# Western Story Magazine

Every Week

Sept. 14, 1929

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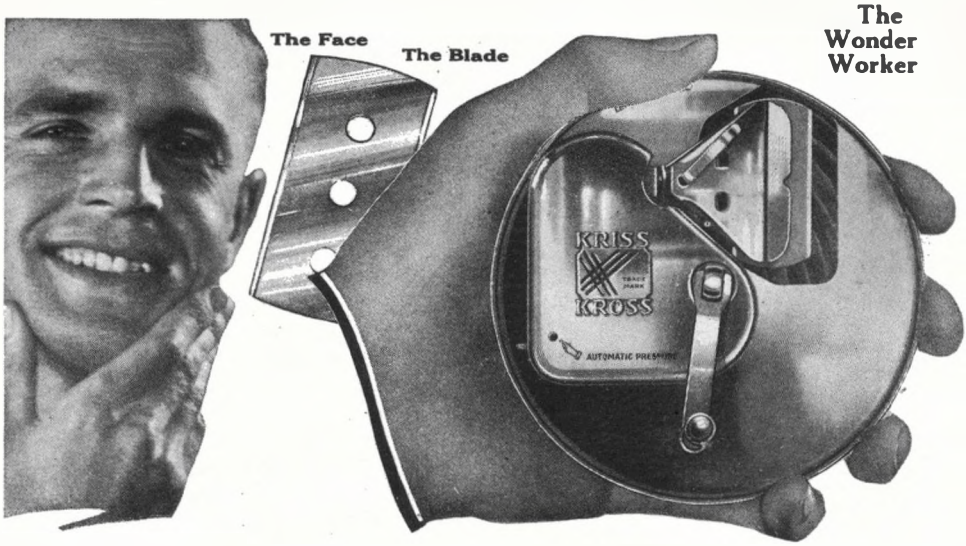
STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION


*Blindly he stumbled into the firelight to face a rifle from* VENGEANCE TRAIL *by* HOWARD E. MORGAN




# 365 Shaves
# With the Same Blade!
## —and Still Going Strong

THINK of it! 365 keen, cool shaves a year—and not one penny for blades during the whole time! That's what an amazing new shaving invention did for J. W. Starksbury of Oklahoma! And W. D. Carroll of Pennsylvania got *two* solid years of slick shaves out of an old blade that was just about worn out to begin with! No wonder experts everywhere are simply astonished!

KRISS-KROSS—the remarkable invention that makes such long-distance shave records possible—deserves to be called much more than a stropper. Rather it is a *super*-stropper or blade *rejuvenator*. Almost literally, it makes a new blade out of an old one every day—makes hundreds of keen, quick shaves blossom where only one grew before. Until you've seen KRISS-KROSS and tested its uncanny ingenuity, you'll never know how really sensational it is!

### MAGIC DIAGONAL STROKE

KRISS-KROSS employs the diagonal stroke, same as a barber uses. Never before has anyone captured the secret of reproducing this stroke automatically. Eight "lucky leather grooves" do the trick in 11 seconds with a precision it takes a master barber years to attain.

But that's not all. KRISS-KROSS embodies still another feature that has hitherto baffled mechanical reproduction. It strops from *heavy* to *light*. It's absolutely uncanny the way the strokes grow lighter and lighter until an adjustable, automatic jig flies up and notifies you that your blade is ready—*ready with the keenest cutting edge that steel can take!*

**Rhodes' KRISS KROSS**

**KRISS-KROSS CORP.**

**Dept. M-3294, 1418 Pendleton Ave., St. Louis, Mo.**

### NEW-TYPE RAZOR BLADE *FREE!*

To introduce KRISS-KROSS stropper, we are including this month free samples of a revolution in razor blade construction. Made to fit your present razor. Guaranteed to last longer and shave better than any other. Expect a new shaving sensation—KRISS-KROSS blades are made of a unique steel, made a new and better way.

### GET FREE OFFER!

Send for full information on these surprising new inventions today. KRISS-KROSS products are never sold in stores. You deal direct with me or my authorized representative. Write for illustrated description and full details of free razor blade offer. It's even more remarkable than I can tell you in this short space. Clip the coupon now. Mail it today.

## AGENTS—$30 A DAY

**Make big money with KRISS-KROSS. Giving away FREE razor blades boosts your profits amazingly. H. King made $66 in one day. N. C. Paige made $104 in 3 days. Others average $350 and up to $750 a month! SPARE-TIME workers, OFFICE and FACTORY men make $6-$12 extra a day showing KRISS-KROSS to friends and fellow employees. Get details at once. Check bottom of coupon and mail it tonight!**

**KRISS-KROSS CORPORATION,**
**Dept. M-3294, 1418 Pendleton Ave., St. Louis, Mo.**

Send me details of KRISS-KROSS Stropper. Also send free sample of your new type razor blade for..... Razor. (Fill in your make of razor.)

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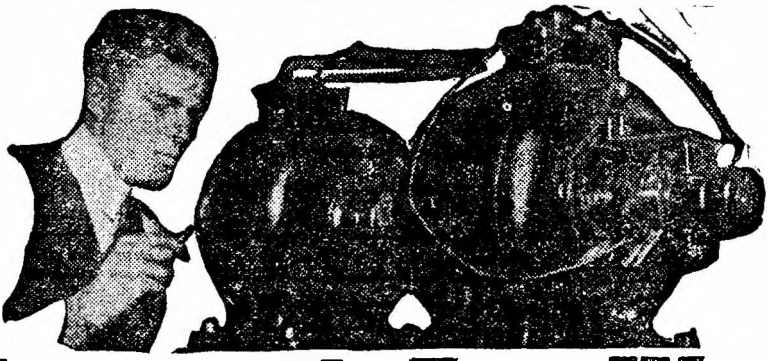

# Amazingly Easy Way to get into ELECTRICITY

**Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises, in a dull, hopeless job. Now . . . and . . . forever . . . say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me show you how to qualify for jobs leading to salaries of $50, $60 and up, a week, in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach, that makes you an electrical expert in 90 days! Getting into Electricity is far easier than you imagine!**

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### Prepare for Jobs Like These

Here are a few of hundreds of positions open to Coyne-trained men. Our free employment bureau gives you lifetime employment service.

| | |
|---|---|
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etc., etc. That's a glimpse of how we make you a master practical electrician in 90 days, teaching you far more than the average ordinary electrician ever knows and fitting you to step into jobs leading to big pay immediately after graduation. Here, in this world-famous *Parent school*—and nowhere else in the world—can you get such training!

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***No Printed Lessons***

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**COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL**
**H. C. LEWIS, President**
**500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. 69-45 Chicago, Ill.**

# WESTERN STORY
## MAGAZINE

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office

## EVERY WEEK



Vol. LXXXIX Contents for September 14, 1929 No. 5

ONE NOVEL



TWO SERIALS



FIVE SHORT STORIES



TWO ARTICLES



MISCELLANEOUS



DEPARTMENTS



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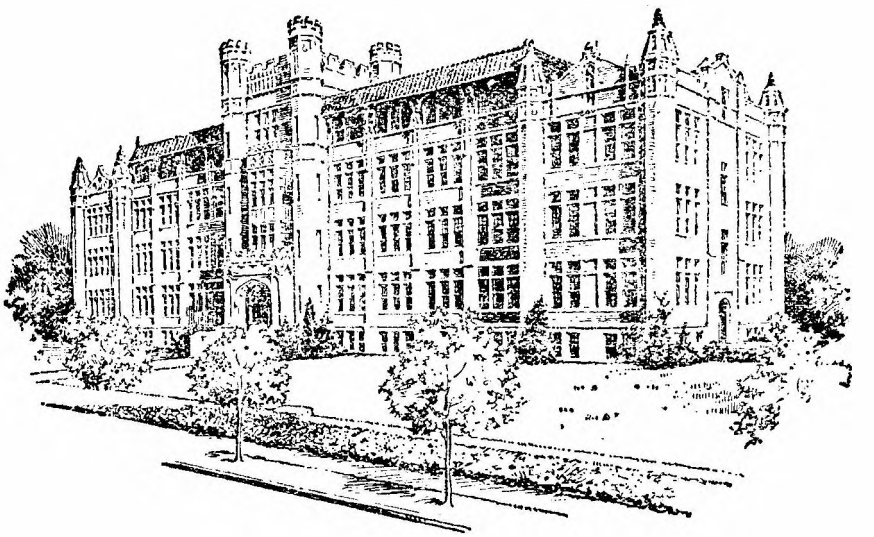

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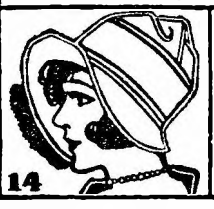


# $7500

## WORTH OF PRIZES GIVEN

## ?Can You Find the Twins?

There are twenty beautiful girls pictured here. To be sure. they all look alike. but, examine them closely. **TWO** and only **TWO** are exactly alike in both dress and features and all the rest are different. See if you can **FIND THE TWINS.**

**Clues!** The beautiful twins are dressed just alike—their hats and clothing are just the same. Some of the girls have beads on, others wear earrings—the hats on some have a checker-board pattern, etc. The twins, however, who are alike are dressed identically the same in every way—so, study each girl carefully and if you can **FIND THE TWINS** send the numbers of them to me at once. YOU may become the winner of a Buick Sedan or $1825.00 CASH MONEY, —without one cent of cost to you. I will give away ABSOLUTELY FREE, a new Buick 4-door Master Six Sedan and 9 other new Closed Cars, including 3 Coupes, 3 Sedans and 3 Coaches and the winners can have CASH MONEY instead of the automobiles if you prefer. 15 BIG FREE PRIZES will be given—totaling $7500.00 in CASH MONEY.

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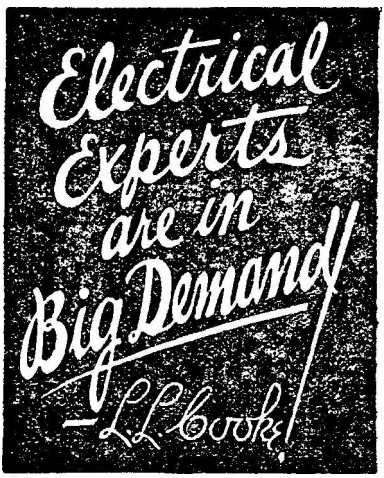
**You Cannot Lose!** Absolutely everyone who takes full advantage of this opportunity WILL BE REWARDED;—but HURRY—FIND THE TWINS (the two girls who are dressed just alike) and rush the numbers of them and your name and address to me today on a postal card or in a letter, and just say:—"Girls No. ..... and No. ..... are the **TWO** who are just alike and are therefore, **THE TWINS.** Please tell me how I can get this MAGNIFICENT Buick Sedan—or—$1825.00 CASH MONEY, without obligation or one penny of cost to me.

**C. A. LIST,** Dept. 64 537 South Dearborn St. **Chicago, Ill.**




# I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big-Pay Job!

L. L. COOKE
Chief Engineer

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make $60 to $100 — and do it easier — not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

## Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning

**Makes $700 in 24 Days in Radio**

"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over $700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from $10 to $40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
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**$70 to $80 a Week for Jacquot**

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**$20 a Day for Schreck**

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18 a week."
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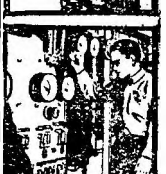

**$3500 A Year For Beckett**

"When I began with you I was just a common laborer, going from one job to another, working for anything I could get, and that wasn't much. Now my salary is $3,500 a year and the Company furnishes me with an automobile."
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## Earn $3,000 to $5,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary Electrician —the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man — the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—the Electrical Expert—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians—to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay $3,600 to $6,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs. Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

### Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $60 to $100 a week.

### No Extra Charge for Electrical Working Outfit

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give them to you—5 big complete working outfits, with tools, measuring instruments and a real electric motor.

### Satisfaction or Money Back

So sure am I that you can learn Electricity—so sure am I that after studying with me, you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will agree in writing to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me in my guarantee, stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution.

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5 big outfits given to you — no extra charge


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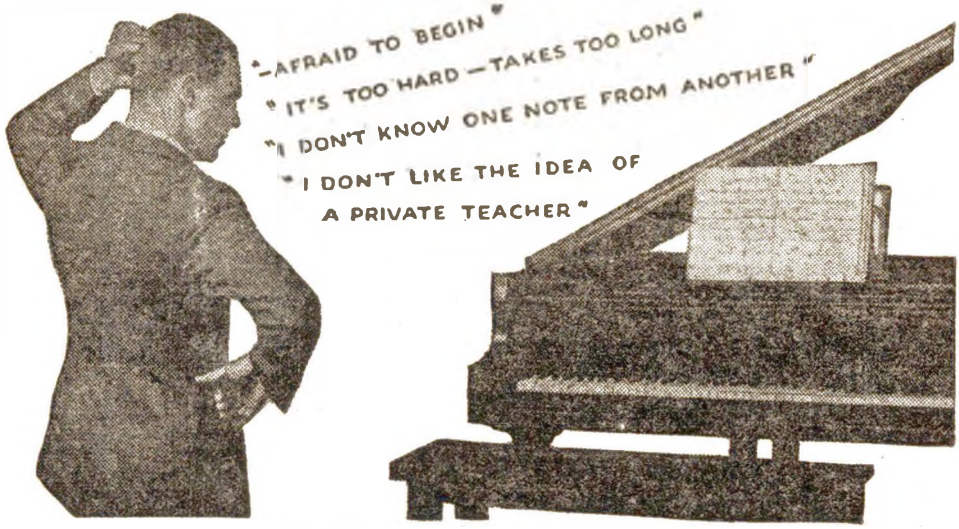
*The "Cooke" Trained Man is the Big Pay Man*

# No alibis *now* for not learning to play!




## *Easy as A-B-C to become a popular musician on any instrument this "no teacher" way*

WHY let your imagination run loose and keep you from becoming a popular musician? Haven't you heard that there is a way of learning to play your favorite instrument in a few short months? Without taking lessons from a teacher! Without paying expensive fees! Without any tiresome technique or dry-as-dust exercises to struggle through—a way that has been vouched for by over a half-million people in all parts of the world!

The U. S. School of Music has completely removed all the difficulty, boredom and extravagance from music lessons. It has made the reading and playing of music so downright simple that you don't have to know one note from another to begin.

### It's *So* Easy!

Your own home is your studio. The lessons come to you by mail. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, and all music you need.

You study with a smile. For instead of just scales you learn to play real tunes from actual notes right from the very first lesson on. And you're never in hot water. First you are *told* how a thing is done, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could make it clearer or easier.

### "Goodbye Blues"

Sooner than you realize you will be bringing cheer to the folks at home with your playing. Gradually you gain confidence and professional expression. Then parties, popularity, orchestra work follow in short order. You'll know how good it feels to be out of the wallflower class and into the whirl of things . . . to be able to provide musical enjoyment for others whenever you are called upon.

The abundance of joys that music can bring into anyone's life is now yours to share. Let the time-proven and tested U. S. School home-study method help you to increased pleasure and financial gain. Bear in mind no matter which instrument you select—the cost of learning in each case will average the same — *just a few cents a day!*

### Pick Your Instrument

| | |
|---|---|
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| Organ | 'Cello |
| Violin | Sight Singing |
| Drums and Traps | Ukulele |
| Guitar | Hawaiian Steel Guitar |
| Mandolin | Clarinet |
| Harp | Flute |
| Cornet | Saxophone |

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Voice and Speech Culture
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Piano Accordion
Banjo (Plectrum, 5-String or Tenor)

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If you really want to learn to play—if new friends, good times, social popularity, and increased income appeal to you—take this opportunity to make your dreams come true. Now! Sign the coupon and send it before it's too late. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3599 Brunswick Building, New York City.

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

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# Vengeance Trail

## By Howard E. Morgan

**Author of "Western Taught," etc.**

### CHAPTER I.

THE FIGHT IN THE CABIN.

WITH effortless ease Anton Prevost stooped, lifted a huge limb which had fallen during the night just past, and, scarcely pausing in his swinging stride, tossed the heavy log into the underbrush at the side of the trail. A plump gray squirrel in an oak tree near by chattered its derision of this feat. A crow flapped on lazy wings overhead, squalling raucous insults. Laughing, "Anton the Glad" cupped his hands and imitated the black scandal monger so accurately that the bird turned aside and peered through the golden autumn thicket as though marveling that its brother should tarry down there in that open glade when a storm threatened.

And a storm was brewing. But Anton the Glad was scarcely aware of the black clouds that were gathering.

His keen ears missed the threat conveyed by the dismal soughing of the wind through the treetops, and his strong body joyously repelled the biting cold. Always was it like this. Always did this glad world in which he lived appear fair to Anton Prevost. For was he not soon to marry Ramee MacAdams, that fairest of all the fair ones in the entire Talking River district? And was he not young and strong, abundingly healthy, and possessed of his full share of this world's goods? Was not the luck of Anton Prevost a by-word throughout the Yukon? And that little cabin which was to house him and his bride in the spring, was it not nearly completed?

Of a surety were all of these things so. Therefore was Anton Prevost a happy man. And so he laughed this black morning as he swung on through

the dew-wet woods; laughed at the insulting gray squirrel; laughed at the dismal, croaking crow; laughed at the black clouds, at the wind that moaned like a thing in pain, recking not of the storm that was soon to cast its dark mantle upon him, erasing the smile from his lips, and smothering the glad light in his dark eyes, which looked sympathetically out upon that fair world in which he lived.

It was gray dawn. The little settlement of Talking River slept. Anton Prevost carried a double-edged ax over his shoulder, and he was bound for that little cabin on the opposite side of the town, which was to serve him and Ramee, that fair one, as a home after they were married.

Only one cabin among the thirty or more scattered buildings that made up the settlement of Talking River showed signs of life this dark morning. A smoke ribbon curled upward out of this cabin's stone chimney, to be whisked away by the hurrying wind as soon as it reached the tip of the peaked roof. The cabin with the smoke coming from its chimney was the home of David Estamet, the cripple. It was a very big cabin. The crippled man often accommodated lodgers for the night, there being no other hostelry in Talking River except the storeroom in the rear of Chandler MacAdams' store, which sometimes accommodated the chance wayfarer.

Anton Prevost was quite sure that no strangers had arrived of late; hence he concluded that his good friend David Estamet must have been taken during the night with one of his frequent sick spells, otherwise he would not be up and about so early. So Anton the Glad, his great heart ever inclined sympathetically toward all mankind, turned toward Estamet's cabin.

As he drew near it, the sound of a human groaning, came to the young trapper's ears above the sibilant moaning of the wind through the trees. The smile vanished from Prevost's face. He hurried his step. Then, as he drew still nearer, other sounds mingled with the groans. A man's harsh voice, low-pitched, angry. Anton broke into a run. He pushed through the half-open door into Estamet's cabin. For a breath, then, he stood, aghast at what he saw.

The cripple, a thin, young man with an old face, lay flat upon his back on his little bunk; he was struggling weakly, futilely, in the grip of a big black-whiskered man, who bent over him, pinning his body upon the bunk, long fingers locked at his throat.

For a single instant Anton Prevost hesitated. This hesitation was not due to a question of the reason for the unequal battle which waged before his astounded eyes. It was downright astonishment that made him hesitate. That any man should seek to harm David Estamet was a thing beyond his comprehension. For no more harmless individual than that kindly cripple ever lived.

In a single stride, Anton crossed the space intervening between him and the bunk on which Estamet lay. Swift as the darting head of a weasel, the young Frenchman's arm shot out, locked beneath the stranger's chin, and jerked it strongly up and backward. No ordinary man could surpass Anton Prevost in a feat of strength of any kind. The stranger's head snapped backward with a cracking sound. His grip at the cripple's throat gave way. With a gasping cough the big man stumbled backward. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Anton Prevost's angry face; then, without an instant's hesitation, he struck out swiftly with his clubbed fist.

The blow was well placed and the stranger judged his distance admirably; but, moving his head almost imperceptibly, Anton Prevost avoided that short-armed, vicious blow. Then, the

young Frenchman's strong teeth gritted harshly together. He took a quick step forward, and, ignoring the ax which still hung loosely in his left hand, he struck out with his fist. The short jabbing blow landed with crushing force fair on the point of the stranger's bearded chin.

The result of that blow would have surprised one who did not know Anton Prevost and the mighty strength that was his. Neither the gasping cripple on the bunk nor Anton himself was surprised, however, when the stranger crashed against the log wall, and, with a whimpering sigh, collapsed upon the dirt floor like a toy balloon suddenly deflated by the prick of a knife tip.

With only a glance at the huddled shape on the floor, Prevost dropped on his knees beside David Estamet's bunk. The cripple touched his aching throat with his talonlike fingers, but his dark eyes were bright and a half smile twitched across his thin face.

"That brute!" Anton Prevost muttered angrily. "Who is he, David? Why——"

The cripple shook his head violently as though to clear away a certain dizziness that blurred his vision. "Lascelles," he finally gasped, "'Black Jean' Lascelles! He accused me of stealing the gold that he carried in a chamois bag about his waist. When I denied it, he struck me. Perhaps he would have killed me——"

"Lascelles," the young trapper said. "Lascelles," he repeated. He scowled. The name was vaguely familiar. For some reason—at the moment it escaped him—the name had an unpleasant memory.

"He arrived late last night," David Estamet was saying, "and begged that I give him shelter from the storm. There was, of course, no reason why I should not do so. Black Jean Lascelles is a rich man, and, although strange stories have been told about him and the manner in which he acquired his great wealth, I could not very well refuse him. And, too—although you may not have noticed it, you glad one—it was raining last night and the wind was blowing. A very bad night for sure. And so, I took him in, gave him food, and my own bed to sleep upon. This morning he wakened me and, without the slightest preamble, accused me of stealing his belt which, he said, had been well filled with gold dust. But I had not so much as seen that belt. I——"

Abruptly, the cripple rose on one elbow. His lips moved, but he did not speak. Instead, he pointed to a dark spot beneath a chair on the opposite side of the room. Anton Prevost followed the cripple's gaze. At first he saw nothing; then, a slim, long object caught his attention. He sprang to his feet and picked up the object. It was a bag of chamois, and it was heavy with gold.

"It is his," the cripple said; "he threw his clothes over that chair last night."

Anton Prevost said nothing. He sat weighing the belt of gold in his hands as Black Jean Lascelles groaned and opened his eyes. With evident effort, the half-conscious man struggled to a sitting posture. He blinked rapidly several times, then a flush of color came into his cheeks and his pale-blue eyes flickered furtively here and there, finally resting on the belt of gold in Prevost's hands. With fingers that trembled slightly, "Lascelles the Ugly," touched the corner of his mouth, from which a tiny rivulet of red trickled down along his chin. His pale eyes turned on David Estamet.

"So, you little thief," he muttered, "decided you hadn't better try to get away with it, eh? You—you——"

Anton Prevost quickly got to his feet. With a single step he fronted Lascelles. He grasped the collar of Lascelles'

mackinaw shirt, and with a single surging heave, lifted the big man to his feet. He relinquished his grip almost immediately, but for a long minute stood there, his flashing black eyes looking deep into Lascelles' shifting blue ones.

Finally, Anton Prevost spoke: "You are, I hear, a rich man, m'sieu'," he said; "but wealth means little in this great Northland. It is the right, not the might that comes with wealth, that rules here. You accused my friend, David Estamet, wrongly. You struck him. Perhaps you would have killed him had I not arrived when I did. You deserve to be punished for these things. Perhaps you have been punished enough! Perhaps not! But, I am always inclined to charity, m'sieu'. Among my friends I am known as Anton the Glad. Always I laugh. When other men weep and cry out in distress, I, Anton Prevost, laugh. But just now, M'sieu' Lascelles, there is no laughter in Anton Prevost's heart. There is naught but a great anger there. For, I do not like you, M'sieu' Black Jean Lascelles. There is something in my heart that tells me you are an evil thing, and that I should crush you beneath my heel—so!"

Black Jean Lascelles straightened, with a gusty intake of the breath. Physically, he was a big man and he was well known as a terrible fighter. He knew his own great strength. But as he stood there looking into Anton Prevost's dark face and flashing black eyes, for perhaps the first time in his life he found a hint of fear taking root down in his cruel heart, where there never before had been fear of any living thing. Despite his rugged strength and skill, he knew beyond all doubt that he would be as a child in that young Frenchman's mighty hands. So he shrugged and essayed a smile.

"Where did you get it?" he asked in a voice that he tried hard to modulate to a matter-of-fact tone.

Anton Prevost pointed to the chair across the room. He thrust the bag of gold into Lascelles' hand. "Go," he said, almost fiercely, "go quick. Do not tarry, I beg of you, for the very sight of you, m'sieu', fills me with the desire to kill. Go, before this madness gets beyond my control!"

Strange as the young Frenchman's words sounded, they held the ring of tense reality. Without a word, Black Jean Lascelles caught up his pack from beside the door and started away. With his hand on the latch, however, he turned. Fumbling in his pocket, he produced a handful of silver. He balanced the coins in his open palm for a moment, then, with a sudden motion, threw them into David Estamet's face. As Anton Prevost sprang forward, Lascelles pulled the door shut behind him and, with a mocking laugh, hurried away.

## CHAPTER II.

### KILLER'S BULLET.

HAD it not been for David Estamet, Anton Prevost might possibly have committed murder. But as the raging Anton passed his bunk, the cripple reached out, wrapped his thin arms about his friend and clung tightly. Prevost attempted, gently but firmly, to free himself of the cripple's grip. But there was a desperate strength in those clawlike hands.

"No, no, Anton," David begged. "Think—think—stop and think!"

And Anton, perforce, did stop, and he did think. And, as the madness left him, he was filled with a great wonder, a sense of mystified dismay. What was the matter with him? What had come over him? Never in his life had he before been possessed with the desire to kill. Was there a hidden madness in his blood? But no, that was impossible. It was that man—that beast—with eyes the color of ice, and thick lips that grimaced but did not smile!

Yes, it was Black Jean Lascelles who was responsible. And why? True, the fellow had illtreated David. But he, Anton Prevost, had meted out punishment for the injustice to his friend. Ordinarily, that would have satisfied him. But this time it had not done so. There was some vague, intangible thing, some hidden memory, that caused him to hate Black Jean Lascelles.

All this Anton Prevost tried to explain to David. Much to his surprise, the cripple seemed instantly to understand.

"It is so with all living things, Anton, my friend," David said; "ever since the world began there have been great loves and great hates. Of late years, according to those many learned books I read, it appears that man is losing his capacity for love, and, by the same token, his capacity for hate. Life is becoming gentler. Love and hate have both become lessened in intensity. They have come to occupy the same channels in a man's mind, so that, in a single fleeting instant, we may both love and hate. With those of the great heart and the mighty body—like yourself—hate is as a lost stream drifting lazily, unseen, unknown, far below the surface of your ever-pleasant thoughts. Always, you happy one, have your thoughts been love thoughts. I have known you since you were a boy and never have I seen you truly angry. But that stream of hate which is in you, somewhere, was bound some time to come to the surface. And if I'm not mistaken Black Jean Lascelles has brought this about."

