoke once—twice——

Bianco, within ten feet of Jones, staggered and fell backward, firing the last shot in his gun. The bullet sang over Jones' head, and the outlaw leader lay motionless, face upward, in the dust of the street.

Jones ran to the sheriff and found he was shot high in one shoulder and in his left leg. He sheathed his gun and dragged the official to the house. The bandits must have been stunned by what they had seen, and, with their leader dead, matters looked different.

A man ran into the street with his hands held high. A shot came from the bank, and he sprawled his length near the form of Bianco. None of the posse would have done such a thing. He had been shot down by a member of his own band because he had offered to surrender!

But the last stand of the outlaws was short-lived. The sheriff's men had closed in behind the buildings and now volleys began to sweep the alleys and open spaces. Others were closing in from all about and guns blazed from across the street. Suddenly there were shouts and a dozen men ran into the center of the street with their hands up. Two of these were shot down before the posse could cease firing. In another few moments, the ten men, all that remained of the most desperate band of outlaws ever to invade the northern range country, were surrounded.

The crowd of citizens surged forward. Word had spread that it was the Bianco band which had tried to rob the bank.

"Give 'em the rope, an' make a clean job of it!"

"Hang 'em in the dark, like they deserve!"

From a window of the house the sheriff shouted hoarsely: "Don't touch 'em! Get 'em to the jail! Show some sense, citizens!"

Jones helped the wounded man to a bed and ran down to the crowd in the street. "Don't put a black blotch on the town!" he cried. "If we have to do it, we'll defend these prisoners with our guns!"

"Keep back," shouted the members of the posse as they started for the jail with the captured outlaws in their midst.

The crowd gave way before the large number of armed men that menaced them. But they shouted and gathered in a mass before the jail when the prisoners had been taken there and placed in cells. There still was work to be done, and Henry Brower spoke to the crowd.

"There are wounded men to be looked after instead of killing more," he pointed out.

This quieted the throng, and the work of attending to the wounded—and there were many—got under way. The bandits had lost heavily, but there had been losses among the sheriff's men also; and he himself was being attended by the doctor. Curiously enough, the body of the arch-outlaw was left lying in the street until sunup.

Before dawn Jones was speeding for the K-T where, he suspected, the other half of the coup had been executed.

Lafe Owens, his family, and Stan Velie, had left for the ranch the morning before and had been met by Jones who was on his way to town to inform the sheriff of the expected attack on the bank that night. Men had been recruited from near-by ranches in the late afternoon and early evening, for the extermination of the outlaw band. Sheriff Rowan had intended to accompany Jones to the K-T ranch, but his wounds now made that impossible.

Meanwhile, extensive preparations had been made at the K-T to repel the projected raid. Since the outlaws thought that whoever had been spying on their rendezvous had been lost in the quicksands, no change in their plans was to be expected.

"This will end the rustling an' the feud," old Lafe had said grimly. "I see now why Bianco returned my cattle. He didn't want me sending men into the bad lands. No one knows how many cattle Bolten will find missing over there when he checks up himself. Fresee must have had a good portion of the Double B outfit in the plot with him. He intended to put one over on me an' make a clean-up an' slope. He sent for that rustler, if he ever did anything in his life!"

Sid Tyler and his P T men, whom

Larry had hired, were brought down from the north range. The K-T crew was bunched midway of the range, and many men recruited from the west-end ranches, who had already arrived at Lafe's request, were scattered the length of the range. Old Lafe did not feel able to be out on what might be a battle ground that night after his exertions of the day before and his ride back from town. Nor would Sarah Owens have permitted it. But he spent an hour giving instructions to Stan Velie.

"Fresee isn't doing this to attract attention away from town," he told his foreman. "You know that would be ridiculous. He's doing it on his own hook while Bolten is away."

As it came about, most of old Lafe's instructions were ignored that night. Not intentionally, but because events took place with such rapidity, and there were so many unexpected moves, that impromptu action was imperative.

It was an hour after midnight, some time before the start of the tragedy in town, when three separate bands of riders swept across the K-T range toward a herd of two hundred shorthorns which had purposely been planted within easy striking distance. In less than ten minutes one of the most disastrous clashes in the history of the Teton range was on.

Sid Tyler with his fighting P T men dashed in from the north; Larry with the regular K-T men came from the west, and Stan Velie with the men imported from other ranches rode madly from the south. In an amazingly short time, the herd and the raiders were surrounded.

The raiders, taken by surprise by this lightning move, were the first to shoot. Their guns blazed as they mingled with the cattle, scattering them in every direction. The K-T forces returned the fire with deadly fierceness. Two-score cattle went down; men on both sides toppled from their saddles, and the night was hideous with the bellowing of the steers, the shouts of the combatants, and the staccato of gunfire.

Then the raiders tried to break through the line drawn about them. In less than a minute they found that this was an utter impossibility. Several were shot down. They converged in the center and ceased firing, holding their hands aloft. Only one made the desperate break for liberty. With his gun blazing, this man raced for an opening.

Both Stan Velie and Larry recognized him. "Don't fire!" roared Velie, as he and Larry tore away from the others to cut the reckless rider off. The rider fired at both of them and then one of those timely accidents occurred which often decide fates, and battles, and careers. The fugitive's horse stumbled and threw the rider over its head.

It was a matter merely of moments before Velie and Larry were on the ground, close to the fallen rider. The man on the ground crouched and fired point-blank at Velie, who fell on his side. Two spurts of flame streaked from Larry's weapon and the raider yelled and dropped his gun.

"Shooting's too good for you, Fresee!" Larry cried. "I'm going to save you for the rope!"

Fresee was clasping his shattered right wrist with his left hand, rocking to and fro on the ground, cursing with pain and rage. But Bianco would get him out of this mess. He calmed suddenly.

Men were raising Stan Velie. His whole left collar-bone was shattered, and the bullet, ranging upward, had torn away part of his jaw. It was Sid Tyler who effectively administered first aid.

"Get him to the ranch quick as you can," Larry commanded. "An' herd that bunch of range crooks to the bunk house."

"Look out!" came a hoarse cry.

Larry leaped, with a bullet singeing his left ear. He was on Fresee instantly with the ferocity of a tiger. When he rose he had the man's gun.

Fresee had recovered the weapon with his left hand and had made one last try to kill the man he hated.

His throaty laugh held the men about spellbound until Larry jerked him to his feet.

"Get his horse an' tie him in the saddle," he cried in a voice none ever had heard him use before. It was the voice of old Lafe himself, ringing on the night air with the wild rage of battle. "You've done one thing, Fresee—you've drenched this range with blood. An' you're going to pay for it with a broken neck!"

Tied in the saddle, hatless and torn, wounded, desperate, Fresee laughed that weird, uncanny laugh that made them shiver as they started for the ranch.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ADJUSTMENT.

WHEN they arrived at the ranch, they found old Lafe up and waiting for news of what had taken place. Larry marched Fresee to the front porch, which was flooded with light from the open door within which Lafe sat in his wheel chair.

"Here he is, dad," said Larry in a hard tone. "The ringleader."

Old Lafe peered at the prisoner under frowning brows, while Fresee sneered. Then, without speaking a word, Lafe motioned them away. As they were leaving, however, the rancher called:

"Come back when you've locked him up, Larry."

Fresee had held his bandaged right hand behind him. Inwardly, he had an instinctive fear of letting men see that he would never shoot again. He walked willingly enough to the storeroom in the big barn, where they locked him in.

Larry left the two men who had accompanied him on guard before the door, and Jerry, the barn man, hung a lantern conveniently near. It would be two hours before daylight.

Larry returned to the house and in the living room told his father everything that had happened. Old Lafe listened gravely. It had been a costly business. Suddenly he appeared to have aged as Larry recited the details of the clash.

"It's the end," was his comment when Larry had finished.

Hoofbeats sounded in the courtyard. "That must be Velie," he said. "Have him brought in. We'll send him upstairs. Send a man on the fastest horse in the barn for the doctor."

While Velie was being cared for in the house, and the prisoners herded in the blacksmith shop under heavy guard, the wounded were brought in and put in bunks in the bunk house. There were eight of them only, for the raiders had lost heavily. Tyler had lost one P T man and had six wounded. Of the men recruited from other west-end ranches, three were dead and four wounded. The K-T suffered most of all, with five dead and three wounded. Men looked at each other grimly as the figures were computed. The range would long remember this tragedy. There were angry, ominous mutterings, with Fresee's name mentioned frequently.

"No, boys," said Larry sharply. "There'll be no lynching. It's bad enough as it is without such an ending."

At sunrise Jones arrived on a lathered horse with the news of what had occurred in town. He reported to old Lafe and then went upstairs to Larry's room for an hour or two of sleep, which he needed badly.

Larry rode away eastward when the doctor came. In a little more than an hour he was back, and Jane was with him. He turned his wife over to Molly and the two went up to Molly's room.

Men were arriving at the ranch by

now. Brower came from town and several west-end stockmen. Six K-T men, after having been instructed by Jones in minute detail, left for the rendezvous in the bad lands to make sure the cattle there bore the Double B brand. Later they reported that this was true.

At one o'clock, Jim Bolten arrived. With him were two men from Great Falls, sent by the bank to inspect his stock. His face was pale as he mounted the steps and confronted Lafe, who was in his wheel chair on the porch.

"Lafe, is all this true that I hear?" he asked abruptly.

"Larry, bring the prisoners," Lafe ordered, ignoring the Double B owner's question.

As Larry hurried away, Bolten took off his hat and mopped his brow. Then he stared steadily at Lafe, who was looking off across the distant pasture lands.

Lafe called: "Sarah!" His wife came quickly to the door. "Bring a chair for Mr. Bolten," said Lafe.

By the time the Double B owner was seated a group of men came around the corner of the porch, escorted by a bunch of K-T punchers. They formed a semicircle about the steps, with Fresee in front. Fresee's eyes were snapping. He held his right hand behind him.

Lafe spoke to Bolten. "I'm turning over your men to you—all except Fresee. An' I don't reckon you want him." He motioned to Larry. "Take those eight punchers aside. They're free."

With only Fresee facing him, Bolten leaped from his chair.

"What is this, Fresee? What have you done?" he cried.

"Followed out your instructions," Fresee leered.

Bolten hurled himself down the steps; but Larry grasped him to restrain him. The big man's face went red and white by turn. It was some moments before he could speak.

"You're a liar!" he shouted. "You lie, an' you know it!" He trembled and his hands clenched. "You're a skunk!"

"Yeah?" Fresee sneered. "Ask your men there?"

Bolten whirled on the eight punchers. "Did you hear me give any such instructions?" he roared.

There was no answer.

"They're afraid to talk, now that we didn't get away with it," said Fresee with his jeering laugh.

Bolten looked up at Lafe Owens. His face was white as chalk.

"Lafe, do you think I did this thing?" he asked quietly.

Lafe removed the pipe from his mouth. "No, Jim, I don't. Come back up on the porch."

"You hear?" cried Bolten, shaking his fist under Fresee's nose. "You hear? You—you——" He sputtered in his emotion.

"Only thing he could say," sneered Fresee.

"He won't feel so good when he finds out that Bianco and most of his gang are dead up in Pondera, an' that the others in jail—where he's going—have started to talk," said Lafe.

Fresee's eyes flashed, but he grew pale. "That should worry me," he managed to say.

"It'll worry you when you come up before twelve real men for trial an' hear the noose wished on your neck," said Lafe dryly. "Larry, take him away an' tell those others to clear out."

"You can't trick me!" Fresee shouted as they took him away.

Bolten tried to speak but could not. He was overwhelmed.

"Listen, Jim," said Lafe quietly. "You've done a lot of listening to that skunk the last two or three years, haven't you?"

"I—trusted him," Bolten snapped out.

Lafe nodded. "An' he's been stealing your cattle. There's a bunch of fine steers in the bad lands now where he and Bianco had 'em cached. Don't

stare. It's a fact. You can see 'em with your own eyes. You never counted much of your stock yourself, did you?"

Bolten failed to reply, but the look in his eyes told plainly that what Lafe suggested was true.

"He must have known this Bianco an' sent for him," said Lafe. "Or Bianco happened along an' he got in with him pronto. You had a puncher shot in the back in the second raid on my place, remember? The one who got lost in the bad lands the time of the blizzard an' saw Bianco? Well, it was Fresee who shot him. He knew too much."

Bolten took off his hat and rubbed his hand through his thinning hair. Then he swore. "Did you know this all along?" he asked.

Lafe shook his head. "Wasn't dead sure of it until, well, you might say yesterday an' to-day. Jones," he called. "Jones!"

In a few moments Jones appeared.

"How many head do you reckon there are of Double B stock in the bad lands?" Lafe asked.

"I should judge about five hundred," Jones replied, as Larry appeared behind him.

"Jumping Jupiter!" Bolten exclaimed. "An' the bank in the Falls sent up two men to verify my count before they'd take up my paper. I'd 'a' been in a fine mess!"

"An' Jones," said Lafe, "you saw Fresee in Bianco's hangout when you sneaked in there? An' heard 'em talking an' planning all this?"

"That's right—an' lost a fine horse getting the information."

Bolten sat staring at him, stupefied.

"There's something you men ought to know," said the youth. "My real name is Louis Cilin. I am connected with the southern association at headquarters in Miles City. I got a tip Bianco was headed up this way an' took a chance an' came up. I can use my share of the reward money. Maybe I'll get it all." He took out papers and tobacco. "I did for Bianco, although I was lucky, at that."

Larry and the two older men stared at him in surprise as he smiled.

Then Larry pushed Cilin aside and came out on the porch leading Jane.

Bolten started to his feet. "Jane!" he cried. "Why aren't you home with your mother?"

"She's home with her husband," smiled Larry. "Jane an' I were married the day of the big meeting."

Both Lafe and Bolten gripped the arms of their chairs, white-lipped. "Is —that true?" Bolten gulped.

Jane held out her left hand with the thin band of gold on its third finger. "Yes, daddy," she said in a low voice.

"An' you didn't tell me?" said Bolten.

"I told mother," was the reply.

Bolten turned to old Lafe, who was looking hard at Larry. "Did you know?" he demanded.

"Not till this minute," replied Lafe grimly. "An' I've a good notion to horsewhip him!"

Jane put a hand on Lafe's shoulder as Sarah Owens and Molly came out smiling.

"He's a nice boy, dad-in-law, and said you'd get over it soon. You will, won't you?"

"Oh, he did, did he?" scowled Lafe. "Said I'd get over it soon, eh? Well, what he don't know would fill a lot of books!"

Jim Bolten was grinning from ear to ear.

"By the way, dad," said Larry casually, "since you gave me the right quite a while ago, I'll have to check out some at the bank to-morrow for a wedding tour. Maybe we'll go East, an' that'll take quite a bit—and Jane'll have to have some clothes—five thousand might do it. But, if we go short, I'll draw."

Old Lafe and Jim Bolten looked at each other. "I wouldn't want to stop Jane from gettin' some new clothes,"

drawled Bolten with a twinkle in his eyes; " 'specially since I don't have to pay for 'em."

Jane put her arms about his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"Nobody ever heard me welch," grinned Lafe. "Congratulations, Larry. An' you've got a good girl, remember, an' if you don't treat her right——"

"Don't be joking, dad—this is serious," smiled Larry as they shook hands.

"Jim," said Lafe in an earnest voice, "this feud thing, as they call it, is all foolishness. I wanted to end it once an' for all—especially on account of Larry."

"Lafe, I reckon we'd better tear down that fence between our places so folks won't have any doubts about our being friends," said Bolten. He rose and held out his hand.

"Larry, help me stand up!" cried Lafe.

Then the two men met for the first time in years in a hearty handclasp, and the Owens-Bolten feud was ended.

"Now, I'll have to send those two bank fellows back—if Brower says it's all right," said Bolten.

"Any time you need a loan you know where to come," smiled Brower.

"An' I know you'll make a good president of our association, Lafe," said Bolten.

"An' I reckon you'll make good as the next one," Lafe boomed.

"As the bride's father," said Bolten, "I announce that the wedding celebration will be held on the Double B!"

The stars were out, riding the fleecy, white ships that drifted in the night sky. A wind, soft and sweet with the tang of Indian summer, laved the grasses and stirred the branches of the trees. An owl cried from its perch down by the river, and was answered by a coyote in the distance of the plain. Stillness, strange nocturnal whisperings, shadows that took form and vanished—a throbbing world of mystery waiting for the moon.

Louis Cilin—"Harry-from-Nowhere" Jones, and Molly Owens, were in the yard on the benchlands.

"You say you're going away?" said Molly, tapping her riding boot lightly with her dainty quirt.

"I reckon so," was the dreamy reply.

"I—hate to see you go, Louis," said Molly softly.

"I hate to go myself," was the answer.

"Then why go?" Molly murmured.

"I'm no longer a man of mystery, Molly, an' girls hate just the—the usual, do they not?"

"Not necessarily."

"You know, Molly," he said casually, putting an arm on her shoulder, "I believe Larry an' Jane had the right idea."

"You mean in not telling anybody?"

"No, I mean in getting married. It must be nice to be married, an' have some one to work for—some one to love all the time. Maybe I'm pretty stupid in the way I'm putting it, but perhaps you understand."

"Yes, I understand." He could barely catch her words.

"Sometimes I think they were setting us an example."

"And if they were?"

"Molly, I believe we love each other. I hope it isn't all one-sided, with me on the one side. Is it?"

She looked up with a little laugh. "Larry said you had my goat," she said happily. "You've got more than that, Louis—for—it isn't all one-sided."

For a long time he held her in his arms before he kissed her. "Do you think we could make it in time to go along with Larry an' Jane, sweetheart?"

"Yes, if you're a good manager," she whispered.

"I'm going to try to be one all the rest of our lives," he said joyously.

After a long time they went into the house.

THE END.

Silent Partners

By Guthrie Brown

Author of "Brute," etc.

