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EveryWeek Magazine June 29, 1929

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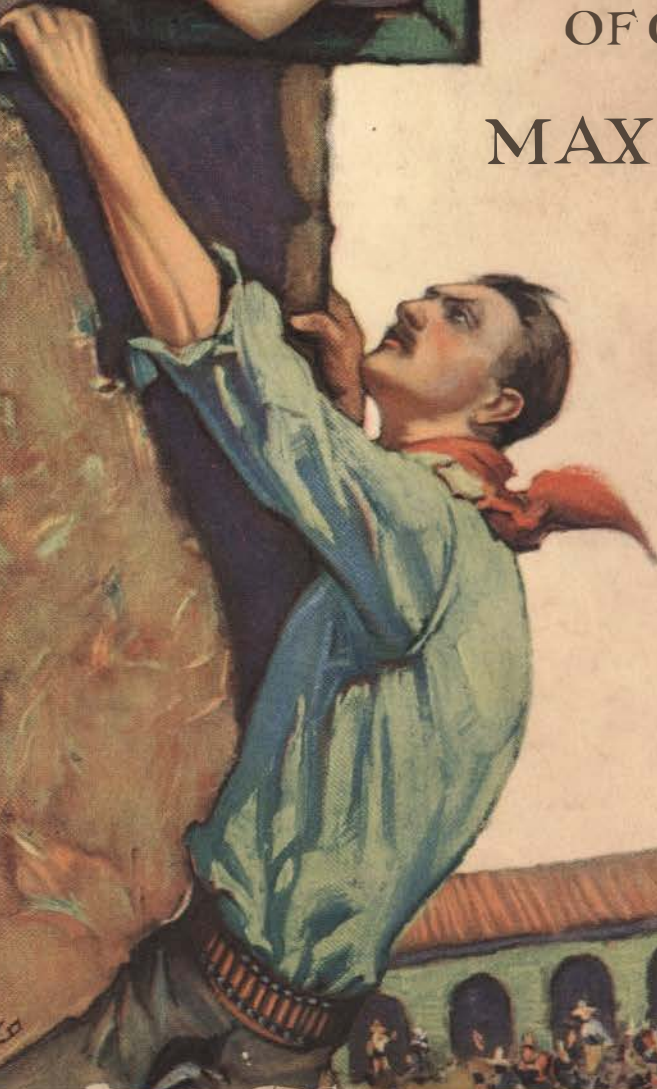
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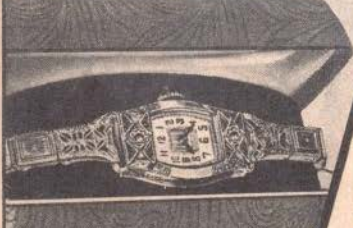
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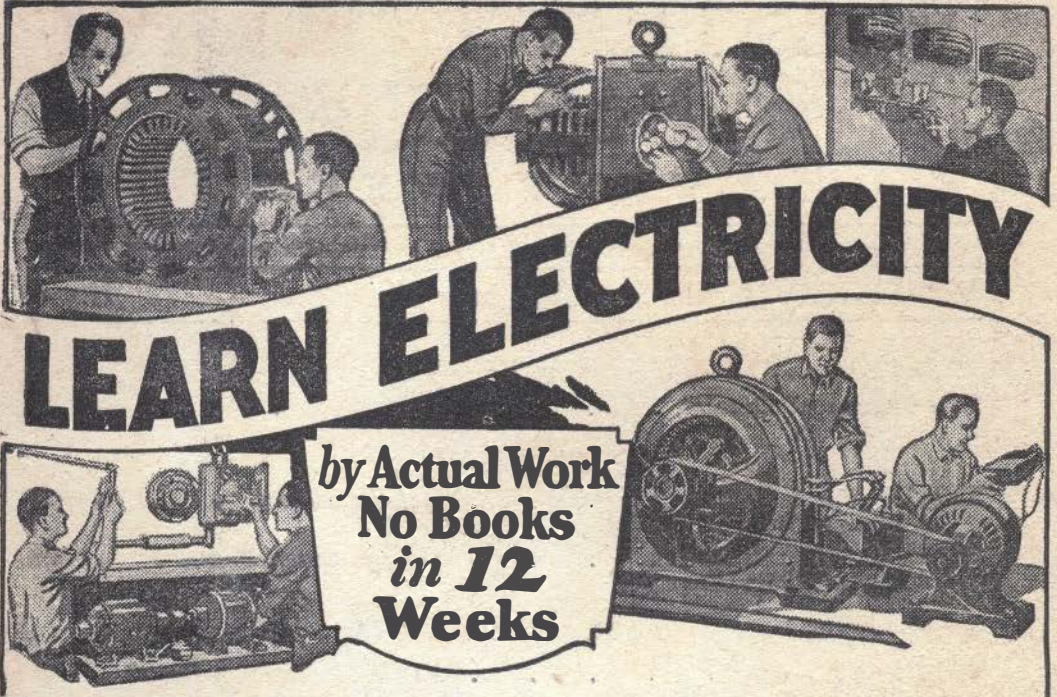
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# but when I started to play the laugh was on them!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## They Poke Fun at Me

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

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

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

"Come over to my house some night," said Harry. "I've got an electric player and you can play it to your heart's content. And I just bought a couple

of new rolls. One is a medley of Victor Herbert's compositions—the other . . ."

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

## I Taught Myself

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

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

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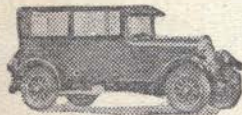
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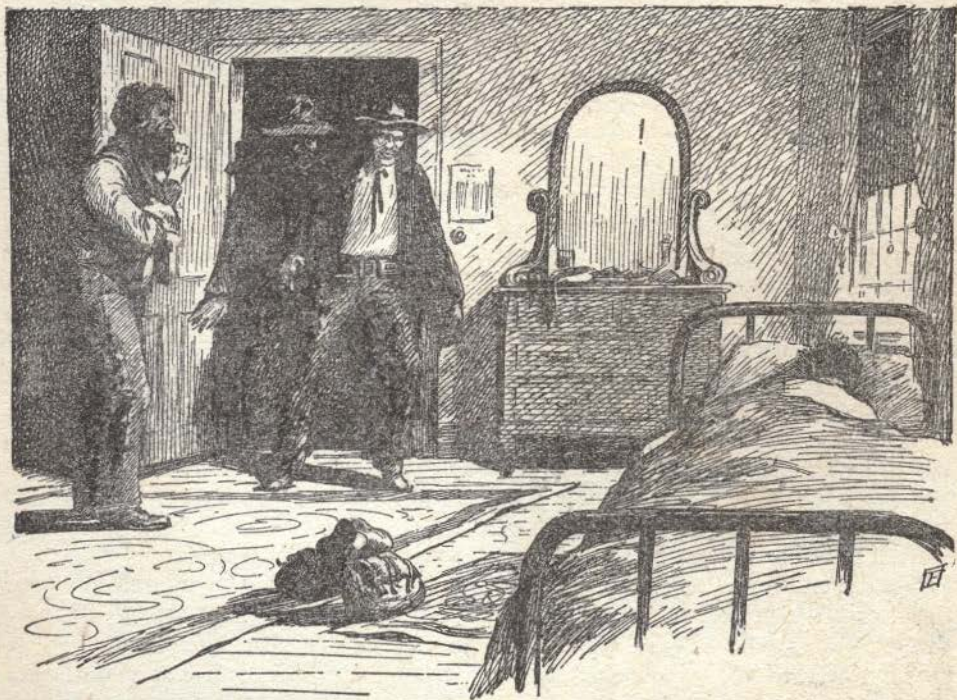
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# The Return of Geraldí

By Max Brand

Author of "The Trail to Manhood," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

### HOW THE TRAINER FEELS.



As they came up to the brow of the hill, Cullen raised a hand to warn his companion, then dismounted. When Darcy had imitated him, they tethered the horses in a clump of poplars and went forward, scouting carefully until they came to the sky line itself. There, lying flat, Cullen wriggled forward through the grass, with Darcy a length behind him.

Finally they paused, when the dip of the valley descended beneath their eyes to a strip of swift water, ruffled with white by rapids here and there. It was

a naked valley floor, beneath the edges of the tall woods that clothed the hill-sides, except for one lofty island of silver spruce in the very center. And at the edge of this island there was moored a small shack of logs.

One could see the sawbuck behind the shack, the white streak of sawdust beneath it; the corral, composed of marvelously irregular logs and branches, some running from post to post, and some thrust into the ground as a mere brush entanglement, loosely surrounded by a little lean-to which, apparently, had to serve as shelter for the horse or horses that would serve the master of such a place as this.

There was no horse in the corral at this moment, but they could see the

black mark where one's impatient wanderings up and down near the bars had rubbed off the surface grass.

"Whoever this gent is," said Darcy, "he ain't got but one hoss."

"Whatever horse he has," answered Cullen dryly, "one of it will be enough."

Darcy was generally in a position of mental inferiority to his companion, but in this case he felt the point was worth an argument.

"I dunno about one hoss," said he. "You look at the Injuns, which they knew all about travelin' fast. They went sashayin' out with six hosses apiece. I dunno how you say one hoss can be enough. Neighbors is sort of scarce, out this a ways!"

He waved to the mountains behind them, over which they had come during this day's march. They seemed to crowd closer as the two looked back; they seemed to thrust out elbows and knees toward the pair, but both of them knew how many a bitter long mile stretched between.

"I'll tell you," said Cullen, after hesitating as though this argument were hardly worth consideration. "I'll tell you, Darcy. How far can a puma run?"

"Oh, they can run a good pair of miles. They're plumb lightning for a coupla furlongs. And for fifty yards they could run faster than the stone you throwed at 'em! Why, when they're started a bullet might part their hair, but it'd hardly get to the roots! That's all they need—fifty yards of sprinting to kill their colt, say! They certainly are partial to hoss!"

"Well," said the other, "look at this point of view, then. All that he needs, this fellow down below, is to have a horse than can sprint fast enough to give him a chance to make a kill. One leap, Darcy, and he finishes his game!"

"I've heard tell of such as that," muttered Darcy.

He lay flat on the grass and talked with a contented mumbling, poking at

the ground with his oddly bunched fingers, which were always collected as though he were trying to pick up some very small object. He allowed his companion to keep the lookout for the sake of which they had come here.

"I've heard tell of such as that," went on Darcy. "I remember when 'Champ' Logan got out of the pen after he done his stretch. He comes back to Tombstone and walks down the middle of the main drag lookin' ferocious. You know how sometimes a Christmas turkey looks, all lumpy with stuffin'? That was the way with Champ. He's got guns in pairs, beginnin' at his knees and goin' up to his chin. He's so heavy with shootin' irons that it would take two men and a boy to lift him clear of the floor. While he's still around the corner, you can hear him chimin' as he walks. He sounds like a grandfather clock bein' toted to the repair shop. Matter of fact, he'd make the prosperous beginnings of a hardware shop, this here Champ Logan would. Wherever he can't put a gun, he lays up a bowie knife.

"Well, every time Tombstone hears Champ Logan jingle, it shakes in its boots. It gets indoors and gives him the right of way. Even the mules and the hosses shy when they see him go past. And every day he walks into the saloons and tells the boys how small he's gunna carve the skunks that railroaded him up the river. But one day in comes a little sawed-off runt of a mining engineer from Pennsylvania, and bumps into Champ just when Champ is beginnin' to roar.

"Keep your voice down,' says the stranger, 'you ain't talkin' to a crowd.'

"Says Champ: 'Young feller, d'you know who you might be talkin' to?'

"Take yourself off of my foot,' says this little gent, 'or I'll kick you through the door.'

"And dog-gone me if he didn't do it! While Champ is loadin' up both hands

with .45s, the stranger steps in between and pastes him on the nose, and that walkin' hardware shop drops both the guns and begins to bleed, and the stranger turns him around and kicks him through the door, and Champ lands on the sidewalk with a crash like a fallin' stove. That same day he disappears, and Tombstone wakes up in time to start laughin' on one side of its face.

"Now, I've heard a lot of these sure-gun boys, but mostly I notice they do best when they got their gang with them. This here fellow—you ain't told me his name—I bet he's the same kind. You think he's dynamite, but I bet he's more sawdust than soup!"

This speech he made with deliberation, and with a good deal of quiet indignation, and his companion listened inattentively, only saying at the end: "Ideas are free in this country, Darcy. You can think what you please. Now lie low, because here he comes!"

Out of the distance they heard a song rapidly approaching them, and peering down through the green screen of the grass, they saw a rider gallop around the shoulder of the hill. He rode a black horse, polished with sweat until it was one flash of light against the westering sun, a stallion with the stride of a leaping cat, a high-headed king of horses which seemed to be running at its own free will, for the rider appeared to give no heed to the way, but his restless head turned a little from side to side toward the rocks, the trees, the bushes that flowed past them; so a hawk rides the upper air and peers down toward the ground.

Swiftly he came past them and was gone, with only one verse of his song ringing behind them in the ears of the watchers:

"The gold that I want is the gold of flowers—

Let them wither whenever they will;  
The silver of water that sings in the valley;  
The wings of the wind on the hill."

So he fled down the slope and wound away for the cabin beside the lofty island of trees.

Cullen looked at his companion with a faint, nervous chuckle.

"You're lying pretty low, Darcy," said he.

"Man alive, man alive!" muttered Darcy. "Is that him?"

"That's the man," said Cullen.

Darcy raised his head by jerks, as though even now he feared lest the stranger might see him from the house beneath.

"It's Gerald!" he said. "It's him! It's Gerald!"

He pushed himself up on his knees.

"It's Gerald," admitted Cullen, looking as grave as his companion, but more thoughtful.

"I thought that he was bigger," said Darcy.

"He seems big enough," said Cullen, "after you've been close to him for a while."

Darcy drew a breath and shook himself, like a dog coming out of cold water.

"It give me kind of a chill," he muttered. "Seein' him come ridin' right at us, that way. Like he was gunna go right over us!"

He laughed shakily. "Ain't more than a strip of a kid, is he?" said Darcy.

"There's enough of him," answered Cullen.

"But if he's a friend of yours," began Darcy, "why, maybe after all we got a chance of winning through!"

"He's no friend of mine," answered Cullen.

The face of the other fell. Then he shook his head in disbelief. "As if an enemy of Gerald would come lookin' him up!" he suggested.

"Off and on, for about three years, he hunted for me," said Cullen.

Darcy gasped. "Git on our hosses and break for it, then!" he suggested.

Cullen stood up.

"You chump!" cried Darcy. "He'll

see you!" and he reached up with one of his deformed hands to draw his companion down.

Cullen, however, stepped back. "Take my guns," said he. "I'm going down to pat his head and call him good dog. Then we'll see what we see!"

He took a long-barreled Colt from beneath the pit of his left arm. A smaller weapon, short but of large caliber, he took from within his vest on the same side, and then produced a slender knife with a blade as thin as a dripping of light, and supple as thought, and keen as death.

He flicked this blade with the tip of his finger and then held it close to his ear to hear the vibrations. However, in that still air even Darcy could hear it, like the faint song of a wasp in the distance.

"Why d'you peel off everything?" asked Darcy in wonder. "Suppose you get cornered—just suppose he tackles you?"

"If he tackles me," said Cullen, "I'm a dead man, anyway. But if I go without my weapons, I'll have an air of conscious virtue, as one might say, and that air will do me a good deal of good with Gerald."

"You're gunna go down and face him?" asked Darcy. "You got your nerve with you!" he broke out in involuntary admiration.

"I have my nerve with me," smiled Cullen, though he had lost a good deal of color.

"Aw, I know how you feel," said Darcy.

"How do I feel, then?"

"I remember seein' a animal tamer. He was in a circus that hit Tucson, and the way he went in and kicked the bears in the face and pulled the tails of the lions and booted the tigers out of the way, it was wonderful to watch. He had to have half a dozen of 'em in the ring at once with him, and he made 'em do somersaults, and stand on their heads

and mix drinks, and pretty near everything. But after that was all over he put on his biggest stunt. He got a couple of assistants with long iron spears, and he went over with a loaded gun in one hand and a club in the other and went into the cage of the black panther. Why, you couldn't hardly see where it was before that. It was just a pool of shadow on the floor. But that pool untangled itself and turned into a black leopard and didn't say nothin', but only looked. Well, the trainer, he pasted himself agin' the bars, right up agin' the door, and he talked mighty soft; and then he fired the pistol a couple of times; and after a while the panther he put up one paw on the stool that he was supposed to get up and set on. He put up one paw and opened his mouth, and you seen his teeth, like icicles, thin and sharp. Still he didn't say nothin', but the trainer, he got out of that cage and called it a day's work. Which everybody agreed to and it was about five minutes before I got my breath again.

"Well, Cullen, I reckon that you feel like the way that trainer did?"

Cullen did not answer. He merely turned and walked rapidly down the hill.

## CHAPTER II.

### OLD ACQUAINTANCES MEET.

A BRISK charge increases the courage with the circulation. The heartbeat mounts, and the will to do with it. And that was the reason that Cullen advanced so briskly, with a swinging stride, and even managed to start whistling, though one tune died and another followed it without rhyme or reason, breaking in upon the middle.

Yet he found himself, at length, marching straight up to the door of the cabin.

The door was open. And from the top of the chimney, which leaned foolishly askew above the roof, the first

thick, white smoke of a newly kindled fire was beginning to roll.

It was nearly sunset; the sun itself was behind a western mountain and though the sky was bright, yet a pleasantly mellow dusk already had gathered like a mist in the valley. It was so dim, indeed, that Geraldí had lighted a lantern inside the hut, and this twinkled faintly through the door.

Cullen crossed the stream, stepping from stone to stone, each with a furl of swift, glassy water rising on its side, and so came to the farther bank.

There his heart suddenly failed him. He had to stop and look about him as though to admire the view, while he set his teeth and raised his courage. He succeeded, noting with a sick eye how the first sunset rose was beginning to fall in an impalpable shower on the face of a pool just above him.

He succeeded so far in his effort that he was able to whistle again, and armed with this music he approached the house.

At the door he paused and knocked. Nothing but silence answered him. He listened more closely, and was able to make out the murmur and dull roar of the fire which was increasing in the stove.

He knocked again, and there was again no answer, so that he peered into the interior. The day struggled against the glow of the lantern, so that the hut seemed as dark as a cave, yet through that murkiness he could distinguish the vague outlines of pots hanging on the wall, the gleam of a rifle that leaned in a corner, and one red eye of fire that looked through a crack of the stove.

"Old Harry Cullen!" said a voice behind him. "Jolly Harry Cullen; brave Harry Cullen again!"

The heart of Cullen stopped; the cold cheerfulness of that voice had iced all the blood in his body. He moistened his dry lips as he turned, and there he saw Geraldí before him.

Years had not altered him. There

was the same slender body, the same handsome face, the same dark eyes, lighted now and again, the same sense of inward power, inward surety, such as takes men safely through hosts of danger.

"And how are you, Harry?" said Geraldí.

Cullen moved his right hand slightly, but did not put it forth, for suddenly he realized that Darcy had been totally right. He had stepped into the cage of a panther, and his one wish was to conclude the performance by escaping with his life!

"I'm well enough," said Cullen.

He managed to smile.

"But I feel as though I might have a sudden attack," he added.

"Of fatigue," said Geraldí, and his own smile was as cold as that of a comedy actor who is tired of his part. "You're tired of walking, of course. I suppose you've come a long distance, Harry?"

"When a man's on a tight wire," said Cullen, "the distance he has gone doesn't matter so much as his height from the ground. Suppose we go inside the house and sit down?"

"I'm afraid you wouldn't like the inside of the house as well as the outside," replied Geraldí. "It's just a shack, and a little stuffy, now, with the stove going. It's pleasanter out here; gives a man and his ideas more elbow-room, eh?"

He gestured toward the brilliant sky and the mountains; and Cullen noted that the gesture was with the left hand. Furthermore, the glance of Geraldí did not wander from the face of Cullen for an instant. Like a prize fighter, he looked the other constantly in the eye, thereby keeping his every move in mind.

"And if you're tired," said Geraldí, "there's a good stump for you."

He pointed, but Cullen shook his head.

"I'm not too tired to keep on my

feet," said he. "What have you done, Jimmy? Turned yourself into a Westerner?"

"I'm a Westerner by nature," said Gerald. "It didn't need any turning to make me one in fact."

"You know all their ways, Jimmy?"

"Pretty much. Houses and horses and women are sacred. Those are the three chief tenets of the great Western faith."

"How is that?"

"Horses and women must not be stolen, old fellow; and a man never offers you his house until he's ready to offer you his hand."

"Ah?" said Cullen.

He nodded and smiled in a casual manner, but he felt that he understood now why Gerald had not asked him into the shack.

"Grand place here, Jimmy," went on Cullen. "This what you use for a hunting lodge?"

"This is where I'm going to build."

"Family house?"

"Yes. I'm to be married in a month or so. Only out here, Harry, to find the right spot, and this is it!"

"Gerald married!" said Cullen. "Well, well, that's hard to imagine. Offhand, I'd lay you on that. A thousand dollars to a hundred that you're not married inside the year."

"Long-distance bets are risky things," answered Gerald. "Accidents happen before a year is out. Some of us might die at any moment, Cullen!"

He said it without emphasis, but Cullen shivered as he listened to the soft, caressing voice; he knew the threat was aimed at his own head.

"We'll drop the bet, then, if you want. D'you think that you'll be happy out here, Jimmy, away from all the excitement?"

"I have enough memory of excitement," replied Gerald. "My life has been fairly crowded, Harry."

"Yes, of course, it has been. You've

been at work from Rio to Capetown, old fellow."

"And from Capetown to the River Min!" said Gerald with emphasis.

Cullen stiffened.

"This very moment," said Gerald, "I can see a Chinese junk swing down the Min and crash straight through the little boat I was sailing. Do you know, Harry, that when I looked up at the prow of the junk, it seemed to me that I could recognize your face there, leaning over the rail?"

He paused. Cullen, knowing that the fatal moment had come at last, looked swiftly into his mind, and deep.

Then he nodded.

"I was there," said he.

"You must have been surprised to see me on the little launch, then! Must have cut you to the heart, Harry, to see me tumbled into the water! But then, you knew perfectly well that I was a good swimmer!"

"I did," said Cullen. "That was why I kept shooting at your head every time you came to the surface to breathe. If the captain of the junk hadn't acted like a cowherd more than a sailor, I would have bagged you that day, Jimmy!"

Gerald smiled; real joy appeared in his face as he remarked: "You're a truth-teller, old man. You go up hundreds of per cents in my mind!"

"Thanks!" said Cullen. "They offered me eight thousand dollars for that job. Four down and four if I finished it off."

"Ah, Harry," said Gerald. "Am I as cheap as that? Now I've turned a corner, I see, and can look at the truth about myself. That's how they bid for me, is it? Four thousand for a shot at Jimmy; eight if they take him!"

"You were a lot younger then, Jimmy," said Cullen. "You hadn't become an international institution. You didn't represent the new culture, I may say. Kleinroth hadn't tried himself against you, at that time; Durkin was



still the diamond king; and Lafarge still lived in the Trois Echelles."

"Three rare fellows! Three rare fellows!" said Geraldi. "Of course, one doesn't have company like that out here. But women, horses, and houses never were sacred to any of the lot, I dare say. I heard that Durkin was crippled."

"He was," said Cullen. "He has only one leg; he lives in an attic in a little Dutch town, and he's hired the children of the neighborhood to let him know if he is being searched for by a young man with a dark, fine face——"

"I love an optimist," said Geraldi, "but after all, every chance is a step covered with ice, and sooner or later a fellow may miss his footing—and roll all the way to the bottom—or all the way to destruction!"

"Durkin rolled all the way to destruction," said Cullen. "I never saw Kleinroth; but I knew a fellow who knew another, who saw a body taken out of the Seine. Only one mark on him. A very narrow, deep knife wound at the base of the throat."

"D'you mean that Kleinroth was that dead body?" asked Geraldi.

"Well, there was no beard on the face of the man who was picked from the river. But about the chin and cheeks the skin was pale, as if he might have been shaved recently. I'm surprised you didn't hear about the affair, because it happened just after you reached Paris from Algiers. I don't suppose you know about Lafarge, either?"

"Charming fellow, Lafarge! No, what happened to him?"

"He's in Bucharest, keeping a pawnshop and building himself up in the world again. He's not like Kleinroth. His spirit was broken, but it's on the mend again, I believe!"

"Delighted to hear it," said Geraldi. "But now to speak of your visit, Harry? It seems that you left your guns behind you—to lighten you for the march, perhaps? But that's dangerous! In this

wild country one should be prepared for self-defense. Here's a Colt, Harry. Will you take it?"

With his left hand, from somewhere in his clothes he produced a revolver and held it out, handle first, toward the other. Cullen, with a blanched face, maintained a smile nevertheless.

Said he at last: "A gun wouldn't help me—here! But there's a story waiting up yonder on that hill, Jimmy. I'm the forlorn hope that came on to get your ear. Will you let me call my partner down here?"

He tried to meet the blazing eye of Geraldi, but his glance wavered sadly. Suddenly he held out his hands, palms up.

"Do you think that I would have got into the same cage with you, Jimmy, if I hadn't had something that's more to your taste than even the revenge that you want from me? Man, man, you're going to settle down and marry the woman you love; that'll be the end of your adventures. But before that happens, I want you to step into a story out of the 'Arabian Nights.' You're the one man who could do the trick. Will you listen to the yarn. But if that doesn't tempt you, and you want me—go on! I'm not fool enough to try to stand up against you!"

He closed his eyes, waiting, wavering a little where he stood. It was a long silence that followed. Then the voice of Geraldi, quick and hard: "Call him down, Harry. You win this first trick, but the game's not over until I hear the story!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### AN IMPOSSIBLE JOB.

SHADOWS possessed all the valley, but the afterglow lingered in the sky, where three separate towers of cloud burned from foundation to turret, making the stream below run softly golden and rose. In this delightful

dusk sat the three men on three low stumps before the cabin, Cullen and Geraldini intent upon one another, Darcy only interested in the story which he was telling.

"You know the Naylor's?" asked Darcy.

"No," said Geraldini.

"You've heard about 'em, though?"

"Yes. What everybody hears. That they have enough beef running on their range to feed the whole nation for a week, and that they run their own affairs without a sheriff, a judge, or a jury."

"That's what they do. They write their own laws in gun smoke, and the periods is bullets, Geraldini. Anything else you've heard?"

"Why, yes. I've heard that those who go in stay in; no one comes out."

"No one comes out," said Darcy. "No one comes out!" he repeated solemnly. "That's a thing worth remembering, too. No one comes out unless he's turned into a Naylor that won't change his color."

"That won't talk, d'you mean?"

"I mean that. But me, Geraldini, I went into their land, and I come out, and here I sit to tell you what I seen and heard and did."

He said it with an odd commingling of fear and of exultation, making a gesture with both his deformed hands.

"I'll start at the beginning. I'd been taking a pretty good rest in a sanitarium where the grub was free, and the rooms free, too. The name of it is Folsom. Maybe you've heard of it?"

"I've known a couple of the doctors there—and several of the patients," said Geraldini pleasantly. "They insist on exercise, I believe?"

"Breakin' rocks is their main hold. Well, I was turned loose at last, and went down Frisco way to look things over and get used to turning any corner I pleased. Got a ferryboat from Oakland Pier, and the first thing I hear is

some one singin' a cowboy song. I go aft and there, in a cleared space with a lot of folks standin' around and laughin', is a puncher from Texas way—I could tell by his get up as plain as print. He had a five-gallon hat on his head, and the bulge of his gun was printed agin' his coat tails every time he spun around. He was dancin' and singin' and carryin' on in a mighty fool way, but it looked good to me, because I hadn't seen a gent with such a pile aboard him for a long time.

"His feet got faster while his balance got worse, until finally his knees hit the guard chain at the tail end of the deck. He tumbled over, rolled, and flopped into the water of the bay.

"'Done for,' says I to myself, and takes a header after him.

"Well, when I come up, that Texan was swimmin' fine and easy because the cold water had shocked the booze out of his brain. He laid alongside of me and laughed and thanked me for jumpin' in to help him, and hoped that the sharks wouldn't dine off of the pair of us. Because if they didn't, he said that he was gunna give me a bust in Frisco that would make the smoke curl higher than the *Call Building*.

"Pretty soon they got a boat down and picked us up, and cussed out 'Texas' pretty bad, until he stood up in the stern sheets and told that bunch as they rowed back to the ferryboat that he was a Texas Naylor, and that if he didn't like a ferryboat, he reserved the right to step off of her, no matter where she was. That quieted down things, and finally we got across the bay and hit Frisco with a bang that pretty soon echoed all over the old hills of the town. We spent about ten days circulating moisture through our systems, and when we finally got pretty damp, we decided that the town wasn't big enough to hold us, so we started south. Jerry Naylor, which was his name, asked me to come out to his place. He

explained things pretty good to me about the people that went in never coming out until old Naylor that run the place decided they was right. I said to Jerry that wherever he was, was where I wanted to be.

"So we stepped off the train, finally, and was met by a buckboard and drove two days back of nowhere through desert and hills and mountains, and grazing lands and forest. We touched fire the first day and snow the second, and the third morning we rolled up to the Naylor main ranch house.

"It looked ornery enough, and the paint was all sun-boiled off in patches, and the front garden is planted with hitchin' posts and plowed up by the hosses that have pawed the ground into holes. There is a coupla dozen mangy-lookin' chickens takin' dust baths, and three or four poison-faced broncs at the racks, droppin' one hip and saggin' the lower lip. Right away I says that this looks like home.

"Inside there's the same sort of a picture that you'd expect in such a frame. The floors was wore to splinters, the chairs was tied up with balin' wire, old clothes was hanging from pegs on the walls of every room, and take it all the way through, that place was plumb comfortable and easy-goin.

"We rested a coupla days and then I started to get used to the range.

"The spring round-up was about due, and I worked into that and had a pretty good time. I got a chance to make myself right with old Naylor, too. That's Pike Naylor. He's a pretty picture of a man. Nature never done a more careless job than his face; and what with age and hoss kicks, his teeth have been removed without no dentist's help, and his beak of a nose shuts right down on his chin. He looks as though he's always smilin', which he's doin' the opposite.

"But durin' the round-up a batch of greasers sneaked over from across the

river and started to run off a bunch of cows. I was the lucky one to spot their back trail, and when it come to the party I managed to nail one of 'em.

"After that old Naylor took me in and had a talk with me, and said he figgered Jerry was right about me, after all, that bein' the first time Jerry ever had been right in his life, so he deserved a lot of credit. But old Pike said that I was enough of a man for even Jerry to make me out without raised type, and Pike says that he's gonna fix me good and place me right.

"Well, what he done was put me on the inside guard, which was three gents that never done nothin' but hang around in the cellar of the main house and keep an eye onto Pike's safe. That safe filled up one whole end of the cellar room that it was kept in. Pike kept everything there. He'd hauled in that safe on a special wagon with a whole flock of oxen about fifty year before, and by this time the safe is all full of money and business of all kinds.

"Well, the three of us stand eight-hour watches, and the other two are a hard pair of boys, I can tell you, and I ain't tender enough to fry, myself. That is the prize job on the ranch. We get double pay. We get one day a week off. We have a greaser to look after us. We get extra special chow, and a lot of attention from the girls whenever we ride to the town. I mean, Naylor's town.

"I'm sittin' pretty, you might say, but all the same, that was a mighty lonely job. And the more I sat there in the cellar, the more I get to wondering what's inside of that safe? And the more I wonder about that, the more close I look at the safe itself. It's a cinch. It ain't a job for soap and soup. It's just for a can opener, and for an old hand like me it's nothin' at all.

"Well, once the idea got into my head, I couldn't get it out. I played with the thought day and night, and so

one night it happened. I cracked that old safe wide open and stepped inside!

"There was a lot of drawers filled with papers, but there was a lot filled with other stuff. There was gold. Piles of it! There was silverwork, and such things, too. But all that weighed too much to be worth while. The paper money was better. I didn't count, but if I didn't rake out a quarter of a million in yallerbacks, I'm a liar and don't know my business.

"But that wasn't the best. There was family jewels! Partly they'd been bought for the weddings of Pike's daughters and nieces and granddaughters, and they rested there in the safe, because what chance is there to show off sparklers in Naylor's range? Partly they wasn't family stuff. There was jeweled crosses, and jeweled robes which, if they didn't come from the lootin' of churches, I'm blind, and don't know what I see. But there was drawers and drawers filled with loose diamonds, and rubies, and emeralds, and sapphires, so's you could dip your hands down into 'em. The fact is that old Pike is sold on jewels. Or maybe he figgers that some day he'll have to make a quick start and leave for a better country.

"Well, sir, when I seen this, I didn't stop to think. I loaded up and carried goodness knows how much in the sack when I left. A million—two million—I dunno. Enough to make you choke, only thinkin' about it!"

He closed his eyes with a soft groan.

"I get on my best hoss, a buckskin son of the north wind, and I streak for the outside. Maybe I would've done it, with luck, but they must've spotted me the minute I started. I looked back, and see the signal fires burning from the hill behind the house, and I see the answers from the hills.

"Well, I went on, because there is no turnin' back. I ride straight on, all that night and all the next day, and

just in the twilight I run into rifle bullets that roll the buckskin, and throw me half dead into the gully.

"When I come to, they're all around me, and Jerry is pleadin' for my life.

"'Sure,' says one of 'em. 'We ain't gunna kill him.'

"They didn't, either. But they found a handy tree where two branches went away from the trunk, and they ties my legs to the trunk with a rawhide lariat, and they drive a pair of big spikes through the palms of my mitts——"

He stopped, and raised his hands a little, with the fingers puckered together as though they were making ready to pick up something small.

"There I hang," said Darcy, "until I go blind with pain and bleedin'. And it was there that a pair of greasers found me. Cattle rustlers, but they had a heart! They had time to put me down, after pullin' the spike through my hands! They took me outside. And here I sit and tell you about it!"

"And why tell me?" asked Gerald.

"Because it's a one-man job," said Darcy. "It's a job for one man that can make himself mighty important and get into the guard job, the way that I did. And then open the safe—and get away!"

"It sounds simple. Am I the one man?" asked Gerald dryly.

"Mind you, there'd be help," said Darcy. "There'd be Jerry, that's tired of the inside, and wants to go outside. He's got a girl, I guess. There's Jerry that'll play the game with you, no matter how you want it played, if he can be sure of enough of a split to make it worth his while! He's been turned loose once, but he never will be ag'in, because the old man won't never trust him ag'in. He thinks Jerry had a hand in my job."

Gerald shook his head.

"I've never heard of such a plant," said he. "A guarded safe, surrounded by a country two days' ride in diameter,

and filled with armed men under one head! That's an impossible job, Cullen!"

"Of course it is," said Cullen, "and that's why I brought it to you, because I knew that anything smaller never would tempt you!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### A LADY IN A DILEMMA.

THE night was still and hot. Under the arcades of the old patio smoky lanterns burned, but in the central portion, where most of the little tables had been placed, the moonlight was brilliant, striking on a smile, a flash of eyes, or the gleam of a lifted glass. Chiefly these were Mexican or half-breed girls of the village, peons, Mexican and American cow-punchers in from the neighboring ranches, and a few people of better station.

"Think that such bad beer has brought so many people out!" said Cullen.

"Not the beer, Harry," answered Gerald, "but the moon. See how the incense goes up to it from every table!"

"You mean the cigarette smoke?"

"Cigarette smoke by day, but incense on a night like this, worship of the great goddess, religious devotion——"

"Oh, rot," broke in Cullen. "I'm half stifled!"

"You have the thick Northern blood," said Gerald. "This air is delightful to your true Southerner. It kisses the face, it makes clothes unnecessary armor to the true habitué, while the Northern distills in drops and sticks to his chair."

Cullen stirred uneasily.

"Speaking of clothes, you have enough of 'em for a fancy-dress party."

Gerald looked down complacently on his tight Mexican jacket on which the metal lacing flashed.

"I'm in a country where I don't wish to be known. Beyond my bounds, but still, some eye might recognize me!"

"So you put a spotlight on yourself with all those childish trimmings!"

"There's nothing like a spotlight to dissolve the features," said Gerald. "Dress me up soberly, and I'll wager two or three of these people would recognize me, but now I look like a Mexican dandy, and I can speak enough Spanish to fill the part."

"You look like——" began Cullen irritably, and then checked himself. "But what are you going to do? When are you going to make up your mind? In the meantime, we've ridden on day after day, until we're on the edge of the Naylor place. This little town, I'll wager, is under their thumb, for that matter. What are you going to do? When are you going to reach a decision?"

"There's always time for the man who expects to jump off the bridge," said Gerald. "In the first place, I need a good excuse for riding into the Naylor place."

"If you ride into the Naylor place without being invited, you'll simply be stopped by a bullet."

"What do you suggest?"

"Wait till you're invited. You can do something that'll make them see you're an expert rider and a fine shot. That's all they want. In a week, you'll be invited in as a member of the gang."

"And that's what I don't want," said Gerald.

"You don't want it? Then you don't intend to go at all?"

Gerald, tapped his lean fingers rapidly on the top of the table and raising his eyes thoughtfully toward the upper line of the hotel, where a great squat adobe tower bulked black against the moonlit sky.

"I don't want to sneak into the place as a friend. I want to go boldly, as I please, with just a sufficient excuse to keep from being shot as a spy. I don't want to sneak into the confidence of old Naylor, as our friend Darcy did. If possible—if I go at all on the job—

I want to be an honorable thief! What are they whispering about so much?"

He said this to the waiter, who was passing by.

The waiter was a dapper little Mexican, who now paused at their table.

"They are all grinning and whispering at the tower," said Gerald in Spanish, "as if they expected the tower to laugh back at them. What's wrong with it?"

"A girl," said the waiter.

"That's a complaint," agreed Gerald, "but I didn't know that it bothered adobe bricks."

"There's a girl inside," said the waiter. "Locked up, with a man outside her door to see that she stays there. There's her father now, who came down and caught her here this evening——"

He nodded his head toward a lumbering man with all the aspect of a rancher who had just entered the patio, hat in hand, mopping his face with a bandanna.

"She's a runaway?"

"Señor, I know nothing, except that she has been here for three days, and gone to the post office five times every day. Some say that Señor Jerry Naylor—but I know nothing. That is always the best way!"

He chuckled and went on.

"This moon," said Gerald to his companion, "breeds such affairs. That's why the incense——"

"Bah!" said Cullen, and fell into a study.

"Why are you so worried?" said Gerald. "Are you figuring up your percentage already?"

"My percentage? I have my percentage," smiled Cullen. "I've learned that I can sit down with the panther and pat his head without having my hand taken off. That's enough profit for me. I'm able to sleep at night, now, without a picture of Jimmy Gerald climbing through the window with a knife between his teeth."

"Yes," said Gerald frankly, "that's

an advantage. Hello, sir. Here's an extra chair, if you want to sit down."

The father of the delinquent girl had been wandering here and there in the crowded patio, looking for a seat. Now he paused, peered hard at the two, and accepted the proffered place with a grunt of satisfaction.

He turned away from them as he waited for his beer, as though he did not wish to break into or overhear the conversation of the two, from time to time mopping a fat, handsome face that glistened with continual perspiration. But after he had drained half his beaker of beer and sighed contentedly, he broke out:

"It's a cold drink, anyway. If they got nothing else, they got ice."

"They have ice," agreed Cullen politely.

"But it takes more than ice to cool down the girls in this part of the world, I guess. Cool 'em off to good sense, and keep 'em from bein' as flighty as birds. You know about what's happened. Everybody here does, I reckon, so you don't have to look polite and blank."

"About your daughter, you mean?" said Cullen.

"The little minx!" said the other. "Not eighteen—and this! But I got her, and she ain't gunna get away. Not eighteen, and I still got the law on my side. Another month, and she could've snapped her fingers in my face. Would've, most likely! For a Naylor, too! For that wo'thless Jerry Naylor, of the whole lot!"

He fumed at the thought, and drained off the rest of his beer at a draft.

"Dances and magazines," said the rancher. "As sure as my name is Ben Thomas, dances and magazines—the fool dances and the fool stories they do! Their heads get full of men. Plumb disgustin'. But I got her now. Unless young Naylor is a bird that can fly as high as that tower."

"He might climb, though," suggested Geraldí suddenly.

Mr. Thomas looked at the speaker with a sneer.

"D'you think you could climb it?" he asked.

Geraldí considered.

"Here's twenty dollars," said Thomas, "that says you couldn't."

He slid the golden coin out on the table, adding cheerfully: "Don't let that hold you back, if you hanker to make the try!"

A second twenty-dollar piece appeared as if by magic from under the hand of Geraldí.

"What shall I say to her when I get up there?" he asked, pointing to the narrow window of the tower.

"Give her my love," said the rancher, grinning, "and tell her I hope she sleeps well because she's gunna take a long ride to-morrow."

Geraldí nodded. He stood up from the chair, removed his hat, and slicked back his hair, while he noted the features of the wall before him.

"I'll tell her that," he said, "and then we'll have an extra twenty for beer."

"Hold on," said Cullen. "You're not going to break your neck, Jimmy?"

"Cats always fall on their feet," said Geraldí, his teeth flashing in a smile that was grimly familiar to Cullen.

Then he crossed the patio and stood beneath the tower.

There were no climbing vines to help him, but only the surface irregularities of the adobe wall, the edges of some bricks projecting well beyond their neighbors. He tugged the boots from his feet, took off his tight jacket, and suddenly leaped high up and caught a projecting ridge. And, to use his own metaphor, as a cat jumps and clings to a tree trunk, so he seemed to jump and cling.

After that, smoothly, rapidly, he went up the wall.

It was not half so hard as it had

seemed from the ground, for the old tower had settled to the farther side, letting the weight of his body have an excellent support as he climbed. There were two windows, also, to help him, and presently he had reached the upper embrasure.

There he paused and looked back to the patio beneath.

They were all on their feet, laughing, clapping, applauding. The moon was so bright that it showed him the fat mouth of Ben Thomas, agape as he stood beside his chair.

He turned back toward the window itself.

It was closed. The old glass panes were set crookedly in their frames. Dust and the dissolving dobe itself, perhaps, had formed a little coil here, and out of it grew a sparse amount of grass, and little weeds.

He reached in and tapped at the panes.

Then he waited. No light showed on the inside of the room, only faint reflections of the moon gleamed dull and faint upon the windowpanes. He began to have an odd feeling that the girl already had left the place, but he knocked again.

Then he thought he heard a stealthy footfall; eventually the windows were drawn open with a jerk that set the frames trembling and shuddering. A faint breeze blew upon the neck and shoulders of Geraldí as the draft set in from behind him, and he heard the fluttering of paper inside the chamber.

But these things—oh, fickle heart of man!—were not what interested Geraldí. Instead, he was straining his eyes to see more clearly the pretty face of the girl before him, and he was breathing deep of a certain delicate fragrance of perfume that tinged the air with delight.

But all was shadow and dimness, until she spoke and seemed thereby to throw a light upon herself.

## CHAPTER V.

## BOTH HANDS AT TWELVE.

SHE was perfectly careless and assured.

"Hello, handsome," said she. "What threw you up here?"

"A twenty-dollar bet," said Gerald. "And a lot of pity for a poor girl locked up in a tower."

"That sounds pretty fairy-story to me," said the girl. "Even if they built towers of brass, and hired a flock of dragons to guard the roads, still, along would come a knight and break up everything and ride her away on the wind. I hear them laughing downstairs. Is this a show?"

"Fools," said Gerald, "laugh for the lack of occupation. Now that I'm up here, your father asked me to say good night to you and to tell you that he expects you'll sleep well."

"Sure, I'll sleep," said she. "But what a donkey I was to stay here and let him catch up! Who are you, partner?"

"I'm a man out of a job," said Gerald diplomatically, "and wondering who will hire me."

"The ranches are always looking for good men."

"I'm lazy," said Gerald. "That idea doesn't sound to me at all!"

"What do you want to do?"

"A long ride would suit me. But with company, Miss Thomas. I'm a lonesome fellow, you see."

"Lazy and lonely," smiled the girl—faintly he could see the flash of that smile—"but who are you?"

"A man with a fast horse," said he, "and a great fancy for riding at night."

"At night?"

"Also, I'm a friend."

"Jerry!" she burst out in whispering exultation. "Jerry sent you?"

"Not Jerry, but luck put me here—and a twenty-dollar bet, as I told you before."

"Speak soft, soft!" said she. "There's a rat at the door."

"He may grow sleepy to-night."

"What d'you mean?"

"That I'm coming for you, after midnight. Will you be awake?"

"Wide awake! You really will come?"

"I've promised."

"And then what?"

"We'll ride for the Naylor place, if that's where you want to go."

"But Jerry—he didn't send you?"

"Lazy men are always bored," he told her. "This will give us a chance for action. Suppose I climb up here to-night and bring a rope. Could you lower yourself down it?"

"I can handle my weight on my hands," she assured him. "But horses! We'll need fast horses!"

"What did you bring with you?"

"A little two-stepping pinto, not worth a cent."

"I'll have a fast horse for you. Remember, it will be after midnight."

"Man, man," said she, "as though I could sleep after this!"

He began the descent, but to climb down a steep place is always far more difficult than to mount. Halfway to the bottom his left hand lost its hold, the jerk knocked his feet loose, and he dangled loosely by one hand.

A yell went up from the patio, but in another moment he had secured grips again, and swarmed rapidly down the rest of the way. He passed through a small ovation of cheers, clapping hands, smiling faces, back to the table where he had left Cullen and Ben Thomas.

"Young fellow," said Thomas, "you're about as much monkey as man, or you couldn't've done that. Here's the twenty and welcome. Did you see Elsa up there?"

"I saw Elsa; gave her your message, and then listened a while. She's a little excited, Mr. Thomas!"

"Sure she is," said the father com-



placently. "She's been excited her whole life. Hosses—men—dances—riding—anything'll excite her. I aim to expect that she's namin' her opinion of me mighty free and liberal, just about now."

"She has her ideas," said Gerald. "Sit down. There's more beer somewhere about."

"Not me!" replied Ben Thomas. "If that wall has been climbed once, it can be climbed ag'in. I'm gunna set myself here and keep a clear head. If I close one eye before the mornin' comes, my name ain't Ben Thomas. That's all!"

Geraldi bit his lip, but shortly after he withdrew from the patio, and Cullen went with him, to walk up and down in the greater coolness outside the building.

"Why did you do it, Jimmy?" asked Cullen. "Riskyed your neck, made every one look at you, and put our whole game in danger!"

"I needed a passport for the Naylor place," replied Gerald, "and that girl will be one."

"Are you going to steal her?"

"Of course I am. And your horse for her to ride on. There'll be a pinto left behind for you."

Cullen clasped his hands behind his back.

"You're going to do it, then, Jimmy? You're going to tackle the Naylor outfit?"

Geraldi laughed and nodded.

"It's my duty," said he.

"Duty?"

"You see how the matter stands, Harry? I used to be one of the fellows who lived outside the law, but now I'm to be married and settle down——"

Cullen coughed sarcastically.

"——I have to enforce the laws, you see."

"By going to rob a safe?"

"That's a rough way of putting it, Harry. Looked at from another angle,

I can't sit quietly when there are people about who crucify living men who are no worse than other thieves. They need a lesson, and I ought to give them one!"

"Of course you should," grinned Cullen. "A rare lesson that they won't forget. But tell me, how am I to help?"

"You are to raise a row because your horse has been stolen. Tell the people about here that you don't know who I am. I'm only a Mexican rascal who met on the road and took on for company's sake. You think I'm probably a professional thief and cattle rustler. In the meantime, look about for a horse to take the place of the one you've lost. Get more than one. Get three or four, while you're about it!"

"And why three or four, Jimmy?"

"Because one of these days you may see some puffs of smoke ride up into the air from the hills toward the Naylor place. If we come out at all, we'll be coming on tired horses, and a change will be useful. Three puffs, we come down the river. Four puffs, we keep the hills north of this town."

"What about one or two puffs?"

"City eyes like yours wouldn't see them, probably. Besides, puffs of smoke are apt to go up from newly lighted camp fires, you know."

"And if it's at night?"

"A fire built strong and high on one of the hills will show you. You can catch a fire signal more easily than a smoke signal. A blanket will make the fire wink clearly enough."

Cullen muttered something to himself.

"What's that?" asked Gerald.

"Tell me, Jimmy. D'you really want the money out of this affair, or is it only a game?"

"Money?" said Gerald lightly. "I never robbed for money in my life! Good night, Harry, because I'm getting up betimes, as the good old books say!"

So he left Cullen, went up to his room in the hotel, and hung his watch from the cross rod at the foot of the bed.

Then he flung himself down, crossed his hands behind his head, and straightway was asleep.

There were many noises in the old building. There was singing in the halls as the other guests went to bed late, and there were slammings of doors and creakings of floors and screeching of chairs, hastily shoved back from tables. But through all this commotion, Jimmy Geraldí slept like a child.

The hotel, in fact, was utterly still when he wakened with a start and sat up in bed. He scratched a match, and the spurt of the flame showed the hands of the watch joined at twelve.

At this he smiled a little, satisfied with that guard which had kept watch during his subconsciousness.

After that he rose, made up his pack swiftly, and carrying his boots in his hand, went down the stairs and into the stable. There he saddled the black stallion, and the tall, strong bay horse which Cullen had been using on the trip. He made the stirrups short for the girl, and then left the two horses standing loose in their stalls. It was possible that they might get into trouble with the other animals in the barn, but this chance had to be taken.

When he left the barn there was a clear sky above him, powdered with white stars; all lights were out in the hotel; and the windows on the western side of it were gleaming black and silver against the face of the moon.

He went to the entrance of the patio, but in the farthest corner, as he peeked in, he saw the stalwart form of Mr. Ben Thomas, who kept vigil there, true to his promise, and with a riot gun in his lap, to give point to his presence.

Geraldí did not disturb him, but fading back into the hotel, he slipped up the stairs in his noiseless, stockinged feet until he reached the winding steps of the tower.

Here he went almost as slowly as the minute hand of a clock, giving the

pressure of his weight only by infinite slow degrees to each of the wooden steps. They gave out noise in every instance, but the noises were so widely separated, so soft, so irregular in recurrence, that it was rather like the noises made when a rising wind begins to press against a house.

So he came up until his head was on a level with the floor of the top hall.

Fumes of tobacco already had warned him that the guard probably was wide awake, and so he found him.

He sat with his chair tilted back against the wall, a lantern hanging from a peg beside his head, a cigarette between his lips, and a magazine folded on his lap.

The story he perused must have interested the tow-headed youth greatly, for he bit his lips and scowled with excitement as he turned the page—then suddenly lifted his head and looked straight at the face of Geraldí!

But the shadows were too thick to be penetrated, and immediately the guard dropped his head again.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AWAY!

THE guard had seen nothing in the shadows; in reality he had been looking straight into the face of death, for Geraldí's hand was filled, not with a gun, but with a small knife, whose handle was weighted to drive home the blow when the weapon was flung.

For an instant the blade trembled on the flat of Geraldí's hand, but the tremor passed and presently the knife returned to its sheath as the guard resumed his reading.

Geraldí renewed his advance.

He moved in no haste, but rather drifted soundlessly forward without a perceptible variation from slow to fast or from fast to slow. He did not even halt when the guard raised his head suddenly and came on the alert. Geraldí

could see the neck harden and swell; he could see the shudder of cold and mortal apprehension that ran over the body of the man; and a cruel little smile appeared upon the lips of the hunter, the shadow of whose coming had fallen so visibly upon the soul of the victim.

But the instinctive warning which was working upon the mind of the guard now, at last made him start violently up. The magazine fluttered down from his hand, the leaves catching at the air like a hundred rattling little wings, and Geraldi saw the startled face turned toward him. A young face, and handsome, though rather heavy about the jaws, and with the brows strongly marked. Beneath the arch of them, frightened eyes glared out at Geraldi with terror, but with the determination to fight that whipped a hand back to the holster on the thigh.

Geraldi, in response, flicked a hand downward; the elastic of a band about his wrist permitted a small bag of shot, cased in soft chamois, to fall down to his finger tips. There it was clasped, and with it Geraldi slapped the guard without violence on the side of the head.

He had gauged the distance, the time limit, the necessary degree of violence, with such accuracy that he was able to pick the drawn gun from the relaxing fingers of the guard, then receive the weight of the toppling body and stretch it gently upon the floor.

In that act, he felt the slow throbbing of the heart, which assured him that his victim was not seriously damaged, and he was free to secure the man at once. A few twists of twine trussed the guard helplessly, foot and hand. His own bandanna, rolled and knotted with expert skill, then made a perfect gag.

Geraldi then stood up, dusting his hands lightly, and nodding with satisfaction at the sight of the man upon the floor. The latter had recovered consciousness some seconds before, and now he lay straining against his bonds

with the hopelessness and the patient fury of a tied bulldog. Red and purple swelled his face; his eyes misted over with his extreme rage. So Geraldi smiled down at him in the most genial fashion.