Anton Prevost listened inattentively to the little cripple. David Estamet had been educated for the priesthood in the East; he was all too apt to speak of things with words that meant little to Anton, who had had to depend upon the local mission school for his knowledge of things beyond the borders of that great wilderness which was his homeland.

Finally, he nodded and smiled, and with a shrug of his broad shoulders picked up his ax and strode swiftly away.

It was not until he came within sight of the partly completed cabin on the outskirts of the settlement that the accustomed smile replaced the scowl that sat so unfamiliarly upon his handsome face. The storm had not yet broken; the sky was filled with rolling black clouds and it was almost as dark as night. For the first time since he had left his own cabin early that morning, Anton the Glad took note of the promised storm. The scowl returned as he followed a swift-moving black cloud across the sky. There was something about the lowering heavens that reminded him of Black Jean Lascelles. There was something vaguely imperious about that threatening sky. There was something imperious, too, about Lascelles' roughly handsome face. Although the stories he had heard about the man were vague, Anton knew, somehow, that Lascelles was evil—like this storm that was due to break any moment. What was there that was good in a storm like this? It would rain and blow and be bitterly cold. The rain was not necessary. There was plenty of water in the streams. The wind and the cold brought only discomfort.

With an effort, Anton brought his thoughts back to the present and the business in hand. He had come to work on this little cabin which was to be his and Ramee's home. But, if the storm developed according to its present promise, it would be impossible to-day to toil at that happy task.

He had about decided to go away, when the rustle of quick feet in the leaves behind him caused him to turn. He caught a glimpse of a slim figure clad in a gay red mackinaw, then, two

round arms locked about his neck and clung tightly. With a glad cry he caught the clinging form, which had attacked him in such pleasant fashion, in his arms, and reached for the upturned face. But, almost instantly, he sensed that there was something wrong. For a long minute the girl clung to him almost fiercely. Then something very like a sob came from her as he set her down.

Ramee MacAdams was not the crying type. No one knew this better than Anton Prevost. So when he looked down into his loved one's white face there was a real concern in his questioning eyes. *"Chérie,"* he cried, "what is it?"

A smile flashed and was gone. "Nothing, *mon ami,*" she said. "Why do you look at me so queerly?"

Anton did not at once reply. This girl who was to be his wife did not lie to him. Never had there been secrets between them. But, she was not telling the truth now. Of this he was certain. Her cheeks—usually rosy with health—were gray and drawn; there were red splotches under her eyes, too, as though she had been crying. With a quick motion he caught her in his arms and held her tight.

"Tell me," he commanded. "You are in trouble, my dear one. Tell Anton. *Chérie,* you know that I am yours to command."

"But it is not that. It——" She hesitated. "It nothing, Anton," she went on, in a voice that trembled slightly. "Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!" Despite this positive statement, her shoulders drooped in evident dejection.

Anton Prevost was puzzled and vaguely angry. "Perhaps it is," he began doubtfully, "that you have found you do not love me? Perhaps——"

"No, no, no, no, Anton!" she cried, in quick staccato gasps, just a hint of hysteria in her eyes. She turned within the circle of his arms and beat upon his breast with her tiny hands. "No, no," she repeated, "you know, my Anton, that I love you more than anything in the world."

Anton Prevost sighed softly. He had been foolish to raise such a stupid question. He knew she loved him. But there was something wrong. "Perhaps you do not feel well?" he ventured, knowing even as he spoke that this was but another foolish statement.

Her quick agreement, therefore, astonished him. "Yes, that is it," she said quickly, "I—I am not well, Anton. Come, let us go back. It is going to rain."

And rain it did. In a single instant it seemed as though the sky had burst asunder and poured its long pent-up wrath upon the helpless earth in a stifling deluge of icy water.

Always before Anton the Glad had loved the rain. Like a healthy youngster he would laugh. But to-day, it was, somehow, different. Huge raindrops slapped coldly against his cheeks. He shivered and drew the white-faced girl close, covering her shoulders with part of his heavy mackinaw. Then, presaged by those first huge drops which slanted toward the earth like shafts of liquid silver, the storm broke in a drenching downpour. Huddled close on the narrow trail, the man and the girl trudged through the scant thicket toward the settlement. Leaves, loosed from their insecure moorings by the wind and rain, whisked by them and whirled as though in flight before some wicked monster along the windy pathway before them. Their way led them into the very face of the storm. Heads low, they hurried on, only a few feet of the pathway directly before them being visible to their eyes. The wind roared and whistled through the treetops, and pounded their drenched bodies as though possessed with an insensate fury against those frail human

atoms who persisted in defying its breath-taking onslaught.

Neither heard the snapping report of a rifle above the crashing of the storm. And neither even glimpsed the rifleman; for, in response to that shot, Anton swung around, reached gropingly for support, then his knees crumpled under him and he fell.

## CHAPTER III.

### TROUBLE'S BLACK SHADOW.

WITH a cry, Ramee rushed to Anton and sought to support him. But even her strong young body was unequal to the task. She dropped on her knees beside the fallen man, and, as her eyes swept the rain-washed thicket on all sides, she sought, like a mothering bird, to hide Anton's body with her own. But there was no sign of that cowardly rifleman. Her wet hair dropped against her face and over her eyes. With a quick motion she brushed it aside, then sure that the intending killer had fled after his cowardly shot, she bent low in search of the injury which had with such painful suddenness transformed Anton into a helpless thing.

His head was smeared with blood. The rain washed onto his shut eyes and made little pools of water there. His face was white as death.

The girl's first horrified impression was that the bullet had pierced Anton's brain; but, more careful inspection showed that the bullet had ploughed a shallow furrow along the temple, cutting more deeply into the skull farther toward the back of his head. But not until she had placed her ear to the injured man's breast and there discovered a faint but definite pulse did she permit herself a breath of relief.

Anton struggled back to consciousness in response to the girl's frantic efforts to lift him. As is so often the case, the slim girl uncovered a reserve of strength which she had never guessed she possessed. She did not dare leave the injured man, for fear the cowardly attacker would return to finish the task he had begun. That trail where they were was seldom used; that little pathway had, in fact, been made by them on their happy journeys between the settlement and the unfinished cabin on the outskirts; hence, the possibility of any one's passing was remote, and the storm rendered this chance still more remote. Knowing that her lover was seriously injured, the girl's one thought was to get him to the MacAdams' cabin, where Chandler MacAdams—a man unusually skilled in matters of this sort—could be counted upon to fight off death's black shadow, which she was sure now hovered over her dear one.

Although Anton Prevost weighed over two hundred pounds and his dead weight would have presented a problem for a strong man, the frantic girl succeeded in lifting him. But her brief flare of desperate strength was not equal to the task of carrying him.

Perhaps it was the cold rain beating persistently upon him; or perhaps some hint of the girl's frenzied anxiety penetrated him; at any rate, Anton's sodden limbs finally became sentient. Assisted by the white-faced breathless girl, he managed to drag himself along.

At the first cabin they came to, strong hands relieved the exhausted girl of her burden. Then Anton relaxed and he dropped into the black void of unconsciousness.

Several hours later Anton fully returned to consciousness. Instantly, everything that had happened out there in the woods pictured itself in his mind's eye. He lay between white sheets in Ramee's room. The rain beat noisily upon the roof. The wind howled. The little window just above his head was constantly awash. Ramee knelt at his side. Her hands

were clasped and her lips were moving. He turned his head with an effort, and tried to speak.

Ramee cried out. A hint of color flashed into her cheeks. She caught his hand almost fiercely.

"My Anton," she murmured.

Anton smiled faintly. "All is well, *chérie*," he consoled. "The hurt is not bad, eh?"

"I hope not," she murmured, "father said not. But he would tell an untruth rather than hurt me, you know, Anton."

Anton nodded and looked up as a step sounded just beyond the open door. Chandler MacAdams' bulk abruptly filled the doorway. The big man's sleeves were rolled up to the elbow and he wore a white apron tightly fastened about his waist.

"Hola, papa," Anton greeted weakly. "So, this time you have one of the family to doctor! But, tell me, what does this hurt of mine amount to? It is the head. Yes, I know that. But, how bad? Perhaps I lose some of those very precious brains of mine—no?"

Prevost's attempt to be jocular failed, however. His dark eyes rested anxiously on Chandler's MacAdams' red-whiskered face. The big fur trader's usually ruddy cheeks were white, and there was a something in his gray eyes that suggested fear. Anton did not understand. Always was Chandler MacAdams a great one to joke. Between him and Anton there was a great friendliness. Always when they were together there was much joking, much laughter. Anton Prevost could not recall the time when that jovial face had not worn a smile. But there was no smile there now. Instead, there was an unpleasant look in the big man's eyes that reminded Anton of what he had seen in Ramee's eyes that morning at the cabin. What was wrong? What terrible calamity threatened his loved ones? And, too, who had shot him? And why?

Anton Prevost could find no answer to these puzzling questions that kept coming to him.

MacAdams had come forward and was talking in a low voice to Ramee. He was suggesting that she leave the room. With a backward glance, she rose and obediently went away, closing the door behind her.

"It's only a scratch, Anton," MacAdams said after the girl had gone. "The bullet creased the side of your head. A thousandth of an inch nearer and it would have caused a fracture. You were lucky, as usual. There'll be no ill effects; just a headache for a day or so. I——"

"What is wrong?" the sick man interrupted. "You and Ramee, you both act so queerly."

"David and several others loked over the ground where the shooting took place," Chandler MacAdams said, ignoring the other's question, "but they found nothing. Not so much as a footprint. The rain washed the tracks away, of course."

Anton, watching the big man's face closely, was aware that, even as he talked, MacAdams' thoughts were busy with another matter. Without doubt, the fur trader had on his mind something of serious import.

"Perhaps I should not trouble you now, Anton," the big man went on, in a manner curiously hesitating, "but—but—there is something that you should know."

Feeling that this news, whatever it might be, was causing his friend pain, Anton shrugged and essayed a smile. "I think, he said, "that maybe we should not talk now. Perhaps you would tell me that one of my good friends fired that shot." He shrugged expressively. "If so—it was an accident. For witness, m'sieu', Anton Prevost has no enemies. If it is that

which you would tell me, therefore, set your mind at rest. Tell me later."

But MacAdams shook his head. "No," he said, "it is not that, Anton. I do not know who shot you. I have no idea, in fact. It is about Ramee that I would speak."

Anton was conscious of a tightening about his heart. "Ramee!" he whispered.

MacAdams nodded. "Yes," he said. "As you know, Anton, she is not my daughter. Her father was my very good friend, Jacques de Monteville. Her mother died when she was a baby. When her father—er—disappeared, I adopted her legally. This was ten years ago. As I say, Jacques de Monteville disappeared. It was thought that he met his death far to the north in the Winnepaw country. I never quite believed that De Monteville was dead. I was right. Jacques de Monteville is not dead."

MacAdams paused and brushed his forehead with the back of his hand. "But do not think for one moment, Anton, that——" Again the fur trader hesitated and stopped. "Jacques de Monteville comes from one of the finest French families. Ramee is his daughter."

Abruptly, Chandler MacAdams rose. "I cannot, I will not tell you any more," he said, and turning on his heel he hurried away.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BARBECUE, A KISS, AND A FIGHT.

WHEN MacAdams had gone, Prevost closed his eyes and tried to think. But all he had heard appeared a meaningless jumble of unrelated things and events. Jacques de Monteville, except that he was Ramee's father, meant nothing to him; he was interested only in Ramee—MacAdams, or De Monteville—whom he loved. Even if she were the daughter of a murderer, Anton told himself, it would make no difference.

The incomplete story that MacAdams had told, therefore, caused Anton little concern. The identity of the man who had shot him and the reason behind the shooting interested him only casually. The thing that did bother him, however, was the unusual behavior of both Ramee and Chandler MacAdams. Neither of them were apt to be perturbed over trifles. Something very real, therefore, was behind it all. There had been dismay, dread, downright fear, in their faces. It was not like Ramee or Chandler MacAdams to fear anything. Ramee was a native of this Northland; she knew well the rough men who were her neighbors. And Chandler MacAdams, confident in his great strength as he had every reason to be, was known as a man of great courage. What troubled Anton's loved ones could not be physical fear. It must be something else. But what?

Anton Prevost's strongest point was not mental dexterity. His life had been lived in the open, where a man's capacity is judged by the strength of his body, not by his mental equipment. Anton Prevost was not stupid, but lack of exercise will dull the keenest brain as it will soften even the most splendid body. So, wearied by his troublesome thoughts, he slept.

He was still sleeping peacefully when Ramee MacAdams tiptoed in. For a long minute the girl stood looking down at her loved one's white face. And, as she looked, tears trickled down her cheeks.

During the night the rain turned to snow. In the morning a raging blizzard was in progress. So, on account of the storm, Chandler MacAdams postponed for two days the barbecue and dance which was one of the two outstanding social events of the year at Talking River. A gala affair was this barbe-

cue. It was held in honor of those who, each year, immediately following the first big snow, started into the hills to set their traplines in those distant spots where fur-bearing animals were still plentiful. Every man, woman, and child within a hundred miles of Talking River attended these barbecues. There was plenty to eat; always plenty to drink. There was dancing, too, for the young folks, and opportunity for endless gossip for the elders.

Anton Prevost's vigorous strength quickly overcame the shock caused by the would-be assassin's bullet, but he was white of face, and his head was still bandaged.

All was hustle and bustle at Chandler MacAdams' big cabin. Strenuously occupied as both Ramee and Chandler MacAdams had been, preparing for their guests, flushed and excited though both were as a result, there was still that haunting look of fear in their eyes. Anton attempted to draw Ramee aside, but she seemed to avoid him. Her dark eyes lifted at frequent intervals and glanced furtively toward the door. It was the same with Chandler MacAdams. Anton Prevost grew restless and unaccountably depressed. When David Estamet appeared with his fiddle under his arm, Anton strove to banish his own gloomy thoughts by getting the cripple to play cheery tunes for him.

By six o'clock the roomy storeroom behind the big store was filled with people. A bright, gay, throng, chattering, laughing, singing, eating, drinking, as their fancy dictated. Dark-skinned, strong men with white teeth flashing; plumb, red-cheeked women, gay and happy; laughing boys and girls, round-faced, wide-eyed children. There was not a scowling face among the lot, for this was a time of good will, and good cheer, a gay festival of merriment with plenty to eat and plenty to drink. Tomorrow, when came the sadness of parting with those loved ones who would journey north into the white wilderness, was another day. But, in all that happy throng, there were two who were different. Although their lips smiled and they spoke friendly words to all, Ramee and Chandler MacAdams were not a part of that gladsome company.

After supper Anton Prevost sat on an upended keg near the door moodily smoking his pipe. The strains of a waltz came to him dimly above the noisy shuffling of feet. Ramee had gone to her room. She had said that she would return in a moment. Just as she appeared and the young trapper was coming to greet her, the door swung inward. Black Jean Lascelles stood there, his fur-clad figure filling the wide doorway. Anton had been watching Ramee's face. He did not turn when the door opened. But the girl's eyes broke away from her lover's ardent glance as though fascinated by that door. So it was that Anton saw the look of staring horror come into her eyes. The color fled from her cheeks. She trembled backward and would have fallen had not Anton's strong arms supported her.

"*Mon ami,*" he whispered sympathetically, "what is it?"

He turned quickly as Black Jean Lascelles laughed. "Rather a public place for a tête-à-tête," he rumbled; "why not go for a walk? The moon is bright."

Once again Anton Prevost felt that surge of hate come over him. Although Lascelles was laughing and the words he had spoken in another man's mouth would have seemed but an innocent jest, Anton was filled with rage. Still supporting Ramee, he turned quickly. "Canaille!" he exclaimed. "Get out of my sight before I do you an injury."

Lascelles assumed a well-simulated look of surprise. He bowed ironically,

and, with his pale eyes fixed on Ramee MacAdams' white face, turned away.

For at least three people the grand barbecue at MacAdams store that night was far from being a pleasant affair. As often as it was possible to do so, Anton danced with Ramee. Each time he sought to engage her in conversation. Each time she was inattentive; seemingly, her thoughts were occupied elsewhere. And always her dark eyes were wandering; the only time they were still was when they rested upon Black Jean Lascelles. It was as though his pale eyes held her. Despite her best efforts, she could not keep her gaze from turning toward the black-whiskered, blue-eyed stranger. Anton Prevost saw and thought he understood. When he finally taxed her with showing undue interest in Lascelles, however, she answered him so sharply that he dared not again broach the subject.

It was not until the evening was all but spent that the young trapper was finally able to arrive at a conclusion that —compared with the relative uncertainty he had been dealing with— seemed partly satisfying.

Yielding reluctantly to the many young men who begged for the honor of dancing with Ramee, Anton had retired from the field. He sought out Chandler MacAdams; but found him an inattentive audience. Here, too, was one seemingly interested in Black Jean Lascelles to the exclusion of all else. The fur trader's smoldering eyes never left Lascelles.

Anton Prevost laughed then. Perhaps this explained the mystery. For, witness, had not he himself watched that black-whiskered one all evening? A strange unnatural antipathy toward the blue-eyed stranger had prompted Anton's attention. Perhaps there were others who felt the same way about Black Jean Lascelles? Ramee perhaps? And Chandler MacAdams? Yes, yes, that was it, of course.

But Anton Prevost's hastily formed hypothesis was rudely shattered when, after the majority of the gay throng had gone, weary but happy, to their homes, Ramee herself sought out Black Jean Lascelles. They stood in a dark corner, close together, talking; then, as David Estamet's tireless fiddle struck up a dreamy waltz, they swung out upon the floor. Anton Prevost could scarcely believe his eyes. He was at first very angry. He stifled this anger with an effort. After all, why should Ramee not dance with the stranger? He had guessed that she had disliked the man even as he did. He had been wrong, that was all. For there was no apparent fear in her sparkling eyes as she moved about the room, resting within the circle of Lascelles' arm. Her cheeks were flushed and her lips were parted in smiles. Lascelles was laughing, too. At frequent intervals he bent and, with his dark face close to hers, whispered in her ear. And she did not seem to mind this. She seemed, indeed, to be enjoying it.

Prevost's jealous eyes missed no single detail of all this. Although his heart beat fast, the young Frenchman was not conscious of the blinding rage that possessed him. So he was, therefore, totally unprepared for the form which his involuntary actions took.

David Estamet's tireless arms finally slowed. The music stopped. The dancers—Ramee and Black Jean Lascelles—sat in a dark corner. But Anton Prevost's jealous eyes pierced that shadowed retreat. His pounding heart counted the swift seconds as they clung close in each other's arms.

Then, in a breath, Anton Prevost became a raging demon. With an angry cry, he crossed the room. He caught the girl by a shoulder and thrust her roughly aside. His right arm shot out, locked about Black Jean Lascelles' neck.

Anton Prevost never knew what happened during the next few moments.

He felt Lascelles' throat give beneath his fingers. He saw those blue eyes seemingly popping out of the man's head. Strong hands laid hold upon him. He paid them no atention. Then he was on the floor kneeling upon Lascelles' limp body. Blows were rained upon his head and back. The butt of a gun struck with crushing force upon his right wrist. His arm went numb, and, he was obliged to relinquish his grip upon that throat. He was dragged to his feet then, and fighting like a madman was half carried, half dragged away.

## CHAPTER V.

### INTO THE WILDERNESS.

THE crisp night air revived Anton somewhat. Slowly, his stifling rage fell away, and he discovered himself pacing up and down in front of MacAdams' store. Chandler MacAdams stood near by. Ramee was at his side, her slim fingers locked about his wrist. Curious faces peered through the half-open doorway. Anton Prevost stopped abruptly.

"I kill that dog, eh?" he replied.

Ramee MacAdams shook her head. "Not quite," she murmured.

"And you—— You let him kiss you, eh?"

"But no, Anton, my own, listen to me!"

"Bah! For why should I listen? I have eyes. Very good eyes, mamselle. I see——"

"But I could not help myself, Anton. Truly would I have killed myself rather than let that man touch me. But I was not prepared——"

Something very like a growl sounded deep in Anton Prevost's throat. "But you like that fellow. I see you, mamselle. All evening you watch him. And, finally, you go to him. *Oui*, do not dispute me. You went to him. He did not seek you out. I saw——"

"No, no Anton. I care not for that man. I—I—hate him. I sought him out, though. Yes, I did that, Anton. And I did it for a purpose. That man knows——" She stopped, confusion sending a riot of color into her already flushed cheeks. "There were things I would ask him," she went on quickly; "but he would not tell me. When the dance was done and we stood there, then he began to speak of the things I wanted to hear. He was talking, and I was, oh, so interested, my Anton, more than I can possibly tell you! Then he—he——"

As she talked the girl's fingers tugged at the lapels of Prevost's coat. Despite her hesitancy, there was a tenseness in her speech that impressed the listening man with a sense of verity. As a quick shadow passes before the sun, so Anton Prevost's jealous rage vanished, to be replaced by a vast heart-warming sympathy. There was love in those dark eyes that looked up into his. And, after all, so long as that love was there, what else really mattered?

Oblivious of those who watched, he caught Ramee in his arms and kissed her.

It was a week later when Anton Prevost started out for Otonwee Mountain, one hundred miles distant, hauling a heavy hand sled laden with camping duffel and supplies. It was in Otonwee Basin, at the base of the mountain, that the young trapper intended this year to set his trapline.

During the week just passed, things had seemingly settled back into their old channels. Black Jean Lascelles had gone away. As a matter of fact, he had not put in an appearance after the fight that night in Chandler MacAdams' storeroom. With the man gone, it was as though an evil spell had been lifted. Hearty laughter again sounded wherever Chandler MacAdams might be. Much of the haunting fear had van-

ished from Ramee's face. And Anton became again Anton the Glad, with a smile on his lips, a jest or friendly gibe always ready.

No mention had been made of the fight that night at MacAdams' store. Not even David Estamet had spoken of it to Anton Prevost, his good friend. Chandler MacAdams had not referred to it. The matter had not once been brought up between Ramee and her lover.

So Anton started out upon his long winter's hibernation far from the haunts of man with a heart that beat high with the renewed promise of that fair one whom he loved, and who, for the thousandth time, had promised to become his wife in the spring. True, there was just a hint of distress deep hidden in the girl's dark eyes; but Anton was never one to seek the obscure. When trouble was forced upon him, he grappled with it. But when it was a thing hidden—forgotten perhaps—it was not in his straightforward nature to attempt to fan it back to life.

It was a tender leave-taking, that good-by between Anton and Ramee. Its memory remained with him for days.

Arriving at his little cabin atop the first of the serrated ridges of the towering snow-capped rockpile that was Otonwee Mountain, the young trapper set to work with his usual energy. In a short time he had set his extensive trapline, snaking in and out along the little streams in Otonwee Basin, following the open ridges and the ice-fringed shores of the two small lakes embraced within the thirty-mile square of white wilderness that was his trapping grounds.

For the first week or so everything went well. Then, he awoke one night with the feeling that unseen eyes were watching his cabin from the edge of the spruce thicket two hundred yards distant. He thought nothing of the matter at the time; assured himself that his nerves were playing tricks upon him, and went back to sleep.

He was so completely unimpressed by the circumstance that he did not even take the trouble next morning to look for tracks. Neither was he seriously disturbed when, a few nights later, the same thing happened. But when, for the third time, he suddenly awoke in the middle of the night he was impressed despite himself. In the bright light of a new day, however, the matter assumed scant importance; and it was not without considerable good-natured railing at himself that he finally inspected the spruce thicket opposite the cabin.

As he drew near the black fringe of long-trunked trees, Anton was laughing. He had, for three years, trapped in Otonwee Basin. During those years he had never seen another human being. As far as he knew, there was no other trapper—not even an Indian—nearer than the settlement at Talking River. Hence, was he mightily surprised when, upon entering the thicket, he almost immediately discovered snowshoe tracks in the soft snow. There were two distinct sets of tracks. The tracks of two men.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TRACKS IN THE SNOW.

NOW Anton Prevost was skilled at sign reading. He realized almost immediately that those tracks had been made by Indians. The pattern of those snowshoes was unusual. The young trapper had never seen any just like them before. But they were Indians beyond all doubt. The native Indian walks differently from any white man. Anton knew this. He knew, too, that no two pair of snowshoes are alike. Those two sets of tracks there in the snow before him identified two individuals, either one of whom he would be

able to recognize by his tracks, a week, a month, or a year later.

His first thought was that the two men were chance wayfarers who had stopped briefly to look at the cabin and had then gone on. But he knew, almost immediately, that this was not so. An Indian is invariably hungry. No Indian would have passed a cabin without stopping—no friendly Indian, that is. Whether or not the owner was at home, the chances were that they would have helped themselves. But they had not come near the cabin, no nearer, that is, than the thicket edge. And they had been there before. He recalled those two previous nights when he had suddenly wakened. It had snowed thinly within the past few days; but he was able, with very little difficulty, to find two old sets of tracks beneath the fluff of new snow.

Three times, then, all told, two Indians had stood at the edge of the thicket, watching the cabin. Why? If their object was robbery, why had they not ransacked the cabin in his absence? Anton asked himself. He spent no more than two nights a week at the cabin. The rest of the time he was following his trap line, which, if set in a straight line, would have covered nearly forty miles along stream and ridgetop. Why, then, were they so interested in his chain? Contrary to popular belief, the Indian is not a subtle or a patient creature. Most Indians are forthright in their motivations and actions—although at times somewhat stupidly so—and, if inclined toward theft, will often venture rashly and foolishly. For the life of him the young trapper could find no other reason for the Indians' presence in Otonwee Basin than the theft of his precious supplies. Why, then, had they not robbed him during his absence?

Although entertaining not the slightest fear of the mysterious Indians, Anton Prevost, instead of starting upon the three-day journey along his trapline, spent the better part of the day caching his furs and supplies in various out of the way spots where even an Indian's keen eyes might experience difficulty in finding them. With this accomplished he erased the matter from his mind. To Anton Prevost—he of the mighty body and strong heart—a Cree Indian was beneath contempt. Of course, if the men attempted to rob his cabin or tampered with his traps, then he would take a hand in things. But when no wrong had been attempted, he was ready and willing, as was his nature, to let well enough alone.

It was some three weeks later that, upon returning to his main cabin following a three-days' absence, he found a visitor there. When still some distance away, he saw smoke rising from the chimney. Although suspicion of any sort was entirely foreign to his nature, Anton removed his rifle from its protective casing of caribou skin and swung it about ready for instant use. He even approached the cabin from the rear.

But it developed that these precautions were unnecessary. When he pushed in through the cabin door, rifle in hand, he found a lean gray-haired man bending over the fire.

"Pierre!" he cried joyfully.

Pierre Juban turned, with a toothless smile.

"And what do you here, you great skinny one?" Anton Prevost shouted, as he shook the visitor strenuously by the hand. "You do not trap the Little Athabasca this year, eh?"

Pierre Juban shook his head. "*Non*," he said. "Dees year, I fin' two carcajou dere. I am too old to fight dose brutes. An' so, I go away. I fool 'em. Dey tink dey eat off me dees winter, dem t'ieves. But no. I go t'rough de ice on my way back to Talking River, an' lose—everything."