IT began way back in the Sanchez Valley in the '80s, when Hale Butterick and Jim Glandon were prospecting for gold along the upper waters of Sanchez Creek. They were working downstream with a pan and getting just about enough color to pay wages. In one place the Sanchez narrows between rock walls for half a mile. Jim was walking along the top of a cliff when he caught his foot in a projecting root. By reason of his height Jim had a good way to fall, and he was so close to the edge that in a second, three quarters of him was over and the other quarter was going.

Hale didn't know how he got there, but he got there. He was twenty pounds lighter than Jim, but he dragged him back to safety; and then the two of them sat on the rocks for a long time, looking at nothing and saying no word.

They worked that creek for two years, side by side, day and night, never talking much to each other, or to anybody else. Wandering prospectors who dropped into their camp reported fine treatment. Everybody who knew the two liked them. Though they were little more than boys, they were making good, and the way they stuck together, for a pair of young fellows, was unusual. They were known all over the country as the "Sanchez partners." They were called that even when they went down into Arizona, where they spent five years.

It was in Arizona that Jim shot the head off a rattlesnake that had coiled up against Hale's shoulder to sleep one night. The two went through the William Tell act without the quiver of an eyelid; and then sat for an hour, breakfast forgotten, while they hugged their knees, and looked into space, and said nothing.

A year or so later Jim married and

took up a homestead. He went into cattle and made money, bought land, and spread out. In twenty years he was comfortably fixed and had a nice family growing up. All was right with his world except for one snarling coyote of a neighbor, Lafe Tracy.

Tracy couldn't get along with any one. He had an evil tongue that had started more than one neighborhood row; and it was pretty generally believed that his herd received artificial increases. Jim was Tracy's special aversion, by reason of the former's popularity and prosperity. Tracy never let the least chance escape him to annoy Jim, while taking good care that he protected himself.

Hale, in all this time, had gone on prospecting. That life suited him. He laid money by, for he knew that the day would come when he could no longer follow the trails. But he was still a husky man, for all his gray temples, when he came in out of the desert one November day to visit Jim Glandon. Hale turned his burros into a corral and found his friend on the sunny side of a barn husking corn.

"'Lo, Jim!"

"'Lo, Hale! Had your dinner?"

"Yep."

After a silent handshake, Hale sat down to help husk corn. They might have separated last night, for all the demonstration they made. They had not seen each other for sixteen years.

Hale stayed two weeks, and he and Jim spent every minute of the time together.

"Do those two old coots ever say anything to each other?" asked a curious cowboy.

"Oh, I hear 'em sometimes," some one answered. "But they don't seem to need much talk. Seem to sorta understand without it."

On the last night of Hale's visit, the two stayed out on the dark porch after the rest of the ranch had gone to bed. They had lighted their pipes from the same match and now sat tilted back against the wall, listening to the bullfrog chorus in the reservoir below the corrals. For an hour they sat silent. Each was living again the golden days of that youth they had spent together. They never spoke of it. They didn't need to. Each knew that the other knew.

The silence was broken by the squeal of a fence wire pulled violently through staples. Jim dropped his chair with an oath.

"That infernal yearling of Tracy's again! He goes through fences just like a pig."

"Have you told Tracy?"

"Half a dozen times. He don't pay no more attention than if it was the wind. I think he trained the beast to break into stackyards."

"Why don't you kill the critter?"

"I told Tracy I would; but you can't do that, and he knows it."

"Shut the brute up and charge him for the pasture bill."

"And take it out in chargin'. Soon's the steer was turned back on the range, Tracy'd catch him and butcher him—while he was fat on my feed."

"We—ell," drawled Hale, "I need beef on this trip."

They both laughed. Both knew that Hale had not the slightest desire for beef. Jim would have supplied it if he had.

After a time they heard the steer go back through the fence. He was seeking water.

"Be in again before morning," commented Jim.

Still the two sat there, saying nothing, smoking contentedly. Once Jim remarked that Hale should get a little rest before his four-o'clock start, and Hale answered, "Forget it!"

It was after three in the morning when they separated.

At nine o'clock that same morning

the sheriff at Brush got a call to come to the Glandon ranch. Jim met him.

"Searle, I killed that steer of Tracy's last night that's been botherin' me for two months. You'll have to arrest me, I suppose."

"Heck!" Searle was amazed and disgusted. "What'd you do that for, Jim? Ain't you got troubles enough without buttin' into the law that a way?"

"Well, I'd got plumb to the limit of my patience, Searle. The pesky brute has ruined more hay for me than a dozen steers'd eat all winter."

"But, crimeny Christmas, man! Don't you know how serious this is?"

"Yeh."

"Well, what in time——" Searle could not fathom such stupidity in a man who usually showed remarkable sense. "This'll cost you more than what two hundred steers'll eat. I wouldn't 'a' believed it of you, Jim Glandon!"

"I s'pose not," admitted Jim.

"Anyway," Searle reminded him sourly, "it's for Tracy to swear out a charge before I do any arrestin'."

"I called him up and told him what I'd done and that you'd be out here."

"Well, I'll be——" Searle's feelings got clear out of range of his vocabulary.

When he rode away an hour later he was in no better humor. Even Tracy, he had noticed, had not seemed to expect that Jim would be such a fool. Halfway back to Brush, the sage-surrounded village that served as county seat, Searle met his deputy, Gilbert. The sheriff's temper dropped to absolute zero.

"What in the name of blisterin' blue snakes are you doin' here?" he wanted to know. "I s'posed you was halfway to Randall's mill by this time. Do you think I talk just to hear my tongue waggle?"

"If you'll give me half a minute to explain, Searle——"

"Explain! Orders is orders, and if you can't take 'em there's fellers in this county that can."

"Well, watinheck you gonna do," burst out Gilbert, losing his temper, "when a guy comes to you and gives himself up and demands to be put in jail?" Searle stared. "You put him in, don't you?"

"Who?" demanded the sheriff.

"Feller says his name's Butterick. Says he ain't got no home, that he's just a prospector and I better jail him."

"Did he murder somebody?"

"No. He said he killed a steer."

"A—which?"

"Steer, I said. Said he needed some meat mighty bad and didn't think till after he done it what the law was."

"Did he take the meat?"

"No. Said when he re'lized what he'd done, he knew he'd be boardin' on the county a while."

"Where'd he kill this steer?"

"In Jim Glandon's corral, he said."

Searle looked so perfectly dumfounded and incredulous that Gilbert insisted:

"Well, I ain't lyin'. I couldn't find you nowheres, so I was goin' out to see Glandon. I didn't know what else——"

"Boy," interrupted Searle, "this is an almighty strange business. Does anybody know you got this feller in jail?"

"I don't think so. There wasn't a soul in sight."

Some time later, Searle and his deputy sat in private consultation with Judge Baines. This old frontier judge didn't know too much law, and his court precedure was at times unconventional, to put it mildly; but he had an uncanny knack of getting justice done. Good men and bad men knew this; knew, too, that mercy tempered his justice whenever it was possible. He had been judge of the county court for more than twenty years.

Baines listened without comment till the end of the sheriff's tale, and sat in silence for some time before he asked:

"Is this here steer dead?"

"He's sure awful dead, judge. Been poled."

"He's dead in Glandon's corral, and he's got Tracy's brand on?"

"Yep."

"Now," said Gilbert, "which one of them two hombers done that killin', and which one of 'em's lyin'—and why?"

Baines did not answer. Instead, he unfolded a plan, to which both officers listened attentively.

Three days later court convened in the town hall, since the courtroom was small and the entire country had declared its intention of attending Jim Glandon's trial. The sympathy of the people was preponderantly with him, though they were blessed if they could see what had made him do such a fool thing.

Searle had ordered Jim to stay strictly on his ranch until he came in for the trial. So when the rancher was led around to the back door and installed in a small dressing room at the end of the platform, he knew by the hum that the big room was filled to the doors. There was not only no standing room left, but the window sills were crowded, and the rough, overhead beams supported a drapery of boys.

Judge Baines kept the crowd waiting until interest was at fever pitch, then he roared:

"Bring in the prisoners!"

At least half of the audience got that plural and stiffened to an astonished attention.

From a dressing room at the right and from a dressing room at the left respectively, Searle and Gilbert emerged, each leading a man.

"Watch your step!" the sheriff sharply commanded Glandon.

"Don't stumble on the matting," Gilbert warned the man whose arm he held.

Consequently, the two prisoners approached each other with their eyes down, while the room became perfectly still.

Baines was watching the two very closely. He had planned the climax carefully.

They were within ten feet of one another before they raised their heads. Their instant recognition was apparent to every one. What was seen by very few besides Baines was the prompt suppression on the part of both of their blank amazement. Not a muscle moved as they studied each other intently, each trying to fathom the meaning of the other's presence, each on guard before a totally unexpected situation.

"By crimeny!" thought Baines. "I didn't know men could sabe each other like that!"

He waited. He was prepared to wait indefinitely. The two stood without stirring, through dragging minutes; and the judge said to himself: "Both afraid to make a move, for fear it will be the wrong one."

There was a restless ripple through the audience and some one tittered. Baines' gimlet glance shot the length of the room.

"Next feller that giggles gets jailed for contempt of court. Constable Farley, close them doors—— I said jail! Not a fine."

The room became intensely still once more. The judge saw that Jim and Hale had not relaxed nor taken their eyes from one another. He was watching them as he started speaking.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "in the administration of justice in this here county, I've always, as you know, tried to get along on the very least expense. This ain't a reg'lar trial. A scrub yearlin' ain't worth one. This is a preliminary hearin'. Both these men standin' before you folks has confessed to killin' a steer belongin' to Lafe Tracy. Both give 'emselves up before anybody else heard about the critter's decease. As

you've prob'ly tumbled, neither knew about the confession of the other."

Hale and Jim were listening carefully, while they still watched each other. It was apparent to Baines that both were beginning to struggle against a growing bewilderment. Baines was having a thoroughly good time, though he did not at once betray the fact. He went on.

"Now, which of them two men is guilty? Can any of you tell?"

An answer came from the middle of the room—not an unusual occurrence in Judge Baines' court.

"Mebbe both of 'em."

"By jingos!" exclaimed the judge. "That's prob'ly right!"

Both Hale and Jim turned upon him, but he raised a hand before either could speak.

"I know what you're gonna say—that each of you done the dastardly deed by your sole, lonesome self. Now keep still, both of you!"

It was becoming apparent that Baines was enjoying himself; and the room, with rising excitement, sensed some unexpected dénouement. The confusion of the prisoners deepened, especially that of Jim, who knew Baines well and would have gambled heavily on the judge's fair dealing. A buzz began to grow among the spectators, which Baines quieted imperatively.

"I'm gonna give you folks a bit of history," he said. "Just learned it myself in the last day or so." He sketched briefly the tale of the Sanchez partners.

"Once in a while," he concluded, "you run acrost a man in this life that you can bank on, plumb to the gates of Hades. This country knows Jim Glandon for that kind of a man. And when two men of that caliber get together, and like each other, they got the world beat. They dern near got a Arizona court of law beat—— Not quite, though."

His glance twinkled as he looked from Hale to Jim. They eyed him a little grimly, trying to guess his game. He saw with delight that he had them stumped. And he knew that it took a smart man to get around Jim Glandon.

The judge leaned forward with a suddenness that made every one jump, his eyes flashing with accusation, his voice ringing.

"Which of them two is guilty? I'll tell you! Neither of 'em! And each thinks the other is!"

The result was profound; but its most devastating effect was upon the prisoners themselves, who whirled upon each other and spoke in the same breath.

"Suffering tripe, Jim! Did you think I killed the bally calf?"

"Heck to Betsy, Hale! Don't you know I wouldn't go clubbin' another man's beef?"

Baines broke down and laughed until he wept. It was a good ten minutes before order was restored, with most of the courtroom wiping its eyes, and still occasionally breaking into helpless guffaws at sight of the sheepish faces of the prisoners.

"Now," said Baines, "if you'll each step out in front and tell all you know about this thing, we'll be much obliged. You first, Butterick, as I got a suspicion your story comes first. Both of you," he added, and raised another laugh, "look a dern sight guiltier than you did before."

"Your deal, partner," muttered Jim.

"Ain't we a pair of bally geese?" returned Hale.

His story was brief. He told of the conversation he and Jim had had when they heard the steer break through the fence.

"I was makin' up my packs when I heard the critter crawl back into the corral again. Then I heard a blow and a sort of grunt, and got down by the corral in time to see a man go over the gate. Well, I—I s'posed Jim had

just plumb lost his patience at last and done what he'd have to pay pretty darned high for. So I—I——"

"You," said Jim, coming forward, "went into the corral to make sure the steer was dead, and then beat it for Brush to give yourself up. I found the critter in the mornin' with your boot tracks around it. I knew they was yours, of course. I didn't know what in Tophet you'd killed it for, unless you thought you was doin' me a favor, and didn't re'lize the penalties. So—I——"

"Just so." The judge nodded. "You thought you'd better confess right away. We—ell—— Sheriff, bring forward your prisoner!"

That was as startling as anything that had gone before, and people looked wildly about, but mostly toward the dressing rooms. However, it was from the back of the hall that Searle came, behind Tracy, who swaggered up to Baines defiantly. There was no laughter in the judge's face now.

"What'd you kill your own steer for?" he asked sharply.

"Prove it!" sneered Tracy.

"No need," returned Baines. "You," he went on in a dead quiet tone that wiped the leer from Tracy's lips, "killed your own steer in Glandon's corral to make trouble for him. Ever since you was in knee pants you been up to these weasel tricks, and always playin' 'em on your betters. You was all fixed to have Jim try to cover up the evidence. You had a man on watch for that. Searle seen him, slippin' up the creek. Never thought nothin' about it till he talked with Gilbert. And it sure flustered you when Jim went and confessed. Then you got flustered some more a few minutes ago, when you found out there was two confessions, and you seen I wasn't actin' as serious as I'd ought. You tried to get out of the room, but Farley stopped you. And when these two give 'emselves away, Searle had you by the elbow."

"Haw, haw!" Tracy tried to laugh it off. "You can't throw a man in jail for killin' his own critter."

"Mebbe not," admitted Baines. "But where he kills it, now——" His gaze dug into Tracy. "I'll look that matter up for Jim. He'll use his own judgment about prosecutin'—— Let him go, Searle!"

"Where did you two," he asked the acquitted, "think you was gonna get by lyin' that a way?"

"Heck!" said the Sanchez partners. "What else could we do?"

A BLACK-AND-WHITE DISTURBER

WHILE Mr. and Mrs. S. A. Todd, of Puyallup, Washington, were awaiting the arrival of some friends one evening, they heard a noise on the front porch, and, believing it to be their guests, they opened the door to let them in. Imagine their surprise when a black-and-white-striped animal with a bushy black tail walked into the house and took up headquarters behind the piano. As the unexpected guest was not the kind of a household pet that the Todds craved, they immediately conceived of a plan to coax the visitor from his hiding place and thence out into the open. This was done by tying a piece of meat onto the end of a string and slowly drawing it across the floor. This so tempted their visitor that he cautiously emerged from his hiding place and followed the bait. When he was well out of the house, the cherished family shotgun was brought into play. The house was then given a thorough airing, and when the expected guests did arrive the party took place as planned.

"Bunko"

By John Briggs

Author of "Tap! Tap! Tap!" etc.

NO more tenderfeet for me! I'm tired an' done with playin' porter an' nurse to an outfit of sight-seein' dudes!"

"Happy Joe" Clert's weather-worn visage bore such a ferocious scowl that a stranger meeting him at that moment would have considered his nickname one of those titles which men acquire through misapplication. Happy Joe had just unsaddled his pack mules in the corral back of the stable. Stiffly he slumped into the stable keeper's extra chair. Hooking a boot-heel over the lower rung, he tilted back comfortably against the wall. His heat-seared eyes turned doubtfully toward the stable entrance and surveyed the sun-scorched street. He seemed to shudder, as if half expecting to behold a party of tourists bent on acquiring his services as a packer and guide.

"No, sir," he soliloquized, "life's too short. I just can't be hired to pack kit for no more tenderfeet."

"You'll feel all right, after you blow off a bit," the stable keeper predicted sagely. "It's just the heat. Folks that er willin' to pay good money just to admire our scenery, oughta be encouraged. It's easy pickin's, I'd say."

"Not for me!" Happy snorted "Hereafter I'll make a respectable livin', or starve. I——"

Happy's mouth remained open and he stared, as if dazed, at the youth who had stepped into the stable entrance. If an apparition had appeared to mock his recent assertions respecting tenderfeet, he could not have been more shocked. Over one arm, the pale, blue-eyed youth carried his coat, from the breast pocket of which projected a pair of light tan gloves. He wore a derby hat and a flowery vest. His ankles, exposed above his low-topped shoes, displayed a pair of checkered socks. Except that his attire was several shades too loud, he might have posed as a fashion model. It was evident that he had just stepped off the stage.

His gaze took in both chair occupants, and finally rested with fixed intensity upon the rugged face of Happy Joe Clert.

"If you're Mister Clert," he announced softly, "you're the man I want to do business with."

Thus addressed, Mr. Clert glowered.

"What kind of business?" he growled.

"My name is Bunker," the youth returned, extending a soft, slender, white hand; "J. Jefferson Bunker."

Happy had never refused to shake hands with any one, unless actual hostilities had been declared. With seething, inner resentment, he grasped the delicate-looking hand in order to afford himself the satisfaction of seeing young Mr. Bunker wince and cringe; also hoping to hear him say "Ouch!"

With a shock, he discovered that he might as well have tried to injure steel rods as to crunch the deceptive fingers in his grasp.

"Now that we know each other," the youth proceeded, grinning slightly, "I'll get you to do some packing for me. Charley Reece sold me his homestead, out in Ocher Flats. He said you'd know the place and how to get there. He told me you're a right guy. Said you might go in with me. There's plenty of land out there, and——"

"He—w-h-a-t?" Happy exploded, half rising from his chair. "Said I might go in for farmin'? With a tenderfoot! Say, kid, you've been bamboozled. Charley Reece—the ring-tailed liar! Sold you his homestead, did he? Where'd you meet up with the lazy, good-for-nothin' maverick?"