Then he stepped to the door and tapped lightly on it.

"Are you ready?"

He heard a soft, swift scurry of feet.

"Oh, ready—yes! Is Dick there? Will he let me go?"

"I think he will. Has he the key?"

"I don't know."

Geraldi shrugged his shoulders.

"The mind of a good old steady-going lock like this could be read with no trouble, I suppose. I'll try it, at least!"

He took a bright bit of steel, a mere sliver of it, from a little case in a vest pocket, and after he had worked in the lock with this for some moments, he felt the bolt give. The door opened an instant later and the girl came running out to him with her pack slung over one shoulder.

She came through a wave of shadow and through a wave of light as the flame jumped in the throat of the lantern. She was far from beautiful, for her nose was what the poet called "tip-tilted," and there were several delicate blotches of freckles across the bridge of it; but she had very bright eyes and a charming mouth, continually smiling or laughing. So she came out to Geraldi, smiling and gay, as though this were a childish game, and not something on which a man might have lost his life.

She gave her hand to Geraldi, coming close to him and smiling with a lifted face, so that suddenly no words of gratitude were necessary, but all was said by that single gesture.

Then she glanced down at the bound and gagged man on the floor.

"Poor Dick Orville," said she. "What a lump on the side of his head. Poor old Dick!"

"Come!" said Gerald. "Because a half second now may mean more than a half mile later on!"

She followed him at once, only pausing, he noted, to throw a kiss toward the empurpled face of Dick, as the latter twisted wildly back and forth, struggling against his bonds. Swiftly they went down the stairs, through the side door, and out into the freshness of the open night.

The house slept behind them, a tall, blank face, staring with deep, dark eyes at the nothingness of the world. Even Gerald felt solemn and small and useless in such a presence.

He led straight on to the stable, where they found the horses and took them out through the rear door of the barn. He gave her a foot up into the saddle, then swung onto the back of the black stallion, which he drew closer to her.

"Look at the hotel!" said he.

"Horrible brute of a place," said the girl. "I've seen enough of it!"

"It's more than a hotel, just now," said Gerald softly. "Mind you—if you leave this town and ride on with me to the Naylor place, you're leaving one half of your whole life behind. You understand that, Elsa?"

"I've had a good look at that side of the coin," she told him. "Now I want to see the other. Oh, I've made up my mind!"

She let her horse lurch ahead a long step, then reined him back as Gerald held up a warning hand.

"I wish I'd had a chance to talk this all over with you beforehand," said he. "But you know one thing—that once in the Naylor place, there's no coming out?"

"I know all about it. I been in prison most of my days."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Stuck on a one-horse ranch, milking cows, making butter and cottage cheese to sell in town; looking after the chickens—about the only fun was hunting for

new nests in the mow of the barn!—and all the parties that we had were mostly in the summer, on Saturday nights, when you're tired from the week's work, and you go dress up in calico and sit along the wall of the schoolhouse room, and dance with gents that've lightened up their feet as much as they can with red-eye! I've been in jail, I tell you, and whatever the Naylor place is, it's a bigger jail than the one that I come out of!"

"I'd like to do this straight and right," said Gerald. "And before we start, tell me if you think this fellow you're headed for wants to marry you?"

"Of course he does," said she. "Once he rode seven days to get to me. Well, I guess that means something."

"You think he's straight?"

"Of course I do. What do you think?"

"I don't think anything. It's up to you, but I don't wish to take you in if you'll begin to beg to have the door opened the instant that you're inside!"

She chuckled as she was about to answer, but that answer was not completed, for out of an upper window of the hotel rang a loud, piercing cry, and a babble of curses to terminate it.

"Dick!" said the girl. "He's from out California way, and I recognize the way that he swears. Dick's loose, and that means trouble. Partner, if you want me to win this game, it's your lead, and I'll try to follow suit."

For answer Gerald loosed the black horse at the low fence straight before them. He glanced back over his shoulder to see the girl flinging her mount well and bravely into the air on the same jump, and then they were plunging through the dark of the trees, then ranging out into the dazzling white of the moonshine.

They heard many voices behind them, but these were of little importance, and all that mattered was that they were ranging farther and farther away from

the disturbance at the hotel; fences darted away on either side. Then all fences ceased, together; the hills swayed up and down through the moon mist; the loftier mountaintops loomed larger, darker, walking slowly toward them in variegated garments of many colors.

A wind cut at their faces with the acrid sting of alkali in its breath.

But now all sound had ceased behind them. They were alone in the desert, and by unspoken, mutual consent, they drew up their horses and let them blow.

It was not for the sake of the animals that they did this; it was rather for the purpose of taking stock of their new surroundings, for during that last long burst each of them knew that they had ridden across the undrawn boundary and passed into the realm of the Naylor. They stood on forbidden ground!

After a little time they could hear the sounds of the desert at night. These, as a rule, are so dim that only the most practiced senses can catch them as they float dissolved along the horizon, but Geraldi made out the quavering, pulsing howl of a wolf and the wavering, mocking yell of a coyote somewhat nearer at hand. Somewhere, also—far closer than the other two—a calf was bawling. And the sound like the insistent squeaking of a shutter, blown to and fro in an upstairs room—that was the barking of a dog!

All of these sounds appeared to the two riders both dolorous and dangerous, as though the very earth was giving out its creatures in order to threaten those who invaded the precincts of the Naylor family.

This thought made Geraldi smile as he dismissed it.

"We'd better start on!" said he.

"Listen to me," said the girl. "You've brought me far enough! Why should you go on with this, when it doesn't mean anything to you? Go back. I thank you a million times. Some way I can blunder along and reach him. The

Naylor, even, wouldn't do harm to a girl, I guess."

She laughed a little as she said the last, but there was something about her manner of speaking that made Geraldi doubt her security of mind.—"Even" the Naylor would be kind to a woman! It was most patent that she wrote them down very low in the scale. Except, doubtless, that she considered young Jerry Naylor a brilliant exception to the family rule.

But he said: "Leave you here in the middle of the night? I'm going to take you right on into sight of the central place. I'll leave you there, if you wish. Let's get on. I've an idea that old Ben Thomas is pretty wild to get you back right now!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### A TALKATIVE GENT.

**D**AWN came over the mountains in waves of gray, of mauve, of rose, and then of golden fire that flooded through the trees which grew densely along the sides of the watercourse down which the two were riding; and the noontide, furnace-hot, found them in a narrow defile scattered with boulders which yet threw shadows, too small to shelter horsemen.

The girl was the guide. She had mapped the estate with care, using many reports which she had pieced together, chiefly from the talk of Jerry Naylor. The reason that Darcy had taken so long to get away was that he had failed to travel in the straightest, easiest line. They themselves should reach the central ranch house, she declared, by the dusk of that same day.

So they endured the heat, focused on them now as though by a burning glass from the glistening face of one canyon wall. Many times the sweat of the horses had been coated over by dust through which the streams of perspiration were breaking again; and all was

heat, misery, while the very rocks had a dreamlike seeming from the transparent waves that rose shimmering above them in endless succession.

Even in that iron pass, however, there was some life, for cactus had found sparse rooting here and there, and in the midst of the gulch they found a meager trickle of water that ran by as a miracle among the stones.

They dismounted to water the horses here, and going up the diminutive creek a few steps, the girl and Geraldí kneeled to fill their canteens at a little pool.

It was while they were crouched here that Geraldí whispered to her: "Now steady, Elsa. Just behind that brown rock back of me there's a rider and a rifle. He's coming out to get us. He has us covered already!"

"I hear you," said the girl.

She did not start, merely stiffening a little as she dipped her hand into the slow current and let the lukewarm water trickle across her wrist.

"What shall we do?" she added. "I can shoot straight!"

She carried a .32 belted on her hip, but Geraldí merely smiled, and, without looking up, she was able to see that smile dimly in the face of the water beneath them.

"We don't want shooting," said he. "This is a Naylor, of course. He'll be apt to make no trouble if I give myself up to him. Probably take us in to the ranch and let his chief make the decision about us. That's what you want, isn't it?"

She did not answer. There was a slight grating sound of a heel grinding against small stones, and then a gruff voice called: "You picnickers, there; where you think you might be?"

Geraldí looked over his shoulder.

It was a bull of a man who stood behind him with a leveled rifle, a thick-chested, huge-armed fellow with a red face, made still more scarlet by the reflection from a violently crimson shirt

which he was wearing. He had the flannel sleeves of it rolled up sun-blackened forearms to the elbow. A prickly stubble of beard seemed to be irritating the raw red of his face, and that, perhaps, inspired the glare of his little pig eyes and the scowl that twisted his mouth.

"No harm, sir," said Geraldí, rising, canteen in hand, and he smiled brightly at the man of the red shirt.

"Oh, no! We don't mean anything wrong," said Elsa.

"No harm! No wrong!" grunted the big man in disgust and in contempt. "Why, you talk like a pair of yearlin' fools! D'you know where you are?"

"We're on the Naylor place, I suppose," said Geraldí.

"You knew it, then?" said the other, his scowl growing, if possible, yet more ugly. "You knew it, but you come right on in?"

"This," said Geraldí, "is Elsa Thomas. You may know her name. She's a great friend of Jerry Nay——"

He could not finish the word, for the other burst in: "There ain't any friends of anybody in this place, except them that old Pike Naylor has passed on. If she's one of Jerry's women friends, what's that to me or anybody else around here?"

At the last sentence the eyes of Geraldí narrowed ever so slightly, though he maintained his smile steadfastly.

"Unbuckle your gun belt, you!" said the guard to Elsa. "Unbuckle it and let that gun drop. Woman or man, I'm a fool if I ain't old enough to take no chances!"

Obediently she loosened the buckle, and the belt with the small holster which it supported fell to the ground, thudding softly on the stones.

"You, there!" said the rifleman to Geraldí. "You don't wear no guns outside. What you got inside?"

"Guns?" said Geraldí, raising his brows. "My dear fellow, what use

would I have for guns when I can't use the things?"

He laughed a little as he said it, and, turning toward the girl, made a little gesture of helplessness.

She nodded in turn.

"Don't you be afraid," she comforted Gerald. "It'll turn out all right!"

"Will it?" growled the guard. "I'm gunna tell the pair of you! I'll do this for you; I'll take you back to the boundary and turn you loose. I'll keep your hosses to keep you from dodgin' back in. You'll have a chance for a fine little stroll. If that's all right, keep right on smilin'——"

"My dear friend!" exclaimed Gerald. "My dear friend, you don't mean to say—a young girl and I—unused to travel—this rough ground—the rocks—we'd have blistered feet——"

"It sure makes my heart bleed to hear you yap!" said the other, keeping a steady eye down the barrel of his rifle. "Now hoist your hands, you tenderfoot loon, and I'll see if you're as clean of poison as you say! If you're lyin' to me, Heaven help you! Hoist up those hands at once and reach as far to the sky as you kin—reach, I said, reach!"

Gerald jerked his hands toward the sky.

"How extraordinary!" he complained to the girl. "I've never been treated in such a manner before, Elsa."

"If I'm treatin' you like you might be a man," said the ruffian, "it don't mean nothin' except that I work careful. You can't tell the poison in a snake by the color of its skin. Stand still, you skinny rat, and if you budge those hands, I'll let you have it!"

He tucked his rifle under his right arm as he said this, holding the weapon balanced with ease in his huge hand, and keeping the forefinger upon the trigger.

And he approached Gerald with cau-

tion in his step, but with an open sneer upon his face.

"This here," he said as he drew closer, "is gunna be a lesson that some of the gents outside might remember. You rambled right in to make a call, did you? You're gunna write a letter the next time, or I'm a liar! Keep them arms stiff!"

He barked the latter injunction, and Gerald, apparently paralyzed with fear, stretched tiptoe toward the sky.

"Yaller-livered as a rabbit!" sneered the guard, and laid his grasp upon the breast of Gerald's coat.

He threw the coat open, seeing in that first glimpse the butt of a revolver neatly secured by a clip beneath the left arm-pit of the stranger. But that, for an instant, was all that he could see, for the right arm of Gerald jerked down, and the elbow glanced on the temple of this outpost with such an impact that he staggered back, the rifle exploding harmlessly as he did so.

Gerald followed him with a gliding step.

The Colt whose butt the guard had seen the instant before now flashed in his hand as though brought to his fingers by a mere wish. Straight at the heart of the big man the muzzle steadied. Then, changing his mind at the last instant, Gerald cracked the barrel across the right wrist of his enemy.

That stroke loosened every nerve and muscle of the strong hand. Down went the rifle, clanging and clattering on the rocks, and as the victim gasped out a curse, Gerald closed with him.

It looked to the girl as though her companion would be swallowed by the vast embrace of the giant. She, desperate with apprehension, scooped her revolver from its holster upon the ground, for she had been raised to act like a man in times of need, but as she straightened, she saw a strange thing.

For the red-shirted monster was strained back, his body bent in a bow,

one hand beating at the thin air to recover his balance, and the other reaching blindly toward the throat of her slender friend.

Then he fell.

It was such a shock that the big frame remained still without a quiver for an instant, and in that instant the practiced hand of Geraldine had removed the gun belt, a hidden derringer, a heavy hunting knife, from the prostrate Naylor.

Then he stepped back, smiling and nodding reassurance at the girl. She, however, looked no more at the fallen man, but at Geraldine himself, with a frown rather of wonder than of admiration. For it had been like the working of a miracle. Vaguely she had seen the flash of hands working faster than the eye could follow; vaguely she had comprehended a craft of wrestling which had made the very hand power and bulk of the big man fight against himself. But still she could not comprehend the fall of their enemy.

And it seemed to her almost horrible that a man should have been rendered helpless and beaten by one hardly half his size. It was like seeing a child master an adult.

The fallen hero, gradually recovering from the shock of the fall, raised himself to his elbows. His face was still loosened; his mouth sagged open; but reason and understanding now suddenly blazed in his eyes again. His huge mouth wrestled with the word, but it came like the gasp of a beast from his throat:

"Geraldine!"

"Geraldine!" echoed the girl. Comprehension rushed into her face. "Geraldine!" she repeated, as though that one word could have explained the greatest of miracles.

"Sit up," said Geraldine gravely, "or you'll have a sunstroke. Put on your hat. Now, my friend, what's your name?"

"Lambert Naylor," said the other, dragging himself slowly to his feet.

He stood inert, one big hand propped against a boulder's top, his head sagging.

"The very luck of the lucky has come my way!" muttered Geraldine. "How should you know me, Naylor?"

"I was up in Chicago," said the other, slowly raising his big head, as though the muscles of his neck were barely strong enough to support it. "I was there that time that 'Red' McIntyre and 'Scotty' Morgan tried for you. I seen you there——"

"You were the third man!" said Geraldine.

The chin of Lambert Naylor dropped, and a foolish, half-stunned smile made his mouth gape.

"Have I been talkin' again?" he asked himself aloud. "I have, and I've talked myself into a .44-caliber slug through the brain!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WHEN GERALDINE SMILES.

AFTER this a silence fell over them, Geraldine staring thoughtfully at Lambert Naylor, and the latter looking back with dull, resigned eyes at the slender youth before him. At last Elsa, glancing from one to the other, said quietly: "I don't know what it means, Mr. Geraldine. Are you James Geraldine?"

"I'm afraid I am," said he.

"I should've known," said she. "The climb up that wall—and taking me out for the sake of the fun of it—and riding through all these chances—and then handling him as if he was a ten-year-old kid—I should've known! But the greaser outfit beat me a little! And—and you never expect that lightning will strike so close to home! But what'll you do with him?"

"He knows me," argued Geraldine slowly. "I can't let him go loose in this place without having trouble jump on my back like a panther out of a tree.



Besides, there's Chicago against him! There's Chicago against him," he repeated slowly, with infinite cold venom.

The girl gasped; but Naylor, gathering himself, set his teeth to face the inevitable.

"I could introduce you to a pretty scene, Elsa," said Gerald. "A wet October night; the wind off Lake Michigan with the rain like teeth in it; and poor Jimmy Gerald walking into that wind around a corner where a street lamp seemed to sputter like a candle through the rain—around that corner and straight into the arms of three men!"

He paused, looking at Naylor with the faintest of smiles; yet that smile turned the blood of the girl cold. And all the old stories of Gerald leaped into her mind, Gerald the thief; Gerald, whose touch, like poison, dissolved the strength of the strongest; Gerald, for whom locks flew open, and the doors of ponderous safes swung back softly; Gerald, whose dead men lay from Singapore to Buenos Aires, from Java to misty London; Gerald, without mercy—as men said—without scruple, without remorse, the cunning of a leopard in his hand, the savagery of a jungle cat in his heart; Gerald, who loved danger for its own fair face, and battle for the sake of blood.

Now, as she looked on him, she strove to read the legends in his face; but she felt she saw one who was neither man nor boy—not boy, because time had flowed richly over him, not man, because no marking of pain, or sorrow, or regret, or of unaccomplished ambition, or of unachieved malice, or of envy, or of hate, appeared in lines about the eyes or the mouth. He possessed—though the girl could not so analyze it—the beauty of sculptured stone, not massive and grave in the Phidian style, but delicately worked, as Praxiteles would have done a fawn.

And suddenly it came to her that he

was neither good nor bad, neither evil nor virtuous, but himself, an unmoral, untrammled creature divorced from the ways and from the laws of other men, and therefore strong with a strength which others could not possess.

She had been amazed that any man could have risked for a stranger what he had risked for her, but now, vividly, she saw the truth—that the very danger he encountered was the bribe which forced him forward. Perhaps she was to him a creature with whom he could have some small sympathy, one whose well-being he could wish; but certainly he was not as other men.

They, almost from her childhood, had been aware of her, had looked for her smiles, had dreaded her frowns, had been shy in the presence of her as children are shy before strangers; but Gerald had ridden with her through the night like a brother, or rather, like something that she never had conceived before—courteous, but totally indifferent.

There was another legend, talked of here and there, that somewhere in the world was a woman who had captured him by force of beauty, of purity, of grace, one woman at whose feet his devotion lay. But the girl, looking again at the calm face of Gerald, denied that legend to herself.

For, whatever else he might be, he must ever be free!

These things went through her mind as she watched Gerald.

What would he do now?

"Three men," he was saying, "and I ran into them around that corner. As the wind let go of me, I staggered, and they were at me as I lost my balance. Why, Elsa, we rolled like children on the pavement! Rolled like children fighting after school in the street!"

He paused and laughed, a pleasant, gentle laughter, with a brooding holding of the notes. It was like a song, and she knew the quality that sustained it. It was the battle that he remembered,

joyed in, tasted again against the palate of his soul and yearned for once more.

"And here is one of the three again!" he murmured, and smiled terribly on Naylor.

"But what happened?" she asked.

"Ah, what happened?" said Gerald. "The fact is that one of them was hurt with a bullet and dragged himself off, howling like a dog. And one of them fell down, got up, and ran away limping."

He pointed toward Naylor, and the latter passed a hand across his face, as though to shut out the memory of a nightmare.

"The third man," went on Gerald, "stayed with me for quite a while. We were busy, in fact, with our hands——"

He paused, and looked with question at Naylor.

"He died the next day," said Naylor huskily.

"Died?" said Gerald. "Died?"

"It wasn't what you did to him—except that he was scared to death. He woke up in the hospital in the middle of the night, with a screaming fit, and died in the middle of it, calling out and——"

Naylor paused.

"Well," he said in a brisk, matter-of-fact voice, "what's going to happen now, Gerald?"

"What do you expect?" asked Gerald coldly.

The girl grew stiff with apprehension. She had no impulse to call out, to intercede, for suddenly she felt as helpless in arresting the course of this man as she would have been under the rushing front of an avalanche that plunges down a mountainside, rolling up the forest as it goes.

Gerald snapped his quick, lean finger.

"If you shuffle off this mortal coil at this point," said he, "it looks like murder. Murder I detest. The brutality—the hopeless stupidity——"

His voice trailed away, and, watching him closely, the girl knew that he meant what he said. She could understand, furthermore; it was not to slay that he fought; it was for the sake of the battle. Never would she forget the wild joy that had been in his face as he had struggled with Lambert Naylor on this day.

Naylor himself said nothing, but he blinked as he strove to meet the scrutiny of Gerald.

The latter continued:

"On the other hand, if I let you live, Naylor, you'll spread the news of my coming, and then there'll be no chance for me at the house. Even as an unknown stranger there'll be enough danger to fill my hands, but certainly poor Jimmy Gerald would be a dead man if he were discovered there!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"There's another alternative. Tie you to a tree. But men tied to trees generally escape, or else they're discovered by some one else. Sometimes a hungry grizzly!"

He laughed musically at the last thought. Then, with another snap of his fingers, he said: "The tree, I take it, is the only thing that I can manage. We'll try to find a safe one!"

Neither Naylor nor the girl made any comment, but Naylor looked fixedly at her as this decision was reached, as though he wondered if she might not have been of some favorable agency in bringing about that lucky termination of Gerald's ponderings.

They took Naylor through the pass, driving him ahead of Gerald's drawn revolver; and dipping down the farther side of the range, he found what he wanted, a gully with a stream running through it, a dense growth of low, squat trees, and a place where no trail would lead close to the prisoner.

There Gerald fastened his prisoner to a small sapling, not with rope, but with the twine, which takes a closer hold,

which tightens when one struggles against it, and cuts the flesh if one struggles too hard. In a comfortable sitting posture he tied Lambert Naylor, and stepping back from him, regarded him with satisfaction.

"There's at least once chance in two," decided Geraldi aloud, "that you'll stay where you've been put. You see that I don't gag you, Naylor. Otherwise I'd be haunted by the thought of your struggles to shout if some wolf or any other beast came near you—strangling in the effort to frighten them away!"

He shuddered as he spoke, and the girl watched him, amazed at such emotion.

It was not actual pity for the victim, she decided, so much as a fastidious disgust at such a prospect. An odd delicacy of sentiment was joined to the love of combat in this man of action. She knew perfectly that Geraldi would have preferred to kill the man offhand, except that the same fastidious sense deterred him, rather than passion for justice, any overmastering love of fellow man.

"Geraldi," said the prisoner huskily, "Heaven knows that if I was in your boots, I'd never give the other gent such a chance for his life as you're givin' me. That's all I got to say!"

"Tush!" said Geraldi; "I'll even give you a hope, as well. When I come back, as I expect to do, I intend to stop by this way and to set you free. You can keep that in mind, old man, as you sit here and watch the day go by. In twenty-four hours, I trust that I'll be back here, and you'll then become a free man!"

The other started, the bonds gripped him, and he relaxed with a nod of his massive head.

"Geraldi," he said, "I got one thing to say to you. There was nothin' for me to gain in Chicago. I was taken in, because I was a chump, and was half drunk, and they told me that you were

a bluffer, and no man at all! Geraldi, I'd give a lot to undo that day!"

"Ah, yes," said Geraldi, "there are days in my life which I would be glad to undo, also, but that can't be managed. We live, Naylor, in such a world that each one of our actions becomes as eternal as bronze. The least word is fixed forever in the air, as you might say. So what's happened can't be undone, Naylor. Forgiven, of course, by a few random saints. But I'm not among the saintly, Naylor. You may even have heard that before, though I trust that I'm not the opposite extreme! I do heartily trust that!"

He laughed again as he spoke, and the girl saw Naylor blanch under that laughter. She herself was frightened. It would almost have been better, she felt, to have seen Naylor dead at her feet than to witness the mild, cold, deathless malice of Geraldi.

But now he waved her away. They went to their horses, and pursued their way rapidly down the canyon, through the trees, and out upon a shoulder of the mountain, where all the great central valley lay beneath their eyes.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HE UNDERSTOOD BIRD LANGUAGE.

IT was no mild and beautiful Garden of Eden into which they rode from the mountains, but rather a great and rugged sweep of grasslands, scattered with wild acreages of rocks that glimmered in the light of the western sun. The grass already was turning yellow, so hot was even this early season, and there were only scattering streaks of trees here and there where water ran in the hollow or stood in dwindling "tanks" after the spring sun had sent down torrents of snow water.

In the center of the valley appeared the ranch house, surrounded by a screen of trees, set back at a little distance on every side.

"They've chopped the nearest wood for the fire," smiled the girl as she looked at the place. "Lazy, shiftless lot of men. But men are always that way! They've cut away their own shade, and let the sun come down on their heads."

She laughed as she spoke, and Gerald gave her a flick of his eye. She glowed from the long ride, from the heat, from the hope of success which was now before her.

"A golden girl," said Gerald aloud.

She flushed at this, partly pleased, partly irritated by the impersonal condescension of his manner. He spoke as he might have spoken about a child, and a stranger, and this made her ill at ease.

"You'll like this?" asked Gerald, waving his hand.

"I'll like it," she said. "Why not?"

"For my part," he answered, "I never like to stay in a room unless I have the key to the door. But you'll have a husband here."

He watched critically as she blushed.

"Well," she said defiantly, "why shouldn't I go to him if they wouldn't let him come to me?"

"Wouldn't let him?"

"Of course not. Old Pike Naylor doesn't like to have his people married to 'outside' girls, for fear they might bring in some new ideas. But mostly they do marry strangers, and Jerry is going to be another one on that side of the list!"

"Yes," said Gerald, adding absently: "I hope that Jerry hasn't changed his mind!"

"He'd better not!" she declared. "The big shambling faker! He'd better not!"

The laughter of Gerald poured musically forth, and the girl herself soon was smiling and at ease. So they rode down the canyon, and drifted toward their goal.

The sun was down when they came

through the trees which fenced the house about on every side, but the afterglow would last for a long time. In that clear light they saw the ranch house exactly as Darcy had described it—not a house, to be sure, but rather a collection of shacks resting shoulder against shoulder, obviously built on bit by bit as the needs of the clan increased, and all leaning toward the center for mutual support. Never was there a more jagged sky line than this building presented. Everything about it showed haste and carelessness. The doors sagged on their hinges. The windows fitted crookedly, with half their panes knocked out by violence from within or from without, and replaced by sides of cracker boxes, with oiled paper, or with strips of sack-

ing. This, at close hand, was the face of "Naylor Castle." Behind it, on the side from which the two had ridden up, appeared a clattering of corral fences, of sheds for horses and cattle, and all in the worst state of unrepair. On the top of the nearest fence a man sat whittling aimlessly at a stick with a great-bladed knife—an old man from whose body age had dried the sap. His head drooped between his shoulders on a long neck, like the head and neck of a buzzard. That bald poll, on which there was no hat, was red and wrinkled, and when he looked up, Gerald saw the long nose resting on the peaked chin, as Darcy had described Pike Naylor, the head of all the clan, the founder of their wealth!

"Why, howdy!" said Pike Naylor. "You-all drop in for a call, maybe?"

"We just dropped in," said the girl, with a significant glance at Gerald.

"You've fetched a long ride, ain't you?" suggested Pike.

Gerald swung down to the ground and stretched himself; the girl following his example.

"I'll put up the horses," said Gerald, adding: "A pretty long ride. You

could learn more about it if the horses could talk."

He started to lead the animals toward the nearest corral gate, but Pike Naylor stopped him with a word.

"You better wait, son," said he. "My boy Alf keeps his string in that corral."

"I'll try the next one, then," said Geraldi, and started for the adjoining gate.

"That's Harry's hoss shed," said Pike. "I dunno what he'd say if you put your nags in there. He's mighty close-fisted with his oats and hay, I can tell you."

"Where can I take them, then?"

"Now, sir, there's a question, said Pike, scratching his red head. "I'd make you mighty free of everything, if I had my way. But now that I'm wore out, I don't have much influence around here. They've shoved the old man off into the corner, these big boys of mine. They do what they please, and don't reckon on me at all, which is kind of a sad thing, as you might say!"

"I'll take a chance with Harry, then," said Geraldi, and straightway led the pair through the gate and on toward the interdicted shed.

Pike looked after him with a shake of his head and said in admiration: "Now there's a brave young feller. If I was him, I wouldn't be free with Harry Naylor. Not me! A mighty wild, cantankerous boy, is Harry, and bound to have his own way. Is you two married?"

He shot the last question suddenly at the girl, and she shook her head.

"I see," said Pike Naylor. "Had to run away together because the old folks didn't approve. Your ma and pa didn't like him, eh? Too slick and smart and handsome, eh? Talks too good and smooth, maybe, to suit them? But that's the way with some folks. They don't cotton to anybody that's got soft hands; they'd rather take to a cow-puncher that can daub a rope on a cow. They don't appreciate college education,

and that kind of a thing. Was that what was the matter?"

She shrugged her shoulders, uncertain what she could say, and Pike Naylor rambled on in his strange, husky, rattling voice: "But every girl, she wants to foller her own heart. A girl is as sure of her heart as a cow is of her calf. You can cut calves away from cows, but you can't cut a girl away from her fancy! She'll swim rivers and walk across the mountains on her way to what she wants. Here he comes again, singin'. Now, I'd say that young man never fell without landin' on his feet. He could make himself at home in the desert with a rattlesnake and a dried-up jack rabbit for company. Got a good voice, ain't he?"

Geraldi reached the fence, laid a hand on the top rail, and floated lightly over the topmost bar.

"Light as a dancer, he is," commented Pike Naylor. "Mighty slick and easy, he is!"

"Yes," said the girl, because she could say nothing else. "I suppose he is."

"What?" said Pike. "You suppose? Ain't you ever danced with him at all? No, you ain't knowed him long, I see. But it don't take any long time for a girl to understand what her heart is sayin' to her. She listens, and right away she knows! Well, sir, you get your hoss all fixed up?"

"Fixed up fine," said Geraldi, ceasing his song. "Very good hay, but crushed barley is hardly oats."

"There, there!" said the old man. "My mind is sure goin'. Barley is it, that Harry keeps for his hosses? Well, barley ain't bad for a hoss that does a lot of work. That one of yours could step out a mite, couldn't he?"

"He goes rather well," admitted Geraldi.

"There ain't anything more needed," declared the veteran, "than a hoss that can get a man to town in time, or kick dust in the face of trouble; though

they's some that would rather have a fine cuttin' hoss than any of these high-headed racers that don't know a cow from a string of Mexican peppers. Hello! There goes old Father Time, and I ain't got a gun, confound him!"

A great owl had slid out of the cove of trees, which now was blended in one mass of shadow in the deepening dusk. Swiftly it came toward them, flying low.

"Dog-gone his wise old heart," said the old man, "he knows when the light ain't fit for shootin'. We've used up a hundred rounds on him and never budged a feather, and still he won't get scared, no matter how much we blaze away."

"I'll make you a present of him, if you want his skin," said Geraldini politely.

His gun was in his hand as he spoke, and the last word of his sentence was brought to a period by the explosion of the Colt as he glanced upward.

The owl, however, sailed on, with only a flirt of the powerful wings to acknowledge the noise beneath him.

"Missed!" said Pike Naylor grimly. "Dog-gone me if everybody don't always miss. He's got a charmed life, and some of the greasers says that we'll have to use silver bullets before we ever get him. You shot a mite to the right—pulled it a little, I reckon!"

"I shot him straight through the body," said Geraldini. "He'll fall in a moment."

The gun had disappeared from his hand, and leaning against a fence post, he idly watched the flight of the big bird.

As though it had heard the speech of the man, the owl suddenly dipped over and dropped toward the ground. With struggling wings it strove to right itself, worked up again into the air a short distance, and actually sailed back toward the group of people. But, losing height with every yard it flew, it finally struck the ground and rolled in

a red-stained heap at the very feet of Pike Naylor.

The latter gave it one look, then with his big knife drew from the stick a sliver of transparent thinness.

"Looks like he knows the language of the birds," said Pike Naylor slowly.

He raised a hand to his mouth, and raised a screeching whistle through the fingers. Doors banged. Four men hurried from the house toward them, one dragging out a revolver, the others carrying rifles, all obviously answering a danger signal.

Pike waved toward Geraldini.

"You can take care of this here stranger, boys," said he. "He's one of them quick-shootin' experts with a sign language that even an Injun ain't got a fast-enough eye to read. Maybe he's come out here to look inside the safe!"

## CHAPTER X.

### JERRY COMES ACROSS.

THE girl looked in haste at Geraldini, and saw that he had not stirred from his position, leaning casually against the post of the corral fence. He glanced at Pike, at the dead body of the owl, at the four young men who were gathering about him, weapons in their hands, and one might have thought that these things were happenings in another man's dream, so little heed did he pay to them all.

The four, grimly intent upon him, narrowed their eyes and drew closer, while Pike Naylor went on: "It ain't my habit to go around tellin' you boys nothin'. I'm a pretty old man, boys. You can pick up and carry on, but my main job is just to watch and learn over again how to do things."

"Go on, dad," said one of the younger men. "You tell us what you want done. Is this a job that needs a little neck stretchin'?"

"Why, Hank," said the old man with a deprecatory air, "you know that I al-

ways hate mean ways of doin' things, though they's some knots that're too hard to untie and have got to be cut. You take this here stranger by name of——"

"Crawford," said Geraldi pleasantly.

"This here Crawford sashays up and puts up his hosses in Harry's own private shed, though I was tellin' him that was dangerous——"

"I'll show him that it's dangerous!" said one of the group.

He, apparently, was Harry. Big, raw-boned, aggressive, he strode to Geraldi and towered above him, fist clenched. Geraldi looked at him with interest from head to foot, as one might look at a distant mountain or a great tree.

"You know your own business, Harry," said Pike Naylor, "but maybe I could suggest that Mr. Crawford here has shot Father Time at fifty yards with a Colt—and then called him back to fall at his feet, because he can talk bird language, it looks like."

Harry flushed with impatience and anger.

"D'you own this section of the world, young feller?" he asked Geraldi.

"I beg your pardon," said Geraldi, "but I thought that strangers were always welcome in this section of the world. If they're not, why not put up signs on the trails leading in?"

"Where'd you come through?" asked Harry.

Geraldi pointed to a place where the heads of the mountains parted and sloped away from a narrow pass.

"If you come in that way, how come you didn't meet up with 'The Lamb'? I don't understand that, dad!"

"Lambert is a good boy," said Pike Naylor, "but maybe he was havin' a siesta. Everybody over two hundred pounds finds this here range a mite too hot for him. The Lamb wouldn't want to sleep, he wouldn't figger on doin' it, but yet he might. The question ain't

so much how these two came through, as what you're gunna do with them, now that they're here?"

"Tie the girl on a hoss and start her back for the boundary," said Harry, turning fiercely on Elsa Thomas.

"Tut, tut!" murmured Pike Naylor. "And her so young and pretty, and mighty tired already? It'd pretty nigh be the death of her, wouldn't it?"

"What for did she come in here, then?" asked Harry. "Take her out the quickest way, and the roughest. It'll be a lesson to them on the outside."

"And him?" asked Pike Naylor, pressing the point with what the girl could see was truly fiendish malignity.

"He's come for trouble. Why not give it to him? If he's found a way of dodgin' in over the hills, why not shut up the book so's that he can't go back and tell other folks about it?"

"Well," said Pike, "that's a mighty sad way of lookin' at it, but sometimes the saddest way is the only way. I wouldn't say that Harry is wrong. Harry's always had a head on his shoulders. But whatever you boys want to do with him, I'd suggest that you do it quick. There ain't any use settin' down to rest because the fox is surrounded. He may find an earth while you're takin' a nap!"

The girl had listened to this judgment as it gradually formulated, and in the meantime was working close and closer to Geraldi, until now she stood at his side. She had not planned to do the thing, but instinct directed her, and now she caught his hand, and standing between him and the others, she faced them with a high head.

"Will one of you tell Jerry that Elsa Thomas is here?" she asked.

The four looked at one another in surprise.

"That's right," said Pike Naylor. "Run along, one of you, and tell Jerry that they's a lady out here that wants to talk to him. Don't make up your

minds for yourselves, but let Jerry come out and do your thinkin' for you, because he has a better head, maybe!"

"Dad's right," said Harry, who was the ringleader in all suggestions of violence, since he had heard of the quartering of horses in his shed. "We can think for ourselves, I guess. Boys, we'll finish off this Crawford, as he calls himself, and then start the girl back for the border. If Jerry wants her, he can dog-gone well go and get her!"

"Murder? Murder?" cried Elsa. "What do you mean to do?"

"Murder it would be," said one of the four with a sudden conviction.

"Shut up, Bill. D'you know more than Harry and dad put together?"

"I know what I think. I'm gunna get Jerry."

"Do!" said Pike Naylor. "Go ahead. That would make you and Crawford and Jerry against the rest of us, maybe, and a fine chance for a shootin' scrape, and brother lined up agin' brother for the sake of a stranger that has sneaked into the valley, we dunno how! And with a woman, too! Why, if two can come through like this, so can two hundred, and one of these nights we'll wake up with a coupla hundred greasers runnin' through the house, and tappin' at our bedroom doors and askin' if they can come in!"

His voice rose and roared as he came to the end of this speech. But the man named Bill resolutely turned his back upon such argument and strode away toward the house.

The rest stood ill at ease.

"Well," said Pike Naylor, "wait for Jerry to come out and settle this here. Just stand around and wait for him!"

Bill was heard calling in the distance. It was thick dusk. Faces became blurred, the mountain receded slowly toward the horizon or else seemed to dissolve and hang suspended in the air above them.

"We won't wait," declared Harry.

"We got our reasons. Partly I seen them; partly dad has showed you. Boys, let's finish off this here sneakin' spy, because I'll lay that he ain't nothin' else!"

"Why not?" muttered one of the others.

At this Elsa gripped the hand of Gerald hard, but he did not return the pressure. She could swear, also, that his pulse had not jumped, that his breathing was steady, that not a tremor passed through his slender body.

"Jim, if you'll take him on that side," said Harry.

"I won't fight you, boys," said Gerald. "I won't have to, for here comes Jerry, and I think that he'll take my part."

For Bill was now seen coming rapidly back toward them, a second man at his side. They walked across the yellow beam of light that struck out through the kitchen window, and so came up to the corral fence and the group which had gathered there.

"Here's Jerry," said Pike Naylor in an odd voice. "Now, it's pretty lucky that we have him here to settle the thing for us. I guess that you'll all agree to that, eh?"

"Leave me be!" growled Jerry. "You've hounded me enough lately. What's the talk about a girl askin' for me out here? What kind of a joke is that to talk around here when——"

He had come striding through the group until he confronted the girl and Gerald. She did not speak, she did not stir, but waited in silence, though Gerald could feel the pounding of her heart shaking her body continually.

Through that silence Jerry leaned above her, and Gerald saw a tall man with a suggestion of strength in the upper part of his face and perhaps of weakness in the lower, but all was indistinctly seen in this light.

"Elsa!" said Jerry in an incredulous voice. "Elsa, by gum!"



Still she did not move, but suddenly relaxed, so that all her weight pressed back against Gerald; he thought that she was about to faint.

"Is it you, honey?" asked Jerry, stepping still closer. "Why don't you speak to me?"

Then he added, his voice rising into a great cry of joy: "You don't have to speak! I've found you, and I've got you to keep!"

He took her, limp, from the arms of Gerald, and held her lightly; laughing, staggering drunkenly, partly from the burden, and partly from the laughter which unsteadied him, and broke the voice in which he spoke.

"Why, I told you, dad, what would happen! There ain't any way to keep a man apart from the girl that he loves, or her apart from him! She's come here. She's come over the mountains. She's busted through your guards. She's laughed at everything. And why? Because she loves me! And if you was to multiply your ranch by ten and offer me the whole thing as a bribe, I wouldn't under any circumstances trade it in for Elsa Thomas here!"

"Then take her," said Pike Naylor dryly. "Don't stand around here and get us all tired out talkin' poetry at us. Write them things down, Jerry, so's you can tear it up afterward, but don't let the world hear you're crazy from your own lips."

Elsa, one arm around the neck of her lover, whispered rapidly in his ear. At once he released her and strode to Gerald.

Whatever that passive and patient young man might have thought about Elsa's lover before this moment, he was ready to change his opinion on the instant, for Jerry ranged himself resolutely at the side of Gerald.

And this, in spite of the snarling voice of Pike Naylor, which was saying: "A fine woman you've brought up here—one that travels day and night

across the mountains with a man she never seen before and——"

"Shut your lyin' face," said Jerry sternly. "He's done this here for the sake of a girl that he never seen before. He's done it because he's white, because he's on the square! And before you get at him, you'll have to cut through me!"

At this there was a breath of silence such as that which precedes violent battle, and then Pike was heard muttering: "I dunno how ever I was the true father to a lump like Jerry!"

After this Bill cried out loudly: "I'm with Jerry and Crawford in this here. We'll have no lynchin' this day, anyhow!"

And Gerald knew that he was safe for the moment, though surrounded by fire.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AN AGREEABLE FAMILY.

GERALDI dined at the family table. There were half a dozen other kitchen fires smoking in the rambling collection of shacks, for there were half a dozen married members of the clan, and these lived apart; but a dozen men were gathered about the long table over which Pike Naylor ruled, leaning with age in his chair, and supporting himself with gaunt elbows that pressed on the edge of the table.

He ate nothing. He remained with his chin pressed into the gaunt hollow of his right hand, and in place of turning his head, his eyes twisted from side to side, watching every one in turn with that hideous grin of toothless age which seemed more ominous than curses and loud-voiced rage.

At the foot of the table, Jerry and Elsa Thomas were placed opposite one another, oblivious of the rest, misty-eyed with happiness. Gerald himself had been placed halfway down one side, and behind his chair was another in

which a man lounged with a gun across his knees.

It was the single concession to the suspicions of Pike Naylor. He had said: "If I was you boys I'd strip him to the skin and burn his clothes to find what's in 'em! Then dress him up ag'in as fine as you please. You can give him my best suit, if you want to. I won't mind!"

He had cackled as he said this, and Geraldi could see reason for the laughter if the "best" suit were not infinitely better than what Pike now wore; for the elbows of his coat were actually in tatters.

"Leave him alone," said Jerry. "I'll go bail for him!"

"Then put a gun behind him, and let him be as free as he likes!" suggested Pike Naylor.

So that was done, and the presence of the gun put a damper upon conversation at the table.

They made an odd appearance, these scions of wealth! Half of them unshaven, half as ragged as old Pike himself, one might have thought that this was a collection of beggars picked up at the first crossroads had it not been for touches here and there. Just opposite to Geraldi was Harry, for instance, with a great diamond pin on his breast, flaring and flickering in the lamplight. Geraldi watched it with casual glances, and weighed it with the eye of his mind. There were other jewels, as well, and Bill Naylor was earnestly discussing with one of his brothers the advisability of buying two or three thoroughbred stallions to improve the stock on the ranch.

"Hossflesh is hossflesh," put in Pike Naylor harshly, "and a thousand-dollar leg busts as easy in a hole as a fifty-dollar mustang. Fine hosses mean fine barns, boys to take care of 'em, mashes, sours, clean oats, and a mighty pile of trouble. Take the hosses that Nature sowed in this ground and use 'em, and

when they're used up, they make extra-fine dog feed."

This was considered good common sense, until Bill broke out: "Use the mustangs, the rest of you. I'll go buy me the thoroughbreds. I'm gunna go down to N' Orleans and get me what fills my eye."

"Go and get 'em," said Pike Naylor. "It's better to spend young than to spend old. The other boys'll always see that you got a bunk and blankets on it! You, Jerry, you stand bail for Crawford, here?"

"Sure I do," said Jerry, when the question had been retailed to him by the bawling voice of a cousin, and so roused him from his trance of happiness.

"Just a moment, gentlemen!" said Geraldi.

"Just a minute, he says," remarked Pike Naylor. "He's got some other ideas! What are they, stranger?"

"I came in here to take Miss Thomas to the ranch house," said Geraldi, "and then I hoped to get back again, but in the meantime, I've heard about a safe that has a lining that's worth seeing. It's made me so curious that I don't think I'll accept bail!"

Eating stopped. All eyes flashed at his face, and found it smiling and genial.

"He won't take bail," growled Pike Naylor, his whole head jerking up and down as he spoke, because the hand remained beneath his chin. "He's got an idea that he don't want Jerry to take on more than he can pay. He wants the safe, the way that Darcy wanted it. Maybe he's a friend of Darcy, eh?"

Geraldi smiled calmly back at the old man, but for all his smiling, he was a little startled. For Pike had come perilously close to the truth too many times.

"I think," said Geraldi, "that you ought to take Pike's advice. Rope me down and put a couple of guards over me, and watch me all night, and then tie

me onto a horse and send me back for the border. Because otherwise I might get at that safe!"

Harry, across the table, sneered openly.

"He wants to make a name for himself," said he. "He wants to show that the whole gang of the Naylor was so scared of him and what he could do that they was stood on their heads. Why, I can see through him dead easy. This here Crawford is a faker and a bluffer, or I'm a liar!"

With this ugly speech he pushed back his chair a trifle, and seemed ready to rise and fight for his opinion.

"Tut, tut," said Gerald in his gentle way, and looking down at the table. "You're nervous, Harry, or you wouldn't call a guest names."

"You're right," broke in Bill, an ugly faced boy with a fine, brave eye. "You got no sense of what's right, or you wouldn't hound him like this, Harry!"

"Am I gunna take lessons in manners from a skinny runt like you?" demanded Harry fiercely.

"Go on!" said Pike Naylor ironically. "Keep at one another. Cut a few of your own throats, because that'll please Mr. Crawford. Maybe he kind of finds things dull. He'd like a little action, and that's why he suggests that he'll wanta open up the safe to-night."

"What with?" asked Harry gloomily, as he saw the folly of his quarrel with Bill. "He ain't got the tools that Darcy brought here." He added: "Is he gonna open that safe with his bare hands?"

"Don't laugh at my hands," Gerald pleaded. "They're quite capable of making a great deal of trouble. You're a bright fellow, Harry, but there are things done in the world that even you can't see and understand. For instance, which——"

As he spoke he flicked two heavy Colts into the air. They had come into his hands, Harry knew not how; they rose lightly, spun high, close to the

ceiling, and descended, spitting softly into the waiting hands of Gerald, who spoke as he juggled the guns.

"For instance, which gun is which, and when have I changed them? And now the butcher knife to keep them company. See how the three dance in the air at the same time, and keep going up and down like the red ball on the stream of water in the target shop. You see, I have reason to ask you not to despise my hands."

Harry watched, sullenly, biting his lips. For the insult which he had just thrown at the head of the stranger now appeared totally foolish and futile. This conjurer could have filled him with lead in repayment of that remark, before Harry had half begun to fill his hand.

"They's a lot of fast hands in the world," said Harry, "but they ain't so many of the fast boys that can hit their target!"

"Ask the owl, you young talker!" said Pike. "What're you gunna do with those hands to-night, Harry? Gunna leave them free?"

"Don't do it!" said Gerald earnestly. "Remember the safe! Remember how sad you'd be if anything happened to what is inside of it!"

This suggestion made Harry almost choke with rage.

He broke out: "I know the kind of a bluff that you're throwin' at us. You wanta make a name, about how the whole gang of the Naylor was so dead set on puttin' you in irons——"

"Ah," said Gerald, "have you irons here also?"

"We got a coupla full sets," said Harry, "in case that you wanta use 'em."

"Thanks," said Gerald. "I'd call that a good sporting proposition, wouldn't you?"

He leaned forward to take the eye of the whole table.

"A pair of guards on me, another guard to watch the safe, and irons on my arms—I'd call that a fairly good

sporting proposition, eh? Irons on my legs, too, if you have them. Because that would make it fairly difficult for me to walk about the place without making a bit of noise. You'd agree to that, Harry?"

"You mean," said Harry, "to keep you from gettin' clear away? Is that what you mean?"

"To keep me from getting away, and taking the best of the insides of your safe with me!"

"Bah!" snorted Harry.

And then his glance went instinctively upward toward the ceiling, as though he were remembering the manner in which the two guns had darted up, and hung there for an instant in dimly spinning wheels of brightness. Yes, as though he half expected that they would appear again!

"I dunno——" he began.

"Take good advice even from an enemy," said Pike Naylor. "Do exactly what he says. You know why he's sayin' it?"

"Tell me," said Harry. "I dunno that I see the point of all of this here!"

"You blockhead," broke out the older man, "the reason is that he wants you to do anything except the thing that he suggests. Ain't that clear? He aims to find you too proud to foller his good advice. Ain't that clear?"

"Why—I dunno," said Harry, but he scowled darkly upon Gerald, and the latter smiled back with the clear eye and the cheerful manner of a child.

"You'd better do it," nodded Gerald. "And then, you see, I'll have a perfectly free conscience about getting up in the middle of the night and breaking open the safe."

"It makes me mad to hear him talk," said Harry sulkily.

"It'll make you and me both a mighty sight more mad if he gets away with what we've been savin' up for fifty year!" declared Pike Naylor. "You do what he says, if you got sense. I make

you responsible for the safety of the safe to-night, Harry!"

At this Harry started in some apprehension, but Gerald, for the first time during the meal, was paying no attention whatever to Harry. Instead, he was looking at the door which faced him, beyond the opposite side of the table.

For the knob of that door now turned slowly, and gradually the door itself swung open.

The dark of the night lay without, and into the black rectangle stepped the form of a big, wide-shouldered man, with a powdering of stars to make a background for his head.

He stepped in and closed the door softly, but with a heavy pressure, behind him. Then, as he turned, Gerald saw the face, and recognized Lambert Naylor, whom the rest of the clan called "The Lamb."

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS.

AND The Lamb looked straight across the table at him, his eyes burning as they dwelt upon the stranger; then down the table, for a single flash at the happy face of Elsa Thomas, only now turning cold with fear as she saw the new arrival.

"Hello, Lambert," said Pike Naylor. "You look as if you'd met this here gent before. Know him, Lamb?"

"Do you know me, my friend?" asked Gerald in his gay but gentle voice.

And he tilted back a little in his chair and smiled up at the glowering face of The Lamb.

But for all his graceful carelessness, he was keyed up for instant action, with the handles of two guns the hundredth part of a second from the tips of his fingers, and the two big lamps with their circular burners as targets before his eyes.

Yet he hesitated, waiting until the last

moment, the ultimate instant, before he acted. One never could tell. Miracles could happen in the ordinary course of events, and it might be that he would not have to smash a bullet through the brain of this hulking stalwart.

"Do I know you?" asked Lambert Naylor. He shrugged his vast shoulders. "How the dickens could I know you when I never seen you before?" he demanded. "Gimme some coffee and a chunk of meat," he added, and slumped heavily into a chair.

The miracle had happened!

But still Geraldi hardly could breathe easily with that formidable bulk of manhood in the room with him, until a new thought jumped into his brain. After all, considering the code of the place and the time, his treatment of big Lambert Naylor had been generous in the extreme. And perhaps this was the big fellow's method of repayment.

At any rate, Pike Naylor now was conversing with his sullen giant of a son.

"What's brought you down here?" he asked. "Ain't you still due to ride out there for another week?"

"I'm due to ride there," admitted Lambert Naylor with his usual growl. "But I got tired, and that's why I'm here. Is it a pretty good reason?"

He glared at Pike as he spoke, and the latter looked straight back at him, without uttering a word.

Eventually The Lamb stirred uneasily in his chair.

"I'll tell you how it is," said he. "I got tired of bein' up there, and it seemed like I'd pretty near choke if I had to eat another meal of my own cookery. Hard-tack and bitter coffee and half-fried bacon that's gettin' soft as butter—what kind of chuck is that to throw into the stomach of a man-sized man?"

"Give The Lamb another turn at the home place," said Bill. "Dog-gone me if he ain't worth three men when it comes to bulldoggin' or to cuttin' wood,

or any of them things, but why should you starve two men inside of one skin that far away from a kitchen stove? It ain't no ways fair."

"I'll remember you for that," said The Lamb gratefully. "We got a new friend along with us—come in from the outside pretty recent?"

"He came straight through your pass to-day," said Pike Naylor.

"He's a liar," said The Lamb with calm conviction. "He's worse'n that. He's the grandpa of all the liars in the world!"

"Hold on," said Pike. "You didn't take a nap durin' the day?"

"Well, maybe I did. A gent can't keep awake a thousand hours a day, can he?"

"That's it," said Bill. "He needs more sleep, just the same as he needs more food. You can't blame him for bein' different from the rest of us, and havin' different needs, dad."

"I don't blame him," said Pike quietly. "But this here gent is advisin' us to put him in irons and under a guard to-night, because otherwise he's gonna open the safe for us and clean it out. What you think about that, Lamb?"

"Open the safe—after he's in irons? I'd put him in the irons, anyway," said The Lamb, "because he looks pretty slippery, and a snake can slide where a lion can't crawl, I reckon."

He began to eat the platter of food which was now placed before him, and, lowering his head, he paid little or no need to what was happening in the rest of the room.

One thing, however, had been definitely decided—that Geraldi was, in fact, to be ironed and guarded as he had himself suggested, and when the meal was ended, he was taken to a room at the top of the house, in a third-story attic.