The gray-haired trapper shrugged ex-

pressively. "But, wit' ol' Mac, Pierre Juban's credit ees always good. I stay four, five day in Talking River, den, I buy more stuff an' try again. I tink maybe I try de odder side of Otonwee Mountain."

Anton agreed to the wisdom of this move. Even as he spoke, however, he wondered why Pierre Juban—who was well known as Talking River's greatest gossip—should have gone out of his way to stop off at his cabin in Otonwee Basin, when the trapping grounds he had in mind were on the opposite side of Otonwee Mountain, and, therefore, nearer Talking River than was his, Anton's, cabin?

It was not until later that night that Anton's curiosity was satisfied. Even then, Pierre Juban, ready and willing talker that he was, seemed reluctant to broach the subject.

"The black one, he has returned," he finally said, casting an oblique eye in Anton's direction. "Jean Lascelles," he amplified.

Despite himself, Anton started. But the start of surprise degenerated into a careless shrug. "Maybe he likes Talking River," he hazarded.

Pierre Juban laughed unpleasantly. "*Oui*, maybe dat ees so," he agreed; "he buy André l'Abbé's cabin. You remember, André was kill las' winter? *Oui*, I tink maybe dat black one like Talking River."

For a long minute the trapper puffed slowly on his pipe. Then he said: "Already, dere ees much talk, Anton. *Oui*, of a surety dere ees much ver' foolish talk. For Ramee an' dat black one are much together. He has a dog team—ten white Ungava huskies—an' every fair day he an' your betrothed take long trips into de hills. One, two, t'ree times already, I watch and see, dey were gone."

Very suddenly, Anton Prevost had come to his feet. He stood over the wide-eyed Pierre now, fists clenched within a scant two inches of the old gossip's long nose.

"You lie, Pierre," he said in a voice that trembled. "Tell me that you lie. If you do not, maybe——" He opened his hands and reached suggestively toward the frightened man's scrawny neck.

But Pierre Juban shook his head stubbornly. "*Non*, Anton," he said, "I do not lie. I come dees way to tell you, because you are my fren'. Always, have I been your fren'. I am your fren', now. I would not speak to hurt you, Anton, except dat I believe tings are going on dat you do not know about. Who am I, Pierre Juban, to say? But, eet look bad for you, Anton. An' people are talking. But, oh, I almos' forgot! She send you dees letter."

Prevost snatched the crumpled envelope from Pierre Juban. With frantic impatience he scanned the neatly penned sheet. Then he read it again, more slowly. And still a third time. Very, very slowly, this third time, his dark eyes resting lovingly on each word.

When he had finished, he folded the letter carefully and placed it as carefully in the pocket of his shirt above his heart. "You carry an old woman's tale, Pierre," he said smiling. "That girl who is to be my wife in the spring is true to me. Perhaps your suspicious eyes saw too much. Perhaps you guessed at many things which you did not see. But it really does not matter. This letter tells me all I need to know. No amount of idle gossip can avail in the face of what she has told me in that letter."

## CHAPTER VII.

### A SHOW-DOWN.

EARLY next morning, Pierre Juban left, palpably disappointed because his tale had not been given the credence that he felt was due it. But that letter, every line of which expressed Ramee

MacAdams' undying love for Anton, had served most adequately to offset Pierre Juban's gossip. As is true of most gossips, Pierre was something of a liar. Under the circumtsances, therefore, Anton was convinced—at least, he thought he was convinced—that Juban's entire story had been manufactured out of whole cloth. Deep in his heart, however, there still remained a suspicion of doubt. He himself, did not know that this doubt was there; but in the days that followed, the smile was absent from his lips; he moved restlessly, nervously, about his work, quickly became angry at the slightest thing.

It was on the third day following the departure of Pierre Juban, and while he was still in this unpleasant frame of mind, that Anton found snowshoe tracks near one of the spots where he had cached some of his furs. The furs themselves had not been disturbed; but, the prowlers had inspected the pelts very carefully, and had devoted considerable time and effort to hiding all evidences of their visit.

The young trapper was angry. He was puzzled, too. Those tracks had, of course, been made by two Indians. But why had they not taken the furs? Why did they prowl around in this manner? Perhaps they were waiting until there were more furs? Prevost shrugged and swore softly through his teeth. Due as much to his unpleasant state of mind as to his angry feeling toward the Indians, he was moved to seek them out at once and rid himself of their sneaking presence, once and for all. But he had been neglecting his trapline for nearly a week. So he finally decided to visit the traps which had been very carefully set along the near-by ridgetop in the hope of snaring a silver fox which he had seen in that neighborhood.

At the base of the icy slope directly below that deep crevice in the face of the mountain where was the fur cache that the Indians had ferreted out, there was a massy brier tangle. Deep within this morass of vines and thorny brambles a cougar had its lair. Anton Prevost possessed in full measure that antipathy felt by all trappers for the mountain lion. So he had set a bear trap at the edge of that brier tangle in the hope of silencing the big cat's squalling, which, all too frequently, rendered the night air hideous. As he circled the tangle toward the spot where he knew the trap lay, he kicked a log half buried beneath the light fluff of snow which had fallen the night before. The instant his feet touched the log there was a crashing snap, and the steel jaws of a huge bear-trap clashed together under his very feet. The young trapper cried out and sprang aside. Those deadly jaws had missed his foot by the fraction of an inch!

For a long minute Anton Prevost stood there looking down at that steel-jawed instrument of death. He realized instantly that it was his own trap; but, it had been moved, and very carefully hidden. It was placed in the exact center of a narrow pathway which cleared one end of the brier tangle and along which he would almost surely travel. If he had walked into that trap, it would have been all over with Anton Prevost. He seldom carried a rifle; and a pistol's leaden bullets would never have served to break that huge steel trap.

With his lips set in a thin white line, the young trapper carefully swept away the three-inch coating of new snow. Underneath that fresh white blanket, he found just what he had expected to find—snowshoe tracks. The Indians had unearthed the bear trap and had placed it there in the center of that norrow pathway!

Muttering angrily, Anton returned to his cabin, got his rifle, and came back to the ridgetop. With that brier tangle as a starting point, he began cir-

cling. Always, the circle widened. It was toward midday when he finally found what he sought. Fresh tracks in the new snow! Here, one of those sneaking would-be killers had stood and inspected the open ridgetop far below. Upon finding that the trap which he and his companion had set was empty, the fellow had retraced his steps.

Rifle gripped tight in his mittened hand, Anton followed those tracks. As he went, his eyes searched the white hills and shadow-darkened thickets.

The prowler had made no attempt to hide his tracks. Toward mid-afternoon, just as the quick winter dusk was descending the trail snaked downward into a thicketed valley. Crouching behind a snow-covered boulder well up on the slope, Anton Prevost carefully inspected the valley below him. For perhaps fifteen minutes he squatted there, scarcely moving, only his eyes circling, everlastingly circling, that cup-shaped depression in the hills directly below him. He finally found what he sought: A tiny tent set inconspicuously in the center of an open space on the opposite side of the valley.

Half an hour later, Anton Prevost approached that tent from the rear. As he drew near, he was impressed by a circumstance which, although seemingly of little importance, did serve in a way to prepare him for what he eventually found. The tent was new and it was a very good one; an expensive tent such as rich hunters from the East, who considered not the value of money, might be expected to own. It was hardly the sort one would expect to find in the possession of a couple of Indians.

When still some distance off, Anton became convinced that the men he sought were away. He approached cautiously, nevertheless. At the edge of the little clearing he stepped very carefully in tracks which had recently been made, and, rifle held rigidly before him, crept up to his objective.

As he had guessed, the tent was unoccupied; but it was also immediately evident that its occupants were not far away. An iron kettle filled with a fragrant stew simmered over a slow fire. Following a quick look around to be sure that no one was looking, the young trapper entered.

Hurried inspection of the contents of the tent added to the amazement which he had felt upon discovering it in the possession of Indians. The camp equipment was all new and the best that money could buy. The entire outfit was not what one might expect to find in the possession of two thieving Indians.

Flinging himself down on a thick bearskin rug, Anton Prevost, scowling, considered the puzzle. He could think of but one answer: Those two Indians who had been spying upon him and who had finally attempted to kill him by that most horrible means, a bear trap, were not acting on their own initiative. They had been employed to kill him—Anton Prevost!

This would account for the expensive camp equipment which their employer had, without doubt, provided; it would also account for the setting of that bear trap. They had probably been warned to use none of the usual methods such as a rifle bullet or a knife.

The more the young trapper thought about it, the more firmly convinced he became that he had found the correct answer to the problem. Perhaps the same man had been responsible for that rifle bullet which had so nearly put an end to him in Talking River! Perhaps——

Prevost's disturbing thoughts were interrupted by the faint sound of snowshoes. He came quickly to his feet. Unsuspecting, the two Indians drew near. They were talking, low-voiced. Occasionally one of them laughed. Anton strained his ears to catch what they were saying; but they were speak-

ing in a dialect that was unfamiliar to him.

The men entered the tent before they were aware of Prevost's presence. Both discovered their visitor at the same instant. And, somewhat to the young Frenchman's surprise, both acted instantly. They dropped flat upon the ground, grabbing their rifles. For an instant, Anton hesitated, his finger resting on the trigger of the gun in his hand. But he did not shoot. He dropped his rifle, and threw himself headlong upon the two men. Yelling, struggling wildly, the Indians fought for their lives, their wiry bodies twisting and turning beneath Anton's clutching hands. One of them freed a knife and slashed viciously at his opponent's throat. The blade ripped through Anton's thick mackinaw shirt, but barely scratched the flesh. Next instant, the young trapper's clubbed fist drove into the knife-wielder's face. The fellow dropped like a log and lay still. Witnessing his companion's summary removal from the fray, the second Indian raised both hands, palms upward.

Anton jerked the fellow roughly to his feet. "Dog!" he cried. "I think maybe I kill you——"

"No, m'sieu'," the fellow cried in French. "We will go away. We——"

Anton turned the man about, and searched him. He discovered a pistol and two knives. He found similar arms on the unconscious man. He tossed the lot into the deep snow before the tent.

When he came back, the unconscious man was groaning. Presently he sat up and rubbed his eyes. When he saw the man whom he had attempted to kill, stark fear showed in his face.

Prevost sat facing his two thoroughly cowed prisoners, rifle in hand.

"I think I kill you both," he muttered, as though talking to himself. "You tried to catch me in that trap, eh? Then you would steal my furs and go away? Yes, I think I kill both of you."

Instinctly, both men dropped on their knees and begged for mercy. Prevost thrust them away with his foot. "Bah!" he sneered, "always it is the coward who cries over his fate. Of a surety you two are less than the cowardly coyote that strikes and runs, and cries of a night on the ridgetops, bragging of his valorous deeds. No man seeks to kill that creature. To a man the coyote is less than nothing, and so perhaps I will not kill you two. I will give you a chance—one chance."

He watched the fear-drawn faces of the Indians closely. Both talking at once, they promised to devote the rest of their lives to his service, if he would but spare them.

"The coyote serves no man," he finally said; "always is he a slinking thief and murderer. Always does he think only of himself. Anton Prevost seeks not the service of such as you. But——"

He paused suggestively. "That which I am going to ask of you is a think in keeping with your cowardly hearts and treacherous instincts. You will answer my questions. And you will answer them correctly. I will know if you lie to me. And, if either of you speak falsely, through that lie will your life be forfeited."

He paused to allow the meaning of his words time to sink in. Then he said abruptly: "You sought to kill me. Why?"

The men exchanged quick glances. For a moment they spoke in their own tongue; then, the older of the two, whose face was marked with a white scar running from ear to chin, replied in French.

"We sought to kill you, yes," he said.

"Why?" the young trapper repeated.

"We were paid to kill you," "Scarface" continued.

"Who paid you?"

The man hesitated. If he answered that question his life might be spared,

for the time being. Later on, however, he would have to answer to his employer. If he did not tell, that scowling young giant sitting opposite him would carry out his threat. But, this Anton Prevost was one who could be trusted. That other was at best an uncertain quantity. So it was that Scarface finally answered truthfully.

"Black Jean Lascelles," he said.

Anton Prevost started. It was not so much surprise that caused him to start as it was the abrupt realization of his own blindness. Why had he not thought of Lascelles before? In a single instant many things occurred to him to confirm what the Indian had said.

The most important part of his confession made, Scarface, without additional questioning, blurted out the rest of his unpleasant story.

"No reason was given," he said, "for your removal. Jean Lascelles is a rich man, and it is not for us to question him. We were paid well; and, if we had obeyed instructions, our task would long since have been satisfactorily completed. Our instructions were to remove you in some natural manner so that your death would appear like an accident. This we intended to do. But we put it off. We found that your trap line was yielding many valuable furs. We decided to wait until your cache of furs had become worth pilfering. Then we intended killing you and stealing your furs."

The speaker stopped and shrugged. "We erred," he admitted, "we waited so long that your suspicions became aroused. And now, my partner and me —we are in a very bad hole, for sure."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### VENGEANCE TRAIL.

BUT Anton Prevost scarcely heard the conclusion of the Indian's confession. A new and vastly more unpleasant phase of the matter had suddenly been forced upon him. Black Jean Lascelles sought his life. Prevost had beaten Lascelles, that rich man, in David Estamet's cabin. He had beaten him again that night at the barbecue in Chandler MacAdams' store. These things, in themselves, were sufficient to cause a man like Lascelles to seek redress by means of murder. They were sufficient to account for that cowardly shot; they were sufficient, too, to account for the employment of the two villains who faced him. But were those two encounters—in both of which Lascelles had been beaten—the only reasons behind Lascelles' attempt upon Prevost's life?

It was at this point that Anton became restless. Ramee! That black one wanted Ramee! And he had attempted to remove Anton Prevost so that the field might be clear.

As he sat there cross-legged upon the cold ground, many unpleasant incidents flitted through the young trapper's thoughts, all tending to bear out this unhappy conclusion. He recalled with new interest Pierre Juban's words. Perhaps there had been some truth in them? If so, the woman he loved was playing him false. But this could not be. No, whatever of truth there might have been in Juban's gossip, Ramee was not at fault. His vivid imagination resurrected a hundred things to bolster up his unwavering faith in her. Always, in every word and action, had she been true to him. And she had promised—a thousand times she had promised——

But, no one could persuade Ramee MacAdams against her will. Therefore, if there was the slightest atom of truth in those things which Pierre Juban had spoken of, Ramee was willingly accompanying that man—that coward who hired others to do his killing for him. And he was handsome, that Lascelles. Had Ramee been attracted by him? If so, had that attraction

touched her heart, or was she merely playing with fire?

With a sudden motion Anton Prevost jumped to his feet. "Begone!" he commanded. "Hurry, hurry before I forget my promise to you!"

The frightened men needed no second invitation. Without pausing to collect their sleeping bags, they scurried away.

Anton Prevost did not return to his cabin. He was like a mad thing. And, like one who has been bereft of his senses, he rushed blindly into the night.

On and on he went, recking not of the manner of his going, oblivious of time and distance. It was dawn when he stopped from sheer exhaustion, on the top of a hill far across the valley. He turned weary eyes back over the way he had come. Directly below him, not half a mile distant, a fire blazed cheerily before a little lean-to.

A man stood clearly outlined in the yellow light from that fire. The man wore a red coat and, even at a distance, Anton Prevost recognized his old friend, Corporal John Hayes, whose headquarters was at Quarterlee Notch, fifty miles south of Talking River. Hayes and Prevost were very good friends. Unlike many men who prefer to be alone with their troubles, Anton Prevost longed for companionship. So he cut straight down across the valley, toward the sympathetic companionship promised by his red-coated friend, Corporal John Hayes of the Mounted.

When the young trapper stumbled blindly into the circle of light cast by the glowing fire, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a rifle in the hands of the gray-haired policeman. Although John Hayes' eyesight was exceedingly good it was apparent that he did not recognize his early visitor until the latter spoke.

"Hola, John!" the young Frenchman greeted.

"Anton Prevost!" the officer muttered. There was doubt in his voice, and he did not for the moment lower his gun. "Sure enough," he muttered, "Anton Prevost. But, whut in the name of the saints is the matter with you, boy?"

Anton Prevost shrugged. "Nothing, John. I go for a long walk. I see your fire. I see you. I come."

Corporal Hayes considered this brusque explanation in silence. "You look like you'd seen a ghost," he finally said. "Maybe you've been hearin' things, eh?"

Aware that he was chilled to the bone, Prevost huddled over the fire. "*Oui*," he admitted, "I have heard many things, John. Anton the Glad is this night very sad."

Corporal Hayes laughed loudly—just a bit too loudly to sound sincere. "Fergit it, me boy," he advised, "they ain't none of 'em worth a man's second thought. Nobody knows better than me. They nearly got me, twice. Both times—glory be to goodness—I crawled outta the trap before 'twas too late. There ain't a woman on this glad earth——"

"You know something, John," Prevost interrupted. "Ramee? She and that Lascelles. Tell me, John. I want to know—all you know."

Corporal Hayes was by nature a silent man. His profession had rendered him still more close-mouthed. He shook his head. "No, I don't know a thing, Anton," he said.

"But you have heard——?"

Corporal John Hayes' pale-blue eyes rested upon Anton Prevost's twitching face. "I have heard much, yes," he finally said, "and I will tell whut I heard. I do this for one reason, and one only, Anton! First, I will tell you that reason. You will do nothin' foolish, see? You do not like Lascelles. I heard about your two mixups with him. That won't do, Anton. You're strong as a grizzly bear; next time you

may finish him. I'd rather cut off me right hand than take you in, boy. But I'd have to do it. You know that."

"Yes, yes," the half-frantic man interrupted impatiently.

"You will promise, then, not to lay a finger on that black-whiskered fellow?"

Prevost was beside himself. A groan came through his tight lips. Finally, he shook his head. "*Non*, John, I will promise nothing," he said; "for of a surety will I kill that black one—with my two hands!"

Corporal John Hayes refilled his pipe and held a flaming splinter to its black bowl.

" 'Tis the blitherin' dolt ye are, boy," he finally said, "and I am another of the same breed," he finished under his breath. "I should have known better than to promise that crooked little man. It was David Estamet who asked me to see you, Anton," the policeman went on; "accordin' to David, Pierre Juban had already carried the tale to you. David—knowin' you so well—figured that you might fly off the handle. I promised David that I'd try an' set you straight. But if you won't promise, I can't talk to you."

There was a beseeching look in Anton Prevost's eyes but he shook his head. "I will surely kill him," he repeated.

"You young idiot," growled the corporal, "can't you git nothin' through your head? Women ain't worth it, I tell you. Why——"

Prevost had turned away. So quickly had he moved that the policeman was altogether unprepared when a crashing in the near-by alder thicket told him that his half-crazed visitor had gone. The old officer shouted. He even fired his gun into the air. But Anton Prevost was gone—with murder in his heart.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MYSTERIOUS PASS.

SEVERAL days later, a gaunt haggard-eyed caricature of the strong, happy man who had a month since started out on a hunting trip, slipped into his own cabin on the outskirts of Talking River.

Pausing only to lighten his pack, Anton hastened toward the settlement. It was very late at night. Every cabin was black. Straight through the town to Chandler MacAdams' cabin, the man with murder in his heart made his way. The store, too, was in darkness. Breathing hard, Anton Prevost knocked on the heavy log door. There was no answer. He knocked again and again, with savage insistence. Still there was no response.

Finally, he made his way around to the back. Here he pried open a little window and squeezed his way into the storeroom. The board floor creaked noisily under his feet. But he gave the noise not a thought. The door leading into Chandler MacAdams' room swung wide. Ramee's door was closed.

Cupping a match in his palms, Anton entered MacAdams' room. The fur trader was not there. Wondering, the midnight visitor backed away. He stood for some time before Ramee's door, nervously shuffling his feet. Finally, he screwed up his courage and rapped. No sound came from within that room. Determinedly, Anton opened the door.

Despite the darkness, he felt sure that this room, too, was empty. He lit an oil lamp which stood on a little table. The bed, neatly made, had not been slept in, but it was the only orderly thing in the room. The drawers in the bureau were open and empty. A bookcase on the wall hung at a crazy angle. A chair had been tipped over and balanced precariously against the wall. On the floor there were two woolen

stockings and a pair of elkskin shoes. Evidently these articles had been hastily discarded. They were still wet. Picking up the lamp, Prevost made the rounds of the store, as though this aimless search might bring something to light which would guide him and show him what to do.

It was not until his third visit to Chandler MacAdams' room that he found the note. It was a double sheet of pink-tinted writing paper, folded once. It lay on a chair at the side of Chandler MacAdams' bed, and it was in Ramee's handwriting.

With fingers that trembled, Anton picked up the letter. In the light of the flickering lamp he painstakingly deciphered the hurried words.

DEAR FATHER: I have given Jean my promise. We are to be married at Lockomort on Sunday. It is the only way out. Molok goes with us from The Pass on, so do not worry. RAMEE.

Something like a sob escaped Prevost's tight lips. He crumpled the sheet in his hand. But, just as he did so, the flickering light disclosed more writing at the bottom of the sheet. He spread the crumpled paper out upon the table. Bending low, he spelled out that tiny postcript.

Tell Anton I love him and always shall.

Anton Prevost reacted to those words like a man who has unexpectedly been given a new lease of life. His shoulders straightened. A flush of color came into his cheeks. His eyes grew bright.

"The only way out," he repeated, "and —she will always love me."

He could not guess what law behind it all; he did not try to guess. Those two short sentences told him all he needed to know. She did not love Jean Lascelles. She was marrying him for some other reason. She was being forced to marry him. This hardly seemed possible. Knowing Ramee MacAdams as he did, it was scarcely conceivable that she could be forced into anything—let alone marriage with a man she did not love—against her will. But, it must be so. In one breath she told of her promise to Lascelles, spoke definitely of the coming marriage, and, in the next said that she loved him, Anton Prevost. Yes, she was being forced into marriage with a man she did not love. But what was behind it all? Surely some resistless force over which she had no control!

Anton slumped in a chair. Sunday. To-day was Friday. The Pass. And Molok. Who was Molok? And why should she stop at The Pass? In reality there was no pass there. That spot, which for some unknown reason was called The Pass, was a Gibraltarlike mass of rock. There was not even a trail through that tangle of mountainous boulders, hardly a tree or a shrub. Among those jagged rocks, only wild animals could safely make their way. There it was that bears and mountain lions had their abode.

The young trapper read the note again. They would stop off at The Pass and there pick up this person with the queer name—Molok.

Prevost leaned forward and blew out the lamp. He had caught the faint sound of snowshoes drawing near. He hesitated briefly, debating in his mind whether to flee or to wait until the midnight traveler had passed on. He finally decided upon the latter. The newcomer was much nearer than he had at first judged. He would be unable, therefore, to leave the store, even by the way he had come, without being discovered; and, under the circumstances, he did not wish to be seen.

The approaching footsteps came to a stop before the store. Anton held his breath. There was a sharp rap on the door, then a familiar voice called, "Mac!"

Corporal John Hayes!

Anton Prevost was filled with dismay. Corporal John was his friend and always would be. But he could not afford to be discovered now by the policeman. First, there was a task that he must perform. And Corporal John already knew the nature of that task. Of this Anton was certain. Otherwise, why had he returned so quickly to Talking River? Of course, no crime had been committed as yet. But, once in the policeman's hands—crime or no crime—Anton would be helpless, unable to do that thing which meant freedom for the woman he loved.

So Anton Prevost crouched in the darkness, fingers clenched until the nails bit into the flesh, seeking frantically for a way out of his predicament. He would not be taken alive. He would fight—even kill, if necessary—in order to insure that freedom which was all-important if he was to prevent Ramee MacAdams from sacrificing herself.

There came a more peremptory rapping. Then, the big door shook as the policeman yanked savagely at the latch. Finally, still swearing under his breath, Corporal John moved on. He stopped at another cabin fifty yards away on the opposite side of the street, and aroused the occupants. A head popped out of a window in the loft. The still night air carried the conversation between the policeman and the occupant of the cabin clearly to Anton as he stood peering through a crack in the door of the store. The fur buyer was at Quarterlee Notch and would not be back until the first of the week. This was the gist of the conversation.

Breathing relievedly, Anton made his way back through the darkened store. After making sure that Corporal John Hayes had gone toward David Estamet's cabin, where, chances were, he would spend the night, Anton squeezed out through the little window and, furtively, like a thief in the night, skulked about the darkened cabins, and away.

As he topped a rise a mile beyond the settlement, he looked back over his shoulder at the little cabins nestling in the valley. Something choked his throat and a mist momentarily blurred his vision. He had known much happiness—naught but happiness, as a matter of fact—during those gay youthful years. The little settlement of Talking River was the only home he had ever known. But, it was home no longer. The chances were, he would never see that place of happy memories again.

A thin ribbon of pink was flushing the eastern horizon when The Pass appeared before him, bleak and forbidding, jaggedly outlined against the gray western sky.

For the first time, now, Anton considered the situation before him from a more practical angle. The Pass, she had said. But there were no cabins.

Standing half hidden behind a cone-shaped spruce tree, he inspected carefully the mile-high mass of ice-covered rock before him. He saw nothing that might serve as a habitation. He looked until his eyes ached. And then a possible answer to his problem occurred to him. There should be tracks—sled tracks, probably. It had not snowed for several days. The instant this possibility occurred to him, he started diagonally along the base of the rockpile.

Half an hour later he found what he sought. Sled tracks in the snow. A very heavy sled, drawn by many dogs, probably ten or more.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE KILLING.

FOR half a mile Anton followed those tracks, upward and onward into the very heart of that rockpile. The sled had followed an intricate, yet well-defined, trail. He saw a streamer of

smoke spiraling upward out of a crevice in the very face of an almost perpendicular wall. He proceeded cautiously. A short distance farther on, the sled tracks turned aside. He hesitated, undecided whether to ferret out the source of that smoke ribbon, or follow the sled. He had about decided upon the latter, when he made out a single set of snowshoe tracks, perhaps thirty feet farther on. These led along the narrow, rock-walled pathway toward the spot from which the smoke emanated. Those tracks had been made by a big man. The snowshoes were new and strongly built, and there was something familiar about the pattern which they left in the snow. He had seen tracks like those before. He remembered then: those two Indians, Scarface and his companion. The tracks before him had not been made by either of the Indians, however. The man who had made these particular tracks was a very big man. His snowshoes had been wrought by the same hand which had fashioned the snowshoes used by the Indians. Those killers had been hired by Black Jean Lascelles. Was it not logical to assume, therefore, that the tracks there before him in the glistening snow were made by a big man—by Lascelles himself?

This conclusion formed itself in his mind even as he continued slowly along the narrow pathway toward that streamer of smoke, which had during the past few seconds, become thicker and blacker. The young trapper came abruptly upon the cabin. Despite the serious business upon which he was engaged, he marveled at the skill with which it had been built. It was placed in such a way, so snugly ensconced under an overhanging lip of the mountainous rock, that even the most persistent searcher might well pass within a dozen feet without being aware of its presence there. And yet there was considerable open space all around the cabin. There were spots, of course, that commanded an excellent view of the cabin.