"With Barnum's Big Show," young Mr. Bunker replied, unmoved. "He was fancy roper and rider. Isn't his claim good?"

"Good!" grunted Happy Joe Clert. "I reckon his title was good——" Happy launched into a diatribe of caustic remarks concerning no-account cowpunchers who would prefer circus performing to useful occupations.

The youth waited until his tirade ended in a series of sputters.

"How soon can we start?" he inquired at length.

The disgruntled Mr. Clert flew into a second fit of vituperation.

"Start?" he fairly quavered. "We don't even begin to start! How'd you ever get the idear you'd hired me? Besides an' moreover—have you got any kind of a notion what kind of a claim you've bought?"

"I understand there's plenty of good water on it," Jefferson Bunker returned, a shade crestfallen.

"Water, yes," the old trailer admitted. "That's why Reece homesteaded it for the Double Y cattle outfit, so's they c'd control the only water there is out there. He agreed to sell to 'em; then he held out for more'n they'd agreed on. It didn't do him no good. He couldn't sell to nobody else—— 'Ceptin' some tenderfoot," Happy supplemented spitefully.

"Say, you couldn't farm out there long enough to raise a spavined flea," he went on, "even if you c'd make the water run onto the land. Which it won't run without flumin' it, on account of the way it sinks into the sand, soon's it leaves the spring. Besides, there's no timber to build your flume with. It's fifty miles out across lava an' desert, with no wagon road to get there. It's so hot this time of year that you'd have to pack twicet as much water as anything else. Your first improvements 'u'd have to be a fort, so's you c'd hold out against the Double Y. Outside of that, you've bought a fine ranch, kid. You ken raise most anything that cattle 'll eat. An' the Double Y cattle 'll be there every spring to eat it! On top of that, I ain't interested in your proposition nohow. Take my advice an' get back to your circus. Ocher Flats ain't a farmin' country. An' you don't look like you'd know a farm if you seen one!"

A shade of doubt which had crept into the young man's face as Happy had begun to speak, was now replaced by a cherubic smile.

"I'm glad that part's settled, Mister Clert," he commented. "I was raised

on a farm. I want one that's high an' dry, an' warm, an' where stuff'll grow all the year round. Now, let's get down to business."

Happy gaped at the dapper youth as if hypnotized. Apparently he had been wasting his breath.

"If you've got any idear——" he began. But words failed him.

From his inner vest pocket the tenderfoot drew a thick packet of yellowbacks.

"Count it," he said, extending the money.

"I don't want your money!" Happy flamed angrily.

"I'm not giving it to you," J. Jefferson Bunker tersely retorted. "I said to count it!"

To humor the crazy youth, Happy reached for the currency. Carefully he counted twenty-five hundred and fifty dollars in large bills. Wonderingly he returned the roll. The young man tossed it to the floor.

"Now," said the amazing tenderfoot, "Charley Reece gave me a tip. He told me that you'd never pass up a good bet. He said it was your worst failing. Here's a new deck of cards," he continued, his slender hand again darting under his vest. "You can see the seal hasn't been broken."

Doubtfully, Joe Clert accepted the packet of cards.

"While you're lookin' through them," the flashy Mr. Bunker remarked, "I'll state the proposition. You shuffle the cards an' deal out the whole deck. We'll draw one card apiece, after they're dealt. If you get the high card, that money's yours. If I win, you'll pack out the supplies and lumber I need, at your own price. Besides which, you'll agree to homestead a half section next to mine. In that way, there'll be two of us to buck the Double Y, an' make the ranching business really pay."

"Is that all the money you've got?" Happy demanded, as he expertly examined the cards.

"All but traveling expenses," the youth replied calmly.

"You're trustin' me to name my own price, if I lose?" the old packer incredulously demanded.

"Right," the other retorted.

"But that homesteadin' proposition ——" Happy reflected. "I dunno. I oughta win this, an' save your life. You'd only lose the money, anyhow—— I'll go you!"

After a quick glance at the youth, whose lean face bore no sign of emotion, he commenced deftly to deal the cards, faces down, on the floor.

"Sure they ain't no trick in this?" he demanded, glancing up after he had scattered the pasteboards neatly.

"If you think there is, after we've drawn," Jefferson Bunker returned, "you can call it off, either way."

"Seems like you're standin' to lose a lot, on one turn of the cards," Happy commented. "Still, I dunno—I reckon I am, too—havin' to go in pardnership with you, if I lose——"

As if in fascination, his hand strayed out over the heap of cards.

"Pick one out, brother," the youth put in coolly. "Any one. Anywhere. Joker is high."

With intense interest, Tucker, the stable keeper, leaned forward to watch the drawing. He had offered no comment thus far. He had been secretly amused. But now he sensed the seriousness of the game. Moreover, he was suspicious of the loudly dressed youth who had declared himself to be a circus man—possibly a trickster of some sort. Tucker was alert to detect trickery. But to save himself, he could not see anything shady about the cards; besides, Joe Clert had dealt them himself.

The old trailer drew a card. His face was tense; his expression indecipherable.

Carelessly the young man stretched

forth his slim hand, lifted a card, and flipped it over. A ten of clubs.

Happy Joe Clert gave a slight start. He seemed about to crush the card in his hand.

"Well, what is it, old-timer?" the gambling youngster inquired pleasantly.

"I—I reckon I win, son," Happy stammered, as though dazed. Almost reluctantly, it seemed, he displayed a jack of hearts.

J. Jefferson Bunker smiled. Not a trace of regret revealed itself in his immobile face.

"Reckon you do, bo," he said, gathering up the cards. "Well, it was my game. Good luck to you, old-timer."

Suddenly arousing himself from his apparent trance, Happy stooped over and picked up the wad of currency. He stood up and sternly eyed the dandified young man.

"Looka here, young feller," he growled hoarsely. "Seems like you just walked in here to hand me twenty-five hundred dollars. I don't want your money. I wouldn't feel right! Here, take this, an' let it be a lesson to you not to gamble no more!"

The youth regarded him with a seriously cool gaze.

"No," he said, "it's yours. I was willin' to stake that on the chance of gettin' a good partner. Charley said you were a right guy, an' a reg'lar fire-eater, once you got your back up. Keep the money, old-timer, an' don't let it hurt you. Money's easy to get; but a man don't get a right partner every day. I'll toddle back to the circus. Good luck to you!"

The dapper youth turned abruptly and stepped out into the dusty street. But he was halted by an explosive burst of adjectives descriptive of several kinds of young fools.

"Kid, you just come back here!" the old man commanded. "I'm with you. Dog-gone my fool hide for sayin' it! I'll plow ground, hoe corn, an' be a pesky nester. An' I'll swap lead with the Double Y outfit. Ain't no tenderfoot goin' to say he had more grit'n me! Take your money, an' I'll throw in what I've got with it."

The slender youth turned back and extended his slim, white hand with a smile.

"Under those conditions, pard," he said, "I'll take it."

Happy Joe unconsciously winced as his gnarled hand was crushed in a grip of iron.

"Ouch!" he exclaimed. "How'n the name of thunder do you do that?"

"I'll show you, one of these days, how it's done, pard," J. Jefferson Bunker returned, grinning. "And, some day when we get better acquainted, I'll give you a little lecture on gambling."

It was a long while before Joe Clert understood the real significance of that remark.

After he had made his first trip with his young partner, and had seen the land upon which he intended to file a homestead for himself, Happy returned alone for a second load of flume boards and other supplies. He had already begun to take considerable interest in the venture. Nor could he honestly find anything to complain about in his partner. Jeff Bunker had turned out to be a tireless worker. Heat and hardship had not seemed to faze him. How his apparently frail body concealed so much energy remained a mystery. And there was something further mysterious about him, too. Happy sensed it, but could not define it. After being with the youth for three weeks, he knew practically nothing more about him than he had at first. The close association of partners, working side by side without any other companionship, calls for certain confidences, the lack of which often creates suspicion.

Reaching town, after his wearisome

trek across the waterless lava beds, Happy confided something of this to his friend Tucker, the stable keeper.

"All he's ever mentioned about himself," he complained, "is about a girl he fell for, in the circus. She was a fancy rider, an' got hurt, an' her lungs went bad. She's all he'll talk about. An' he don't say much, at that. Only, that I gather he raised that money mighty quick, somehow. Then left the show an' hopped out here to make a home for her. Says she's the kind that'll like it out here, an' that she's sure to get well."

"Happy," his friend commented thoughtfully, "you're a pretty soft ole coot. That kid was pretty sharp. I figger he tricked you right on the start."

"How?" Clert challenged.

"He had you sized up," Tucker declared. "Besides, that Charley Reece had give him the low-down on you. He knew he could rope you in on a gamble, if no other way. An' he figgered you'd be just soft enough to throw in with him, if you won all his money!"

"Might be," the old packer confessed sheepishly. "Anyhow, the deal ain't so bad. There sure is a pretty piece of land out there. When we get the water down to it, it'll grow anything. An' there's only 'bout three crossin's have to be fixed, then we can drive out with wagons. It's the prettiest settin' for a cattle ranch I ever seen. An' I wouldn't never 've got one no other way."

"D'you think your pardner'll pan out in a pinch?" the stable man queried.

"Dunno," Happy confessed. "I don't like the idear o' his trickin' me, that way. I kinda suspected it myself. D'you s'pose he knew he was underdrawin' me?"

"I ain't got a doubt he did!" the other declared.

Happy Joe Clert pondered the question as he packed back across the blistering lavas with his cargo of short one-by-twelve boards. He did not like the idea that any one had gambled on his good nature, and had drawn a low card besides. It hurt his self-respect. Yet he had to admit that the kid had been a nervy gambler, even so.

Having reached Ocher Flats, and finding his partner hard at work cutting scrub piñons to elevate their flume across the depressions, he was a trifle short-spoken with his greeting. For another two weeks, he became rather a surly working partner. Young Jeff seemed not to notice his silence. The tenderfoot had become bronzed and even more thinned. It seemed that he had always been hard. Happy had to exert himself more than his system enjoyed to keep up with him.

They had nursed the shining ribbon of water along until it had nearly reached the tillable land. They calculated that one more pack would supply enough lumber to finish the flume. The old packer was worrying about his mules. Another trip would go hard on them. The pack animals were showing the ill effects of scant feed. They were grazing on the lower flats, which had been cleaned by cattle during the early part of the season. Of their own accord, they would not come for fresh water, but would drink from a spring which was little better than a bog-hole at this time of year. Having no other excuse for complaint, Happy vented his unusual temper on the subject of having to lead the animals to water.

"Only one more trip, old-timer, an' we'll spread this water all over those flats," his partner announced cheerfully. "Then watch that bunch grass shoot up over night. The mules'll be rollin' fat in six weeks! While they're fattenin', we'll add a 'dobe onto to Charley's shack; then we'll put 'em to plowin'!"

"They ain't plowin' mules," Happy muttered.

"Then we'll get us some that are!" the youth returned undaunted.

Together they made the trip to town for the final load of lumber and a few lengths of iron pipe. Jeff bought a span of mules guaranteed, by Tucker, to plow, and to be used for packing a few extra supplies. The young homesteader was absorbed for several hours in a half dozen letters which left him in a very thoughtful mood.

"Pard, we've just got to make a go," he announced, as they started the homeward journey, at daylight. "We've just got to!"

"She complain?" queried Happy, who had always been doubtful about members of the fair sex.

"Not her!" his youthful partner retorted. "But I can read between the lines."

As the sun of the second day dipped toward the horizon, the heavily laden mules quickened their plodding steps, scenting water. The reddened eyes of Happy and Jeff strained ahead expectantly to catch the first sparkle of the clear-running stream which their strenuous efforts had coaxed foot by foot across the dry sands.

"Funny," the old trailer mused, "I allus seen it before, when I got to here!"

The two exchanged apprehensive glances. The younger man urged his tired mount ahead at a faster gait than was possible for the burdened mules. Happy watched him ride on along the flume, reach the spring, dismount, leap into the saddle, and hurriedly return.

"Drier'n a Scotchman's joke, old-timer," he announced tersely. "Water's sunk out of sight. A charge of dynamite did it. Here, read this!"

He extended a slip of brown paper.

Signed simply "Double Y," the note announced that irrigation projects were not desired in Ocher Flats; adding that, during the spring-grazing period, there was always enough water for cattle to drink, in the lower spring.

"An' I thought I had some friends in that outfit!" Happy fumed. "I reckon that settles our ranchin'! Just as I was gettin' set on the idear myself!"

His partner smiled.

"Only a little setback, pard," he said. "They blew a crack in the bed rock and let the water down. All we have to do, is shovel out the sand, get some cement and fill the crack with concrete. The water'll come up again, as long as it's there."

Clert's spirits rose, as they removed the packs from the mules. He declared himself ready to fight the Double Y outfit till the last man was shot.

The mules, thirsty because their water supply had been limited to make room for the lumber, turned from the sand-filled spring and trailed down toward the lower flats.

"We'll have to get ourselves some water from down there, such as it is," Happy complained. "An' it means I've gotta make a trip for cement."

"I'll get the sand cleaned out while you're gone," Jeff declared. "And we'll have the old bubbler going as good as ever. That outfit'll have to go some to oust us, pard!"

As they approached the lower spring, they saw two mules stretched out on the ground, kicking convulsively. Four were pawing in the mud, and two were staggering away. The partners stared at each other with puzzled expressions changing to grim realization. Then, breaking into a run, they drove the thirsty mules from the stagnant spring. In vindictive terms, Happy was invoking all the known plagues to overtake the poisoners. With merciful bullets, they ended the agonies of three of the stricken mules. His face almost lugubrious with heat, grime, and misery, he turned to his partner.

"Mebbe the others'll pull through," he said, "if we can get 'em water before they die of thirst. Fetch the stake ropes, so's we ken keep 'em out of this hole till we fence it."

While the young man was gone upon the errand, Happy considered their own predicament. They had about a gallon of water left in their canvas bags. Before Jeff returned with the ropes, he was obliged to shoot another mule.

Together, in thirsty silence, they trudged back to their camp and surveyed the sand-filled depression which was all that remained of their spring. Neither wasted words in idle comment. Both realized that their own lives depended upon reaching water, somehow.

"By takin' what water we've got between us," the youth remarked thoughtfully, "one of us might make it out to Cactus Wells, while the other stays here an' digs."

"Eh!" Happy grunted in disapproval. "If there's any water under that sand, two of us can dig to it quicker'n one. Besides, I see plumb through you, kid! I might have a chance gettin' out, with all the water. While there ain't nothin' certain 'bout your gettin' any by diggin'!"

"What makes you think I meant for you to go?" the tenderfoot retorted sharply.

"Sounded like it," Happy returned, with sudden resentment and suspicion. "In this here country, when a man makes a one-sided offer, he usually figgers on the loser's end—if he's a man!"

"I see," young Jefferson Bunker answered slowly. "Well, we can draw to see who goes."

"We can both stay here an' take turns diggin' for it, t'night!" Happy returned harshly. "If we don't strike water by mornin', the feller that goes won't have much better chance than the one that stays. Does that suit you?"

Jeff Bunker grinned cheerfully.

"Anything suits me, old-timer," he said. "We'll draw to see who digs first."

"We won't draw nothin'!" Happy exploded. "We'll eat a snack, an' then I'll dig. Remember, we gotta go easy on what water we've got. There ain't half enough, now, for one man to make the trip on!"

Under the rising moon, Happy Joe Clert worked as he had rarely worked in his life. His parched throat cried for moisture. Frantically, he shoveled; it seemed for endless hours; and yet he made little headway against the sand which continually shifted back into his excavation. At about midnight, he saw his partner approaching from the cabin. He rested on his shovel and glanced up at the youth, who halted at the edge of his shallow pit.

"Jeff, there ain't a dad-blamed thing in this," he panted hoarsely. "I had a hole 'most twelve feet square. Now look at it! Sand just keeps oozin' back in. Le's call off this here dumfoolery an' take our chances together, in the mornin'."

"It's all a gamble, pard," Jeff Bunker responded. "You've played your hand in the game. Now I'll play mine. Let me have the shovel. You go an' take a snooze."

Reaching the cabin, Happy took a mouthful of water and swallowed slowly. Then he dropped wearily onto his bunk. For a long time, he lay awake, pondering. He was almost certain that his young partner's efforts to strike water would be futile. He wondered which one of them would face the desert alone, to-morrow? Then he thought of the girl—Jeff's girl. "A game little sport," the kid had said. Well, he'd always been sort of a slacker about women. Somehow, he'd try to make up for it. If he could save the kid, it might square him a little, with one of them, at least.

Daylight was well along when he felt his shoulder being shaken. Blinking, he gazed up into the drawn face of his young partner.

"I've got water, old-timer!" the youth rasped hoarsely.

"Honest?" Happy demanded.

"No foolin'. Come and see for yourself."

Joe Clert reached eagerly for his water bag. Now he could quench his burning thirst with a long drink. But the kid grabbed his hand, halting the water on its way to his lips.

"Not that way, pard!" he commanded. "You can drink out of the pipe. What's in the bags'll have to do for the one that tramps in. You see, I got water by shovin' a pipe down through the sand. It comes up in the pipe kinda slow. I joined some teasel stems together, an' you can drink it through them. Come on out and get a drink."

Quickly pulling on his clothes, Happy followed his partner out of the cabin. The pit which he had excavated during the night had nearly refilled itself with sand. From the sand projected a length of half-inch pipe. Taking the jointed teasels which Jeff handed him, Happy found that by extending them down the pipe he could suck up some water laboriously. The water was flavored unpleasantly by the new pipe and the teasel stems.