It was a small, low room, with space for a narrow bunk, on which were rolled down a pair of blankets, and on this bunk he sat down, and there Harry Naylor

lor in person came and snapped the handcuffs over his wrists, and locked the irons upon his legs. To them, attached by a heavy, four-foot chain, was fastened a fifty-pound lump of lead.

"When you start runnin' around in the middle of the night," said Harry Naylor, "you wanta be careful goin' down the stairs, because the ball will be jumpin' down behind you."

Geraldi looked on him with calm eyes.

"Are you to be one of the guards?" he asked.

"And why not?" asked Harry in his ugly manner. "Why let the other boys have all the dirty work to do?"

"No reason at all," said Geraldi, with that flashing smile of his. "Except I rather hoped that I could have another Naylor, for a change. Besides, I'm a little afraid of you, Harry, you're so rough and bold. One can see that you're a daring fellow!"

Harry flushed with instant fury.

"You won't always be in irons, Crawford," said he. "And when you're out of 'em, maybe I'll escort you—alone—to the border!"

"Will you?" smiled Geraldi, and looked thoughtfully up to his guard.

It was patent, then, that Lambert Naylor had kept his secret even after Geraldi left the room. And the latter wondered to what he could attribute that silence—to shame that others should know of the manner in which he had been manhandled, or to a real largeness of heart?

For if the name of Geraldi were revealed, if these people knew what others knew, they would hardly trust to irons to hold their prisoner!

Even as it was, Harry Naylor had no mind to keep the watch by himself. A second guard appeared, and the two took up their vigil together, while Geraldi lay comfortably on his side, watching them and chatting.

Not easy words to listen to were these of Geraldi, as he praised the vigilance of

the pair, and promised to escape through their hands, nevertheless.

And at last the two sat in a sour silence, never making a response in spite of the taunts and quiet gibes.

"Thank you, boys, for the pleasant chat," said Geraldi, and turning his back to them, he instantly fell asleep.

It was not a sham of slumber, but for four hours he slept like a child, and at the end of that time wakened to hear the pair talking softly together.

"He's still sleepin'," said a muttering voice just above him.

Geraldi kept his eyes closed, and heard the watcher move cautiously away. The two kept their voices so low that he barely could make out their words by straining his ears.

"I'm pretty far gone," said one. "I been up to three last night, playin' poker with Harvey, and Chuck, and Miller. I'm about all in."

"Go take a walk, then, will you?" advised Harry Naylor.

"I'd rather take a sleep, a whole lot!"

"Sure you would, and after you woke up—if you ever did!—you'd be numb all through your head. I know! Go take a walk."

"Well, maybe you're right, if you think that we need to have the two of us watchin' him."

"It ain't the question of need. It's makin' dead-sure. Dad would cut our throats if anything happened."

"Nothin' is gunna happen. Look at him! He's made fools out of us. Just a joke he's playin' on us, with all his talk. Why, there ain't anything to him, in spite of dad——"

"Is dad often wrong about a gent?"

"Well, he's gettin' old!"

"You go take your walk and come back here, will you?"

"I'll take a walk, then. The fresh air had oughta do me a lot of good."

"Don't stay away too long."

"I won't be gone more'n half an hour."

He opened the door, and his footfalls creaked slowly down the stairs.

At this, when the door had been closed, Geraldí began to snore, and Harry Naylor cursed impatiently, in a mutter.

Then, jerking open the window, he leaned out to refresh himself with better air, or perhaps merely to make the noise of the snoring fainter.

This, by turning his head, Geraldí was barely able to make out, and the riot gun lying on the table, close to the bed.

The next instant, furling his hands small, he had slipped them back through the handcuffs, and fumbling in a vest pocket he brought out one of those small slivers of steel in the use of which he was such a master.

It was easy to reach the lock of the fetters that clasped his legs. Each resisted for an instant. Each presently gave way, and now he lay on the bed, free!

He heard big Harry Naylor stir, felt him come toward him, and covered the loosed iron by turning on his face with a groan, as though freshly overwhelmed by sleep.

"A talkin', lyin', fakin' cheat!" he heard Naylor mutter, as the latter turned away again.

He went toward the window once more, but this time Geraldí rose behind him.

Softly he took up the gun from the table, saw the hammers were raised, and curled his fingers around the triggers.

"Harry!" said he.

Harry Naylor caught in his breath and whirled about

He was a fighting man, and he showed his spirit and his training at this critical moment, for though he had been taken utterly by surprise, yet half the length of a revolver was out of its holster on his hip as he faced Geraldí.

Then he saw!

The legs and hands of the prisoner

were free; the yawning mouths of the sawed-off shotgun gaped at his breast, and his life lay inside the curled forefinger of the stranger.

Utter consternation and bewilderment froze the brain of Harry Naylor. He stared like a child at a ghost.

But when he spoke, it was to say strangely: "I knew it couldn't happen—but all the time I was dead certain that it would!"

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A SAFE PLACE.

HARRY NAYLOR left his room with a revolver's muzzle leaning against the small of his back.

At the head of the stairs, he paused, though the gun thrust cruelly into his flesh as he halted.

"Ah, man," he breathed, "have the killin' of me here and now, but don't be shamin' of me any farther. By gravy, I won't take another step!"

The silent laughter of Geraldí was the faintest pulse in the air behind his victim.

"Why, Harry," said Geraldí, "I haven't the least desire to shame you. I wouldn't be guilty of such a thing, I hope and trust. But the fact is that I'm playing a school-teacher for you, Harry. Trying to drive home one great lesson. Mercy to strangers, charity to the poor and the afflicted, Harry! I don't think that you'll ever forget that part of your duty to humanity after this day. So you see that I'm taking all this trouble for your own good, my friend. Don't be ungrateful, but go lightly down the stairs. Lightly, lightly, Harry! Go as lightly as a feather. Be as soft as if you were all bubbles, for if one stair creaks under your foot, I'll turn you into an actual spirit, my lad, and you'll float without a sound for the rest of eternity!"

Again there was the soft pulse of silent laughter, and Harry Naylor went

shuddering down the steps, bracing his hands on both walls, endeavoring to take as much of his weight as possible from his feet.

So, without a sound, they worked down to the foot of the stairs. Then down a narrow hallway, slow as crawling worms, but as noiseless.

At length they reached a door where Harry Naylor paused again to make his last appeal.

"I've brought you along this far," he said. "It's through this door and down the steps. Another door at the foot. You can open that and there's one man in there. Tom Wilson is guarding the safe to-night. That's the whole lay of the land. Crawford, will you tie and gag me and leave me here? Otherwise, it's worse than death for me here in the house! I'll have to go to the end of the world to hide my face!"

"Tut, tut," whispered Gerald. "Think, man, how grateful you should be that you have a face at all? Only this evening you were going to turn the poor stranger from your door, Harry. You were even intent on stringing him up to the branch of a tree so that he never would bother you again. Think of that, old fellow, and be glad you have the face to save. Because, with one silent touch of a knife-point, that big heart of yours will be stopped forever! But you see, Harry, that I keep you with me, step by step, imparting little lessons in generosity, in gentleness, in the loving touch of kindness!"

Again that laughter which froze the very soul of poor Harry, and the latter groaned, ever so faintly.

"No more of that," said Gerald cheerfully. "Don't give way to weakness, Harry. Open the door, and pass softly down to the bottom of the stairs. Softly, but not too slowly, because time runs on, and your sleepy friend promised to be back in half an hour!"

Harry Naylor, without another protest, opened the door, and led the way

with his former care down the cellar flight of steps until they came at last to a flooring of rough stones, slippery with moisture that must have seeped through the foundations of the old buildings. Before them was a door sketched in by a broken line of light; behind that door, as Gerald knew, lay a safe that contained unknown treasure, and guarding the safe was some hired gunman, of tested courage, of tested willingness to lay down his life in the execution of his duty. Since the affair of Darcy, beyond question Pike Naylor must have tried and doubly tried the guard who remained for this secret post.

"And now, Harry," said Gerald in his softest whisper, "invite our friend to open the door. Call to him, Harry, and tell him that you must speak to him. Tell him that Pike Naylor has sent you. That ought to bring even lions out of their dens!"

He heard the gritting of Naylor's teeth; then Harry tapped at the door.

There was a stir inside, and then a gruff voice that called: "Who's there?"

Even in this greeting the man spoke softly, as though unwilling to break the charm that surrounded his post of office.

"It's me. It's Harry," said Naylor. "Louder, old fellow," said Gerald gently, but with a shrewd thrust of the gun-muzzle into the backbone of his victim. "Louder and more cheerfully!"

"You? Harry?" said the man inside.

"Yes, it's Harry."

"Well, Harry, whacha want? A hand-out?"

And Wilson chuckled at his jest.

"Cantcha wait till the old man dies?"

"Look here, Wilson," said Naylor, urged by the insistent gun of Gerald, "are you gunna open the door?"

"What for?" snarled Wilson. "I got my orders from the old man. He's my boss here. You ain't!"

"The old man's sent for him," whispered Gerald.



Naylor obediently repeated this phrase.

"He'd come and get me, if he wanted me," said Wilson. "What's your game, Harry?"

"Sprained ankle!" murmured Gerald.

"How can the old man come and get you when he's got a sprained ankle?" demanded Harry Naylor, throwing himself into his part with a surprising fervor.

"Him? He never took a wrong step in his life!" exclaimed the guard.

Harry chuckled.

"Ain't he? He took one to-night, though, and the language that he's been usin' is fit to use for black paint, and red, too. I never heard nobody carry on the way he's been, the last half hour!"

"What's he want of me?"

"How should I know?"

"I'm to leave the safe?"

"Yes."

"And who's to guard it?"

"You are," whispered Gerald.

"I am, you squarehead," said Harry Naylor.

"Squarehead, am I?"

"Aye, you are!"

"I'll see about that," growled Tom Wilson, and with a sudden jarring back of the bolt, he cast the door open and appeared before them.

He was one of those men who seem to have been born for fighting, and made for that purpose. The nose, usually such a vulnerable point, was in him a mere upturned button. The eyes, so susceptible of blinding bruises and painful shocks, were defended and ringed about by heavy projections of bone. They were hardly larger than the eyes of a pig. The jaw, too, was broad and blunt, made to sustain blows which would have stunned the brain of ordinary men. In addition to this, Gerald saw a fiery complexion, so that the scowling fellow always seemed flushed with fury.

"Now what the heck got you here to ——" began Wilson.

Then he saw the gun which Gerald leveled with his right hand across the shoulder of Harry Naylor. His left still kept a weapon poked into the back of that unlucky young man.

"Who--what——" began Wilson.

"Up with 'em," said Gerald gently. "Up, up, Tommy! I'm hurried, and haven't time to make explanations. Don't make Judge Colt do my talking for me!"

Tom Wilson backed slowly away, his hands at the same time struggling slowly upward past his shoulders and pausing at about the height of his ears. It was as though they possessed separate intelligences and wills, and desired above all to be down within finger-hold of the handles of the guns.

Gerald now drove Harry before him, and entering the safe room, he pushed the door to behind him with the pressure of his heel.

"The two of you!" said Tom Wilson. "Crawford—and he's bought you in, Harry?"

Brute and warrior though he might be, Tom Wilson sneered at such treason.

"He got me when my back was turned," said Harry Naylor with a groan. "What was I gunna do? Have I got eyes in the back of the head?"

"And him in irons?" Wilson laughed sardonically.

"Well-trained hands can slip the cuffs," explained Gerald generously. "And a touch of steel in the right place will open fetter locks. Stand back to back, my friends. You, Wilson, if you watch my gun instead of my face, will understand everything a great deal better. There you are. Raise your hands high, and put your arms together. So, so! Two strong young men, brave young men, imploring the gods for a better chance in life——"

As he spoke, with one gun leveled, and with the twine working with snaky

speed in the other hand, Geraldi snared the pair, and bound them inextricably together.

There is no more utterly hopeless way of embarrassing a man, no matter how strong, than by hitching him to another human. And presently the two lay on the floor, back to back, painfully gagged, helpless.

Geraldi, standing over them, drew out a handkerchief and wiped his hands, while he nodded and smiled at the pair.

"All will be well in the end," said he. "A little trouble at first, and some rough words from Pike, I suppose, but after he has had a chance to reflect—unless he has your throats cut in the first moment of discovery—Pike will realize that you never would have joined a plot which left you behind in his power after the treasure had been stolen. You understand, boys? You see that all this is done as a lesson to you in patience? I feel not like a thief but like an upright and wise teacher. I shall feel the better for this the rest of my life. Let's see, now, what the old iron cupboard contains!"

A new lock had been welded in to replace the one broken by Darcy with his "can opener," and Geraldi now squatted on his heels to examine it.

After that, he laid out a little kit which looked like a leather wallet and contained a closely packed row of little tools of the finest and the brightest steel.

From this he selected several, then drew from the center of the room the little round mat which lay there. On this he kneeled, and instantly was immersed in his labor.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### KIND AND GOOD.

IT was Tom Wilson who lay facing the safe. His face was puffed by the distension of his mouth and by the swelling of blood, so that his eyes were re-

duced to narrow slits, but these slits glittered with fire as he saw Geraldi at work, whistling the while a tune which was barely audible even in the silence of that place.

But not five minutes had passed before there was a noticeable *click*, and the door opened with a faint sigh of the in-rushing air.

Geraldi now replaced the tools in their kit, folded it, and thrust it back into a coat pocket. Next he removed the drawers from the safe, one by one, arranging them in a regular row along the floor. Then he began to go through them, making appropriate comments as he reached one exhibition after another of wealth.

He found the jewels about which Darcy had waxed so eloquent. He found the relics which were evidently the product of church plundering, and from these he picked up a crucifix of gold, set with an incrustation of large emeralds.

No consideration of the shortness of the time left to him could induce him to let this go without comment.

He carried it to Harry Naylor and exhibited it before the eyes of that unlucky young man.

"Now see, Harry," said he, "how much bad luck comes to people who plunder churches. The bad luck that's making your venerable father lose this entire treasure is, of course, the result of keeping such stuff as this in his safe. There is bad luck for me, also. Because I have to load myself down with a great deal of stuff that I can't keep, because all of these things I shall have to give back to the church.

"What church, Harry? In the old days, how many times did your father slip across the border with a gang at his back and beat up some village at night? How often did he smash in the door of a church and brain the poor guardians who tried to keep him away? How often did he come back with things like

this? Altar cloths, too—like this lace one! Why, it would take two wise women both their lives to make such a thing as this! How much, besides the few prizes that he kept for their own sake, did Pike Naylor sell and put the money into cattle? Tell me, Harry, if the whole Naylor fortune wasn't built upon exactly that foundation?

"No, don't tell me, because I can guess for myself!

"Wickedness, wickedness, Harry, regardless of your particular religious beliefs. These things are all gifts, and whoever steals a gift is taking something beyond the fact. I'd rather steal a horse than steal a gift, Harry. Tell your papa that when you next see him.

"Tell him, besides, that he should never steal except when stealing is a game as well as a profit."

He closed this odd speech by returning for more loot.

He worked rapidly, although his movements did not appear hurried. Yet it was as though there were eyes at the tips of his fingers as he routed out wads of bank notes, separated chamois sacks of the rarest and best jewels. A pair of big saddlebags being conveniently at one side of the room, Gerald piled the loot in these, not tumbling it in, but placing it in good order and arrangement.

He finished, at last, by again dusting his hands on the handkerchief, while he smiled at his two helpless captives.

"There's a moral to be gained from this tale," said Gerald. "Do good with all your heart, and there will be a reward for you in this world or the next. Perhaps in both—who knows? At any rate, you see that in escorting the young lady to her lover, my reward was heaped up for me at the end of the trail. It had been kept safely for me in a pocket of steel, which, nevertheless, opened at a mere touch."

He laughed again.

"If Pike Naylor wants desperately to

see me, after this, tell him that my address is uncertain, but that a warm greeting always awaits him, wherever I may be. And so, my dear friends, farewell!"

He left the cellar softly, closed the door behind him, and mounted the stairs to the hallway above.

Here he passed slowly down to the front door when he thought that he saw something glimmering down toward him from the upper stairway. He shrank back against the wall, but as the form came closer a sufficient amount of starlight sifted through the windows on either side to make him visible, he knew. He was prepared to leap and strike when the form paused on the stairs and a whisper said: "Is that you, Jimmy?"

He sighed with a vast relief and straightened at once.

"Elsa! I thought it was a ghost!"

"It almost turned into a ghost when it saw a man there between the windows," she said. "But then I remembered that Jimmy Gerald was not likely to make such a long ride for nothing! I mean, I can guess what's in the two bags!"

"What is it, Elsa?"

"A little present from a steel safe," said she.

"Some of this is probably out of Jerry's pocket," suggested Gerald.

"You're welcome to his share," she assured him.

"What brought you down here. Did you hear anything?"

"Not a thing except my own heart, and it's been thundering and racing so that I couldn't stay in bed. I had to get up."

"Happiness, Elsa?"

"The minister comes to-morrow, Jimmy. Of course, it's happiness."

"And after that?"

"I know what you mean. They're a rough lot. So's Jerry. But so am I. I never wanted to live in silks and such. I want horses and a place to ride 'em,

and that's what I'll have here! Oh, I'll be as happy as a queen!"

"Good night," said Gerald. "I won't say good-by, because I think that we'll find one another some place."

"I haven't thanked you," she said. "But I know that on account of me, you've made Ben Thomas your enemy! Ben Thomas on one side, and the Naylor's on the other—you'd better move out of this part of the country at once, Jimmy!"

"I don't need thanks," said he, "when I'm carrying away two sacks full of—what shall I say?—unconscious gratitude?"

He laughed softly in the darkness.

"You and Jerry be as happy as you can," said he. "It may be that the others will be hating you for a time, after this. They'll be sure to blame at least some of this bad luck on you. But you stick to Jimmy and everything will be all right. When is the marriage?"

"As soon as the minister can come over the hills. To-morrow night, perhaps!"

"Adios, Elsa. I'd give you a handful of wedding presents, but I'm sure Pike would recognize them and conclude that you'd been bribed!"

"Adios, Jimmy. Wherever kind men and good men go, there'll be room for you."

"Kind? Good?" chuckled Gerald.

"You're a thousand times better than you think," she assured him, and then she had a last view of Gerald in the open doorway with the stars clustering about his head and shoulders, kissing his hand to her. The closing of the door shut out the picture, and Gerald was gone!

## CHAPTER XV.

### A DEVOTED FOLLOWER.

OUTSIDE, Gerald paused and looked back at the dark side of the house. All was still, except for a feeble and irregular pounding which seemed to come

from the earth beneath his feet, but he could guess that it was the captured pair, beating their feet as well as the cords permitted them against the cellar door.

How long would it be before these sounds were heard, or until the second guard came to relieve the first in the natural course of duty?

He went on, unhurried.

Straight toward Harry Naylor's shed he took his way. With the black horse once under him, then let them look to their pursuit, for he would give them a chase worthy of a poem!

So he thought as he passed through the gate of the corral, when it seemed to Gerald that under the shadow of the shed, close against its wall, he saw horses and mounted men!

The saddlebags were slung over his shoulder, leaving his right hand and arm free, and that hand instantly possessed itself of a gun.

He stared into the shadows, and now he was sure that he saw a rider, but only one, keeping his horse perfectly still. Three other animals were with him. For another moment Gerald hesitated. He would not turn back, having gone this far, but, as he prepared to shoot, a low voice, a deep, and husky-bass voice called to him:

"Friend, Gerald!"

A friend, and in that house?

However, he went straight on until he was beside the mounted man. And then he recognized big Lambert Naylor, who could have caused his destruction on this evening, but had held his tongue! He was mounted on a capable-looking animal, two others were unsaddled behind him, and one of the two was undoubtedly the black stallion. The fourth horse wore a saddle also. It was as if Lambert were waiting for a companion, and about to start out with a relay of horses.

In fact, he said at once: "I been waitin' pretty near a half hour. We better start on."

"We?" echoed Geraldi, amazed.

"You and me," said The Lamb. "I been ready a long while. You got the stuff?"

"What d'you know about this stuff?" asked Geraldi, more amazed than before.

"What would Geraldi be out here for except the stuff that Darcy bungled so mighty bad?" asked The Lamb. "I know what you was after, and that you'd get it."

"Lambert, you have me bewildered. How could you know that I'd get it?"

"Well, didn't even a fool like Darcy get it? Then how could you miss it up? But I got two pairs of hosses ready. When we've used up the first pair, the second will take us over the line. We better start, though."

There might well be treachery behind this, but for some reason Geraldi could not doubt what the big man had said.

He mounted without another word; they left the corral, and soon they were through the screen of trees and heading out on the home trail.

They went at the lope with which the Western pony eats up the miles of a day-long journey, and as they rode, they still talked.

"Lambert," said Geraldi, "I can't understand you or what you're doing. D'you mind explaining? You know that if Pike Naylor suspects you of helping me away from the place, you never can come back?"

"I know that," said Lambert.

"But you've got as big a share in the place and the future of it as any other Naylor, haven't you?"

"Why, I suppose I have."

"But that means that you're giving up wealth, man!"

"What's money," said the other. "You can't eat it. What's hosses? You can't use more'n six or eight for riding."

"But they'll think that you've helped me to steal the money and the jewels from the safe, I tell you!"

"Let them think what they want."

"And, in that case, they'll never rest until they've tried to get at you, just as they'll try to get at me!"

"They won't get at you," said the other, "and if they miss you, they'll miss me. Because I'm gunna stay with you!"

"Stay with me?" cried Geraldi, almost exasperated, by this time.

"You won't want me," said the big man, patiently. "But all the same, I'm gunna stay right along with you. The fact is that I'm never gunna leave you, Jimmy, till I've learned something."

"Man, man," said Geraldi, still baffled, "you're giving up your family, your friends!"

"I'll take you in their place," said Lambert Naylor.

"They'll call you a traitor."

"Let 'em call me what they please."

"And every one in the world will be against you. They'll sneer behind your back. They'll swear that you've sold your own family to a stranger!"

"Let 'em sneer behind my back, if they can, but if they sneer in my face, I'll crack their heads together," declared The Lamb composedly. "I been a man that's been able to handle others tolerable easy. I ain't gunna begin losin' my hold on all the rest because I couldn't keep a grip on you!"

He paused here, and Geraldi, keeping quiet, felt that the explanation of the mystery was about to be his.

"When I went anywhere," said The Lamb, "they used to keep back from me. If there was a street fight, I could walk right through it, and the side that I took was the winning side! If there was a row in a bar, I fixed it. I've kicked twelve men into the street out of Jim Gresham's bar in Candy Creek. I done it myself, with my own feet—and hands. Then I had a drink with the bar-keep. He said that he never seen nobody fight like I done that day."

"Aye," said Geraldi. "I wish that I'd seen you!"

"Do you?" asked the other eagerly. "Well, maybe you will some day. And any day that you say, where there's a big enough crowd to make it worth while. I can handle 'em like sheep, even though I can't handle you!"

"Is that what troubles you, my friend?"

"Ain't it enough to trouble me?" asked the big man. "I been all by myself, when it come to a fight. When I laid my hands on anybody, he turned numb and got sick. It was always that way, even when I was a kid. The things that I touched, they got paralyzed. But then you come along, and you treat me like I was a kid, or a woman!"

He threw up a long arm against the sky; then arm and head fell together.

"Is that it?" asked Gerald. "Is it because you want me to teach you some of the wrestling tricks that I know how to use?"

"Would you do that?"

"Of course I'd do that! Gladly, too."

"Ah, and it's mighty good to hear you talk!" said Lambert Naylor. "Hard tricks—I know that they're that, and I never could get as slick as you at them. But what with my size and strength, if I was to learn some of the things that you can do——"

"Why, in that case, you'd kill a man, no matter how big, every time you handled him!"

The giant gasped out a laugh which was really choked with joy.

"Kill him, eh?" said he, with a brutal satisfaction. "Yes, an' I reckon that maybe I would. I reckon that I could, anyway! Look at you, not big at all. Like a feather! But I thought that you was pulling my arms out of their sockets. Suppose I was to know that trick, why, I'd be able to fix people the way that kids fix flies and grasshoppers."

He laughed once more, enormously, the bellowing sound flooding out in a really terrifying manner.

Then Gerald understood.

More than honor, more than duty to his family, more than fear of the world's opinion, this fellow valued the ability to rule his fellows by the weight of his hand, and this he hoped to learn from the very man who had caused his own downfall.

There was a naïve directness about this method of thinking that appealed hugely to Gerald!

"Take me willin', or do I have to come along and you not willin'?"

"Would you do that?"

"Whatever I say, I do it, or else I die tryin'," said The Lamb without any real sententiousness.

"I'll take you, then," declared Gerald. "And very glad to have you with me. You've thrown up your family, your money, your place in the world, all for the sake of a few wrestling tricks. But—I don't know that I blame you! You could learn some of these things still better in Japan, though."

"I wouldn't go to Skibby Land," said The Lamb, "for half a million dollars in spot cash. I'll learn from you! I'm glad that I'm goin'. And I'm glad that I've chucked everything for this. I'd rather do this than be on board of a pirate ship!"

The comparison made Gerald laugh heartily. He still was wiping his eyes when he heard The Lamb say:

"They've got our line, I guess."

"Who? Your family?" demanded Gerald.

The other waved his hand ahead, and upon the black slope of the mountain Gerald saw three fires standing in a row, of which the middle one winked out repeatedly.

"That means they know that we're going to take the middle trail through the mountains. But maybe we won't. It'll cost us a detour, but we can stand that, I think?"

"You know this country and I don't, partner."

"We'll swing left. We'd better go over that ridge. Confound the moonlight, though! It'll show up everything against the sky line, almost like the day. Now we better ride, Jimmy, ride like the furies were one jump behind you. If they get us, they'll broil us and serve us on toast to the dogs!"

He put his horse to full speed, riding with such skill; in spite of his bulk, that Geraldí was hard put to it to keep up.

They entered a narrow defile, with rock walls springing up on either hand, fencing high above them a narrow road like a bright street in heaven. And here the enormous laughter of The Lamb began again, booming and echoing like the roar of a waterfall, so that the very horses became uneasy.

"But if we come on only a patch of 'em—on only four or five—won't we make hash of 'em, Jimmy Geraldí?"

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HE'S ASLEEP!

IN the patio of the hotel, Cullen and Darcy drank bad beer, and practiced the rolling of cigarettes in Mexican style, that is to say, in the form of cornucopias, the big end to be lighted and the small one placed between the lips. They had acquired some skill in this labor, because for several days they had had nothing else to do.

They were waiting for the return of Geraldí, and their hopes were dwindling day by day.

Around them, on this evening, was the same well-packed crowd of Mexicans and cow-punchers which had filled the place on the night when Geraldí and Cullen here heard the story of big Ben Thomas. But the crowd did not elbow the two at their corner table. Only, now and again, eyes flashed toward the two, and dwelt cautiously upon them, for it was known that these men were, in some way, connected with that daring fellow who, it was said, had actually

raided the ranch of the Naylor, and was at this moment harried somewhere along the border line by all the mounted men the Naylor could put into the field. On the nearer side, big Ben Thomas with his cow-punchers, and with as many hired gunmen as he could afford to raise, was blocking the retreat of the fugitive.

But now a sudden murmur of excitement passed through the patio as a large man waded through among the tables, looking here and there for a vacant chair until he came, at last, to the table of Cullen.

"Sit down, Mr. Thomas," invited Cullen.

"You again," said Ben Thomas, glowing.

He changed his scowl for a grin.

"Waitin' for the fox to come home?" said he. "But he ain't never gonna get to earth! What's his name?" went on Thomas, sitting down in the proffered chair.

"Crawford," said Cullen.

"They's some say that he's Geraldí himself!" suggested the rancher. "But whether he is, or whether he ain't, he's a gone goose!"

"I suppose that he's close to cornered," admitted Cullen, with as much indifference as possible.

"And you ain't out tryin' to help your friend?" challenged Thomas.

"What's the use?" asked Cullen. "I'd help Crawford if I could, but every draw is watched. I don't see where Crawford has been able to hide. And they say that there's another man with him!"

"There is," said Thomas. "A Naylor, I've heard. And that's why we'll get him, even if he's really Geraldí. We'll get him, because when foxes travel in pairs, they're always caught."

"I reckon they are," groaned Darcy.

He had risked very much indeed, in returning so close to the land of the Naylor, but irresistible curiosity and the great suspense had drawn him here.

"The smart ones nigh all go that way," said Thomas. "Keen as mustard till they get lonesome, and then they're bagged through a partner!"

"You're so sure of the job that you've given up the hunt yourself?" asked Cullen.

The rancher tasted his beer and sighed at the poor quality of it. Then he removed his sombrero and mopped his forehead.

"I ain't give it up, but I've come back and coralled a dozen fresh hosses, and I'm gunna freshen myself up a bit before I go back and swaller some more dust. If only the Naylor's get him before I do, I'll be satisfied!"

"How come?" asked Darcy, bitten with curiosity.

"Why, I claim to be tolerable white. And you take what he done to me, it ain't so bad. He wanted a pass to the Naylor house, and he used my girl for the job. She wanted to go, and he was willin' to take her. But the Naylor's, they're a mighty sight more peeved. If they catch him, Geraldi won't never back a hoss again, and you can lay to that."

"It's not Geraldi," said Cullen. "His name is Crawford."

"Maybe," said Ben Thomas indifferently. "Maybe they was two Napoleons, too, and two Hannibals. But I reckon not! He rides a hoss like Geraldi's hoss, and he slips through like Geraldi does, and he raises the same kind of trouble all around in the same kind of a way. He's got the same looks, too, and so I say if it ain't Geraldi, it's his twin brother, which is just as bad! But whoever he is, he's a goner."

"I suppose he is," said Cullen. "But he's put up a game fight!"

"Game?" said the rancher. "Nothin' but game, I'll tell a man. I got a boy with a leg broke—fall from a hoss. I got three more in the hospital. One with a rake along the ribs where a bullet plowed. Two with holes in their

legs. That was when they tried to get through the Chimney Draw, and we turned 'em! But my boys all like the game, and they're stickin' steady to the guns."

He waved his hand toward the crowd about them.

"These fellers all want to see the pair of 'em get through and clean away, I reckon?"

"They seem to," admitted Cullen.

"The under dog gets the headlines, always, when his back is to the wall," declared Thomas. "Well, this here Geraldi, I like the ways of him. He shoots safe, for one thing. Nobody tell me that he couldn't've dropped some of my boys for good, if he'd wanted to. But he didn't. He played it safe, and only trimmed 'em. And he's a man fightin' for his life, at that!"

He finished his beer with one great draft.

Then, as he got up, he leaned for a moment across the table.

"I'll tell you what, young man, I kind of wish your friend luck in spite of myself!"

Then he turned and passed slowly out, stepping in and around among the tables.

There was a great outbreak of chattering voices as he disappeared and Cullen exclaimed irritably, under cover of the noise: "Jimmy should have had better sense than to take one of the Naylor's in tow!"

"He ain't caught yet," said Darcy hopefully.

"It means a four-way split instead of a three-way split, too," suggested Cullen.

"If he comes through at all, they's enough for four," answered Darcy. "Leave Geraldi be, till we find out what's happened in the end. A dog ain't dead so long as he's showin' his teeth. How many horse-miles, I wonder, have they used up on this chase of him, already?"



But Cullen did not answer, for he had fallen into gloomy thoughts.

At last he rose, and Darcy followed him out of the patio, pursued by soft-voiced murmurs which wished well to their "amigo."

"It's no use," said Cullen at last, as they reached the open in front of the main entrance to the hotel. "We'll never see Geraldí again. You've heard what Thomas said? I've made up my mind. I'm starting East in the morning. You can go part way with me, if you like."

"I'll go," said Darcy, "till I find another set of gents to tackle this job."

"Will you find a better man than Geraldí for it?" asked Cullen dryly.

"I dunno," said the patient Darcy, "but, somehow, I'm pretty sure that the stuff I seen is gunna be taken away from the Naylor's. Thieves got no right to keep their loot forever, and a lot of the Naylor treasure is stole, by my way of thinkin'!"

"Whatever it is," said Cullen, "we'll never see any part of it! Let's go up!"

Up the stairs they went, and at the door of their room suddenly paused in surprise.

"I thought that you didn't lock it, Darcy?" said Cullen, trying the knob.

"No more did I," replied Darcy. "Did you turn it to the left?"

"Yes," said the other, and tried again.

"Here," said Darcy. "I'd sure swear that I didn't lock that door."

In fact, it gave at once under his hand, and in the gloom before them appeared a form with monstrous wide shoulders, and great hanging arms, like the arms of a gorilla.

This huge fellow placed his finger at his lips.

"Steady, partners," he whispered. "The chief is asleep!"

"The chief? What chief? And who are you?" demanded Cullen, nevertheless, sinking his voice.

"Jimmy, you blockhead," replied the other in a gruff whisper. "He's pretty

well tuckered out. He ain't hardly slept at all for five days and nights! Set up and watch over me while there was danger. Now I reckon that I'll see he gets this first sleep out. Come in if you have to, but step soft. You two can sleep on the floor along with me. They ain't gunna be nobody disturbs the chief on that bed!"

On tiptoes, clutching at one another in excitement, Cullen and Darcy entered the room.

They hardly dared to breathe, but with held breath they stared through the gloom. From the lanterns in the patio, a dim radiance entered the window and was reflected from the ceiling to the floor, so that on the bed they could make out the slender form of a man lying sprawled, face downward.

"It's Jimmy!" said Cullen.

"It's Geraldí!" said Darcy, his voice quivering.

"How—did he bring it with him?" asked Cullen.

"The stuff? It's there under the bed. You can see the pair of saddlebags!"

"We'll have a look at it, Darcy," said Cullen, tiptoeing forward.

He was taken by the shoulder by a hand that seemed capable of smashing the joint with a slight increase of pressure.

"Back up, son," said The Lamb. "No part of that stuff is mine, but all the same, I ain't gunna see nobody else touch it. If you got any claim on it, let the chief hear what you got to say. Hey," he added with a sudden start, "it's Darcy, eh?"

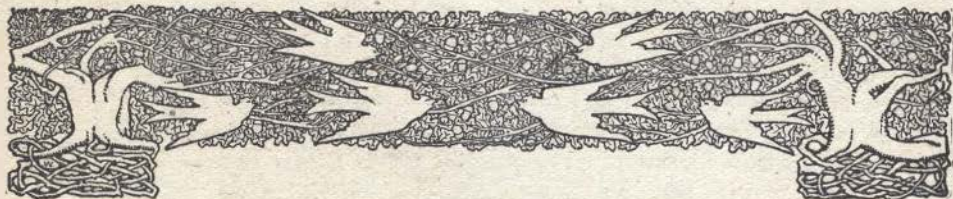
He laughed, the hushed noise of his mirth wheezing softly in the room.

"You'll have a share, I reckon," said the brutal Naylor. "You've finger-marked a lot of that stuff with your blood, ain't you? Now back up, and set down, and we'll wait for him to wake up. Step soft, or I'll crack your heads together if he wakes up. Five days—five dog-gone, mortal days of livin' one

minute and dyin' the next, and him, he stand beside it, he faced toward the two  
never stopped laughin'——" thieves, and remained like a tower on

He approached the bed, and taking his guard.

Another adventure of Geralsi will appear in an early issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



## BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

### The Chestnut-sided Warbler

(*Dendroica Pennsylvanica*)

THE wood warblers are many, numbering approximately one hundred and fifty known species. America is their home and no other country can boast of them. In North America, there are said to be seventy-four kinds, fifty-five of these belonging to the United States.

One of the best known members of the family is the chestnut-sided warbler. These are sprightly little birds. The male has a mottled olive-green back and a bright yellow crown. The under side is nearly white with a definite wide chestnut stripe on each side. The female is similar in appearance, but her colors are less striking. The coloring just described is the spring dress. In the fall the back becomes yellower, with a few spots of the chestnut on the breast.

The nest of this warbler, which will be found in the woodlands, is made of strips of bark, soft, dry leaf stems and like materials, lined with tendrils and rootlets. It is usually placed in a small tree or even a bush, three or four feet above the ground. Because of its proximity to the ground it suffers from depredations of any cats which happen to live near by. Four or five white eggs marked with brown are deposited in the nest.

The diet of these warblers is almost exclusively insectivorous—caterpillars, plant lice, beetles, and small insect life infesting the bush and tree where they make their home. Occasionally the birds will fly after some of the winged insects.

The song of the chestnut-sided warbler is similar to that of the yellow warbler. It is delightful to listen to. One feels that the warblers stay too short a time, but like all other birds which depend upon insect food, they must keep traveling in the direction of insect life. By the middle of September they have left their summer haunts and flown to Central America, Tennessee, and the Carolinas.

The warblers are very clean birds, taking a great pride in keeping their little homes neat and tidy. The mother and father bird are very devoted to each other and interest in their young family, taking turns caring for them. Sometimes the shiftless cowbird drops an egg or two into the warblers' nest. The poor warblers find it very disconcerting, for the cowbird grows to a size twice that of its foster parents. Nature did not give birds the power to distinguish their own from any others, provided the stranger is placed in their care at birth.



# Old Birds Fly High

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Kitty! Kitty! Kitty!" etc.



EH! Heh!"

"Dad" Simms indulged in a chuckle as Kusko, his lead dog, ignored a traffic signal on Pioneer Place and caused a general slamming on of brakes. The crossing patrolman smiled. His crossing was a favorite for sour doughs and their dogs. Sour doughs either leaving for or arriving from Alaska generally managed to find Yesler Way and Pioneer Square and from this point got their bearings. A drinking fountain flowed almost in the shadow of the totem pole and a man could drink without getting down on his stomach or dipping it up with his hands. Thus he got his first taste of city life.

"Heh! Heh!" chuckled Dad again.

WS-4F

"I'm surprised at you, Kusko," he said; "you've been up North so long you're a regular jay walker. A few more escapes like that and you'll get back your city ways. It's a good thing people can see we're from the sticks or we'd be killed."

Dad was down in Seattle from Cold Deck on a little matter of business for "Flapjack" Meehan and "Tubby" Wil-lows. Flapjack's managing the Cold Deck Rodeo kept him busy, and Tubby could not very well leave Cold Deck. Thus Dad was getting a trip outside and having all expenses paid. Naturally, Kusko was along. Dad had taken his Hollywood clothing out of the moth balls and looked like a real sport again. Though he wore his city duds well, he never felt as easy in them as he did in

parka and moccasins. He hurried on to the Frye Hotel and registered. Then with the dog he started for a walk about the city.

As usual, the trail Dad followed led to the pawn shops. Here and there in the windows an old .44 occasionally made its appearance. And if it were old enough Dad invariably bought it for his collection of old guns. This collection was quite varied, and while he did not have the gun used by Daniel Boone he possessed several others just like it.

Behind the old weapons he could sense the history of many. This one, he dreamed, had saved a man's life during a cattle stampede. That one had brought a hunter game when he was starving, and the next one had enabled a man to defend himself against overwhelming odds. The owners were gone, but the weapons had come to rest in a pawnshop window. If Dad could pick up a gun with notches carved in it he was happy for a month afterward.

The first shop brought nothing of interest, but the second caused him to come to a dead stop.

"Dang my buttons!" he cried. "Can I believe my eyes? If that ain't Pete Seldon's .44 my name ain't Dad Simms and I never saw Cold Deck or any other place in Alaska."

His keen memory slipped back through the years and he recalled a late summer afternoon when Pete Seldon had ordered him to be out of town within twenty-four hours or shoot it out. Dad had done nothing to leave town for and so he decided to remain—but he kept his powder dry. He sent word to Pete that he would be glad either to call it quits or to exchange compliments through the medium of six-guns at sunset. Pete had replied by saying he would come down the main street exactly at sundown. Dad had replied stating he would come up the main street at sundown. As the street in

question was three blocks long, each would have ample opportunity not only to see the other in plenty of time, but to begin firing whenever he believed his marksmanship equal to the situation. Exactly on the dot Dad had fared forth, with his gun riding within easy reach and his eyes alert. Halfway down the main street he had not seen his enemy. Nor had he seen any one else. The entire camp was indoors waiting until the powder smoke, if any, cleared away. With one block remaining Dad heard something sing past his ear and at the same instant a gun roared. Pete was shooting at him from an old adobe building.

Dad returned the fire instantly and all he got for the first three shots was spurts of dust from the adobe walls a few inches from Pete's head. Then, fighting mad, Dad had charged. Pete vanished out the rear door and disappeared into a thicket, from which he fired another shot. A moment later Dad heard the hoofbeats of his horse. Then, for the first time, Dad realized that one of Pete's bullets had taken effect. He hurried to the nearest aid, which happened to be a horse doctor, was patched up and then took the trail for Pete. Dad had never found the man, but he had sworn to get even if it took him the rest of his life.

Nor would he ever forget Pete's weapon. It was a .44 Colt and on either side, just above the butt, there was fastened to the weapon a dime. The year was 1877. Dad remembered that perfectly.

Entering the shop, Dad motioned the pawnbroker to come forward. "I'd like to take a look at that gun," he announced, "and see the date on the dime."

"Sure," the other agreed. "The date is 1877."

"I thought so," Dad answered. "Now, tell me this. What kind of a hairpin brought that gun in?"

"Don't remember right now. It was

about three months ago," the pawnbroker answered.

"Was he a long, lean, hungry cuss with kind of queer-looking hair? Hair about the color of a barley sack?"

"Such a fellow came in here," the other admitted. "Had a scar over his left eye."

"That's the baby!" exclaimed Dad. "Was he a kind of a windy cuss? Didn't he tell you he'd killed forty or fifty Indians in his time and ran several bad white men to earth?"

"Yeah, come to think of it he did. And his name was—was—— Wait! I'll find it."

"His name was Pete Seldon," Dad answered. "You don't need to look it up. What I want is the cuss' address."

"Going to give him a hand?" the pawnbroker inquired. "You old-timers are great on helping each other out."

"Yeah. I'm going to give him a boost," Dad said; then to himself he added, "with the toe of my boot."

The pawnbroker consulted his records at length, then he wrote down an address. "That's the address he gave me, but you can never tell. He looked to me like a slippery son of a gun and he may have moved on."

"That's good enough for me," Dad growled. He left the place, then at an afterthought returned. "I'd like to buy that gun if the time on it has expired," said he.

The pawnbroker examined the ticket. "She's yours for five dollars."

Dad was thrilled and did not mind admitting it. "Kusko," he said, "some-where in the Bible it says something about a man's enemies being delivered over to him if he waits long enough. I don't remember whether they're supposed to be bound or not. I don't care. I'm sure going to square accounts with this cuss before another sun rises."

At the hotel Dad looked up the district where Seldon lived; then, wrapping up the weapon, he called a messen-

ger. While waiting the boy's arrival Dad wrote:

COYOTE: A lot of water has run under the bridge since you agreed to shoot it out. I found this in the pawnshop to-day. I've loaded it and made it ready for business. I'll come down the street toward your house at sundown to-day. I'm giving you one more chance to die like a man.

Yours truly,

SIMMS.

He did not sign the letter "Dad Simms," because "Dad" was a young man in those days and did not merit the title that age and the affection of his friends had since given him.

When the messenger was gone, Dad fell to thinking. "It's one of the unfinished bits of business of my life," he muttered, "and it ought to be cleaned up. Dang his worthless hide, any way! I sure did suffer from that wound. It wasn't serious in a way, but it hung on and kept me from going on a stampede that would have made me rich. Fate has queer ways of dealing the cards at times. But if a man waits long enough he'll get his chance.

"I'll bet the cuss is busted, too," Dad continued. "If he wasn't busted he wouldn't have soaked that old .44. And now it's mine. Of all the guns I've collected none can equal that. It's the prize because it was a gun that actually wounded me when it was fired by an enemy. I'll fix Seldon, then I'll take his old gun back again." He looked out the window. It lacked two hours of sundown. "Huh!" he grunted, and abruptly left the hotel, carrying the weapon hidden in a holster under his arm. Police in cities are careful about such things.

Sundown was an hour off. Dad Simms had located Seldon's home. It was an old cabin set back among a stand of fir. Though Seattle had grown, it had not yet reached this place. A few fruit trees were scattered about. They

needed trimming. The garden was over-run with weeds.

"That's Seldon's place," the old-timer mused, "I'd know it anywhere by the neglect. Shiftless Seldon! I'd like to tear in there now and start working on the cuss." He glanced toward the sun. Would it never set? "If I thought he had any interest in the place, I'd buy it just for the sake of kicking him out." With the passing of time Dad's memory of Pete Seldon's treachery grew. "Tried to shoot me in the back. I'd forgive most anything but that. Not because it was me so much as because it shows how yellow the cuss was. Why, that cussed sun seems to be standing still!"

He walked down the road a half mile and vanished in the timber. He whipped out his old .44 and blazed away, trimming the leaves off a small tree. "I can shoot as well as ever," he muttered. "I'm a mite slower, but just as sure. I'm good enough for Seldon."

Presently, Dad's rage gave way to caution. "The cuss will probably try his old tricks—shoot from the brush this time. I've got my dander up and I ain't going to be caught off guard." Dad slunk along through the brush, seeking signs of ambush. He found none. When he returned the sun was half down. He watched the red ball vanish over the Olympic Mountains. The hum of the city was distant. Once more primitive man was settling an account with primitive man.

"Now!" Dad muttered. "I'm ready!" He stepped into the open and started walking up the road. The cabin was still about two blocks away. Dad glanced toward it, expecting to see the muzzle of a rifle protruding or perhaps a sawed-off shotgun. Well, if so, he was ready to dive into the brush.

The door opened and a man's tall figure suddenly appeared. In his hand he held the weapon decorated with the old dimes. "Pete Seldon!" Dad muttered. "And he's coming for me!"

Seldon lifted his gun. His face was deathly white. Dad could see it at a distance.

"Scared plumb stiff," Dad muttered. "That sight's good for my old eyes. Always was yellow. I'd better let him have it now. No, I'll get a little closer."

Seldon suddenly pulled the trigger. The old weapon roared and the bullet droned over Dad's head.

Dad's gun came into action. "I gave him first shot and that's fair enough," he cried. Then his gun crashed.

Pete Seldon sprawled out in the road. "I'll be dog-goned," Dad cried. "I never shot at him at all! My bullet missed him by thirty feet and he fell flat. Heh! Scared stiff!"

Dad stepped closer. He expected treachery even now. The man might suddenly turn and fire. Then he saw the old weapon at least five feet from Seldon's hand. He stooped down and looked at the other's face. Time had taken its toll. The face was lined and drawn. But there were different lines in it than Dad had once known. Pete Seldon had changed in another respect. The lines made his face seem less treacherous.

"Get up!" Dad ordered.

There was no sign of life in Seldon. Dad dragged him to his cabin and placed him on the bunk. A teakettle was filled with warm water. Dad looked around for tea. The grub box was empty of tea, coffee, or food.

The place was clean, far different than the cabin Dad had once known. "That cuss has been starving to death," Dad muttered. "Huh! Well, maybe the hot water will help some." He forced a drink between the man's lips.

Slowly, Seldon opened his eyes. "Hello, Simms," he said weakly. "If a man waits long enough he'll get his chance. I was waiting for one more chance at you. I thought I'd die before it came, but it came—to-day."

"You didn't shoot at me," Dad

charged. "I could tell the bullet went way high."

"I shot at you once, from cover, from behind," Seldon said weakly, "and it has been a cross I've carried my whole life. It was the one time in my life I was yellow. I couldn't live it down. Wherever I went men talked about it and pointed at me. I was afraid of you that time. You were among the best shots in the country and you still are. But you missed me to-day. That don't count. What counts is that I finally had my chance to let you shoot at me. And—you did!"

"And missed," Dad said. Inwardly he was smiling. He did not tell Seldon he had purposely missed him; that he had no intention of doing more than wounding him, nor that he could not do that when he saw his conditoin.

"Now, I guess I can die," Seldon said. "I've wiped the slate clean by giving you your chance. Men can't say I'm yellow now. I stood before your fire. You don't think I'm yellow, eh, Simms?"

"Heck, no," Dad snorted. "And you're not going to die, either. You're

just beginning to live, as I take it. Look at me. Ten years older than you. I'm having more fun than I ever had." He picked up the weapon he coveted. "Here's your old gun for a starter. You might need it if you got in a tight place some time. I'll send out some grub to-night. To-morrow morning I'll come out to see you. I know of some creeks that some old fellow should look over. These young cusses don't always go deep enough. They get tired if they don't find bed rock right away. Us old birds aren't in such a hurry. What do you say?"

Seldon did not need to answer. His cheeks were glowing with excitement over the chance. "There's nothing left in the old poke, Simms, unless I can get something for this," he said. "I bought it so I could die on land of my own."

"Keep it. You won't need it for years yet. As for a grubstake, leave that to me. I can always scare up some dust for an outfit." Then Dad Simms hurried away to round up some supplies for immediate use. "Heh! Heh!" he chuckled. "I'm sure a mean cuss when I get my dander up!"



### THE WEED THAT FOUND FAVOR

**T**H**E**R**E** is a law in the State of Oklahoma which designates Johnson grass as a noxious weed and provides a penalty for the man who lets it go to seed. The law was all well and good when the only enemy that cotton growers had to fight was weed, but now farmers are confronted with a far worse plague—the boll weevil, and the former plant pest has suddenly proved itself a blessing in disguise.

The virtues of Johnson grass were discovered in this way. Farmers whose cotton crops had been destroyed by the attacks of the boll weevil, disregarding the law, allowed Johnson grass to overrun their fields. The grass, which grows waist-high and resembles Sudan grass, proved excellent as fodder for cattle. It makes hay nearly as good as alfalfa for dairy cattle, and E. T. Zigler, in tests made in Stephens County, showed that an acre of this pasturage will fatten two beeves.

So now the once-despised weed has become highly popular. Farmers of southern Oklahoma whose cotton crops have been destroyed by the boll weevil are even buying seeds of the grass, and many have turned from the raising of cotton to the raising of cattle on the strength of this discovery. The grass, in spite of legislation to the contrary, has come into its own.



# The Longhorn Queen

By George Gilbert

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

CLAIRE CRESSLIN, owner of the Star J, hires Kurne Kessler. She warns him that Star J men do not mix with the Lightning S, of which Tib Haslane is owner. Haslane admires Claire, as do all her own men, but his attentions are not welcomed. At a dance Haslane attempts to kidnap Claire, and with his followers attacks Star J men.

Kurne proves his worth and is sent on line-camp duty. He encounters Haslane riding with a Mexican. Haslane draws, but Kurne beats him to it, administers a quiring, and forces Haslane to walk home. The Mexican admits he is going to Star J to see Claire, but will give no reason. Continuing his journey, he is shot on the trail. Kurne, scouting, is set upon and attacked by another Mexican. Taken to a shack, the Mexican is about to make a statement when he is shot dead through the window.

Returning to Star J, Kurne finds a man named Freschter at the Lightning S line camp. The latter dislikes what Kurne tells him of Haslane's methods and decides to ride with him to Star J.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CALL-DOWN.



NOON found Kurne and Freschter back at the Star J line shack. Not a word had passed between them to show that Kurne had held the former Lightning S man up early that morning. Without discussion or any show of sentiment,

Kurne had accepted the gunman at his own estimation. In the same manner the gunman had accepted Kurne's offer of hospitality at the Star J camp.

They buried the Mexican, Luis, and Kurne wrote on an air-tight label a brief account of what had happened. This he hid in a chink in the wall, first letting Freschter read it. Freschter had gone over the sign when they had back-trailed the killer and at the line



shack, too. To the statement Kurne made out he added: "The sign shows he's right," and signed his name to it.

After noon had passed Kurne began to watch the southern trail for dust. He saw it at midafternoon. The signal cloud betokened a numerous party, and they were coming rapidly.

They drew up to the line shack half an hour later. Claire, Durkie, Hi Low Lurton, Morrow, Wherton, Big Nabors. Durkie looked curiously at Freschter. Kurne accounted for him thus:

"Man I found over at Lightning S line camp. He's sick of workin' for an owner that doesn't measure up."

The narrowed eyes of the Star J men swept over the newcomer's hard face. He was quickly appraised. Durkie said: "Well, yo'd hardly fit in that outfit, cowboy."

"And how about workin' with us?" Claire asked.

Freschter's hard eyes were on her face an instant. He nodded, saying: "O. K., if yo' can stand me."

"Yo're pay begins right now."

"I'm rememberin' that, miss," touching his hat.

"And now, let's hear all that happened since Wherton left," Durkie suggested.

Kurne told them what had happened. Freschter confirmed such details as he was aware of. As Kurne went on, eyes flashed and men made heated remarks by way of interludes to the narrative crisply told.

"I think Star J owes Lightning S a call," Claire declared.

"That's just it," Durkie agreed.

"If they're all home they'll have double our numbers," Big Nabors reminded them. "Not that I care, particular." He hitched his belt as he spoke.

"But what did Ramon want t' see Miss Claire for?" Kurne asked, and his eyes were on her face as he put the question.