There were hiding places without end all about. Anton stooped behind a jagged boulder and studied the ground. There was evidently another cabin near by, for the sled had turned aside, back there, and there were no dogs to be seeen. Slowly, cautiously, he edged his way among the rocks until he faced the side of the cabin. There was a single small window in that side of the big log building, probably six or seven feet from the ground. The snow was deep, and the watching man was puzzled by a deeply worn pathway which circled the cabin.

Anton gave this only passing consideration, however. Gripping his rifle, he boldly approached. He reached the cabin and dropped down into that deep pathway. Still puzzling, he edged his way cautiously toward the front door. Just as he turned the corner of the building, a step sounded behind him. He turned like a flash. But, quickly as he moved, he was too late!

He found himself looking into the muzzle of a rifle. And the man who held that gun was the strangest-looking human Anton had ever seen. He was a big man—almost a giant, in fact. He wore no hat and no mittens. A huge head covered with a mass of tightly curled black hair rose from powerful, sloping shoulders. His skin was dark, nearly black. His features were thick and pudgy.

Although Anton knew every one within many miles of Talking River, he knew that he had never before seen this man. Though he realized that he was looking death in the face, Anton considered many seeming non-essentials in a single fleeting instant. For instance, the man who faced him had not made the tracks which led up to the cabin. However, he was responsible for that deep path which circled it. There was

no mistaking the imprint of his round, bear-track snowshoes.

In the face of that threatening rifle, Anton Prevost advanced.

"I look for Jean Lascelles," he said. "I have a very important message for him."

The man's eyes glanced aside. It was as though he were motioning, toward the cabin.

"In there?" Anton asked.

The man nodded.

"But——" Anton began.

The man pointed to his mouth and shook his head to indicate that he was dumb.

Abruptly, he stepped forward until the rifle's muzzle was within three inches of Prevost's breast. With horrified eyes the young Frenchman saw the fingers tighten about the trigger. He tensed to resist the impact of the bullet which was about to blaze out of the barrel of that high-powdered rifle. But the finger that pressed the trigger relaxed slightly. A clatter of pots and pans sounded from within the cabin. Then came a man's voice: "Molok, you scoundrel! Where are you?" And then after a short pause: "Don't try to fool me. I know you're out there. I know you've been there all night. I heard her tell you to watch me. Come in here and give me a hand before I send a bullet into you."

Black Jean Lascelles!

Evidently, there was nothing wrong with the man's hearing, for his face twitched with rage at the sound of Lascelles' voice. In a breath then, Anton saw it all. This man was Molok, whom Ramee had mentioned in her letter to MacAdams. Although he had never before heard of the fellow, evidently the man was Ramee's faithful servant. All night he had circled the cabin occupied by Black Jean in order to make sure that Lascelles stayed inside!

Anton was about to make himself known to Molok, when the snapping report of a rifle sounded from the craggy hills on the opposite side of the ravine. The bullet brushed the side of Prevost's head, sending his fur cap askew. Then, the rifle trickled from the black man's fingers. His knees crumpled, and he fell. Prevost's horrified eyes glimpsed a jagged hole in the man's temple. Molok, that faithful watchdog, was dead before he struck the ground.

"Molok!" came Lascelles' impatient voice.

Wondering whether that rifle shot had been intended for him or for Molok, Anton edged around a corner of the cabin. Another shot sounded, but the bullet must have gone wild.

"What's all that shooting?" came from inside the cabin. There was a sound of steps. The bar which held the log door in place squeakingly protested under the tugging pressure of impatient hands. It swung inward, and Lascelles, half dressed, looked through the aperture.

Anton Prevost acted then. In a single bound he reached the door. An outthrust foot prevented the startled Lasecelles from closing it, and then Anton threw his entire weight into that opening. The door gave abruptly and he sprawled headlong into the cabin.

Lascelles said no word. His face, beneath the black beard, had turned a sickly gray. His eyes flitted toward his belt which lay on the bunk near the wall. A pistol and a bone-handled knife were in that belt.

Prevost had come to his feet like a cat. A quick glance told him that Lascelles, half dressed as he was, was unarmed. The young Frenchman threw his rifle aside, and removed his coat.

"I kill you, Lascelles," he said evenly; "with these two hands—I kill you."

Lascelles opened his mouth as though to speak, but only moistened his white lips with his tongue. He backed

away as his enemy advanced. But he did not go far. In the middle of the big square room he stood his ground, and, as Anton Prevost sprang in, he struck out with all his strength.

The blow went solidly home, landing with force beneath the young Frenchman's ear. But Anton was hardly aware that he had been hit. His eyes never left Lascelles' blue ones.

Again Black Jean struck out, again and still again. Each time those brutal blows found their mark. But Anton merely shook his head like a great dog and advanced purposefully. He made no attempt to answer those blows. He moved forward, arms outstretched, hands reaching toward his opponent's throat. Always, Black Jean Lascelles backed away. The log wall stopped him finally.

Anton Prevost advanced. The curled fingers of his right hand reached inexorably for the enemy's throat. Lascelles sought to brush that rigid arm aside. Failing, he caught the young Frenchman's wrist with both hands and clung tightly. But even his entire weight failed to turn that arm aside. Those clawlike fingers locked irresistibly about his throat. Slowly but surely they tightened there.

Panic took possession of Black Jean Lascelles. Possessed for the moment of that unnatural strength and desperate courage which is a heritage of all living things when faced with death, the cornered man fought. Scratching, gouging, kicking, he fought like a madman. Around and around the room the two men struggled. A dozen times they lay face to face, gasping, on the floor. A dozen times they scrambled erect and threshed in short stubborn circles. The cast-iron stove was overturned. The bunk along the wall crashed to the floor beneath their falling bodies. Twice, Anton Prevost lost and recovered his grip at his enemy's throat. Alternately, Lascelles tugged at his fingers or struck out with clubbed fists. Anton's face was smeared with red. The breath whistled in noisy gasps through his lips. But no once did he speak; not once did his eyes leave those of Lascelles'. Always his grip tightened at his enemy's throat.

Suddenly, as they struggled, close locked, on the floor, Lascelles snatched the knife from his opponent's belt. Anton saw that gleaming blade flash upward. It descended in a glittering arc. The knife cut shallowly into his shoulder. But there had been little force behind that stabbing blow. The knife lifted again; but, when it fell, barely penetrated the young trapper's clothing. A third time the knife lifted. But this time it did not reach its mark. Instead, it trickled from Lascelles' fingers and fell clattering upon the floor. Anton Prevost knew when the knife dropped, but it was some time before he realized that his enemy's body lay, limp and resistless, beneath him.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FLIGHT.

HE came to his feet almost reluctantly, and looked down into that black-whiskered face, hideously contorted in death.

"So," he said, "the job is done. And you, my fair one, are free. And now——?"

He shrugged and laughed harshly. He had killed a man. No matter how justifiable his act, he was a murderer. Of course, according to law, there was no justification for his act. The law—the redcoats, those persistent human bloodhounds—and, specifically Corporal John Hayes, would be seeking him. If he was caught he would hang. But he did not intend to be caught. Not for an instant did he consider giving himself up. The instinct of self-preservation comes first with all wilderness dwellers, whether beast, bird, or human. Dur-

ing the brief instant that he stood there, Anton Prevost considered only ways and means to insure his immediate freedom. But Ramee was near. Those sled tracks would lead him to her. He would see her before he went away.

But it was destined that Anton should not see Ramee before he started into that lonely white wilderness which was to serve as his only home for weary months to come. As he stood with his hand on the door, the distant rattle of rifle shots sounded. He opened the door and peered out. Almost immediately he discovered the dog team and —Corporal John Hayes. The old officer was crossing the white valley over a mile away. Hayes had stopped and, rifle in hand, was looking about as though striving to locate the source of those reports. It was evident that Corporal John had not been the one at whom those shots had been directed; it was also apparent that he, himself, had done no shooting. The reports had come from much nearer at hand.

With a single backward glance at that still, lifeless form huddled in a grotesque heap on the floor, Anton started back along that narrow rock-walled trail.

It was not until he crossed an open space half a mile from that cabin of death that the mysterious shooting was resumed. This time he was the target. There were five shots all told. But he was, evidently, out of range, for all five shots fell short of their mark. The fugitive hurried on.

It was not until he was out of The Pass and well into the treacherous muskeg, giving entrance to the northern wilderness, that he paused for breath. His body ached and throbbed from head to foot. His breath came in gasps and his heart pounded loudly as though it might hammer its way through his breast.

And then his chin sagged forward upon his breast. His eyes shut. But he did not sleep. Fiercely he struggled against the desire to rest interminably on that fallen log whereon he sat. To sleep meant death, he knew. It was bitter cold. In a mere matter of minutes it would all be over. Why not? Why should he live? Why should he fight for life when life now held nothing for him? True, Ramee still loved him; but he would never be able to claim her. He was a murderer. Soon the police would come——

Again his chin sunk upon his breast, but once again he aroused. His eyes opened wide. But he did not see the expanse of whiteness before him. She stood there. Ramee! And she was smiling. Her lips were moving. She was talking. He leaned forward to catch her words. But he could not hear. Finally he understood. It was a vision. Even so, it was pleasant. His lips twisted into a smile. She drew away then, and, as she backed slowly out of sight, she threw him a kiss.

He was no longer inclined to sleep. She had not been there. It was a vision, merely, he knew. But she still loved him. Therefore, he would live. He groped to his feet. His limbs at first refused his bidding; but, little by little, feeling came back into his numb body. The wilderness took on form and substance before his dizzy eyes. He swung his arms, slowly at first, then with rapidly increasing vigor. At the end of a mile he had struck, temporarily at least, his customary strong-swinging stride.

But a man's body can accomplish unusual things only when his thoughts persistently demand the unusual. That pleasant vision had served as a brief tonic to his waning energy. But his heart still was sad. Even though Ramee did love him, the future held nothing pleasant.

Soon his steps began to lag. Once more great weariness took possession of his exhausted body. With every la-

bored step he willed to stop and rest. But some vague urge kept him going.

He had been paying little attention to the country through which he was passing. He knew that he was heading north. That was all. As he stumbled along a hogbacked ridge, he looked into the white valley below. His uncertain eyes discovered a moving object. He stopped, and after much effort focused his gaze upon that moving thing—two men. And they were not so far away as he had at first judged. Even as he watched, one of the men stopped, dropped on a knee and lifted his rifle. A puff of smoke spurted out of the rifle barrel. There was a sharp report and a bullet struck a boulder near at hand and spun screeching away.

The exhausted man tried to return that shot; but, when he finally drew his rifle out of its case his hands trembled so that he could scarcely lift the gun, let alone focus it on a distant target. The second man was firing now. Several of the shots came close. And there was no way of avoiding those bullets. The open ridge on which he stood was absolutely devoid of shelter of any description. The opposite wall of the ridge was an icy glissade extending almost perpendicularly downward for a thousand feet or more.

The men had stopped firing. Sensing his exhausted condition, apparently, they were drawing near. Slipping, sliding, falling, Prevost plodded along the open ridge.

He had covered perhaps half of the distance to the end of the ridge, when it seemed as though he had been struck across the shoulders with a club. There was no pain. Just a jolting, numbling sensation as from a blow. He knew instantly, however, that he was hit. Something warm trickled down his side. He tried to locate the wound but his numb fingers were without feeling. As he stumbled on, it seemed that it became increasingly hard to breath. A dull pain, which grew momentarily in intensity, developed in the small of his back. His legs suddenly gave way beneath him, and he fell, face forward upon the icy ground.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

AS he opened his eyes, Anton found David Estamet bending over him. He lay on many blankets in a little cabin. A fire blazed cheerily in an open fireplace. A glad look came into the cripple's eyes as he saw the light of reason return to that sick man who had lain for three days and three night, rolling and tossing in fevered delirium.

"David," the sick man whispered.

David Estamet placed a finger on his lips. "Be still, my friend," he cautioned, "you have been a very sick man. Go to sleep, now. When you wake we will talk."

Obediently, Anton Prevost closed his eyes. But he could not sleep. He sought, finally, to rise. Even this slight effort taxed his strength to the utmost. He sank back upon the pillows.

"I was shot. You found me, David?"

David Estamet nodded. *"Oui,"* he said; and those two men will do no more shooting, my friend. Dogs that they were! Hired killers. Indians both. One of them with a scar. Of course, they knew not that their master lay dead back there at The Pass. They had been threatened with death if they did not kill you. This I learned from Molok. They tried. Ah, yes—and they almost succeeded. I came upon them at The Pass that morning while I was looking for you—I saw you as you were leaving Talking River that morning and followed you. I exchanged shots with them. They eluded me; but I followed them. I arrived almost too late. They were running along that open ridge toward you when

I entered the valley. But my gun is a very good gun, Anton. You know that. You know, too, that I have keen eyes and a steady hand. So it was that I shot down both of those men before they reached you."

"And this cabin——" the sick man interrupted.

David Estamet smiled slowly. "It is well hidden, Anton, my friend," he said, "fear not. The police will never find you here. By now, Corporal John is far away. He started into the North, you see, knowing that you would go that way. Perhaps it is providential that you received this injury. Otherwise, most surely would Corporal John have overtaken you. As it is, he has passed us by. No doubt he is marooned in the great white wilderness far to the north. There has been a great snow during the past week. It will be long before he can make his way back and pick up your trail where he lost it."

In the days that followed, Anton Prevost gained steadily in strength. Under the watchful eyes of the little cripple, he enlarged his diet and took short walks into the hills.

It was not until six weeks later, however, that David Estamet pronounced his patient cured. There was a pleasant hint of spring in the air when Anton Prevost finally said good-by to his faithful little friend.

"You will tell her that I am well, David," he said in parting. "And, and that I love her."

The cripple promised faithfully.

But Anton Prevost was not one to whom the lonely life comes readily. Although, each year, his occupation as a trapper demanded that he spend nearly six months alone in the wilderness, always there was the springtime and the long happy summer to look forward to. Now, the springtime meant nothing to him, for it did not mean reunion with his friends and loved ones. He was a murderer, and a visit to a settlement would mean almost certain capture. Anton Prevost knew the ways of those red-coated men. Their methods of tracking down criminals were carefully worked out and wondrously efficient. By this time, for instance, less than two months after the death of Black Jean Lascelles at the hands of Anton Prevost, every policeman in northwestern Canada would be in possession of complete details of the crime. They would know that Anton Prevost was the guilty one; and, even if they did not know the murderer by sight, they would have in their possession a most accurate description of the wanted man.

All this the fugitive thoroughly realized. So he avoided the most remote settlement, isolated cabins set far back in the hills. This, even when he was sure that the occupants were his friends. He avoided all men on the open trail. Never before had there seemed to be so many in this wilderness land. Formerly, he had been on the lookout for every chance passer-by; to meet a fellow-traveler in the great woods was a pleasant event. The intervals between these infrequent meetings had seemed long. Now he did not want to meet these men. Each one assumed the rôle of a potential enemy. The intervals between the appearances of these lonely travelers in the white wilderness seemed short. Scarcly a week went by that he was not obliged to turn aside into a muskeg swamp, or burrow deep into a black thicket, to avoid coming face to face with some wayfarer.

At the end of the first month of his flight, he had become as a lonely wolf that skulks along the open ridges at night and sleeps away the days, hidden from the sight of man in a black cave or brush tangle in the hills. In other words, the fugitive traveled by night and slept in the daytime. In many other ways he took on the aspect of the wil-

derness creatures whose manner of living he aped. There was forever a furtive, hunted look in his eyes. The flesh fell away from his strong body until he was haggard. Like the wolf, he followed the ridge tops, or slunk, like the hunted thing he was, through the trailless swamps.

Twice, in the early spring he narrowly avoided capture. Both times these escapes occurred just after he had settled himself in some remote rockpile or brush thicket to sleep through the hours of sunshine. The first time, an entire detachment of police had struck upon his trail in the soft snow and had followed it. The second time, a lone policeman had turned aside to inquire into the identity of that strange human creature who traveled by night. To the understanding eyes of those red-coated men, it was readily apparent that the curiously spaced tracks which he left behind him were made by a man traveling under difficulties, either by one whose eyesight was affected or by one who walked at night. But the fugitive's every sense had been immeasurely sharpened. His hearing, particularly, had developed an acuteness which permitted him to identify a hundred and one vague woody sounds which an ordinary man might never have known existed. So the fugitive's keen ears warned him of the approach of his enemies in plenty of time to permit him to make his escape.

In the Northland there is really no springtime; in the space of a few short weeks winter merges abruptly into summer. When summer comes, however, it is as warm and as pleasantly fair as any Southland summer. During the half-dozen weeks embraced by the summer season, Anton Prevost traveled steadily northward. When the frost came early in August he was five hundred miles from Talking River. Since the commencement of his flight his every instinct had urged him to place as much distance as possible between himself and that homeland where was all that he held dear. Perhaps he felt that distance would serve to numb the pain that always wrenched his heart when he thought about Talking River —and Ramee. But he soon discovered, as has many another man, that space is no panacea for heartache and mental turmoil. It seemed that the loneliness and weariness grew upon him even as the distance increased between him and that little settlement at Talking River, which had for so long contained his every interest in life.

So, as the frost tang held longer each day to the reluctant green earth, he was possessed of an uncontrollable desire to journey southward toward his homeland. By this time he had become an object of suspicion. Dressed in furs from head to foot, with long hair and beard, even the bright-eyed Indian lads, who peered at him from the depths of the alder thickets, fled at his approach. Several times these Indian boys had told their elders about the wild man; on different occasions he was trailed for miles by those most skillful of all wilderness people in matters of woodcraft, native Cree Indians. Each time he avoided those clever ones, however.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE HUNTED THING.

IT was late in September when he came within sight of Otonwee Mountain. At dawn, one chill morning, he came out on a little knoll, covered lightly with a thin layer of early snow, and first looked upon that glorious sight. For glorious it most surely was to the weary fugitive. He stood, scarcely moving for the better part of an hour, watching. He saw the sun creep over the eastern horizon and start upon its hopeless daily task of bringing warmth to that frigid land below. He located his little cabin nestling cosily on the

ridgetop. And then, he decided upon a very foolish plan. He would spend the winter in that cabin! He would trap Otonwee Basin, as usual.

Curiously enough, perhaps, the possibility of capture did not now appeal to him in such a dismal light. Perhaps if—— But there was no definite process of cogent reasoning before or after his decision was made. He merely started out boldly in the bright light of day and took possession of that little cabin on the ridgetop.

In the days that followed, he was, for the first time since he had become a hunted thing, in a measure contented. He uncovered his traps, where he had cached them the year before, and set his trap line in the accustomed way.

But there was something wrong. The pelts secured were not so fine as usual. Perhaps he imagined this! Perhaps it was merely a state of mind! During the early winter he found in his traps a black fox and two silvers. But those precious pelts brought no satisfying glow to his weary eyes. His only sensation was a sort of vague regret that his traps should have served to take the lives of those beautiful creatures.

As the winter waned, his physical energy lessened noticeably. During the summer his diet of red meat had been balanced somewhat by the berries and roots he had been able to secure. But now, in the winter, living only on meat, his health deteriorated. When he had fled into the hills a year since, he had weighed well over two hundred pounds; now he would have tipped the scales at less than one hundred and fifty.

In March he visited a food cache on the opposite side of Otonwee Basin, which cache, he knew, was the property of Corporal John Hayes. From this cache he helped himself to ammunition for his rifle. To pay for the shells he took, he left furs equal in value to many times the value of the cartridges.

A week or so after his visit to the cache he returned one night at dusk from a three-day inspection of his trapline. As he approached his cabin along the open ridge, some inner sense conveyed to him a warning. He stopped in his tracks a mile from the cabin and circled widely. He did not know why he did this. There was nothing about the appearance of the cabin to indicate that a human being was there, but Anton knew that this was so.

It was night by the time he had completely circled that little log building on the wind-swept ridge top. Yet he had come upon no tracks in the soft, shallow snow.

Logic told him that his suspicions had been without foundation; instinct argued that he had missed the incoming tracks of a man and that there was a human being in the cabin.

It was here that his newly acquired fatalism rendered a decision. What if there was some one there, he asked himself? Even if Corporal John Hayes was there? What of it? What did it matter if he was taken away and hanged by the neck for that crime he had committed? What did it matter? He could suffer no more than he had already suffered. And there would, at least, be a brief interval before the end during which some iota of comfort might fall his way. He would, at least, have the solace of talking to his fellowmen.

Finally, with a shrug of his angular shoulders, he cut straight across the open ridgetop toward the cabin.

Although he had discovered no signs of a living thing, he knew that he would find Corporal John Hayes inside that cabin. So he did not even start when the old policeman confronted him, leveled rifle in hand.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE RETURN OF ANTON THE GLAD.

HOLA, John," cried Anton.

The old policeman did not answer. He stood, gun in hand, his steely blue eyes resting compassionately upon the haggard, bearded face of the fur-clad man before him.

"Put down your gun, John," the fugitive finally said, "I will not fight you."

Still without having spoken a word, John Hayes lowered his gun. "I couldn't believe it was you," he muttered finally, as though talking to himself. "You poor fellow!"

Anton Prevost laughed harshly. But the laugh vanished almost immediately. With a weary sigh, he tossed the pelts which he had collected into a corner. Then he sat on an edge of his bunk and leaned toward the still speechless officer. There was in his voice the heartrending note of a man beside himself with loneliness when he spoke: "Talk to me, John," he begged, "tell me everything. Anything. Just talk, talk, talk. How I want to hear——"

Corporal John Hayes swallowed hard. Something suspiciously like a mist blurred his eyes. He filled his pipe, held a match to the black bowl and puffed rapidly, nervously.

"I don't know where to begin, boy," he finally said; "somehow, all I can think about is you. The suffering you've been through! And all for nothing."

The latter statement, fraught as it was with glorious possibilities, seemed to impress the listening man not at all. He appeared to be lost in an ethereal ecstasy brought about merely by the sound of his old friend's voice. The words which had come from John Hayes' lips meant nothing to the lonely man. It was merely the sound of a voice.

"I'm not much of a story-teller, Anton," the old policeman went on. "A great many things have happened during the past year. Many confusing things. Many good things, for you and yours. I'll do my best to tell you everything."

The policeman laid aside his pipe, cleared his throat, and went on quickly: "To begin with, you're all in the clear, me boy," he said. "In putting an end to Black Jean Lascelles you only served as an instrument of justice. For that black scoundrel, Anton, was a murderer! He had killed two men. Within a week after you disappeared, papers came through from headquarters containing his description and the story of his crime.

"I see you don't understand. Well, there's quite a bit of history to it. It goes back a good many years. Twenty years, to be exact. Lascelles was then a factor for a big fur company. A neighboring station of the company was in charge of Jacques de Monteville. Lascelles and De Monteville were close friends. Irregularities—crooked stuff—developed. An innocent man was killed. Later, one of the company's inspectors sent on to investigate the muddle was killed. Everything pointed to De Monteville as the guilty man. His guilt was substantiated, as ye might say, when he disappeared. Lascelles supplied the police with much additional information, which served to convict De Monteville of a dozen or more colossal fur thefts, also of the murder of the two men.

"Like I say, De Monteville disappeared. The police searched for him from one end of Canada to the other. They never found hide nor hair of him. Finally, it was reported that he had lost his life in the Far North. From that time on the search petered out.

"But, Jacques de Monteville was not dead. Chandler MacAdams knew this. Lascelles knew it. Ramee—De Monteville's daughter—did not know it, how-

ever. Not for some time, that is. Until the time Lascelles appeared at Talking River last spring, the girl supposed that her father was dead. Lascelles told her a different story, however. He told her that her father was living; he told her, too, that unless she accepted his attentions he would turn Jacques de Monteville, that thief and killer, over to the police. That left the girl no choice. She was in his power.

"De Monteville had come on to The Pass to be as near as possible to his daughter. He was a sick man, you see, knew he didn't have long to live; and —I guess you can appreciate this—he wanted somebody to talk to occasionally. Chandler MacAdams visited the old man regularly. De Monteville lived at The Pass along with that dumb servant of his, Molok, from the middle of last summer until—after the fireworks.

"He died just a few months ago, rest his soul! But he died happy, Anton—in his daughter's arms."

The policeman found his pipe and, forgetting to light it, slipped it under his grizzled mustache and puffed quickly, blowing imaginary clouds of smoke toward the ceiling.

Anton Prevost had settled back on the bunk. Not by so much as a flicker of his dark eyes had he indicated his reaction to the old policeman's impressive tale.

"But the police ain't so stupid as some people think, Anton," John Hayes went on. "There ain't much that they miss. For instance, some time after De Monteville's disappearance, Lascelles resigned his post with the fur company. A year or so later he blossomed out as a rich man. He didn't do nothing. He just, all of a sudden, seemed to have plenty of money. You might say that this was nobody's business but his own. But us fellers, Anton, make all sorts of things our business. And so, although absolutely in the clear, Black Jean Lascelles was, as you might say, more or less under suspicion for a good many years. It was fifteen years after the ruckus which had sent poor old De Monteville to a living death that we finally got the goods on Monsieur Jean Lascelles. No need to go into details about that; a chap who had been his assistant in the old days was picked up in connection with a shady deal and spilled the beans. That was all.

"All of this—about Lascelles, I mean —came out at about the time he first showed up at Talking River. Of course, De Monteville's innocence was proved at the same time.

"And there you have it, boy," the old policeman concluded. "Lot's of words just like you asked for. Mebbe the whole story ain't there; but it won't be long now before you'll be where you can ask questions from somebody you'd a danged sight rather hear talk than me."

Early the next morning Corporal John Hayes and Anton Prevost started back toward Talking River. Not by a single word or sign had the erstwhile fugitive betrayed his reaction to the great good fortune which had been so suddenly thrust upon him. He seemed to be stunned. He moved like a man in a daze.

On the opposite side of Otonwee Basin, John Hayes picked up one of his men who had been stationed near the cache which the fugitive had visited a week since, thereby giving a clew to his presence in Otonwee Basin.

Following a whispered conversation between Corporal John and his man, the latter laughed and hurried away, soon leaving Anton Prevost and the corporal far in the rear.

In the days that followed, few words were exchanged. It seemed as though Anton Prevost, that once loquacious, cheerful fellow, had forgotten how to

talk. So very silent was he that Corporal John many times found himself wondering if his young friend's mind was affected.

Although the corporal was himself all-impatient, the two men traveled very slowly. It was midday of the tenth day when they came in sight of Talking River. The snow was gone. The fresh, clean odor of wet earth was in the air. New green things peeked from all sort of unexpected places. Birds sang in the trees. The mellow sunlight rested pleasantly on the log shacks of the little settlement. Anton Prevost knew that it was spring. The songs of the birds came clearly to him. Those sun-brightened cabins were familiar to his eyes. A warm something surged up about his heart. But his eyes were listless. His lips did not smile. He still seemed to be somewhat in a daze.