"Hard to get, but good," he commented finally. "Only, a feller has to stay right here to drink it. Sure ain't much hopes of shovelin' this dry sand out."

"Well," suggested the youth, "one of us can stay here with enough water to keep him alive. The other can go in and bring out some cement and a pump. We can put the pump down, and that way bring up enough water to wet the sand, so it won't slide while we're digging. Drink hearty, and we'll go in and decide which one goes."

Following his partner to the cabin, Happy reflected darkly that the kid might have offered to go, at least. In the cabin, he reached for their last can of tomatoes and started to open it.

"Let's draw first," Jeff Bunker proposed. "Then the one that has to go can eat the tomatoes."

"Well," Happy hesitated, "I reckon that's fair."

But he frowned, as the youth produced the cards. He was recalling the drawing which had made them partners. Now their situation of the night before was reversed. The man tramping out across the desert would be taking the long chance. Detecting his frown, his partner hesitated.

"Are you doubtin' me, Happy?" he demanded.

"I dunno," Clert responded honestly. "I wish I c'd say I wasn't, Jeff."

"I don't blame you," young Bunker returned pleasantly. "I might be sharp with the pasteboards, for all you know. Well, let's settle it another way——"

Reaching into one of their provision sacks, he produced two beans.

"A marked bean has settled these questions before," he grinned.

He placed the beans in front of the older man.

"Mark one," he directed. "Here's a pencil. Put any kind of a mark on it you want. Only, don't bear down so hard that I can feel the marks."

Doubtfully, Joe Clert selected a bean. He held it below the edge of the table and rubbed it lightly with the pencil. His young partner picked up an empty flour sack.

"Now," said Jefferson Bunker, "drop both beans in the sack. I'll let you hold the sack while I draw. That's right, shake 'em around. Now, so there can't be any trick about this," he went on, "I'll draw a bean and hold it in my hand. Then you can name the bean that says for me to go. Ain't that straight?"

Happy was obliged to agree that the arrangement seemed all right. After drawing a bean, surely the kid would have no way of knowing which one he might choose to name. Convinced that his tenderfoot partner had turned soft,

Joe Clert was willing to let luck decide the issue. It was apparent that young Jeff was afraid to face the trip across the sun-heated furnace of lava with only a mere pittance of water. He had not offered to go, like a man. Had he done so, Happy would have resorted to every means in his power to shoulder the hardship and the risk himself.

"Draw!" he ordered, sullenly holding forth the sack. "It's your game, kid. Don't howl, if you lose."

The youth's face seemed to pale slightly as he thrust his hand into the bag and drew it forth closed.

"Now, if that bean ain't marked—you go!" the old packer declared in even tones. "If it's marked, you stay."

Slowly, Jeff Bunker opened his hand.

Happy examined the bean closely. There were the same markings he had placed upon it. He shrugged.

"I'll be startin'," he announced. "Where's your water? I'll need it. I reckon you won't."

Jeff Bunker's face darkened, apparently with shame, as he extended his deflated bag.

"Not much left," he rasped. "I got dry, diggin'."

"So did I!" Clert snapped. "Serves me right for goin' in with a tenderfoot!"

His preparations for the journey were few. Before starting, he drank from the pipe until he felt that he had taken his fill. He sucked air with the last few swallows, and he glanced at his partner with a shade of doubt.

"There's not enough pressure to fill the pipe very fast," the youth explained. "You'd better bring out above twelve feet of two-inch pipe with the pump. It'll work better. Better pack plenty of water, too, in case we don't get it to working quick."

"I've got sense enough for that," Happy returned shortly.

With a terse leave-taking, Happy headed out across the blistered flats. Steadily he kept to his plodding pace. The molten rays of the noonday sun found him trudging mechanically on. There was no need to stop. Cactus and stunted clumps of greasewood offered him no shelter. Thirst increased with each step. Remorselessly he forced himself on, step after step, until objects blurred and danced crazily about him and then only allowing himself a few drops of water to moisten his constricted throat.

Turning from molten white to coppery red, the sun hung low above the distant hills. It seemed almost to pause and redouble its burning intensity. The grim plodder glanced but rarely into the discouragingly barren stretches ahead of him. Once he thought that he had seen moving objects in the writhing heat haze. For a long while he did not glance up again. Then he discovered that the moving objects had not been illusory. A rider was approaching, outlined in the dust from the hoofs of several lead animals. The exhausted hiker allowed himself a little water, then waited.

He recognized the approaching horseman. It was Pete Ronnell, a rider for the Double Y. Ronnell halted in a swirl of dust and dismounted stiffly. He was a short-coupled man, of stocky build and ruddy face.

"Happy! Bless my eyes!" he exclaimed. "Where's your tenderfoot pardner—hey?"

"Left him back yonder," Clert rasped "Where you headin'?"

"Headin' for to get you both," the old puncher declared. "I heard of the dirty trick they done you. So I quit 'em. I've got plenty water an' two plugs for you. You an' me has been side-kicks, Happy. But how come you left the 'Bunko Kid'?"

"Bunko Kid?" Joe Clert queried.

"Yeh! Didn't he ever tell you?"

"His name is Bunker," Happy returned.

"Yeh. The 'Great Bunko,'" Ronnell declared. "Charley Reece wrote me about him. Charley said he'd bunkoed the Great Bunko! He was a side-show man. Sleight-of-hand performer. Sometimes run a shell an' pea game, an' suchlike, on the side. But not a bad guy, at that, says Reece."

Happy Joe Clert took a long drink of water and swore roundly. Then he explained the circumstances under which he had left his partner behind. He was harshly interrupted.

"Water?" Pete Ronnell demanded. "Water under the sand, you say? Thunder'n'blazes no! When we blew up that spring, the water sunk clean to Halifax!"

Ronnell bristled defensively, as Joe Clert's lean hand shot forth and gripped his shoulder.

"Yeh," he confessed. "I was with the men. But honest, Happy, I didn't agree to no poisonin'. That's why I quit an' come right back!"

Happy's hand slipped from Ronnell's shoulder. "Say!" he exclaimed, as a painful realization dawned in his mind. "If there wasn't no water at all in that hole—what was it I drunk fr'm that pipe? Pete," he gasped, "I drunk the durned kid's own water! I see it now! Pulled the wool over my eyes, by makin' me sore! Tricked me! That dog-gone Bunko Kid—he done tricked me to give me a chance! An' all the time I was thinkin' he was soft! Durn my fool hide——

"Jump onto your hoss!" he exploded. "We're startin', an' ridin' hard!"

Darkness settled down upon the riders, and it seemed to Happy that the hoofs of their mounts dragged.

"Pete!" he burst out, after several hours of silence. "D'you know what that kid 'd do? He'd go down there an' drink that poison water! Knowin' there wasn't a chance for him to hold out. Why, he ain't drunk any since we landed there, yestiddy! He must 'a' been sufferin' like tarnation when I left. An' I didn't know it!"

His companion made no response. There was none to make. The creaking of saddle leather and the rhythmic thumping of hoofs were the only sounds. And thus they rode on, until they entered the shallow valley where the dry sands of a formerly meandering creek shimmered under the moon.

There was no light in the cabin. Since it was after midnight, Happy did not expect to see one, though he peered hopefully. They entered the deserted camp and dismounted. Happy shouted his partner's name. Silence mocked him. He hurried into the cabin and groped about in hopeless frenzy. Lighting a lantern, he ran out to the ruined spring, Ronnell puffing behind him.

"Here's where we dug, Pete," he grated. "An' right here's where you an' the rest ought to be buried. No, that pipe ain't standin'! But he's been tryin' to dig—— Tryin' to dig to water—an' there wasn't a drop!"

A shovel handle with a piece of paper attached caught his frantic glance. He handed the lantern to Ronnell, and read the note, which was addressed to him. His voice quavered:

"He says the water gave out. He's lyin'. There wasn't any to begin with! He just plugged that pipe an' poured his own in!"

Happy Joe Clert's hands trembled and his eyes blurred as he strained to make out the rest of the note.

"So long, an' good luck." He gulped. And the paper fluttered from his hands.

"Pete!" he yelled insanely. "You're to blame for this. Drop that lantern an' grab your gun!"

Instantly, Ronnell swung the lantern in his face. The light went out and he was partly dazed. In the next instant he was caught in a bear hug by the stocky cowman. Struggling, he was borne down, and then he got his frantic fingers into Ronnell's throat. He man-

aged to struggle uppermost of his attacker, and with all his crazed fury, he tightened his grip on the cowman's throat. Ronnell's arms began to relax; but Happy was beyond reasoning. Forgetting that Ronnell had tried to rectify the wrong, he was mad for vengeance.

Slowly he became conscious that some one was hammering at his back and commanding him hoarsely to cease. Bewildered with rage, he was slow to recognize the voice of his tenderfoot partner.

"Lay off, you blunderin' idiot! Want to kill the man? Gone crazy, Happy? What's the trouble, anyhow?"

The youth was speaking barely above a whisper; evidence that thirst had injured his powers of speech. Happy loosened his throat hold and panted.

"I yelled for you, Jeff," he gasped.

"I heard you," Jeff Bunker returned. "But I couldn't make much noise. After givin' up here, I went down to the other spring. I was crazy, I guess. But, say, pard, the water was just rushin' out of it, pretty as could be. I sure thought I was crazy, then! I soaked up. Then I figured it out that the water we lost here is flowing down there. We don't need any more flume. It's right where we want it!

"I was sort of all in," he added. "After I turned the mules loose, I had a long snooze. You woke me up——"

The man underneath Joe Clert squirmed and gasped.

"If you ain't gonna kill me, get off me!" he gasped.

Happy assisted the cowman to his feet.

"This is Pete Ronnell. Old friend of mine, Jeff," he announced.

"Queer way to treat a friend," the youth commented.

"Well, Pete was with the Double Y," Happy explained. "An' when I thought you was done for, kid, I got kinda sore——"

"I'm apologizin', Pete," he added.

"That's all right, Happy," Ronnell returned. "I'd 'a' felt the same way." He extended his hand, and Clert grasped it.

Then gripping his young partner's shoulder, Happy remarked sternly:

"Jeff, I'd oughta be sore at you; but I ain't. You bamboozled me, for fair. Don't try to deny it! Pete got a letter fr'm Charley Reece sayin' they call you the Great Bunko. But, why'n blazes did you have to bunko me?"

"Aw, forget it, old-timer!" the youth answered. "I knew you was too much of a right guy to take the chance that was coming to you, in any other way. Besides, it's just plain natural for me to pull tricks. I can't resist the chance!"

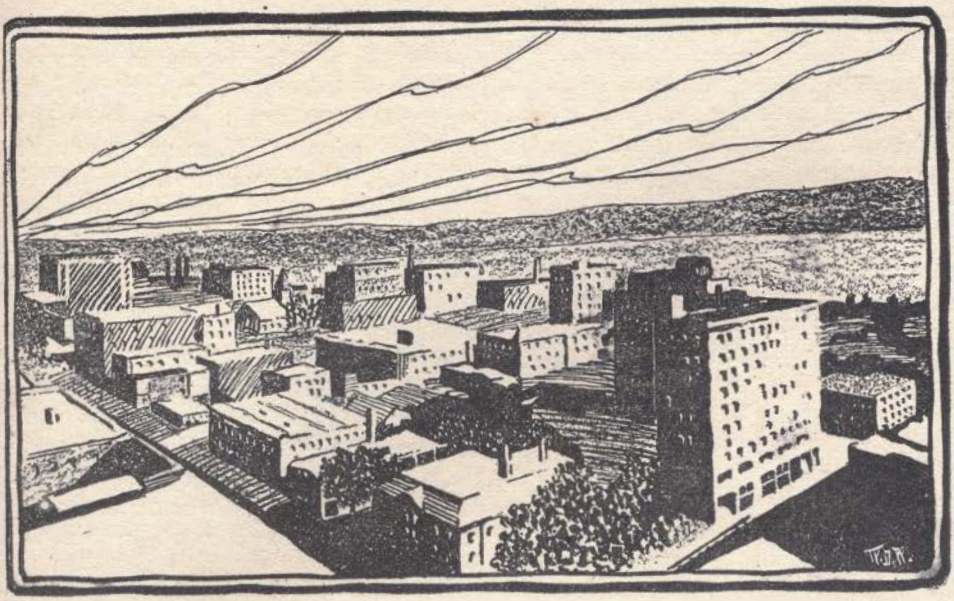
"You could 'a' played to win!" the old trailer snorted.

"Too easy, pard," Jeff grinned.

"The Great Bunko!" Happy remarked with deep feeling. "Well, you are great, pard! If it ain't inquirin' into perfeshnul secrets, how did you pick that marked bean—not even knowin' which one I was goin' to name?"

"Aw, lissen here!" the Great Bunko remonstrated. "I ain't admitting that I did! But it would be an easy one. The one you marked and held in your hand might have been a little bit sticky, or warmer than the other. I might have felt the mark. And to begin with, I picked the beans from the sack. One might have been a shade smaller than the other. Not enough to notice the difference, but enough to feel; when you know how. Then I might have picked three beans from the sack; so I could have a blank one palmed, and that way show the marked one, or a blank one, either way you called. Easy to do, old-timer. One of these days, I'll show you some real tricks!"

"Nope!" Happy answered emphatically. "I don't want to learn no more tricks. I've done seen enough!"



Pioneer Towns of the West

(Davenport, Iowa)

By Duane Clark

DAVENPORT, now a thriving city of sixty-five thousand, was once but a tiny settlement. It was founded by Antoine LeClaire in 1836. Now, a park bears his name and a monument has been erected in his memory. The monument stands at the entrance of the park.

The first white settler in that locality was Colonel George Davenport, in honor of whom the town was named. The old home of the colonel still stands on Rock Island, a small island in the Mississippi, opposite Davenport. At that time the settlers had unfriendly Indians to contend with, besides the privations and struggles of the early pioneers. But Davenport has steadily grown to its present size, having successfully combated many obstacles. Rock Island has recently been connected with the city by means of a causeway. Here, those desiring recreation may enjoy a beautiful park which is equipped with a municipal golf course, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, a bathing beach, and other diversions.

Davenport is located on the west bank of the Mississippi River. It is one hundred and eighty-two miles west of Chicago; three hundred and twenty miles east of Omaha; two hundred and sixty-five miles north of St. Louis, and three hundred and fifty-two miles southeast of Minneapolis. These cities and other important cities and towns are connected with Davenport by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad; the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad; the Davenport, Rock Island & Northwestern Railroad; and an interurban line, the Clinton, Davenport & Muscatine Railway, which operates between Davenport and Clin-

ton, Iowa, and Davenport and Muscatine, Iowa.

The city of Davenport is known as "The Gateway to the West," so called because the first bridge across the Mississippi River was built here in 1853, and the first railroad west of the Mississippi was started at this point.

Davenport is the major city of a group which includes Iowa, Rock Island, Moline, and East Moline, Illinois. The four cities are served by the same street-car system, and total a population of approximately one hundred and fifty thousand people.

Although the city is situated in the heart of a rich agricultural section, it is particularly noted for its industrial achievements. The largest manufacturing concern is the Bettendorf Co., makers of car frames. Seven basic open-hearth furnaces have thirty tons capacity for making steel used in casting truck frames. The only oxygen plant in Iowa is located near by. It is the first all-American oxygen plant ever built, and serves business plants for a radius of one hundred and fifty miles.

The sixth foundry center of the United States is the Blackhawk Foundry Machine Co., where aluminum castings are specialized. The Crescent Macaroni and Cracker Co. employs two hundred and fifty people and is the largest factory of its kind in the country, totaling yearly over a million dollars in products. Covering forty-seven acres are the Davenport Locomotive Works where construction locomotives for many of the large cities in the United States are made.

Another major plant is the Davenport Manufacturing Co., which makes and ships three products to every country in the world. These products are the Davenport oil engines, the Schick baling presses, and the Midland cigar lighters. These oil engines, it is said, were used in pumping at King Tut's tomb. From the fresh-water mussels in the Mississippi Valley, buttons are made yearly by the Davenport Pearl Button Co.

The largest exclusive steel wheel factory in the world is the French and Hecht Manufacturing Co., where over five hundred men are employed, and the yearly pay roll amounts to six hundred thousand dollars. Wheels are made for tractors, road machinery, and agricultural implements.

It is said that more newly married couples spend their honeymoon at Davenport than at any other place. This is because the Gordon Van Tine Factory keeps a commodity which every one must have—houses. There you see them standing as substantial houses, you choose the one with the green blinds and the red flower boxes, and in no time at all, all the parts of your selected home have been packed and shipped to those two lots you bought last year. These ready-made homes have traveled as far as New Zealand.

Since 1870, the Lee Broom Co. and Modern Broom Machinery Co. have done their best to see that no house or business building goes unswept. These are two of the largest broom-manufacturing concerns in the country. Most of the labor employed by these plants is supplied by the residents of Davenport itself. There are other no less important manufactories than these already mentioned, such as: flour, mill work, stereopticons and motion-picture machines, cigars, candy, industrial gases, cut-stone and cement plants.

Davenport is noted for its beautiful drives. The River Drive commands a fine view of the Mississippi, which is a half mile wide at that point. The bridge which crosses the river at Davenport is the only free bridge between St. Paul and St. Louis. It was erected by the United States government, for it crosses the grounds of the Rock Island Arsenal, the nation's largest munition plant. The upper deck of the bridge

is used by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad, and the lower deck is used for automobile, street car, and pedestrian traffic. The bridge is the means of uniting the cities of Rock Island, and Moline with Davenport.

Among Davenport's buildings are: Intermediate school, high school, Chamber of Commerce, public library, the Eagles building, Masonic temple, and several hotels. The Municipal Art Gallery contains paintings of great value, many of them of the old Italian and Spanish schools.

One of the best-equipped stations in the country is the radio broadcasting station WOC. The city has thirteen parks, containing over seven hundred and forty-six acres.