"He was sweet on one of the Star J girls, Josefina Carillo, Kurne," said Claire. "I asked her about him and she told me that he was steady and not a boaster or a man to make an alarm over nothing. But she did not know what he might have to tell me that would make any one wish to kill him."

"And that other fellow that got killed? What do yo' make of that, Durkie?" Kurne asked of the veteran foreman.

"The killer most likely figured that as that Mex was hurt, he might weaken and confess before goin' out on his last journey, and he stopped his mouth with a bullet."

"That's how it tots up t' me. And who would have a killin' reason t' stop Ramon from goin' t' see Miss Claire? I think if I hadn't come onto him and Haslane, something would have happened t' Ramon right then and there."

"Yo' suspectin' Haslane?" Durkie demanded.

"I don't know yet."

"That isn't it," Claire declared. "A killer has shot from Lightning S territory and killed a man on our side of the range. A killer has tried murder and then killed his tool, right on Star J ground. And we've still got that old score against Lightning S that we told Haslane once we'd bring up, if any mean acts against us could be traced to him or his outfit."

"Yo' mean that old privilege that we always claimed?"

"Yes, that thing of making our drive to Portales by way of Lonesome Ridge and north from there. Lightning S has always just held this part of its range by a compromise. But a proviso in the old range agreement between Star J and Lightning S was that Star J could drive over this section."

"Yes, that's on record," Durkie agreed with her. "We laid off this route in drivin' t' Portales as a matter of compromise, holding the right t' revive that

privilege any time Lightning S acted against our interests. That closed the old feud between old Haslane and yo' dad."

"And now we'll revive our right to drive over Lonesome Ridge and around to Portales in that way," said Claire, and her hand swept around to include the northeast and north.

A hum of assent and admiration went through the group of picked men of Star J as their leader gave out her program.

"We ride in the morning," Claire declared; "we're all right now ourselves, but the horses need rest, and feed, and water."

A man was told off to act as night-hawk on the horse herd. Durkie took a horse and rode out along Lonesome Ridge and verified before dark the findings of Kurne in regard to the sign left by the killer. Kurne had kept off the sign itself, riding to one side while reading it.

Durkie came back about dark with his brow clouded. He said the killer's trail finally had merged with so much cattle sign that it was lost. And also that he had verified Kurne's findings from the sign as far as he had gone over it. He had with him the quirt Kurne had thrown away.

"Here's that quirt, Kurne, better use it," he suggested.

"Not any; it's been used on a polecat."

"I'll take it and give yo' mine, Kessler," Freschter offered. Kurne passed him the discarded quirt and received Freschter's in return.

They were not disturbed that night by sight or sound of anything unusual. They slept in the open, leaving the line shack for Claire. With the dawn they were making ready and in an hour had made a light meal and started for Lightning S. Durkie took a route to the west of the stone hut, which they avoided. It was a ride of fifteen miles

and they took it at a steady trail shuffle, with Durkie in the lead. Just behind him rode Claire and Big Nabors, side by side. Behind them were Kurne and the other Star J men. Freschter was in the clear. Once Big Nabors turned and said, in a low voice to Kurne:

"That new man don't quite add up even t' me, Kurne."

"Well, it was a quick jump he made from Lightnin' S t' us, but he'd hardly worked for them yet."

"He'd ought t've quit them entire."

"He's not ace-high; just a gun warrior for hire."

Big Nabors grunted disgustedly and let the subject drop.

The sun was three hours up when they came to Lightning S. It was a fairly large headquarters outfit, but not to be compared to Star J. It was against the shoulder of a foothill, and behind it was the principal Lightning S range, upland, rolling, reaching up to a mesa on the west where gramma was for summer feed and down to the dryer levels for winter pasture. Lightning S had a mixed lot of cattle, and many of the brands clearly had been worked over or vented, indicating change of ownership before Lightning S got them.

"And he's the man that's said that Star J brands too many calves! Now that we've worked so much into long-horns, pure, he cain't swing that kind of a loop, because we're the only outfit runnin' those old mosshorns," Durke told Kurne, as they neared the Lightning S headquarters. This was a rambling stone building, with some adobe additions and L's. Corrals, outbuildings, sheds, *casa* and bunk house bore signs of slovenly management.

The coming of the cavalcade was heralded by the scurrying of hairless dogs and the baying of two big hounds. A man came out of the bunk house and stared. Then he started for the *casa* in a hurry. He had barely time to stick his head in the door and bawl something,

when the Star J group arrived, coming to a dust-raising stop before the door. Almost immediately Haslane came out, dressed as for the trail, immaculate, all his finery in evidence. He had on a new pair of tan buckskin gloves. He raised his hat with his left hand, bowed, and said:

"Charmed, Miss Cresslin. Can I be of assistance to Star J?"

His face was free of lines of worry or anger, his bearing perfectly polite and self-possessed. But the marks of Kurne's quirt were plain on his smooth cheeks.

"I came over to report that two of your men were killed on Star J territory, one yesterday afternoon, the other last night, Haslane."

"Two of my riders?"

"Yes, Ramon and Luiz."

"How killed?" And now the quirt marks showed red against the sudden white of Haslane's face.

Now he caught sight of Kurne Kessler and despite his control his face flashed into a stormcloud of hatred. Then it passed and he was smiling again. He kept his face toward Claire, who went on:

"Ramon wanted to tell me something. He was assassinated on the way. A man, Luiz, from your line camp near Lonesome Ridge, tried to waylay my man Kessler last night as he returned from scouting to find who shot Ramon. Kessler got Luiz, but did not kill him. As Luiz was on the floor of our line shack, some one shot through the window and killed him. We think it was a man who was with Luiz to assist him in killing Kessler, but who was afraid Luiz would confess who sent them, and so finished Luiz to protect himself."

"It might have been so, Miss Cresslin," said Haslane, as if honestly puzzled; "but as for me, I know nothing about it. I'm just back from Portales and was going t' start a round of my line camps t'day."

He looked to his man, who had bawled him the warning of the coming of the Star J group. The man nodded, saying:

"Sure; the boss just got back from Portales. Took forty winks and breakfast and was ready t' ride again."

"Where are all your Mexican vaqueros?" Durkie asked sharply. "And are yo' sure yo've been over at Portales so recently as all that?"

"Yo're not runnin' my ranch," icily retorted Haslane. Again his face was white, the quirt marks laced across it plainly.

"I guess not," said Durkie, looking around scornfully.

"We won't appeal to the law on this case," Claire went on; "it will be like that joke you tried to pass off on us in town not so long ago. We'll let it rest as it is. That killer's trail pointed this way. It's up to you to let the law know, Haslane, and if you do, we'll have our men testify as to what the sign says."

"I think yo're wise; a judge and jury might have a funny idea about two of my men being killed on Star J territory," Haslane said slowly. "And so yo're wise, not making any complaint before a law court. And then, again, there was that unprovoked assault your man Kessler made on me, at the point of a gun," and now his face was very white and the quirt marks stood out plainly.

"Those never ought t' be taken into court; every one would laugh yo' out of court if yo' told them that yo' took a quirtin' without throwin' lead," Kessler retorted.

Haslane, with a powerful effort of will, got his face smoothed out again. He bowed to Claire. "You will have to excuse me, for I'm busy, right busy," he said. "And with the feeling so unfriendly, I may be excused for not offerin' yo' hospitality."

He started to back into the *casa*. Durkie called to him:

"Just stay right in between us and

that bunk house; yo' may have some dark-skinned gunmen in that dawg's hole. Miss Claire's got another say-so."

Haslane remained quiet. Claire leaned over in her saddle.

"Haslane," she said coolly, "it was understood in other times between Star J and Lightning S that we kept south and southeast of Lonesome Ridge, as long as Lightning S did nothing underhand or mean against Star J. I think that attempt on Kessler's life last night breaks that agreement. We'll let the killing of Ramon pass. He was your man, but coming to Star J to tell me something he thought important. I wish I knew what it was——"

Haslane smiled and interrupted:

"Oh, that's plain enough; he wanted yo'r consent t' court Josefina Carillo."

"But why should any one kill him for wanting that?"

"He and Luiz were once rivals for her hand."

"I never heard of that."

Haslane was silent.

"Getting back to Lonesome Ridge, Haslane," Claire went on; "we are making up our beef herd. I intend to drive by way of Lonesome to Portales and we intend to use Lonesome in the future, just as my dad used it years ago. Those old surveys left a question open. The agreement between your father and mine was that you kept Lonesome as long as Lightning S did not break the peace. You've done just that and we take up our old-time right to drive by way of Lonesome Ridge."

Haslane's self-control snapped like a thread. His face went black with mounting rage and he broke into that snarling, bestial cry that Kurne had heard after he had quirted him on Lonesome Ridge. He raised his hand and shook it and for a moment he seemed like a different man. He seemed a fighter, a savage fighter, but yet a man of courage, if it were but the courage of the ruthless slayer.

"I'm servin' notice that if yo' come past Lonesome, I'll——"

He choked back his rage and stood shaking like a leaf in a late autumn wind.

"Finish it," Claire said quietly.

He was silent.

"Haslane!"

He started.

Freschter pressed into view. He had been behind the Star J line till then. He was holding the quirt high. He snapped it in Haslane's face.

"That's Kessler's quirt," he cried. "I've done quit Lightning S. Yo' told me it was a job of work; I found it was playin' second fiddle in a coward's outfit. I've worked for hoss thieves, and cow thieves, and all sort of bad men, but I never took up t' work for a coward before. I'm off yo' pay roll and I don't want a cent for the work I did. I wouldn't tech yo'r old money, Haslane."

Haslane glared at them all and said, in low, sharp tones:

"Yo've called the turn, Star J. All right, I take it right up. No Star J herd will go over Lonesome. If yo' come, come shootin', and yo' stay home, Miss Claire, or Star J will be accused of tryin' t' hide behind a woman's skirts."

He turned on his heel and went into the *casa*.

"We roll out," Durkie announced, turning his horse as if he were on a pivot. They all followed suit and in a moment Star J was riding away from Lightning S. After they had gone quite a distance Kurne called out:

"Look-it, the bunk house was full of his vaqueros but none of them dared t' shoot!"

"Maybe they knew better," Big Nabor said; "Mex boys ain't fools enough t' run against Star J when she's got her war togs on."

"Will he fight or quit when we put up that herd and go through Lonesome?" Durkie asked of the crowd.

"He won't fight himself, but he may hook up with those Portales outlaws and then Star J sure will have a fight on," Morrow said.

"Say, we've sure got to go through on what we've laid down," Claire said quietly; "and that's whatever."

"Just like yo'r dad," Durkie said quietly.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE HERD ROLLS OUT.

I'LL send two boys up to Lonesome camp," Claire said, as they were passing it. "Nabors, you stay till they come, then come on in and help with the herd. My final arrangements for the herd will be made when I get that last letter from Bryce & Cairnes, our commission men in Omaha."

"Suits me. I do sure like t' be alone in a line camp; it's improvin' on the mind," Big Nabors replied gratefully.

"How is my Goldie hoss?" Kurne asked of no one in particular as they got straightened out on the way home.

"He's treated these days," Durkie said, with a sly look around at the others, "like he was a sugar bowl. It's a scandalous thing."

Kurne glanced at the faces of each in turn by turning around. He had got pretty well to the front of the cavalcade, where Claire was. Last of all he looked at her. Her face was scarlet.

"Yes, it sure is scandalous t' see a one-man hoss, raised fierce and noble, weaken down into a lady's pet that comes around and whinnies for sugar."

Kurne's face showed irritation. "I like my hoss t' be let alone," he rasped out; "no use having a hoss unless he's yo'r own animile."

"You seem to be a pretty jealous man, Kessler," Claire rallied herself to reply, "wanting all the attentions of a horse that a way. I suppose if you had a sweetheart, it would be the same way?"

"Which it sure would, Miss Claire."

"I'll bet he'd be a regular touch-me-not, then," said Wherton, venturing into the game of teasing.

"And I'll bet any woman likes being a man's only treasure," Kurne replied a bit savagely. "I can hardly see a real woman, that is a woman, taking half of a man and letting some other woman have the other half. Now, Miss Claire, if a man courted yo', wouldn't yo' like t' think he wanted yo' and no one else?"

She looked at him squarely and nodded decisively.

"It's sure that a way with a man and his hoss," said Kurne.

"Oh, Goldie doesn't seem to mind it in the least."

Kurne was silent, but his disapproval of having any one play with his private horse was plainly to be seen. Very soon Claire was biting her lower lip over her failure to make him forget that she had infringed upon an unwritten law of the range, that a man's private horse should be let alone.

Kurne dropped back with the others in the rear of the cavalcade and so remained till they came into Star J's "front yard" very late in the day. Two of the hands then at the headquarters were ordered to go to Lonesome on the morrow, and Durkie issued orders for every one to get ready then to begin working over the cattle to fill the order that had arrived. Claire was handed her letters by a lad who had ridden in for the mail. She held up the letter from the Star J commission agents in Omaha and said to Durkie:

"They want all the longhorns we can send in, and they tell of better prices. They have worked on that publicity for longhorn beef. Sportsmen's dinners and fancy hotels and restaurants are calling for longhorn spareribs, and there is a big demand from rodeos for longhorns for use in rodeo stunts and for barbecuing. They give me credit for working up a market for the old-

time cattle and say that my little articles that they managed to get into the Eastern press and in the Western weeklies, have attracted attention back to longhorns again. What can we spare this year, Durkie?"

"I wouldn't spare them more than five hundred longhorns. If they're going that big, we better keep our best bulls and cows and look t' our increase for the future. Again, we don't want t' overcrowd the market. Let them go short and they'll appreciate it all the more."

"We can comb out another five hundred common cattle and put up a herd of a thousand. From the poorer cows and calves we gather, I'll make up a small stocker herd for that nester colony below Agua Frio that has written for them."

"We could sell one thousand longhorns right now, but we'd better go slow on them," Durkie advised.

"That's what is in my mind. Well, cowboys, we start to work to-morrow, and don't you-all forget it."

"Well, she'll be out with her war paint on to-morrow," Wherton grumbled a bit, as he went with Kurne to the corrals. Half an hour later they had eaten and every one had sought sleep.

With the morrow Star J sprang into full activity. Already the territory near headquarters had been combed and a small beef herd was under loose herd about a mile above the *casa* on a little natural meadow. The wagon was filled and sent north toward Lonesome under the charge of Big Nabors, who had arrived by night. He reported that he had not seen a person during his night and half day on Lonesome.

"Bill," Claire told him, "ordinarily, you wouldn't be asked to take charge of that wagon. But this may be war and I want a man that is steady and sure. All I want is that you'll drive and handle those mules safely. It's mighty bad going beyond Lonesome for a wagon.

You got your education with mules as a skinner in the army and I count on you to fetch that grub through and keep the boys happy and contented. We all know you're the best cook with Star J, but that you don't like cooking as a regular thing."

Big Nabors touched his hat brim in salute and walked away, saying nothing at all. She knew that he would have preferred saddle work, and rather despised a wagon job, but she knew, too, that in his charge the wagon was safe and that the riders would have plenty of tasty food, with a pot of coffee always on a corner of the embers for late-coming, tired men, and something to eat as well, without any grumbling.

Kurne Kessler had found Goldie in good condition. He at once took him into his regular string, dropping one of the other horses assigned to him. The first day on circle Kurne rode Goldie all morning and he found that to keep up with any of the Star J top hands was work enough for any man. All the apparent sloth and ease of ordinary times had sloughed away from these big, hard men and they were cowmen now, from hair to toe tip. Their horses were good, and they took pride in doing their work quietly, thoroughly. Accustomed to depend upon themselves and to having the ranch depend upon itself in that far-away nook among the foothills, the Star J hands had developed a code of their own, which they summed up tersely: "Do it now and don't talk about it."

The second day Wherton and Kurne cut circle to the west of the wagon that was halfway to Lonesome. Claire was with the wagon on a little flat where a dozen small, winding draws came down onto the flat. Like the spokes of a wheel these draws ran back into the higher ground on all sides.

Kurne and Wherton had routed out several bunches of hide-outs and had them started down grade. Goldie knew

what was wanted. He could sense the presence of cattle where his master could not. Wherton had a good cow horse, too. They had jumped not a few longhorns that morning. Kurne watched Wherton's work admiringly. Every little while he would see his bunkie emerge in the clear when he had quartered a patch of shrubs or ridden into and out of some small gully. At first Kurne had been too hasty with these dun, quick cattle. Despite their size, they were like deer in a thicket. They had a queer way of simply evaporating if one did not watch them mightly close. And their calves were especially elusive. And once a calf got back of a rider, the cow would not be forced downhill any farther. She would go back.

Kurne found that the best way to drive these wild cattle was to take time to it, to drift them, to let them find their way easily and quietly down the grade. Out on the little flat the herd was growing. As soon as the drifted cattle saw it, they started right for it, for it seemed to them to furnish protection. This flat was to be holding ground for all the cattle collected in that section. Very few outside cattle were to be found on Star J for natural barriers kept most of them out. Durkie kept an eagle eye on the cattle drifted down onto the flat. He was looking for quality, and also to make sure that the finest of the longhorns remained at home. All the other kinds of cattle he let remain with the held herd, though.

From the other side of the flat, cattle also came drifting. Durkie was the center of a far-flung net of human brains and activity drawn over that whole territory. A few brief questions addressed to each man that came near, a few brief orders, kept the dragnet working. The big force put to the work made it go fast. By afternoon they had selected half the number of beeves needed for the Omaha order.

Claire, with Nabors, had worked hard

at the wagon. Claire had brought out from headquarters several Mexicans to help with that first open-air supper, in order to make it gala. The men came in to find a yearling barbecued, plenty of brown gravy, potatoes, beans, Dutch-oven bread, jam, and delicious pie and coffee.

"I'll be a subject for the loney-fat asylum," Morrow declared, patting himself after that meal.

"They couldn't fat yo' up on corn-meal mush and cream; ornery cusses never get fat," Hi Low jeered at him.

"We'll all have t' ride in the wagon, hosses won't carry us," Durkie said; "it's no way t' use a cowboy, stuffin' him full this a way. Any one might think we was all Goldie hosses and needéd gentlin' with sugar." Durkie gave a sly wink toward Kurne.

"I suppose Goldie is as offish as his master?" Claire flung across the fire at Kessler. She was eating a bit of pie, and she ate it out of her hand, like the men. She smiled a most provoking smile as she crunched it with her strong, white teeth.

"He ain't half as offish as his master," Kurne declared grumpily, and then was silent. In some way that he refused to explain to himself this frank and direct young woman who was so modest, so kind, so brave, and so just, kept in his thoughts. Heretofore, Kurne had paid little attention to women. He had not been bashful. He had danced and gone to parties with girls he had met on the ranches where he had worked. But when the time had arrived for parting, he had never found it hard to quit a place because some certain girl was there. Now he kept thinking of this big, strong, fearless woman who was fighting the world about her, and winning, who was in command of a big ranching property and able to keep with her the finest outfit of hard-bodied men Kurne had ever seen working cattle.

A strong guard was kept over the

herd that night. They were penned in an old branding corral used by the Star J in the time of Claire's father. The corral was a bit weak, but it served better than letting the cattle stay under loose herd with their well-used daily haunts so close by. Next morning the herd was driven off the little flat, through a break in the rolling land, and on toward Lonesome. They were using a great many more men than were really necessary because Claire wanted to make it a short gathering and she planned to get started as soon as possible. She hoped, rather than believed, that by prompt action they might get the herd through without a fight with Lightning S.

Four days later they were in sight of Lonesome. The two men on duty there reported that nothing unpleasant had occurred. They had scouted up to the Lightning S line shack, the stone hut, and found it deserted.

"Looks suspicious t' me," Nabors told Claire.

She nodded.

Durkie also thought it boded no good.

"Good or not, we go through," Claire stated firmly; "it is our right. We have the cattle and the market for them is waiting."

"That sure sounds," Freschter spoke up. He was squatted off to one side, smoking. He had kept pretty much to himself. He was still "on trial" and did not yet "belong," and he knew it. A bit of doubt attached to him because he had left Lightning S so easily. No one took up the thread of talk and he was passed over in silence. He grinned readily enough and bowlegged away toward the wagon to beg an extra slab of bread from Big Nabors.

Nabors eyed him with sincere disapproval. Freschter grinned at Big and began to munch the bread.

"Say, Big, I'm on that I'm not considered ace-high with Star J, but I'll prove up first chance I get."

"Do it and don't talk," Big replied. "Hey, lemme spread that with jam."

Freschter soon walked away, a contented expression on his face and a new light in his eyes. He felt that Nabors had taken him into a new relationship.

That night the herd was held in the open, under a strong guard. Not until they got off the Star J range would it be safe to leave it at night without an extra lot of herders around it. Once away from home, the cattle would come to depend upon the men and their horses for guidance. Now they were so close to their home grounds that they would like nothing better than to go back to them in a hurry. The herd was held on a bit of elevated land, well grassed—a small mesa, in reality—about a mile southeast of Lonesome line shack.

The wagon was about half a mile from the herd, north of it.

"Say, bunkie," Kurne asked of Wherton, as they lay under their blankets. "I'm askin' a question, personal."

"Shoot, pardner."

"Now, take Miss Claire, haven't any of the big-wig ranchers ever come courtin' her?"

"Yo're shootin' right they did. Every one within reach."

"And she never let any of them build right up t' her?"

"No, she just laughs at them. Maybe she'd take them out for a ride around and put on one of those big-boy sketches of hers and prove she could do more than they could do. It's a mania of that lady's that she can do anything a man can around a ranch and that she doesn't need a man t' boss her around."

"Any of the Star J boys ever looked crosswise at her?"

"All of us, but that don't signify. Say, ever run into a stone wall in the dark? That's how it feels when she suspects yo're maybe wantin' t' build up next t' her, Kurne."

"Yo' mean she gets cold when yo' get warm?"



"Well, yo' get the idea that she likes yo' as a man that works with her and all that, but as for playin' any favorites, I guess not."

"Shucks! I got a hunch she'd like t' be gentled, like any other woman."

"Well, go as far's yo' like with such thoughts, Kurne. But she is sure one able-minded woman takin' care of herself. She never yet fired a man for makin' eyes at her. She just takes it as a matter of course."

"Maybe she's been admired so much from a girl up that it's got t' be an old story with her."

"That may all be."

"Maybe some man that worked another kind of racket would make more headway."

"Aw, quit it; she'll never let any man build up t' her, Kurne. She's all set t' play the part of successful woman of the open spaces, and she likes it, too. She's not goin' to marry, and that's all there is t' it."

The outfit now had its thousand heavies for the market, besides a lot of stocker stuff that Durkie said could be sold to the colony of German grangers that had moved into the State. These cows and their calves they cut away from the beef herd and gave them into the charge of four young Star J men to deliver over at Agua Frio, where they would be received and where the money could be banked. Wherton was put in charge of this small herd, and thus given a chance to have real responsibility. They drifted south the third day after they had reached the open range under Lonesome. Wherton wanted to go with the main herd, where danger promised, but he got orders direct from Claire and so bade the big bunch good-by and went, like a good soldier of the saddle, to safer but less exciting duties.

The next morning Durkie and Claire reviewed their forces. They went over the details sitting near the embers of

the breakfast fire and found that they had 1009 heavy beeves, half longhorns. They had twelve fighting men, a remuda of one hundred good saddle-horses, and two changes of mules for the chuck wagon. There were rifles and short guns enough and plenty of shells.

Freschter had shown himself able and quiet. Whenever he was close to Claire, his eyes followed her like those of a faithful dog. The strong, erect, capable horse woman and ranch manager had fascinated this serene dweller on the fringes of outlawry. She had accepted him as a man among men on his own say-so, exactly as a stone-faced old cattleman of the upper Pecos might have done. All during the gathering Freschter had done well with rope and horse. He had been hailed as a real herd cutter, one who could find any cow in the midst of a close-packed bunch and drive her to the open with less excitement than any other man on the job would make.

Kurne had seen little, directly, of Claire Cresslin. He had worked hard and quietly, and his work had been duly noted by every one. At first he had made mistakes in handling the big, rangy longhorns, but he never made the same mistake twice, and that counted with Durkie.

Kurne had seen Claire work on circle, at cutting out, at holding loose and close-held herds, and he had seen her take a turn at hazing the remuda, driving the cook wagon, and making camp-fire bread.

And he had come to realize that this queen of the range worked cattle with her men because she liked it. It was her joy so to do. She had a deep and genuine interest in the work and all that went with it. She was not there merely because she was a masculine type of woman, forcing herself into men's company through the power of her wealth in land and cattle, but she was there as an extraordinarily gifted woman who loved her calling, who liked a salty horse

and a herd nicely rounded out. She was there as a quick-acting, clear-thinking, business woman, who knew her business from the ground up. Her string of horses was the average of the Star J. Her working outfit was plain, useful. She had learned to handle a gun because a gun was useful for many things—shooting vermin, killing a horse or cow so injured that it had to be dispatched, protecting person, herd, and friends, if need be. Claire did not do things to be spectacular, but just to be useful.

"I'll tell yo'," Hi Low Lurton said to Kurne that last night in the camp under Lonesome, "she likes t' do all these things just as a boy might, but she's no mannish woman. She's all woman. Let a fellow get stove up, or a hoss get wire cut that's got a chance if he's saved, and yo' never saw a more tender-hearted person in the world. But she can ride, and rope, and shoot, and she likes them all. She's got a dozen cups in a case at home that she's won at State rodeos, and she won them all just because some one said that an outfit owned and managed by a woman would be soft and easy. But when she beat a field of choice men—rodeo sharps—two years back, they quit talking like that. They don't call her the Longhorn Queen for nothin'."

With the dawn things began to happen. The horses came in with heads high as they touched the rope strung out to hold them while each man snared his first mount for the day. Big Nabors had cooked an early breakfast. While the horses were being snared out, Nabors washed his dishes and stowed all snug. From now on he would have no help with the wagon, except when men came dragging in wood to go under the wagon in the "calf hammock" to make sure there was something to start the fire with at the end of each day.

The herd, bedded that night on the slope of Lonesome Ridge, was drifted

over the ridge and strung out on the barren northward stretch of it.

The cattle had not grazed on starting, something unusual in trail practice. They hated to leave that nice home range, too. It would take all the care and skill of these steady-nerved men to get them going as a herd, with that barren stretch as their first experience in trail work.

Ahead rode Durkie, who had taken the point that first day. He was well ahead, too. On either side of the point of the herd rode Hi Low Lurton and "Cases" Morrow, first swing. They kept away from the cattle. Kurne and Parker were second swing men, a little farther back and behind them the others were fanned out along the flanks of the herd. There was no pressure, seemingly, but the cattle gave way for the horsemen and the horsemen took up all the ground the cattle vacated. Gradually the herd strung out and a big, rangy, wide-horned steer took the lead and bellowed. This was the moment all the men had been waiting for—the establishment of the leadership by some one strong, courageous steer, for it marked the turning of the herd from a mass of sullen, uncertain cattle, into a disciplined band. The leadership of that steer might be challenged and even broken, but for the time being he was leading and the others easily accepted his leadership. He stepped out easily, with a swing to his horns that clearly said to all the world: Behold me, able to lead this herd! Come along and you will be safe. And such is the power of leadership that his fellows accepted it for what it seemed to be, the guarantee of safety and assurance.

Claire was with the drag, steady, cool, alert. Behind her came the wagon, with Big Nabors handling the reins of the mules, and off to one side, but back, so they would not disturb the marching cattle should they become playful and indulge in a run, was the horse herd.

Freschter had accepted the rather unwelcome duty of wrangler without question when Claire said:

"On this drive, I want a full hand with the remuda. We may run into anything and the wrangler may have to use his head and his gun. Freschter, I'm putting over three thousand dollars' worth of good horses in your care for the drive."

"I'm rememberin' that, miss," said Freschter, touching his hat.

"So'm I," Big Nabors echoed, eying him doubtfully.

And so the Star J herd drifted down that barren slope quietly. In an hour they had made two miles and then the herd began to scent grass ahead and they went forward in better order. They had seen no Lightning S cattle. They did not go near the Lightning S line hut, but bore far to the east of it. On the other side of the ridge the land flattened after a time and they came into a parklike territory, with patches of shrubs and even small trees here and there and fair grass. They had to let the cattle spread a great deal to get any real nipping. There was a creek right about where they would want to noon, Durkie told them on starting. And the cattle were thirsty, as they had been started dry. Every little while some big beef would get the idea that he could break back and get away from that new-formed herd that was marching away from home. Then he would stand still and let the others go past him. When all had passed, he would suddenly whirl and start back. But he would find between him and that home range a cow horse, on which was a man with other ideas. He would bawl, perhaps gore the ground, only to have a coil of rope flung against his face, or perhaps a quirt strike him between the eyes stingingly. One bull that got proddy and charged Claire she tailed down by wrapping his brush over the horn of her saddle and riding at right angles to

his course, thus throwing the foolish bull off stride and sending him rolling, end for end. After that he was anxious to get back into the herd and quit.

Now and then ambitious animals thought to get out of the herd on either flank and get away. But always a horse and human intervened. There was no yelling, no spectacular riding. It was all easy, sure, quiet control of mind over matter.

A sharp lookout was kept as they drifted thus northward. Every man's saddle had a rifle in a scabbard. Every man's six-gun was oiled and cleaned, and every man's thimble belt was full of fresh shells.

"We're not looking for trouble and we're not running away from it," Claire told her men early that morning. "I don't want any fighting. And my guess is that we'll not get any fighting. Dad always said that if you met trouble half-way it got smaller, and if you ran away from it, it grew on you."

About mid-forenoon Claire left the drag and rode along the side of the herd, still grazing quietly, but drifting as they grazed northward. She was on the side where Kurne was. She did not ride rapidly, but quietly, and drew in to speak to Kurne, who was lolling in his saddle, seemingly somnolent, but really very much alert.

"Kessler, work up to the point and tell Durkie I want a man to go ahead and scout out the land where we are going to noon. None of us have ever been up this route before. Dad had a rough map of it, which we are going by. But things may have changed in the fifteen years since Star J drove this way to market. My men have kept absolutely, this side of Lonesome and don't know this ground."

Kurne started at once and she took his place on the swing. He thought she was a bit vexed because he had gone away so promptly. But he kept right along at a shuffle. He was on Goldie

that day. Goldie had been grazing as the cattle had grazed, as had all the other horses now and then, for despite bit and rein, and even spade and cricket which some riders affected, horses would nip at especially nice bunches of grass and if given a loose rein could graze fairly well. Goldie, with his straight bit, could eat his fill, given a chance, and he was too wise a cow horse ever to miss a chance at good grass.

Durkie agreed with Claire that the ground ahead should be scouted out. He ordered Kurne to go ahead and do that work.

Kurne started slowly, that he might not startle the cattle. When some distance away he got Goldie into a shuffle that after a time he bettered into a low lope.

Ten minutes later Kurne pulled up on a low mound and looked back. The Star J herd presented a pretty sight at a distance. He could make out the point, swing, and drag, with the big lead-steer marching proudly ahead a few paces; far back was the wagon, and off to one side of the drag was the remuda going along like a convoy protecting a fleet. A dust cloud was over them, like a signal banner, telling of the coming of a host with ensigns fluttering.

"Well, the old herd's rolled out and we're on our way, Goldie, and we've got a boss that sure make a man think. They say she never warmed up t' a man yet. Now, I wonder if she ever got a chance t' say 'No' t' a man as homely and short on women as I am?"

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### POISONED WATER.

AS Kurne advanced he began to wonder at the lack of cattle. It was as if that part of the range had been swept clear of all stock and horses. He read sign that told him that cattle had been driven there and always to the west or toward Lightning S.

"They just skinned the range, as if they wanted t' give us all the room in the world. Has Haslane got cold and knuckled right down? He's not that sort of a duckling, it seems t' me, Goldie."

The driving on that range had been done only recently, Kurne could tell. Bands of cattle had been forced over west by men riding in orderly circles, as if for a beef round-up.

"They may be gatherin' at Lightning S, but they'd have t' work close t' take everything off the range. Nor would they do all of that for just a beef round-up."

The cattle trails showed him that ordinarily the Lightning S cattle went for their water down toward the creek for which he was scouting. He did not know what sort of creek it was—whether clear-flowing, muddy, or brackish. Much would depend upon that, in planning to water the Star J herd. A thousand cattle properly watered will spread out over a wide front in watering. If there were just a few pools, only part of the cattle would be sent forward at a time and the process of watering might entail a hard fight to keep the others back, and take a lot of time. But if they could all drift down together over a wide front and find water, they would water soon and then be ready to march.

In breaking a trail-herd, as Kurne well knew, a big step is taken when they have marched over the first stream, however small. If it is a fair creek, approaching a big river in size, the cattle seem to accept it as a boundary they can not cross to get back to their home range and they thereafter yield more readily to the drovers' pressure. The first march of a herd is the hardest, and the first night on the bed ground up the trail is apt to prove ticklish, if the cattle get anything to upset their nerves. The home range is close enough to exercise a strong pull on the bovine mind. But once across a stream, and especially a

few marches from home, the cattle seem to accept the inevitable with more docility.

Hence it was with keen anxiety that Kurne rode toward the creek. He had to reach it in time to permit of some lengthy examination, perhaps to scout along it, up and down, to make sure that where he struck was the best place to water the herd.

Goldie sensed that something big was on hand. His ears were snapping back and front, and then cocking off to either side, and his wide-flared nostrils showed he was scenting the air from all quarters. He shook his head from time to time and made the bridle jingle, quite as if he were saying "Yes, pay attention to me. I could tell you a lot of things if I could speak."

Goldie was still fresh when Kurne sighted the creek. It was in a trough-like depression, and Kurne at once knew that it would turn out to be one of those slow-flowing creeks that in dry spells become a series of pools, mostly unconnected by links of flowing water. Given a rain, they would resume their flow, and the channel between pools would be filled with a fair current again. And so it turned out with this creek. Eagle Creek, they had called it in talking about it among the Star J bunch.

Kurne drew up Goldie on a little rise and studied the creek. Habitual caution made him do this. It would be a likely place to waylay the Star J. There was a line of knolls beyond the creek that would hide an ambushing party. Kurne decided to cross the creek and circle those knolls before reporting that all was well.

He sent Goldie along at a fair clip. When they struck the water Goldie slowed down, as if to drink. He had earned his drink, and he knew it. But Kurne had his mind set on seeing the other side of those knolls. If enemies were there, they would have a nice long-range pot shot at him if Goldie halted to

drink then. He meant to keep going. If enemies were there, they should not have a still shot at him, anyway. Goldie resented being thus put through that water, after his long, dry journey from the herd to the creek. He shook his head and snorted and even stopped and tried to turn around when they had crossed the creek, but he got scant sympathy from Kurne just then. Instead, Kurne hit him a little with his quirt and the horse was astounded and resentful, but he yielded.

Kurne was so intent upon getting Goldie away from that water and up behind those knolls that he did not look carefully for sign on the margin of the pool he crossed. He noted without wondering much then about it that a number of small animals and some birds were dead at the margin of the pool. But that is often the case, for often an animal or bird will come to a pool to die from natural causes. Below him was a row of bushes that fringed the pools. The pools were right in the natural line of march for a herd. He got Goldie away from the pools and going toward the line of knolls. Now, Kurne could turn in the saddle and look back. No one was hiding behind that line of bushes below, he could see. But he did see the first cattle he had seen since leaving the herd. They were three two-year cows, and they were standing with their heads down, feet spraddled out. Thinking they were merely trying to get down closer to earth, the better to nip some delicacy they had chanced upon in the course of grazing, he rode on. He got behind the ridges and saw that his fears of an ambush were groundless. No one was in sight, and there was no sign of horses anywhere that were controlled by man up or down behind the line of knolls.

Relieved upon this head, Kurne turned back over the last knoll toward the creek again. He rode slowly down the grade and now his mind went back

to what he had seen along the margin of the pools.

Goldie now wanted that water and he wanted it very much. He had earned it before and he had doubly earned it now. So he got into a fast lope and Kurne indulged him in it.

Suddenly, he checked the indignant Goldie. His eyes were centered upon those three two-year-old cows. Instead of being spraddled out, they were lying down. And instead of being down in the natural, easy position of the contented animal that has grazed and watered herself and now wants to chew the cud, they were on their sides and their legs were stuck out awkwardly. They evidently were dead.

"Now what killed them so suddenly?" Kurne asked Goldie.

Goldie didn't care. He wanted water. He fought for his head, but Kurne had begun to get at the bottom of the day's mysteries.

"All their own stock driven off the range. Birds and all small animals dying at the margin. Those cows, just daid."

Goldie was clearly disgusted now. He sulked, but had to obey as Kurne rode toward the dead cows, instead of letting him wade into the pool nearest at hand. Kurne looked down at the dead cows. Foam was coming from their mouths. Their eyes were glazed and red, protruding.

Kurne heard a sound like the humming of many bees. He went back into the bush fringe that thickened just a bit below. In it were a number of dead cattle and horses, all with brands strange to Kurne. There were no Lightning S animals to be seen, though.

"Lightning S knew that water wasn't good. Now what's happened?" reflected Kurne aloud.

Those pools were stagnant and really smaller than he had thought to find there. There was no movement of water flowing from pool to pool. Poison of some

powerful kind placed in each pool in large quantities would do the work. Cattle, thirsty and tired after a day's march, would gulp down the water eagerly. Half a herd might be killed, the other half weakened and made a dead loss in five minutes, unless the drovers were given knowledge of conditions. Kurne had heard of creeks that were poison in slack water, but that became all right when copious rains restored their flow, diluting the mineral poison in them to a point where it was not dangerous for passing herds to drink of it once.

Now he noticed that at the very margin of the water a white sediment had been left when the water receded in dry weather. He doubted not that this sediment was the poison precipitated along the edges of the pools everywhere he chanced to look.

But could enough poison to taint the whole creek have been purchased and hauled there in time? Would not the cost be high?

Kurne rode along, fighting Goldie all the time. Half a mile above, he found the solution. Here a spring came up out of a bank. It had been turned so that its channel now flowed into the creek. Before it had been turned, it had flowed almost due east and been lost in a sandy wash. He could see where it had ended thus, and the wash was coated with dazzling white.

"In old time," said Kurne to himself, "that spring flowed into this creek all the time. Some of those first cattlemen in this region turned it so it flowed down and lost itself in that wash. Not diluted, it is so strong with mineral, probably arsenic, that a cow or horse won't touch it. But flowing into that sluggish creek at this time of the year, it is about right to make that water deadly and yet not strong enough so that a thirsty cow or horse will spurn it. Why, this creek, as it stands, is a death trap! Until a day or two ago there was a little flow from

pool to pool. Now it's too dry for even that; the evaporation keeps it down."

Now the real situation had dawned upon Kurne. He had no time to trail those who had done this foul deed, although their sign was plain all about the spring. No, he did not dare go after them. To turn the spring back into its old and safe channel would not get rid of the poison in those pools. The herd must be turned! Once the cattle got close enough to scent that water, after their long, dry march of the morning, they would stampede, arrive out of control, and possibly all be done to death in a short time. Even if part of them were saved, they would be made unsalable, except for the lowest grades—bologna steers, hamburgers, and the like.

Goldie, fighting for his head so he could drink out of that spring at least, was surprised and enraged to find himself turned about sharply and then to feel the spurs. He leaped to his work angrily. He loped back to the stream, angrily slashed through it and on, feeling quirt and spur together now. Goldie was enraged and determined that if his master wanted to be mean, he would let him have a share of it, too. He began to fight to get his head in bucking position, but this was denied him.

Goldie then straightened out and began to show what he could do. Kurne held him to the high lope and all the time he was thinking:

Can I turn that herd in time?

In a few moments he drew Goldie in, swung down, and got his canteen. He opened it and gave the horse all the water in it. He kept not a drop for himself. Then he swung to the saddle again and called on Goldie for all he had.

"If he don't stumble!" muttered Kurne desperately. "If I can get t' that herd in time, before they scent this water! If that wind stays as it is, from herd t' water, they'll not scent that water so soon!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE BARGAIN.

IN the back room of a place of no repute in Portales two men sat, with a rough table between them.

One was Tib Haslane, his face set, his dark eyes seeming to bulge with hatred as he talked.

The other man had a head too large for his broad shoulders and a very short neck. His grimy face was bearded heavily. A bulge on his cheek told of a huge piece of tobacco inside and he masticated it with evident liking for the bitter weed. From a strong black cigar he took pulls now and then to prove that tobacco in both forms at once was not distasteful to him. Haslane smoked a cigarette daintily.

"Now, let me get this straight, Haslane." The man thrust his big head toward Haslane's face across the table. "They're comin' by way of Eagle Creek, and that's poisoned?"

Haslane nodded.

"Foolish way t' do, kill good cattle. Let them come through and they'll be profit in them."

"A lot of them will come through, maybe. They may discover that those pools are poisoned from that arsenic spring."

"And if they come through, they come right past Portales, and go up Bear Canyon, with Preston, over the range, as their destination? And they plan t' ship by rail from Preston? That the right dope on it, Haslane?"

"That's it, Butch."

"Got a good remuda, too?"

"Yes."

"Say, Haslane, why'n't yo' do this yourse'f?" the big man asked suspiciously.

"I've got Mexicans mostly. They wouldn't face Star J."

Butch studied this man's smooth face intently for some sign of treachery. He read there hatred that convinced him.

"Yo' seem t've got up a big man on Star J. I wouldn't be mad at the woman that owns it."

"Yo' might," sullenly.

"She turned yo' down, I suppose?"

Haslane did not reply.

Butch laughed with deep enjoyment. "I've seen her at rodeos. Handsome! And hard as nails, they say. She'd make a match for a man that lived on the dodge." He licked his thick lips. "Yo' say that Star J revived an old right t' drive over yo'r range, or what yo' claim as yo'r range. And that's what made yo' want t' get them and get them right. Now, Haslane, if I get them, wreck their herd, get their cowboys and Claire Cresslin, what will there be in it for me and my crowd? It costs money t' run the Robbers' Roost, remember, and Butch Condertone don't work for nothing."

"I'll give yo' five thousand dollars cash, if yo' get them and her," and as he spoke of Claire, Haslane's voice broke almost into a scream.

"Yes, and what else?"

"I'll give an extra thousand if yo'll get one of their cowboys, Kurne Kessler, and let me have the killin' of him."

Now Haslane's voice was low, hissing.

"What did that hombre ever do t' yo'?"

He was a Fallin' Arrow man once. I wouldn't want them after me, either."

"Just turn him over t' me, bound, and I'll pay yo' one thousand."

"Yes, all right. Cash?"

"Sure; gold."

Butch's eyes glistened and he nodded. They shook hands on the bargain. Butch leaned over to talk to Haslane

"Leave the details t' me," said he, "but stay with us. We'll ride forward and get between them and Portales. We run the town now, and what we do here is our own business. No one lifts any voice against me since I took hold. I had a good man in my gang not long ago that disappeared over night. Had funny slaty-blue eyes. Went by some

nickname. Fair-haired, too. I wish I had him on this deal; he's a hard man, but loyal when he's hired. I'd like t' roll him against some of those hard Star J shooters."

"Would he be callin' himself Freschter?"

"He might call himself anything."

"How long ago did he quit, Butch?"

"Say three weeks ago. Why?"

"Man like that hired with me, then deserted t' Star J."

Butch stared. "What did he desert yo' for?"

"I dunno. Some whim," Haslane lied blandly.

"That homber, if it is the same, isn't so mealy-mouthed that he'd quit on a trifle. If it's the one I mean, that's one more fast gun Star J has, and if I expected t' fight them in the open, I'd need a new gang after the battle. But I won't fight like that. When I strike Star J, they'll think an earthquake has hit them, and after we clear up on this trail herd, I'll raid down onto the Star J home grounds and clean them. I can drive what I get out this way and market them through one of the fake brands I hold and that a brand inspector of mine will certify is clean. I'll vent-brand them in Indian Corrals and ship them openly. Star J is so out of the way that, if they're raided right, it will be weeks before others find them t' be looted. They never mixing with other outfits will make it so no one will wonder if they don't see any of them for a while. Meanwhile, we'll clean up, get our cash, and make a get-away and keep on my northern stamprin' grounds till she blows over."

This outline of destruction for Star J pleased Haslane. He laughed and seemed to draw in deep breaths of enjoyment, as if the very air of the place were fragrant already with the fruits of a victory he had bought against Star J. He drew out a roll of gold pieces and laid them down for Butch to grasp.



"Lots more where they came from, Butch. I'll stick with yo' till it's done. And yo' get Claire t' have and t' hold, if yo' can, and I get Kurne, alive, if possible and I kill him as I please. As for the other Star J men, why——"

He gave the killer's signal and Butch nodded and smiled as he chinked the gold coins together in the cup of one huge, hairy paw.

## CHAPTER XX.

"HOLD THAT HERD BACK!"

CLAIRE worked toward the point after Kurne Kessler had been gone for a time. She signaled to a man from the drag to come up and take her place in the swing. Ten minutes later she had placed herself beside Durkie at the point.

"Everything seems lining out well, Durkie," said Claire.

"Too dang'd well t' suit me."

"Why?"

"I fully thought Haslane would've hit us a wallop of some sort by this time."

"Maybe he's frightened."

"Yes, always frightened out of a square fight. But not out of some underhanded trick that I fear worse."

She turned in her saddle and glanced back over the long line of marching cattle. The herd had taken a straggling, thin formation and the drag was quite a long way back. She could see the white cover of the wagon and off to one side a moving patch that changed shape and pattern constantly—the remuda under charge of Freschter.

"We'd ought t' make that creek about noon," Durkie told her; "long time since I saw it as a young cowboy, under yo'r dad."

"Be pretty low this time of the year."

"Probably pools, unless they've had rains over this way lately."

"Some better grass right along here; we'd better throw them off the trail and let them graze again."

"They'll sure be thirsty if they graze on this dry stuff some more."

Durkie whistled and the signal went down the line to the drag. Durkie raised his left hand and got to the left of the point. The right-swing men edged back, the left ones came in closer, and the herd gently yielded to human brain power.

The lead steer began to graze, facing to the left, from which direction a slight breeze was blowing.

Taking advantage of the instinct of cattle to graze with the wind in their nostrils they they may scent danger if it threatens and still eat, Durkie had thrown them off the trail toward the wind, and when they found the trailing pressure really missing, the cattle naturally put their noses to the wind and ground and began to eat. The left-hand-swing men drifted easily through the grazing cattle, now strung out in loose formation like an immense half moon as the narrow front of the herd bent over to the left. These swing men now formed behind the screen of cattle and the herd was free to go to the left without interference, while all the man pressure came from the right. Thus the herd grazed off on a broad front to get the good grass that was so tempting to them.

The Star J herders lolled in their saddles, smoked, talked. Big Nabors halted well in the rear. The dust cloud settled slowly down. The remuda was visited by each man in turn and changes of mounts were made.

An hour later the signal went through the Star J forces to throw the cattle into trailing formation again. Pressure was applied steadily but slowly to the sides of the herd, and Durkie got at the point. The big lead steer at once appeared and shoved his way to the front, and others followed him, and far back the drag swung in behind. The snailing march was thus resumed without a word having been spoken.

"They're gettin' broke right smart,"

Morrow told Claire, who had worked back to where he was in the second swing.

"Yes, everything seems to be going just fine. Better than I had hoped when we started."

"About time we looked for Kurne with a report on what the water is at Eagle Creek?"

"About time. In fact, he is overdue now."

"That must mean he found something t' take up his time."

"I hardly think so."

She drifted back toward the point again, her eyes alight with pride over the splendid condition of her market heavies.

"Say, Durkie, isn't it time Kurne was coming back?"

"Kurne? Oh, yo' mean Kessler, that homely, slab-sided cus we sent t' spy out on that Eagle Creek water?"

"Yes, Kessler, I mean," said Claire, biting her lip; "and he isn't so homely or slab-sided."

"All the boys think he's homely enough t' make a good hand."

She made a pretty grimace and turned to look back over the rising and falling backs of her cattle. Then she turned to the front again, to find Durkie gazing steadfastly at some thing in the distance. She got it right at once—the dust signal of a coming rider.

"If that fool ever hits this herd at that clip, he'll stampede the whole lot," Durkie grumbled. "Kurne wouldn't be hailing for the herd that a way, Claire."

"No, he's got too much sense. But who can it be, then?"

Now, from under the dust cloud a single rider came into plain view. Behind him the dust seemed to stream straight back, showing how fast he was coming. Durkie gasped in surprise:

"That sure is Kurne, and he's bringin' news."

Claire at once started her big bay toward Kurne, who had swerved off to

one side and pulled Goldie down now that he saw he was recognized. The lead steer pricked up his ears. Something was out of the ordinary, he had decided. Durkie kept stolidly on.

Durkie saw Claire meet Kessler and in a moment they came toward the herd, but with horses held down so they would not start the cattle to running by a sudden, threatening approach. Durkie got his horse well in front of the lead steer before Goldie was close. Kurne, his eyes snapping with excitement, said huskily:

"Water in Eagle is poisoned, bad. The herd's got t' be turned t' get it above where an arsenic spring makes into Eagle. Not any current t' dilute that arsenic flow into those stagnant pools, and we've got t' get those cattle above that spring, or the loss will be big when they drink that poison stuff."

"These cattle are plumb dry, boy," Durkie replied, "and they'll go for that water if they get a sniff of it. Lucky the breeze is from the left or west of the herd. We'll change the angle of march right now."

"I'll drift along one side and let Kurne drift along the other and pass the word," Claire suggested.

Durkie nodded his head. He angled over slightly, and the lead steer followed him unsuspectingly. The other leaders swung with the lead steer and all seemed to be well. Claire on one side and Kurne on the other, waited till the cattle and men came drifting by and to them they passed the word along. Last of all they came to Big Nabors. He grunted his delight:

"Looks like we'd have a scrap, after all. They was takin' it too honeymoon sweet t' please me."

Claire remained with him and Kurne went over to warn Freschter with the remuda. The gunman grinned and at once began to haze the horses over toward the west. He called to Kurne:

"Tell Miss Claire not t' worry about

the hosses gettin' any of that arsenic water, Kurne."

The herd kept steadily on, the wind was from the left or west yet and one part of the land was as good as another for them, it seemed.

The sun had mounted, hot and blazing. The cattle were full of dry fodder and needed water. But they were not suffering yet. Nor would they actually suffer if left dry all day, nor be in danger of acute thirst agony for another day. But they were really thirsty now, and this told the more as the Star J range was well watered and these cattle had been accustomed to regular watering every day. They had had no drink since the night before, some of them not since the afternoon before. They were getting uneasy.

"At this rate, we'll be angled far enough west t' hit that Eagle Creek above those poisoned holes," Kurne told Durkie, when he had worked back to the point again; "and I sure hope that wind holds."

"Well, it sure won't; wind is apt t' change a li'le before noon."

"I think I can notice a shift now."

In fact, a puff of wind came, directly out of the north, just as Kurne ceased speaking. As soon as it swept over the herd, a low, moaning sound went down from point to drag and the cattle threw up their heads and sniffed. Then, as if at a signal, they stopped. The lead steer wheeled and faced right north. Kurne spoke sharply:

"We're not far enough t' the left yet, Durkie, as I reckon it."

"They're goin' t' be tough taffy t' handle, son."

The beeves started to change their line of march into due north and Durkie ordered Kurne to get around the herd and pass the word for all the men to get on the right-hand side of the line. He remained there to argue with the lead steer, who now lowed and gored at the ground. Again came a puff of

north wind, and again that lowing went down the straggling ranks of beef. The lead steer started—north. The column behind him swung out of its half-moon formation caused by the confusion in front, and again came a puff of wind out of the eye of the north. The cattle began to quicken pace.

Durkie swept his eye along the herd. Men were drifting through to get to the right side of the line. Claire came up to him on that side for orders. He gave them:

"Go get those drag men; this herd will be all point in two minutes, and that creek isn't so far away, by the way they're actin'."

Claire rode rapidly now, for the cattle would pay no attention to anything but that water scent from the front. Durkie was pretending to yield to them and let them go, but he was between them and the north. Claire passed the word as she rode down the line and when she pulled the drag men out of the dust she quickly got them started for the tip of the herd. Already the plan of campaign was outlined before her and the others. With true cowman instinct the men of Star J had seen that the herd would not stampede now except in one direction, and that the direction of the creek. The problem was to keep them moving, yet to force them always sidewise so they would hit the creek above the poison pools.

So now the line of horsemen stiffened and the surging beeves came almost against it, yet slid over to the left a bit with each surge.

"That's it, men," Claire called in her clear, mellow voice. "A little gained each time they start north will throw them over to the place where we want them."

"Yes, but once they top that rise ahaid and actually see those pools, we'll never hold them," Kurne warned.

The rise, that had not seemed so marked, now, indeed, did appear to be

sharp and clear-cut against the northern sky. The sun was hot and pitiless.