Talking River's snakelike main street was deserted. Even the cabins seemed empty. There were perhaps a dozen people grouped about the front of Chandler MacAdams' store. The red-bearded fur buyer was there. He came forward and took Anton Prevost in his great arms. The others, all of them Prevost's good friend, came forward and shook his hand. Anton murmured greetings, returned handclasps. But it seemed that he scarcely saw these good friends who greeted him so warmly. Always he looked over their heads, his eyes searching, everlastingly searching.

Finally he entered the store. Ramee was not there.

One by one his friends went away. As they went, their dark faces wore smiles.

When the last one had gone and only Chandler MacAdams remained, Anton Prevost put into word that question which was uppermost in his thoughts.

"Ramee?" he said.

MacAdams smiled. "Come," he said. And then, taking his young friend's arm, he started away.

Anton Prevost asked no questions. His thoughts were vague and uncertain. He realized after a bit that the old fur-buyer was leading him along that little pathway through the thicket which led to that unfinished cabin of his dreams. He wondered, disinterestedly, why that pathway was still clear. It should be grown up by this time, filled with weeds and brush. And that uncompleted cabin would be brush-hidden and rotted away.

And then the cabin itself appeared between two head-high clumps of green-tipped poplars. At what he saw, Anton Prevost cried out involuntarily. The building was not as he had left it. During his absence his friends had completed the cabin! The land for a hundred feet all about had been cleared. There was even a freshly spaded spot at the side—a garden. There were windows of glass in that cabin, and there were curtains in those windows.

He saw the people then—the entire population of Talking River, men, women, and children. Smiling, calling friendly greetings, they filled the little cabin to overflowing. David Estamet stood there, fiddle under his arm.

Slowly the weariness disappeared from Anton Prevost's dark eyes. He breathed hard, like a man who has run for a great distance. He took two quick steps forward, then stopped. The crowd before the doorway of the little cabin parted, and, along that aisle of smiling faces came Ramee MacAdams.

She wore a white apron and her cheeks were flushed from bending over the fire. Anton Prevost's eyes grew brighter. His lips formed words, but he did not speak. Instead, he opened his arms. With a glad little cry, she ran forward and threw herself into them.

For a long minute they stood thus, unmoving, lost in their happiness.

Then, a great shout went up from the crowd. Anton Prevost straightened. With head erect, his eyes swept about that group of friendly faces. He lifted his right hand high.

"My friends," he said, and then he smiled, that old familiar smile. Those shouting ones smiled too. And Ramee, resting happily within the circle of her lover's arm, smiled also.

And so it was that Anton the Glad returned to Talking River.

## BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

### The Sharp-shinned Hawk

*(Accipiter Velox)*

IN the foregoing articles on various species of hawks, there has been some doubt among a few of our bird-loving readers about the correct status of the hawk. It is not generally known that most of these birds—including the sparrow hawk, the marsh hawk, the red-shouldered hawk, and the sharp-shinned hawk—are classified as belonging to the order *Raptores*, the sub-order *Falcones*, and the family *Buteonidæ*. The sparrow hawk differs in the last-named division, being of the family *Falconidæ*.

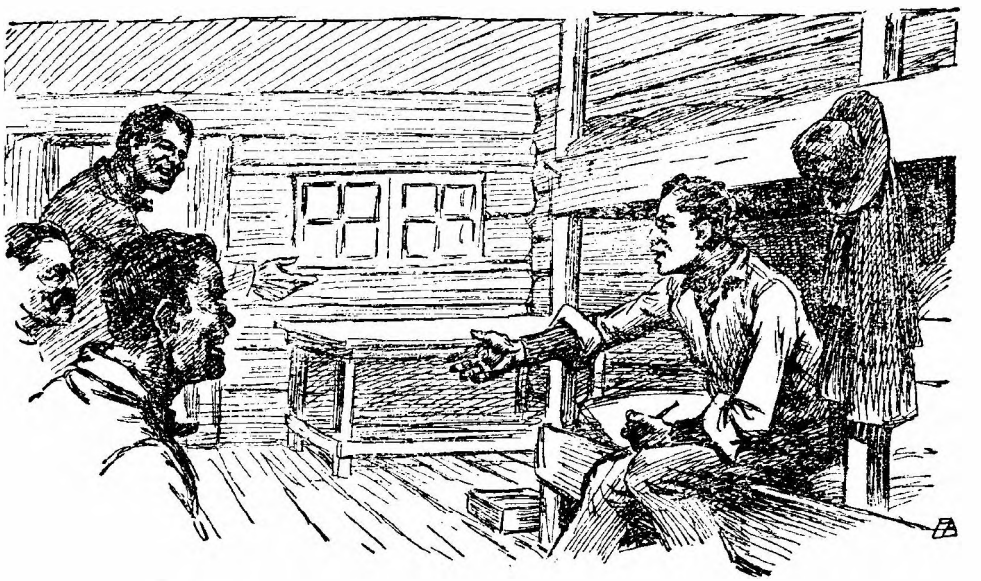
The word "falcon" is derived from *"falco."* These birds have a slightly shorter tail and long, pointed wings. "Buzzards" comes from *buteo,* and these birds have long, broad wings and a broad tail. That is why the hawks belonging to the family *Buteonoidæ* are often called buzzards. The scientific name given to these enables one to distinguish to what group they belong. The accipters may be distinguished from any of the other groups—the falcons or the buzzards—by their comparatively short, rounded wings and long tails. They fly by alternately flapping and sailing, unlike the buzzard, which usually soars in circles.

The sharp-shinned hawk averages a little more than a foot in length. The adult is bluish-gray above, and white, barred with red, below. Until they reach maturity the sharp-shinned hawks are brown above, with the breast streaked with reddish-brown. The tail is square-tipped and heavily barred.

Early in the spring, the male bird perches in a conspicuous position and utters shrill calls until a female replies. No time is lost in selecting a suitable spot for a home, which will probably be chosen rather high up in an evergreen tree. Usually, it is inconspicuously placed and is made of a sort of a platform of sticks resting on some branches and fixed against the trunk of the tree. Strips of bark and grasses form the lining.

From three to five pale-white eggs, heavily dotted with shades of brown, are deposited. Both male and female assist in the incubation and care of the young. The baby birds are at first covered with a soft, white down. After about four weeks they begin to fly and flutter about, but continue to stay in the vicinity and be fed by their parents. As soon as their wings are strong enough for long flights, the home is left far behind.

These birds are strong and brave, being markedly energetic and quick in all their movements. Ofter the hawk strikes and kills birds too large to be carried away. Silently, it swoops over a poultry yard, seizes a helpless chicken, and disappears before the loss is noted. The hawk is the terror of all birds because he is able to match any of them in swiftness and agility, and is also able to follow and overtake them, no matter how intricate and tricky their flight may be. When in search of prey, no danger seems too great for them to attempt. When birds are not obtainable, mice, frogs, and insects form the hawks' diet.



# Chip of the Old Log

## By Howard J. Perry

**Author of "Dog Watch," etc.**

THE Shadow Mountain Camp of the Sunset Logging Co., had gone "haywire," which in the parlance of big timber operations on the West Coast means a state of affairs wherein a subtle lethargy takes hold of things, and production drops to an unprofitable level.

It is not an uncommon condition in the timberlands, and had it occurred in any of the other outfits, Jim Pierce, owner of the Sunset Co., would have resorted to the accepted expedient of firing half the men, placing another foreman in charge, and laying down in profane but lucid language the age-old code of the camps, "Log, you timber beasts, or roll up your blankets!"

But, while there might have been a hundred causes for the slump at the Shadow Mountain Camp that could have been eliminated in this simple manner, the real reason—and one demanding serious consideration—was Kerry Donnegan, the foreman.

In the words of "Peewee" Potter, veteran camp bullcook, "Every batch o' timber has one tree, bigger an' finer than all the rest, that always makes a feller stop an' wonder if after all, something we don't know much about didn't have a hand in its makin'; an' that's the way Kerry Donnegan strikes me."

And Peewee's analogy went unchallenged, which was proof enough that every logger who knew the big, rugged foreman felt the same way about him.

Kerry Donnegan had drifted into the Sunset camps fifteen years before. He was then a powerful giant of thirty. Where he came from and what his past might have been, no one knew. And a grim sadness that lurked in the depths of his steel-blue eyes dissuaded any

open curiosity on the part of his companions.

From the beginning, it became apparent that he was born to be a logger. Also, in those first years, it was evident that he was a leader of men, and soon he was elevated to the position of foreman.

Loggers fought to work under him. Only an accident or a death created a vacancy in his crews, and on such occasions a hundred applied for the position. Yet a berth with him was never known to be a soft one. On the contrary, his outfits became recognized in the logging world as the greatest "high-ball" camps in the Harbor country. The hardest contracts were always given to Kerry Donnegan, and the hardest contracts were always finished by him, all of them before the allotted time limit of the most optimistic.

After a few years, the haunting sadness vanished from his eyes, but the grimness remained, and only on those occasions when the mail arrived in camp and a letter with a scrawled address on it was handed to him did he really smile. Then it seemed that the entire camp reflected his joy. Men laughed loudly, the smoke-filled bunk house reverberated with rollicking chanteys, and even the grouchy cook came forth with a special frosted cake.

Not until a long time later did any of Kerry Donnegan's history become known, and then he revealed it bit by bit to Jim Pierce. The owner had been quick to sense the unusual qualities of the big woodsman, and after he had made Kerry a foreman, the two became fast friends.

In the mellow twilight of the summer evenings, they would strike off through the timber to go over some detail of the logging, and when they finished their inspection, they would pause in a favorite spot and talk until darkness enveloped them. In stormy winter weather, these talks continued by the side of the glowing stove in the commissary. Thus it was that Pierce learned something about Kerry Donnegan.

"So you don't want the boy to become a logger?" Pierce asked one night, when Donnegan had finished telling him about the writer of the letters.

The big foreman's eyes hardened and Pierce saw his fingers tighten about the iron poker with which he had just stirred the fire. "Not as long as I have the strength to stop him," he said. "Not logging for that boy, Pierce. He's all I've got in this world and I want him to have a better chance. That's why I'm keeping him in school. He's going to get an education. He ain't going to work like I have, 'specially not in the woods."

"But the timberlands need brains, Kerry," the owner argued.

"Brain!" the other snorted. "Brawn, you mean. I guess I ought to know." He rose and stabbed viciously at the burning coals. "No, Pierce, that boy ain't ever going to log." Then his voice softened. "'Course I ain't saying I'd not like to have him with me, but I'm willing to give all that up to see him free of the camps."

Jim Pierce realized that Kerry Donnegan had made up his mind, and he did not bring the subject up again. He was glad to have the big foreman working for him, and each year he took delight in presenting him with a bonus check for the records he hung up in getting out logs. Kerry Donnegan was a logger.

He often went to the city to visit his son, and on several occasions Pierce had the opportunity to accompany him, and he saw the two together. The first time he met Jack Donnegan, his eyes widened appreciatively as he gazed on the youngster.

"Good gosh, what a kid!" he said later to his mill superintendent. "He's a chip of the old block. What a tim-

ber beast he would make, but Kerry's sure determined to see that the boy doesn't ever get into the woods."

"What does the kid want to do?" inquired the superintendent.

"Oh, I guess he would like to be with his dad," Pierce replied. "I heard him mention it to Kerry, but you ought to see the old man shut him up. No, sir, that kid won't get into the woods if Kerry Donnegan has anything to say about it."

Then came the day when Jim Pierce returned jubilant from an Eastern trip. He had been gone several months, but he brought back a coveted contract. He had outbid all the other companies for the famous Bear Valley stand of timber. The price he had offered had made the rival bidders shake their heads. They openly told him that he could not make any money at such a figure, but Pierce had smiled. He was thinking of Kerry Donnegan when he set that low mark. Kerry could make money for him even if the bid had been still lower.

The production reports of all his camps were on his desk when he got back. They would show what had been done while he was away. One by one, he went through them. Things had been going fine. He came to the report of the Shadow Mountain Camp, where Kerry Donnegan was foreman. The instant he picked up the first sheet a sense of impending disaster swept over him.

Production had fallen off forty per cent, yet the camp was logging in one of the easiest sections. The owner stamped from his private office and shot a few questions at his chief clerk. The replies only substantiated his fears, and in a few minutes he strode out of his office, announcing that he was going into the woods.

Three hours later, as he approached the camp, he felt the change, yet there was no specific evidence of it. It was an hour before closing time. The chatter of the donkey engines came to his ears and the thundering boom of falling timber echoed down the valley. Everything seemed to be running all right, but there was something about those familiar sounds that did not accord with one of Kerry Donnegan's camps. The verve and snap were missing.

He noticed it again when he walked into the commissary. The timekeeper looked up in surprise.

"Hello, Mr. Pierce," he greeted. "We didn't expect you so soon."

"No, I didn't plan on getting up here for a while," the owner answered, making an effort to be casual. "How've things been going?"

The timekeeper shifted uneasily in his chair. He dropped his eyes to his work. "Oh, pretty fair. Kerry'll be in from the woods in a few minutes."

"Pretty fair?" snapped Pierce. "What do you mean by that? The production sheets don't show it."

The other fumbled with the papers before him. "Yeah, I know the stuff ain't been coming out fast lately. Seems as though things have been breaking against us. I guess Kerry can explain it."

Jim Pierce looked at the speaker steadily for a long time. Something was wrong, but he saw that the timekeeper preferred not to discuss it. He was about to demand an explanation when he heard the door open slowly behind him. He wondered before he turned around if it were the cold blast of air that chilled him or if it were the sudden premonition of what he expected to see. It was an effort for him to face about, and when he did, he blinked and passed his hand across his eyes with an involuntary gesture.

Kerry Donnegan stood in the doorway, but not the Kerry Donnegan he had known. It was as though time had leaped a span of twenty years. Before him stood a prematurely stooped and tired old man.

Jim Pierce pulled himself together and stepped forward with extended hand. Kerry's sunken blue eyes smiled wearily, the grip in his fingers was limp.

"Hello, Kerry. how are you?"

"Hello, Jim; fine."

That was all they said. At that moment the owner knew that nothing else could be said.

The foreman moved past him and approached the timekeeper. "Better go and get some chow, Ed," he said. "Tell the cook Mr. Pierce and I will be over later."

The timekeeper got up and went out. Kerry waited until the door closed after him. Then he turned and faced Pierce.

"Well, Jim, she's haywire," he said hollowly. "But I guess there ain't no need my telling you. You've seen the reports."

The owner nodded, his eyes probing Kerry's face. "Yes, Kerry, I saw the reports, but I don't think the camp's haywire. You must have run into some tough logging."

Kerry Donnegan laughed bitterly. "Nope, Jim, I ain't got any alibi. She's haywire, and you and I both know it —and the reason is, I'm haywire. That's why I'm glad you're back. I wanted to stick that long at least. Now I'm rolling my blankets."

Jim Pierce's jaw fell. Then he essayed a laugh. "What do you mean 'rolling your blankets', Kerry? You're not quitting, and I'm not telling you to. What's up, anyway? Give me the dope and we'll fix it up and the old camp will start producing as it always did."

The big foreman shrugged his massive shoulders and slumped into a chair. He sat there for several minutes staring at the floor.

"There ain't nothing that can be fixed, Jim," he murmured. "I'm through. I'm haywire—and I'm pulling out." There was hopeless finality in his voice.

Pierce walked over and stood beside him, looking down on his bent head. "Listen, Kerry," he said. "You've been the best foreman I've ever had in the woods, and you're not going to pull out on me without telling me what's wrong."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you, Jim," the other said. "But it won't help. It's just the kid." Kerry Donnegan lifted his face to the owner. His eyes were moist. "He's gone, Jim."

"Gone!" ejaculated Pierce. "Jack gone! Where'd he go, Kerry?"

"I don't know. You see, I've always planned on his staying in the city and somehow he didn't take to the idea. Wanted to get out in the open, but I figured he'd get over the desire and see things my way. A few months ago we had an argument about it and then one day I got a letter from him saying he was hitting out for himself, but he didn't say where. For a while I thought maybe he'd come back, but he didn't, and I haven't had any word from him."

Kerry rose and paced across the floor. Pausing by the small window, he gazed out over the timberlands, now washed in mellow sunset. Finally he swung around.

"Jim," he said, "every man loves some one thing better than all else in the world. For many it's a woman, for others it's liquor, gambling, or their work. For me it was that boy. Now he's gone and I can't go on. That's why I'm rolling up and leaving. That's why the camp's haywire." He made an effort to pull himself together, working a smile on his drawn face. "But come on, Jim," he said starting for the door. "Let's eat now, we'll talk after supper."

Pierce followed him out and into the cook shack. But after they had eaten and returned to the commissary, nothing he could say would change Kerry's decision. The best he could do was to

get the foreman to agree to stay for a few weeks until another man could be found.

While it was the owner's custom to remain overnight at the camp, this time he determined to return to town, and as he went down the trail, he felt the burden of a mighty problem on his shoulders. Not only must he save his camp from its depression, he must save Kerry Donnegan from his.

Strangely enough, Kerry Donnegan's grief was shared by every man in the Shadow Mountain Camp. Ordinarily, one man's trouble in the rough and bitter life of the timberlands remains his own, but the big foreman was an exception. What was Kerry's trouble, they made theirs, also. So when Kerry lost his grip on things it was as if a potent epidemic had seized the camp. And because the loggers were almost totally inarticulate when it came to expressing their sympathy, the condition was made doubly hard. A mute sorrow somehow seemed to settle over the men.

Then one evening when the men came in from the woods they found a bulletin posted on the walls of the cook shack. It was signed by Jim Pierce, and stated that the opportunity to log the Bear Creek timber with a salary bonus for every man would be awarded to the outfit which finished its present operations first, and that since the Shadow Mountain and Rocky Canyon camps were the only two who were nearly done, the contest would center around them.

This announcement was a stunning blow to the Shadow Mountain loggers. Under ordinary conditions they would have sworn lustily and hurled a challenge to the entire logging universe to try and beat them in any contest. But now it was like expecting a crippled invalid to get out of bed and fight.

"An' to think of losin' to that Rocky Canyon bunch," lamented one of the men. "It's enough to make a feller feel there ain't no justice!"

"Confound that kid o' Kerry's," growled Peewee Potter. "If he had only waited 'til this was over! We could lick any one if Kerry was with us."

"Say, you fellers get me down!" declared Tom Boland, a new woods boss. Boland had just recently come into the camp. "What if Donnegan is haywire? We can do it without 'im."

The group in front of the bulletin turned on him in surprise.

"Fat chance we'd have!" asserted Peewee. "It ain't as if Kerry is the only one. How can a bunch o' timber beasts work right when they know their boss is feelin' like he is?"

"Well, I'm lookin' out for myself. I need that bonus job," retorted Boland.

There was no reply to this. The men felt that if Boland had been in the camp long enough and had known Kerry Donnegan, he would not talk like that.

Pierce's announcement, however, only made Kerry still more dejected. Inwardly he felt that he owed it to his men to make a fight of it, yet he knew that he was incapable of leading them. The anxiety he read in their faces just made him feel worse. He saw they were only waiting for the word from him to be logging again as of old. He avoided them whenever he could and waited impatiently for Pierce to come up to camp and relieve him of his job.

But Pierce did not come and no word or man came from headquarters. Instead, a rumor drifted across the valley from the Rocky Canyon camp that they were already talking of their new jobs on Bear Creek. Confident that the Shadow Mountain camp was haywire, they were sure they would get the chance at the new operations.

Kerry's men refused to go into town on Saturday night. They knew the Rocky Canyon loggers would be there, eager to gloat over their almost assured

victory. In place of going, they loafed around camp hoping against hope that Kerry would have a change of heart and take up the fight.

For a week the conditions remained the same. The Shadow Mountain camp had truly gone haywire. Again word came from across the valley that the Rocky Canyon group already were dumping their logs into the river. They would be through in another two weeks. At the rate Kerry's men were logging, they would not be done in four.

Sunday evening the Shadow Mountain men gathered in one of the bunk houses and gloomily discussed the situation. No one could offer a solution. Boland tried to urge the men to take up the fight in spite of Kerry, but it was plainly evident that the foreman's grief had thoroughly permeated every man in the camp.

Across in the commissary, Kerry Donnegan sat alone. He had come to the conclusion that it was futile to stay on the job and was getting ready to write his resignation to Pierce, and slip out that night, when the door opened and a logger from the Rocky Canyon outfit walked in.

Kerry looked up from his chair inquiringly.

The other came across the room and drew an envelope from his pocket.

"Here's a letter for you, Donnegan," he said, handing it to Kerry. "It's from our boss, an' he told me to see that you got it personally." He turned and went out again.

For a long time, Kerry held the envelope in his hand. Then he slowly tore it open. Getting up, he moved closer to the bracket lamp on the wall and read the contents. It was addressed to him and ran:

I'm a new man in these parts, Donnegan, but I've heard a lot about you and I thought when Pierce told us we could get a battle out of you for the Bear Creek job that you'd show some of the stuff everybody said you had. But I guess they were all wrong. I happen to know your kid pretty well, and I know why he quit cold and beat it. Right now I'm one of the two men who know where he is, but unless you show some grit and make a fight for us, you'll never have a chance to see him. I'd hate to have him learn you were a quitter like him.

Boss of Rocky Canyon.

Kerry Donnegan stiffened. He reread the note. His jaw bulged until the knots in front of his ears stuck out. His fingers closed talonlike and crushed the paper. Then his body relaxed and he stumbled across the room and sank into a chair.

He was a quitter, after all. The man was right. What if Jack did learn that he had thrown Pierce down and the men of the Shadow Mountain as well? Kerry Donnegan shuddered. A sudden longing to see the boy surged over him. So this fellow was one of the two who knew where he was! He got to his feet and strode to the other side of the room, his shoulders back and his blue eyes contracted. He flung the door open and went toward the bunk house where the men were gathered.

As he entered, the conversation was clipped off as though with a pair of scissors and every man turned. Something in Kerry's face held them. For a few seconds there was silence, broken by the crackling of the fire in the stove.

Kerry Donnegan swept the faces before him. "Fellows," he said, his voice hard. "Take a good look at me. I'm a quitter! I'm yellow! I've thrown you down!" He paused.

A chorus of protests rose from the men. "Aw, cut it, Kerry. Who said you're yeller? You're not a quitter."

"You're darn tootin' I am," the foreman cried, bringing his clenched fist down on the edge of a bunk and shaking the frail building. "I know it, and that's why I'm here—to apologize. And I've got something more to say. This camp's been haywire. We all

know that, but it won't be any more. To-morrow we are going to log. We're going to trim that Rocky Canyon bunch."

The effect of this announcement was like the explosion of a percussion cap in a box of dynamite.

Instantly every man was on his feet. A lusty shout from their throats rocked the bunk house. A dozen loggers leaped forward, each trying to grasp the hand of the big foreman.

Peewee Potter climbed onto a table. "Everybody rolls out an hour earlier to-morrow mornin'. What say, boys?"

"Hurrah, you bet!" came the answer from every man.

And the next morning when the little bullcook struck up the cadence on the triangle, the very lilt of its beat told of a new life at the Shadow Mountain Camp.

The men went into the woods that day, a rousing chantey on their lips. Only half an hour was taken out for lunch. The giant trees thundered to the ground as never before, and the donkey engines screamed and chattered defiance across the valley to the camp of the Rocky Canyon.

Word that Kerry Donnegan's gang was fighting back traveled to all parts of the Harbor country. Just what had happened no one knew, but they did know there was a battle on. The rival loggers heard it too, and they bent to their ask of maintaining the lead they had gained.

Kerry had changed overnight. Once more he was the Kerry of old. All day long he was with his men. His force seemed unlimited. If the buckers got behind, he would grab an ax or saw, and set a faster pace for them. If the yarder got jammed with logs, he would take the donkey engines in charge. Men strained and toiled and at night dragged themselves into camp weary but jubilant.

They were dumping their logs into a tributary where they were boomed and held for the drive. The Rocky Canyon logs were secured in the main river farther up. High water in both streams promised a fast drive. Pierce had sent word that the camp which arrived at the forks first with its logs would be considered the winner. The odds were still against the Shadow Mountain men, but they were gaining each day, according to rumors that floated in regarding the progress of the others.

By the end of the second week, Kerry saw the last bunch of his timber fallen. And, by Saturday noon, he figured, every log would be in the water and the drive could begin.

A nervous tension swept the camp. Some of the men decided to investigate the situation at the rival one. They started out Friday night, and when they returned, their faces were long. They found Kerry in the commissary.

"They're all through up there," Tom Boland reported. "It looks like they're going to start their drive the first thing in the morning."

Kerry's face was serious. "Gosh, that's bad for us then!" he exclaimed. "We can't possibly get started until noon. Of course they've got a little farther to go, but we can't get into the main river by four o'clock and if they start in the morning they'll get by the mouth of this stream at noon."

"Well, we've got to do something to stop them," Boland announced savagely.

Kerry looked up at him suspiciously. "What do you mean, 'stop them.'"

"We're not going to let them beat us, are we?" the other retorted. "I guess we can pull something on them. How about that narrow canyon they've got to come through? Something might 'happen' there to jam their logs, and we could get into the river before they got to the junction."

Kerry Donnegan rose and ap-

proached the woods boss. "Boland," he said coldly, "we're going to beat those fellows if we can, but it's got to be done honestly. Remember that. We've still got a chance, and we're not licked until their logs get ahead of ours. Tell the men we'll get out before dawn to-morrow. We've only got a few more logs to get into the water and we can have everything ready for the drive when the last one hits the riffles."

Boland glowered sullenly. It was apparent he did not approve of Kerry's policy of squareness.

Kerry read his thoughts. "And another thing, Boland," he said, "if they beat us, we've got to take our hats off to that gang. They've been logging—and logging good. Who ever is heading that bunch knows how."

Boland went out without another word. Kerry watched the big woods boss go and wondered if he could depend on him. Much as the foreman desired to win, the thought of doing anything crooked to stop the other camp's logs did not appeal with him.

The next morning the men were in a fever of excitement. All hands bent to the task of yarding the remaining logs into the water. Peewee Potter delegated himself to go across the valley and watch for the starting of the drive of the Rocky Canyon outfit.

By nine o'clock, Kerry grew hopeful. Peewee had not returned, and he was to come as soon as the other drive started. Kerry's men were toiling furiously, and cursing under the strain of their work. A tenseness marked their efforts. If something went wrong now, they would be lost.

The last bunch of logs was ready to shoot down the skidway when a yell from the hillside above them announced Peewee. He was waving his arms excitedly. They could not understand his words, but every man knew what he was trying to tell them.

The Rocky Canyon drive had started!

Kerry turned on his men. "All right, fellows!" he shouted. "Let's get those remaining logs into the water. We'll cut the boom now and start. The clean-up crew can bring them along. I'm going down to the river to see how the Rocky Canyon drive is going. We can still beat them, but she's going to be a race."

It was a mile to the river. Kerry ran most of the way. While he had assured his men there was a chance, inwardly he felt a deep foreboding that he had lost. There was more water in the river than in the stream his logs were in, and it was swifter. If the Rocky Canyon logs had got a good start, he might as well give up.