Davenport welcomes the visitor and the home seeker alike. New business concerns looking for a site are given help and encouragement "where the West begins."

PAPERING THE GARDEN

THE use of paper in cooking has become a commonplace, but the idea of papering one's garden to bring up the vegetables is still more or less a novelty. Nevertheless, tests have proved the value of mulch paper for this purpose. The tests were made on vegetables by E. R. Lancashire, a specialist in gardening at Ohio State University. Among the important results observed from the use of mulch were the better distribution of moisture to the plants and the increase in temperature, thereby hartening the appearance of the product. Also, dark paper has been found to be more productive and generally satisfactory than light. Careful attention must, of course, be given to the fastening of the paper covers in place. The results have been so satisfactory in most cases that they have been found to warrant the expense of these paper "coverlets" for the plants. This use of paper seems logical enough when one considers how useful mankind finds paper wrappings. It is well known that newspapers keep one warm. Who has not seen summer picknickers gladly avail themselves of the added warmth of their journals when a sudden drop in the temperature sets them shivering in their light costumes? The new song seems to be, wrap up your vegetables in their dark-paper covers and they'll grow, grow, grow!

A SALMON STRAYED

A SALMON that was tagged by the United States observation bureau in Alaska was picked up forty-five days later near Kitchiginskoi, Russia. Fortunately this does not happen to all the salmon that are taken to northern waters. Although the figures for 1929 have not been completed, we have those of 1928, which state that salmon fishing is Alaska's biggest industry. In 1928, the total catch amounted to forty-seven million dollars, while the mineral output for the same year was but fourteen million dollars.

From Puget Sound, proceeding north along the Canadian and Alaskan coasts, to the Bering Sea is the most ideal spot for salmon fishing. If intelligent conservation of the fish resources continues, this section will be a source of food and wealth as long as time lasts. Seattle is the port through which this product reaches the world.

Ol' Man Buzzard

By Harry R. Keller

HIGH above the barren, arid wastelands
Ol' Man Buzzard swung on sable wings,
Eyes upon the blistered land below him,
Sand, and snakes, and sundry other things;
But most of all he watched a swarthy Chola
Who sprawled along a dry arroyo bed;
For though the man there feigned a deathlike stillness,
Ol' Man Buzzard knew he wasn't dead.

Then out beyond the black buttes boldly looming
Across the swells that shimmered in the heat,
There slowly rode a dusty, careless cowboy,
A-swaying to his pony's plodding feet;
And Ol' Man Buzzard's eye was quick to notice
The glint of metal shining in the sun;
For where he waited hidden in his ambush,
The lurking Mex had raised a gleaming gun.

Nearer rode the cowboy, near, and nearer,
Toward the death that waited, stark and grim;
But Ol' Man Buzzard wheeled in wary circles,
For up along the far arroyo rim
A second silent buckaroo had ridden,
To stop beside a stunted, twisted tree
Behind the Chola's back, and safely hidden;
But watchful Ol' Man Buzzard, he could see.

Then two things happened, lightning-swift and sudden:
The Chola aimed his rifle for the kill,
And in that fleeting instant, past his eardrums
A bullet whistled, whining high and shrill;
For close behind his back a gun had spoken.
The Chola whirled and fired—a bit too late;
The silent puncher pressed a fatal trigger,
And one more killer Mex had met his fate.

And at the gulch's mouth a shaken cowboy
Had seen and understood. The marksman waved,
Then swung astride his horse to spur toward him,
And there they met, the savior and the saved.
A handclasp, and they started onward, swinging
Their ponies' heads toward the brooding east—
But back within the dim, the grim arroyo,
Ol' Man Buzzard settled to the feast.

Through Flood And Fire

By George Cory Franklin

Author of "Cowboy and Castle," etc.

I HAD just stopped my horse to look out over the San Juan in flood, and had decided at the first glance that it was way past fordin', when I saw a man ridin' a fagged horse down the slope on the farther side. That feller was doin' his best to make it to the river. A couple of hundred yards behind him was six more men, and they was sure burnin' the earth to catch him.

Fifty feet ahead of the man on the tired pony the mesa broke off into a bank of yellow clay, and when he wasn't more'n twenty-five yards from the edge of that steep place I saw one of the men that's chasin' him jump from his horse without even slowin' him up, and drop on his knee and aim a rifle. Gosh, it was a tough-lookin' deal, that man strugglin' to force his horse over those few yards to temporary safety, and this proddy hombre fixin' to bump him off!

Right on the very brink of the steep place, the pony's legs buckled under him, and horse, rider, and all, goes rollin', and tumblin', and floppin' down that steep place toward a hundred yards of sand-saturated water rollin' at the foot of it. The horse had been killed by the man with the rifle; but, as near as I could see, the cowboy wasn't hurt till yet, though rollin' down a place like that there's no tellin' how soon he will be. Maybe this wasn't any of my play, but I couldn't help but feel sorry for the cowboy. No matter what he'd done, he was sure up against a tough play, and you're just bound to sympathize with anybody that's in such a hole.

I rode back and left my horse in a arroyo, while I crawled behind a bush to where I could see what the finish was of somebody. The dead horse is layin' at the foot of the slope right in the edge of the water. The cowboy has laid his body as close to the horse as he can, and he's about half covered by the mud and water.

The bunch that's been foggin' him up has left their horses at the edge of the

mesa and spread out to come down the steep place afoot, and I got my first insight into the reputation of the cowboy behind the dead horse when I saw how awful careful they all was. Even if this boy has run like a scared rabbit away from a six-to-one fight, they ain't any of 'em hankerin' after a close-up view of him until they're mighty sure he's dead.

From where I'm layin' I can see that this boy is not only organized for war, but he's plannin' to go further. He ain't got any idea that he's licked—none whatever. He's left a six-gun restin' over the body of the horse, while he's pullin' the latigos loose and is workin' to get his saddle off the pony. He's makin' it, too, and before any of his enemies is close enough to do much damage with a six-gun, he's got his whole outfit off and rolled into a sort of a bundle.

One man who seems more anxious than the others to get this boy pushes ahead of the rest. When he's maybe fifty yards up the slope the boy plants a slug in the clay right at his feet, and the man loses some of his enthusiasm right off and scrambles back up the bank quicker than scat. The cowboy rolls over with this bundle in his arms and starts right out into the flood, swimmin' on his back and holdin' the bundle made up of his saddle, chaps, and guns, between him and the men on the slope.

My admiration for pure, clean grit makes me forget that I don't know the right or wrong of this fuss. The cowboy might be the worst bandit in the whole San Juan basin, so far as I know, and the pursuers could easy be a sheriff's posse, but I'm playin' a hunch that the boy ain't a criminal at all; and, anyhow, a man who's got the courage to tackle the old river by hand, rather than be taken prisoner, must have something bigger to fight for than criminals ever have. Only a man with right behind him would show such cold nerve as this. A criminal will fight like a coyote snaps, and be licked just as easy. It's only the man who's got something big to fight for, like the honor of his country, or his family, or a woman, that will keep on tryin' even after he's licked.

The sand rolls in the bottom of all these desert rivers are the worst part to buck, either with a horse or a boat, and for a man carrying a saddle and cowboy outfit to try to swim it is quite some job; and when there's six armed men sittin' up on the bank like a lot of hungry crows, lookin' for a chance to plug you, the play gets too excitin' for comfort. Anyway, I've made up my mind to throw in with the swimmer, who I can see is a tall, slender boy in the young twenties.

None of the men on the bank had seen me. They had left their rifles in the scabbards on their saddles, expectin' to finish this scrap with six-guns at short range, and now that for the minute the boy had outfoxed 'em by takin' to the water, they wish they had the longer-range guns. Bullets plug around this queer, floating fortress that's slowly comin' toward me through the nasty water; but none of 'em do any more damage than just to scar up his saddle a little and splash muddy water in his face. The worst part of his job is ahead of him, though, and that he knows it is shown by the way he's savin' up his strength for the current that rolls and dips, sometimes sending water spouting up, and again rollin' away in long, troughlike swells.

When the men on the bank saw that their six-guns was doin' no damage, they rushed back to their horses, and right then was when I took a hand. None of 'em had seen me, not even the boy in the stream; so when I aimed my Winchester at a boulder near the top of the ridge so that the bullet would screech over their heads, they was plumb surprised, and ducked behind their horses, which lull in the proceed-

ings was promptly taken advantage of by the swimmer, who saw 'em dodge down, although he had no idea what had happened. Probably if he'd seen me, he'd 'a' thought I was layin' for him, too; but he was quick to take the slightest advantage, and he flopped over on his face and swam as hard as he could, draggin' his bundle behind him by means of a coil of his reata that he had worked loose and looped over his shoulder. A second later, he hit the main current and went bobbin' and twistin' down the river like a piece of driftwood.

The men saw he was goin' to get away, and they ran along the top of the bank, shootin' wild, and doin' no harm to the swimmer. It wanted about half a hour till dark, and I concluded that I'd have more of a chance to help him, if he should be washed ashore on my side of the flood, if I waited till my movements wouldn't be seen from the other side. So I lay still until the shadows got deep before I got on my horse, and started down the river to see if this venturesome cuss had been washed ashore.

It didn't hardly look reasonable to expect to find him alive after what he'd gone through, still there's no tellin' what some dare-devils will stand, and if he's layin' in the edge of the water some place half drowned, I'd be glad to help him out.

There hasn't been anything happenin' over on the other side of the river for a long time, so I concluded that the band or posse, whichever it might be, had gone back, or else camped where the light of their fire would not be seen. I rode quietly, watchin' for a huddled heap beside the stream, listenin' for some sound. It was so still that I could hear the waves lapping against the sand.

Stars had come out, and where the sand was wet it glistened in the faint light. I had rode a quarter of a mile downstream when I come to a place where there was a little eddy on my side of the stream. The warm air from the mesa brought a tang of cedar, sage, and piñon that mingled with the sand-saturated water and alkali. I got off my horse and walked down close to the edge. There was a dark object partly in and partly out of the water. I waded to it and pulled the cowboy ashore and up onto dry land.

His heart was beatin' faintly, but he was unconscious. As near as I could tell, he'd fainted from overexertion. He hadn't swallowed much water, and I boosted him across the saddle on my horse and packed him back a ways into the piñons. His belt was gone, and I couldn't see anything of his saddle or outfit in the eddy, so I concluded he'd struck a sand roll and been forced to turn them loose. I built up a hot fire, and pretty soon he opened his blue eyes and whispered:

"Well, you got me, did you?"

"Yeah," I says. "Feel better?"

He looked puzzled like he couldn't understand the way I spoke to him. He turned his head to look around camp.

"Where's the rest of your crowd?" he asks.

"Say, feller," I comes back, "don't get me wrong. I'm not one of this lot that was shootin' at you."

The puzzled look increased in his eyes. "Who are you then?" he wants to know.

"My name is Thad Rollins," I answers, "and I've got a camp back here about a mile and a little bunch of cattle I'm trailin' north to my ranch on the Dolores River."

He nodded. "I've heard of that feller," he admitted; but he don't give me his name, which is the customary thing to do when a cowman tells a stranger who he is. I overlooked that, though, thinkin' he was hardly himself yet.

He sat up, leanin' against his arms. "You didn't get my outfit, did you?" he asks.

I told him about where I'd found him, and that I'd looked around but didn't see anything of the bundle he'd been swimmin' with. He struggled to his feet, but he was too weak yet from the poundin' he'd had in the old San Juan to be able to navigate, and he tipped over again. He looked at me plumb pitiful.

"I've simply got to find my outfit," he said. "I know I had it when I hit the shore."

That struck me as funny, 'cause there wasn't any current to speak of in that place where I had found him, and if he had pulled the saddle with him that far it sure would have stayed there. "Well, let it go till mornin'," I says, "and if it's along this side any place we'd ought to find it."

Again he looks at me plumb curious as if he don't hardly know whether to believe me or not, and shook his head. "I've got to find it," he says, and gets up on his hands and knees and starts to crawlin' toward the river I'd just dragged him out of.

I grabbed him by the leg and pulled him back.

"Looka here, pardner," I says, "for a man that's come as near drownin' in that brook as you have, it seems to me you're awful anxious to get back to it. That old hull of yours'll keep till mornin', and if it don't, I've got a extra one along. I figured on pickin' up a Mormon boy to help me drive these cattle back, and I brought a extra saddle along, in case he didn't happen to have one."

I was surprised at the next move he made, which was to kick himself loose from me and run for the river, stumblin', fallin', strugglin' to his feet, but still makin' his way in that direction faster than I'd have supposed a man in his condition could have made it. I followed him, and when he got to the edge of the stream he located the place he had been dragged from, and then went lookin' along the bank; he got down on his hands and knees and tried to strike one of his wet matches but couldn't make it. I pulled one from my pocket and lit it, holdin' it so's he could see. He looked at some marks in the sand, then he suddenly straightened up and held out his right hand to me.

"You'll have to overlook my bein' sort of suspicious of you," he says. "You see, I've got a lot on my mind, and I've got to thinkin' everybody I bumped up against was after me."

"What convinces you that I'm not?" I asked him.

He pointed to the marks in the sand. "These tracks," he answered. "Give me another match."

I lit another and held it down for him. He's on his knees now, and with his face close over a wet spot in the sand.

"See," he said, "here's where that hombre dragged my outfit out of the water, leaving me there where you found me. If he bothered to examine me at all, he figured I was dead, and he wasn't losin' any time. In fact, if I've got his play right, he was in a hurry to get away from here." The boy took a step or two back on the sand. "See," he pointed down, "here's where he threw the bundle over his shoulder and walked away, the water dripping from my outfit. His track is considerably bigger than yours. Did you see—a big feller that started down the clay bank while I was layin' behind my dead horse?"

I nodded. "The one you stopped by shootin' in front of him?"

"That's the bird," he agrees, "and he's swum the river in the hope of findin' me. If you'll loan me a gun I'll follow him."

"Follow would be all that you would do," I scoffs. "Why, boy, you can hardly walk as yet, and this man who's got your outfit ain't afoot. He'd never tackle such a job as swimmin' the San

Juan himself, when he had a horse to ride."

We tracked him easy for about fifty yards, and then we found where he'd left his horse standin' while he walked down to the river to investigate the man he'd seen layin' in the eddy. It wasn't any job at all to reconstruct the picture. We could almost tell the exact time it had been done by the way the dirt had dried up, and the tracks in the short grass.

The cowboy starts followin' the horse's tracks, which led off south toward the Navajo country, and in the first low place, behind some sage bushes, we found his saddle and outfit complete. Even his guns are still wrapped in the saddle blanket. The boy looked at his outfit for a second. Then he turned to me.

"You say you've got some extra saddle stock?" he asked.

"Uh, huh," I says. "If you'll explain all this mystery and tell me why these men was chasin' you, I'll let you have a horse."

He didn't make any reply, but picked up his stuff and started back for the place where I'd left my horse. I wouldn't let him carry the whole load and insisted on carryin' the saddle for him, and as I threw it over my shoulder I noticed that one of each pair of back saddle strings had been cut with a sharp knife. As we walked along I examined these strings closer and found that they'd been tied in a hard knot such as no cowboy would ever use in tyin' on a slicker or an ordinary package.

Part of the mystery, I thought I had solved. This boy had tied something onto that saddle hard and fast. He had taken no chances on the thing's workin' loose. This other man who had followed him had carried the outfit back there where he couldn't be seen by the rest of the crowd across the river, and he was in too much of a rush to stop to untie any knots. He's just cut those strings and high-tailed it out of the country without even undoin' the bundle to get any of the rest of the stuff. Whatever was the cause of all this fuss was in a package that had been tied on behind the cantle of the saddle I'm packin'. The man I had rescued was gettin' pretty much himself by the time we got back to where I'd left my horse, and he said he was all right now and able to walk. We packed his stuff securely on my horse and went on to my camp.

My cattle was gentle, domestic stuff, and my horses pets. They was right where I'd left 'em grazin' in a little grassy rincon near a spring. I built up a big fire of dry piñon and began gettin' supper while my friend took off his clothes and spread 'em around to dry.

"You're goin' to have to kind of take me out on trust," he says, "for a while. There's some things I can't figure out myself."

I'd been studyin' him whenever I could, and I couldn't make that frank, boyish face fit in with the idea of a criminal any more than I'd been able to when I saw him fightin' his way into what looked like death, rather than give up after they had shot the horse from under him.

"There's only one thing," I says, "I'd like to ask you. You can answer me or not, just as you please; but if I'm goin' to help you, seems like I'm entitled to know who that was that was chasin' you, and why they was so everlastingly proddy."

He sat there by the fire, one of my blankets wrapped around him, his face sober, and I could see he was thinkin'. I went on fryin' bacon. I felt I'd give him all the chance a honest man would need to tell whatever he was goin' to. When I glanced at him again his eyes was twinklin' like something pretty near tickled him to death, and that funny kid grin on his face made me ashamed of

even hintin' that there was anything crooked about him.

"Rollins, you're a regular feller," he says. "Maybe you'll find out quicker than you expect about this, and you'll be convinced by what you see better than you could by what I might tell you. In fact, if I was to tell you exactly what happened, it would sound so fishy that you'd have less faith in me than you have now, a whole lot. Just to show you, though, how easy you might misjudge a man, look at this."

He handed me a piece of folded paper that had been kept dry by bein' in a leather bill fold in the pocket of a calfskin vest that had been wrapped inside of his saddle blanket. I looked at the paper and something gripped my heart like a icy hand had suddenly shut down on it, 'cause there wasn't any doubt about who the picture above the words, "Five thousand dollars reward, dead or alive!" was intended to represent. I guess my face must have showed how surprised I was, 'cause when I looked up the boy was chucklin'.

"Gwan and read it," he told me.

I looked at the paper and read:

Gord Dalloon, twenty-two. Bank robber and murderer. Last seen on the west bank of the San Juan, heading for the Blue Mountains.