"Now, meet them, cowboys," Claire called, as the beeves again turned their faces north and came toward the line of horsemen. Cowboys leaned over with closed loops and slatted the beeves on their hairy frontlets. The beeves were bellowing now. It was a time when a herd could become stampede-crazed, or run wild and to destruction, in the hands of poor drovers.

"Steady, firm, very firm, but always sure," Durkie cautioned.

The beeves slid along northwest for the moment. Then came the wind again, with its scent of water. Again the old lead steer turned himself north and gave a signal bellow. Again the animals turned north, and again Star J came against them. The men had unwrapped slickers now. The cow ponies, recognizing the crux of the struggle, began to nip and strike as they were sent against the living wall of beef. Again human mind prevailed against brute force.

"But we're right at the foot of that rise," Kurne reminded Durkie, "and once over it, they'll see those poison pools."

"Fight it out, right in this trough," Durkie ordered; "they mustn't get t' the top of this ridge and into sight of that water."

Again the beeves turned, and again Star J met them. The herd turned up the trough at the foot of the rise. Then the wind came again and the beeves turned and this time seemed set upon a real fight. They were lowing and the leaders were pawing the earth wildly.

Again Star J rallied to the fight and turned the leaders down the trough. They trudged sullenly along, swinging their heads from side to side, and a great clacking noise went through the herd as horn touched horn. They turned to face a new blast of wind and surged, as one animal, right against the line of

fighting men led by that one glorious fighting woman.

Now for the first time Star J felt the true weight of the beef avalanche. The fighting ponies were swept back, nipping and striking. The beeves were heedless now of blows from ropes, slickers, and quirts. Kurne called something to Durkie and left the line, going up the ridge. The Star J men and Claire remained fighting. The beeves were coming with steady, even rushes, the weight of the rear ranks driving the fore ranks on, despite everything that could be done. The wind came again over the brow of that ridge and it brought such a scent of water that the beeves seemed to throw all fear of man aside. They bellowed, charged, and their sharp horns clacked and clicked. The cow ponies tore at them savagely, and the men hurled themselves against the herd in terrific explosions of muscular effort, but all in vain.

Big Nabors, in the wagon, yelled, but he was out of it. Off the northwest a moving patch showed where the remuda was being fought away from the danger by Freschter's determined one-man hazing.

Another whiff of wind, and the cattle seemed to go wild. The wind came in a steady breeze, and Durkie spurred to where Claire was and got her bridle reins.

"Let me go. Fight, fight, fight," she said firmly.

"It's all over; they'll tromple yo' flat in a second more."

"Let them, then. Let go my bridle, Durkie."

"Come out of it; the boys are fightin' now only t' let yo' have a chance t' get out of line, then they're goin' t' turn and ride with the herd."

"Yes, ride t' destruction. Let go my bridle, Durkie!"

The roar of the loosed herd was like that of a tornado as it bounds and whirls across the plains. Its note had gone up

menacingly. The great beeves were without fear of man now, without fear of anything. They seemed to mass, to crouch, to make ready for that final explosion of bovine fury that tears a herd from its destined course and transforms it into a raging, furious killing monster of myriad horns and cruel, stamping hoofs.

"It's all over," Durkie yelled; "we're licked!"

Now came the wind again and with it a new scent—that of burning grass. Down the slope to the trough there came a licking, spreading line of fire, and on the crest of the slope a man was riding along, pulling a burning mass of stuff at the end of his rope.

"Kurne's done it—set the grass afire!" Durkie yelled. He dropped Claire's bridle and at once threw himself against the herd again. She followed his lead. The fire came racing down toward them. The beeves no longer smelled the water; they smelled fire and smoke, and they turned and fled, with the Star J men after them, northeast, along the trough. The grass was not heavy on that slope down which it had raced; there was no grass on the far side of that ridge, so the fire had not spread north. Behind the herd some of the men spread out and began to beat out the thin line of fire. Part kept with the now running herd. The herd was not in a regular stampede. They were in a mild run, alarmed, suspicious of the north, yielding to pressure toward the northeast.

Half an hour later the ridge ended and dropped away to a flat, grassed, easy slope leading north again. Kurne was with the point by then. In fact, as Durkie had predicted, the herd was "all point." Big Nabors was not far behind with the wagon. The remuda had disappeared.

Down that slight slope the beeves lumbered. Ahead was the creek. Kurne yelled that it was all right; that he had a landmark in mind as the northerly

limits of the poisoned water and they were far to the left of that now.

Ten minutes later the pools of Eagle Creek above the poison spots were lined with beeves, drinking and snuffling noisily. The water here was somewhat scant in quantity, but it would do, Durkie judged. The herd was held while the beeves drank to repletion, wading back and forth, drinking, and then drinking again. They were kept close to the creek all afternoon, to chew the cud and rest up. Later they were drifted off to graze again. Freschter had brought the remuda safe through the danger and won the applause of even Big Nabors for his faithfulness and skill.

"A few more things like that and they'll be gaunted like greyhounds," Claire laughed, after it was all over.

"They sure melted off some of that Star J fat that time," Durkie agreed with her.

"I'm going back to stay with Nabors and help him throw an extra gala feed together for this fighting bunch of cow persons," said Claire.

"That won't do any harm. First good bed ground I see, after they graze some, they'll go onto it and my guess is that they'll sleep hard as we will."

Kurne, detailed at last to go over to the remuda, found Freschter grinning and eager to hear the news. Kurne had not given him any particulars at first. Now he did. Freschter nodded:

"I call that a bright idea, tryin' t' poison a whole herd. No real cowman would do that. He'd fight folks, not cattle."

"Say, Freschter, what kind of a place is this Portales?"

"A wolves' hole, plus."

"Who is the he wolf?"

"Butch Condertone. He wasn't as long as I was there," and now his slat-blue eye glittered. "I never trained with him much, but he never held his haid real high when I was in the same town. He double-crossed me on a deal and I

quit him. I had an idea I'd go straight and hired t' Haslane, thinkin' he ran a man's place. When I found out different, I came t' Star J. Say, Kurne, that lady boss sure puts a man in right with himself, don't she?"

"Yes, I think I know what yo' mean."

"Take a man like yo' that's never gone wrong, it must be nice t' look a true woman like that in the eyes. It hurts me, but still I look at her and grin. The way she took me on without a question, and the way she put all these hosses in my charge and with them a good share of the safety of the bunch, sure has got me."

He looked away and something like mist was over those slate-blue eyes. Then he began to laugh and chuckle to hide his unexpected emotion.

Kurne rode away thoughtful and quiet. The danger was over. The strain was past. He had seen again Claire in action. This time she was fighting for her herd. She had not tried to get in the way of experienced men with panicky orders. She had simply fought with them in the ranks, meeting, shoulder to shoulder, all that came against her outfit. She had not shown weakness nor masculine harshness. She had been just a woman, plus, yet brave, controlled, strong, courageous, eager to contest with destiny for the safety of her men and cattle.

Goldie was frazzled. The long ride from the creek at top speed, the fight, the tension, had taken all the good horse had to give. Kurne, coming back to the herd, found them grazing. Many of the Star J men began to cast eyes at the wagon, behind which Claire's horse walked, tied fast to a ring at the rear of the tailboard, which was down. Seated on the tailboard, Claire had a bowl in her lap and she was stirring something in it.

"Making us something choice for supper," Hi Low Lurton informed Kurne. Kessler worked Goldie up close to the wagon. Claire looked at him and pity was on her face:

"Kessler, that Goldie boy sure needs a rest. Here and now I break a rule."

She slid a little drawer out and extracted therefrom a lump of sugar. She held it out. Goldie whickered and moved up to get the treat.

"I hope yo're not all mad, Kessler, because I did that t' that one-man hoss."

"No, yo' can do anything t' me or my hoss, after what I've seen yo' do t'day for yo'r men and cattle, Miss Claire," said Kurne, and he raised his hat in salute. He turned Goldie off to one side. The horse looked back and whickered.

Claire looked after this strong, homely man with the seamed face and fierce glance of masculine independence when he was crossed.

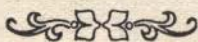
With the bowl in her lap, she stirred and stirred its delectable contents and she sighed, just a little.

At dusk the beeves, full of good grass, were held in loose herd around a little knoll. They began to go up it one by one and to drop down, grunting and blowing their satisfaction. They were going to sleep, and the men, noting all these signs of bovine content, relaxed and then full preparations were made for spending their first night on the trail.

"Well, first water's behind us, and we've overcome our first piece of skullduggery. I wonder what's next?" Durkie remarked as he finished the last of Claire's peach dumplings.

"Trail herdin', my dad taught me, is just one event after another," Morrow remarked, "but as for me, blankets for mine, right soon."

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





# Shorty's Horseplay

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Grandpa Takes 'Em for a Ride," etc.



"WAL," said Sheriff Joe Cook, managing to continue a subject on which he had been preaching, more or less, for almost two hours, "as I has repeatedly said, a good guard could easily have prevented that stage robbery yesterday. Thar's no doubt in my mind, 'Shorty,' but that the robber was 'Slat's Painter, an' that he was a-lookin' fer that currency shipment that he figgered was on yesterday's stage. Not findin' it, it's a cinch he'll be brazen enough to hold up to-day's stage, guard or no guard! He's got all the stage company's guards buffaloed, anyhow—An' what sort o' guards are they, anyway? Nuthin' but barn hostlers an' harness wipers armed with sawed-off shotguns an' a empty title!"

"Yeh!" agreed Shorty McKay, Sheriff Cook's long-suffering deputy. Shorty and the sheriff had been in what the sheriff pleased to call a "conference" ever since the news had arrived in Monte Vista that morning that the

Monte Vista Stage Line's regular stage to Salida Falls had been held up late in the afternoon of the preceding day. A lone bandit had "stuck up" the six-mule outfit, despite an armed guard, robbed the passengers, and escaped with a valuable registered-mail pouch, after expressing keen disappointment and bitter resentment that the usual first of the month bank shipment of currency was not on board. The bold robbery had not been the first on the stage line in recent months. There had been four, and in three of the affairs, the lone bandit, believed to be the same outlaw in all instances, had obtained the bank money.

"Yuh kain't make a stage guard out o' a mule chambermaid!" went on Sheriff Cook, pounding the table to drive home him observations. "I has tol' the stage outfit a dozen times that what they wants to do is to bring in a coupla real hombres fer guards—fellers like Coleman Ball, or Ray Hardison, or Johnny McLachlan—birds as kin make six-guns sing like mosquitoes, an' who has all

the nerve o' a regiment o' cavalry behind their two gray eyes. But it takes dough to hire men like them, an' the stage company prefers to use currycomb experts who won't resist nuthin' worse'n a hoss-fly."

"Yeh!" agreed Shorty dutifully. He knew that he was expected to agree with everything his boss said, whether he did or not. He knew it would be quite useless to argue. The sheriff, undoubtedly, had made up his mind as to his next move and the long-winded "conference" was simply leading up to the revelation of his hand. Shorty had some ideas of his own on catching stage robbers—ideas evolved as the sheriff had sermonized—but Shorty hardly dared to risk mentioning them. The sheriff, he knew, would not take a young deputy's advice, kindly or otherwise.

"Ef that bandit who did that job yesterday was Slat's Painter, as we has practically decided he was," went on the sheriff, waving a lead pencil at Shorty, who blinked, "we kin jus' lay our bottom dollar on one thing: He'll be out ag'in this afternoon to take a crack at to-day's stage, knowin' that ef that currency wasn't on yesterday's stage it has almost got to be on to-day's stage. See? He's that crusty, that bird is! An' he'll be right. The stage to-day will take the bank currency, an' halfway to Salida Falls, Painter will take it, unless—Shorty, yuh lissen to this—unless——"

Sheriff Cook paused for greater emphasis.

"Yeh?" suggested Shorty unhappily.

"—unless we outsmarts him, Shorty. An' that's jus' what we're goin' to do. Now, don't interrupt me! We could take a posse down an' trail that stage, but Painter would spot that posse from some o' his mountain lookout posts no matter how far behind we trailed, an' he wouldn't strike. An' we wouldn't nab him. An' it's far more important to nab him than it it to scare him off. We

could load the stage with a posse, but it would be spotted easy up top, an' it would be practically useless inside the stage ef he got the drap on the outfit. So, Shorty, I has fixed up a plan——"

The deputy nodded his head energetically. "Yeh, Shorty, I've hit on a plan that should oughter be a humdinger! One that'll pectect the bank shipment, fool the bandit, an' ketch him, all to once! Now, ef I do say so myself, I'm as good a shot as any man jack in this part o' Colorado. An' nobody has ever accused me o' lackin' nerve. I got cast-iron nerve. An' next to myself, I figgers yuh, Shorty, as some pumpkins with a gun. Yep, I admits that. An' yuh has a lotta daring, too, Shorty. Yuh ain't got sense enough to git scared! So, either yuh or me, one o' us, will set up on top o' that stage when she rolls this afternoon as guard—hat down over our eyes, badge hid—an' when that bandit appears—bang, bang right then!"

Shorty seemed a bit surprised at the sheriff's bold suggestion. But he hastened to make a correction on the plan.

"Why not both o' us?" he asked.

"Two guards would wise that outlaw up an' he might start crackin' right off, an' then we would be outta luck!" said the sheriff. "Jus' one o' us will ride up with the driver, same as ef we was only a stage barnyard guard. The other, I figgers, will go—but he'll ride inside the coach, ready at the fust shot from the man on top to lean outta a side winder an' pump whatever oth'er lead may be necessary at Mr. Holdup, ef any be necessary. I figger that plan will mean jail or the morgue fer Mr. Slat's Painter."

Shorty frowned as the full meaning of the plan dawned on him.

"I suppose yuh've picked me to ride inside, boss," he protested, "while yuh roosts up top with the driver, an' has all the real fun, excitement, an' glory ef Slat's does hold us up."



"Shorty," said the sheriff, in grieved tones, "yuh should oughter know me better'n that! I'm fer fair play every time. I couldn't order or eyen ask yuh to take the most risk on a plan that I've figgered out an' which yuh may not like. Yuh ride inside."

"Say," said Shorty, and that was a ray of hope in his blue eyes, "I tell yuh what, boss—we'll toss fer it! I'll toss up a quarter. Heads, I wins an' rides up top! Tails, yuh lose an' yuh ride inside. That'll be fair enough, an'——"

The sheriff pondered for a second.

"Good!" he said. "We'll flip fer it—but I does my callin' after yuh tosses up the coin. Flip her, Shorty!"

Shorty sent a coin spinning into the air.

"I take haid!" snapped the sheriff, and Shorty's face fell. When the coin fell, it was "heads" sure enough. Shorty pocketed it with a sigh, while the sheriff grinned happily.

"I rides up top, Shorty, yuh ride inside," he said softly. "I'm goin' up to Wallace's hardware store to git me a nice shotgun right now! I suggest yuh carry a pair o' sixes, seein' yuh're inside. The stage starts, as yuh know, at two o'clock. Better git yuhr lunch. An' meanwhile, not a word to nobody. I'll see yuh at the stage barns jus' afore startin' time. Remember, mum is the word, Shorty."

"Yeh," agreed Shorty, but his tone was listless and indifferent.

When two o'clock came Sheriff Joe Cook was at the barns of the Monte Vista Stage Lines Co., but Shorty was not. The big mountain stage coach was ready to pull out, too. But what surprised the sheriff, next to Shorty's tardiness, was the fact that instead of the six mules that ordinarily pulled the Monte Vista-Salida Falls stage, there were four big horses in the traces. And further, there was a new driver on the box. A fat, heavy-set old man, with streaming white whiskers, a gay scarf wrapped

securely around his neck, and a rusty old black slouch hat tilted jauntily to one side.

"No," said Steve Chapman, the stage-line superintendent, in answer to the sheriff's sudden question, "I ain't seen Shorty around here, sheriff. Was yuh expectin' him?"

"I was—dang his slow hide!" said the sheriff. "An' whar's ol' 'Pappy' Stewart, the reg'lar driver, an' his mules? This is the fust time I ever seen yuh use hosses on this route."

"Yes, it is the fust time," said Superintendent Chapman nervously. "They're new hosses, sheriff, that we're tryin' out fer the fust time ter-day. They're supposed to be good ones, however. Pappy Stewart is layin' off ter-day. He's a little worried, I guess, over what may happen ef that robber——"

"Ssshhh!" warned the sheriff, shaking his head.

"Anyway, he refused to drive the hosses as his alibi," went on the superintendent, "so we got Charley Johnson drivin' fer us. He's a new driver, sent up with the hosses, from Salida Falls; been on one o' the other routes outta thar—a good man. He got up outta a sick bed to drive, though—has a bad sore throat and kain't talk—so—the ride mebbe kinda lonesomie."

The sheriff glanced up at the coach.

"Only two passengers?" he asked cautiously. He had warned the superintendent earlier in the day that no one must know that Shorty and himself were riding the stage as guards. At that time the stage superintendent had been unable to say whether there would be any passengers or not. But now he nodded.

"Jus' two," he said, in a whisper. "That stranger is a salesman from Denver who has been on a vacation up here fer the past few days. He's goin' home. The other fellow—o' course yuh know him, the man with the package—that's Cliff Holmes, the half-wit."

The sheriff nodded.

"Oh, I know that nut—but I wonder what's keepin' Shorty?"

Something was surely keeping Shorty. Five minutes passed without his putting in an appearance. Then ten minutes. Then fifteen, and twenty. The superintendent was nervously lighting one cigarette after another. His brow was damp. The sheriff, too, was fretting at the delay. The new driver, Charley Johnson, was squirming impatiently at the wait. The superintendent, watch in hand, finally spoke his mind.

"Twenty-five minnits late now, sheriff," he growled. "I reckon we kain't hold the stage much longer fer yuhr man."

"Shucks," exclaimed the sheriff, with sudden determination, "I won't waste no more time waitin' fer him! Like as not he's got cold feet at the last minnit. It was arranged he was to ride inside an'— But to heck with him! He's found a purty gal to lallygag with, or a boob tourist to impress with his stories o' deputy-sheriffin', or a crazy idear has popped inter his haid. Come on, Chapman, git that box we're to take an'—"

Superintendent Chapman ran into the stage office, knelt before the big safe, twirled the combination knob, and came out in a minute with a small, strong box, which he handed Cook.

"Three thousand berries," he whispered to the sheriff.

"Don't worry none!" said Sheriff Cook, climbing up on the stage. He put the strong box on the floor and placed both feet on it. He laid his sawed-off shotgun across his knees. The superintendent nodded to the muffled driver, Charley Johnson, and Charley shook out the ribbons. The four horses tightened the traces. There was a jingle of trace chains and harness trappings and the big stagecoach rolled. The sheriff swore under his breath. Why hadn't Shorty appeared, as arranged? But then, the answer was probably simple enough. Shorty, draw-

ing the inside position, was probably sore and had decided not to come. After all, the sheriff reasoned, Shorty was merely a boy.

The sheriff turned around to look at the passengers.

"Hullo thar, Cliff," he said pleasantly to Cliff Holmes, the vacant-faced youth who sat on the last seat, close to the near end of it, clutching a huge bundle wrapped in brown shipping paper in his arms. "Yuh seem to have a big package thar, an' it's a long ride to Salida Falls. Don't yuh want to put it inside the coach—or back on the luggage rack in the rear?"

"Nope," said the town character sourly. "I carry."

"What's in it, Cliff?" asked the sheriff kindly. "It must be purty valuable ef yuh're afraid to trust it outta yuhr hands."

"It's some stuff fer Santa Claus," said Cliff gruffly. "He couldn't git it in his sleigh. One o' his reindeer had a split hoof an' he didn't want to overload the sleigh, so—"

The sheriff grunted and swung around in his seat.

"That loon!" he remarked to the driver, Charley Johnson. "I dunno whether yuh know o' him or not, Johnson, seein' yuh're a stranger hereabouts. Cliff's jus' kinda daffy, I guess. All the boys make fun o' him. The county keeps him. He ain't all home. Imagine him carryin' that big package—probably nuthin' in it and some o' the boys are playin' a joke sendin' him with it to Santa Claus—but he falls fer all that gaff! I—"

The sheriff paused and sniffed suspiciously.

"Yes, it was garlic! Garlic with a capital G. The new driver, with utter disregard for the unfortunate persons who might ride near him, seemed saturated with garlic. The sheriff edged away with a snort. He glared his disapproval at the muffled-up Johnson, but

the driver did not seem to notice. His hat, pulled jauntily to one side, hid his near eye from the sheriff's view. His white whiskers, flying every which way in the breeze, further served to hide his emotions.

"Yuh—yuh like garlic, Johnson?" asked the disgusted sheriff.

Johnson nodded, pointing quickly to his bandaged neck.

"Oh, fer yuhr sore throat!" said the sheriff. "I understand!" But, nevertheless, he edged farther away down the seat. The driver, bending over, gave his whole attention to the four spanking bays in the traces.

And what horses they were! Great big brutes, full of fire, it seemed. The sheriff, staring at them, decided that they were well-trained animals, even if they were green on the stage-line route. They took the first long hill out of Monte Vista with taut traces. They took the big coach spinning across the first good stretch of level road on top of Piñon Mesa. The driver, Johnson, merely shook the reins and the bay leaders changed from a trot into a lazy gallop. The bay wheelers followed suit at once. The big coach swayed and creaked. The sheriff, getting a whiff of garlic every so often, tried to keep his face averted from the driver, but even at that he could not help but notice that Johnson was handling the reins rather clumsily.

What ef we should have a runaway? thought Sheriff Cook, with a sinking heart. A new driver, four green nags, an'—

But that worry speedily departed with the return of the sheriff's first—and principal—care. After all, why fret about a runaway when there were more important matters in the wind? The sheriff, recollecting Slats Painter, and the holdup that was quite probably inevitable, caressed the shiny barrel of his new shotgun. And then, despite the fact that the garlic was strong as ever,

he turned and spoke crisply to Driver Johnson.

"I guess it's time to tell yuh that we may have trouble on this trip," said the sheriff, switching his gaze from Johnson to the two passengers—Cliff Holmes and the salesman from Denver. "We expect a stick-up. Ef it comes, jus' all o' yuh folks set tight. Don't be frightened by a gun goin' off. I expect my gun may do that. Ef thar is any great amount o' shootin', I'd advise yuh all to duck down ef yuh kin. Ef I'm lucky, thar'll be only one shot an' it won't come this direction, either."

No one said a word but Cliff Holmes.

"No robber ain't goin' to git this stuff I got fer Santa Claus!" he objected. "I'll soak 'im in the snoot!"

"Now, Cliff, yuh keep ca'm!" advised the sheriff quickly. "I'm here fer to take keer o' that robber bird, ef he shows. Yuh jus' set tight an' watch me go inter action, Cliff! An' yuh, Mister Salesman, I hopes yuh won't git frightened none?"

The salesman, sitting on the seat directly behind the sheriff, smiled rather weakly at the sheriff's remark.

"I'll try not to," he said, but his voice trembled a bit.

"An' yuh, driver," said Sheriff Cook, "yuh kinda see that them hosses don't bolt ef thar is some gunfire. I guess yuh kin handle 'em all hunky-dory, but don't take no chances! Haul in on 'em hard! I don't want to be plucked out o' the top o' some pine tree down the mountain-side like a daid eagle jus' because some green hosses run away! Everybody be ca'm an' cool—understand?"

Driver Johnson nodded.

"Yes, sir!" said the Denver salesman.

"Santa Claus won't stand fer no robbery," said Cliff Holmes, with a wail. "This package is fer him an' he has to git it."

The sheriff, getting another whiff of garlic, turned aside. He got his gun up, ready for action, however. He wished

—a little—that Shorty was along to back him up. It would be sheriff against gunman now, without any backing from the stagecoach. The new driver, besides being a garlic fiend, seemed to be a silent chump as well; the salesman, if one could judge his courage by his voice, was already scared to death; Cliff Holmes, the town nitwit, could be relied upon for one thing only—to make matters worse. The sheriff swore softly. Well, he was capable of handling one bandit alone!

The big coach was swaying down Hicks Mountain now, at a pace that certainly could not be said to be slow. Johnson was trying to make up the time lost by waiting for Shorty, the sheriff figured. He could hardly be blamed for trying to catch up on his schedule. The sheriff said nothing. He looked down at the four well-matched bay horses, however, and marveled at their strength and beauty. They were trotting briskly, all in step, heads up, ears forward, hides glistening. The coach wheels were singing merrily. The sheriff took a chew of tobacco and relaxed a little.

Ef that Slats Painter—ef it is him—does try any hold-up it won't be this side o' Spring Gulch, decided the sheriff, with due deliberation. Thar's no good place fer a ambush until we gits thar, fer one thing. An' he's never struck this side o' Spring Gulch before, fer another thing! It's far safer country over thar fer him than it is here—this is too open, trails kin be too easily followed, while beyond Spring Gulch—"

The near leader snorted and jumped sideways, into his bay mate. A shadow leaped out into the road from a clump of bushes. Sheriff Cook, acting almost mechanically, brought his gun up into firing position.

"Don't shoot!" said a hoarse voice in his ear, while something prodded him in the small of the back. "I got yuh covered!"

"Hands up—everybody!" roared the man in the road.

"Slats Painter!" groaned the sheriff, as he dropped his sawed-off shotgun and elevated his hands obediently. Out of the corner of his eye the sheriff had seen that the fellow whom he had heard was a "Denver salesman" was the party who had spoken in his ear just at the crucial moment. The man was an accomplice! Right on the coach! And the thing prodding the sheriff in the back was, without doubt, the muzzle of a six-gun!

"Whew!" sighed the sheriff, but the bandit in the road yelled again—and there was sure death in his voice now!

"Yuh—back thar with the bundle—put yuhr hands up!"

The sheriff shuddered for the safety of poor Cliff Holmes. Driver Johnson, the sheriff saw, had reached for the sky at the first command. He had dropped the reins over the dashboard and reached high, wide, and handsome. He had not had time, apparently, to drop his long blacksnake whip. He held it in one up-raised hand. But the bandit in the road did not seem to mind that. His eyes were fixed on Cliff, who still clung to his bundle.

"I kain't put my hands up!" wailed Cliff pathetically. "This here package is fer Santa Claus—"

"Put yuhr hands up," barked the nervous Slats Painter, "or yuh'll go whar thar ain't no Santa Clauses!"

"I kain't!" protested the miserable Cliff.

*Bang!* At the shot the team of bay leaders nearly jumped out of their glistening skins, but they quieted immediately. Cliff Holmes' hat sailed out over the top of the coach along with the bandit slug that had punctured it. Cliff's face blanched, his hands shot up into the air, and the great big package that he had been holding to his heart for dear life fell to the ground.

*Clangity—clang—clash, crash—clink!*

And at that precise moment the fretting bay leaders jumped into their collars and took their heads so fast that Slats Painter, taken by complete surprise, had time to do but one thing. He dropped his gun, crouched and leaped madly, and the next moment he was struggling for life between the running bay leaders, accomplishing a desperate feat by a seeming miracle. The outlaw, appearing to cling by hands and feet and teeth, was flung along between the two bay leaders, until he rested on the pole, with a hand on the neck of each bay wheeler. The four bays were running wildly. Johnson, the sluggish driver, had reached for the lines just as the bays started, but the reins were whisked over the dashboard in the twinkling of an eye. The tremendous lurch of the stagecoach, as the horses started, had thrown the "salesman" accomplice of Painter back into the lap of Cliff Holmes, and that individual, pained at the loss of his precious package, had snatched the long black gun from the accomplice's hand and, before the man could object, had cracked him across the head with it. The gun, fortunately, did not go off. The stranger flattened out on the stage top with a grunt, and Cliff Holmes wailed his grief.

"What'll Santa Claus say now?" he cried desperately. "I was to hold that package tight—an'—an'—"

Meanwhile, all in a brief second, it seemed, the badly scared Slats Painter had worked himself to a safer perch, if it could be called such. Hanging to manes and harness straps, swearing at the top of his voice, he was maintaining a precarious foothold on the swaying wagon pole. The bays were paying absolutely no attention to him. They were too busy attending to the business of running to heed the excess human baggage.

The sheriff's face was chalky white. He groped for the shotgun—to find it gone! It had fallen overboard or else

the outlaw on the coach had taken it before Cliff had laid him low. The sheriff turned to look for the gun.

"Yuh, Painter!" came the sudden wild howl of Johnson, the stage driver, and the black-snake whip hissed a threat. "Yuh come up outta thar now, right smart, or I'll flay yuh off into the road, an' yuh'll never know what run over yuh! Come up outta that—quick, yuh cheap gunman, quick!"

Sheriff Cook gasped and choked. He stared first at Driver Johnson and then at Slats Painter. The outlaw, sure enough, was coming, hand over hand, inch by inch, under the threat of the waiting whip. The outlaw seemed to sense that the stage driver would use the whip—and besides, Painter apparently figured that he would be safer on the coach, seeing that an inevitable smash-up was coming. The four horses were galloping madly. The big coach was rocking and swaying. The frightened Painter worked his way along the pole, reached for the bobbing dashboard, seized it, drew himself up over it, and sprawled onto the coach top, to find himself looking squarely into a six-gun in the driver's hand.

"Put the bracelets on him, sheriff!" ordered the driver tersely, and Sheriff Cook, still acting like a man in a trance, did as he was told. When the cuffs were safely on Painter's wrists, the astounded sheriff gave sudden voice to his feelings.

"Shorty, yuh crazy, half-witted galoot, yuh!" he cried.

The stage driver, "Johnson," whipped the scarf from his neck. Another yank, and the false white whiskers came away. He pushed his hat back on his head and then, despite the swaying of the coach and the thudding of the hoofs, he spoke casually.

"Oh, hullo, boss!"

"It's all right, I suppose," yelled the sheriff, who had other worries now that Slats Painter was in custody, "but,

Shorty, mind them hosses! They're runnin' away, yuh nut! Yuh've lost the ribbons an' yuh never will stop 'em! We better all jump——"

The sheriff glanced hastily around.

"Cliff, we're goin' to jump!" went on the sheriff, with frantic gestures. "But—but I hate to leave that danged accomplice cold up here—ef the stage crashes—as it will."

The sheriff felt a hand on his arm.

"Keep yuhr shirt on a minnit, boss!" cried the smiling, perspiring deputy. "I jus' remembered somethin'. Mebbe we won't have no smash-up after all—mebbe——"

Shorty cupped his hands. He leaned forward.

"Whoa thar, boys!" he whooped at the running bays. "Whoa now, whoa, whoa! Whoa thar!"

And to the sheriff's astonishment, to the bewilderment of Slats Painter, and to the disappointment of Cliff Holmes, who had perched himself on a seat all ready to leap for life, the four bays seemed to slow up. The sheriff decided it was just his feverish imagination, but Shorty shouted again through his cupped hands.

"Whoa now! Whoa thar, whoa up! Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

The four shiny bays responded again. The slackening of their headlong speed was plainly apparent now. The sheriff sighed and licked his parched lips. Slats Painter gulped. Cliff Holmes, still poised for a jump overboard, grunted. The dog-gone horses, he feared, were really going to stop. Shorty gave them another hint.

"Whoa, fellers, whoa up now! Whoa!"

The bays came to a jumbled, broken trot. At that moment Shorty's foot came down on the screeching brake. Another soothing order from Shorty and the bays slackened to a walk. The next instant Shorty was down off the stage, like a cat, and at the head of the

near leader. The leaders stopped. So did the wheelers. The stage groaned to a halt. The wild ride was over—and without mishap.

"Waal," said the sheriff, and he was shaking like a leaf, "I swanny ef I ever seen anything like it! Thar sure is a Providence that takes good keer o' sparrers, green hosses, an' amateur stage drivers! I never seen nuthin' like it!"

Shorty patting the heads of the panting leaders, grinned.

"I—I has to offer an apology, boss," he said, "I almost fergot something important! An' ef I hadn't remembered it jus' when I did the Monte Vista Stage Line might 'a' been out one good stage an' minus four o' the swellest hosses I ever handled."

The sheriff bristled now that all danger was over.

"What was the idear, yuh brainless cub?" he demanded, as he pointed an accusing finger at Shorty. "What was yuh masqueradin' as a feller named Johnson fer all the time, an' smellin' o' garlic like a Eyetalian restaurant in Denver, an' pertendin' to be a stage driver, riskin' all our necks put together, an' foolin' me, an'——"

"An' outsmartin' Mr. Slats Painter an' his slick accomplice, don't fergit that!" cut in Shorty quickly. "Waal, I'll tell yuh, boss, seein' Slats might like to know hisself. I figgered we had to use strategy to git him. Yuhr plan o' pretendin' to be a guard was all right but I figgered Slats might put one over on us, seein' he'd know blamed waal that the stage ter-day would be loaded fer game, since he held up yesterday's stage through the mistaken idear that the bank shipment was on it."

Shorty continued to rub the warm muzzles of the leaders.

"I was scared Slats would outsmart us on that guard idea," went on Shorty, "how, I didn't jus' know. I admits I never thought he would have a accomplice on the stage like he did. But I

wasn't greatly surprised. When we tossed fer the right to ride up here I gotta confess I used my trick quarter, boss, the one with two haid on it. Yuh kinda beat me to it, however, insistin' on hollerin' after I flipped the coin. Yuh took haid an' won, so I decided to go ahead with my own little plan after that."

Shorty put one arm around the neck of one of the bay leaders.

"I beat it over an' talked to Superintendent Steve Chapman at the stage barns," continued Shorty. "I talked him inter seein' the wisdom o' my plan an' I swore him to secrecy, o' course. Fust, I was to take the place o' Pappy Stewart, the reg'lar driver, an' second, I was to use the new four-bay hitch that every one was afraid to use up to now. Then I got hold o' Cliff Holmes an' persuaded him to go down on the stage carryin' a big bundle o' stuff fer Santa Claus—that's what I told Cliff, who is to be thanked fer his part in it. I guv him the bundle, which was made up fer me by Eddie Owens. It contained a coupla ol' tin boilers, some sleigh bells, some cow bells, some tin cans, an' the like—stuff plenty noisy. Then Eddie got me disguised, an' I carried a big sack o' garlic so yuh wouldn't set too close to me an' mebbe see through my disguise afore I put over my stunt!

"My strategy was that when the hold-up occurred an' Cliff put up his hands—as I tried to impress on him he must—the bundle would fall with a great racket, the new hosses would run, an' the hold-

up would either save his neck as he did or git run over, in either case endin' his career o' crime! Slats did as I thought he would; the hosses run at the noise o' the clatterin' bells an' things, an' my plan worked!"

Sheriff Cook stroked his chin and nodded, frowning.

"Yuh seemed to be daid sure the hosses would run, Shorty," he said, "an' kinda sure they'd stop, too. Seems——"

"Sure I was!" said Shorty, with a malicious grin at Slats Painter, the scowling bandit. "They're ol' Denver fire hosses, boss, taught to run at the sound o' the gong, an' trained to run sanely without runnin' away, an' educated to stop an order no matter how fast they're goin'. I knowed for several days that the Monte Vista Stage Lines Co. had 'em in their barns, the drivers bein' rather leery o' usin' 'em—seein' they was ol' fire hosses jus' auctioned off in Denver an' bought by the stage outfit—but they fitted in swell with my plans. In fact, they was the whole kernel o' my strategy, boss."

"Kernel?"—echoed the sheriff, grinning broadly. "That word reminds me a whole lot o' the word 'nut,' Shorty, but—waal, this is no place fer personal remarks, I reckons! I kinda figger that I owes yuh—an' the four green fire hosses an' Cliff Holmes here—a lot o' thanks, Shorty! An' by golly, they're yuhrs, Shorty—a million an' one thanks!"

"Thank yuh, boss," said Shorty, bowing.



## BOILING SPRINGS HEAT THIS CITY

THERE are few cities in the world that would not suffer if their supply of coal were shut off. But one of these few cities is Boise, the capital of Idaho, which is provided by nature with a hot-water system of its own. This system consists of numerous artesian well, which are located in the immediate vicinity of the city. When the water leaves these boiling springs it has a temperature of one hundred and seventy-five degrees Fahrenheit. And, when it reaches the city, it furnishes very adequate heat for various great office and public buildings.



# Strength of the Hills

By George Owen Baxter

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

**C**ARRICK DUNMORE is asked by Elizabeth Furneaux to rescue her nephew, Rodman, from James Tankerton's gang. Dunmore agrees and, by cleverness and strength, defeats "Chuck" Harper, Lynn Tucker, and Doctor Legges—all Tankerton's aids—and finally forces the chief to accept him as partner.

The two rejoin the gang at Tankerton's headquarters, with young Jimmy Larren as hero-worshiping companion. Tankerton is embittered by his defeat. Beatrice Kirk, his ward, is loved by Rodman, who stays with the band for her sake. Dunmore also quickly feels her charm.

Rodman gives his ruby ring to Beatrice, asking her to wear it if she cares for him. Dunmore, realizing Rodman's position and that the girl does not love him, wins the ring as a wager. Vainly she tries to get him to return it. All might have gone well, but the malicious Legges calls public attention to the matter at table.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

GET READY TO RIDE.



**W**ITH the shock of that speech, it seemed to Dunmore that the lights were a great dazzle above his head, but through the dazzle he strained his eyes at the grinning malice of the doctor, and then toward the girl and Furneaux.

Beatrice had been struck white! All

her assurance, all her poise, was not enough, now. And she looked blankly before her.

Tankerton was as alert as a cat, instantly. It seemed as though he had known beforehand of this plan! Only Furneaux did not understand the speech, as it appeared.

"My ruby, doctor?" said he. "Beatrice is keeping it safe for me. I was tired of chipping it!"

And he laughed, rather foolishly, as



though he expected every man to guess, at once, the heart of his mystery.

"Where's she keeping it for you, Rodman?" asked the doctor. "Not on her finger, I see?"

Furneaux glanced at the girl's hand and frowned a little. Then he looked up at her face. She was making a desperate effort to keep control of herself, but that effort was a failure, totally.

Jimmy Larren slipped unnoticed from his place and left the house at once; even Dunmore hardly noted what the boy had done.

Dunmore would have liked to take the doctor by the throat, but that worthy now laughed and rubbed his hands.

"Ah, these girls!" said he. "We never know when we have them. The rascal wheedles a pretty ring out of you, Furneaux, and hands it on to this famous fellow, Dunmore."

The doctor laughed again, and still rubbed his hands; while Furneaux looked actually agape on Beatrice.

"To Dunmore?" he asked huskily.

And not a word came from Beatrice.

Then Furneaux, convinced, whiter than the girl herself, leaned back in his chair a little.

"Well," said he, "some men have a way of getting what they can—out of girls!"

He sneered at Dunmore, and a red haze passed over the eyes of the latter.

He saw every man at the table grow tense; he saw hands ready to thrust back out of harm's course, when the guns were drawn; he saw the eyes of Beatrice like staring wells of darkness, and Tankerton faintly smiling, an acid smile.

Then Dunmore understood. It was all arranged beforehand between Tankerton and the doctor. They were to make Furneaux badger him into a fight. Furneaux was a quick hand with a gun and a straight shot; who could tell but that he might drop even a more formidable fighter than Dunmore? Besides, in the confusion of the shots, might not some

one fire from the side—the doctor, say; or Lynn Tucker, pale with malice?

But he, for his own part, was for the first time in his life digesting an insult without striking back!

He bent his attention to his plate, and went on with his eating.

He heard a little murmur, made by the indrawn breath of many men. They were struck with wonder to see him "take water"—he who had stood up to Harper, to the doctor, to Lynn Tucker, to Tankerton himself.

Furneaux raised his voice. "Did you hear me, Dunmore?" said he.

Dunmore shrugged his shoulders, and still he did not look up. Both hands trembled with eagerness to get at his guns, yet he restrained himself.

"I said," went on Furneaux, "that there are some men in the world who are curs enough to hunt for what they can get—from women!"

Slowly, Dunmore looked up.

He saw, in his agony, the blood-red heap of apples which graced the center of the table. He saw, beyond them, the desperate and appealing face of the girl; and that sight gave him a sudden courage.

Furneaux was stiff and tensely alert in his chair. His left hand was on the edge of the table. His right hand was out of sight—gripping the handles of a Colt, no doubt!

"Doctor," said Dunmore, "you're handy to the apples, there. Will you throw me one?"

The doctor hesitated, frowning a little. He could not understand this request, at such a time; but eventually he reached out and picked up an apple.

"It's bigger," said the doctor, "but it ain't a ruby to set in a ring!" And he tossed the apple toward Dunmore.

There had to be some outlet for the pent-up fury which was working in the heart of Dunmore, and now he snatched a revolver out of the empty air, as it seemed to those astonished eyes that

watched him; it flashed and exploded at the same instant and the apple, torn in two, fell back upon the table. One half struck a tin cup and raised a great rattling. The other half rolled off upon the floor.

Furneaux, at the same instant, had made a move with his own weapon, but only the muzzle of it had appeared above the edge of the table before Dunmore drew and fired.

The inference was clear enough. The face of Rodman Furneaux grew patched with purple, he bit his lower lip, and slowly put up the revolver.

"That apple was no good, doctor," said Dunmore cheerfully. "You can see by the inside of it that the worms were already at it. Pass me another, will you?"

Again the doctor threw an apple, but this time, Dunmore caught it with his left hand and started eating it.

"Try one, Furneaux," urged he. "You know what they say—an apple a day keeps the doctor away!"

He glanced at the doctor, as he spoke, and the worthy doctor lost control of himself so completely that he scowled broadly, for all to see.

Tankerton, too, sat with pinched lips, and Lynn Tucker was breathing hard.

One would have said that the least matter in the world—the mere falling of a leaf—would have made all three leap into immediate action. But the leaf did not fall!

Furneaux, brave as a lion and willing to fight, still hesitated a little, for he had seen his own death, as it were, rehearsed before his eyes, and the picture was something to remember. Besides, there still was the acrid taint of powder-smoke in the air!

Yet the atmosphere was still charged with danger, when Beatrice Kirk pushed back her chair and rose.

No one spoke to her; she herself did not utter a word, but looked at Dunmore as though at the end of the world.

Then she left the room, hesitating for an instant at the door, with one hand against the jamb of it, as though she were dizzy.

The long silence at the table continued. It began to grow breathless; Dunmore could see the brow of Furneaux shining with moisture beneath the lamp. He had turned paler than before, and his eyes looked hollow, but he was brave as any hero could be.

Finally, he thrust back his chair. The scrape of it on the floor was like the scream of a human being in that tense stillness, and every man at the table started.

"Dunmore," said the other, "I'm going to be waiting for you outside the door of the bunk house where I sleep. I'll have some things to say to you; you can talk to me. And it won't be an apple that answers you back!"

He turned on his heel and strode out into the darkness. However, Dunmore could see that he did not turn in the direction which the girl had taken, and that eased his heart.

Tankerton spoke for the first time.

"Dunmore," said he, "that was a fine thing to do. You kept Furneaux from joining Harper, and that would have been a crowded berth for him; besides, he wasn't ready to make the trip, I think."

"Thank the doctor, too," said Dunmore. "There's a fellow that's got my good at heart, and Furneaux's, too. However, I got an idea that he wouldn't 've been standin' by doin' nothin'. Not him! Doctor, I drink to you!"

He raised a cup of coffee and drained off the steaming contents. Never had he wanted a stimulant more.

"When I finish with Furneaux," said he then, "I'll come back and have a little chat with you. Where'll I find you?"

The doctor turned gray-green around the eyes. The greater part of his face was covered by his beard. Yet he answered stoutly:

"I sit on the steps of the bunk house after dinner, always. You can come and talk to me there, Dunmore!"

"All right," said the latter. "We're going to be a chummy lot of friends, I can see."

He stood up, stretching himself, and as he did so, he felt all eyes dwell upon him critically. Dunmore smiled upon them, and then walked slowly out of the room.

At the door, as Beatrice had done, so did he do, pausing with his back turned full upon them, and waiting, as it were, in defiance of them all, but no hand was raised, and no voice spoke against him.

Then he descended quietly to the ground, and went out into the dark. There he paused for a moment, took note of the glimmering lights which showed through the windows and through the open doors of the bunk houses, took heed of the gentle and irregular circle of shadows which embraced the clearing, and of the big bonfire in the center, now burning down, but with the great embers of the logs glowing rich and red.

There were fragrances, too, in this place—the scent of the fresh wood-smoke, beyond all things appealing to lovers of the open, and there were the perfumes of the pines, and of flowers, mysteriously mingled with the other odors.

Dunmore, looking upon these things, inhaling the breath of the wilderness, watching the red-hot glow of the great logs rotting away in their own heat, sighed a little.

And he looked back, above all, to the brightest light, which was the illumination that streamed out of the door of the dining room. Looking at that maze of golden light, he could see in his fancy the faces of the men around the table. He could hear, also, the excited murmur of their voices, every moment growing louder.

He knew of what they talked, and he

smiled grimly within himself as he thought of it. They were counting the ways and the manner in which he could be disposed of.

It seemed as though a shadow rose out of the ground beside him.

"Everything's ready, chief," said the voice of Jimmy Larren.

He reached out and gathered the skinny shoulders of Jimmy within his arm.

"Jim, old partner," said he, "the fact is that we're going on Old Nick's own ride, to-night. We've got about one chance in twenty of pulling clear, and on the way to it, they'll shoot down every man of us as if we were no better than dogs. They'd shoot down you, Jimmy, and forget that you're only a boy."

"Why," said Jimmy, "that's about all that I could ask, ain't it? I mean, to be mistook for a man, so's I could die a man's death! I wouldn't aim to die no better than alongside of you, chief, and it seems to me that a gent has gotta die some time. Ain't that right?"

Dunmore grew thoughtful.

"We have a few minutes, I suppose," said he. "They'll be talkin' for a while in the dining room."

"More'n a while," said Jimmy. "They'll be talkin' till the cows come home, if you wanta ask my idea of it. They never run up agin' anything like you before, and they'll never run up agin' such a thing ag'in. So they got reason to talk, darn 'em all!"

"You don't like them, Jim?"

"I thought that they was free," said Jimmy Larren, "and that was the only reason that I ever liked their kind of a life."

"Well, Jimmy, they're free enough."

"Free to make fools of themselves," said Jimmy bitterly. "Is that bein' really free? I should say not! They ain't no freer than a hoss in a pasture; sooner or later, he's gonna feel the rope around his neck, I reckon."

Dunmore chuckled softly.

"Jimmy, where's the girl?"

"She ain't come out of her house."

"I'll go try to get her, then. Every-thing's lost unless I take her along."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THROUGH THE BRUSH.

AT the door of the girl's cabin, he paused for a moment, listening, and he heard a throb of dull, soft sound within, almost like the pulse of his own heart.

He tapped at the door and heard a frightened gasp in response.

He pushed the door open, and he saw Beatrice lying on the couch, in the very act of raising herself from it. She, at the sight of him, sprang erect.

"I'm ready," she stammered. "I'll go, Carrick."

He took heed of her carefully, as one who had no time to spare, because he could see that his ship was ready to sink, and yet he said to her: "Have you thought it out, Beatrice? If you go with me now, you never can come back! You leave this. You've been a sort of a queen, up here, but you never will be a queen again. Have you figured on that?"

She nodded to him, dumb with sorrow.

"Only if you could say what I'm to be," said she. "Where I'm to go, what I'm to do."

"Go where I go," said Carrick Dunmore. "Ride as I ride, and ask no questions. I could say one thing more—but there's hardly any use of it."

"I want to know."

He looked at her tear-stained face and took a half-step toward her.

"I mean you no harm, Beatrice. I hope it'll be for you as much as for myself."

It seemed to Dunmore that he never had seen her so beautiful, for the only light that was in the room, at that time,

was the flame on the open hearth, which rose and fell, and flickered wildly, and gave to her body and to her face a strange life. Her weeping had not disfigured her, but it seemed only to have made her more feminine, with a helpless softness that went to his heart.

"I'm ready," said Dunmore.

She looked wildly around the room. "I'm ready," said she.

"Mind you," repeated Dunmore, "once you leave, it's forever."

She drew a quick breath, and then nodded. "What am I to do?" she asked.

"Jimmy has the horses ready. Shall we start?"

Suddenly she threw out her hands to him.

"Don't you see?" said Beatrice. "It's all hopeless. You want to take me away from them, but you can't. They're sure to follow. They're sure to catch us. Every one in the mountains is devoted to them. Every one is ready to fight and to die for them. They have signals that would cut us off. They know how to work every corner of the country. We'll be running into a net every step that we take! Have you thought of all that, Carrick?"

"Aye," said he, "I've thought of all that!"

"But still you'll try?"

"Still I'll try."

She gave one glance more around her, as though she were taking into her mind all that she never would see again—the two big grizzly bear rugs on the floor, the skins of the mountain sheep that covered the couch, and on the floor the heads of elk and of deer that had fallen to her own rifle.

Then, with a little gesture, she went to Dunmore and gently laid a hand on his arm.

"I'll go," said she. She looked up suddenly to his face. "It was a grand thing, to-night," said she. "I never saw a man do such a thing. I never hoped to see it!"

And she went out before him into the dark of the night.

Dunmore, following, quickly joined her and led the way around the house and back into the trees.

There, among the shadows, they saw the outlines of horses.

Jimmy Larren's voice greeted them.

"I've got Gunfire and Excuse Me," said he, "and the piebald for myself. Start quick! Here's been that fox, Lynn Tucker, walkin' along through the trees, and I was sure he'd see us!"

Dunmore gave the girl a hand into the saddle. Then he swung up on Excuse Me, and headed away through the woods, with the girl behind him, and Jimmy Larren last of the lot. But, as he went, an odd joy and surety filled the breast of Dunmore that the girl would not leave them. She seemed as much a member of the party as Jimmy's loyal soul itself; so he did not look behind him, but went straight forward and heard the cautious crackling of the twigs beneath the hoofs of the horses which followed.

After a time, they had passed sufficiently far to warrant his going fast and with a glance behind him, he swung Excuse Me into a gallop.

Steadily, he headed on, keeping the road to Harpersville, which he had such good reason to know. The trees flowed steadily past them. The road rang like metal beneath the hoofs of the horses, and the wind cut at his face.

So they descended two-thirds of the way to Harpersville and were cutting along at a good clip when Jimmy Larren cried out. At that, Dunmore looked back, and he saw a light flaring on the forehead of the mountain behind them. It winked rapidly, and Dunmore drew Excuse Me to a halt.

"Do you know how to read that signaling?" he asked of the girl.

She already was spelling it out aloud.

"Ten — thousand — dollars — for Dunmore — alive — or — dead."

"Ten thousand dollars for Dunmore, alive or dead!" she said, putting the letters together. "I knew that they'd send out some message like that. But—ten thousand dollars!"

"It ain't possible!" said Jimmy Larren. "Why, every man in the mountains will be oilin' up his rifle and startin' for us. I pretty nigh wish that I was on the other side, chief! You ain't going straight on through Harpersville, chief?"

"We're going to skirt around it. Jimmy, you'll be able to show us a way where we're not apt to run into any one?"

"But the whole town is turned out by this time, blockin' the trails. I dunno that I can do the job, but I'll try! You'll get scratched up a mite, though."

"How fast are Tankerton's messages relayed through the mountains?"

"Fast as you can think! There it goes ahead of us!"

He pointed, and from the tallest hill before them, they saw a light begin to blink, repeating the message.

"They's hardly a house but what's got somebody in it that can read the signaling. And every house on a high place is fixed with a strong light for the signal-makin'."

Dunmore nodded. Then, tersely: "Lead on, Jimmy. Beatrice, go next. I'll wind up the procession."

They started on obediently, winding off into a thick growth of trees and shrubs which constantly whipped them with projecting branches. Now and then, they could jog their horses at a slow trot, but most of the time, they had to go at a walk, and even at a walk, they had to pause occasionally.

Dunmore found himself straining his eyes into the thick darkness on either hand, though all was so black beneath the big trees that the most he could do was to make out the dim forms of the brush and the stalwart trunks when he was an arm's length from them.

They were constantly choked by the dust which had settled on the foliage and which now was brushed off into the air in clouds. Thorns tore at their clothes with many a sound of ripping, and now and then a horse would clear its nostrils with a snort that sounded to their frightened ears like the blowing of an alarm trumpet.

However, they sifted in this manner down the hillside, and across it, until finally they were able to see through a gap in the trees the scattered lights of Harpersville above them, and finally the tall, blocky outline of the hotel itself.

Jimmy suddenly halted; the girl paused behind him; and Dunmore, bringing up his horse in turn, heard her gasp with fear.

Straight before them came murmuring voices.

After a moment Dunmore heard a gruff man's voice exclaim: "I tore off half my face on that brier! I ain't gunna go no farther along here. The kid's crazy!"

"I ain't crazy," answered a boy's voice. "When we was playin' Injun, Jimmy always used to fool us by gettin' onto this old trail."

"Trail? It ain't no more trail than a cactus patch!"

"It got choked up a good deal, but you see that you can get through. Jimmy's with them, and he might show 'em this way. We better go along, dad!"