Arriving at the edge, Kerry climbed the bluff which gave him a view of both streams. There was no mistaking its meaning. The Rocky Canyon men were driving their logs.

He turned and listened behind him. If his own men had started, they were still farther away. At that moment Kerry Donnegan would have given ten years of his life to win. It meant more than victory in a contest. It meant redemption for him. For the sake of his men who had stood by him, he had to win. And for the boy—yes, he had turned quitter. There was no question about that. If he lost, Jack would sooner or later learn that his dad had quit cold.

Again a shout came from up the river. Rounding the bend not more than a half mile away, the advance logs of the Rocky Canyon Camp came tossing along, with the lead crew riding them. They bore down on the narrow gorge where the river forced its way between two high walls.

Suddenly Kerry saw a figure racing up to the crest of the nearest one of these. Instantly he recalled Boland's words. Was it possible that the woods boss was going to try to stop the Rocky Canyon drive?

He studied the hurrying figure closely. It looked a whole lot like Boland, and this resemblance was sufficient to make Kerry start on a run for the bluff. He clambered rapidly up through the brush, and as he came out above, he saw the woods boss clawing at the base of a huge rock that poised on the brink of the cliff. Beside him lay several sticks of dynamite.

Kerry saw the other's plan in a flash. If that rock were toppled over, it would carry enough gravel and dirt with it to temporarily choke the water below, and the Rocky Canyon logs would jam up beyond any hope of getting them out for several hours.

Boland worked frantically. Up the river, not more than three hundred yards away, the Rocky Canyon drive was coming.

As Kerry paused, he heard a lusty shout from behind him. He recognized it as the cry of the Shadow Mountain river dogs. His drive was coming! And he needed not to look to know that his men were putting everything into this last supreme effort.

For a moment he forgot Boland. A mighty race was on, and the Rocky Canyon men had the edge. The gang that got to the point where the two streams joined would win. The winding-up crews would have few stranded logs to work down.

Then Kerry's thoughts came back to Boland. He whirled and started for the other. The woods boss had placed his dynamite and was reaching for a match as he rushed up. Grasping him by the collar, Kerry flung him backward.

"No, you don't, Boland," he cried angrily. "You can't get away with this while you're working for me."

The woods boss scrambled to his feet, his face flushed. "You're crazy, Donnegan," he retorted. "Do you know what it will mean if that bunch beats us out? It means we've lost a good job and a chance at some real money. And it's all on account of you. If you hadn't quit on us, we'd have beat them easy."

Kerry Donnegan winced under this thrust. The truth of it went home.

"We're not licked yet," he replied. "And even if we are, I'll not have the stain of a dirty trick like this on my hands. I may have quit on you fellows, but they will never say that I played crooked. If you want to get away with this, you'll have to whip me first."

Boland glared at him. Kerry knew that the woods boss was measuring him, but his steady gaze never left the other's eyes. They stared at each other for a full minute, then without a word, Boland turned and walked away.

Kerry waited for a few minutes before he leaped down toward the river. The rival camp was driving through the canyon now. He looked over and saw his own crew bearing down.

Both streams were filled with logs. He started on a run for his sticks. If nothing unusual occurred, he could still win. The Shadow Mountain men had a clear sweep of water before them, while the Rocky Canyon drivers had to fight their logs around one shallow point. While he was still some distance from them, he yelled encouragement to his crew. "Come on, you river dogs! Let's show 'em how to drive these sticks!"

An answering shout came from the throats of his group.

Abreast of the advance logs, Kerry leaped into the water and climbed on one of the largest. It pitched and started to roll, but he met its speed with experienced feet. He glanced back up the river, and a surge of pride throbbed beneath his flannel shirt. His men were doing great work.

Ahead, the fork of the river showed. On the other side, he could hear the Rocky Canyon men coming down. It was going to be exceedingly close.

At the point where the two streams joined, he saw Jim Pierce standing and waving his hat frenziedly. At the same time, Kerry caught sight of a tall logger riding a lead log down the river.

There was something vaguely familiar in his poise.

Pierce waved to the latter to come ashore. Immediately he turned and signaled Kerry to do likewise. Both men skipped across the heaving logs. A few yards from the shore they leaped into the water and waded up to the owner.

Suddenly Kerry Donnegan stopped, his mouth open. The rival logger was approaching him with a broad grin on his boyish face.

"Well, dad," he laughed. "She was some race for a dead heat. It looks like we both win."

Kerry blinked. He rubbed his eyes and blinked again. Then he stumbled forward and grasped the boy about the shoulders.

"Jack," he choked. "Jack, where—why—what are you doing here?"

"Trying to prove to you and Mr. Pierce that I could log," the boy replied.

"And you did it, too," the owner declared, coming up and slapping him on the back. He turned on Kerry. "And Kerry, you staged a real comeback. I'm more than proud of you."

Still bewildered, Kerry stepped back and gazed blankly from one to the other. "But—what—I don't get all this," he stammered.

The other two continued to chuckle.

"Maybe I'd better do some explaining, Kerry," said Pierce. "I'm responsible for Jack's being here. When you told me he had left town, I hunted him up and located him down in the Oregon camps. In talking to him, I found that logging was what he had always wanted to do. And after a word with his boss, I discovered he knew a lot more about it than even he realized. So I asked him to come up here.

"It didn't take much persuasion, but we couldn't let you in on it until we were sure he would make good, seeing how you didn't want him in the woods. I put him up at the Rocky Mountain Camp and announced this contest, and I leave it to you if the kid can't log."

"Yeah, and I ought to do some tall explaining myself," said Jack. "I sent you that note, dad, to get you mad. I knew it was all my fault, for it was the way I treated you that made you feel like you did. And I thought a letter like that was the only thing that would make you fight. I hope you ain't sore at me," he added wistfully.

Both men studied Kerry's face. It was a mixture of puzzlement and joy. He tried to speak, but the words jammed in his throat.

"Can I stay, now, and log with you dad?" the boy asked eagerly.

Kerry Donnegan strode forward and placed his arm about his boy. "You bet you can, son, if that's what you're dead set on doing. I kind of thought it was for your own good—keeping you out of the timber. If I'd been thinking of myself, I'd have had you with me all the time."

"Well," said Pierce, "that's that. And now I might add that I've decided to let you both have the Bear Creek job. What do you say?"

"What do you expect a couple of timber beasts to say?" laughed Kerry. "Sure we'll take it." He looked at the boy. "And we'll log it right, won't we, son?"

"I'll say we will," Jack declared, as he slipped his arm through that of Kerry Donnegan.

# Happy Valley

## By George Owen Baxter

**Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.**

**JIM FANTOM, fresh from prison, is invited by Jonathan Quay to join his reform colony for ex-criminals. In return for a year's work he will be provided with house, land, and his marriage with pretty Jo Dolan will be arranged. Fantom agrees. Among Quay's men he meets his boyhood hero, "Chip" Lander.**

**Sheriff Cross seeks Jim for murder. Eavesdropping, Jim hears Cross warn Quay that he suspects his men though not himself. Lander tells Jim to ask no questions. Ordered by Louis Kendal, Quay's foreman, to hold up a stagecoach and bring back a hunchback passenger, Fantom, filled with adventurous spirit, does so. His prisoner paints Kendal and the Happy Valley in a sinister light. The hunchback escapes. Kendal harshly rebukes Fantom, and the boy regrets his promise to Quay. He finds Jo in a cottage, and learns she is to be married. He fears she is for Lander and, overcome with jealousy, rushes blindly from her presence.**

### CHAPTER XXII.

#### TWO TRUSTING WOMEN.

THAT outburst of physical action saved him from himself, as it were. When he came to the house again, his brain had cleared a little.

As he neared it, he walked slowly, and found himself repeating aloud, over and over, rhythmically: "I've gotta be calm! I've gotta be calm. She's gone!"

Coming fully back to consciousness, he stopped short, and with cold drops standing on his face, he told himself that he was going mad. The shock of that suggestion sobered him still more; and the next moment he saw the tall form of Louis Kendal striding up and down behind the house.

Kendal paused as the boy drew nearer, and said brusquely:

"Get into the buckboard—you'll find it in that shed—harness the pair of buckskin broncs at the end of the east side of the barn. You see that pile of dusty plowshares? Take 'em down to the village and give 'em to Wilkes to be

sharpened. Tell him I want 'em back by to-night. While you're down there, get three boxes of half-inch copper rivets. Here's the order for them."

He extended a slip of paper to Fantom, and the latter took it in silence. He was almost glad of the terseness of the tall man's language.

As he turned away, Kendal snapped at him: "One minute!"

He turned back.

"You're here maybe to stay," said Kendal. "All right. Now keep a head on your shoulders. What's happened between us, I'll put out of my head. You do the same, and we'll get on. If you don't, I'll make you think the Happy Valley deserves another name. That's all!"

He did not wait to hear the reaction of the boy, but continued his striding back and forth, deep in the solution of his problem.

That problem, as Fantom could guess clearly enough, doubtless had something to do with the mysterious hunchback; and as he went into the barn, his thoughts turned a little from the cabin in the clearing and the loveliness of Jo Dolan to the hunchback, the filmed eyes, the pale, long face, as pale and as long and infinitely more ugly, even, than that of Louis Kendal.

Were they related?

The shock of that thought stopped him again; he grew so absent-minded that, when he came to the buckskin mustangs, his head was nearly clipped from his shoulders by the flying heels of the off horse.

That wakened him to reality. He paid heed to himself as he tossed the harness upon them and led them out into the open, as tough and cunning a pair as ever he had handled.

The buckboard was soon drawn out from the wagon shed; but it took ten or fifteen minutes of backing and filling to get the bronchos into their positions. But at last they were hitched, the plowshares piled in, and away went Fantom down the drive.

The mustangs, their tails switching with vicious energy, leaned on the bits, shouldering out as the mighty pull of Fantom dragged their heads together, and so they flew down the road, sometimes breaking from a trot into a hump-backed gallop.

He could not help wondering, as the wheels crunched and whirred upon the stones of the road, whether Mr. Louis Kendal had had some hidden purpose in assigning him to such a team as this. The white flank of a birch tree was enough to make them bound like deer into the ditch, almost overturning the wagon, and the clangor of the spilled heap of plowshares in the body of the vehicle frightened them back into the middle of the road.

For a moment they were uncontrollable, leaning ahead in a panic. But the strong hands and the cunning craft of Fantom sufficed to reduce their gait again. The bridge crashed beneath them as though thunder were dropping upon their heads from above. Then they whirled on down the road, with the trees blended almost into a solid wall on either side, a solid heaven of green above them.

Into the village he came at last, standing up with his feet almost jammed through the footboards, and his arm and leg muscles aching from the strain. Yet he managed to bring the team to a prancing halt in front of the blacksmith shop.

Josh Wilkes came out, grinning widely.

He was a fat man, with hanging cheeks and little eyes like the eyes of a pig, quick with greed and with cunning inspired by hunger.

"You've got the Dynamiters, have you?" said he.

"Is that what they're called?" asked Fantom.

"Sure. The last time that they were

hitched up, they exploded Bill Watkins into a blackberry patch and blew the wagon into the lake. When we fished poor Bill out, he hollered like a kid. Them berry thorns, they'd scratched him like twenty wild cats. Pretty near put out his eyes. The Dynamiters ain't been used since then. How come you picked 'em out?"

"They was given to me," said Fantom, his teeth clicking on the end of the words.

The little eyes of the blacksmith gleamed.

"Well," said he, "you needn't say 'Thank you, ma'am' for 'em. Was it Kendal that throwed 'em at you?"

"Aye."

"Well, maybe he's got a lot of confidence in you; maybe he thinks that you can bounce, like a rubber ball! That near hoss is a pack of wild fire! He's showin' me the red of his eye, the brute! Well, good luck to you, son, and give this pair plenty of air and don't let 'em turn you inside out like an old coat. They got a scientific spirit, these here. They wanta get right under the skin, like a doctor!"

He carried the shares into the shop, and Fantom drove across to the general merchandise store which stood on the farther side of the square which composed the village. It was something like a New England common; three or four cows, a mare and its colt, were staked out, browsing contentedly. And the buildings were spaced about it, solidly built and capacious structures, as though Quay expected that this might be the nucleus of quite a town.

Two women had just climbed down from a pair of buggies in front of the store. And they came willingly to hold the heads of the buckskins while Fantom jumped out with the tie ropes to secure them to the hitching post.

"It's the new man," said one. "It's Jim Fantom."

"Of course it is," said the other. "You better introduce us. Go ahead, Mary!"

"I'm Mack Rhiner's wife," said the other. "You've heard of Mack, I guess, Mr. Fantom?"

"He did me a round good turn the other day," said Fantom. "You bet I've heard of him. I'm mighty glad to know you, Mrs. Rhiner."

"Thanks," said she. "This here is Harriet Samuels. Maybe you have heard of Terry Samuels, too?"

"Of course he has," said Mrs. Samuels. "Sometimes I wish that I hadn't though!"

She was a handsome woman of close to middle age, with a shrewd face and a shrewder look, but her manner was very open.

They walked on into the store together.

"That's a fine-thing to say about poor Terry!" commented Mrs. Rhiner, who was pretty, and blond, with a dappling of freckles over her nose.

"Poor Terry!" exclaimed Mrs. Samuels. "He sat up till two, last night, working over a new kind of lock."

"Inventing?"

"Inventing nothing! Inventing new ways of taking the thing to bits. He's gotta read the mind of every newfangled lock that comes out, or else he ain't happy. You never seen such a man. 'You better get to bed,' says I. 'I can't sleep,' says he. 'They got a dropping bolt inside of this here. Who would of thought of that? Jumps down, and then slides up when the key turns, and sets the rest of the lock free to work. What good would a skeleton key be, I'm askin' you, on a lock like this? They's been too much brains spent on locks. Kind of makes a profession like mine get poor and skinny.'"

"Does he talk like that?"

"Yeah. You'd never think that Terry was an honest teamster, now. If it wasn't for Mr. Quay, he'd be gone like a shot. But he's sure interested in his

old business. The other night, I heard a scratching for ten minutes at the front door. It was Terry. He was trying to work back the bolt with just a common pin. Drat the man! How's things, Mr. Fantom?"

"Fine," said Fantom without conviction. "Everything fine."

"You'll like it up here," said Mrs. Samuels. "Won't he, Mary?"

"Yep. If he don't get sleepy and bored with it all," said Mrs. Rhiner. "Mack cuts up a little, now and then. If only there was a greaser or an Indian or something that he could work off his steam on! But there ain't."

"Listen to her," said the pacific Mrs. Samuels. "She'd like to see her husband eating up Mexicans and Injuns. Ain't you ashamed of yourself, Mary?"

Mary Rhiner shrugged her young shoulders. "Well, he was born with teeth," said she, "and he's gotta use 'em. He was made that way. And all I want is Mack to be happy. Yesterday he was settin' on the front porch and a squirrel jumped down from the trunk of one tree and scooted for another. Out comes Mack's gun and he blazes away. He knocked that squirrel over, but it was only the dirt that the bullet kicked into the side of the poor thing. It rolled over and scrambled up the bark of another tree and switched its puff of a tail out of sight.

"It got away; Mack was near wild. He walked around and around that tree, lookin' for a second shot.

"'I'm gettin' old'! says he, and he spends the rest of the day throwin' pebbles into the air and shootin' at them.

"'Pebbles ain't men,' says I to Mack.

"'Neither is squirrels,' says he, 'but men eat 'em! I'm gettin' old and shaky, I tell you!'

"That's the way with him. But he's been a real artist. You can't expect him to settle down easy, like some other men."

"Sure he's an artist," admitted Mrs. Samuels. "I heard Terry once say that Mack could make a Colt talk English and three other languages, none of which was understood outside of himself and the gun. But it's better to have him up here where there's more trees than men."

"Oh, but ain't it!" sighed Mary Rhiner. "I bless Jonathan Quay every day of my life, I'm telling you!"

So talking, they wandered into the general merchandise store, and Fantom ran his eyes over a wide display of stocks that ran from overalls to Winchester rifles in racks.

One thing of importance had happened, at least. He had liked both of these women, for their frankness, their direct speaking; beyond that, their faith in Quay moved him, and made him feel that his feet were based upon the bed rock!

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CHIP CHATTERS.

"HEY, Mrs. Rhiner," said the clerk, coming from behind the counter. "Look at here what we got in that your kid will be crazy about!"

He wound up a spring and placed a gay little toy bird, painted yellow and red, upon the floor. At once it began a jig, pecking busily at invisible grains of wheat.

"Whacha think?" demanded the clerk, stepping back and eying the toy with as much pride as though he had himself devised it.

"Why, it's a beaut," said Mrs. Rhiner heartily. "Jimmy'll love it to pieces in about five shakes. You better gimme half a dozen of 'em, if you got that many."

"Hold on!" broke in Mrs. Samuels. "Little Terry will be eating his heart out if he sees Jimmy with one and none for himself."

"We got four," said the clerk. "We'll split 'em two ways."

He disappeared behind the counter.

"You know him?" whispered Mrs. Rhiner aside to Fantom. "That's Don Pilson, the slickest second-story man you even seen. He done the Marlborough robbery in Chicago. That's him! You wouldn't think it, would you? Say, Don, meet Jim Fantom, will you?"

They shook hands, Don Pilson grinning his welcome.

"Glad to have you here, son," said the ex-robber. "What can I do for you."

"Half-inch copper rivets," said Fantom. "Here's Kendal's ticket."

It seemed to him that he could see the other scowl as his eye fell upon the writing of Quay's lieutenant and manager.

Then he stood by while Pilson looked over some shelves at the rear of the store; the two women were busily engaged, with much laughter, in working the dancing bird, when the door slammed, and Chip Lander came into the store.

"Here's the handsome bachelor," said Mary Rhiner. "Hullo, Chip. How's things?"

"Dizzy," said Chip, grinning.

"Dizzy with what?"

"Girl," said Chip.

The heart of Fantom grew small and hard within him.

"Listen to him!" said Harriet Samuels. "He's talking right out loud. You must be runnin' a temperature, Chip."

"What girl, where?" demanded Mrs. Rhiner, more to the point.

"In the new cabin," said Chip Lander.

"Is there a girl there?" asked Mrs. Samuels. "The poor thing will have rheumatism, sure, livin' among the shadows of all of them trees!"

"Who is she, Chip?" urged Mrs. Rhiner.

"She's a beauty," said he.

"Sure. I could guess that. How beautiful, child?"

"She wins before she starts," said Chip.

He thrust his thumbs inside his belt and teethered exultantly from heel to toe, and back again.

Fantom, watching him, hungered to shout an insult, and then snatch at a gun. Never had he detested anything in the world so much as he now loathed the handsome, flushed face of Chip Lander.

"Look at him!" chuckled pretty Mary Rhiner. "The poor thing's in a trance!"

Mrs. Samuels laughed gayly.

"The fast fish," said she, "is the one that gets hooked the deepest. Is she a black-eyed darlin', Chip?"

"She's all gold," said Chip. "Gold and blue and pink."

"Sugar and cream and butter," scoffed Mary Rhiner good-naturedly.

"If you was to see her," said Chip Lander, "you'd forget to be jealous."

"Of you?" asked Mrs. Samuels.

"Of her. If you was to see her, Harriet, you'd thank your stars that she was livin' in a cabin fenced around with tall trees."

"How come, handsome?" asked the older woman.

"Because when the gents in this here valley see her, they're gunna lose their sense of direction like a carrier pigeon that's been tapped on the bean! They're gunna run wild. I'm telling you that."

"All right," said Mrs. Samuels. "My Terry has rode some long rides, but he always comes back as sure as a boomerang, and has to be dodged ag'in!"

"They're all gunna run wild," went on Chip Lander complacently. "And they're all gunna head in one direction."

"Because you're dizzy, child," said Mrs. Samuels, "that ain't a sign that they's only one pair of eyes to serve all the men in this here valley! She's probably a peroxide and paints her eyelashes."

Chip Lander laughed loudly.

"Sure," he said, "you better start knocking. You better practice. Because you're all gunna need to do some talking. You married women will all be hobblin' your husbands or takin' them out on the lead."

"There never was a girl in the world," said Mrs. Rhiner philosophically, "that could please every man. Some see faces and some see deeper."

She touched the end of her rather upturnd nose and frowned with gravity.

"Men see the time of the year," declared Mrs. Samuels. "When May comes around, you would think that the girls was in flower, like the earth. Along about May, when my Terry goes past a girl, he steps as light as a burglar and looks guilty."

"With my girl," declared young Chip Lander, "it's always spring, I tell you. The blossom is always on the dog-gone bough, as somebody wrote in a poem, I think."

"When did she come in?"

"Last night, for a surprise. I found her this morning."

"Have you known her long, Chi asked Mrs. Samuels.

"A coupla thousand years," said Chip, almost gravely.

"Is that all?"

"Yeah. I used to dream about her back in the days of old Pharaoh."

"You was likely a close bosom friend of Pharaoh, you," suggested Mary Rhiner, half smiling and half in disdain.

"Him and me used to eat at the same lunch counter," said Chip Lander. "And we daubed our ropes on the lean kine and the fat ones, elbow to elbow. But then we fell out!"

"How come?" asked the clerk, returning with the boxes of rivets.

Fantom took them, but remained where he was, tormented into movelessness, tortured, but fascinated by pain, as it were.

"We fell out," said Chip Lander happily, "because he seen Beautiful and forgot to go home to supper. I had to show him the gate. And for a long time, he forgot all the street numbers in that town except where I lived."

"Kind of was a bother to you and the girl, eh?" said Mrs. Samuels, sarcastically.

"Sure," said Chip. "He was always hangin' around, leanin' on the front gate, and lookin' at the dog."

"How long did he keep that up?" asked Mrs. Rhiner.

"Well, he got tired. He kind of lost heart, and decided to leave the country," said Chip Lander. "He never could forget her, though."

"I see," said Mrs. Rhiner. "You been chummy with her ever since?"

"Dreamed of her every night since I was a kid," said Chip Lander. "We been mighty thick."

"Maybe you been the thickest of the two. Is she fond of you, Chip?"

"I'll tell you how it is," said Chip, "she's so dog-gone good-natured that she sees something even in me."

"She needs good advice," said Mrs. Rhiner.

"The poor simple thing," said Mrs. Samuels, chuckling. "Handsome, when are you gunna get married to her, and what's her name?"

"Her name is Beautiful," said Chip Lander, "and we're gunna get married as soon as I've put a lining of gold inside of that house and mounted the doors and windows with diamonds."

"That'll just take you a coupla days," said Mrs. Rhiner.

"Sure," said Chip. "After seein' her this mornin', I could take old Mount Baldy, yonder, and break him in two, and pick out the nuggets out of his insides."

"She ain't swelled you up any, Chip?"

"Her? Nope, she's just made me feel nacheral, and strong."

"How old is she, handsome?"

"She's the right age for singin' and

dancin'," said Chip. "She's about as old as the spring of the year, ma'am."

"I bet," said Mrs. Rhiner, "that she wears glasses and has a lantern jaw."

"Speakin' of glasses," said Chip, "you'll need smoked lenses when you look at her, she's that bright!"

"Chip, where did you get it?" asked Mrs. Samuels. "I didn't know that the moonshine they peddle out in this here Happy Valley was that good."

"Aw, he ain't particular," suggested Mrs. Rhiner delicately. "He has one good gift, and that's a strong stomach. Don, have you got any canned salmon? We gotta eat, in our house, even if they's a peroxide sweetheart just come to town."

"You'll eat, ma'am," said Chip Lander, "but Terry won't eat after he's seen her. They's gunna be a terrible loss of appetite among the gents in this here part of the world. They's gunna be a tunin' up of banjos and fiddles. They's gunna be a clearin' of throats and a mighty lot of caterwaulin' around in the night, over there by the new cabin. They's gunna be a lot of footmarks leadin' toward that cabin door, but they's all gunna stop at the threshold except one pair of shop-made boots. How d'you like 'em, ladies?"

He looked down admiringly at the narrowly pointed tips of his toes.

Fantom could endure no more.

The gloating of young Chip Lander carried home to his very heart the remembered beauty of the girl, and now he started hastily out from the store.

"Hey," called Chip after him. "I wanta tell you some things about her, Jimmy!"

"I'm busy," croaked Fantom, and passed out the front door of the store, letting it slam heavily behind him.

There on the front veranda he waited for the mist to clear from his eyes—a red-stained mist of fury, and jealous hatred.

Behind him, in the store, he heard a sudden burst of loud laughter. That was the way, he said to himself, that Chip Lander had carelessly laughed his way into the heart of the girl.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A BREACH REPAIRED.

IT was that, he thought, which chiefly maddened him—the casual air of this man, the excessive bouyancy with which he floated through his talk about the girl.

To Fantom it seemed a sacred thing, to be closely housed in the secrecy of the soul. But the flamboyant Lander could not help rippling out his nonsense!

Fantom breathed deeply, squared his shoulders, and was about to go down to the buckboard, when the door clanged again behind him, and he heard a cheerful whistle coming out.

It was Lander, he knew, and his mind darkened with the thought, as though a shadow had fallen across his soul.

A hand clapped him heartily upon the shoulder.

"How are you, old boy?" asked Chip.

Fantom whirled, with a backward gliding step. It was that swift, light motion of his which had gained for him in an earlier day his sobriquet of "The Phantom."

"He can walk on dry leaves and they'll never whisper a word of him!" some one had said.

So whirling, he scowled at Lander.

"Tell a man when you're coming!" he exclaimed savagely.

Lander stepped back in turn, amazed.

"Why, what's bitten you?" he asked.

Reason and natural gratitude to the man whose riding had saved him from the law surged up in the heart of Fantom, but instantly they were dismissed again, and beaten down. Only red anger, fiercely flaming jealousy, remained to control him. He wanted nothing in the world, it seemed to him, except the death of this man.

So he remained a moment, his lips stiffening into a straight line.

"Don't sneak up behind and whang a man," he said. "They's parts of the country where it ain't safe!"

Lander turned crimson. "Are you talkin' down to me, young feller?" said he, as hot as Fantom.

The latter smiled and drew in a quick breath. And there was that in his smile and in that thirsty intake of breath that banished most of the color from the face of Chip.

"Why not talk down?" asked Fantom.

"Why?" said the other, shrugging back his shoulders, as though he needed to harden his courage by some physical act, "because they ain't enough inches in you to see over my head."

"I see over you, and I see through you!" said Fantom slowly. "I see over the top of you, and I see through you, like thin water. And all there is at the bottom is mud!"

Lander started violently.

"Man," he exclaimed, "are you crazy? What's started you after me?"

"I been raised," said Fantom, "in a part of the country where they's only one way of talkin' about a lady."

Lander parted his lips to speak, then closed them firmly. He had seen the two women come out through the door of the store, and whatever explanation he might have offered, he would not be seen to take water in the presence of such witnesses.

"My way of talk is my own," said he.

"A dang poor way I call it!" answered Fantom.