There wasn't any question about the description or the place, 'cause he'd been comin' from that very country when I first saw him. When I looked back at him, his face was plumb sober and there wasn't any fun in his eyes. They was as cold and sober as if he was right then bein' sentenced to hang.

"Well?" he questions.

"Your name is Gord Dalloon?" I asked.

He nodded. "And up till now it's always been a respected name," he says in a voice so low that I had trouble to make out the words.

I didn't say anything more just then. He ate like he hadn't tasted food for days, and after the dishes was put away in my pack panniers, he rolled up in the blanket and went to sleep by the fire. I sat there until the coals burned down to a little heap of white ashes, and the stars got brighter, and the cool breeze swept up across the desert country to the south, bringin' that sweet tang that gets into the blood of a man and holds him to this wild outlaw country like it was the paradise of the whole earth.

I went over in my mind everything that had happened from the moment I'd seen Gord strugglin' to get a worn-out horse across that last fifty yards, up to the time I'd noticed the cut saddle strings. Reason told me that the poster that said he was a bank robber told the truth, and yet I didn't believe it; and when I went to sleep I had decided to play my hunch to the extent of givin' Gord a horse and a chance to go on followin' his play accordin' to his own ideas.

The way he wore those two old frontier-model Colts, though, next mornin', almost made me reverse my judgment. There's some marks of a gun fighter that you can't overlook, and Gord had 'em all. Those crossed belts that hung so easy from his hips seemed to be a part of his body, and when he'd stand lookin' off over the mesas watchin' the horizon, his thumbs would just naturally hook themselves into them belts like they did it of their own accord.

After we'd et our breakfast, I caught a big bay that I called Cortez, havin' bought him in that little town when he was a yearlin'.

"Put what's left of your saddle on him," I says. "I suppose nine hundred and ninety-nine men out of a thousand would say I was crazy, but I'm goin' to loan you the best and fastest horse you ever throwed a leg over. You're free to go as you please, and if I meet any of that posse that was chasin' you,

my sight was awful poor yesterday—in fact, I ain't seen nuthin'."

His eyes had that happy, tickled expression this mornin' and in spite of all else, my hunch was stronger than it had been any time.

"You can't cross the river yet, Thad," he suggests. "You may have to camp here a day or two longer. Put your saddle on a good horse and ride with me to-day. If what I hope for comes off, it'll be worth lookin' at."

We rode back to where we'd found his saddle the night before, and the tracks are easy to follow in daylight. One thing that strengthens my judgment that Gord has got something that he ain't tellin' me is that these tracks don't lead back into the country he had come from. Whoever had followed him across the San Juan and had cut that package off from his saddle hadn't gone back, but was bearin' off south into wild country. Gord pointed Cortez at them tracks and jogged along, me followin' a short distance behind.

At the next arroyo, Gord stops and looks close at the tracks, then motions me to stay there while he rode down the arroyo a ways. Pretty soon he calls me to come on. When I got to where he was, he pointed at another bunch of tracks comin' up from the San Juan.

"Here's where the rest of 'em come across," he says. "Suppose you follow them. I have an idea they'll camp over near Cottonwood Springs. You won't have any trouble with 'em," he says. "If you run into their camp, just tell 'em you're a cattleman lookin' for strays, and sit around a while. If Cortez is as good and fast as I think he is, I'd ought to be somewhere around pretty soon after you arrive." He held out his hand to me. "You're a regular feller, Thad," he said. "No man can be sure how a play like this one I'm goin' into is comin' out; and if I've overbet my hand, and these hombres succeed in doin' to me what they tried to do yesterday, why, just always remember that I was plumb grateful to you for helpin' me out like you have; and whenever you're tempted to doubt the correctness of the hunch you've been playin', just remember that I died tryin', anyhow."

He squeezed my hand and then neck-reined Cortez back toward the other track we'd been followin'. Somehow, Gord's actions and his words depressed me. By no stretch of the imagination could anybody think of him as puttin' on or exaggeratin' a danger. He'd be a heap more likely to make fun of the men he was tacklin' than to admit that they was either fast or accurate, and I couldn't help but wish he'd let me go along with him. I was gettin' worse stuck on him all the time, and I'd reached a point where I was ready to throw a gun on his side without knowin' any more about him than I already knew, and from the standpoint of common sense that was all bad.

I was ridin' away on the track of five members of the band, Gord only follow-in' one; but when I thought of that I remembered that the one he was follow-in' was the one that had started to go down the bank toward where Gord had been lyin' behind the horse. He was the one that had swam across behind him, and he was the one that had cut the saddle strings and taken whatever was tied on behind the cantle.

"I guess Gord is not takin' any the best of it," I thought as I rode into the piñons.

This country south of the San Juan is for the most part desert, but sometimes there's piñon-covered ridges and there's one big black dike that cuts through the country clear from Shiprock to east of Gallup. It don't show the entire distance; but every few miles one of those queer-shaped ridges breaks up through the rest of the country, and the natives know that there's almost always water to be found at those places.

I fell to speculatin' on this queer deal. Was the man who had gone away alone, cuttin' loose from the rest of 'em? Were they tryin' to overtake him, or had they spread out to search for Gord's body along the south bank of the river, and failed to meet as they had planned? A lot might depend on the answer to that question, and probably I'd know it when I caught up with the ones that I was followin'. I headed for the nearest dike that showed above the bushy trees, and rode as fast as I could. Some way I felt that if I wanted to have a hand in the proceedings I had not time to lose.

I had kept a sharp lookout for smoke or any sign of a camp; but if the men had made a fire they'd been careful to use fine, dry cedar twigs that wouldn't make any smoke. Knowin' as I did about the water around these dikes gave me an advantage; and when I got to this one toward which the tracks was pointin', I went around on the far side and, leavin' my horse hid, I injuned up to where I could peek down on the water hole. Before I looked, I knew that somebody was camped there, 'cause, while they had been awful careful to use wood that didn't make much smoke, they couldn't avoid the smell, and I got a good strong whiff of that burned cedar, even before I saw the camp.

I took off my hat and raised my head to look over the jagged rocks of the ridge, and there, at the mouth of a little canyon, with their horses herded where they can't get away without comin' past the camp, was five of the six men I'd seen the day before, and a close-up view didn't improve their looks a bit. Their faces was as mean and crafty lookin' as Gord's was frank and open, and my faith in the boy went up still more when I saw the sort of men that had been tryin' to gun him.

Anybody can see that this camp ain't a happy one. They evidently hadn't come prepared for a long trip, and only had what little grub they could carry in their saddlebags.

"Don't try to tell me that 'Wolf' is playin' square with us," a squat-lookin' tough is sayin'. "I believe he's found the body, got the stuff, and is gone. Probably he's pullin' for Durango and laughin' at us for bein' so easy as to let him come across by himself first."

"You're dead wrong, 'Blacky'," broke in another, "'cause there comes Wolf now, and the way he's ridin' I'd say he'd seen a ghost, or something."

They all jumped to their feet and looked up the main gulch that led down from the north, and, sure enough, there comes that same man I'd seen the day before, and he's quirtin' a tired horse every jump. The men all stood up, watchin' him and speculatin' on why he was ridin' like that; but I thought I knew, and my feelin' so good seemed strange, seein' as I'd only knowed Gord one day.

The one they called Wolf had seen their camp and was headin' for it. Blacky looked around.

"Somethin' has gone awful wrong to make Wolf ride like that," he says. "Better saddle up quick."

They grabbed their bridles, ran into the little canyon, and came out leadin' the horses as Wolf busted into camp.

"Did you find him?" asks one.

"How about the money?" said another.

"Yeah, I found him—twice," snaps Wolf. "The money is on my saddle. I thought he was drowned, and I didn't take the trouble to put a bullet through his head. He must have come to, or else that interferin' whelp that shot us up yesterday and give him a chance to get away, must have found him. I'd like to get a shot at that lizard."

I'd forgot until now about that part of the play, but the second he says that, I knows that this bunch is as sore at me as they are at Gord, and somehow I'm glad of it.

"He's got a peach of a horse and is on my trail. That's why I've been so long findin' you fellers," Wolf explained.

If any one questioned this statement, they didn't say anything. They had other things to think about, 'cause right then Gord comes into view at the lower end of the dike not a hundred feet away. Cortez is puffin' harder than I'd ever seen him, and right off I knew that Gord had located the camp and Wolf and had simply outrun him down the other side of that ridge, and now was comin' straight into a fight with six men.

I could see by the way they looked that every man in this bunch was afraid of Gord. He had left Cortez standin' behind a rock out of danger of the bullets that he knew would be flyin' toward him, and was comin' straight at the band. Of course he had no way of knowin' that I was there, because I'd come up to the dike from the other side, and he was almost as much surprised as the others when I scrambled down behind the ledge and ran around a tree so's to step beside him.

"Hello, Gord," I says. "Looks like a show-down, don't it?"

"Hello Thad," he says. "Pleased to meet you."

Neither of us had drawed, and none of the band dared to turn back toward the Winchesters in their saddle scabbards. They was up against a six-gun fight, and they didn't like the looks of us. We was grinnin' like a pair of cats, and there's nuthin' a gunman hates as bad as a smilin' fighter.

The first play comes when Wolf drags at his guns and starts toward Gord. Both his shots went wild, and I didn't wait for Blacky or any of the others to outplay me. I made a fast draw and stepped well to one side, my guns held low and coverin' the whole bunch, which was sort of huddled together.

"Tryin' to pull a gun," I says, "would be like writin' your own ticket for death. I couldn't possibly miss a man at this distance."

Evidently they think well of my statement, 'cause none of 'em makes a break. All eyes except mine are centered on the two men who are facing each other with flamin' guns. Both of 'em are hittin', too. I can't look around, but out of the corner of my eye I can see red on Gord's shirt, and his right cheek had been cut by one of Wolf's slugs. Seems to me that their guns must be empty when suddenly Wolf tosses both his in the air and falls forward on his face.

Gord turns to me.

"Take the others' guns away from 'em, Thad, and toss me a pair of 'em. I've only got three cartridges left. I don't believe that any of 'em wants to try, but they might."

How in the world he'd ever kept track of his shots, goin' through such a mêlée as that, is a mystery to me, but he had. I lined 'em up and turned to Gord.

"Are you hurt bad?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, just a couple of stone bruises on my arms and a little gash in my face. I'll have to shave careful for a while."

He went to the horse Wolf had been ridin' and untied a leather sack, stuck his hand in, and pulled out bundle after bundle of yellowbacked bills.

"Thirty thousand dollars, Thad," he says. "Quite a haul, don't you think?"

"Yes," I said, "but whose is it?"

He grinned at me. "Would you be willin' to have your picture on a poster like the one I gave you last night for that bunch of money?"

I shook my head.

"Well, I happened to be ridin' down the street of Farmington about ten minutes before Wolf held up the bank and killed the cashier. Several people saw me and they jumped at the conclusion that I'd done it. A friend tipped me off

to what was comin', and I decided that the only way to clear my own name so's there'd never be any gossip about me, or hintin' that maybe I was a thief, was for me to go and bring back the man or men who did do it. So I went into the Blues, found out where they had the money hid, and I got it. I caught Wolf, too, but an Indian tracker cut him loose, and he went after this bunch and followed me. There ain't much more except what you know. Your cattle will stay where they are for a few days," he went on. "Come with me, and we'll take this outfit into Farmington and collect the reward money. Then I'd like to go back to the Dolores with you."

I looked at the clear, honest, blue eyes I'd been trustin' even when everything seemed to be agin' Gord.

"Suits me," I agreed; "I need a partner."

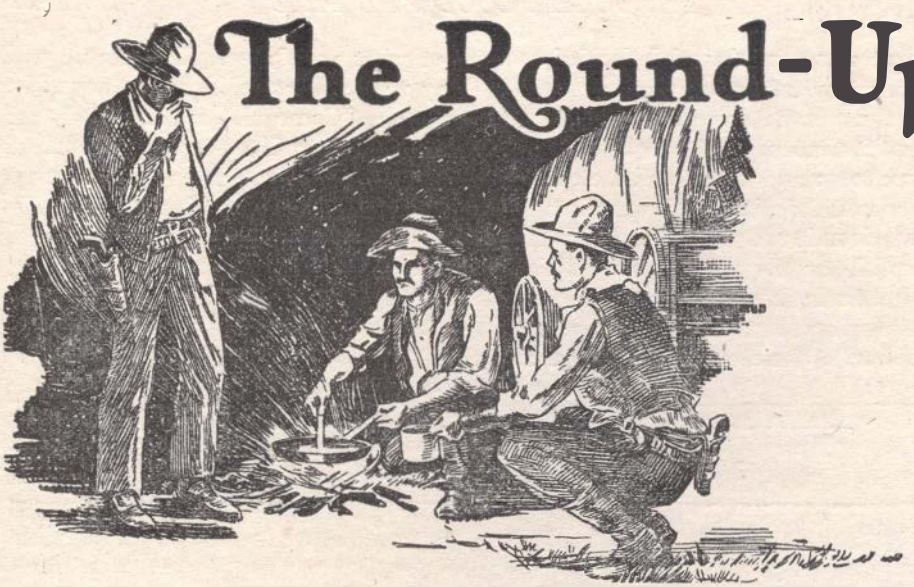
"SHERIFF JUSTICE," by ROBERT J. HORTON, in NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE.

PLEA FOR DOG'S LIFE

IT is quite out of the ordinary for a dog to go to jail, but this is exactly what has happened to Tim, the police dog owned by Donald Diffenbaugh, of Santa Rosa, California. Unfortunately, Tim loved the wide-open spaces and every chance he got he made for the hills. There, to his delight, he found choice spots where sheep were herded. Not that he meant any harm, but it was such fun to jump into a herd of peaceful, grazing sheep and see them all run and scamper for their lives. And then, singling out one of them, he would pursue it until it became exhausted, and, before he realized what he was doing, the sheep would be dead at his feet and he, a joyous victor, would run along home. Many sheep lost their lives in this way, and when it was discovered that Tim was the guilty party, the court gave him a death sentence for killing sheep.

As soon as it was learned that Tim's life was in danger, telegrams began to roll in, begging that he be spared. Hundreds of dog lovers from all sections of the country have offered to take Tim and bring him up as a dog should be brought up, far from temptation.

The Round-Up



LET'S open with the complaints. Here are the documents in evidence. First, came a letter, signed "A few loggers who have seen a camp":

"BOSS AND FOLKS: In regard to the story 'Chips from the Big Sticks,' by Howard J. Perry, in the issue for December 14, 1929, we should like to know where Mr. Perry got his information on logging. In his story he states that the bullcook awakens the men in the mornings, and makes the beds. We have worked in logging camps all along the Columbia River for the last ten years, and have never found a camp where the bullcook performs these duties. In a *logging camp* the bullcook builds the fire in the kitchen as well as in the bunk houses. He does not waken the men in the mornings, ring the bell, or make the beds. The locomotive whistle generally wakens the camp, and the cook rings the bell at meal times. There is also a bed maker who takes care of the beds. We wish to state that Mr. Perry probably got his information from a book entitled 'Paul Bunyon.'"

Following our undeviating custom, we sent this letter to the author of the complained-about story, Howard J. Perry. Perry wrote to us:

"DEAR BOSS: I am not a bit surprised to read such a complaint, and I'll wager you'll get some more of them. I'd like to get a bunch of loggers in an argument, because that's what they thrive on. And there's plenty of room for debate, for I've never seen two camps that operated alike. For instance, in one camp they say 'high-climber,' while across the river they call him a 'high rigger.'"

This is the letter which Howard J. inclosed, in reply to "A few loggers who have seen a camp":

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I'm sorry to have to admit to the 'few loggers' on the Columbia River that I haven't read the book called 'Paul Bunyon'; but since a good friend of mine, who has spent his life in the woods, wrote it, I'm going to read it one of these days. And I hasten to assure you that much of my information dates back further than ten years.

"Fortunately I have been in several of the camps that still operate along the Columbia River, and I agree with the

writers of the letter that the bullcook in those camps does not wake the men in the morning; neither does he ring the bell; or make the beds. In fact, in one place, the bullcook owned a car and drove into town every night to his home; while in another, the men lived in a modern hotel with all the conveniences of a city hostelry. Also I saw one cook working over a gas range; and there were bed makers, as well as women waiters.

"But it must be remembered that the first logging operations in the Pacific Northwest started on the Columbia, and the camps that still cut in some of the remaining stands can in no way be compared to the vast majority that are logging in the more remote regions of the country.

"I'm afraid I must take issue with the authors of the letter, regarding that little matter of the bullcook waking the men in the morning in many sections. Last summer in northern Washington, I experienced the sensation of being startled out of a sound slumber by a bullcook, who stood in his red flannel shirt and beat the triangle for fully five minutes; and if any logger wasn't awakened, it was because he was stone deaf. I doubt if a locomotive whistle would have been more effective. But, as it happened, this camp, like many I have been in, didn't provide for such a convenience as a locomotive.

"Also, on the same morning, I chatted with that same bullcook as he went about his task of making up the bunks and putting the interiors of the bunk houses in order.

"And now, Boss and Folks, I want to apologize for taking so much of your time, but, before I close, I'm wondering if there aren't some real old-timers of the big sticks who attend Round-up here who would oblige us with a few words. There's a lot of different ways of logging, and I'm sure the gang would like to hear them spill a yarn or two."

Having got that little matter off our chests, and while we are awaiting further comments on it from any of you who care to make them, we'll listen to Miss Marion E. Green, Box 3 A, R. F. D. No. 1, Casa Grande, Arizona, who will give a little talk on horse breaking:

"FOLKS OF THE ROUND-UP: There has been quite a bit said about horses and the training of them lately, so I'm going to have a say about Spanish bits, spurs, etc.