"It's a fool business," said another man. "We're waistin' our time down here, with a kid to lead us, and somebody else is gunna rake in that ten thousand. My stars, ten thousand dollars!"

He said it reverently, and with an almost religious emotion.

"And something more for the girl and the kid!" exclaimed another voice.

"Hey, I wouldn't mind plugging that Dunmore, but I'd hate to try to handle that wild cat of a girl without thick gloves on, I'm gunna tell you!"

"Go on, boys. We'll keep along the trail, now that we're started on it. Keep your guns ready."

"I ain't gunna go another step. My face is all tore already. Besides, how could even Dunmore get the girl to ride along this here trail?"

"She's in love with him, ain't she? And a girl'll do anything for a man she's in love with. Love thickens up the hide of a girl till it's like the skin of a mule!"

"All right. Keep ahead. I'm gunna go back. So long, boys!"

"Don't you leave us, Jack! We need you, if we should run onto him!"

"Brave, ain't you? Three of you, at that!"

"If Jack goes back, I'm goin' back too."

"Then we'll all have to go. Dash the luck!"

With much swearing, they turned back, crashing through the thorny brush.

And the last thing that Dunmore heard was:

"This here Dunmore, they say that he didn't come to the mountains for nothin' but the girl."

"Him? Nobody knows what he wants. Most likely he don't know himself. Ask a bull terrier why it loves to fight. As much sense in that as to ask what's in Dunmore's brain. Trouble raisin' is all that he's interested in!"

"A lazy loafer, they say."

"Sure, and a drunk."

"And a crooked gambler."

"Well, he held a hand that Tankerton couldn't beat!"

The voices faded away.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

THEY waited without a whisper, until after all noise had died away, and a few minutes had passed, Dunmore said that they might go on. Therefore, they started again, with Jimmy again in the lead, and the very horses, as it seemed,

stepping more lightly after their fright of the moment before.

Presently the trail widened a little.

That scene was printed forever upon the memory of Dunmore. On the left there was a run of water, beginning to sparkle under the pale silver light of the moon, which was just floating up like a cloud above the branches of the eastern trees. Second-growth forest and shrubbery banked the hill to the right, and there was a nest of glistening rocks in the center of this little natural clearing. No sooner had they come well within the range of it than half a dozen rifles suddenly clanged in their faces. Voices yelled, but of them all, he could remember only one childish screech: "I told you! I told you they'd come this way!"

He put spurs to Excuse Me and rushed straight at the rock nest!

"It's Dunmore!" some one yelled.

A figure rose from among the stone. Guns blared in his face. And as he fired his revolver, he saw the lanky form of the first man topple backward.

Behind him, he sensed the sweep of the boy and of Beatrice riding for cover, and he swung off from the natural fort to get into refuge in his turn.

It seemed to be by miracle alone that he escaped being hit. He felt the check and tug of bullets as they whistled through his clothes. His sombrero was knocked from his head. But he went on, unscathed, and the blessed darkness of the forest once more closed behind him.

He heard the yells of the marksmen—frantic yells of disappointment as ten thousand dollars in hard cash melted away from their grasp, but now the trail widened, and he was galloping over easy ground, with the girl and the boy a scant distance in front of him.

Joy rose in the heart of Dunmore. Let her ride with whom she would, how long would it be before she went with a man who dared what he had ventured on this day?

Then he saw her turn in the saddle.

"That was a glorious thing to do!" she cried at him.

"Nothin' at all," said Dunmore, with a chuckle, and brought Excuse Me up beside them.

He wondered at Jimmy Larren, who did not speak a word, but rode with his head turned straight forward. His wonder turned to anxiety when he saw Jimmy grip the pommel of the saddle.

"Jim! Jim!" he cried, swinging Excuse Me beside the lad.

The boy did not answer, did not so much as nod.

"Are you hurt, Jimmy?"

Larren shook his head.

"Jim! Jim! They've nicked you, çarn 'em!"

Beatrice was cantering ahead, and Jimmy suddenly threw the head of his mustang over and galloped knee to knee with Dunmore.

"Get her out of it. I'll drop back. They got me, chief, but don't you let her know. She's got a funny, woman's way, and she'd be kind of apt to want to stay behind with me. Go on, chief. I'll pull through fine!"

Dunmore groaned.

"Where is it?" he asked.

"Why, nothin'. I'm only nicked. I ain't hurt."

But the lad rode bowed over the pommel.

"They got you through the body!" exclaimed Dunmore. "Oh, the skunks! They've killed you, Jimmy!"

And Jimmy gasped: "Don't make so much noise, or she'll hear you. Ride on, chief. Don't pay no attention. I had—to die, some time."

He sagged heavily from the saddle as he spoke, and Dunmore gathered him into his arms, and lifted him out of the saddle. Limp as a half-filled sack lay the child against his breast, a lean, bony frame, the head falling back and bobbing over the arm of Dunmore. He had fainted completely away, and the pinto

ran wildly on ahead, bolting with the reins flying high above his head.

Beatrice reined sharply in to them.

"Not Jimmy!" she cried. "They haven't hurt him!"

"I think he's done for," said Dunmore bitterly. "A better sort than you and me would ever be! Why should he've been hit? Where'll we take him?"

"It's Jim! It had to be the boy!" said Beatrice. "There's a light yonder. Take him there, for heaven's sake!"

Dunmore asked no questions.

If they were followed even on foot, they might be located in this house. The house itself might be a fortress and stronghold of their enemies. But he was more reassured when he saw it close at hand.

It stood in a wide clearing. All around, in a great circle, the trees had been cut away from a low mound on the top of which stood a small shack, such as a hunter might use.

Here in this lower valley, the air was warm, the door of the shack was opened to it, and from the open door shone the lantern light, dimly. Whatever this house might be, it was here that they must try to leave the boy.

So he rode on straight to it, and dismounted, holding the senseless lad in the strong cup of one arm.

It was a trapper's cabin, and the trapper rose from the work of making a stretcher on which to dry pelts. He was an old man with a very long white beard that flowed down from just beneath his eyes. Great overhanging brows, likewise heavily fringed with white, helped to give him a prophetic look.

"Why, hullo," said this veteran. "What's matter? Accident?"

Dunmore walked straight in and laid the boy on the bunk. He waved a hand at the proprietor, and then, with Beatrice hanging breathlessly at his shoulder, he bared the breast of poor Jim Larren.

There was a great crimson slash over

the heart. Beatrice moaned at the sight of it, but Dunmore, teeth gripping hard, put his finger into the wound. Straightway the tip of the finger struck the bone of a rib. That bone gave a little under pressure, with a grating sound, and Jimmy groaned in his sleep.

But the bone merely was cracked; it had not been cut through by the bullet which glanced on around the side of the lad, leaving a dreadful furrow from which the blood streamed.

"He'll be ridin' buckin' hosses inside of three weeks," said Dunmore, and the girl gasped with relief.

He ran out to his horse and brought in the saddlebag which contained materials for bandaging, and with lightning skill, Beatrice and the trapper helping, he soon had cleansed the wound and strapped a hard bandage around the body of the boy.

"Skinny little sparrow, ain't he?" remarked the trapper.

At that, Jimmy opened his eyes wide and looked straight up into the face of his impromptu host.

"Hullo," said Jimmy, "whose grandpa are you, mister?"

The trapper grinned. "You're gunna pull through, son," said he. "You been about as bad scared as you been hurt, I reckon."

The face of Jimmy puckered with anger.

"Chief," said he, "did I show the white feather?"

"Never a touch of it, Jim," said Dunmore.

"Go on, chief!" urged the boy. "You've gotta hurry! How much time you've wasted here on me might——"

"We have to ride on," said Dunmore. "If you'll take care of him for us, partner, I'll pay you."

The trapper raised his hand in protest.

"If I was a doctor or a hotel or some such," said he, "I'd sure be glad to get your money, but the way it is, I can't use it. The kid's gunna be all right with



me. You run along and forget about him. I'll be glad to have him for company."

"Go on, chief, go on!" pleaded the lad.

Dunmore gripped both the hard, skinny hands in one of his and stared into Larren's eyes.

"You've been as straight as a gun-barrel and as good as gold, kid," said he. "I'm comin' back for you later on. You and me belong together!"

Tears which his pain could not have brought to the eyes of Jimmy Larren now misted his sight. He tried to speak, but there was only a twisting of his mouth. Beatrice kissed him; then she turned behind Dunmore toward the door.

He sprang out of it for the mare, but his hand did not get to her. Three rifles flashed from the brush on that side of the clearing as Dunmore appeared. One bullet nicked the hip of the mare and sent her off at a wild gallop; another slashed the cheek of Dunmore as he leaped back into the hut again.

He slammed the door, and looked savagely about him.

There was a small window at the back of the shack, but yet it was perhaps not too small for him to wedge his shoulders through and draw the girl after him.

He leaped to it and jerked up the sash. Instantly, half a dozen shots barked from the bottom of the hill and he heard the pellets of lead strike the logs with a soggy impact.

He whirled back again toward the door. Blind fighting instinct urged him to break out through that door again and charge the enemy, and he actually had taken a step toward it, scooping up his rifle as he went, when the thin, piping voice of Jimmy called out:

"Don't do it, chief! Don't do it, for Pete's sake! They got you cornered, but they ain't got you in hand, yet. Chief, take your time, will you?"

Beatrice ran to the door, shot home the bolt, and then put her shoulders

against it. He, lurching forward still full of his first impulse, stopped to brush her aside. But she struck at his hand and shook her head.

"They're lying down, with beads all drawn," said she. "They can't miss you. Don't go, Carrick! Don't go!"

She was white. Her lips trembled with earnestness. And Dunmore stepped slowly back from her.

"You're right," said he. "I'll have to stay here. It's better that way, a lot!"

For though it might be that she had interfered as she would have done to keep any man from running out to death, still he felt that there was something more in the emotion with which she had spoken.

"Good for you!" called the boy. "Good for you, Beatrice. If that maverick had busted loose, they'd 've turned him into beef in about two steps."

"Halloo!" called a voice on the outside. "Hey! 'Whitey' Dodd!"

The old trapper went to the door and set it ajar a crack.

"Halloo!" he thundered back. "Is that you, Neighbor Parson, that's come here murderin' my guests in the middle of the night?"

## CHAPTER XL.

### THREE GO OUT.

**G**UESTS, you old loon?" yelled Parson in answer. "It's Dunmore and Tankerton's girl!"

Whitey Dodd fairly reeled from the shock of this announcement, but he rallied instantly.

"Nobody from this here house is for sale, Parson!" he yelled. "And they can't raise the price high enough to get 'em!"

"You're cracked in the head," the other assured him.

There was a nest of rocks halfway between the house and the beginning of the woods, and from this vantage point the speaker called on behalf of the besiegers.

"I'd rather to be a cracked bell than a sold one," retorted Dodd hotly. "If you all start for this house, I'm gunna be ready for you, and I tell you that I don't miss my shots!"

"The old rattle-head," commented a voice from the rocks, perfectly audible in the breathless stillness of the night, "Is gunna get romantic and big hearted. And he'll hold us up till the Tankertons get here and grab most of the reward for themselves. And here we are, ten of us, that had oughta be able to divide the profit among us! Whitey's beatin' us out of more'n a thousand dollars apiece!"

"I'd like to have his scalp!" said a companion. "Look sharp, old son. That Dunmore might bust loose any minute!"

"I'm watching, all right. I got that reward right inside the hook of my trigger finger, in case he tries to bust out in this direction! Is that hosses?"

It was the wind, rattling with a sudden violence in the leaves of the trees, and then making the big boughs groan dismally. A film of cloud was instantly tarnishing the moonlight, and Dunmore, watching from the door which was still ajar, could thank his fortune that was sending a light less brilliant.

Even so, he could not see a possible solution of his problem. The house was solidly surrounded, and even the horses were gone. So that it must be a case of breaking out on foot, in which event there was hardly a chance in a million that they would be able to get clear. Besides, the Tankertons would soon be here!

Even as he thought of it, he heard a noise louder than the rattling of the leaves in the wind, and in a moment it had grown into the distinct beating of hoofs. They poured up to the verge of the clearing. Voices called; there was a triumphant Indian yell from many throats, the wild sound shrilling and thrilling the blood. And then all doubt

ended, and all hope with it. The Tankertons were here!

"They've come," said Dunmore over his shoulder, without looking back.

"Let 'em stay till they rot!" said the trapper savagely. "They'll get no man out of my house."

"Won't they everlastin'ly lambaste us?" asked Jimmy Larren, laughing feebly. "Ain't they just gunna drill this here house from one end to the other, though?"

"These here logs will soak up lead like a blotter soaks up water," said Whitey Dodd. "Besides, will the Tankertons fire into the house as long as their woman is here?"

He turned toward Beatrice. She stood against the farthest wall of the cabin, staring steadfastly at Dunmore.

"In this here game of tag," said he, "it looks as though I've been caught. You're free to go whenever you feel like it. Just unbolt the door again for her, will you, Dodd?"

Beatrice shook her head.

"I've made my bargain. I'll stick to it," said she. "I'm not going to leave."

A loud voice called from the clearing at this moment: "Dunmore! Dunmore!"

He paused for another inquiring glance at the girl, but she looked back at him as steadily as a soldier on parade. Then he went back to the door.

"Dunmore!" came the voice of Furneaux.

"I hear you, Furneaux."

"Dunmore, you're trapped and done for," said the boy. "But I'll give you a last chance to die like a man. Come out here and I'll stand up to you, man to man!"

Dunmore laughed. Rage and despair were in that laughter, but afterward he answered:

"I know the way we would fight," said he. "You in the open, and twenty rifles among the trees. As Tucker, and Legges, and Tankerton fought, they'd

fight again. One honest man don't make a square show."

"Is that final?" said Furneaux. "You won't come out?"

There was sufficient anger in Dunmore, considering his helpless position, to have made him leap at such a chance; but it seemed to him, as he leaned against the door and talked, that he could see again the dark old panel in the Furneaux house that showed his own features out of the old time dimly, like a face reflected in muddy water. But he was The Dunmore, and this was a member of his clan. That old pride of race which had sent him into the mountains to do the impossible now boiled up in him again, steadied him, and enabled him to answer almost gently:

"I won't come out against you, Furneaux."

"If you were any other man," called the boy, "I'd call you a coward and a sneak. Heaven knows what you are, Dunmore. But you've done a thing worse than murder! You're going to die, Dunmore, and heaven have pity on your soul. Where is she now?"

"She's with me in this cabin."

"Are you going to keep her there until the bullets have killed her?" shouted Furneaux.

"I'm going to send her out," answered Dunmore. "The rest of them go with her—Dodd and Jimmy Larren, I mean. Larren is wounded. What sort of care will he get with you?"

"I'll give you my word for that. I'll take care of the kid. Do you mean that you'll send them out freely?"

"Man," exclaimed Dunmore, "what sort of a low hound do you think I am?"

"It's finished, then," said Furneaux. "Tankerton has left this job to me. I'll promise you one thing, and that is that there'll be no burning you out. You'll have as fair a chance as I can give you!"

"Why," said the prisoner, "that's more than any man could really ask you for. I'll send them out at once."

He turned to the other three.

"I dunno," said Whitey Dodd, "that I've ever been turned out of my house before by any gent that wanted to use it for a coffin. I claim it's big enough to hold two, and I'll stay!"

"That's your idea of it, Whitey," said Dunmore good-humoredly. "But step into my boots and you'll see the other side of it. Can I let you stay here and be butchered? Go out, Dodd, or I'll have to push you through the door myself."

Dodd was silent, but he nodded a little, looking off into the distance as though he were seeing and recognizing the truth there.

"You'll be able to carry Jimmy. He's light."

"Me?" shrilled Jimmy Larren. "Who's gunna carry me out?"

He worked himself up on one elbow. "Whacha mean, chief?"

"What good will it be to me to have you here?" asked Dunmore sternly.

"Can't I clean and load guns as good as the next one? You wouldn't turn me off, chief! What's the good of anything, if I can't make the last march with you? What's the good of belongin' to a friend, if you can't make the last stand with him, eh?"

Dunmore leaned over him.

"If the two of us are gone, Jimmy, who'll be alive to really look after her?"

Jimmy Larren opened great eyes. "You mean I'm to watch after her?"

"Aye," whispered Dunmore. "Even whether she knows it or not! I've tried to bring her down out of the mountains, Jimmy, and I've failed. You'll tackle it, one day, and win!"

Jimmy Larren looked at the ceiling with anguished eyes.

"Have I gotta leave you, chief?" said he.

"There ain't any other way, Jimmy. You can see for yourself. So long, old-timer."

They shook hands, and Dunmore,

lifting him, placed him in the lean, strong arms of Whitey Dodd. One last glance Jimmy cast at his hero. He tried to make a last speech, but his manhood, at that moment, deserted him. He buried his face on the shoulder of the old man and wept; fighting hard against the noise, so that it sounded only like a soft moaning.

Said Whitey Dodd in farewell:

"Possession is nine points in the law, young feller. You got your own life in your hand. Keep a-hopin', and you may learn how to keep it there! Nobody's dead till he's closed his eyes!"

He went out, bearing the boy, and Beatrice lingered an instant behind.

"Is there one big thing that you want done in the world?" she asked. "If there is, I'd try to do it for you!"

"You would? Then send Furneaux back to his own people."

"Send him back?"

"It's what I came up here to do, Beatrice. I thought that I could beat Tankerton and all his men. But I was foolish to think so!"

"Furneaux!" she gasped again. "But you taunted him, and worked up trouble with him!"

"One of the best ways of sending a man home is on a stretcher!"

"Then—I'll send him if I can. Is there anything else?"

"There's nothing else," he said. "except for yourself. Get out of Tankerton's hands, Beatrice."

"I shall! I shall!" said she. "I thought he was a lion, but after I saw——"

She checked herself, though the very heart of Dunmore yearned to hear more.

"Furneaux and myself—and nothing that is for you, Carrick?"

"Aye, one thing that's for me. Take Jimmy under your wing. He'll be worth the trouble, goodness knows, because I never seen the makings of a better man."

"I'll do it," said the girl. "Oh, Carrick, why did you make me hate you

those other days? But I was blind. I should have known you were playing some deep game, unselfishly. I should have guessed from little Jimmy Larren, when he picked you out of all the band!"

"It's time to go," said he. "Furneaux and the rest will be wonderin' at you if——"

"Dunmore! Dunmore!" shouted Furneaux loudly. "Are you holding the girl back?"

He led her to the door. "She's comin' at once," he answered, and added softly to her: "There's one last thing you could do. Remember me on Sundays and on holidays, now and then; and think of me as a fellow who lived a lazy and a useless and a pretty crooked life, but before the end he thanked Heaven that he tried to do one decent thing—and failed tryin' it. And he found one woman and loved her, and lost her; but died mighty glad of the findin'."

He saw that she would have spoken again. But, like Jimmy, she seemed choked.

"Good-by," said Dunmore, and helped her through the doorway, and closed the door after her.

## CHAPTER XLI.

BY THE THROAT.

WHEN Dunmore was alone he looked around him and prepared to die.

From the edges of the clearing, he heard a sudden shouting and whooping, by which he knew that the girl had come to the hands of the Tankertons again; the next moment, it seemed that a hundred rifles blazed. He distinctly heard the thudding of the bullets into the wood, and then a clang and a crashing from the pans that hung on the wall behind the stove.

That answered what Dodd had said of the impregnable walls of his house! In certain spots, at least, the lead would fly through like water through a sieve.

He tried the flooring. The boards

were loose and came away easily in his hand. He ripped up three of them. From a corner he took a shovel and started scooping up the earth beneath the flooring.

*Clang!* rang a bullet that glanced from the iron blade of the shovel. And another clipped close past his head.

But every swing of his arms drove the shovel deep into the soil and quickly he had entrenched himself.

As for the wound on his cheek, it was a trifle. Already the blood had stopped flowing. He laid himself down behind his barricade and waited.

Wasp sounds darted above his head. Again and again the pans crashed against the wall; a steady tattoo drummed upon the stove; they were searching the cabin through and through with rapid fire from repeating rifles and no doubt they would continue steadily.

No, now the firing died off. Only a single shot came now and again, as though, having vented their spleen in a first outburst, they were content to keep him disturbed with an occasional shot.

He chose that moment to slip across the floor to one of Dodd's loopholes, and when he looked out, he was glad that he had come in time.

For he saw a pair of shadows work out from the trees and slide rapidly along the ground toward the nest of rocks.

He drew up his rifle and fired. The leading shadow twisted into a knot, like a worm that has been stepped upon. The second bounded to its feet and fled. Dunmore fired low, aiming between hip and thigh, and saw the fellow topple. The speed of his running carried him along, and with a cry he rolled back into the shelter of the trees.

There was a wild burst of rifle fire, a chorus of fierce shouting that reminded him of the baying of a pack of hounds, and something stung the calf of his leg.

At the same instant the door of the

cabin swung open with a loud creaking. He whirled, rifle at the ready, but no one appeared. There was only the deadly whistling of the bullets as they cut through the opening and lodged with sullen thuds against the rear wall of the house.

Then he knew what had happened. The rusty bolt had been cracked in two by the impact of bullets, and the weight of flying lead had driven the door wide open.

He was not really sorry. The door itself was too thin for a shield, and with it open he had a wider view of what was happening outside. He could see, for instance, the wounded man rolling on the ground in agony.

At the first let-down in the fire, he raised his head above his trench and thundered: "Go get your sick man, Tankerton. I won't shoot you down!"

A bullet, as though in answer, struck the dirt before him and filled his mouth with a loose shower of soil.

He spat it out with a curse, and heard the clear, ringing voice of Tankerton calling:

"I'll take that offer, Dunmore! Two of you fellows go out and get Mike."

There was a pause. Dunmore even could hear the muttering of the distant voices, almost immediately drowned by a roar of the wind, which was rising rapidly.

Then, out from the shadows, appeared two men without guns in their hands. They skulked along uncertainly, as though they expected bullets at any moment, but Dunmore held his fire.

He saw them reach Mike, and pick up the hurt man between them; Mike groaned loudly, then was carried away, still groaning at the jolt of every step. He would remember this night, if he lived past it!

The bearers, when they were close to the trees, lurched forward in a run, like children fleeing from the dark, but still Dunmore did not fire. And, as a result,

he got a rousing cheer from the Tankertons.

Yet he would not trust them as much as they had trusted him. He went instantly to the back of the cabin, as the firing recommenced, and from a loophole there he scanned that side of the battle.

The ground was empty, as well as he could see, but sight now was difficult. Rapid clouds had swept across the face of the moon and the woods were blurred masses of shadow. A moment later, the rain rattled against the thatched roof. The wind whistled it into the cabin, and the face of Dunmore was wet with water and with blood.

The firing instantly increased in volume. Across the threshold of the door and against the window, a steady succession of bullets plunged. That was to keep him from trying to break away in the dimness caused by the rainstorm.

He had other troubles within the shack, for with a sudden crashing, the stove, battered by many bullets, lurched to the floor. The room filled with smoke and steam. Scattered embers rolled everywhere, and he had to become a fire fighter.

With a blanket, he thrashed right and left, and stamped out the bigger fragments. He won, but a stifling mist had filled the room. He could hardly breathe in it, and through that mist the wasp sounds of the bullets still were darting everywhere.

A knife thrust, it seemed, raked his left side—much such a wound as Jimmy had received.

Dunmore sat down with a sudden sense that he was lost indeed, that moment.

"The cabin's on fire?" he heard a voice yelling—the voice of Tankerton. "Charge him, boys!"

"Charge him yourself!" answered a bass roar. "Let the fire take care of him."

Dunmore tore off his coat. He did

not wait to draw his shirt and undershirt over his head, but the tough cloth parted like paper under his mighty finger tips. He was naked to the waist, and fumbling through the confusion of the cabin, he found on the bunk the remnants of his roll of bandages.

Around his body he passed a thick, binding arm of cloth and tied it tight. He could have laughed as he performed that operation; but the strong grip of the cloth numbed the pain and left him more at ease. It would make him more fit for the final moment of his life, for he intended, when the weakness from his wounds increased upon him, to fling out of the door and rush the enemy. If he could get to them and die fighting hand to hand, that would be the vital comfort for his end.

The fierce thought of it warmed all his blood!

The darkness increased. It was one of those mountain storms during which the clouds seem to be built like the ranges over which they are floating—a league-thick belt of densest moisture! All starlight, all moonshine had disappeared. The night became blacker and blacker.

But still the rifle fire continued. They had spotted the window and the door, and such a steady flow of bullets swept at those vital points that it was impossible for any creature to pass through the stream unmaimed.

There was another possibility, however.

With the shovel, he enlarged the hole of his trench, found the foundation logs, and in a few minutes, had mined beneath them. Once the hole was open, he thrust his head up into the open air, and ducked again as a rifle spat fire not ten strides away from the cover of a fallen log!

He heard the bullet hum over his head and felt sure that he was seen. But when he raised a broken section of board, it did not draw the enemy's fire.

No, the man had been blazing away blindly at the house!

Dunmore crawled back into the house to consider for a moment. He went for a last tour of the loopholes, peering anxiously into the mist on every side, until it seemed to him that something stirred to the south of the building.

Aye, three forms suddenly loomed, running hard toward him, not twenty feet away, as it seemed!

He fired point-blank. It was death, he knew, as he curled his fingers on the trigger. — The middle man of the trio bounded into the air with arms and legs spread-eagled. His yell stabbed the brain of Dunmore like a blinding flash of light. That cry was cut off in the middle, and the body dropped heavily to the earth, while the two companions, shouting with terror, turned and bolted.

In half a second, the gray penciling of the rain had entirely covered them from view!

He went back to the trench and lay curled there, while the outburst of revengeful fire which he had expected beat upon the shack; but in the meantime, his hands were not idle.

He was lashing a revolver to a piece of wood. To the trigger of the gun, he attached one end of a big ball of string. This ball he next passed through the mouth of a large loophole and let it fall on the outside. The gun itself he then fixed with the muzzle protruding from the loophole, securing it safely there by means of the board which already had been tied to the handles.

After that, he was ready for his great experiment.

He returned to his mine beneath the wall of the house and crawled out, secured the fallen ball of string, and began to wriggle forward toward the log near by.

He had hardly started when the rifleman fired again. Dunmore lay flat, then tugged the string. Behind him, the revolver banged. His plan had worked

almost too well, for the bullet actually skimmed the hair of his head!

He went on. He pressed himself into the mud and worked as a snake would work, but holding now in his right hand a heavy Colt. Not for firing. It must serve him as a club, now!

Then, when he was hardly half-arm's distance from the log, the pale gleam of the rifle and the dark outline of the sharpshooter's head appeared again.

Were there two men behind the log? If so, his plan was totally spoiled, but he had to take that chance, and as the rifleman's head raised, Dunmore struck with the butt of the revolver.

It barely reached not the head but the face of the other. He pitched back, with a cry; but the blow had so stunned him that even his cry was faint. The next instant Dunmore was across the log like a wild cat and had the fellow by the throat!

## CHAPTER XLII.

### OLD HOUSE ABOVE THE TREES.

THERE was murderous force in the hands of Dunmore, for his own life depended upon his ability to dispose of the man without allowing him to make a sound, but as he grappled with him, he recognized, as he thought, something in the face of the other, in spite of the dimness of the light.

He jerked the man closer till his face was a scant inch away. And it was Chelton!

Already the outlaw had forgotten all gratitude to the man who had saved him from a death by hanging! He struggled furiously, tearing at the hands of Dunmore, and beating at his wounded face. But in a moment that throttling grasp had done its work. Chelton lay still!

He was not dead; he breathed with a faint, harsh rattle in his throat, and Dunmore poised a revolver like a club to strike a final blow; but he could not!

At least for some moments Chelton would lie here in the rain incapable of speech or motion, and Dunmore decided to leave him where he lay, unharmed.

The hardest portion of his work lay before him, now.

Once more he found the twine, tugged at it, and instantly the gun at the loop-hole spat fire behind him. He took note of that and crawled on.

Soon the rim of the trees was not far away.

Then twice he pulled on the twine and twice the gun far behind him barked. He actually heard the bullets cut their way through the branches before him.

Then came an oath, and half a dozen shots in rapid succession from a rifleman who fired from the cover of a tree just before him. Dunmore stood up and ran forward.

The muzzle of a rifle struck his breast. "Who's that?"

"Chelton, you simpleton!" said Dunmore. "It's too close work, out there. Tankerton can have that place behind the log for himself, if he wants it!"

The rifle was removed, and the outlaw muttered: "Looks like that Dunmore can see in the dark. But why's he usin' a revolver at that distance?"

"If you wanta find out, go up and ask him," growled Dunmore, and strode away.

He saw other shadowy forms couched behind the trees, peering through the blindness of the rain, but he himself was behind the lines! If only Chelton did not give the alarm at once!

But, now that he was through the greatest peril, he paused to slick off with his hands some of the mud that covered him; and as he paused, he thought again of the work which he had attempted and which apparently had failed in his hands.

By miracle, he was safe for the moment. What if he could strike one more blow?

A light flared farther back among the trees and toward it he went. The

rays were broken, passing through the rain; they dazzled the eyes of Dunmore as he came closer, cautiously stealing from tree to tree, but at last he saw the sleek, glistening forms of horses; then he heard voices; and finally he was in secure covert between a bush and a tree looking out upon the main council of his enemies.

The doctor and Tankerton were there. At one side was Jimmy Larren, with Beatrice Kirk and old Dodd taking care of him. Gunfire was stamping impatiently, but Excuse Me, as though she cared not for the fate of her master, plucked at the green tips of some shrubbery contentedly. Furneaux was cinching a saddle upon the back of a fine bay gelding.

"What'll you do?" the doctor was asking.

"Rush the cabin," said Furneaux curtly.

"You'll use up half a dozen men, if you do," said the doctor. "Tucker's dead already; and Dunmore apparently can see clearly enough even in this light."

"If he's in there another half hour, the fox will find some way to get out," said Furneaux curtly. "He can't escape! He's got to die. You hear, Beatrice?"

He turned on the girl, brutally. But Dunmore could see that his face was pinched and wrung with anguish.

She was on her knees at that moment beside Jimmy. At Furneaux's words, she started up and turned on the speaker. She said nothing. No words were needed to reënforce the white contempt and scorn that shone in her face; and Furneaux turned away with a twisted mouth of pain.

"I'm on the rounds again. Will you walk 'em with me, doctor?"

"Glad to," said the doctor, and the two went off together.

"You see how it is, Beatrice," said Tankerton calmly.

"I know that he's as good as dead,"



he answered steadily. "But I hope that he makes some of you know him still better before he dies!"

"My dear," said Tankerton, "this interest you're taking in him doesn't worry me. It's a child's romantic interest, and you'll be laughing at the memory of it yourself, inside of another month."

She did not answer.

For out from the shadow of a tree she saw a dreadful form appear. It was Dunmore, naked to the hips, except for the red-stained bandages that girded his body, plastered with mud, and with the blood slowly rolling down from the wound on his face, which had been broken open again during his struggle with Chelton.

He came from behind Tankerton, and in the full light of the fire he paused, gun in hand.

"Tankerton!" he said quietly.

The outlaw gasped, and spun like a frightened cat, stooping low, and bringing out his gun as he swung about.

No man beneath the sky could have moved faster. His side-leap made the first bullet fly wide of the mark; but Dunmore's second shot roared as Tankerton's own weapon spoke for the first time.

A whiplash mark of crimson sprang out on the naked side of Dunmore; but he saw Tankerton stagger, and held his fire.

The gun dropped from the chief's hand. He made a few staggering steps forward with an oddly blank face, then sank to one knee. He coughed, and red bubbled on his lips.

Beatrice instantly was beside him. It was into her arms that he tipped sideways and then—fell prostrate.

He lived for a single second, muttering: "Marry him, Beatrice. He has the only hand that's strong enough to hold you!"

One convulsive shudder jerked his body, and then he lay still, smiling at the rain that streaked into his face.

"Hello!" called the voice of Furneaux from the distance.

Dunmore caught Beatrice from the ground, where she kneeled, weeping like a child.

With a sway of his strong arms, he lifted her into the saddle on Gunfire.

"Hello!" called Furneaux, coming closer. "Do you hear me, Tankerton?"

"Go it, go it, chief! I knowed they'd never beat you!" said Jimmy Larren.

Dunmore was already away through the trees, with the volleying rain crashing into his face, washing the mud from his body.

They dipped into a narrow gully, and they were in the midst of it when a ringing clamor of voices broke out behind them. It seemed to Dunmore that he could hear the shouting and the cursing of Furneaux above the rest. Then they lost all the sound of the Tankertons in a fresh roaring of the wind that ripped away the clouds from before the moon and let its light through.

Dunmore glanced up at it with a wild emotion, for it seemed as though that bright moon had been covered merely to screen him in his escape and that now it shone again to illumine his way.

The horses broke into a gallop on a level stretch. Through the trees they wound. Gusts of rain still rattled out of the sky, from time to time, and cut and hammered at Dunmore. But he knew that the miles were flowing rapidly behind him. He saw the girl rocked easily in the saddle on the stallion, always half a length before him, and the confidence of victory grew great in his heart!

His blood no sooner had warmed with that sensation than a shuddering chill of weakness passed through him. It was as though all the vital power had drained out of his heart. He could understand it. He had lost enough blood to have been the death of a normal man. Even his own frame could not endure it!

But he locked his teeth, and endured. The forest spilled away behind them. They rode out onto lower ground in the open, with a sense of rushing into the brilliant heart of the moonlit sky. Then, beneath them, he saw the rolling of the foothills, and he saw the flat country of the range beyond like a mist.

A warmth fell over his shoulders. It was a blanket, thrown into place by the girl, and now she tied it securely.

He blinked to see her more plainly, for a mist troubled him, like the breath upon a window pane.

However, he could see that she was looking at him coldly, critically.

"Are you very bad, Carrick?" she asked.

"I'm well enough," he told her.

She said no more. They went on, knee to knee, down the trail which sloped and flowed among the hills. Sometimes he raised his head and turned it, hearkening for the sound of hoofs behind them, but never once was there an alarm of that sort.

His head began to spin; moments of utter mental lapse came. He roused from one of them to find that his knees had been lashed up with the saddle straps, and that the girl was riding close beside him. His weight had slumped heavily on her shoulder.

Shame thrilled him back to life.

"Seem to be mighty sleepy," he muttered to her, and his lips were numb.

He had to peer with effort to make out her face. The moon was gone. There was warmth in the air, a dazzle in the sky.

It was the sun, and they had ridden out of the night into the full day!

The shock of this discovery made him take a brighter note of the things around them, and he saw with joy that they were actually on the road to the house of Elizabeth Furneaux. He had kept enough of his wits during that dim night to enable him to keep to the trail!

But here the landscape began to act

in a strange fashion. The level ground heaved itself into soft swells and these waves traveled around and around the horizon with increasing speed. He could no longer find Beatrice Kirk. She had disappeared! But her voice came sharp and strained with fear, out of the distance.

"Old house on right—above the trees—white——" said Dunmore, and then he bowed his head in the darkness and gripped the pommel with both hands.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### JIMMY CONSENTS.

DUNMORE dreamed that he was a bubble, floating high in the sky, with the sun shining through him.

He roused a little from the dream, drifted slowly back to consciousness, and realized that it was not the warmth of the sun that he felt but the comfort of a soft bed. He heard the voices of two people in the distance, a man and a woman. They seemed to be walking toward him, but suddenly the voices were just beside his bed—Elizabeth Furneaux, and her nephew, Rodman!

He would have opened his eyes, but they seemed weighted down with lead. Only his brain waked; the rest of his body was heavy with slumber!

"Aunt Elizabeth," said the boy, "I don't doubt what you've told me. But what could have made him tackle such a job as that? Certainly he didn't give a rap about me; and you hardly had enough money to hire him for such a job!"

"I had no money. I hired him with a shameful trick, Rod. I would have loathed myself, if the thing hadn't worked out so well.

"A trick?"

"You know the old panel in the library?"

"Yes, of course. The old effigy, you mean?"

"Well, Rod, I planned this thing with

a good deal of care. I want you to take a look at the face of that effigy, and you'll find that it looks like——"

"A donkey with a dead smile on its lips?" said the boy.

"Not a whit! The fact is that I painted out the face of the effigy and painted in a pretty fair likeness of Carrick Dunmore. Then I made up a little story for him, about that wild ancestor of ours, the one who went to Scotland from France in the days of the Bruce. I simply switched the names around and put in ones that fitted the new case. Before I got through, Carrick here, was reasonably sure that he was the head of the family!"

"Great Scott!" said Rodman Furneaux. "What——"

"What will he do when he wakes up and finds out about the sham? I don't know. Perhaps we can keep him from learning, ever! I'll tell you what, Rodman, he wouldn't be a bad head for this family, I should say!"

There was a little pause, and then the youth replied: "He's more man than I ever saw packed into one skin before. But he'll be furious when he learns how he's been tricked."

"Well, he has his reward, you know," said Elizabeth Furneaux. "Do you really feel as sick as you look, when I say that?"

"A little sick. But I'm learning to give up, pretty fast. Of course, she couldn't think much of me with such a man as that inside the horizon. How is she now?"

"She's sleeping. Worn out, poor child. What a beautiful girl, Rodman!"

"Don't rub it in," he grumbled.

"You'll forget her in a month," said his aunt.

"Aye," said he. "A month of hard work ought to rub out something. I'm going to pitch in."

"I think you will, Rodman!"

"I swear I will," said he. "Aunt Elizabeth, you can't imagine what shame

I feel when I look at that fellow there on the bed and think what he's been through for you, and all for nothing except your benefit and mine. I feel as though I'm only a half-man!"

"Do you think that it's a permanent change, Rod? Won't the lure of the old, free life come back over you?"

"How could it? The Tankertons are split to pieces. Legges tried to hold them. They killed him an hour after the old rascal tried to handle the reins. The rest of 'em are scattering fast and the sheriff has gone up there. For the first time he's got inside the stamping grounds of the Tankertons, and they'll soon be pacified, I can tell you! We'll have Jimmy Larren down here in a few hours, and he'll be able to give us the latest news."

The voices passed slowly from the room, and Dunmore lay still and digested the news which he had heard.

At last, he laughed and opened his eyes.

He was lying on his side, and his glance passed straight through the window and far off to the mountains. He saw their white caps, their dark robes of trees, and above all the piled blue of the valleys and the canyons which checked them. There was his kingdom of the horizon, his blue kingdom which he had inherited, as he had thought, from Carrick Dunmore of the other century!

He smiled a little bitterly.

All this had been rubbed away to nothing. He had ridden up into that kingdom to follow a lie, as it were, and now nothing remained!

A sound of trotting horses on the road ended in the screech of a brake against iron tires.

Then, up the front path, he heard a familiar voice saying: "Aw, I can walk, all right! I don't have to be carried. Hullo, Furneaux! Hullo, ma'am. Aw, I'm feelin' fine. Only—I'd like to know how's the chief?"

The voice of Jimmy rose sharp and high.

"How's Dunmore? Why—why don't somebody say?"

A reassuring murmur answered this demand; they passed indoors.

Other voices spoke distantly in the house.

Then, "Hey, Beatrice! I am mighty glad! How's the chief? Kin I see him?"

"Hush, hush!" said the girl. "Walk softly, Jimmy. He's sleeping sound. He's been delirious for days. You'll hardly know him. But now he's better. He's sleeping. Walk softly, Jimmy. I don't want to waken him!"

Dunmore closed his eyes.

He felt them come closer, and a sense of guilty joy rose in his heart. Yet there was also an odd weakness in him, so that he felt as though he hardly could endure looking upon them, face to face.

They stood beside his bed.

"Oh, my stars!" he heard Jimmy gasp, presently.

"He looks thin—and wild, Jimmy. But he's much, much better. He's going to get well. Do you hear, dear? He's going to get well!"

"Why," said Jimmy, with a choking gasp, "I kind of thought—he looked like—like he was dead, Beatrice!"

"Look at the pulse in his temple, Jimmy."

"Yeah! I see it now. Well, it wasn't much fun to stand there and see!"

"Oh, Jim, the hours that I've been through, hoping and praying! And Miss Furneaux and Rod. We've all worked! And now we've won!"

"Aye," said Jimmy Larren, "you look like you'd been workin' for about the first time in your life! Is he gunna marry you, Beatrice?"

"I really don't know, Jimmy," said the girl.

"Do you hope he will?" asked Jimmy roughly.

"What d'you think, Jim?"

"Why, I think you ain't a fool," said the boy.

"I hope I'm not," said the girl, and she laughed a little, in the softest of voices.

"You might try to put in a word for me, Jimmy," she added.

"Me?" said the boy. "Why, sure I will, Beatrice. I'll get the talk around to you, some way. Now you go along and have a rest. You look sort of tuckered out."

"Who'll take care of Carrick?"

"Why, who but me?" said the boy.

"Are you all right, yourself, Jimmy, dear?"

"Me? Why, sure I am. I'm gunna set here and rest, and take it easy, Beatrice. You go along."

"Very well, then. Good-by for a little while, Jimmy."

Her footfall whispered from the room. The door suddenly closed with a light click.

There was utter silence; then Dunmore felt that a face and breathing were close to him.

"You faker!" said the sudden voice of Jimmy.

Dunmore breathed deeply.

"You faker!" said Jimmy more loudly. "Open your eyes. You've been listenin' the whole time!"

Dunmore looked up.

He saw Jimmy, looking pale and thin, close beside him, scowling. The scowl disappeared in a vast grin.

"It's sure good to see you ag'in, chief," said he.

"It's good to have you here, kid. How's things?"

"Pretty good. The Tanks are busted to bits. You took the heart out of 'em, and then they fell to pieces."

"I'm not sorry, Jim."

"Naw, what should you be sorry about, chief?"

They paused and regarded each other thoughtfully, fondly, as brothers long tested might do.


"You figgered where you and me head for, from here?" asked Jimmy at last.

"No, I ain't. But, Jim——"  
"Well?"

"Suppose there was three in the party, Jim? What would you think?"

"Her? Aw, I don't mind. I've got used to her!" said Jimmy Larren.

THE END.



### PLENTY OF BIG GAME

**E**NCOURAGING news comes from the department of the interior. Not only are the herds of wild animals, which we have striven to protect by the establishment of national parks, no longer in danger of extermination; on the contrary, they are thriving.

The most numerous of any of our national park big game are the caribou, which, in company with large numbers of mountain sheep, roam about Mount McKinley National Park, in south central Alaska. With the completion of the Alaska Railroad, and the consequent opening up of that territory, these animals were threatened with extinction, and it was largely for their protection that Mount McKinley Park was created, in 1917. Yet now the caribou number some one hundred thousand, while the mountain sheep total fifty thousand in that park alone.

Next to the caribou in number, but next to none of the park animals in popularity among visitors, come the deer. In the California parks there are over fifty-seven thousand deer, while some nine thousand mule deer are found in Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain, Grand Canyon, and Glacier parks, and more than two thousand white-tail deer inhabit Glacier and Mount Rainier parks.

The buffalo have multiplied very rapidly in Yellowstone National Park. In fact, the danger now lies in the direction of overstocking of the park range. However, intelligent measures are being taken to distribute and decimate the herds so that the animals can be properly handled and cared for. Not more than one thousand buffalo can be adequately taken care of in Yellowstone Park, and, in consequence, many bison have been shipped to zoölogical gardens and game preserves.

Another interesting attraction in Yellowstone Park is the antelope herd, now numbering six hundred and twenty-five animals. An attempt to stock Grand Canyon Park with this species proved less successful.

Most of our elk herds center around Yellowstone National Park. The northern herd, which is under the jurisdiction of the national park service; diminished from between fifteen and twenty thousand animals in 1927, to around ten thousand in 1928, due to disease. The southern herd is under the jurisdiction of the bureau of biological survey, and no recent figures as to its size are available, although, in 1927, it numbered about the same as the northern herd.

Two other popular park animals are the black bears, which number around fourteen hundred, and the moose, seven or eight hundred of which make their homes in Yellowstone, McKinley, and Glacier parks.

It is indeed good news to know that our native game is not in danger of extermination, as was once feared. It has taken warm public interest, intelligently directed, to perform the work, but the right steps were taken, and the danger point is long since past.



# Fun in Badger Valley

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "The No-gun Man," etc.



**A**GAINST the adobe wall of Whiteman's general store leaned Sam Bellamy's six feet of bone and brawn, while through half-closed eyes the young man witnessed the one exciting event of the day, the arrival of the mixed train at Lazula. Even after the four or five passengers had alighted from the combination coach, the train did not go on. There was a very good reason: the rails extended no farther. Lazula was at the western terminus of the spur that connected the little town with the outside world.

Two of the men who had alighted from the train climbed into a waiting buckboard and were driven away to some distant ranch. The others drifted across the single street with the usual

quota of loafers, and entered Whiteman's, which was not only the village emporium, but also a place where the wayfarer might obtain food and lodging. The last man to enter was evidently a stranger. Sam, watching him covertly, saw that he was near his size but somewhat older, though with a complexion that was sallow rather than tanned. He carried a small traveling bag, and his dress marked him for a man of the city, and, therefore, unused to outdoor life.

Sam remained where he was. He took no particular interest in the stranger's identity, had never developed the curiosity some men have regarding each new arrival. Besides, Sam was not a permanent resident of Lazula himself. He was from the cattle country to the north, at present out of a job, which to

a young man just turned twenty-one was trouble enough. If he was surprised when, ten minutes later, the stranger came out of Whiteman's and walked straight toward him, he did not betray it by so much as a wink.

"Your name is Bellamy, I believe," the man began as he came up.

"I can't deny it," Sam replied with a quizzical grin.

"And I take it you are unemployed at present."

"You made two good guesses, mister. I been punching cows for old Tom Johnson up on Four Mile, but me and him had a argument about how much work a fellow should do for forty a month, and I quit."

"Oh, you quit!"

"Yes, after old Tom had stopped my wages."

The stranger's reaction to this little pleasantry was a clear indication of his nature. Instead of a grin of appreciation, there was a pronounced frown of impatience on the countenance of the man.

"Well, I would like to engage your services for a few days. I am told you are familiar with the road to the Badger Valley settlement, and could doubtless guide me to the place."

"You got it straight, mister," Sam assured him. "I'm plumb footloose and rarin' to go, and I reckon I know the trail to Badger as well as most of 'em. But you picked a rough way to get there, I'm telling you that much before you start. You would have saved a lot of time if you had left the railroad at Lone Pine and gone down on the stage that runs right through Badger. Only way to get there from here is by horseback or afoot over the trail through the Packsaddle Mountains."

"I had my own reasons for choosing this route," the stranger observed stiffly.

"Which it ain't my business to question," Sam replied.

"Well, when can we start and how long will it take to make it through on horseback?" the stranger then asked in a businesslike manner. "I'll pay you well for your time."

"I've got my own hoss, and if you can rustle one for yourself, we can be ready to start in half an hour or less. It's eighty miles by the trail, a matter of two days in the saddle. I reckon ten dollars and grub wouldn't be too much to ask you."

"That will be satisfactory," replied the stranger. "I can get a horse from Whiteman, and it won't take me long to get ready, just time to change my clothes."

Sam chuckled to himself as he went about catching his horse from the corral behind the store and saddling the animal for a long ride. He had been planning to ride out toward the Packsaddle range, anyway, and here was the opportunity to pick up a few much-needed dollars on the way. His personal belongings were few, and they were soon rolled in his blankets and tied on behind the saddle.

"I got that job pronto," he muttered, "but what puzzles me is why any man in his senses would pick eighty miles of rough trail when he could ride half that far from Lone Pine on the stage. Still, that's his business, like he said, and if he hadn't come by Lazula I'd still be out of a job."

His own mount saddled, Sam helped the Mexican boy catch and saddle a gentle horse for the stranger. Since they would be on the trail but two nights at most, a pack horse was unnecessary. A little canned stuff, coffee and bacon, was all they needed in the way of food, and this could be carried in the saddle pockets. Blankets were tied in a roll behind the saddles.

It was near noon when they rode out of Whiteman's corral and headed west. Sam could not repress a grin when he saw the other man's outfit—riding breeches, leggins, and a narrow-

brimmed hat. He could have advised the stranger that a hat with wider brim would be more comfortable, but something in the attitude of the man told him that it would be only a waste of breath to give him advice of any kind. It was evident that he was not altogether ignorant of horseback riding, however.

Had Sam Bellamy been choosing a congenial companion for a long journey, he would never have selected the man riding at his side. It was plain from the first that the man was determined to maintain his supercilious attitude toward his guide, just as he would toward a servant hired to do his bidding. They were not far on the way before Sam realized that he was going to earn all the money he got; but when a fellow is out of a job he is apt to put up with more than he would at another time.

Sam had not troubled himself to learn his employer's name, and the man did not make it known until they had been on the trail two or three hours. When he did so it was with some ostentation.

"My name is Devine, Percy Devine," he volunteered. "Perhaps you have heard of my father, Charles T. Devine?" he added, when young Bellamy failed to show signs of being impressed by the news.

Sam nodded, but except for a slight contraction of the jaw muscles, his countenance underwent no change. Had Devine but known it, he had not elevated himself in the estimation of his guide, nor had he awed him by disclosing his name. Far from it!

"We formerly owned a large tract of land in the Badger Creek Valley and the foothills," Devine explained. "Indeed, I should say we own it now, since it has never been transferred," he amended.

"And I imagine it is rather valuable now, since they have begun to raise

high-priced crops on it," he went on. "I am making this trip in order to look it over, to set a price on it. Then I shall offer it for sale to some syndicate to cut up into smaller farms—don't care to be bothered with the details myself. Since my father died five years ago, I have been trying to get this matter settled up."

For all the interest Sam showed in the matter, he might have been listening to the latest quotation of railroad stocks or hearing about the prevailing styles in Paris. Beyond a perfunctory nod of understanding he made no reply.

"I am telling you this so you will understand why I came this route instead of arriving at Badger Valley by the stage," Devine hastily explained, as if he would excuse himself for being so communicative. "I don't want anybody there to suspect who I am. I understand there are some squatters on the land who might be nasty if they knew I planned to dispose of it."

This time Sam turned his head in order to hide the smile that played for an instant about his mouth. "Nasty" was hardly the word for it, he thought.

"Father was too easy with them, allowed them to live on the land rent-free for years, ever since the timber was logged off," Devine continued. "Some of them even go so far as to lay claim to it."

"Uh-huh," Sam grunted, indicating thereby a more or less clear understanding of the situation.

"Perhaps you know these men, McCall and Watson, who claim the greater part of the tract," Devine suggested. "You would have heard of them if you had been in the Badger Valley country recently."

"Been seven or eight years since I was there, or closer than the Packsaddle range," Sam replied somewhat evasively. "I was just a chunk of a boy then."

"Well, Watson and McCall were



there long before that, the old men were, but I understand there is quite a clan of them now, sons and sons-in-law. The last time we sent a man in there to look after our interests he was run out, with threats against his life if he returned. Now you can easily understand why I wish my identity to remain unknown while in that section."

"I see," Sam replied, with an inflection that signified a complete understanding of the situation.

"I think perhaps father did have some sort of an agreement with the older men to permit them to squat on the land for a term of years, since they worked for him in the sawmill; but with no written record of it, they have no rights I am bound to respect," Devine finished.

Although he had imparted all this information seemingly in a burst of confidence, he quickly relapsed into his former uncommunicative mood, as into a shell. It was evident to Sam Bellamy that the man had a purpose in telling him all this. Sooner or later he must be advised of the name and mission of his employer, or else form opinions of his own that might be in the nature of suspicions and therefore prejudicial.

When they camped at night, it was Sam who staked the horses in a flat where there was plenty of grass. Also he gathered fuel and made a fire, cooked the frugal meals, and made ready for the night. But even had he been inclined to help, Devine would doubtless have been more in the way than otherwise. At the end of the second day, he was sore from the unaccustomed jolting on the back of a horse that knew but one gait. Consequently, he was surly and irritable.

When Sam learned the nature of his employer's mission, he decided that the man was either possessed of unlimited nerve or else was a pretentious fool. Before the second day wore to a close, he was sure the latter supposition was

correct. No brave man would fume and fret at such light discomforts as chapped lips and sunburned ears; nor would he be apt to pale at sight of a horned toad scuttling out of the way of a bed-roll thrown on the ground.

Though younger in years, Sam Bellamy was the older of the two in experience, and much better schooled in self-control. Several times he was on the point of calling Devine down when he became unusually exacting or complaining, but each time he let it go. Only ignorance would make a man act like that, and another day of Devine's company could be endured unless he became openly abusive.

Due to Devine's inability to remain all day in the saddle without frequent rests, they did not top the last rise, thread the foothills, and reach a point where they could look down upon Badger Valley until late afternoon of the third day. Even Sam drew in his breath quickly at the pleasing sight. Where he had remembered shacks and little patches of fenced land, were now fields of waving grain, and neat buildings surrounded by sturdy, fruitful orchards.