"They's nothin' about me that you can dang and get away with it," replied Lander, quivering from head to foot with excitement.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Rhiner. "They're going to fight! What's the matter with the pair of you young idiots?"

She pushed in between them boldly.

"Get back!" snapped Fantom.

She threw one glance at him, and that was enough. He had swayed a little forward upon his toes, his body crouched slightly, so that he gave the appearance of one about to leap. But they who watched knew well enough that all this energy, all this collected nerve power ready to explode, would be flashed into action in the movement of a hand and a gun.

The lean fingers were working slowly; the eyes of the boy gleamed as they clung to the target.

"He's going to shoot! He's going to shoot! Mary, get back!" cried Harriet Samuels.

And Mary Rhiner ran hastily back.

She was gone from the field of The Phantom's vision. All that remained in his eye was the form of his enemy, and a horseman coming down the street at a canter, a cloud of dust puffing up behind the heels of his horse.

"Scream—do something to stop 'em!" exclaimed Mrs. Rhiner.

But the older woman broke in. "Don't so much as stir, or it'll start 'em at each other. Chip, Chip, back out! Don't be ashamed. He's got a murder in him, and you won't have a chance. Chip, back out of it! Don't be foolish!"

"I'll see him danged, first," said Chip, white, but coldly resolute as one prepared to die.

"There can't be anything really wrong," said Mrs. Rhiner. "Jim Fantom, Chip never harmed any man."

"No," said The Phantom. "He never harmed no man. He never had the nerve to do it. It ain't men that he hunts down. That ain't his way! He's a sneak. He's a lyin' sneak, and I'm here to prove it on him."

Said Chip, his voice coming rather hoarsely and far away:

"I've licked you before. I'll do it ag'in, to-day!"

"Good!" said Fantom through his teeth. "I wanted to hear you say that,

and you've said it. Now, fill your hand, you skunk, and fill it with aces, because you're standin' around the corner from the finish of one of us!"

"Make your own move. I'll take care of myself," said Chip Lander.

"Listen, you," snarled Fantom, "I'm giving you the last chance. Make your move and fill your hand—or I'll start this game."

The fingers of Chip twitched. Plainly, he was sorely tempted, as one who knew that the odds were heavily against him. Yet his pride and his sense of honor controlled him to the end. He resisted that impulse and fought back the shameful temptation.

He was no better than a dead man, he knew; the coldness of that fear was numbing his wrists, tingling in his finger tips, and yet he faced Fantom without a stir.

"Make your own time," said Chip Lander firmly.

Then a shrilling voice cut the air. It was Mrs. Samuels, calling: "Mr. Quay!"

The hand of Fantom stopped in midleap.

And he saw the form of the nearing horseman turn into that of Jonathan Quay!

Savagely he resented the coming of his master, but master he admitted Quay to be. Into his hands he had given himself for a year!

There was no stir of Chip Lander; he had seen a change in the face of Fantom, and the first hope came to him, followed by the call of Quay himself: "Hello, what's the matter?"

"It's Jim Fantom and Lander—they're about to fight——"

"Nonsense," said Quay, coming close. "Fight? Here in the valley? It's forbidden, and they both know it!"

Fantom turned on his heel toward Quay, his face as hard as iron.

"You've come in time," he admitted grimly. "I was about to bust loose."

Quay looked calmly upon them, his keen eyes searching each face in turn.

"What's happened to you two?" he asked. "What in the world is the matter? This is the man who helped you only the other day, Jim!"

"I know it," said Fantom, remorse swelling in him. "I know it. I—I turned into a mad dog. That's all!"

He started hastily down the steps of the veranda of the store and toward the waiting buckskins.

"One moment," said Quay, after him. "If you ladies will step on, a bit—— We must talk alone."

They drifted away, hungry eyes of gossip turned over their shoulders as they went.

"Now, Fantom, what's it all about?"

"I've talked enough. I've said that I was wrong," said Fantom sullenly, without meeting the eye of the older man.

"Chip, speak up," commanded Quay.

"If Jim wants to drop it, it's dropped," said Lander, "as far as I'm concerned."

"I drop it," answered Fantom.

Then his repentance grew strong in him. "I'll apologize—with the women to listen to me, if you want," said he.

"Gosh, no," answered Lander. "I never had a mean thought for you, Jim, from the day when we had our fight in Burnt Hill. Has it been workin' in you all this time? Man, man, I don't pretend to be what you are with the guns!"

"Guns?" said Quay.

"Aye," said Fantom slowly, making himself face the truth. "I would have killed him, quick enough!"

"Here in my valley?" demanded Quay angrily. He checked himself and controlled his voice at once: "I still don't know what's at the bottom of this."

"I slapped him on the shoulder as I came out of the store and found him waitin' here," said Lander. "He turned

around, pretty black in the face, and give me a mean word and a bad look. Seems that he didn't like the way that I'd been talkin' about the new girl over yonder in the new cabin—I don't know her name."

Fantom reeled.

"You don't know her name?" he repeated.

"Me? Why, man, I was only blowin' off a little wind! I seen her. There ain't any harm in seein' a pretty girl—the finest I ever laid eyes on—and then talkin' a little large and foolish, is there?"

Fantom took him firmly by the shoulders.

"D'ye mean it, Chip, d'ye mean it?" he asked.

There was such a groan of anguish and of hope in his voice, that the other gasped.

"Mean it? Why, man, I only was there long enough to ask her for a drink of water. I hardly had a chance to see the color of her eyes; and she was off ag'in, singin' in the kitchen. But what's she to you, Jim? Will you tell me that?"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### BASHFULNESS AND BISCUITS.

WITH trembling hands, Fantom drew forth a bandanna and with it wiped his streaming face. He felt weak; he felt as though his blood had turned to water, so great was the reaction of his relief.

"What's she to me?" he said. "Why, I dunno—Mr. Quay—maybe he's got an idea!"

Jonathan Quay looked sharply from one of them to the other.

"She's to be his wife, Chip," he said at last.

Lander winced.

"Ah, man," said he. "I see it, now. I was drivin' you mad. Why'd you leave the store before I explained my joke to the two ladies? I called to you, but you wouldn't wait! I wouldn't of let you go out with a wrong idea."

But Fantom had turned his back upon his friend.

He stood beside Quay's horse and looked into his face with eyes of fire.

"There ain't any doubt, Mr. Quay? She's—she's——"

"She's doing her housework, I suppose," said Quay, rather tersely. "And probably a bit lonely, as well."

It was to Fantom like the sight of beautiful blue water after the long desert march.

Somehow the lead ropes were taken from the horses, he was in the driver's seat, with Chip Lander hanging to the heads of the roaring mustangs.

"Steady, Jim," he warned. "They're crampin' the wheel, there. They'll have you turned over, in another minute!"

"Let 'em go!" shouted Fantom.

He stood up and whirled the whip.

"Let 'em go, Chip!"

Lander released them. They flung themselves forward and high in the air, as though leaping together at a given signal. The buckboard flew after them, landed with a crash, and heeled far to one side.

But Fantom kept himself erect. He seemed upheld by some extraneous force in that heaving, pitching vehicle; then, with a broad whirl of the lash, he cut both the mustangs at once.

One of them squealed with fury and with surprise. They were accustomed to having the reins held hard, their mettle feared, their paces regarded with awe. But now they were scourged forward.

They gathered speed. They burst into a full run, and with reins only tight enough to assure his balance, Jim Fantom stood erect behind them and plied the whip again, and again, until their rumps were scored with welts.

From rut to rut they skidded in the dust, which rose in a lofty cloud behind them. At every bump the wagon

vaulted into the air. And the frightened, infuriated ponies, squealed and bawled with excitement as they bucked and pitched and raced through the town.

Those who saw declared that in front of the upward-curling rush of dust, Jim Fantom stood erect all this way, plying the whip, and laughing like a maniac.

So they tore out of the village, and turned into the out road with a skid that almost put them in the opposite ditch. Then they straightened out and fairly flew forward, with the whip still working. They struck the bridge, and the wheels sprang at one bound from the first rise to the high-curved center, then shot down the farther side.

They swept and skidded along the curves of the forest road, next, until Fantom drew rein and shouted. And at once that gallant pair of bronchos, the Dynamiters, came back into his hand!

Their danger had been extracted from them, their explosiveness removed. With apprehensive eyes they glanced aside and backward at the strange madman who had so stroked them with fire, as though he rejoiced in their wildness. They danced a little in their trot, but the bits were light in their mouths, and Fantom laughed again, softly and fiercely, as he regarded them.

At last, they stopped gently beside the road, and quietly they stood while he dismounted and tethered them, only wincing a little now and again as the pain of the recent whipstrokes burned them.

He left the span and went forward through the trees. But when he saw the cabin beyond them, all his courage disappeared.

Perhaps it was apprehensive joy that stole the strength from his knees, and from his brain as well, and joy that made his body feel light as a bubble, ready to float in the air.

He stopped beside a tree at the edge of the clearing and there paused with his hand against the trunk, resting.

He tried to think.

He wanted to plan what he would say to her, how he would act. But his heart rose and choked him, as though he were about to face an audience of thousands.

But what were thousands to him? No, there was no other place in the world where he would be but this. And yet he could hardly force himself forward.

And then the voice rose sweetly from the house again. There seemed to him now more woman than child in the song; and yet the child was in it, also.

That thought filled him with pity and gentleness, so that he had a sudden courage to go forward across the clearing until he came to the spring.

There he paused. It was this very grass that he had seen darkened beneath her footfall that morning. And this memory unnerved him again. He would have prayed for strength, but his numbed brain could not find words.

He went slowly on. Sometimes joyous confidence made him take a long stride forward. Then, abashed, he would halt.

But he came to the door.

It was shut, and this troubled him. The singing, as well, had stopped.

Twice he raised his hand.

The first time, he heard a poker rattle in the stove, and let the hand fall. Again, a pan clanged loudly. But the third time he was able to rap.

"Come!" called the clear voice of the girl.

It was so briskly matter of fact that he held his breath. He could not push that door open.

"Come, come!" she called most impatiently.

Then rapid steps crossed the floor, and the door was jerked open. She stood frowning above him.

"Who wants——" she began. "Oh!" she ended. "D'you leave something behind you, Mr. Fantom?"

"Matter of fact," began Jim Fantom, "matter of fact——"

He paused. He had stumbled on the word "Mister" which she had prefixed to his name.

So he stood, uneasy, uncertain, looking wistfully up to her.

"It looks," she said severely, "as though you want to say something."

"I wanted to say," said he, "I wanted to say—that—that—I'd come back here——"

"So I see," said she.

She looked past him, above his head, absent-mindedly watching the woods.

He was glad that her eyes were off him, for that allowed him to think more easily.

"I wanted to sort of apologize," said he.

She looked at him with a puzzled air as though trying to guess at some meaning hidden behind his words.

"What are you apologizing for?" she asked.

At this, a bit of color flicked into his face.

"Are you makin' a joke of me, Jo?" said he.

"Not a bit," said she. "Come in and sit down. You look all tired out."

"I don't wanta sit," said he.

"Why not?"

"Why—somehow I could talk better standing. What I gotta say to you is this——"

"Wait a minute," said she. "The biscuits will be burned to a crisp!"

She fled to the stove and dropped to her knees to open the oven door, while he climbed higher on the steps, pausing at the threshold to see her the better.

She had drawn out the baking pan; a mist of steam and smoke flew up into her face, and a good savor came to him. It made him hungry. That bread had been made by her, touched by her own hands.

His hunger grew; his heart ached more bitterly.

"I wish that you'd stay out or come in," said the girl, sharply. "You're blocking all the light for me."

"She doesn't care," said he to himself, in sorrow. "What does she care a rap for a stupid fool like me that just stands around and can't talk? Look at Chip, the way that he always smiles and is bright. He's funny, too. How I wish I could say something that would make her laugh!"

He communed with himself in this manner.

"Please!" exclaimed the girl, impatient as he did not move.

The Phantom sighed. "Well," he said, "I guess I'm in the way."

"In the way of the light, you are," said she.

He felt that pride demanded that he should leave at once, after this insult; yet though his heart swelled with sullen anger, he somehow could not take himself away.

Then, as he despaired, he remembered that Quay had said that she would come to the valley, and that she would be his wife.

Quay was all powerful. He was omniscient, also. But though he could perhaps force the girl to marry Jim Fantom, even the great Quay could not make her love except where she chose to love.

Standing against the wall, miserable and uncertain, he regarded her as she dexterously covered the tops of the biscuits with butter and then replaced the pan in the oven. What had brought her here, he wondered profoundly? What mighty lever of temptation had the great Jonathan Quay acted upon her to lead her to this Happy Valley and place her in this house? She had been placed there for him! Out of Quay's own mouth he had heard the thing. The joy of that thought made his heart as light as a floating leaf; yet he dared not let his affection touch her with the weight of a word or of a finger's tip.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### SALAD AND SMALL TALK.

"YOU'LL excuse me, Mr. Fantom," she said over her shoulder, as she slid the pan of biscuits back into the oven. "You'll excuse me if I ain't got the time to listen to your apology, won't you? But I'd sure like to know what it's all about!"

She smiled at him in bright inquiry and then rose and went to the sink, where she washed some salad. He watched the water flying from the crisp sprays of green and dissolving as diamond powder in the strong shaft of the sunlight; until it almost seemed that not water but mists of fire flew upward from her hands.

He, with enchanted eyes, watched, and had faith in miracles.

"You were going to say something, a minute ago," said she. "I hope I ain't been interrupting you too much."

"Ah," said The Phantom, "the fact is, I ain't a very slick talker, you see!"

"Well," said she, "you're too big to talk fast. It's always the little dogs that start yapping and wagging their tails because they like their own music so much."

He chuckled a little. It was forced and rather shaky mirth that he managed to produce and the girl turned fully about and looked him over.

"You laugh like you were sick," said she.

"Sick?" he murmured.

"Yeah."

"I'm not. I'm all right," said he.

He went on desperately:

"About apologizing, I meant, for having, eh—laid hands on you the way that I did, and——"

"What hands?" said she. "Oh, I see what you mean! Why, that was nothing. My brother, Billy, has hugged me a lot harder than that. All you did was put a smudge on my sleeve, but you didn't break no bones. You'd oughta wash your hands before the next time you hug a girl. That's all, Mr. Fantom."

He looked earnestly at her and moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, but she kept her face entirely grave.

"Look here——" he broke out.

She said idly: "Look at what? Goodness, the roast!"

She fled to the oven. Jerking the door of it open, presently she had the cover off a roasting pan. Steam gushed out past her and the rich aroma of the cooking, browning meat hung about the room.

Her head tipped critically aside, she studied the roast for a moment, and then basted it thoroughly.

"That's a roast," said Jim Fantom intelligently.

"You bet you guessed right," she answered, without smiling. "That ain't no chicken stew! It never crowed when it was wearing feet and hair."

She recovered the roast.

"I dunna that it browns as much under one of these lids, but it's tenderer."

"Aye," said he. "I'll bet it's tenderer."

"But sometimes these basters make a roast soggy."

"Yeah," said he. "I bet they do, all right."

She looked critically at him.

"Did you ever see a basting lid like that in all your born days?"

"No," said he.

She laughed, a real peal of merriment.

"All right," said Fantom. "I knew that was the only way that I ever could make you laugh. At me, I mean, instead of with me. But I don't care if you make fun of me, Jo."

"I couldn't make fun of you, Mr. Fantom," said she. "A great big important man, like you!"

Fantom flushed.

"All right," said he. "Go ahead and plaster me. I guess I got it coming to me all right!"

"I'm not trying to be mean," said she.

"Sure you ain't," he agreed. "It jus' comes nacheral to you, eh?"

His face was very red, but he laughed a little.

"There I go again," said he. "Saying the wrong thing, every time. I dunno what's the matter with me."

"The kitchen's pretty hot," said she.

"Is that a way of suggestin' that I go out into the fresh air?" he asked her.

"Not a bit," she answered. "Sit down and make yourself at home."

She carried a tablecloth into the next room and he heard the clink of knives and forks as she laid them out. Through the doorway he saw that two places were arranged.

Who would sit at the second one?

His bewilderment grew greater and greater while he watched the flash of her hands as she laid out the dishes with rapid dexterity. She looked up, and her eyes met him, with a smile.

"Jo," he said, inspired by the smile, "will you tell me what it's all about?"

"What, Mr. Fantom?"

"And why d'you have to be 'mistering' me so much?"

"I won't, then, Mr. Fantom," said she.

"All right," said he. "Yuh're gunna keep it up?"

"Well," she answered, as she came toward the kitchen door, "who's little Jo Dolan to be talkin' familiar to a famous man like you, Mr. Fantom?"

"Famous?" he said, suddenly frowning.

She slipped past him.

"Famous, sure," said she.

"Famous for robbing a stage, you mean! Well, I'll be going along. Only——"

He paused. There was something to be done, or said. There was some word which, like a key, would open the door of his understanding.

"Look at what it meant to me," she suggested. "I mean, somebody that had done so much——"

"And been so long in jail. Is that it?"

"Well, a jail's a good, quiet place. Folks say that's where you got such a thoughtful look, Mr. Fantom."

"I'll be going along," he repeated, and got as far as the outer door.

Then he turned once more. Her back was toward him, as she laid out the salad on two plates, taking the bits of it daintily in her pink finger tips.

"Would you mind telling me," he burst out, "how you come to be here? Would you mind saying it again?"

"Why, Mr. Quay brought me up here," said she.

"And what made you want to come?"

She turned sufficiently far from him to see the curve of her cheek; and she rested a thoughtful finger against her chin.

"Well, a girl has to get married some time, Mr. Fantom. I guess you'd admit that."

He felt that he was going mad, with love of her, with incredible longing to touch her, if it were only to shake hands and say farewell.

"Jo," he almost shouted at her, "will you tell me who that man is? Will you name him, Jo?"

"How can I name him?" she said. "It's all in Mr. Quay's hands! He's old enough to pick and choose, I guess."

He gasped.

"Maybe he would wanta marry me himself, d'you think?"

"That old—my gosh, I'm gunna go crazy!" he panted. "Will you turn around and look at me?"

"As soon as I get this salad fixed."

She actually turned her back on him again.

"What did he say to make you come up here?"

"Well, he pointed out that I wouldn't be getting any younger from now on."

"You bein' pretty near out of your teens already, I guess," said Fantom with fierce irony.

"Well, I'm pretty near twenty-one," said she, "if you wanta know, young man."

"Ha!" said he. "You was afraid of getting to be an old maid, maybe?"

"Well," said she, "you never can tell. I'm more'n two thirds of the way to thirty. Maybe I'll get fat."

She looked down at her arm, holding it out for judicial consideration, and moving her hand with a graceful flexure. A dimple appeared at the elbow, flickering out and in.

"Jo!" he cried.

"Well?"

"Will you stop it?"

"Stop what?" she asked him, and, opening the oven door, took out a pan of biscuits, marvelously browned.

"Stop drivin' me crazy!"

"Well, I wouldn't want to bother you that much," said she. "I'm afraid that oven heats a little uneven."

"Oh, dang the oven," said Jim Fantom. "I mean, I wanta ask you——"

"You see how much browner they are at that end of the pan?"

"Jo, will you for pity's sake tell me who's gunna be here for lunch with you?"

"Why," she said, "I don't know. Have you invited anybody else?"

"Me?" said Jim Fantom. "Invited? Me invited somebody else?"

He drew toward her. The look of a sleepwalker was in his eyes.

She turned past him to the sink, saying in a matter-of-fact voice:

"You better wash your hands, unless they're a lot cleaner than they were early this morning! Before you come to the table, I mean. There's some hot water in the steam kettle at the back of the stove, there. You better take the yellow soap. It's good for getting the grease off the skin."

He made an impatient gesture.

But still, obediently, he took the soap, got the washbasin, and poured some steaming water into it. He worked up tremendous suds, and scoured his fingers furiously.

"Jo," he thundered at her suddenly, turning with soapy water and bubbles streaming from his wet hand.

"Yes!" she cried, starting violently.

She shrank against the wall as though she who had been so carelessly gay and so insolently self-possessed all this time had now been broken down with sudden alarm.

"Jo," he announced, as loudly and fiercely as before," the fact is that Quay sent you up here because you'd promised to marry me!"

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A TREASURE WON.

SHE appeared as though she would shrink through the wall; she turned pale; he dreaded and wondered at the change in her, and yet he loved her for it.

"Answer me!" called Fantom, approaching her with a slow stride. "He sent you up here because you'd promised to marry me!"

"I couldn't remember little details," said the girl. "I wouldn't think that it was you, Mr. Fantom——"

"Ha," said he, "you may 'mister' me and mock me as much as you like, but I'm guessin' at something, right now!" He stretched out his arms to her. He was close, now, and she was shrinking away, straining back her head as a frightened horse strains it back in fear of punishment.

Yet she managed to laugh.

"Look at yourself, Jim Fantom," said she. "In another minute you'll be spoilin' this dress with those wet hands of yours! Go be a man, will you now? And dry your hands, Jim, like a good boy!"

He hung over her. She was tense with fear, yet there was a smile somewhere in her eyes.

"Please, Jim," said she.

He turned on his heel and crossed the room to where a towel hung on a roller. It was glazed with newness, that towel, and the water came off slowly.

But he was in no haste, now. His eyes followed her, adored her, rushed upon her, then shrank away in awe. His heart beat so thunderously, now, that he felt the pulse like a finger, tapping at his lips.

She was busy taking out the roast, uncovering it, heating a platter with hot water, drying it, then putting the roast upon it. All about the edge she put garnishings of green things, then stood back to criticize as Fantom came upon her again.

"Jo!" said he. She turned with a jerk, as pale as before, her lips parted, her breath panting.

"Oh, will you stop these charges, Mr. Fantom?" said she.

"Go on with your mistering,'" said he. "Much good may it do you! Because I'm gunna have you. D'ye see? Have you and hold you and keep you here in the Happy Valley forever!"

"You're all talk," said she. "And the roast is gettin' cold."

"Aw, Jo," said he. "Be kind, will you? And be honest! Are you afraid of me?"

"Why should I be afraid?" she asked him. "I wouldn't be. And I wouldn't run a step from before you, Mr. Fantom!"

She looked at a dainty finger and deliberately licked from it a drop of gravy, then with a forced insolence, stared straight at Fantom's face. But her glance wavered; she shrank as he came closer.

"You said that you wouldn't be running away from me," he taunted her. "Look at you now, though!"

"I'm getting the roast," said she.

"Look at me," said he. "I'm gunna have you look at me, Jo."

She raised her eyes, but they flickered away again.

"You're not so pretty that a girl would have to be lookin' at you all the time," she explained.

"Jo," said he, "my heart is ragin' and achin' to have you close to me and to tell you that I love you!"

He could see the word strike her, with a physical impact. But she said: "It's a likely thing, after seeing me once in the evening!"

"As true," said he, "as that I'm here before you. I want to tell you——"

"You can stand off and tell me, then," said she. "Do you have to have your hands full before you can talk?"

"You can speak plenty of sharp words," said he, "but can you look me in the eye when you say them? Tell me that, now!"

Once more she tried to lift her glance, and once more it was overburdened and shrank from him.

Yet she did not retreat; she merely raised a hand and let it rest lightly against his breast. This was her one defense. He trembled from head to foot at her touch.

"I'm mighty busy—and everything is getting cold—will you go sit down to have your lunch, Jim?"

"I've gotta talk a minute."

"Well, finish up your talk, then. Wouldn't you of made a lawyer though, the way that you carry on!"

He moved an inch closer. There was no greater pressure from the hand to keep him away, but he saw a tremor in her, as though a wind had touched her lightly.

"You never would of come here, if it hadn't been that you cared a little about me, Jo!"

"Wouldn't I?" said she. "I'm a practical-minded girl, you know. The nice little cabin is what I came for."

"And the husband you got didn't make any difference?"

"Of course not. You take men, they're all about alike, I'd guess. There's nothing to choose, much."

"So long as you choose me, what do I care for your talk?" said Fantom joyously.

His arms hovered about her, and at that, she caught her breath and shrank smaller, though she would not give back.

"Don't be touchin' me, now," said she.

"Ah, Jo, will you care so much if I touch you?"

"I'm not a puppy or a calf that needs to be patted," she told him. "I can listen to what you have to say, Mr. Fantom."

"I want only to kiss you, Jo. Is there great harm in that?"

"Why would you be philanderin' around?" she asked him. "We're not married yet, you know!"

"Is a girl to be married before she's ever kissed?" said he.

And he watched the rapid rise and fall of her breast, and felt the quivering of the hand that touched him.

"Ah, Jim," she murmured at last, "it's a mighty long way from my home and my folks to here. I'm all alone, d'you see?"

"Say no to me then," said he. "And I won't touch your bright hair, darling"—he touched it as he spoke, with a shaking hand—"or so much as the hem of your dress."

"Well, there would be no harm, perhaps, if you kissed me——"

She raised her face to him and it was warm and bright with tenderness; she held aside the hand that had kept him away.

"Once every day if you kissed me—until we're married, Jim."

"Only once, d'you mean?"

She tried to laugh, but the sound fluttered musically and faded.

"I've got housework to do, you idle man," said she.

"But the whole long day, from the morning to the middle morning, and from that to noon, and from that to the middle of the afternoon, where the sun sticks for whole hours and doesn't move in the sky, and from that to the evening, and from the evening to the night. Then all the long night until the dawn begins to come up—why, only to touch you once in all that time?"

"It's best," said she.

"Do you fear me, Jo?"

"I wouldn't have you think lightly of me, even if I've come up here like something bought. But I won't be standing here for hours and hours, holding out my hands to you. My shoulders are aching now!"

He sighed, with sorrow, with impatience, with burning joy.

"You can put down your hands, then. If there's only one time in the day, I'll wait for it."

"And have me livin' in fear of your Injun charges, all the day long?"

She turned from him and picked up the platter of the roast but instantly put it down again.

"I guess," she said faintly, "that you'd better carry the things in to the table. I seem a little shaky."

"Because of me bothering!" he cried in a torrent of remorse.

"We had to talk," she said. "But I sort of dreaded it. And after I let you go away this morning, I wondered when you'd come back. Well, it's over now!"

She went to the door and leaned against the side of it, while Jim Fantom obediently carried in the dishes to the table. Then he went to her at the door and stood there a moment beside her, frightened by her pallor and the distance in her eyes.

"Are you no better?" he asked her.

"Oh, I'm better," she said.

"Would you come on in, then, and have lunch, Jo?"

"I'll be coming in a minute."

"Are you grievin' about something?"

"No, I guess not."

"You look as though you were seein' things over the hills and far away."

"Well, it don't matter."

He took her hand. It was soft and small, and strangely cool.

"You'd best come in," said he. "You sort of scare me, standin' here lookin' at the other end of the world."

"Ah, but I've been terribly scared myself!" she whispered. "I've been so scared that I had to sing, to keep up."

She laughed shakily.

"I'll be all right. I'll go in with you now, Jim."

They went in. But at the door of the dining room her hand pulled back in his.

"Jo, Jo," said he, "you look like crying!"

"I won't though," said she.