"I'm the proud owner of a five-year-old mare I call Bess. She is the smartest and best educated horse in Casa Grande. I bought her for one hundred dollars when she was ten months old. The boy that sold her to me had been mean to her. As soon as I got her I started to break her, and let me tell you I didn't have any jaw-breaking bit and sharp spurs. I used only a plain snaffle bit, and rode bareback. I treated her gently, and when she did what I wanted her to, I gave her bread or sugar. Soon she grew to look forward to doing what I wanted her to, so she could be rewarded. After I had her broken pretty well, the boy that used to have her asked me if he could ride her. When he got on her, Bess piled him so quick he didn't know what had struck him.

"Then I started to teach her tricks. She learned very easily. She understands every word I say. These are the tricks she does: kisses me, adds, subtracts, tells age, laughs, shakes hands, says she loves me, bucks, paces, single-foots, trots, stands on box, rears up, jumps, hurdles, acts as cow pony, bows down on her knees, and lies down. When I taught her to lie down it was at night and cold. I had a can of chicken feed. I would pick her foot up and tell her to lie down, and she would lie down. I would then give her some grain and pet her. I taught her to lie down that night without any beatings.

"Anybody who wants to learn more about Bess and ways of breaking and training horses, please write to me. I have a regular cowboy bit with roller and bridle and stock saddle. I wear spurs mostly for dress purposes, but sometimes I have to use them as Bess is kind of lazy. Yet I have never spurred any horse so cruelly as to draw blood.

"Please let me hear from all horse lovers. I will send a photo of Bess and myself to all who send me photos. I want some real pen pards."

And now, another lady, Mrs. Jack Oliver, Box 241, Libby, Montana:

"Boss and Folks: I have just finished reading 'Boomer,' by Robert Ormond Case, and I liked it so well I could not help telling him so. I think it is one of the best novels Western Story Magazine has published for some time. I always look for Shorty and the sheriff, but of late have missed them. Hope to see more of them soon.

"What has become of those two old-timers, Windy and Lonesome, and the school-teacher? I miss them also.

" 'What the Buzzards Said,' by Austin Hall, was a good one also, and 'Raised on Trouble,' by George Cory Franklin, was a dandy. Indeed, they all are good; but some strike me better at the time than others—according to how I feel.

"Long may Western Story Magazine live to cheer our lonely hearts."

Leaving his patients for a few moments, V. Sandbothe, Greeley, Colorado, will slip into the saddle:

"Boss and Folks: What has become of Shorty McKay and Sheriff Cook? Tell Ray Humpheys I like his stories very much.

"I read Western Story Magazine as often as I can, but, being a doctor, I can't always find the time. However, if you go into my office, you will find the current issue lying on the table each week. I then pass it on to some of my poor patients, who can't afford to spend fifteen cents for anything but bread.

"I have a free clinic for children that are ailing—some with deformed limbs and backs, and others that are undernourished. I give my services once a week to any that call.

Say, if here isn't good old Bill Meyers, now at Hot Springs, South Dakota. Well, Bill, never knew the time when you didn't hand out some real, genuine, good dope. What will it be this evenin'?

"Boss and Folks: I just dropped by this evening, looking for Joseph P. Ryan, of Mount Morris Place, New York City.

"Mr. Ryan wants to know if I know what a cactus buck is, and, fortunately, I can say I do. I shot one once in Arizona, and that's how I found out what a 'cactus buck' was.

"I shot my deer—a common, Western mule deer, and, finding him a stag and a mighty fat one at that, I sought information from an old 'desert rat,' who was camping with me, and from him learned this:

"A 'cactus buck' is so called because at some period in his early infancy he got pierced by cactus thorns, and through the course of natural events of festering, caused by poisonous wounds, was made a stag; 'altered,' if you please, and in that way he grew to be an oversized animal and mighty good eating.

"This, my informant assured me, happens to about one buck in every ten thousand, so a 'cactus buck' is a species indeed.

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.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

EASTWARD of the Beaverhead country and stretching in the direction of the Yellowstone are the Madison Canyon country and the old Pony country of southwestern Montana.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My pal and I trekked from Arkansas back to my old home stomping grounds—the land of shining mountains—Montana. And when we struck the Madison Canyon country we did a little prospecting. We struck it rich! Gold, silver, and copper. We are working the claims that we staked out last fall.

We have built up quite a home here in Madison Valley, which is only about twenty miles from the entrance to Yellowstone Park. This is a great country. It is equally good for the trapper, the hunter, and the prospector. There is plenty of game shooting here in season—deer, elk, grouse, ducks. Mountain sheep and moose are protected. The trapper can get his share of coyotes, timber wolves, otter, beaver, mink, marten, wild bobcat, lynx, mountain lion, and all kinds of bear, including the big silvertip grizzly, and the black and brown bear. There is fine fishing, too. Here is where you can catch the "big ones" in the rushing, tumbling waters of the Madison River. The Madison is a mountain stream headed in the Yellowstone Park.

Perhaps some of you folks would like to come here some time and look around. This is a good prospecting country. And we'll call this little home of ours The Old Holla Lodge, so that when you-all come up here to the Yellowstone country this summer you will call to see us. And if we are not "to home," just wait until nightfall, as we may be up in the canyon on our claim. Well, folks, adios, until we all meet in the little Madison Valley lodge.

ALICE E. DUBARREY AND KATHERINE E. RAY.
Cliff Lake, Madison County, Montana.

Wilderness fastnesses of Wisconsin.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This North Woods country is made up of lakes, forests, hills, and valleys. Wilderness Lake, out of Iron River, in northeastern Wisconsin, is where we—my family and I—have our home. It is right in the heart of the wildest section of Wisconsin, although our mail box is only two miles from the cabin door, passing through a deer yard in a forest of pines to get there. I cut this new trail out to the mail box because the old trail was five miles long.

We are located on the north shore of Wilderness Lake, which is just about eleven miles from the Brule Trout stream that you-all have heard of. The land is covered with ironwood, aspen, white and red pine, both hard and soft maple, alders, and canoe birch. Across the bay from our cabin is a white-sand-bottomed lake. It's clear, and there you will see wall-eyed pike, large-mouthed bass, and yellow perch.

This country is so wild that we see far

more wild life each day than we do humans. It is a natural game country and trapping could be carried on during the five months of winter. We have bear, wolf—see their tracks every mail day during the winter months when I hike through the forest on snowshoes—fox, marten, wolverene, otter, badger, lynx, wild cat, skunk, mink, weasel. Of course, there is plenty of game for the larder—partridge, grouse, prairie chickens, ducks, geese, et cetera. All in all, life up here isn't hard because one can raise more than one can eat on a small piece of garden. And game is plentiful and wood is for the picking up.

We have been here seven years now. Our home is a seven-room log cabin. When we first came here there was a good deal of pioneering to do, and we had to live in a tent for six months before I could get a log cabin built. Yes, I have built four log cabins; but it is hard work, and one man can't manage very well alone. It takes two to build a log cabin. And right here is where I could use a good pard, folks. And then, too, a good pard would be useful in deer season. During the deer season we have to turn down hunters from all over the country. One gets seven bucks a day as guide—either fishing or hunting—and that means a pretty good profit on ten men for about ten days. With a good pard we could take care of the hunters I am forced to turn away.

A pard who came here would have a home with us until we got his cabin built. He wouldn't have any pioneering to do. I have everything necessary in the way of tools, and I have a lot of experience to offer him, too. He would have to be the sort who is a lover of nature, and one who can see all sorts of wild life without getting the urge to kill everything he sees. A man of about, say, forty years of age, single, who would like to settle down to a life in the North Woods where such wild life is at his very elbows. And, above all, he must be a hombre who can stand being snowed in for five months each year without wanting to grab an ax or shoot somebody!

There is an excellent chance here for fur ranching, too, folks. One could raise foxes or muskrats. We have muskrats in numbers on the lake now. Of course, the thermometer gets down to forty here in the winter months—even forty-eight below at times. But that means that fur that comes from this section is of greater value than fur from a milder climate.

Well, folks, I hope to find that pard. We will haul up our winter's wood together, hunt together, and trek the wilds of good old Wisconsin together.

C. A. B., OF THE NORTH WOODS.
Care of The Tree.

Take a *pasear* into the Madison Canyon country on your trail to the Yellowstone, folks. The friend-maker badge will make you welcome at the little cabins in Madison Valley.

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.

Bow-and-arrow hunter.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Well, here I am back in California again. While in Florida I killed three alligators with the bow and arrow. And now I'm wondering whether to organize a big-game party or just to find a pard and trek the outback trails of the country. I have got the reputation of being the American Odysseus—drawing the strongest bow of any archer in the good old United States. Although in my late thirties, I am still young enough to go out after a lot of adventure. With a good pal I would just take my trusty old bow and, à la Robin Hood, trek the outbound trails. So it's "Ho for London Town!" and the high coasts of adventure, folks. Let's hear from you-all.

EARL B. POWELL.
Box 728, Vernon Branch P. O.,
Los Angeles, California.

One-time cowhand.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Yes, I was a cowhand one time—years ago. Have worked in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, but after all my wanderings give me good old Tennessee. I live here on a farm, alone. I do all my own work and, folks, it sure is lonesome sometimes. I'm not an old-timer, and I'm not so young—forty-one! Come ahead, folks, and cheer a fellow with a few of those stray letters.

HUBERT COLTON.
R. F. D. 6, Nashville, Tennessee.

Coloradoan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm just a maverick who would like to horn my way into the old Holla for a spell. I would like to have some pen friends from Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and old Mexico. I am interested in cattle ranges in the unsettled sections of the country and would like to get in touch with some rancher who has an extra bunk. I am an ambitious maverick and would some time like to run a few cattle of my own. I call Colorado my home range, and I know the cattle game from start to finish. I'd be very glad to tell any one all I know about little old Colorado.

W. A. SULTZ.
3304 Flushing Road, Flint, Michigan.

Prairie country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Southwestern Oklahoma is where I live—out where it's mostly prairie country. Yes, there is a little timber here, but it is just a sparse sprinkling of cottonwoods or sometimes pecans, with some mesquite. The cottonwoods mostly line the creeks and small streams, and you will find the pecans along the creek beds, too. The mesquite is content anywhere, although it, too, prefers the creek beds. Oklahoma is one good old State to live in, or at least I think that way, folks!

Yes, I've been farther West. I have trekked a part of Arizona, New Mexico, and west and southwest Texas. I have been in some twenty-odd States of our Union and have also been in six foreign countries. But I have been nowhere compared with the rest of this old globe of ours!

Folks, the one and direct cause of my vaulting the corral fence is to corral a few friends from far-away places. So sit right down, folks, and drop a line to a lonesome ex-soldier out Oklahoma way.

WILLIAM J. HURST.
Box 56, Faxon, Oklahoma.

The West coast.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Most of the old Holla folks seem to be young people, but I hope you will find room for me, too, even though I am in my fifties. I cannot ride bucking horses, but I lived for many years in a mountain cabin, far from even a wagon road, in the northern part of California, my native State. I live in southern California now.

I wonder if there is any one in all the world who likes good scrapbooks better than I? I would like to hear from some of these folks. And I would like to hear from any one, young or old, who knows how to sympathize with one who finds the way of life hard and long and weary. MRS. C. I. DUNHAM.
Care of The Tree.

"I live in the West Virginia hills," says Edna Clause. "I love farm life and am very fond of horseback riding. We have a new iron-gray stallion that's a real beauty, folks. You-all want to hear about this West Virginia farm? Well, let's have your address." Edna's farm is in Ridgeville, West Virginia.

"The Hoosier State is full of interesting places, folks, and I would like a chance to tell you about them," says B. Kingery. His address is Box 123, Kewanna, Indiana.

"I've lived in Washington, in the big wheat belt, for nearly thirty years. Perhaps there are some folks who would like to know about that wheat belt—land that forty and fifty years ago was covered with bunch grass and grazed over by herds of cattle and horses. I'm living in Idaho now, folks, and will be glad to tell you anything I can about this State. I'd like to hear from folks in other sections of the country and also from the Hawaiian Islands." Address your letters, folks, to E. H. Wallace, Box 64, Cœur d'Alene, Idaho.

"Folks, I crave adventure—first, last, and at all times! I am intending to hike West in the summer, so would like to have some real information on the West. Come on, pals—makes no difference whether you are old-timers or young mavericks—I would like to hear from you-all. Some of you folks from west Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, just take your pens in hand. I'll exchange snaps with all." This member is W. H. Colnan, 124 Pine Street, Hamburg, Pennsylvania.

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.

TO the red-blooded hombre who is looking for real adventure we can think of no more alluring type of holiday than one spent exploring the Canadian wilderness by paddling a canoe along some favorite route of that country's many waterways. Evidently, Dave H., of Boston, Massachusetts, shares our sentiments, judging from the queries he is putting relative to this very topic. "I'm one of those lovers of far places, Mr. North, who likes every once in a while to get plumb away from civilization. For the past two years I've been working in the city, and I'm all set for a vacation away from crowds and clatter. Not long ago I was talking to a man who told me about a canoe trip he took up in Manitoba, from The Pas to Port Nelson. It sounded just about ideal to me, and I'm wondering if you could give me any definite information about such a trek."

We'll do the best we can to accommodate Dave. According to information on canoe trips furnished by the Canadian National Railways, this particular jaunt is a trek some five hundred miles in length and carries its followers away from the beaten track. The route from The Pas to Port Nelson takes a westerly direction to Cumberland House, and then turning in a northeasterly direction, picks its way through a chain of lakes and connecting rivers to Split Lake. It is known as "the trip north of the railway," as it runs in this relation as far as Kettle Rapids, which are only about ninety-five miles from Port Nelson.

Dave may make the first lap of his jaunt by steamer from The Pas to Sturgeon Landing. Here he collects his canoe, camp outfit, and provisions, before saying good-by to civilization. The route is up the Goose River, across Goose Lake, to the easterly end of Athapapuska Lake, and then portage over into the first of the three Cranberry lakes, about one and one-third miles of good, level, smooth trail. After this the waters run down to the Bay, by way of the Grass River and into the Nelson.

Dave will find these water routes in surprisingly good condition, and the trails and portages clear. This is due to the fact that, since the discovery of copper and gold ores, this region, previously thinly populated by Indian trappers and hunters, is now the happy hunting ground of the miner, the prospector, and the trader. Through Reed, Sandy, and Wekusko lakes, down the winding Grass River, into Settling Lake, and through to Split Lake, the course parallels the railway at an average distance of about seven or eight miles. Between Settling and Paint lakes there are about twelve miles of rather rough going, with three high falls, Sasagui, Pisew, and Kwasitchewan; the two latter being between forty and fifty feet drop, with a long stretch of rapid water before entering Paint Lake.

From here down to Split Lake, the route follows the usual winding and twisting of the Grass River through innumerable small lakes studded with islands, with a swift current, and along a course where one needs the services of an experienced guide. Before entering Split Lake, the Grass and the Nelson rivers effect a junction and the rest of the trip is down the Nelson River. For about eighty-eight miles after leaving Split Lake the river is a series of rapids, some of which can be run, but only by a good canoeman. Kettle Rapids, where the railway crosses for the second time, are the most magnificent on the whole route, the total fall being about seventy-eight feet in a distance of three and one half miles. The head of navigation is about thirty-three miles below Kettle Rapids.

After reaching Port Nelson, the return trip to The Pas may be made by the Hayes River route from York Factory. Dave may be interested to know that outside of The Pas Game Preserve, such game and game birds as moose, caribou, deer, bear, and partridge, geese, and duck may be had in season. Fishing along this route consists of pike and pickerel.

While some hombres are trekking to the outdoor West for recreation, others are heading for the same goal with a more serious aim in view. To the latter class belongs George H., of Grand Rapids, Michigan. "I'm interested in stock-raising, Mr. North, and am considering moving out to Meagher County, Montana, which I am informed is a fine region for this industry. What can you tell me about this part of the Treasure State? Is it adapted also to dairying? What crops are raised? What is the county seat? Is there any mining? If so, what minerals? Are transportation facilities good? Well, as you can see, I'd like all the available facts about this county and shall appreciate any information you can give me."

Since the early days of the pioneer West, Meagher County has been a famous stock-raising region. Nor has it changed much with the passing years. In fact, natural conditions are such that the stock industry, in one form or another, will probably continue to be the major agricultural pursuit. Mining, which figured in the county's development, has declined; but the undeveloped mineral resources justify the prophecy that this industry will be revived some time in the future.

Located in the central part of Montana, mountain and grazing lands occupy most of the area of Meagher County, which extends to the crest of the Big Belt Mountains on the southwest, and to the crest of the Little Belt Mountains on the northeast. Between these ranges lie the Smith River and many smaller valleys. In the southern part rise the Castle Mountains, an isolated range. The Crazy Mountains, another isolated range, extend over from the south in the southeastern corner. This part of the county is in the Musselshell River drainage system.

Farming is confined to the lower val-

leys and bench lands, the higher lands being devoted to forage and grazing purposes. Both irrigated and nonirrigated farming is done, and it is estimated that an additional twenty thousand acres can be reclaimed at reasonable cost. Spring wheat is the chief grain crop. Oats and barley, generally grown for seed, yield well. Alfalfa is the principal forage crop under irrigation. Moisture is the controlling factor of crop production on the nonirrigated lands, and its successful conservation requires that careful cultural practices be followed.

George will be interested to hear that rapid progress is being made in dairying, many thousands of dairy cows having been shipped into the county in recent years. The largest dairy barn in the State is located in this county. There is a creamery at White Sulphur Springs which furnishes a home market for the industry. More than a fourth of the county's area is included within national forests, which furnish summer grazing. The range sheep industry is more important than the range cattle business. Some of the largest stock-growing outfits in the State operate in Meagher County.

As for the mining industry, Meagher County has produced in commercial quantities gold, silver, copper, and lead. There are large deposits of iron ore in the northern part of the county, which are reported to be of high grade, but not enough development has been done to determine their economic value. Oil shale, manganese, and coal are also found. There are three well-defined structures in the county which may be valuable for oil.