A sidelong glance revealed to Sam a crafty smile on the face of Devine as he contemplated the scene before him. It was, indeed, a prize worth fighting for, and it was little wonder that the men occupying this land looked with disfavor upon any one who attempted to dispossess them. Well might the emissary have fled the country to escape their wrath. And now what better could Devine himself hope than the fate that had overtaken his agent?

"That is worth money now, a goodly sum, and all the best of that valley belongs to me," Devine declared, continuing to gloat over the rich acres spread before him, licking his lips as one might imagine a wolf would when viewing a prospective victim. "It's worth the beastly ride from Lazula just to look it

over and know it is so much better than I ever suspected," he added.

"Figure to pay the settlers something for all them improvements, don't you?" Sam ventured, asking his first question about the business of Devine.

"Why should I pay them anything?" Devine retorted irritably. "They knew they were trespassers, improving land that didn't belong to them, so let them take the chances. No, I shall sell the entire body to some one after I have made a careful survey to determine its value, then let the innocent purchaser put them off. They would likely feel differently toward him, and when they saw the jig was up would get off peaceably."

"I reckon that's so," Sam agreed, but he made no further comment nor did he ask other questions.

They had dismounted, and were leading their horses down the last escarpment of the Packsaddle foothills. The trail was narrow here, so that they must go single file. It was the only path by which one could approach the fertile valley from the east or come by way of the mountain range. Sam was a dozen yards in the lead, picking his way cautiously down the rocky trail, when a rifle shot at no great distance caused him to jerk his head around to look behind.

He was just in time to see Devine dodge back and raise his hands as if to ward off a blow, while a bullet whined overhead and struck the rocks above them with a vicious spat. It was clear enough that the bullet had passed behind Sam's horse, cutting across their course less than a yard in front of Devine's head and giving him ample cause to dodge.

"Here—What—Be more careful!" Devine shouted into the thick brush that bordered the trail on either side.

But when he had taken two or three steps more, grumbling at the carelessness of a hunter who would fire at ran-

dom without knowing what lay ahead of him, the rifle cracked again, the bullet coming even closer than before. Before Devine could do more than halt and stagger back, another report followed in quick succession, and another bullet whistled along the path.

Sam stopped and turned around. "Looks like it wouldn't be healthy to go any farther this way," he called back to Devine, who stood pale and wide-eyed, his knees trembling beneath him. He had felt the puff of wind from that last bullet.

"Why—why, it's ridiculous! You don't mean that——"

"I wouldn't call it that, mister, I'd say it was a invitation for us—for you—to take the back track and do it pronto," Sam interrupted, genuinely concerned over their safety.

Devine opened his mouth to protest, but when a bullet whistled uncomfortably near his head he turned without another word and led his horse back up the steep trail. The fact that no more shots were fired gave proof of the intention of the man with the gun. With some difficulty, Sam got his horse turned in the trail, and followed the other man back the way they had come. When they had gone a hundred yards or so, he called a halt.

"Looks like somebody has spilled the beans, gone and passed word that you was coming," Sam calmly remarked.

"How could any of these people know. I did tell Whiteman my name, but nobody else."

"News travels fast, even when there ain't wires to carry it. Allow somebody heard you was headed for Badger, and put two and two together, is how come there was a reception committee out to meet you."

"Why, it's preposterous, shooting at a private citizen going about his business!" Devine stormed bravely enough, now that he was well beyond range of the menacing gun. "They should be ar-

rested and tried for attempt to murder."

"The officers and judge all live here close around," Sam observed, which simple statement clearly explained the difficulty of ever invoking the aid of the law.

Devine was silent, for the moment he appeared beaten. He sat scowling at the ground, while Sam removed both saddles and made preparations for night camp. There was water near-by, and it was not likely they would be molested as long as they made no further attempt to reach the valley below. A fire was going and the preparation of supper was well under way before Devine roused from his reverie.

"They didn't shoot at you," he observed in a casual manner.

"Reckon they knew you by your clothes; somebody carried the news from Lazula," Sam replied.

"Then, if we exchanged clothes I wouldn't be troubled, you think?"

"Huh?" Sam grunted the question almost involuntarily as he turned to stare with astonishment and some resentment at the other man. "You mean I would get shot instead of you?"

"Oh, not necessarily," Devine calmly assured him. "If, as you seem to think, they won't trouble us as long as we don't come any closer, you would not be in any danger whatever while you remain up here. I have come too far and spent too much already to give up without a struggle."

"Uh-huh, I begin to see," said Sam; "but suppose they should come on up here and nab me all dressed up in your clothes, and threaten to burn me at the stake or fill me full of nail holes?"

"In that case I shall take the responsibility and tell them the truth," Devine replied. "My plan is to sneak out to-night after it gets dark, and find out what I can, and again to-morrow if everything goes all right. You can remain in camp here, or you can move

a little farther back if you think it would be safer."

"Sounds all right, but I don't know," Sam demurred. "That bullet came too close to be funny, and maybe next time that fellow wouldn't miss if he happened to sight that same little brown hat you got on."

"No danger at all, but I'll give you twenty dollars extra if you'll exchange clothes with me right now," Devine offered in desperation.

Sam grinned. The novelty of the situation, as well as the element of dangerous adventure, appealed to him. He thought he could keep out of sight without any difficulty, and Devine had promised to shoulder the burden of his own identity if it came to threatened violence. What Sam did not know was the extent of the settlers' hatred for Devine.

Without further parley, Sam began to remove his boots and outer garments, and five minutes later he was garbed in corduroy breeches and leggings, while Devine wore his clothes, including boots and hat. Sam was bound to admit that to the casual observer their identities might have been exchanged with their clothes. They were of a size, and three days in sun and wind had reddened Devine's face until it would pass for tan at a distance or in a dim light.

It was with a feeling of awkwardness rather than uneasiness that Sam moved about in the unfamiliar garb. Coffee was boiled in a little pot, and slices of bacon broiled over the coals. Twilight came quickly and was as quickly gone. It was quite dark by the time they had finished supper. Devine did not at once betake himself off for a night prow through the valley as he said he would. Instead, he lounged back in the shadows, well beyond the circle of light cast by the flickering fire.

"I rather think I shall wait for morning to begin my investigations," he presently announced. "We will move off as if leaving, and when well out of

sight of any watcher, I shall slip back afoot and make my way down into the valley."

Such a course appeared logical enough. Sam wondered why Devine had contemplated a night trip in the first place, especially over new and unfamiliar paths. It did not occur to him that it was but a subterfuge in order to effect a change of clothes at this time, though he was forcibly reminded of it a few minutes later.

Sam had just thrown on fresh fuel, and stood in the bright glare of the flames, when he found himself suddenly and without warning in the center of a ring of menacing gun barrels and dark forms, springing simultaneously from the gloom on every side. Devine jumped to his feet as if to run, but was swept to the center of the ring by the tightening cordon of armed men.

"Hands up, fellers!" commanded the leader of the band of armed strangers, a man well along in years, but with a keen eye and erect carriage.

Sam instantly complied with the request, as the only sensible thing to do under the circumstances; Devine was too frightened to do anything except stand where he was. The men made a quick search of their prisoners, taking Sam's old six-shooter and Devine's pearl-handled revolver of small caliber.

"Which one of you is Devine, old Charley Devine's son?" demanded the leader.

There was an awkward moment of silence, in which Sam waited for young Devine to admit his identity, as he had intimated he would do in such a situation. Devine was the first to speak, but what he said almost took Sam's breath away.

"That's him there," he said, pointing a shaking finger at Sam.

Their eyes met for an instant, and in the countenance of Devine Sam beheld a mixture of treachery, cunning, and avarice, all overshadowed at that mo-

ment by a groveling terror at sight of the grim figures ranged about him. One of them carried a coil of rope in his hand.

"Well, what have you got to say, young man?" demanded the leader of the band, looking Sam fearlessly in the eye.

Sam was not quite sure what his reply should be, or if he had anything at all to say. What would it avail him to deny that he was Devine? He wore the telltale clothes, and the word of one stranger would be as good as that of another to these men, who knew neither of them by sight.

"Well," prompted the speaker, a little impatiently.

"Just suppose I don't say anything," Sam ventured, groping for a cue that might lead him to a complete understanding of the queer situation he found himself in.

"If you don't speak up right off, you won't have a chance. I reckon you'll be hangin' to a tree limb by your neck inside of five minutes," calmly announced the grizzled spokesman.

Sam glanced at Devine, whose eyes were wide with genuine terror, his knees trembling beneath him, his jaw sagging helplessly. Serious as his plight might prove, Sam experienced a delicious moment of real joy at Devine's panic. He loathed and despised the cringing coward that denied his own name to shield his worthless skin.

But there was little time for contemplation. The grim figures ranged around the two captives were beginning to move restlessly, there were muttered threats. As much to gain time as to acquire information, Sam put a question to the man who had just spoken.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I reckon you don't know me by sight, but you've heard a heap about me," was the ready reply. "I'm Andrew McCall."

Sam nodded. He had heard of old

Andy McCall, and knew somewhat of the nature of his grievance from hearsay. Devine had told only a part of the truth, he knew that.

"Your old dad was a real man, but from what you been threatenin' you'd do, an' maybe have already done, I allow hangin' is a little too good for you."

At that moment there was a commotion, as Devine made a sudden break to escape and was caught by one of the men who stood back in the shadows, evidently expecting some such move.

"Let me go," Devine begged. "I don't know anything about his affairs, I didn't have any hand in it, just came along with him. Do whatever you please with him, but let me go."

In spite of his struggles, he was shoved back against the man he would have suffer for his own misdeeds. Sam, loathing the touch of him, shoved an elbow in his ribs and pushed him clear.

"Keep quiet, you cowardly skunk," he hissed in Devine's ear. "Another word from you, and you'll hang first."

Every man admires courage in another, even an enemy, and Sam's calm assurance gained him favor. He had not for a moment pictured himself dangling from a limb, but he was not so sure about Devine. He had no doubt that he could convince his captors of the truth, if it came to that; but since Devine had chosen to deny his own identity, Sam, in a spirit of wild adventure, determined to see what would happen if he played the part through.

"When a man is going to be hanged, he always likes to have a trial, at least to know what the charges are against him," said Sam, turning to old Andy McCall.

"I reckon you know it's fer sellin' us out," the old man grunted.

"Maybe I ain't—aren't—maybe I am not guilty," Sam floundered, striving to speak as correctly as a man of business should.

"If you sold out from under us the

land that your old daddy promised we could live on fer a lifetime, or if you was figgerin' to do it, I reckon you're plenty guilty fer us."

"Just what can I do to prove that I don't aim to do anything of the kind," Sam queried, beginning to get some light, but determined to get at the heart of it, even if he did betray ignorance of the thing old Charles T. Devine's son should have a perfect knowledge of.

"I reckon you know well enough that you ain't got to do nothin' but sign that lease to me an' Tom Watson, givin' us an' our children use of the land fer forty years, account of us clearin' it an' puttin' buildin's on it. That's the trade your daddy made with us when the land wasn't worth nothin' to speak of, an' long as he lived we didn't ask no papers. His word was good enough."

"Oh, is that all?" Sam asked simply. "That's what I come for, to fix that up."

The simple statement, true or not, threw consternation into the camp. The men drew nearer, one of them kicked the half-burned chunks of fire together, as if he would make a light by which to see the face of the man whose words belied the message he had sent by mail. Even Devine puckered his lips and stared at Sam, evidently trying to read what lay behind the frank smile.

"Yes, just take us to some place where the writing can be done, and I'll sign your forty-year lease," Sam repeated.

"That ain't needful," Andy McCall replied. "We had the lease all writ out proper fer some time, waitin' till you come. Allowed you might be made to change your mind once we laid hands on you. That feller you sent to spy around wa'n't no good to us, so we sent him back, it wa'n't healthy fer him here."

A younger man, who had remained in the background until now, stepped forward and brought from an inner pocket a folded document, which he handed to old Andy McCall. Pen and ink were as mysteriously produced. The fire had

blazed up, giving sufficient light by which to read the brief document that the patriarch of Badger Valley handed to Sam.

When Sam Bellamy reached out a hand for the pen, young Devine voiced the objection that his lips had silently formed three or four times before he could make a sound.

"You—you don't dare do that," he gasped, moving as if to restrain Sam from putting pen to the paper in his hand.

"Who are you, to be saying what I dare do?" Sam demanded, looking Devine squarely in the eye. "Speak up. What business is it of yours?"

But Devine was silent, lacking the courage to assert himself. Sam looked over the group until he spied the man with the rope, and beckoned to him.

"Reckon you'd just as well put the halter on this hired man of mine," he said. "Looks like he was trying to run my business for me, and if he makes any more trouble, you can string him up."

With the pen in his hand, Sam hesitated to sign Devine's name. Such an act might be interpreted as forgery, even after such irregular proceedings as were now taking place. In the end he signed his own name to the paper. None of the other men were near enough to see what he had written. He then motioned to Devine.

"Here, you, sign your name as a witness," he ordered, placing the pen in Devine's nerveless fingers. "Sign it right here, just as you always write it," he directed, pointing out a place on the paper just above his own signature.

Devine hesitated, but when the man with the rope came toward him he moved willingly enough. When he had signed his name, Sam took the paper and wrote the word "witness" after his own signature, leaving that of Devine as the principal. He called for another disinterested witness, and one of old

Andy McCall's ranch hands stepped forward and affixed his scrawl just below Sam's name.

"Glad I didn't have to use force to git this signed," Andy McCall observed, the ends of his grizzled mustache pointing upward in a grin. "Allow it's legal an' all if you signed it freely an' of your own accord."

"Yes, I signed it freely," Sam agreed. "Picked my own witnesses, too. Sure, it'll hold water."

The paper was passed back to the man who had first produced it. He was a duly appointed justice of the peace, and therefore qualified to take acknowledgments. There followed an awkward moment as the men shuffled about uncertainly. Sam saved them, as well as himself, from any further embarrassment.

"If that's all the business you got with us to-night, I reckon we might as well get a little sleep before we start back in the morning," he said.

As silently and mysteriously as they had come, the men of Badger Valley disappeared into the surrounding darkness. They had only succeeded in getting what was rightfully theirs, no thanks were due anybody. Sufficient time had hardly elapsed for them to get out of hearing when Devine's courage began to return, and along with it his wonted conceit.

"You four-flusher," he snarled, "I'll have you sent to the penitentiary for this, impersonating me with fraudulent intent. I will——"

"Shut up!" Sam snapped, and Devine recoiled as from a lash. "Say another word and I'll thrash you! I'm just itching for a good excuse to beat you into a jelly, anyway. I've put up with your jawing as long as I can stand it. Impersonating you, huh! Who was it told them fellows that my name was Devine? Why didn't you speak up and tell the truth before it was too late? You low-down skunk, you would have made a break and left me to face the

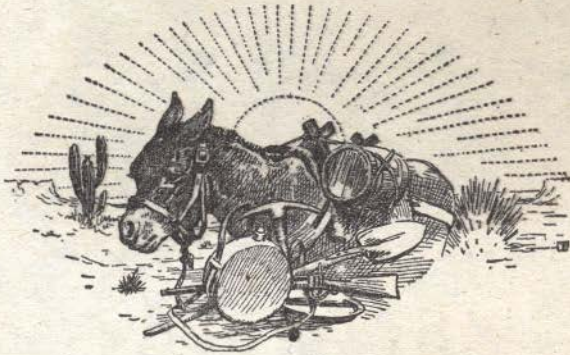
music! I ought to have told them who you were and let them hang you."

Whatever might have been in Devine's mind to say was left unsaid. Sam's hard fist was within six inches of his nose.

"And in the morning you can take your choice between taking a good licking before we start and flagging the stage to Lone Pine. I couldn't stand to ride with you two days more without

giving you a licking, and I'm guessing you'll take the stage. I'll take White-man's hoss back to him. Now shuck off my duds. I don't feel right in these here togs, they ain't made for honest men."

Rolled in his blankets for the night, Sam chuckled to himself. "Ten dollars in money, and twice that in fun. I'd do it again for the same price," he muttered sleepily.



### A PROSPECTING JACKASS

**H**AD it not been for a jackass, two men, back in 1885, would have been cheated of their grubstake interest in a mine which, up to date, has paid more than forty-three million dollars in dividends. Fortunately for them, the animal played an important part in the discovery of the mine, and was later given due recognition for that act in court.

The mine in question is the Bunker Hill and Sullivan Mine at Kellogg, Idaho, reputed to be the greatest silver-lead mine in the United States. Its discovery came about in this way: Two prospectors, O'Rourke and Kellogg by name, lost their jackass one day. After the manner of jackasses, this particular specimen managed to elude his pursuers successfully for some time; then he let them find him standing quite unconcernedly on a large outcropping of silver-lead ore—the location point of the later famous mine.

Thinking to keep the rich find for themselves, the prospectors nevertheless forgot to conceal several important items, which were—that the jackass had been furnished by Cooper and Peck, the men who had grubstaked Kellogg; that the jackass had been used by them the day they discovered the mine, and that the jackass had, in reality, found the location himself. Cooper and Peck, however, were delighted to learn that their jackass had conducted himself so worthily, and they did not hesitate to bring action against the ungrateful prospectors.

The decision reached by Judge Norman Buck of the district court of Idaho in 1885 is one of the most interesting in mining history:

"This court is of the opinion that the Bunker Hill Mine was discovered by the jackass, Phil O'Rourke, and F. S. Kellogg, and as the jackass is the property of the plaintiffs, Cooper and Peck, they are entitled to a half interest in the Bunker Hill and a quarter interest in the Sullivan claims."



# Stampede

By Harry R. Keller

ALL in the darkness we rode,  
Circling the night herd;  
Naught broke the stillness that night,  
No call of night bird.  
Low in the distance we saw  
Wild storm gods clashing;  
Weird cloud peaks troubled the sky,  
Red lightning flashing.

Then on our listening ears  
Deep thunder rumbled;  
Round milled the fidgeting steers,  
Restlessly grumbled.  
Swift then we quickened our pace,  
Whistling and singing,  
Soothing the shuffling beasts,  
Scared heads upflinging.

Red lightning leaped at a pine,  
Gnarled and storm-battered;  
Stricken, it toppled and fell,  
Splintered and shattered.  
Low cringed the quivering brutes;  
Flames danced before them;

One giant bellowed his fear—  
Panic swept o'er them!

As when the avalanche breaks,  
Swelling and surging,  
On came the maddened stampede,  
Deaf to our urging.  
Swiftly I reined to the flight;  
Huge hoofbeats thundered;  
Grim death had written the tale  
Had I but blundered!

The storm fiends, wild in their wrath,  
Sought me and found me;  
Fiercely they strove for my life,  
Wailing around me—  
Late sunrise vanquished the night;  
Light filled the canyon.  
I was unscathed—but how  
Fared my companion?

Gaunt shadows guarded his bier,  
Leering and yawning;  
Silent and broken he lay,  
Stark in the dawning.





# Only a Kid

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Limpy," etc.



HERE were perhaps a dozen men in the Olympia Saloon when Joe Rudd appeared.

Although no man there suspected the tragedy that was about to be enacted in that room—Hosmer Clark, the man most concerned, least of all perhaps—an atmosphere of uneasiness had prevailed for an hour or more. A vicious Montana blizzard roared and screeched along Northville's deserted main street. The pot-bellied stove in the center of the room was red-hot, yet the rough-hewn walls less than a dozen feet from the stove were covered with frost.

"It's a bad one all right," Hosmer Clark said. "No man would last long

in that storm. I remember once when I was prospecting up in Manitoba——"

It was an unpleasant story that Clark was about to tell. Most of his stories were unpleasant. Every man there had heard this particular story before; still, they all paid respectful attention, for when Hosmer Clark chose to speak most men listened carefully.

Clark was a big man both physically and financially. He was one of the most influential men in Northville. The fact that he was cordially disliked by most people detracted little from his prominence in town, county, and even State affairs.

Clark had reached that point in his story where he had killed a dog which had been his constant companion for

months because he had stolen a haunch of moose veal, and his listeners were beginning to shift about uneasily when the outer door swung inward, admitting the slim, snow-covered figure of a man. A second glance told the occupants of the room that the stranger was, actually, little more than a boy. Still more detailed inspection, however, caused most of them to revise their judgment once again. Young in years, the new arrival undoubtedly was, but there was something, some intangible thing, reflected in the wind-reddened, beardless face that indicated strength—man strength.

As old Lee Briggs told Sheriff Clank Scrafford later: "Even though he wasn't nothing else but a kid, you kind of felt that it wouldn't be healthy t' step up to him and poke him one on the nose. A kind o' spunky something or other. Not cocky. Becuz why, he looked down in the mouth, really. Kind o' sad. Sick, maybe. Or discouraged. He was a man size, though."

The stranger shook the snow from his shoulders and unbuttoned his coat. His blue eyes slowly circled the room and came to rest on Hosmer Clark. By this time, Clark was talking to a noticeably inattentive audience. Finally, Clark himself looked up.

And then the stranger spoke: "You, Clark!" he snapped.

Hosmer Clark's bulky body jerked to attention.

"I'm Joe Rudd," the lad said then.

Hosmer Clark's red face paled. His greenish eyes twitched from side to side. "Well, what of it?" he sputtered.

"I'm Joe Rudd," the boy repeated; "and I'm going to kill you."

Silence, complete and breathless, settled upon the smoke-filled room.

"But I'm going to give you a chance for your life," Rudd went on. "Go for your gun!"

The law had long since come to Northville to stay. Men, as a rule, no

longer carried guns. Hosmer Clark always did, however. He was armed now. So was Joe Rudd.

For a long minute, Clark stood there, the pudgy fingers of his right hand hovering over the butt of the gun in his belt. Joe Rudd's cold-reddened hands were even with his armpits. The black butt of a long-barreled six-gun stuck out of his belt. Clark's greenish eyes were staring with a terrible sort of fascination at Joe Rudd's face.

"The rest of you boys keep out of this," Joe Rudd said. Then he added: "I'm counting three, Clark. If you don't go for your gun, I'll shoot you in your tracks!"

He began counting slowly. "One—two——" As the count of three trembled on his lips, Hosmer Clark yelled and snatched at the gun in his belt.

There was every evidence of frantic haste in Clark's action; on the other hand, Joe Rudd's movements seemed pitifully slow. Actually, however, the two thunderous reports sounded almost as one.

Clark was known to be skilled with that long-barreled six-gun which he always wore. The witnesses of the fray were, therefore considerably surprised, when the smoke lifted, to see Joe Rudd standing erect and apparently uninjured. Immediately following the report of Joe Rudd's gun, Clark's body had jolted solidly back against the log wall, then he had slid gently to the floor. The bullet had actually pierced his heart.

The killer made no threats. Smoking six-gun still in hand, he stood there, calmly watching. With his free hand he buttoned the frayed mackinaw tightly about his throat. Then he backed away slowly to the door. He paused there for a moment, hand on latch. "Is he dead?" he asked. Men nodded positively. Joe Rudd smiled then. "That's good," he said. With a quick motion he opened the door, and

was almost instantly swallowed up in the curtain of driving snow.

Sheriff Clank Scrafford was on the scene less than ten minutes after the shooting. The old officer listened to the story with that silent preoccupation which was characteristic of him. When he had heard everything from several different angles, he asked just one question. "Did the kid have a dog team?" Nobody knew. The point was quickly checked, however. Joe Rudd had entered Northville afoot. He had left town the same way heading northward into the hills.

When he learned this, Sheriff Clank Scrafford turned and went back to his little office. "No sense in looking for that particular killer until spring," he told his deputy. "The man ain't been born what could make his way through the Redlinn Hills in a blizzard. This kid's a stranger. He won't have no chance at all."

With which succinct summation Northville, as a whole, agreed.

Nobody grieved over Hosmer Clark's death. His body was removed to the undertaking parlor in the rear of the general store, and as far as Sheriff Clank Scrafford was concerned, at any rate, the shooting was regarded as one of those inevitable but hopeless matters with which a mere human cannot be expected to cope.

Joe Rudd had expected pursuit. When that did not materialize, however, he was not particularly glad. He had not hoped to make a get-away. This despite the fact that he had been planning the shooting for over a year. It was a task completed, that was all. With this deed, which had actuated his every move for the past fifteen months, behind him, there was really nothing left to live for. Outside of the fact that death by hanging repelled him, he did not care greatly whether or not he succeeded in escaping.

By the time he realized that he was not being followed, he was well into the foothills of Redlinn Mountain. He knew, then, why there had been no pursuit. The authorities figured that he would almost inevitably lose his life in the storm. And it was becoming momentarily more and more probable that this was exactly what would happen. It was bitter cold and growing colder. The snow was of that peculiar, sand-like quality which drifted but did not pack. At times he floundered waist-deep in the shifting stuff. The uneven terrain tended steadily upward. The trail grew rougher. Ice-topped rocks towered on all sides. Drift-filled coulees and snow-hidden ravines barred the way.

Just as the winter dusk was descending, the fugitive came out midway upon a long, snow-covered slope. Through the thick curtain of driving snow he made out a tangle of upended trees in the valley at his left. The slope was glare ice, covered thinly with ever-shifting snow. Joe Rudd was familiar with the sight. He was, without question, looking upon the scene of many snow-slides. It was altogether possible—probable, in fact—that his slight weight would be sufficient to cause another slide. He did not hesitate for long, however. With a shrug, he started diagonally across the windswept hillside.

The expected happened. When he had covered less than half the distance to the spruce thicket on the opposite side of the slope, above the screech of the wind, he heard a grinding, roaring sound, then, in a breath his feet were whisked from beneath him and he was swept downward and away at express-train speed.

No matter how willing a man may be to die, he will always struggle when faced with death. Joe Rudd was not anxious to die. He merely did not care. However, as he was swept down-

ward on the crest of the slide, like a chip borne along on the foam-flecked surface of a spring flood, he fought for his life. That is, he struggled to keep from being inundated beneath the mountain of snow and rock that at frequent intervals overtook and passed him; and his every sense was alert to find some way out of his dangerous predicament.

It was the huge pile of snow, ice, rocks, and trees at the bottom of the slope that saved him. This débris constituted the remains of several previous slides. It was piled mountain-high at the bottom of the slope, and when the snowslide containing Joe Rudd struck it, he and the frozen stream of snow and ice upon which he rode were turned aside, part down one side of the mountain of débris, and part down the other. The helpless lad naturally followed the path of least resistance.

Just as his flying pace was beginning to slacken and the powdered snow was drifting away so that he was able to breathe more freely, an ice-covered boulder, traveling fast due to its greater weight, bore down upon him. Joe Rudd threw himself, headlong, to one side. However he was not quite quick enough. A jagged edge of the rock caught upon one of his loosely hanging snowshoes. With the first jerking, downward pull, the leather thong which held the snowshoe in place gave way. Even so, the abrupt tugging effect was sufficient to yank the slight lad's head over heels down the slope.

There was a considerable drop at the bottom of that slope. This Rudd discovered as he sprawled flat on his stomach in the wake of the big boulder. Spreading hands and feet wide, crab-fashion, he tried to stop. If the slope had been fifty feet longer he might have succeeded. As it was, however, he was still traveling swiftly when he reached the lip of the miniature canyon over which the ice-covered boul-

der had just crashed. As he felt himself falling, he glimpsed a tiny cabin almost hidden in a depression in the wall near by. Then his eyes became filled with powdery snow, and he dropped, clutching futilely at the walls of yielding débris all about him.

He landed on head and shoulders. One outflung leg struck a solid substance. He felt a sharp twinge of pain, then darkness enveloped him.

He struggled back to consciousness and a sensation of warmth. Louder than the roaring in his head came the squall of the blizzard. His dizzy eyes identified a log wall at his side. He sat up then, and found himself face to face with a girl. He was in a cabin—the cabin he had seen couched beneath that overhanging wall, evidently. And the girl? Slim and straight she sat there, lips parted, white face set in an expression which Rudd first interpreted as fear. A second glance told him, however, that the girl was not afraid. Her dark eyes were wide, and she had been crying.

"You're all right," she said, in a colorless voice. "You're just shook up pretty bad, that's all."

Joe Rudd nodded. But he did not lie back on the pillow. There was something in the girl's white face and tear-dimmed eyes that fascinated him. She was not exactly pretty, but there was something about her— He knew instantly that he liked her. And she must be in trouble of some sort, for he knew instinctively that a girl like this one would not cry unless there was a real reason for tears.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She started and a palapably manufactured smile twitched across her face.

"Nothing, nothing," she said, "only—dad—"

"Your father?" Joe prompted.

"He—he's sick," she said. She spoke in a low voice, and motioned with her head toward a back room.

"It's his heart," she went on, "his old trouble. Only this time it seems to be worse than usual. I—I'm afraid he's going to die——"

Abruptly then her eyes filled and two big tears coursed their way down her cheeks.

Joe reached for the floor with his feet. His right leg hurt him. It was painfully stiff, but evidently was not broken.

Joe had had little chance in his cramped life to think of girls. He had, as a matter of fact, never been interested in them, and knew only two or three, and those casually. He did not know what was expected of him in this instance; but he did know that he was very anxious indeed to do something. He reached out suddenly and caught one of the girl's hands in his. "Listen," he said earnestly, "isn't there something we—I can do?"

The girl shook her head slowly. "No," she said. But she clung tightly to his hand. "Only the doctor—Doctor MacGowan in Northville—can do anything. Dad doesn't have these spells very often. But when he does have them Doctor MacGowan knows just what to do. We—nobody—can get to Northville in this storm. It may be two or three days, and then—it will be too late. I know I've been with dad every time he's been sick. This is the worst——"

"The doctor, in Northville," Joe Rudd repeated. "The doctor," he said again. Clinging to the wall for support, he got gingerly to his feet. There were two pairs of snowshoes hanging on the wall across the room. Joe Rudd moved uncertainly toward them.

But the girl, divining his purpose, barred his way. "No, no," she expostulated, "you can't do it. Why, it would be suicide, even for a strong man. You have been through a terrible experience. I saw you when you fell. You were unconscious for over an

hour. You slept for a long, long time, but still you are in no shape to travel."

Resisting her gently but firmly, Joe Rudd took the two pairs of snowshoes down from the wall. "Sure, I can make it," he said confidently. "I'm all right. I feel fine."

The blizzard had abated somewhat, when Joe Rudd, an hour later, started back toward Northville. Despite the fact that he limped painfully, there was a lightness to his step which, to an uninformed observer, would have been, under the circumstances, mystifying to say the least. The reason was that Joe Rudd had again found something to live for. Something tangible, something real, and this time, something pleasant.

Margaret Dawson, that was the girl's name. It was her face dancing before his eyes across the glistening snow that made his step light. He did not know whether or not he loved her. Love was a thing unknown to Joe Rudd. For too long his youthful thoughts had centered upon hate. He did know, however, that he liked her more than any girl he had ever seen. And he wanted to help her. The fact that he was actually offering his life in her service did not occur to him. They would pick him up in Northville, of course. Before they got him, however, he must, by hook or crook, see Doctor MacGowan. After that, nothing really mattered. With her father out of danger, she would soon forget Joe Rudd. At least, this is what he had told himself a hundred times. He even tried to persuade himself that he wanted her to forget! But in this respect he failed, dimly. He had told her the whole bitter story, everything, about himself. Almost everything, that is. He had not told her that the killing had taken place in Northville, and he had not mentioned Hosmer Clark's name. She had held his hand down there, when he left her, tightly in her own. And she had

spoken rapidly under her breath, words which he had not understood but which he felt, somehow, voiced a prayer for his success. There had been a sad but pleasant something or other in her eyes, too. It was this that occupied most of his thoughts. He crossed that dangerous slope wholly absorbed in these reflections.

After the accident he had slept for ten hours, so Margaret had said. It had been mid-morning when he had left the Dawson cabin. It was dusk when he limped into Northville. The little village was busy shoveling itself out from under the blizzard. Joe accosted the first man he met and was directed to the general store: "You'll most likely find Doc MacGowan thar," the man said.

As he plodded on, Joe felt that his informant stood staring after him. When he finally turned, the man had disappeared. The lad quickened his steps then. He must get to Doctor MacGowan before they arrested him.

He found the doctor, a lean, capable-looking man, in the general store. With one eye on the door, Joe Rudd told his story. His last worry vanished when he saw Doctor MacGowan—without a single question—begin making hasty preparations to start. "He'll be all right," the doctor said positively; "just so long as he knows I'm on the way. Half of Cog Dawson's trouble is panic, d'ye see? It's the same with most folks who are sick like he is. He knows I'll come. And he knows I'll come in a hurry. So, he'll be all right, you can bank on that."

As the doctor's angular shoulders disappeared through the door, Joe Rudd sank on a sack of beans in a corner. For the first time he was aware of a great fatigue. There were throbbing pains in his leg; his head ached intolerably. He was vaguely aware of people milling about him. Then some one touched him under the chin, and

lifted his face. His eyes traveled slowly upward. He saw a silver star on a gray, flannel shirt surmounted by a florid, kindly face with grizzled whiskers.

"Is this him?" the sheriff asked.

Several voices uttered an affirmative.

Rudd grinned wanly. "I'm Joe Rudd," he said. "I killed Hosmer Clark," and, without rising, he held out his hands, wrists together.

"No need for the bracelets, son," Sheriff Clank Scrafford said not unkindly. "You look like you was kind of all in. If you feel up to it you might sashay over to my place, though. It's just across the street."

Without a word, Joe Rudd groped to his feet and followed the sheriff.

The exhausted youngster slumped down upon the bunk in the steel-barred cell directly behind the sheriff's office, and almost at once fell sound asleep.

The sun was shining brightly when Joe awoke. The sheriff was bending over him, shaking him. The door to the little cell stood wide open. The pleasant aroma of freshly-made coffee was in the air. "Come on, come on, snap out of it," the sheriff was saying. "You slept all night, and now yore tryin' t' sleep all day. Come, come."

Joe Rudd rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"Sure do hate t' eat alone," the sheriff was saying, "danged ef I don't! An' you oughtta be hungry by this time."

Joe then saw a little table, set for two, in the sheriff's office just outside his cell door. "Me?" he queried doubtfully.

"Sure," the sheriff answered roughly. "I eat with anybody. That is, I mean, yore only a kid, an'— Go on now, wash up and come out here and help me get outside of this here reepast."

Somewhat doubtfully, Joe Rudd obeyed.

As he took the chair to which the

sheriff waved him, he was aware that the old officer was watching him closely. He saw then a neatly folded note at the side of his plate. It was from Margaret Dawson! Beside the news that her father was better the note contained only many expressions of gratitude, but Joe Rudd's face reflected a contentment that must have been caused by some exceedingly pleasant thing or circumstance. He had not been particularly hungry before, but now he ate everything that was placed before him.

When the last scrap of food and the last drop of coffee had been consumed, Sheriff Clank Scrafford lit a long black cigar, and leaned back in his chair. "Now, Joe," he began, "you an' me is goin' t' have a little friendly talk."

Joe shifted about uneasily. During the past half hour he had forgotten that he was a murderer, and that the kindly man on the opposite side of the little table was his jailer.

Assuming a judicial air, the old sheriff went on: "Here's the story: In the middle of a blizzard, a young feller by the name o' Rudd blows into town, an' shoots one Hosmer Clark through the heart, killin' him pronto. Them's the facts in the case. Now, a few contributory items is, you might say: This here Clark feller, although possessin' plenty o' dinero, was plumb onpopular. He hadn't been with us long, but I never did see a feller who, without doin' nothin' in particular, could make as many enemies as he did in a short space o' time. We never did get nothin' on him, didn't try to; but somehow or other we all kind of suspected he wasn't the good-natured, friendly feller he seemed.

"So much for that, which same, Joe, is all we know about Mr. Hosmer Clark. Now, if you had come here an' put a slug into Clark, an' had looked an' acted like a killer, if we had picked you up, we probably would've sent you

over the line in short order. Maybe that will happen, even yit. I ain't making you no promises, understand'. But what happened is this: You go slidin' downhill, along with a snowslide, an' end up at Cog Dawson's front door. Old Cog, he's sick. You volunteer t' git the doctor. Said doctor is located right here in Northville. You ain't no danged fool, an' so, you must've known that you would be picked up. Still, you go to Northville for Doctor MacGowan. You like Margaret Dawson. I don't blame you. Prob'ly you done it for her. Regardless of the whys an' wherefores, howsomever, you done it! Now, Joe, a sure-enough killer wouldn't do a thing like that. You ain't no killer. Why did you plug Hosmer Clark?"

Joe's pale cheeks had taken on a flush of color as the sheriff spoke. With the note from Margaret Dawson clutched tightly in his right hand, he suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to live. He had killed a snake. Why should he pay the penalty with his life?

"Hosmer Clark robbed and killed my father," he said calmly. "That was two years ago. I saw him do it. I've been following him ever since. I found him the other day. I killed him. That's all."

"Clark kiled yore dad, eh?" the sheriff mused. "Did anybody else see him do it?"

Rudd nodded. "Yes," he said, "two others—Otto Blandin and Mando Cordez. Crooks, both of them. They were Clark's partners."

"Where did all this happen, son?" the sheriff pursued.

"Las Vedos, Arizona," Joe Rudd replied.

"Was this Clark feller an' his two partners ever in any other mix-ups that you know about?"

"Yes, Clark was involved in several shady deals. It was he who shot and killed the superintendent of the Golden Star Mine in Las Vedos. I know that

for a certainty. But Clark didn't appear in it. Blandin and Cordez were the ones. The sheriff was looking for both Blandin and Cordez when I left Arizona, but I don't believe he ever got them."

Sheriff Scrafford stroked his pursed lips with a stubby forefinger. "Waal, that gives us suthin' t' work on anyhow, son," he finally said. "Now, you just make yoreself t' hum here. Sit down t' thet desk over in the corner thar an' write Margaret a nice long letter. I'll see thet it's delivered. An' don't worry too much. I'm writin' a letter, too—to the sheriff o' Las Vedos County, Arizona. Maybe we'll find out suthin'. Who kin tell?"

And find out something Sheriff Scrafford most assuredly did. Ten days later he received a thick letter post-marked "Las Vedos, Arizona." After he had succeeded in spelling through the half dozen sheets of scrawled writing, his ruddy face was purple with suppressed excitement. He called and Joe Rudd came and pressed his face close against the bars of his cell.

"This here windy epistle, son, is from a feller whut signs hisself 'Two-story' Hank Lanagan, sheriff o' Las Vedos County, Arizona," the sheriff began. "Mr. Lanagan's a terrible writer, but he does have suthin' t' say. Seems like

they got both Blandin an' Cordez in the hoosegow down thar in Las Vedos and neither o' them two hombres had chirped a peep about Hosmer Clark; but, after he got my letter, this Two-story feller had speech with them an' they been talkin' ever since! All in all, it 'pears like they've laid every crime in the calendar since the shootin' o' Dan McGrew at Hosmer Clark's door, an' the sheriff has done proved up on half a dozen or so of 'em. F'rinstance, the fellers at the Golden Star Mine positively identified Clark by his picter as the skunk what plugged a Mr. Eades, their superintendent. Right pronto, they offered a reward of a thousand dollars fer information leadin' t' Clark's arrest an' conviction an' et cetera. The State has offered another five hundred.

"I didn't tell 'em, o' course, thet Hosmer was already a dead goose, which same was, p'raps, right sensible, becuz the way the thing stands now, son, instead o' swingin' fer bumpin' off a skunk yore collectin' fifteen hundred dollars reward money. Not bad fer a starter, is it? O' course, furniture an' things is expensive nowadays; still an' all, Margaret, she's a mighty sensible little gal, an'— Whut you gittin' so red fer? Blushin'! Jest like a consarned woman—Heaven bless 'em!"

## SURVEYING FROM THE AIR

AIR operations on a large scale were undertaken in the year past by the Royal Canadian air force, and, though this has a formidable sound, the purposes of the operation were peaceful and most successful. An air survey of fifty-three thousand square miles was made and photographed, and of these miles twenty thousand were photographed vertically and thirty-one thousand by oblique photography.

Eight of the nine provinces of Canada were "taken" by the birdmen and the photographs were made for such various purposes as geological mapping, water-power investigation, determination of lumber resources, and for use in the preparation of topographical maps and experimental work. The total extent of country photographed was larger than the whole of England, and than the combined areas of the States of New York, Delaware, and Rhode Island. The bird's-eye view of things is becoming much more elaborate and useful than it used to be.



# Highways Old and New

(The Pacific Highway)

By Edna Erle Wilson



FOR many of the most beautiful Western trails we are indebted to the self-sacrificing Spanish padres, the daring Argonauts, and sturdy pioneers, who carved narrow, winding paths through the virgin wilderness. When these adventurous and courageous men first journeyed beyond the Rockies they opened to the world a new land of sea and mountain, of forests and snow peaks, of valleys and lakes. To-day in this region lie the three great States of California, Oregon, and Washington, and the Province of British Columbia. Across this region, like a ribbon of silver in a verdant field, runs the Pacific Highway, one of the longest and most beautiful continuous thoroughfares in the world.

The traveler who desires romance will find it at the very beginning of this trail, which starts down below the border in Old Mexico, a land of vivid contrasts, of weird deserts and lush fields, deep canyons and towering peaks. Leaving the picturesque streets of the colorful little town of Tia Juana behind, the Pacific Highway traverses in its course one thousand seven hundred and seventy

four eventful miles before reaching its destination beyond the Canadian border in Victoria, the capital of British Columbia. From one end to the other this road presents much of historic interest as well as an almost unrivaled variety, beauty, and grandeur of scenery.

Seventeen miles beyond its Mexican starting point beautiful San Diego, the birthplace of California's civilization, is reached. Here one visits such landmarks as the ancient Spanish mission, in which the present city had its origin, the old Estudilla home, better known as Ramona's marriage place, and the San Pasqual battlefield.

From this quaint city the Pacific Highway makes its way for two hundred miles along the margin of the sea, passing beach after beach of smooth sand unmarked by rocks. As they slope gently into the deeper water where the breakers roll, these beaches invite the tourist to pause and take a plunge. This he probably does when he arrives at the very modern city and resort town of La Jolla. The ocean is almost constantly in view of the traveler as far as Serra, where the trail turns inland un-

til it reaches the great wall and portal of the town of San Juan Capistrano, with its old and interesting mission. No tourist should pass its ancient doors without going inside, for there he will get a real insight into the early life of California.

This will not be the only reminder of the days of Spanish occupation, however, for between San Diego and San Francisco Bay there are some twenty-two of these missions. In fact, over this part of its route the paved Pacific Highway of to-day follows the ancient trail of the Spanish padres as they toiled on foot or with pack animals from one mission to another. Some of these pioneer missions are now nothing more than ruins. A number, while showing the inroads of time, are still in use, while others are kept in good repair and have been used as places of worship continuously since their founding. Many of these the motorist sees as he wheels along the Pacific Highway, while the remainder may be visited by a short turning aside from the main route.

Continuing north, the trail winds into California's famous orange region, in the very center of which are found the splendid cities of Santa Ana, Orange, and Anaheim. As he journeys through the great orchard and gardening region, the tourist will be enchanted with productive valleys which yield hundreds of thousands of oranges, grapefruits, peaches, and pears. The highway passes through Fullerton, La Habra, Whittier, and Montebello, and continues along a city boulevard into the streets of busy Los Angeles.

This California city, with its more than a million inhabitants, is a center of unending interest to tourists. It lies at the base of the mountains, which hem it in on the north and east, and is surrounded on the other sides by great areas of valley and foothill land which stretch for twenty miles west and south to the ocean and southeast through a

vast fruit region. To the west lie such well-known beaches as Santa Monica, Venice, and Redondo, which are thronged with visitors the whole year around. Hollywood, on the northwest, and a part of the city, is famous as the seat of the great motion-picture industry and as a place of many beautiful homes and estates.

That portion of California now traversed by the Pacific Highway, running between Los Angeles and San Francisco, is the most traveled section of the entire route. This delightful region of valley, mountain, and ocean is very beautiful as well as comfortable. During every month of the year the climate is delightful; flowers of great variety and quantity bloom in gardens and parks, and the houses are literally embowered in roses and vines. Travel is never interrupted or made dangerous by snow, of which there is none, and rainy days are few.

After leaving Hollywood the thoroughfare passes through the low Cahuenga Pass to Ventura, known as the "Poinsetta City" because of its profusion of these flowers. Then for many miles this Western trail runs along the ocean shore through Carpinteria, Summerland, and Montecito to Santa Barbara. This town offers such attractions as a mission, the De La Guerra House, the Casa Grande, a new Street in Spain, and if the tourist times his arrival advantageously he may take in the old Spanish Days fiesta, which is held every year.

For thirty miles farther the road continues along the ocean and then goes through the very beautiful Gaviota Pass to Las Cruces and Buellton. The next stopping places on the route are the towns of Los Alamos, Orcutt, and Santa Maria, located in the heart of the productive Santa Maria Valley. There is nothing monotonous about the scenery along the way, for at Pismo Beach the thoroughfare again reaches the ocean,

only to desert the water a little farther on for the mountains en route to San Luis Obispo, situated in the midst of a great cattle and dairy district.

Beyond this typically Western town the highway crosses the Santa Lucia Mountains and winds on through a beautiful section to Paso Robles, where fine hot-sulphur springs and mud springs are located. It traverses the Salinas Valley, with its missions and ruins, on the way to the town of Salinas. Here is celebrated every year the California Rodeo, one of the most interesting of the displays of horsemanship held in the entire West.

Another treat is in store for its followers when the trail reaches San José, in the heart of the rich Santa Clara Valley with its seven million fruit trees. Near by, on the top of Mount Hamilton, is perched the Lick Observatory. Another interesting spot which may easily be visited from this city is the California Redwood Park, where one finds the oldest living trees in the world.

The Pacific Highway now plays a dual rôle, continuing to San Francisco by two equally alluring routes, one lying west of the Bay and the other to the east. Visitors will find the bay region full of attractions, with its magnificent cities, beautiful parks, splendid beaches, delightful climate, and ever-blooming flowers. No wanderer over this trail should fail to allow ample time for enjoyment of San Francisco and its environs. San Francisco's bay is one of the world's greatest harbors and the Golden Gate entrance to it is renowned for its charm. South of it are the famous Seal Rocks, and a long stretch of smooth beach, continually thronged.

Although southern California, the land of Spanish romance, lies behind, the highway does not lose its spell, for it now enters a region which, reminiscent of the "days of old, the days of gold, the days of '49," is crowded with American romance. And although the

beauty of the scenery, not the quest for riches, is the lure of to-day, it proves equally strong, for thousands journey over this Western trail every year to revel in the loveliness of the forests, lakes, and tarns, to hunt and fish along the way, to invade the mountain fastnesses, and to fall captive to the charm of the Sacramento Valley.

This great valley, which is traversed from end to end by the Pacific Highway, lies between the Sierra and Coast Range Mountains. And a wonderful garden region it is, with its fields of grass and grain, orchards of fruit, and flourishing vineyards. When the upper end of the valley is reached a radical change in scenery takes place, for here the highway passes along a route of canyons, past springs, and castellated rocks, and under the shadow of towering peaks. To the right, just before entering the mountains, is seen the snow-covered summit of Mount Lassen, often crowned with a wreath of volcanic smoke. Nowhere on any other highway in California can such sights be seen as this volcano and Shasta, the snowy monarch of the Sacramentos, along whose base the trail runs for miles. And then there is the thrilling sight of a huge and wonderful rock formation known as Castle Crags just a little way south of Dunsmuir. But although the main road offers so many scenic attractions, it is a man of strong will who can resist the call of the fascinating bypaths. Such a temptation now presents itself to the adventurer over the Pacific Highway, for a few miles east of the main road he may visit Mount Lassen Volcanic National Park.

Stretches of open country alternate with great cities along this route, each claiming in turn the attention of the tourist. He should not fail to tarry for a while in Sacramento, California's capital. Here one feels again the spell of pioneer times, for in the heart of the city still stands old Sutter's Fort, the

most interesting relic of the early days of gold. To the east of this city lies wonderful Lake Tahoe, and to the south the parks of the giant sequoias and famous Yosemite, while to the north stretches the largest peach area in the world.

In fact, there is not a dull mile along this Western trail, for when, after following the Shasta River Canyon for some miles and crossing the Klamath River, the wonders of California are left behind, the delights of Oregon begin. The highest point in the entire trail is reached a few miles beyond the California-Oregon line, when the Pacific Highway crosses the summit of the Siskiyou Mountains at an elevation of four thousand five hundred and sixteen feet. In true lariat fashion the road then circles down the mountains through beautiful forests of cedar, oak, and madrone, to the Rogue River Valley. The route runs through this fertile region of orchards to Medford, where a fine graveled road takes one to Crater Lake, one of the world's greatest national wonders. This famous body of water occupies the crater of a huge extinct volcano, at a height of over ten thousand feet. Its waters are a deep blue, unbelievable by those who have not seen it. A small cinder cone of a more recent volcano rises from the bed of the lake. This is a national park, provided with good roads and camping facilities.

A little farther on, at Grant's Pass, another side road may be followed to the wonderful Oregon Caves, whose large, long galleries are filled with strange formations. North of Grant's Pass the Pacific Highway runs through the beautiful region of the Rogue and Umpqua Mountains and traverses the valleys of the two forks of the Umpqua River. Every sportsman who travels this road will stop for a while at Eugene, at the head of the great Willamette Valley, for to the east lies the wonderful Mackenzie River country, af-

fording the best of fishing and hunting in a State famous for its outdoor recreation.

At Junction City the traveler may take his choice of the east and west side routes, which will, however, both land him eventually at Portland, a great tourist base for seeing the whole Oregon and Washington country. This extreme Northwest corner of the United States through which the Pacific Highway winds is a most wonderful region from every point of view, offering in turn great mountain ranges, dense forests, of great size, mountain lakes, fertile valleys, and a great interior region of fruit, grain, and stock. Capping it all is marvelous Puget Sound, with its hundreds of miles of forest-bordered channels and its sunsets which challenge the world for equal.

The first city to be reached in Washington is Vancouver, on the north bank of the Columbia River, a town of exceptional historic interest. It has the distinction of being the original settlement in the State and the house built by the first hardy settler is still standing. In the early days of the fur trade this town was the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Co.'s fur operations on the Pacific coast. Passing through Olympia, the State capital, the road winds on to Tacoma on Puget Sound, the gateway to Rainier National Park. Mount Rainier is one of the great snow peaks of the Pacific coast and is visited every year by thousands of tourists, many of whom make the somewhat strenuous climb to its rugged summit before returning to the main highway en route for Seattle.

This city has all the charm and romance of a great seaport, for in and out of its harbor glide steamers bound for Alaska and the Far North, and also for the distant Orient. At Bremerton, across the sound, is a great naval station, which is well worth a special visit. Two other interesting lumbering towns

where the tourist may wish to stop are Everett and Bellingham.

The road is now on the last lap of its journey, for the international line is just ahead. Although the remainder of the route leads over Canadian soil, this portion of British Columbia shares the delightful climate and scenic attractions of the Puget Sound region. At the mouth of Frazer River stands the little town of New Westminster, which was the first on the mainland to be established and which is the only fresh-water port. A typical Western atmosphere prevails here, for it is in the very center of great lumbering and fishing industries.

This same atmosphere exists, although on a much larger scale, in Vancouver, which also has large lumber interests, in addition to being the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and the port of all steamers bound for the Orient, Australia, down the coast, and up to Alaska. This Canadian town is surrounded by a region of great beauty of river, mountain, and sea too varied and numerous to give in detail.

A ferry now carries the traveler to Vancouver Island, down which he journeys past an interesting old blockhouse and Indian totem poles to Victoria, the capital of British Columbia and terminus of the Pacific Highway.



### HOW TO KEEP THE MOSQUITOES AWAY

SOME time since the doctors discovered that calves liver had a highly valuable effect in the restoration of patients suffering from anæmia. In consequence of this pronouncement, the humble liver which was looked at askance and eaten with apology, has risen to a high price on the bill of fare and is sought after with avidity.

An interesting parallel in the fish kingdom is the discovery that the liver of dogfish is extremely effective as a preventive of the attacks of the mosquito and his comrade plagues, black flies, midges, and other insect pests which are particularly annoying to sportsmen in the woods.

In Vancouver, British Columbia, an oil is being manufactured from dogfish livers which is to have the magic effect of driving away the mosquito. This discovery is not entirely new, however. In early days the coast Indians used dogfish oil as a preventive against the attacks of pernicious insects, but the odor of the oil was so offensive as to render the cure less endurable than the disease. In northern Ontario the Cree Indians have also found dogfish oil effective for similar purposes, with the same defect of its strong smell. Now, however, a way has been found to retain the good qualities of the oil and at the same time include an agreeable odor which will do away with the chief objection to the dogfish-liver oil.

It is inherent in oil to have a soothing effect, and the prospects are that this new product will spread unlimited balm very widely. For the markets for such an oil are practically unlimited. In New Zealand, it will be welcomed by the dairy herds who suffer cruelly from the insect pests; the prospectors and sportsmen of British Columbia are potential buyers, and residents of the districts of northern Quebec and northern Ontario are expected to take quantities of the soothing liquid.