White Sulphur Springs, one of the old established towns of Montana, is the county seat. The springs from which the town derives its name are reputed to be of high curative value. This Montana town is well built and modern in every respect. Another town in the county is Ringling, which is a shipping and distributing point.

The southern part of Meagher County is traversed by the main line of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, and a branch line from Ringling runs to White Sulphur Springs, eighteen miles north. The eastern Park-to-Park Highway, from the Gardiner entrance of Yellowstone Park to the Glacier entrance of Glacier Park, crosses the county north and south, and there is also an east and west highway via Harlowton, Ringling, and Helena. For the nature lover Meagher County offers rare scenic beauties, while the sportsman will find fishing and big-game hunting in season.

We have our sportsmen, our settlers, and now here comes a husky miner. "Can you tell me anything about the recent gold strike in Alaska, Mr. North?" asks Perry H., of Erie, Pennsylvania. "I'd like to know its location and any other facts you may have."

The last strike we heard of up in Alaska occurred in February of this year in the vicinity of Poorman, which is in the west-central part of the territory, not far from Placerville. When this strike occurred the temperature was forty below zero, and the earth had to be thawed in boiling water to obtain the precious metal. The Poorman placer vein was discovered by three men and reported to the United States War Department by Sergeant William N. Growden of the Signal Corps at Ruby, who took five days' furlough to stake a claim.

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 a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all communications to Missing Department, WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TAYLOR, ROBERT, JENNIE, and **ALICE.**—Last seen in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1913. Information appreciated by J. A. Rankins, 617 South Eighteenth Street, Omaha, Nebraska.

SMITH, HELEN.—Twenty-tbree years old. Last heard from in Visalia, California, in March, 1929. Information appreciated by Jesse Smith, Elsie, Oregon.

BATES, JOHN.—Twenty-one years old. Five feet nine inches tall, weighs about one hundred and forty-five pounds, has light wavy hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Left Caroleen, North Carolina, May 7, 1929. Your mother and I are worried. Patsy calls for you. Please come home or write to your wife, Mrs. Ruby Bates, 216 McBrayer Street, Shelby, North Carolina.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from members of the 619th Aero Squadron, who trained at Kelly Field, Texas. Information appreciated by George Mitton, Box 253, Ottawa, Illinois.

JOHNSON, ALBERT B.—Forty years old. Five feet eleven inches tall, light hair, gray eyes, and weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Lived in South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa. Last seen near Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1928. Information appreciated by his father, B. F. Johnson, 2421 Seventeenth Avenue, Columbus, Georgia.

ELLEDGE, J. D., JR.—Last heard from in Oklahoma. Twenty-seven years old. Father needs him. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. D. A. Parker, Lucedale, Mississippi.

RICE, T. A.—Please come home or write to your wife, Clara Rice, Capitol Hill Laundry, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

TINSLEY, FRANCES.—Last known address was, in 1928, 2612 East Forty-first Street, Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by Dean Jones, 2219 Avenue H, Galveston, Texas.

S. E. A.—This is too hard. Just let me know where you are, and I will come. We have protected your name here. Please write to K., care of this magazine.

VERA.—Glad to receive your letter. Helen is with us. Please write to Mother D., care of this magazine.

MALLORY, H. E.—Five feet eight inches tall, light-brown hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Port Arthur, Texas, in June, 1929. Information appreciated by Box 15, Tupelo, Arkansas.

REEF, OSCAR J.—Why don't you come home? Please write to your youngest sister, Margaret, care of this magazine.

WINCHESTER, E. T.—Fifty years old. Was at one time organist in a Catholic church at Albany, New York. Last heard from in the Metropolitan Hospital, New York City, in 1927. Information appreciated by Mrs. M. L. Myers, 2507 Rhode Island Avenue, N. E., Washington, D. C.

SUTHERLAND, JAMES.—Last heard from in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Information appreciated by Mrs. L. Norland, care of this magazine.

BARNOUSKY, JOHN.—Last heard from in North Bellingham, Washington, in 1922. Forty-five years old. Five feet eight inches tall, light-brown hair, and blue eyes. Information appreciated by George Barnousky, 1108 East Sixth Street, Anaconda, Montana.

BRITTON, JOHN S.—Of Lynn, Massachusetts. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, about two years ago. Six feet two inches tall, brown hair and eyes. Weighed about two hundred pounds. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary Richards, October Cottage, 778 Ocean Avenue, Revere, Massachusetts.

THIEM, VINCENT.—Twenty-six years old. Five feet seven inches tall, black hair, and gray eyes. Weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. Last heard from in May, 1928, at Quitague, Texas, where he was employed by the Brooks Construction Co. Information appreciated by his sister, Nellie Thiem, Route 1, Bishop, Texas.

CARTER, RETTA.—Want so much to hear from you and the kids. Please write to Jack, care of this magazine.

BALDWIN, BERT.—Left Elmira, New York, in 1917. Three girls—E., L., and C.—would like to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. I., care of this magazine.

B. B. M., LOUISE.—I have important news for you. Please write to your mother, Mrs. C. J. Clarkson, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from Jennie Colvin Goss, Lester Colvin, and Sophronia Colvin. Please write to Ella M. Morrell, 214 Howard Street, Cadillac, Michigan.

HAMLIN, SIDNEY and **HARLEY.**—Formerly of Orange, Texas. Please write to Ella M. Morrell, 214 Howard Street, Cadillac, Michigan.

CLARK, ROBERT and **ALLEN.**—Formerly of Portland, Oregon. Please write to Ella M. Morrell, 214 Howard Street, Cadillac, Michigan.

HARVEY, EVA.—My letter to 1512 Miller Street, Utica, New York, has been returned. Please write to G. L. H., care of this magazine.

TROY.—Of King Hill, Idaho. Formerly of Virginia. Have you forgotten the promise you made November 29, 1929? Please write to Rena, care of this magazine.

WHITEAKER, V. R.—Of Winegar, Wisconsin. Joined the navy, in December, 1920. Information appreciated by W. I. Frye, Box 176, Schoolfield, Virginia.

GLADYS.—Met you in Washington, in 1925. I left the States soon after. Please write to Shorty, care of this magazine.

IRONS, MRS. WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Great Falls, Montana. Please write to an old friend, Mrs. William Rowen, 291½ East Morrison Street, Portland, Oregon.

ELMER and **IRENE.**—Last heard from in Millersburg, Pennsylvania, in 1926. Mother is very ill. Please write to sister, Vernette Harkins, care of this magazine.

BOYLE, LYNN E.—Born in Toledo, Iowa. The son of M. J. and Emma Stivers Boyle. Left Bovine, Colorado, for the West. Last heard from in 1912, when he wrote from Seattle, Washington, saying he would come to Fort Dodge, Iowa, to see his mother. Information appreciated by mother, Mrs. Emma Stivers Blue, 519 South Sixteenth Street, Fort Dodge, Iowa.

FRITZ, ARTHUR E.—Something important has come up. Need your help. Please write to Sonny, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—I was placed in the Waverly Baby Home, in Portland, Oregon, on August 15, 1907. My mother's name was Florence Brown. Information appreciated by Thelma Gertrude, care of this magazine.

SLIM OF PITTSBURGH.—Everything can be fixed all right. Please come and see me or write to Curly of Johnstown, care of this magazine.

SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.—Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, Route 2, Jackson, Michigan.

The consular office of a foreign government, situated in New York, is trying to get in touch with the following people for various reasons: HOZACK, JOHN.—Native of Ireland; worked for Klein & Son, in the automobile-repair business; last known address was 225 East One Hundred and Twenty-fourth Street, New York City. **LUDEKENS, ALFRED.**—Of Ceylon; last known address was 65 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, New York. **GLEN, SAMUEL.**—Thirty years old; native of Scotland; was a fireman on the S. S. "Baron Herries." **HAMILTON, JOHN.**—Formerly of the S. S. "Badagny"; a native of Liverpool, England; recently of 27 West One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street, New York City. **FARR, EDWARD HARRY.**—Otherwise known as **BAILEY;** came to New York thirty years ago; worked in stores in Buffalo, Philadelphia, and in Pittsburgh. **BARRET, JOSEPH.**—Native of Liverpool, England; was in Buffalo, New York, in 1925; sometimes known as **JOSEPH HART. McCARTHY, MRS. M.**—Formerly of 511 West Fifty-fourth Street, New York City. **Information concerning the present address of any of the above should be addressed to Box 2, Station P, New York City.**

MILLER, HARRY M.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1914. Important. Please write to your cousin. Pearl Gibson, Route 11, Box 132, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

LAMB, EDDIE.—Formerly of Brainard, Minnesota. Had a brother, Howard, of Bemidji, Minnesota, in 1917. Please write to your pal, Frances, care of this magazine.

WILL, WILLIAM.—Last heard from twenty-one years ago. Information appreciated by his nephew, William Will, 413 Twelfth Street, Union City, New Jersey.

MAJOR, ELI CHARLES.—Five feet ten inches tall, dark hair and blue eyes. Scar on left hand. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. A. Major, Route 1, Wentworth, Missouri.

DOUGLASS, CLYDE E.—Last heard from in Indiana, Pennsylvania, in 1922. Information appreciated by his son, Gordon Douglass, 640 Seventh Avenue, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

RIGGS, LARRY E.—Please write to Jean, same address, or care of this magazine.

MacGREGOR, AUSTIN.—Six feet tall, light hair and blue eyes. Last heard from twenty-two years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Emma MacGregor, care of this magazine.

EVANS, SAM.—Worked for some time in Banning, California. Last heard from in Utah. Information appreciated by Walter E. Searles, 33 Bath Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

DUNCAN, BIRT.—Last heard from in Cisco, Texas, in the spring of 1920. Information appreciated by R. E. DeLozier, Chelsea, Oklahoma.

LUKE, CLARENCE E.—Information appreciated by Leona May DeLozier, Chelsea, Oklahoma.

HAVILAND, JESSIE.—Do you remember Vic S., who worked on the G. N. R. R. in 1924? I met you at the restaurant in Leavenworth, Washington. Please write to Vic S., care of this magazine.

BOONE, AUGUSTUS.—Last heard from in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1918. Information appreciated by Mrs. W. O. Johnson, 863 California Avenue, Bakersfield, California.

REYNOLDS, WALTER.—Thirty-four years old. Black hair and brown eyes. Was slightly gassed during the War. Believed to have gone to New Mexico. Information appreciated by his niece, Stormy, care of this magazine.

DORR, R. H. WALLIE.—Born in Dansville, New York, about 1865. Last heard from in Lincoln, Nebraska, forty years ago. Information appreciated by a nephew, T. V. D., care of this magazine.

TYSON, JOHN.—Married Abigail Haight. They had two sons, Isaac and John. Would like to hear from them or any of their descendants. Information appreciated by John C. Haight, care of this magazine.

GARDNER, WILLIAM ROBERT.—Born in Whitehall, Wisconsin. Last heard from in Victory, Wisconsin, in 1896. Information appreciated by his son, Harold, care of this magazine.

FAUST, FRANCES.—Seventeen years old. Lived for some time near Centerville, Pennsylvania. Last heard from in 1923. Information appreciated by Andrew Smith, Military Police Detachment, Fort George Meade, Maryland.

LINCK, SAMMIE L.—Went to France in 1917. Returned in 1918. Last heard from in Mexia, Texas, in 1922. Mother is ill and would like to hear from him. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Daisy Fleming, 109 South Robinson Street, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

DAWSON, GLENN and HAROLD.—Glenn was born February 25, 1905, and Harold, September 10, 1911. We were both placed in the Iowa Children's Home at Des Moines, Iowa, July 3, 1913. Both were later adopted. In 1913, my name was Anna Roland, and I lived in Mount Pleasant, Iowa. I am their mother. Information appreciated by Mrs. Anna Jessen, Davenport, Iowa.

MUNSON, ALFRED YONIG.—Sixty-two years old. A dentist. Formerly of Toledo, Ohio. Last seen in Detroit, Michigan, about fifteen years ago. Information appreciated by his son, Howard W. Munson, care of this magazine.

ROGERS, WILL.—Left Lampasas Springs, Texas, about forty years ago. Information appreciated by his granddaughter, Mrs. G. G. Ainsworth, 7943 Brays Boulevard, Houston, Texas.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any one by the name of Boyce, Kurkendil, Roark and Rogers. Information appreciated by Mrs. G. G. Ainsworth, 7943 Brays Boulevard, Houston, Texas.

REEVES, JOHN JESSE.—Last heard from in Plaster City, California. Please write to Rufus Cox, R. R. 6, Box 391A, Fresno, California.

MILLER.—Was on the police force, at Columbus, Ohio, in 1924. Later in the army, stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Please write to an old friend, George M. Cleary, 653 South Park Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

LANDGROVE, HARVEY.—Last heard from in Forest Lake, Minnesota. Do you remember the old days of wire-grass cutting at Caliento, Manitoba? Please write to Teamster, care of this magazine.

JACKSON, ROY.—Forty-nine years old. Left Mobile, Alabama, for Jackson, Mississippi. Worked for a loan company there. Father is dead. Information appreciated by A. Bride, 6 West Chicago Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

JOE and NELLIE.—You are forgiven. Please write to L. S., Montgomery, Alabama.

NICKOLSON, WILL.—Five feet five inches tall, weighs about one hundred and forty-five pounds, dark hair and blue eyes. Last seen in Kansas City, Missouri, eighteen years ago. Please write to Subina, 709 South Thirty-fourth Street, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

CASEY, JOY.—Last heard from near Porum, Oklahoma, eighteen years ago, with his stepfather, Ike Evans. Information appreciated by Mrs. Gertrude Forgy, Box 404, Morris, Oklahoma.

BROWN or AUFEROTH, HARRY.—Thirty-seven years old. A baker. An important letter is being held for him at the Memphis post office. Information appreciated by R. S., care of this magazine.

WHITMAN, FERN FRANCES.—A blond. Finished the eighth grade at the Richgrove grammar school, Richgrove, California. Information appreciated by R. R. 6, Box 391A, Fresno, California.

WALLACE, ARCHIE.—Believed to bo in Arizona. Please write to your sister, May, care of this magazine.

CARTER, EDGAR.—Six feet tall, gray eyes and hair. Weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Last seen in Greenville, South Carolina, in February, 1930. Information appreciated by his daughter, Lois Bright, Buffalo, South Carolina.

YAGEN, ANDREW, LARS and AUGUST.—Left Sweden in 1900. August was heard from in Pennsylvania. Please write to your sister, Nellie Swenson, 1810 Washington Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

STEWART, WILLIAM MORRISON.—Left Irdell County, North Carolina, in 1866. About eighty-five years old. Believed to be in Missouri. Information appreciated by Blye Davis, Box 57, East Gastonia, North Carolina.

SULLIVAN, WILLIAM or BEN.—Mother is not very strong and would like to hear from him. Information appreciated by Lizzie, care of this magazine.

MILLER, JACK.—Traveling salesman for a paint concern. Last heard from in Providence, Rhode Island. Do you remember "Bernice"? Please write to Helen, care of this magazine.

WEST, THOMAS H.—A member of the Fourth Iowa Battery, during the Civil War. Left home for California, fifty years ago. Information appreciated by his niece, L. L. W. F., care of this magazine.

WEST, JOHN W.—Left home with the Orton Brothers Circus about fifty years ago. Reported shot by a member of the circus troupe at Colfax, West Virginia, about forty-eight years ago. The report was never verified. Information appreciated by his niece, L. L. W. F., care of this magazine.

PRICE, MORDECAI.—Of Maryland. Important. Would like to hear from him or his descendants. Please write to Mrs. M. A. Robertson, 407 North McPherrin Avenue, Monterey Park, California.

NELSON, E. H.—Please write to your old friend, M. Y., care of this magazine.

GILLOCK, EUGENE.—Forty-three years old. Six feet tall, dark-brown hair, and weighs about one hundred and ninety pounds. Last heard from in Wink, Texas. Believed to be in New Mexico. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Ike Powell, Route 3, DeLeon, Texas.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from members of Company F, Twenty-ninth Division, 104th Engineers, who served overseas during the World War. Information appreciated by David A. Ruckman, Box 841, Dardanelle, Arkansas.

HART.—Jay B. Hart, thirty-seven years old, five feet six inches tall, blue eyes, light-brown hair; a good shot and mechanically inclined; believed to have come from out West. A soldier stationed in the Philippines for several years. Died April 23, 1927. Would like to get in touch with his family. Please write to A. W. B. F., care of this magazine.

MARUZZI, MARGUERITE.—Twenty-two years old. Formerly of Dawson City, New Mexico. Last heard from in Colorado, in 1926. Information appreciated by Anthony Maruzzi, care of this magazine.

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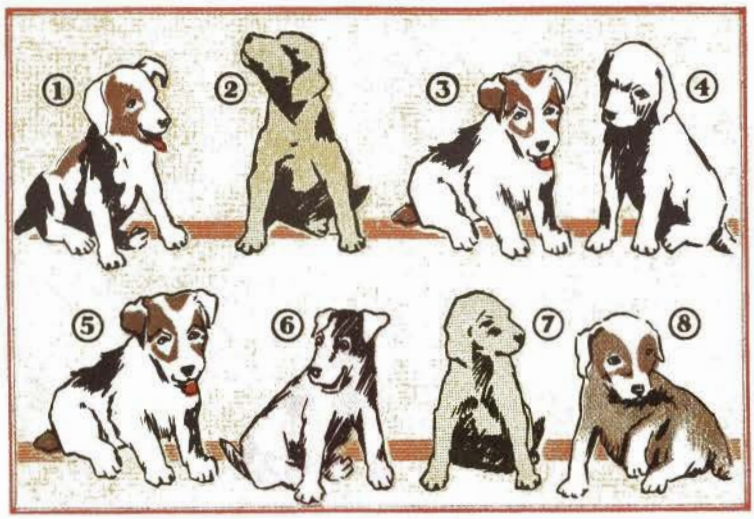

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