Fish oils are becoming more important each year. In fact, the fish is becoming most useful to the landsman. Fish meal for live-stock food, fish fertilizer for the land, and fish oil for a variety of purposes are constantly growing in demand.

# Native Fish

## (What Can Fishes See?)

**A**LTHOUGH several investigators maintain that they have demonstrated that fishes have color vision, validity of the evidence has been in each case seriously questioned.

Among the experiments along this line is the work of two well-known investigators who found that the creek chub could be trained to distinguish food associated with green from food associated with red of different shades. Another student found that the gray snapper can distinguish blue as well as green from red, even though the red might appear much darker or much brighter than the blue.

The fact that these animals are able to distinguish the blue from red that is brighter, as well as from red that is darker than the blue shows, the authors maintain in their articles on this subject, that the selection could not have been solely on the basis of difference of intensity, or brightness, such as a color-blind person can perceive in different colors.

It is believed by some that fishes have color vision only when their eyes are

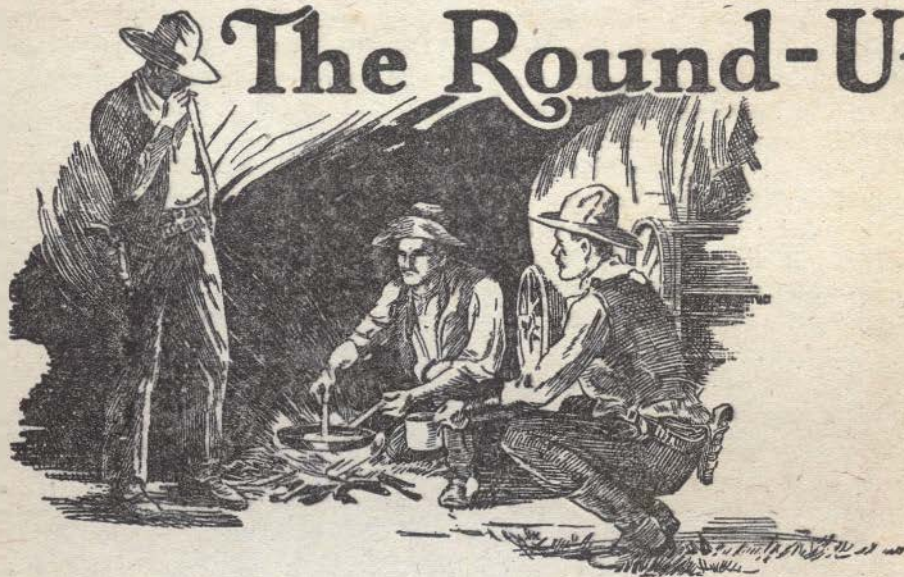
adapted to light, but not when they are adapted to darkness. While it is easy to discover at what water depth red or yellow may appear gray to man's eye, it is impossible to know for certain what fishes see, whether reaction comes through the motor nerves or through the sympathetic nerves. It is true that many species, while securing food, regulate their movements by vision, and that smell and taste play a minor rôle.

Into a fish aquarium was thrown a fiddler crab of moderate size. It was seized at once, partly swallowed, and then thrown out. Another specimen took it and rejected it also. During the next few days crabs of varying sizes were thrown into the aquarium, but the fish would have none of them. This shows that the crabs were evidently recognized because of their form.

Sometimes size is also recognized, since fish rarely attack minnows, which are too large to be easily swallowed. Thus, it is generally conceded, that images on the retina of fish react similarly to those on that of man.



# The Round-Up



**A**S to that trick saddle that one of you was askin' about here, not so long ago, Judge Arthur W. Sluper, Calabasas, California, slips into the Boss' saddle to advise:

**"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS:** I've been settin' back here in the shadow for the last—well, about fifteen years, watchin' an' listenin' to you fellers wranglin' over things, an' I am sure interested in what Walt Woodward said the other night about a trick saddle.

"Sure, Walt, I know where yuh kin git one! I know a feller here as has a trick saddle that would sure make yuhr eyes snap. The thing is that durn tricky that when a feller rides down the street in one of them big parades we have out here, every once in a while, the women all stand up and, after making their bow tuh the feller on the hoss, they goes plumb wild.

"This saddle has about three hundred dollars' worth of silver trappin's on her, an' is a razzle-dazzle tuh yuhr eyes. I'm tellin' yuh, the thing is so tricky that yuh won't know whether yuh are headed forward or backward. If yuh git throwed, the thing will jest naturally

git down an' pick yuh up an' put yuh back in the leather.

"There's only one thing yuh might have tuh do, an' that's tuh give her a dose of lubricatin' oil now an' then, tuh keep her shynlike, an' screw up the mainspring occasionally with a left-handed monkey wrench.

"If yuh want tuh know the feller ownin' the contraption, let me know—I'm always here.

"WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is going just as good now as it was fifteen years ago. Keep her up, Boss! Thanks."

Say, Folks, if this isn't a real sportin' proposition, we'll devour our Stetson. Just listen to Forrest Maddox, D. D., pastor of the First Baptist Church, Bay Minette, Alabama:

**"BOSS AND FOLKS:** Yes, the Boss has given my own moniker, titles, address, and all. How about a marathon horse race from coast to coast—say from some point on the Virginia coast to San Francisco? I have three horses, and any one of the three can do it; and, what's more, it is suggested that

I be the first entrant in this race. I have divided my time between the East and the West, and let me remark that such a contest, sponsored by WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, would excite more interest than any race of any kind since the Athenians licked the Persians.

"I would appreciate hearing what the Folks think of this idea. The WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is the first party I am putting this proposition up to." —

Come, boys and girls! Who of you want to get into this race? Let's hear from you.

Mrs. R. R. Pettit, R. F. D. No. 1, Gibbon, Nebraska, to the rescue of Bob Case:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I am rather at sea to know just how to begin this speech. I will take up just as little of you folks' time as I can, but after listening to A. C. Mewhirter of Washington, I felt as though I just had to speak.

"I have yet to get a WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE that I do not feel well repay me for my money. We are fixed so we must count the nickels, but we never forget to count out three for WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. I also wish to say that all to whom we pass on the magazine like Case's stories, and I, for one, would like to see some more about Smith and the partners, McQuirk and DeLong. They are all good and worth reading. I have seen very few stories in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE I did not care for. Sometimes our dealer does not order enough copies, and then we surely miss all of you. Wonder why Shorty McKay does not get a girl. Should like to meet up with him myself.

"I enjoy the singing. Would it be asking too much to have you sing 'The Lavender Cowboy,' as I would like to learn the words?

"Just pass the word to Bill Meyers of Danville, Illinois, and tell him I am serving sour-dough hot cakes for breakfast. They are O. K., only it takes so many to fill 'em up.

"Here's good luck to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and all its writers."

Hate to let a meetin' go by 'without we do some singin'. Then let's go to it now. Get set, and we'll make it.

### THE COWBOY'S LAMENT.

As I walked out in the streets of Laredo,  
As I walked out in Laredo one day,  
I spied a poor cowboy wrapped up in white  
linen,  
Wrapped up in white linen as cold as the  
clay.

"Oh, beat the drum slowly and play the fife  
lowly,  
Play the 'Dead March' as you carry me  
along;  
Take me to the green valley, there lay the  
sod o'er me,  
For I'm a young cowboy and I know I've  
done wrong.

"I see by your 'outfit that you are a cowboy,"  
These words he did say as I boldly  
stepped by.  
"Come sit down beside me and hear my sad  
story;  
I was shot in the breast and I know I  
must die.

"Let sixteen gamblers come handle my coffin,  
Let sixteen cowboys come sing me a song,  
Take me to the graveyard and lay the sod  
o'er me,  
For I'm a poor cowboy and I know I've  
done wrong.

"My friends and relations, they live in the  
the Nation,  
They know not where their boy has gone.  
He first came to Texas and hired to a ranch-  
man;  
Oh, I'm a young cowboy and I know I've  
done wrong.

"Go write a letter to my gray-haired mother,  
And carry the same to my sister so dear;  
But not a word of this shall you mention  
When a crowd gathers round you my story  
to hear.



"Then beat your drum lowly and play your fife slowly,  
 Beat the 'Dead March' as you carry me along;  
 We all love our cowboys so young and so handsome;  
 We all love our cowboys, although they've done wrong.

"There is another more dear than a sister;  
 She'll bitterly weep when she hears I am gone.  
 There is another who will win her affections,  
 For I'm a young cowboy and they say I've done wrong.

"Go gather around you a crowd of young cowboys,  
 And tell them the story of this my sad fate;  
 Tell one and the other before they go further  
 To stop their wild roving before 'tis too late.

"Oh, muffle your drums, then play your fifes merrily;  
 Play the 'Dead March' as you go along,  
 And fire your guns right over my coffin;  
 There goes an unfortunate boy to his home.

"It was once in the saddle I used to go dashing;  
 It was once in the saddle I used to go gay.  
 First to the dram house, then to the card house;  
 Got shot in the breast; I am dying to-day.

"Get six jolly cowboys to carry my coffin;  
 Get six pretty maidens to bear up my pall;  
 Put bunches of roses all over my coffin;  
 Put roses to deaden the clods as they fall.

"Then swing your rope slowly and rattle your spurs lowly,  
 And give a wild whoop as you carry me along;  
 And in the grave throw me and roll the sod o'er me,  
 For I'm a young cowboy and I know I've done wrong.

"Go bring me a cup of cold water  
 To cool my parched lips," the cowboy said.  
 Before I turned, the spirit had left him  
 And gone to its Giver—the cowboy was dead.

We beat the drum slowly and played the fife lowly  
 And bitterly wept as we bore him along;  
 For we all loved our comrade, so brave,  
 young, and handsome;  
 We all loved our comrade, although he'd done wrong.

We'll have a little shootin' now. John Gagnon, 682 Bedford Street, Fall River, Massachusetts, lettin' go:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I thought when Corporal Newman got that barrage he would see his error, but he still wants to argue.

"Now, corporal, I have at hand a 'Description of Rifle,' taken from 'Manual of Basic Training and Standards of Proficiency,' Volume III, which reads as follows:

"No. 1 General: The U. S. Rifle, ca. .30 model of 1903, is the only caliber .30 rifle at present authorized for general issue to the service; it is sometimes referred to as the 'Springfield Rifle,' because it was first made and is still made at the Springfield Armory at Springfield, Massachusetts, et cetera.

"When you say 'nomenclature' and mean muzzle velocity, you are all wrong again. If you want me to name you a rifle that will give you more than two thousand seven hundred F. P. S. muzzle velocity, ask me, corporal, ask me. There are several. How's that? Corporal, I did *not* say that the United States army had poor training methods. In fact, I know they are good.

"Corporal, I've had five years as instruction sergeant. As for all these fifty out of possible fifties and that sort of thing, I have got medals and cups, and my team was champion for four years. Furthermore, let me tell you that the international champ himself can't do what you say. As a matter of fact, I have been thinking this over, and would be only too glad to arrange a team shoot and an individual one. Does that interest you? We will then see what you can do!"



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.

**A**BOVE the Red River of the Southland, and across the prairies of eastern Oklahoma, is the land of buried treasure, lost Spanish mines, outlaw caves, and the home of the red man—the old Indian territory of the West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: The San Boise Mountains of eastern Oklahoma are about a hundred miles above the Red River of the South, and in the land of the old stamping ground of the red man—the great Indian territory of the West. Here in the San Boise Mountains, sixteen miles from Red Oak and the nearest railroad, is my cabin, on the bank of a mountain stream. I am trapping in here, and prospecting, and am exploring an old cave that was once used by bandits and outlaws. I have opened an entrance in the cave that was filled with rocks, and have hopes of finding something interesting to repay me for my efforts.

Folks, is there a hombre who would like to throw in with me here in Oklahoma? I am twenty-two, have a small grubstake, and could hold up my end of a homestead, should some square-shooting partner want me to throw in with him on a homestead, trap line, or prospecting trip. I would consider going to Canada, Mexico, Alaska, anywhere in the good old United States, or will be glad to have a pard come and share my shack with

me in the San Boise Mountains. I have two saddle horses and a car, folks. And a grubstake that will provide beans and bacon.

J. M. O.

Box 8, Red Oak, Oklahoma.

East of Waco.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Texas waddy, and happy to say that I'm with one of the largest ranch outfits in this part of the Longhorn State, just east of Waco a way, and out of Farrar, in Limestone County, central Texas.

No, I'm not what you'd call a lone waddy, but I like to yarn with other hombres; and, although I don't know everything about Texas, I have traveled over a considerable lot of the State. I am a young hombre, but maybe I can interest some of the old-timers, too. So come along, pards, all of you.

F. DUNLAP.

Farrar, Texas.

Trekking to the tropics.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: During the past ten years I've done a great deal of trekking, mostly in the tropical countries, and I'm waiting for the time—in the near future, I hope—when I will return to the tropics again. I've spent a good deal of time in the great Southwest, mostly in Texas, but have also been in Arizona, New Mexico, and Cali-

fornia. Have been in the Philippines, China, and Japan, and also through Panama. I'm a-hankering for the islands again, and will be restless until I am trekking the tropics. Lest any of the hombres get the idea that I'm an old-timer, I'll state that I started roaming when I was fourteen, and that this traveling has been done in the last ten years. I'd like to hear from all the Gang—any one—anywhere.

RAMBLING RALPH.

Care of The Tree.

Canadian ranch hand.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a ranch hand—born in the good old United States, but came to Canada when I was very young. I intend trekking to Peru next fall, and would like to get a few folks down that way to give me some information as to the prospects for a ranch hand in that Far South country. I'll also welcome hombres from any part of the world, and will exchange snaps and yarns with them about Alberta, up Canada way.

ART HOLTHE.

411 Thirteenth Street, South,  
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

Into the land of the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are a family who belong in the land of sunshine, and we're trying hard to get located somewhere in the great Southwest and take up poultry ranching or homesteading. I am twenty-nine, have a fair grubstake, and think that we would be happy if we could locate somewhere in Arizona, or perhaps in Colorado. Will the Arizonans and Coloradoans come forward with information and suggestions? Thanks, Gang.

FRED R. FELDER.

3517 North Seventy-fourth Avenue,  
Chicago, Illinois.

Kansas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I hail from that sand-storm-ridden, jack-rabbit-infested State of Kansas—and am very proud of it! And, by the way, folks, Kansas has no more gumbo than any other State, and not so much as some of them. But that doesn't mean that I wouldn't live in any other State. Quite the contrary, folks. I would like to hear from some of the girls of the Gang who are making their own way. I am a widow of thirty-five, with a son of nearly eighteen, and we would like to hear from some of the Gangsters of the West and Southwest regarding working conditions there.

And if any one wants to know about sunny Kansas, its climate, crops, et cetera, don't hesitate to take a *pasear* over this way.

STERLING OF KANSAS.

Care of The Tree.



Trekking above the Red River of the South is trekking across the trails of romance in the great open spaces of the West. Wear a friend-maker badge and say "howdy" to the hunter of the trails, the hunter of buried treasures, the hunter of lost Spanish mines, and the explorer of outlaw caves.

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.

Indian princess.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a little Indian girl who was born in our great Northwest, and who has never been any farther east than the wonderful Rockies. I am very lonesome without Pen Pals, and want to hear from here, there, and everywhere. I am twenty-one. I do not have to tell you—all that I am fond of the out of doors. I am a true daughter of the West.

DEERLET.

Care of The Tree.

Nebraska ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Here is a twenty-one-year-old Gangster who has lived on a seven-teen-hundred-acre ranch all her life. Have also traveled lots, and, although I want to hear from just everywhere, I'd feel plumb sorry if I didn't corral a few letters from Arizona, New Mexico, Montana, and a few of the other Western States.

I have a splendid saddle horse, and I do a great deal of riding in the country hereabouts. I'll send a snap of my white cow pony to all who write.

VIOLA POSPESHIL.

Venus, Nebraska.

The land of plenty hills.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live in Oklahoma, the land of plenty hills, some large ranches, and never-ending sunsets. I'm eighteen sum-

mers, love the wide, open spaces of the West, and was born in the Lone Star State. And I've lived in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, the home of the Osage Indians, right in the famous Osage Hills. MAYDALEEN MCKNIGHT.

404 West Randolph Street,  
Enid, Oklahoma.

### Virginians.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We have just returned from a trip by motor across the country to Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, New and Old Mexico, and Texas. If any one is interested, we'll be glad to answer questions and tell of our wanderings.

MR. AND MRS. RAY SWEITZER.  
Floyd, Virginia.

### The desert's open spaces.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: There's no place like the hills and the canyons and the desert lands of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, and California. I've been over them all. But especially do I like the desert country—prairie dogs, rattlers, horned toads, and all! And the semidesert country, with its sage, cactus, and cottonwoods. A new growth of tumbleweed will be growing up while the old tumbleweed will be tumbling around—growing up to take the place of the old when it's gone. And there will be miles and miles of poppies.

I'm starting on the westward trek before long, and can take a couple of square-shooting pards along. But I want pards who have a grubstake, for I aim to cover a lot of ground, and don't intend to stop along the way. And make it pronto, pards.

JACK H. WEIGAND.

313½ Carver Street,  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

### Longhorn hombre.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Ranching is my game, so I would be much more interested to hear from some cow poke than from any city hombres. I am a Texan, and Texas is my real given name, although most folks insist on using it as a nickname. I'm a right smart way from the home range, and I get a hankering at times to hear from some of the pokes down along the border. Would also like to hear from some of the hombres across the border in Old Mexico. I can tell you-all a heap about Canada if you happen to be interested.

TEXAS HALL.  
Box 4, Belle Mead, New Jersey.

"Would like to hear from some of the older women of the Gang—around forty-five or fifty, and especially those who have done some trekking across country as lone wanderers. I did some lone trekking last summer and as I wore my friendship badge I made the acquaintance of several of you folks. I am planning another trek through Washington, Oregon, and California, and would like to have you-all tell me some of the interesting places to visit." Address your letters, folks to Mrs. B. L. Walker, 1500 McAllister Street, San Francisco, California.

"We are a young married couple who are looking for another young couple to join us in a trip through the West. We expect to hit every State west of the Big River, from Canada to Mexico, and possibly to dip into old Mexico, too. All that we ask is that our pards be square shooters, and not afraid to stop and go to work when the funds run low. A big grubstake is not necessary. We have the car, and we are willing to share it with the right kind of pards. We expect to be gone for a year, at the least, and will hit the trail in July or August." Address your letters, folks, to Bill and Billie, care of The Tree.

"I am interested in the West, as I'm aiming to locate there. I'd like to hear from any of the Gang from Arizona, New Mexico, Montana, Wyoming, California, or any of the other Western States. Who-all can tell me what Western States have government land that an hombre can homestead on? Folks, please walk right up to this east-Texan." The Gangster is Irvin W. Rettmann, Route 3, Como, Texas.

E. J. Downey, Box 308, Kenmundy, Illinois, has a collection of Western cowboy songs that he would like to exchange for other old-time range ballads.

# 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.

**L**UMBERJACKS, Bob H., of Norfolk, Virginia, accuses us of neglecting you! Well, all we can say is that it isn't intentional oversight, and to atone, we are going to lead off this week's discussion by answering the queries of this Southerner. "I'm interested in hearing about the lumbering business out in Montana, Mr. North. What town is headquarters? How much business is done? Where are the forests located? Just give me all the information you have on this subject, if you please."

Bob has opened up a mighty interesting topic, for Montana ranks high as a lumbering State, as well as in mining and agriculture. Missoula is one of the largest lumbering centers between the Twin Cities and the coast, having an output of between one hundred and fifty million and two hundred million feet per year. Missoula is also the district headquarters for the United States forest service, and the State forest service. A cooperative State-Fed-

eral nursery for the production of between two and three millions of trees is located in Missoula.

Montana forests contain approximately fifty billion feet of timber, of which twenty-seven per cent is controlled by private individuals or companies; four per cent is owned by the State; and the remaining sixty-nine per cent is owned by the government. Three fourths of the total stand is in the nine counties of western Montana: Flathead, Granite, Lake, Lincoln, Mineral, Missoula, Powell, Ravalli, and Sanders.

This vast area of timberland has developed a huge lumbering industry. Moreover, the supply still available is sufficient for years to come, with the sawmills running at capacity, and if proper conservation measures are taken, the forests of Missoula and its vicinity never can yield less than their cut, since the annual growth in this region is now in excess of the combined output of the mills.

If Bob wants a job out that way he will probably be interested in knowing that manufacturers and distributors of forest products, together with forest administrative agencies, give employment to more than six thousand seven hundred of the State's population, with a pay roll of more than eight and a half million dollars. Two thirds of these wage earners are employed in actual milling or logging work; the remaining third have work in connection with the retail marketing of lumber or in the administration, protection, and improvement of the forest properties.

Bob will find some mighty big lumbering concerns located in Missoula and its vicinity. Some of these companies own their timberland and do their own logging, while others give contracts to private concerns to cut the timber and deliver the logs at certain designated points. Bonner, six miles east of Missoula, is another center of Montana lumber-manufacturing industry, the mills of this town delivering an output of almost half a million feet a day to meet the enormous lumber requirements of the Anaconda mines and smelters.

The lumberjacks may accuse us of neglecting them, but surely the homesteaders have no such cause for complaint. For the benefit of Sam S., of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who is a prospective settler, we are going to pass on some information which has come to us from the department of interior. "Can you tell me anything about a recent opening of public land on the Tule Lake Division of the Klamath Federal Irrigation Project, Oregon-California, Mr. North?" asks Sam.

We surely can. This opening took place on March 18th last, water being available for twenty-eight additional farm units beginning with the irrigation season of this year. Until June 18th, these units will be open to entry only by officers, soldiers, sailors, or

marines, who have served in the army or navy of the United States in the war with Germany, and have been honorably discharged or separated therefrom, or placed in the regular army or naval reserve. Applicants must be qualified, however, to make entry under the homestead laws and also possess the qualifications as to industry, experience, character, and capital required of all applicants for public land.

After June 18th, 1929, any units which remain unentered will be subject to entry by the general public. Application blanks may be obtained by addressing the Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.

Having taken care of the serious-minded hombres, such as lumberjacks and homesteaders, we are now going to turn our attention to Oscar W., of Wheeling, West Virginia, who confesses that he is trekking Westward to enjoy himself. "I want to spend my vacation out in some Western forest, Mr. North, where I can, and will, have to rough it. None of these wilderness jaunts de luxe for me. I'm keen for the honest-to-goodness thing, and have been advised to try the Wallowa National Forest out in Oregon. What information can you give me about this spot?"

We think Oscar has been directed to an ideal place for his plans. The Wallowa National Forest is situated in the extreme northeast corner of the State of Oregon. It has an area of nine hundred sixty-one thousand seven hundred and one acres. The Canyon of Snake River forms the eastern boundary of the State as well as of the forest. The southern portion of the forest is high and extremely rugged, containing four peaks nine thousand feet in elevation. The northern part is more plateaulike in character and bears an extensive stand of Western yellow pine.

Oscar will find that this region is

perhaps as little known as any mountainous area in Oregon, being frequented mostly by the hardy camper and mountaineer who like roughing it in a district of rugged and impressive mountains. The Wallowa country must be traveled on horseback, as there are few roads outside of the valleys, the La Grande-Enterprise and the Enterprise-Flora Highways being the principal routes.

Although I know that Oscar won't want to stop there, I will tell him that there is an extensive summer resort on private land at the south end of Wallowa Lake. Here cottages may be rented, and boats are available for fishing. Oscar will be interested in hearing, however, that from this spot a rough, steep trail extends some seven miles south to Aneroid Lake, where there are camping grounds and plenty of boating and fishing. If he wants to keep on exploring he can follow a trail

which leads from Aneroid Lake over the mountains south to the Cornucopia Mines and Halfway, within the Whitman Forest. At the higher elevations are a series of small but beautiful alpine lakes, stocked with trout and surrounded by majestic peaks, which can be quite easily reached by horseback or afoot.

But for sheer grandeur of scenery, high waterfalls, rugged, rock-walled canyons, and immense marble mountain peaks, intermingled with stretches of meadows and meandering streams, Oscar will find the trail trip up Hurricane Creek from Joseph the best in the forest.

Much to our regrets, we have not space here to say more, so we are sending Oscar an address from which he can obtain further information and maps of this region. If any of the rest of you *hombres* would like this address, just let us know.



### THE COYOTE GOES NORTH

THE coyote, whose cry in the desert seems to make the night only the more lonely to the traveler, and who figures in every writing of the West, has now appeared in northern and central Alaska. So vigorous and intensive have been its depredations there that it has aroused the special vigilance of the hunters of the Federal government.

Not content with the four-footed animals on which it usually preys, the coyote has turned its attention to the ptarmigan, and with such rapacity that now only an occasional bird of this species is to be seen where once flocks of thousands lived and flourished.

It is only within the last three years that the coyote has made its presence known and felt in the North, but it is so ferocious that it threatens to outstrip the wolf in the destruction of wild game. The government hunters have succeeded in decreasing the wolf packs which used to pursue the caribou to a negligible few, but the coyote continues to elude them and its skill and cunning in evading traps is almost uncanny.

# MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

**WARNING**—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

**CARLISLE, A. E.**—Please come home or write to Mother, care of this magazine.

**SHURM, NORMAN and FRED.**—My brother and father. Lived at one time in Sheffield, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by Mrs. Gladys Gowins, Route 2, East Canton, Ohio.

**CARTER, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.**—My father. Married Lillie Shephard at Harrisburg, Illinois, and later they separated. Last heard from in 1896. Information appreciated by Burl Carter Baker, 2412 West Brown Street, Alton, Illinois.

**SMITH, ORVAL D.**—Twenty-five years old. Was employed near Dean Lake, Ontario, in 1928. Information appreciated by G. L., care of this magazine.

**KEANE, DAN, and CONROY, MART.**—My foster father and uncle. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. I was born February 26, 1905, and adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Keane. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. T., care of this magazine.

**CHAMBERS, FLORENCE and LONZO.**—Mother and son. Lived in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with Lonzo's grandmother, Deloria Chambers. Left there twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by his aunt, Josie Usmiller, 1700 South Kelly Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

**MURPHY, TOMMY.**—Thirty-three years old. Last seen in 1905. Last heard of in Kansas City, in 1917. Information appreciated by his brother, William Murphy, Kenton Hotel, 33 Brewery, New York City.

**HESTER, R. F.**—Forty-eight years old. Six feet tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. In 1910 was in Fort Worth, Texas. Sometimes worked as a locomotive fireman. Last heard from in 1911, at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Please write to Jackie M., care of this magazine.

**TAYLOR, BURDINE, and wife, MARTHA.**—Left Missouri for Oklahoma, several years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Bessie Marlor, Route 11, Box 238C, Springfield, Missouri.

**PRESTON, ELZIE.**—Left Akins, Oklahoma, in 1901. Went from there to Kansas City, Missouri, and enlisted in the United States army. Served in the Philippines for three years. Discharged at San Francisco, California, in 1904, and has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by his brother, Leonard, 16½ South Main Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**LEES, FRED.**—Of Green River, Utah. Information appreciated by Dickey, care of this magazine.

**HADAWAY, J. T.**—We are holding letters for you at this office. Please write to Madge and Bablos, care of this magazine.

**SIS.**—Who advertised for Doc. We are holding letters at this office for you.

**L. P. H.**—Who advertised for Jerry B. We are holding a letter at this office for you.

**DeLOREY, EDWARD F.**—Please send for letter. Address Anna, care of this magazine.

**MURPHY, J. J.**—Please, send for letter. Address Patricia, care of this magazine.

**PEELER, JOHN A.**—Please send for letter. Address Bill, care of this magazine.

**SMITH, BILL.**—You were deceived. I do not love any one but you. Please come back or write to Leola, care of this magazine.

**R. W. I.**—Your letter from Highwood, Illinois, received. Mope says be sure and come quickly. Buck, care of this magazine.

**ED.**—Every one is worried about you. Please write to father at the old address in Wyoming, or to Dick, care of this magazine.

**ARNOLD, LATHAM.**—Last heard from in Anderson, South Carolina, five years ago. Information appreciated by J. H. Arnold, 2105½ Twenty-seventh Street, Ybor City, Tampa, Florida.

**VICTOR.**—All is well. Jackie is fine. Important news. Please write and give your address to Mother, care of this magazine.

**WILLIAMSON, GLENN.**—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, brown hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Buffalo, New York. Was working on a boat on one of the Great Lakes. Information appreciated by Red, care of this magazine.

**CARTER, ALICE.**—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in the spring of 1928. Information appreciated by HAPPY, care of this magazine.

**BROWNE, MARGARET.**—Last known address was 233 Englewood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. I have been in Panama and unable to get in touch with you. Please write to H. H. McAllister, care of Sheriff's Office, Downerville, California.

**WILLIAMS, ELLEN.**—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, twenty years ago. Mother and brother are dead, and father, James Thomas Williams, married a Miss Lydia Ann West. Information appreciated by E. M. Williams, care of Red Globe Transfer Co., 257 South Williams Street, Dayton, Ohio.

**LUCIEN, P. J.**—Last heard from in Spokane, Washington, in 1922. Have important news for you. Please write to Will H. D., care of this magazine.

**CONRADSON, CLARENCE.**—Last heard from at White Fish, Montana, in 1919. Please write to your sister, Bernice Galoupe Dorsey, care of this magazine.

**HAMDY, FLOYD.**—Last heard from in Texas. Please write to Texas Girl, care of this magazine.

**SCHWAB, JOHN G.**—Fifty years old. Last heard from at Malta, Montana, in 1921. Do you remember a stormy December night on a train leaving Great Falls? Please write to B. G. D., Box 115, Winifred, Montana.

**ENNIS, HARRY F.**—Last heard from in October, 1923. I have forgiven all and am willing to help you as ever. Please write to Amy A. Ennis, 3763 Brown Place, Detroit, Michigan.

**KING, JAMES EDWARD.**—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, five inches tall, red hair, and brown eyes. Left Kittery, Maine, in March, 1928. We do not expect young boy to live. Please come back or write to Ida, care of this magazine.

**HARRISON, CHARLES EDWARD.**—Fifty years old. Last heard from in Hot Springs, Arkansas, several years ago. Please write to your sister, Bellena, 4637A Delmar Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

**B., ROLAND M.**—Auto affair all O. K. You are welcome home, and your people are waiting for you. Please write to your Father and Mother, care of this magazine.

**CAMPBELL, MRS. GRACE.**—We are lonesome. Please write to James and Pal, 1207 South Santa Fe Street, Salina, Kansas.

**SIMONS, MRS. MARGARET.**—Last heard from in Belton, Texas, forty years ago. Information appreciated by I. L. Hollis, 1501 Avenue G, Lubbeck, Texas.

**BYERS, THEODORE.**—I met him in Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri. His home is in Canada, and he was discharged from the army in 1927. Last seen in November, 1927. Information appreciated by Albert Thomas, Sternberg General Hospital, Manila, Philippine Islands.

**WALTERS, ANNIE BELCHER.**—Left Dad Watson in May, 1924, for Boise, Idaho. Important news. We are still your friends, and need you. The same house is waiting for you. Please come back or write to Daddy Watson or Flora, 4088 South Acoma Street, Denver, Colorado.

**F.**—I saw the ad. What is Slicker's address? Am interested in Jerry. Please write to Peggy, care of this magazine.

**TROVIK, HANS.**—Last heard from eighteen years ago. Please write to your brother, Harold, care of this magazine.

**SNEE, JIM.**—Last heard from at Bokaway Beach, three years ago. Information appreciated by his friend, Edward Cavanagh, 1812 East Eighteenth Street, Brooklyn, New York.



**HAFFY, ANN ELIZABETH, and WILLIAM JOSEPH.**—Elizabeth is twenty years old and William nearly eighteen. Their parents were divorced when the children were very small. Information appreciated by their father's sister, Mrs. A. V. Blair, Route 3, Yuma, Arizona.

**LACEY, RALPH.**—A former member of the Eighteenth Battalion, Australian Expeditionary Forces. Last heard from at the Acher Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland, in 1922. Father died in July, 1928. Information appreciated by his brother, Barney Lacey-Levy, 21 Ewing Street, Milford, London, E. 3, England.

**O'DELL, PAUL J. or PERLE.**—Thirty-one years old. Five feet, six inches tall, blond hair, and blue eyes. Joined the marino corps at Toledo, Ohio, in 1916. Served on the U. S. S. "North Dakota" during the World War. Last known address was 167 East Eighty-ninth Street, New York City. Information appreciated by Jeanne Summit, 1734 East Nineteenth Street, Apartment 33, Cleveland, Ohio.

**BENNETT, JOHN FRANCIS BEVERLY.**—Last heard from in Toronto, Ontario. I am very ill and want to find you. Please write to your wife, Grace Doyle, care of this magazine.

J. M. P.—I am sorry. I love you and need you. Please come home or write to Peggy, care of this magazine.

**GILBERT, JOHN.**—Wherever you are, I want you to know that I have faith in you and trust you above every one else. I still love you and always will. I don't care what you have done, because I know you love me. Please make me happy by writing to Emma, care of this magazine.

**HELEN.**—I still love you, and want you to come back. Please write to your old sweetheart, Howard Roberts, care of this magazine.

**MENSCH, BILL.**—Six feet tall, brown hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Bestwater, Arkansas, seven years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. T. E. Sanders, 13 Maple Street, Collinsville, Oklahoma.

**McMANN, R. K.**—Sixty-five years old. Fair complexion and blue eyes. Formerly of Hazlehurst, Mississippi. Last heard from in Miami, Florida, in 1926. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Bettie Myers, 1115 Stokes Avenue, Houston, Texas.

**ROY, JOSEPH.**—French Canadian. Dark complexion and dark eyes. Left Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, Canada, thirty years ago, en route for the Crow's Nest gold fields. Information appreciated by his brother, care of this magazine.

**SMILEY, GEORGE.**—Do you remember the girl who went to Newton school, in Philadelphia, with you? Please write to Alleine Clark, 3712 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**SHOEMAKER, LAWRENCE.**—Twenty years old. Last seen near Ashfork, Arkansas, November 8, 1928. Information appreciated by James F. Smith, Russell, Minnesota.

**DAVIS, HOMER G.**—Last heard from in Bristol, Oklahoma, three years ago. Information appreciated by J. W. Davis, Route 3, Barnard, Minnesota.

**CODDINGTON, HARRY, or PAUL SANFORD.**—Have important news about your mother. Please write to W. E. Harten, 507 Gradwell Street, Elmira, New York.

**SPECIAL NOTICE.**—I am a young man, between twenty-one and twenty-five years old, five feet ten inches tall, brown eyes and hair. I am suffering from loss of memory and know nothing that happened before January 29, 1929. Information from any one who thinks he can help me will be appreciated by Jack Roberts, Box 208, Lyman, Mississippi.

**HENSLEY, JOHN.**—Twenty-five years old. Formerly of Cincinnati, Ohio. A barber. Last seen in Ionia, Michigan, in 1924. Information appreciated by his old buddy, Glen H. Crossett, Detroit, Michigan.

**STANTON, JOHN HENRY.**—Five feet eight inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Left Priceburg, Pennsylvania, in April, 1906. Last heard from in New York City, in 1908. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. John Stanton, 804 North Market Street, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

**COX, JOHN J.**—Thirty-eight years old. Five feet eight inches tall, black hair, and hazel eyes. Plumber. We need you. Please write to X., care of this magazine.

**PENMAN, ROBERT.**—Twenty-seven years old. Last heard from in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1928. Was in Vancouver three years ago. Information appreciated by James Penman, Box 119, Michel, British Columbia, Canada.

**STONER, or TURNER, TIM.**—I can explain those old misunderstandings. I was only fifteen, and have always been sorry for any trouble caused you. Please write to M. H., care of this magazine.

**KAESTNER, GEORGE.**—Father of Georgiana Kaestner. Lived in High Street, Brooklyn, New York, twenty years ago. Please write to your Grandchildren, care of this magazine.

**GORE, WILLIAM.**—About forty-five years old. Tall and dark. Was in Bainbridge, Georgia, in October, 1927, looking for his daughter. Last heard of in Atlanta, Georgia. Please write to your daughter, Olga Louise, 1217 St. Louis Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas.

**BERG, MRS. CLARA.**—Lived at Lantana, Florida, in 1926. The September storm destroyed your home. A friend is holding what is left of your furniture for you. Please write to Neighbor, care of this magazine.

**WOOD, BERT.**—Married Bessie Rogers, about seventeen years ago. Believed to be in Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by his daughter, Juanita Alberta, care of this magazine.

**McPEAK, R. J.**—Twenty-four years old. Six feet two inches tall, black eyes and hair. Last heard from in Billings, Montana, in July, 1928. Father is very ill. Information appreciated by Joe McPeak, 525½ East Waters Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**FLYNN, IRA B.**—Black hair and has a scar on his upper lip. Last seen in Independence, Oregon, in September, 1928. Information appreciated by his son, Stanley, Box 77, Salem, Oregon.

**JOHNSON, J. C.**—Everything is all right at home. Mamma is very worried about you. Please write to Dad, care of this magazine.

**WERNET, or HENRICHS, WILLIAM.**—Twenty-six years old. Last heard from in Pewaukee, Wisconsin. Believed to be in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by G. E. Wernet, 3209 South Fifty-third Avenue, Cicero, Illinois.

**WINNE, FRED.**—Last heard from in Wallace, Idaho. Information appreciated by Elsie Winne, Gaylord, Michigan.

**CRAIG, BENNIE.**—Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1926. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. I. L. Craig, Coleman, Texas.

**MICUE, ARTHUR.**—Member of the Seventh United States Cavalry, stationed along the Mexican border in 1917. Information appreciated by Sister Mary, care of this magazine.

**BUSH, ELZIE.**—Thirty-five years old. Tall and has blue eyes. Born at Belton, Texas. Lived for some time at Mount Calm, Texas. When last heard from was leaving Roswell, New Mexico, for California. Your stepfather is dead, and your mother needs you. Please write to W. D. C., care of this magazine.

**ROSS, JOE.**—Information appreciated by L., care of this magazine.

**BROWN, JOHN JAMES OLIVER.**—Born in Pittsburg, Kansas. Father's name was Charles Seymour Brown, and mother's name was Tillie Johnson. Moved from Kansas in 1883. Please write to Charles W. Brown, Black Diamond, Washington.

**AKINS, ELLIS.**—Lived at Foss, Oklahoma, and moved from there to Chickasha, Oklahoma. Please write to Charles W. Brown, Black Diamond, Washington.

**BROWN, HOMER.**—Born in Pittsburg, Kansas. Please write to Charles W. Brown, Black Diamond, Washington.

**McKENNA, JAMES.**—Left home in May, 1923. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Please write to your sister, Clem, 34 Vivian Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

**GRIFFITH, REVEREND WALTER R.**—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Please write to E. D. Archer, Papillion, Nebraska.

**DONNELLY, DOROTHY.**—Last heard from in Santa Barbara, California. Please write to Irwin Battelle, Buena Park, California.

**GEORGE, or ST. GEORGE, HULDY.**—Lived in O'Neill, Nebraska, forty-five years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary Whetstone, 638 Klamath Street, Denver, Colorado.

**RYCKMAN, HURON ALDRED.**—Joined a ranch show in August, 1926, and left it in Washington. Later heard from in Texas. In 1927 was in Oklahoma. Six feet two inches tall, brown eyes and hair. Information appreciated by his sister, Pearl, care of this magazine.

**HAYNES, HUGH.**—Forty years old. Last heard from in New York City, in July, 1925. Information appreciated by Saunders, care of this magazine.

**ENFRED, ALLDREN.**—Last heard from in 1899. Information appreciated by an old friend, Lillian M. Rice, 900 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**CHRISMAN, JACK.**—Medium height, dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in New Boston, Texas. Information appreciated by his sister, Ida Mae Chrisman, Box 92, Holbrook, Nebraska.

**FLESCHÉ, EDWIN.**—Six feet tall, dark hair, and gray eyes. Last heard from in St. Paul, Minnesota. Information appreciated by his brother, Roy Flesché, Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

**CASH, CLAUDE C.**—Five feet nine inches tall, light hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Base Hospital 114, A. E. F., ten years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. Lillian Olson, 326 East Broadway, Butte, Montana.

**BRINGANCE, CLYDE.**—Nineteen years old. Five feet eleven inches tall, brown eyes, and dark-brown hair. Last heard from aboard the S. S. "Gulf Light," Gulf Refining Co. ship. Please write to J. C. Penz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

**SAFFREED, LEO.**—Twenty-one years old. Last seen in Corpus Christi, Texas. Last heard from in Kingsville, Texas. Please write to your old pal, J. C. Penz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

**S. R. R.**—Have paid V. News for you. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

**WOLFF, FRANZ EMIL.**—Came from the Dominican Republic in 1923, to go to St. Olaf College, at Northfield, Minnesota. Last heard from in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Please write to your pal, Socorro Reventos, 10 West Sixty-fifth Street, New York City.

**TEMPLE, WILLIAM.**—Last heard from in Stockton, California, in 1921. Please write to your son, News, from Great Lakes, care of this magazine.

**BARKER, ROBERT and CHARLES.**—Have missed you both. Mother is still in Akron. Please write to Dorothy Keller, Waukegan, Illinois.

**SNYDER, or GRIFFITH, WARREN FRED.**—Forty-three years old. Five feet eight inches tall, gray eyes, and ruddy complexion. Last heard from in New York City, in November, 1928, at which time he was working as cabin steward on a fruit freighter. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Warren Snyder, R. F. D. 1, Ladbroke, Pennsylvania.

**NOTICE.**—Joseph B. Taylor was born in North Ireland, and died in California. His wife later married John Taylor, son of Daniel Taylor, who came to California from Illinois in 1849. Joseph B. Taylor had a daughter, who is believed to be living near Stockton, California. Information appreciated by E. Walbring, Box 34, Camp Point, Illinois.

**LAUMAN.**—For four years we have been looking for you. Please write to your heartbroken parents, George Christianson, 705 South Ash Street, Crookston, Minnesota.

**WHITE, JOHN.**—Fifty years old. Left Wauchula, Florida, in June, 1927. Please write to your old pal, L. F. Owen, Wauchula, Florida.

**BROWN, GARLAND L.**—Last heard from in Maud, Oklahoma. Please write to your old pal, Alvie E. Blackman, Berger, Texas.

**OLSON, JOHN EDWIN.**—Last heard from at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in 1918. Please write to your brother, Herbert Olson, 2404 Twelfth Street, Two Rivers, Wisconsin.

**STALLING, MRS. K. C., nee BERTIE FORMAN.**—When last heard from was running a beauty parlor in Eastland, Texas. Information appreciated by E. M. S., care of this magazine.

**SANDERS, ERNEST BAXTER.**—Thirty-four years old. Five feet six inches tall, brown hair, and gray eyes. Last heard from in Douglas, Georgia, in 1926. His mother is very worried and needs him. Information appreciated by Lettie Sanders, Dewy Rose, Georgia.

**SMITH, MARION T.**—Last seen near Tremont, Indiana, March 10, 1929. Please write to your father, Milton H. Smith, Chesterton, Indiana.

**HALL, J. W., SR. and JR., and EARL HALL.**—My father separated from my mother twenty-two years ago, taking with him my two brothers, J. W., Jr., who was born in 1896, and Earl, who was born in 1903. Information appreciated by Goldie, care of this magazine.

**ATTENTION.**—Members of the Seventh Cavalry, Troop B, Fort Bliss, Texas. Please write to Smitty, care of this magazine.

**HERBERT, HARRY P.**—Last heard from in the Philippine Islands. Please write to your pal, Smitty, care of this magazine.

**LLOYD, FRANK.**—Evelyn's husband is dead, and we need you. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Gault Williams, Newport, Arkansas.

**PINKSTON, ROBERT.**—Formerly of Fort Smith and Van Buren, Arkansas. Last heard from en route to Detroit, Michigan. Please write to J. V. N., care of this magazine.

**HENDERSON, SAMMY.**—Eleven years old. I am at the Alderson place. Please come home to your mother, or write to Irene Henderson, Route 1, Locksburg, Arkansas.

**HENDERSON, S. J.**—Forty-nine years old. Blond hair and ruddy complexion. Left home in August, 1928. Last heard from in Alton, Texas, in February, 1929. Information appreciated by Mrs. Irene Henderson, Route 1, Locksburg, Arkansas.

**BURKS, ROSE.**—Very important. Information appreciated by Burdle G., care of this magazine.

**MURPHY, MARY.**—Formerly of Crescent, Bahany County, Dublin, Ireland. Heard from at 56 Birch Street, Boston, Massachusetts, and later in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Information appreciated by her cousin, J. Kelley, 102A Westbourne Grove, London, W., England.

**MCLENNEN, WILLIAM.**—Fifty-five years old. A blacksmith and ex-railroad man. Last heard from at Ratio, Arkansas. Information appreciated by his cousin, Hiesie Wilson, Blytheville, Arkansas.

**GARRETT, BERTIS.**—Twenty-four years old. Last heard from in Amory, Mississippi, in 1928. Information appreciated by Hiesie Wilson, Blytheville, Arkansas.

**WEAVER, MRS. CLAIRE.**—Thirty-nine years old. Weighs about one hundred and twenty pounds. May be employed as a maid. Last heard from in Beaumont, Texas, in August, 1927. Information appreciated by L. B., care of this magazine.

**NEWTON, LUCY CAROLINE.**—Formerly of Camden, New Jersey. Will her relatives please communicate with Mrs. Edith Edwards, 240 Otis Street, West Newton, Massachusetts?

**C. E. H.**—I forgive you. Please write to Edna, care of this magazine.

**MAPES, or SWEET, FLOYD.**—I am free to go anywhere. Please write to your old friend, S. Shaw, care of this magazine.

**HARRY.**—We want you and need you. Please write to the same address or to Doris and Laura, care of this magazine.

**HOLMS, GEORGE C.**—At one time a salesman for the Wildroot Co., Buffalo, New York. Last known address was the Venetian Hotel, Miami, Florida. Do you remember the trip you took in January, 1927? Please write to X. Y. Z., care of this magazine.

**ALLEN, FRANK POWELL.**—Twenty-two years old. Five feet ten inches tall, dark hair, and gray eyes. Last heard from in Temple, Texas, in July, 1925. An auto mechanic. Information appreciated by Father and Mother, care of this magazine.

**A. E. C.**—I am going home this summer. Please send your address. All O. K. Write to Mother, care of this magazine.

**SMITH, DORA.**—Believed to have been placed in an orphan's home in Hot Springs, Arkansas, nineteen years ago. Information appreciated by an uncle, Bradley Smith, Box 162, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

**CLARK, BETTY.**—Last heard from in Mount Shasta City, California, in 1925. Information appreciated by Al, care of this magazine.

**MAHSING, WILHELM REINHOLD.**—Fifty years old. A metallurgist. Formerly of Riga, Latvia. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1914. Information appreciated by his sister, Don R., care of this magazine.

**SMITH, HAPPY.**—Everything is all right. Please write as soon as possible to Mrs. Ethel Nothardt, 126 North Dale Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

**KITTLE, FRANK MARION.**—Left Waterford, Michigan, March 25, 1928. Mother is ill. Information appreciated by F. I. K., care of this magazine.

**STONE, RUSSELL.**—A seaman. Last heard from on a freight vessel leaving Holland. Information appreciated by his niece, Florence Bagger, East Smith Road, Medina, Ohio.

**GENTRY, WILLIAM.**—Fifteen years old. Last heard from in Nashville, Tennessee, in the fall of 1928. Please write to Willie, care of this magazine.

**HARRY.**—I am still in Texas at your home. Please write to us; we are worried. Everything will be all right. Fred, care of this magazine.

**RICHARDSON, JACK.**—Formerly of Akron, Ohio. Please write to Dad, 121 Tenth Street, Toledo, Ohio.

**B. WILLIAM JOSEPH.**—I am very worried about you. Please write to your wife, Winifred H. B., care of this magazine.

**L. P. H.**—Who advertised for Jerry B. We have news for you. Please send your address.

**DELOREY, EDWARD F.**—We are holding a letter at this office for you. Please write to Anna, care of this magazine.

**COONEY, LESLIE.**—Who advertised for Mary Craig Cooney. We are holding letters at this office for you. Please send for them.

**GREEN, JAMES F.**—Please write to your old pal, Joe, 209 Front Street, East, Toronto 2, Ontario, Canada.

**BRADFORD, BARBARA.**—Am waiting. Still love you. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to John F. W., care of this magazine.

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

## RUSTLER'S ROCK

*By David Manning*

A rattling outdoor tale. Get in at the start and you'll surely hang on till the finish. You will remember Manning as author of "Ronicky Doone's Reward," etc.

## ONE WAY RIVER

*By Reginald C. Barker*

A swiftly moving tale of the untrodden country where, against the mighty background of Nature's grandeur, men show up in their true measurements.

## SETTERS NEVER QUIT

*By Seth Ranger*

They say that setters never quit. Perhaps that's one reason why men like them.

Also Features by

George Gilbert  
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Roland Krebs  
And Others

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At All News Stands

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## THE CELL HOUSE MYSTERY

*By Bryan Irvine*

With horror, he watched the thing he loved—broken, pitiful—ground down by the wheels of hate and spite.

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*By John D. Swain*

They were failures in the eyes of the world—one a hard-boiled crook, the other a pious man—but they came together in a strange way.

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*By Charlotte Dockstader*

He offered her pearls, but the loud voice of conscience told her that they would strangle her.

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Albert William Stone  
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On the Stands Now

# Folks! it's really TRUE

On July 2nd, my husband met with his accident

—On July 22nd, I received

## \$10,000.

and accumulations, and all my husband paid for his policy was less than **3¢ A Day**

*Thank God, my husband didn't laugh at the idea of accident and sickness insurance*

"When, on January 18, my husband took out a North American Accident Insurance Co. policy, he did not dream that he would meet with a fatal accident in a few months. Yet we had seen so many friends and neighbors hurt or sick, with no money to help them when they needed it most, that my husband took no chances.

*The Premium for a Whole Year's Protection Against Accident and Sickness Costs Only \$10*

"It might have been different if the insurance cost a lot, but a friend had told us about the wonderful policy he had taken out with the North American Accident Insurance Company, which cost less than 3¢ a day—and which protects you for a whole year. My husband said 'Why this policy is only the price of a newspaper every day, yet look what it gives you'—\$10,000 for accidental loss of life, hands, feet, or eyesight—\$25.00 weekly for stated accidents and sickness—and it pays Doctors' bills, gives hospital benefits and emergency relief benefits. 'Every man,' my husband said, 'owes it to himself and his family to take out a policy.'

*How True Those Words Have Proven To Be*

"I don't know what would have happened to me and the children, if my husband had not wisely taken out a North American Accident Insurance Co. policy. We would have had to depend upon charity, for what we had saved would have gone quickly. But this wonderful policy protected us in our hour of need. As soon as I sent the proofs of my husband's terrible accident to the Company, I received a check, which amounted to \$10,000 with accumulations. A representative called the very next day and gave me the full sum."

*No One Is Safe—Are You Prepared If Accident or Sickness Strikes You?*

There is no way to prevent accident or sickness. No one is safe—You may be next. Supposing you became suddenly ill—could you continue in your job? What if you had lobar pneumonia, an appendicitis operation, or any of the many common ills covered in this policy—wouldn't you rest easier, convalesce more quickly if you knew that this Company stood ready to pay you \$25.00 weekly, or take care of Doctors' bills, hospital benefit, emergency benefit, and other liberal benefits?

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Can you say neither will happen to you?*

Then don't delay another day. Protect yourself by insuring in the largest and oldest exclusive accident insurance Company in America. Send the coupon **NOW** for complete information about our new \$10. Premier \$10,000. Policy—and protect your family the way the Goold family was protected.

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**AGENTS Wanted for New Territory**



Actual photograph of Mrs. Dora Goold, of Brooklyn, New York, who tells you the true story, in this advertisement, of her experience receiving insurance check for \$10,000 and accumulations for the accidental death of her husband, Julius Goold.

Entire **\$10** a Year  
Cost

No Dues No Assessments

**\$10,000**

Principal Sum

**\$10,000**

Loss of hands, feet or eyesight

**\$25 Weekly Benefits**

for stated Accidents or Sicknesses

**MEN AND WOMEN**

16 to 70 Years Accepted

**NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION**

This is a simple and understandable policy—without complicated or misleading clauses. You know exactly what every word means—and every word means exactly what it says.

**Oldest and largest exclusive Health and Accident Insurance Company in America**

Simply tear out and send the coupon, today, it may mean \$10,000 or \$25 weekly in case of accident or sickness and costs only \$10. a year. Send the coupon, now.

North American Accident Insurance Co. [of Chicago]  
309 Bonnell Building, Newark, New Jersey

GENTLEMEN:

At no cost to me, send details of the NEW \$10 Premier \$10,000 Policy which will insure me for a whole year.

Name .....

Address .....

City and State .....