"Ah, but you're not happy. There's something that's forced you into this. It's Quay. He's got some hold on you, or on your family—you——"

"D'you think he's a wizard, Jim?"

"Aye, he's done something to you!"

"He has," said the girl. "By sayin' your name over and over to me. That's how he put the spell on me!"

"Ah, dear," said he, "will you tell me, then, why you're so sad just now?"

"Well, I've been lookin' at everything and sayin' good-by to it. All the faces I've been seeing; all the voices I've been hearing. They'll never seem or sound the same to me again. I belong to you. But it's only now and then that I'll look over my shoulder. The rest of the time, my life'll be yours. But will you think that I'm a light thing or a cheap thing, because I loved you all at once?"

"Do I think light and cheap of myself, for loving you the same way?"

She turned to him suddenly and drew down his face between both her hands, and kissed him; but he remained half stern, half sad, for he was enlarging his strength and bracing himself against the future. He had a sense of guilt, as though he had stolen this unbelievable treasure, but he swore that he would give it good care all the days of his life.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### JOY BEHIND AND DANGER BEFORE.

THE sun had marched well west before Fantom left the house and started for the team. He was half grave and half laughing, like a child. He even was partly blinded, on this day of days, and stumbled and almost fell over a root that twisted up from the ground before him.

Therefore, he was only aware as in a dream of a figure that appeared on his right hand, and actually rubbed his eyes as he turned and stared again.

It was the ugly white face of the hunchback, who leaned one hand against the trunk of a tree and regarded Fantom with perfect nonchalance. The latter, utterly amazed, bewildered, instinctively reached for a gun. His mind cleared as it glided brightly into his hand.

"Well, well," said the hunchback, "do I frighten you into pulling a gun on me?"

And he smiled at Fantom. Even at that distance, the boy was aware of the glazed, fishy eyes of the little man. His face was the color of a fungus of one of those pale plants that grow in the dark heart of a forest, or in the damp of a cave.

"I missed you in the woods, stranger," said Fantom. "I'm glad that I've come up with you again here in the valley. You won't mind coming along with me."

He approached aggressively as he said this.

However, the hunchback shook his head without the slightest perturbation.

"You won't do it," said he. "You're not the kind that does a good turn and then takes it back."

"You think," said Fantom, "that I won't bring you on to the house?"

"For Louis Kendal? No, you won't do that. You wouldn't care to stand by and see him swallow me alive."

Fantom frowned at him.

"You're sure of yourself, and me, too!" said he. "But the fact is that I was sent to get you, and you'll have to come in with me."

Said the cripple: "I don't think that I'm wrong in you. There's more manhood and honesty in you than you think. Why, my boy, it would have been easy enough for me to stay behind the trees while you went by."

Fantom paused, close to the other.

"It's true," he said. "I never would have seen you. Then why did you show yourself? Do you think, man, that I won't keep my promise to the people that I work for?"

"That's what they count on," said the hunchback. "Honor, honor, honor! They work on that. They turn it into hard cash by the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Your honor! They can be sure of that. They are sure of it. They plan on it, and scheme for it. Your honor, and their crookedness, make a safe team. They'll cover a long mile with you in the harness and their crooked whips in the air above you!"

Fantom stared at him.

"You talk," said he, "as though you knew everything about every one here in the valley."

"Isn't that possible? However, I don't know about them all. I don't know much about the poor dupes who are trying to work out their lives in a new way, here. But I know the brains at the top. I know the brains at the top!"

He laughed, without making a sound, and the ugliness of his face during this silent laughter was a thing to wonder at!

"Stranger," said Fantom, "I dunno that I'm right to stand here and let you talk."

"You will, though," answered the other with perfect calm. "Not maybe for yourself, but because of the girl in the cabin, yonder."

Fantom stiffened a little.

The hunchback nodded, and went on: "I've been watching her for some time. I watched the two of you, in fact."

"Hello! You mean that you came up to the house and looked in?"

The hunchback studied the face of the boy and nodded. Then he broke into his usual hideous and soundless laughter.

"I looked in," he said.

He wrung his hands together almost as though in pain, yet Fantom could tell that the little man was enjoying himself immensely.

"Love!" said the hunchback. "Love! Ha, ha, ha!"

This time his laughter was aloud, and it sounded like the cawing of a crow, harsh and ominous.

"She loves him, and he loves her. They live in each other. They cannot look at one another without blushing. They smile and simper and stare at the floor. Oh, love, I know all about you, I know all about you! Baby food, baby food. Food for babies—and angels, not for men with broken backs, and dangling long arms like the arms of a monkey, and a hideous face. Not for me, but I know about it. However, you will run around the world ten times, and never find another like her. You agree with that, I suppose?"

Fantom was silent, not knowing how much mockery was mixed with this praise.

"And she," said the hunchback, "will travel ten times around the world before she finds another Jim Fantom. Brave, simple, full of trust, worthy of trust. Some people get to Heaven by the work of the left hand. This may save even Quay and send him there—this little work of his in bringing the girl to you."

He struck his lank, pale hands together and nodded, his eyes closed, obviously filled with satisfaction because of this thought.

"But think of her courage, her great

heart, her beautiful spirit! One glance in the twilight. She who has had men around her like the bees around honey! One glance. A moment of talk. And she knows the man who is meant for her! Well, this thing makes hard hearts turn soft, opens the minds of the cynics, seats a little firmer on its throne. Yes, makes it an actuality. Tush! She is beautiful, and she is good. I wish you joy out of the bottom of my heart."

"Thanks," said Fantom doubtfully. "Even Quay, did you say?"

"Even the good Quay, the generous, gentle, thoughtful, wise, benevolent philosopher, Quay? Yes, even Quay, I said. Beside him, Louis Kendal is an angel of grace! Do you hear me? An angel of grace!"

He said it angrily, and scowled at the boy.

"I've heard enough from you," said Fantom firmly. "It's true that I can't take advantage of you when you give yourself up to me. But I'll have no slander. Quay's been a father to me."

"Aye, a father," said the other. "That's what he is. A father, and starts his children for a bad end! Ah, well, my lad, I won't feed you with slander, then. Keep your faith. Keep your faith, and your love, until your eyes are opened, and everything is lost—everything lost to you. The girl, the hope, everything gone!"

He waved his lank hands.

Then he peered at the startled face of Fantom.

"You know for yourself," said the boy, "that your life ain't worth a penny, if you're found here in the valley?"

"I know it," said the hunchback. "I know it, and I take my chance. Kendal the evil one, Quay the emperor, and their myrmidons. I take my chance against them all. Courage, you see, can be locked up even in a little twisted body like mine. Courage, and hope, as well. Hope to find them, to talk to them, only to talk!"

"Without a gun?" asked the boy.

"Only a gun to keep their hands in the air and their ears open. That's all. No danger to them, my lad. Otherwise, I know that at least you'd take me out of the valley. Aye but talk! What harm can I do them with a little conversation, spoken softly?"

He leered at Fantom.

"Goodness knows what I should do," said the boy doubtfully.

"Goodness is not in the valley, except in that cabin, yonder," said the hunchback. "Aye, maybe there are shadowings of it in other houses around here. But little of goodness in the Happy Valley, Jim Fantom. There's Quay, instead. Quay, and his minister of evil. His Kendal!"

He waved toward the road.

"Go on with your team. Keep your eyes wide and your head clear. There'll be need of thinking, before you're done with your life here."

Fantom paused.

Never had he been more at a halt than he was at this moment, for he could not see where his duty lay.

To take this man by force and to bring him to Louis Kendal according to order was now, he was sure, impossible. His soul revolted at the thought of taking advantage of a man who voluntarily had put himself in his hands. Moreover, it seemed impossible that the cripple could actually be dangerous to such a man as Louis Kendal. Though he knew that that human monster dreaded the little man.

He went back a pace and hesitated again.

"Go on," said the hunchback. "Hurry, hurry! Get through with your day's work. Come back to see her again in the evening. And ask Quay to bring the minister."

He tipped back his ugly face and laughed again.

"Ask Quay to bring the minister. Listen to his answer."

He began to laugh once more.

But this spectacle was so horrible to the boy that he suddenly turned his back, and without a word went on to where the team was tethered.

They were still tame. They tossed their heads up and danced a little, to be sure, but the instant that his hands were on the reins and the shadow of the whip dangled above them, they went off down the road at an easy trot, the bits light in their mouths.

And Jim Fantom could let his puzzled thoughts fly back to the girl, and to the hunchback. It seemed to him that she was like brightest sunlight, after which there comes the darkest shadow. The cripple was the shadow!

On Quay and on Kendal he had thrown his accusations, with such a surety that in spite of all his loyalty, in spite of the gratitude which was bubbling up from his heart like water from a well, Fantom felt that there must be something in the words of the little man.

Yet he was happy. It was as though his mind were a slate, covered with joyous poetry. There was no room for more than scrawlings on the margin, and no matter how ominous these might be, he would not heed them.

He saw the shadows of the trees jerked past him down the road. A blue jay darted through the air, a dazzling flash of color on some errand of mischief, and then he came out on the avenue to Quay's house.

He knew that there was joy behind him; he guessed that there was danger before; but he could not keep the smile from his lips.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A GRATEFUL HEART.

HE drove the span of buckskins with a certain pride up the driveway toward the big house of Quay, and as he came closer, saw something to the left, among the trees, that made him rein in his span and send them on at a soft walk.

It was Rhiner, the ex-murderer, the peaceful cottager of the Happy Valley, now, who was talking with Kendal among the woods. Rhiner was arguing vehemently. His horse was behind him, the reins over the crook of his right arm, and so violent were his gestures that the reins jumped and flung about in the air and the horse stood back with flattened ears, plainly in terror.

Kendal listened, half turned away, his head bowed with thought. Now and then he nodded. Now and again he raised a hand as though to protest against needless violence in the speech of the other. Finally, he struck one hand through the air and shook his head in flat denial.

Rhiner recoiled as one amazed and incredulous. He started forward as if to repeat his argument, but was met with a similar gesture of definite refusal. At this, it appeared for a moment as though the ex-criminal would snatch out a weapon; but he changed his mind, threw himself onto his horse, and rode furiously away. Once or twice he reappeared through gaps in the trees, going at reckless speed. Then he was lost in the distance of the woods.

It sent Fantom on in gloomy thought; it was another conclusive proof that strange things went on in the Happy Valley. All its happiness might be of no more substantial stuff than the bright colors that are reflected in a bubble. The very face of lovely Jo Dolan might be to him no more than what dreams are made of!

This made his fingers slow and stiff upon the harness; his head and glance were so downward that he did not notice the approach of Kendal until the strange voice of that man spoke at his back.

"Fantom!"

He whirled about and saw the long,

pale face of the other man sneering at him.

"I sent you on an errand, Fantom," said he. "I didn't send you out to spend half the day!"

Fantom returned to his unharnessing.

"D'you hear me?" barked Kendal.

"You needn't bawl at me like a calf," said Fantom. "The fact is that I hear you, but what you say don't mean anything to me, Kendal!"

He shuddered slightly as he said this. It was far from true!

"Means nothing, eh?" echoed Kendal.

"Nothin' at all! You can give me orders. Quay's handed you the right to do that. But as for houndin' me, they ain't a man in the world that I'd take that from, Kendal!"

He felt the other come up to him, though there was no sound. The breathing of Kendal was almost on his neck as he answered: "I've tried to give you your chance, young feller, and you wouldn't take it. I'll give you one more day to find out for yourself that the other dogs in this valley stop howling when I begin to bark! After that——"

He was gone. Silently, at first; and only in the near distance did Fantom hear the trailing footfall and the jingling of the spurs begin.

The instant the danger was gone he was sick at heart, for he realized that he had done a useless thing, which would only imperil his happiness, and the happiness of the girl he loved. Her very existence, perhaps, was involved, and more and more insistently the first image returned to him—the Happy Valley was a beautiful bubble, and when it dissolved at some touch of tragic reality, the girl would disappear, and all the rest, and leave him more lonely than death itself in the midst of the mountains.

A snarling order from Kendal, in the distance, told him to report to the straw boss, Hendricks for work, and he willingly did so, after the team had been put up. From Hendricks he received orders to ride fence in the river bottom, and there all the afternoon he worked up and down the line, replacing fallen staples, and wondering, like all line riders, at the slowness with which the time passed.

He was drawn in two ways.

From the hillsides along which he rode, he could see the bending of the lower river between its wooded banks; he could see the western windows of the cottages flash golden bright as the sun drew toward the horizon; he could see the lake take on color, and deep in its arms the white clouds turn to fire. On the other hand were the uplands, with their spotting of cattle, and white mists of sheep far away.

Never had the valley seemed to him so beautiful; yet the sense of dread increased in him momently, and as the lower canyon and gorges which split the sides of the mountains filled with blue, the heart of the boy fell lower still.

It was as though the coming of the night were bringing a danger with its shadows, welling up out of the ground.

Before sundown, he had used his last staple and hurried back across the fields to the house of Quay; and Quay himself he found walking up and down before the stable, smoking a pipe and looking contentedly down across the darkening crimsons, blues, and greens of his valley.

Quay looked like the commonest laborer. He wore riding breeches of a cheap, heavy corduroy, gathered into the tops of high boots which laced up the front almost to the knees. He had on a canvas shooting coat that was badly stained with soil in several places and was ragged at the elbows. A flannel shirt, open at the throat, and a storm-battered and stained felt hat completed his outfit. Yet the eye of the boy dwelt upon this uncouth attire in kindly fashion. It brought the rich man closer to him. It made the heart of Quay seem

more open to inspection, revealing kindness, deep sympathy with less rich and lucky men.

Indeed, it would have been an instinctive thing for the boy to snatch off his hat as he went into the presence of the older man. As it was, he approached him slowly and waited for Quay to speak, which he did with the kindest of smiles.

"You're already reconciled with Chip Lander and your own fate, I hope," said he.

Said Fantom: "You see how it is, Mr. Quay. I remembered your promise to bring her up here. But somehow it didn't seem that even you could do a thing like that. And the idea of losin' her was pretty hard to bear."

"I didn't bring her up," said Quay gently. "She came herself. She used her own arts of persuasion. I was merely the agent who opened the door and showed her a way to travel. You yourself brought her here, my lad. Thank yourself for it. Yourself, and youth, youth, youth! That is the gold which buys women. Good luck to the pair of you!"

"Whatever luck we'll have is your giving!" said the boy. "Her—and a house—and everything fixed so fine in it—Mr. Quay, I'd ride to the world's end and back for you!"

Jonathan Quay lifted his big, bearded head at this and stared at the boy with a keen appreciation.

"I think you mean that," he said at last.

"I mean it. Aw, I know that it sounds loud and useless, but the time may come when something happens, and you can use me!"

Quay did not answer at once, merely remaining at a stand, while he looked across his valley, but at last he replied quietly:

"You see that I've taken dynamite and mixed in a little more clay with it. But if it should ever take fire, the Happy Valley might burn with a very bright flame, Jim!"

Fantom did not answer. He stared earnestly into the face of the other, yearning for a fuller answer, but Quay merely said:

"I trust that the time never will come; but if it should, I don't know of another man in the place that I could be sure of. Not one so much as Jim Fantom!"

"You've saved and made 'em all," insisted Jim. "They'd all die for you, Mr. Quay!"

"Honest people and loyal people see honesty and loyalty in others," said Quay. "It warms my heart to hear you, Jim. Hello, there's the supper bell—if you're dining at home?"

The boy laughed, and instantly he was gone across the fields for the cottage in the woods.

But as he went, the hope of seeing the girl could not altogether illumine his heart. There was, more than that, a strongly possessing shadow which had been gathered about him all the afternoon, since the appearance of the hunchback. The talk with Kendal, the overlooking of the interview between Rhiner and Kendal, the interview with Quay himself had not reassured him.

Moreover, when a man has any strong cause for happiness, he cannot help but feel that Fate may easily be tempted.

It seemed to the boy that whatever power there is that watches men's lives must now be watching and envying him. As a boy watches a line of hurrying ants, and deliberately crushes the one that bears the heaviest seed, so it seemed to him that Fate might now be looking down and ready to destroy him.

Or the girl!

It might be she that would be taken away from him!

Suddenly he threw back his shoulders and laughed at himself for a foolishly impressionable lack-wit.

This was no fairy place, no valley

taken from a book of myth or legend, but a real and living thing. The rocks and the trees were real, the people in the Happy Valley no different from others!

So he spoke to himself, but suddenly found himself sprinting ahead at full speed, and as he labored, he found that fear had leaped up in his throat and was driving him on faster and faster.

A shadow leaped behind him, a shadow fled before; madness whirled through his brain; his face ran wet with cold moisture.

And so he came suddenly upon the sight of the cabin!

It was all at peace. The rosy evening made color in the sky, but already a lamp had been lighted and glimmered like a bright yellow eye through the kitchen window; from the chimney, a column of wood smoke was rising, crystal-white as it streaked across the trees, and then dyed with rose as it lifted higher.

There was no wind. Up to heaven arose that column, like the smoke from a sacrificial fire.

And Fantom laughed softly to himself.

He slipped to the living-room window, and peering through, he saw the table laid for two, the fire fluttering on the hearth beyond, and a big white rug made of the skin of a mountain sheep looking on the firelit floor like a cloud in the sky.

He went back to the kitchen. She was not there!

"Jo!" he called.

She was hiding from him, no doubt, and would jump out, to laugh at him.

So, still smiling, he went into the front of the house.

"Jo!" he shouted.

He got no answer, and the smile became a fixed grimace upon his lips.

Suddenly he was running from place to place, opening closets, growing cold at heart and desperate.

She was not in the house, so he dashed outdoors and cried furiously: "Jo! Jo!"

He cupped his hands, and cried again.

Then he started to run toward the trees, but the black sight of the shadows beneath them told him that it was useless to search for her by this light.

He turned toward the house again, and now the sight of the rising smoke, already dwindling as the wood burned out in the stove, and the increasing glimmer of the lamp from the kitchen, were to Fantom like the sight of ghosts.

He stood for a long time, wavering, and then a light voice called from the side of the clearing. Called his name!

He ran toward her stumbling, with his arms outflung.

She was alight with a triumph and held toward him a dripping, shimmering mass of pale green.

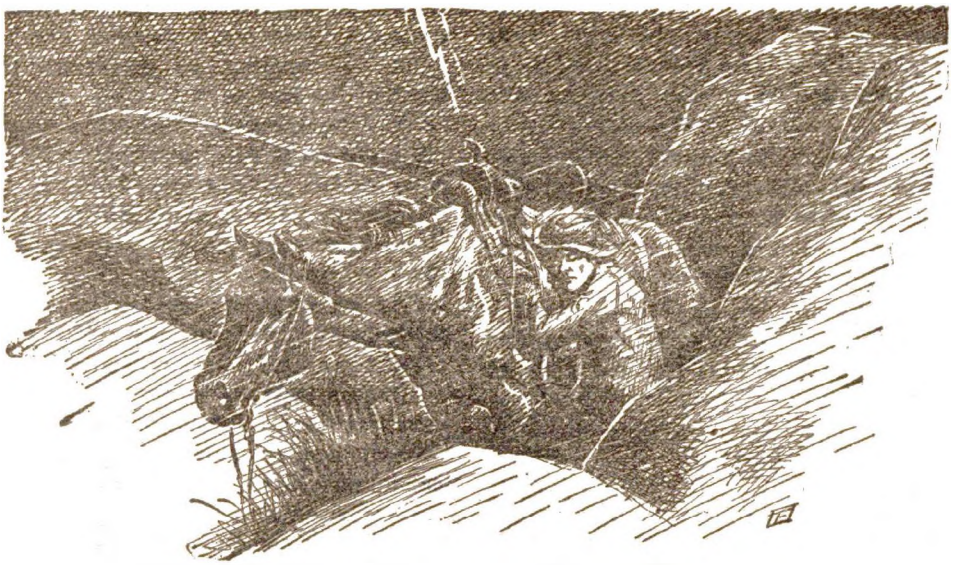
"Look what I've found! Watercress!" said she.

He took her into his arms. "I thought you were gone!" he groaned.

"You're spoiling the cress," she complained. "And the fire's dying. We'll have to hurry in. Why, Jim, where would I go? Silly dear!"

She slipped from him and hurried away.

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



# Old Buckshot

## By H. C. Wire

**Author of "His Place in the West," etc.**

HIS name was Old Buckshot. He was a bony, short-coupled pinto with two white socks on his forefeet and brown boots on those that followed behind. His color scheme was wholly without reason, as if he had once been a white horse, and then some one had come along and pasted him all over with brown patches. On top of that he was thickly freckled from short, pointed ears to blunt, scrubby tail, giving the impression that a load of buckshot had been fired at him, leaving these dark lead marks. A comical wrinkling around his nose gave him a reminiscent look, while both eyelids drooped with old man's dreams. No one knew his age.

Even in his far-away youth he had not been fast. He had never run a record mile nor won fortunes at New Orleans or Tia Juana. In fact, his hoofs had not touched ground beyond the dry reaches of Gila Bend Valley. It would be difficult to imagine that he had ever earned a dollar. Still, he was worth a million.

Johnny Carr knew it. Out of breath, running desperately, he raced down to the log corral where Old Buckshot stood sunning himself in the afternoon warmth. Old Buck was worth a million! He wasn't done for! Johnny halted at the fence and looked back to where smoke came from the chimney of a house hidden in a willow clump. Men didn't understand Old Buckshot. They hadn't grown up with him—those men back there in the house—they didn't know what he could do!

For an instant Johnny stood waiting, undecided. He was small and thin, topped with a mat of sunburned hair, and tanned to saddle-leather brown. The very hardness of his skin gave him a seasoned look far beyond his years. He was a product of the desert, to be

found in no other place; unsmiling, a little tired, proudly self-reliant, with the bearing of a man about him, yet at heart filled with all the vague yearnings, the loneliness, the inarticulate questions of a boy.

The men had not seen him run from the house. He was sure of that. In his mind he could still see them: Jeff Harrow, a sheepman from down the bend; "Apache" Louie, the trader, and his own father. He saw them sitting and laughing around a table. He heard again what they said. Bears were getting the sheep. Jeff Harlow and Apache Louie were going to trap. They were up to take Old Buckshot away—kill him, use him for bear bait!

Buckshot thrust out an inquiring ear as Johnny darted into the corral. The boy ran to him. "Buck!" he gasped. "Buck, we're gettin' out of here! You and me. We're leavin'. They can't never do that, they can't. I won't let 'em!"

The horse lowered his wrinkled nose and nuzzled Johnny's shoulder. There was human affection in the act; something born of the years these two had been companions, of the miles they had traveled daily before Johnny was taken from school, of long dark hours when the boy tended night herd at round-up time, of rides that were work and some that were play, an affection which only a boy might understand.

It was the one thing in his desert, motherless life that Johnny could grasp. All else was a puzzle. His father was. He did not know why a grown man should have so little to talk about. Around them lay so much to be discovered and discussed. His father was tall, and big, and good to look at, like a pine tree up in the mountains; but even a pine tree spreads its branches out and you can stand under them while it whispers things.

Johnny had never felt that way about his father. Years ago he had ceased to bring his joys and his wants to the older man. He had never wanted much. Somehow there was always a feeling in the desert shanty that you mustn't want at all.

So through a widening gap of silence father and boy had grown apart. At rare intervals Johnny felt his father's eyes upon him. They were blue, like his own, set in a very dark, deep-lined face, and looked out with a sharp gaze that made Johnny wonder what he had done wrong now. But on these far-apart times they were different. Gray eyebrows would be pulled down over them, and they would seem to be wondering and sad.

Once Johnny had gone around the table and had put a hand on his arm.

"What's the matter, kid?" his father had asked gruffly. "Go on back and eat your beans!"

A boy must have something. He cannot live within himself. There must be an open ear, a smiling eye, a butt for his jokes, a confidant, a friend, a comforter. These things Old Buckshot furnished.

Fiercely, Johnny grasped the horse's mane and dragged him to the corral gate. There he flung on a saddle and bridle. Willows still prevented discovery from the house. The men, he knew, would not think of him until supper time. That gave him at least an hour's start.

Night came swiftly over the Gila Hills. Their red, pointed teeth gleamed for a moment against a sunset sky, then vanished in blackness. Yet that picture of them, the feeling of bared fangs, clung to Johnny. He leaned forward in his saddle to be nearer Old Buckshot.

It was not the first time he had been out alone at night; but those other nights he had known where he was going. He was riding blindly now, north, vaguely planning to skirt the range of

hills encircled by Gila Bend, for the river bottom, and then—— Something choked in his throat; he could not think ahead. He had never thought it would be hard to run away from home.

A cold wind sprang up after dark, throwing angry clouds across the sky and piling them thickly against the stars and moon. In time he could not see the ground at Old Buckshot's feet. Rain began to fall, the first rain of spring. Cowboy that he was, Johnny had rolled all his possessions into a slicker and had tied it behind his saddle. Now he put on the slicker, stuffing a broken comb, a red handkerchief, a dried rabbit-foot luck piece and a deck of fortune-telling cards into his trousers pockets.

Rain fell harder. Overhead, black clouds suddenly ripped wide apart. Lightning stabbed them. Torrents of water spilled out. Johnny hunched over his saddle pommel. He let Buckshot pick the way. With head low, ears forward, the horse went on. Johnny patted his wet neck.

It seemed surely that all the water in the sky had fallen, yet more was coming, harder every minute, pouring in sheets and spouts until the hill slope ran with a flood inches deep. Old Buckshot halted. Johnny spurred him lightly. Buckshot shook his head. That was sufficient.

Swinging off, Johnny advanced, bent down, and then leaped back. They had come to a jump-off. Everything was dark. Maybe it was only a few feet, or it might be hundreds. Johnny reached up with one hand and found Old Buckshot's chin. Their own wordless assurance passed between them.

Any move now was dangerous. Direction was lost to Johnny; all sense of north or south being torn from him since the storm closed down. Distance, too, was vague. He might have come as far as the upper Gila Gorge. His limp hat brim shed a blinding fall of water before his eyes, and he could not feel if there was any blood left in his numb legs. Renewed thunder burst on the mountainside close overhead, and then in a flash of lightning he glimpsed a rock ledge with an overhanging lip.

He stumbled to it, leading the horse. There was no dry ground, but the concave rock face gave shelter from two winds. They crowded in together, boy and beast. Johnny stood between the wall and Old Buckshot. The horse's side was warm. Johnny leaned against him, putting his cheek on the stirrup guard. He thrust his cold hands up under the saddle blanket where it was hot and steamy. Old Buckshot drooped his head and shifted onto three legs. In that way, unmoving, they waited for the dawn.

Johnny gave his head a vigorous shaking to clear it. His brain seemed as stiff as his body. Old Buckshot drew a deep sigh and looked around dismally. Morning had come.

Eastward, against a pale-gray sky line, the Gila's fangs were bared once more, black now, for the light was behind them. Johnny moved out from his rock. It was not yet day enough to see far. On the hill back of him he saw round boulders that looked like the carcasses of cattle lying white and swollen. He shivered.

Dawn broke through this first dim light. Fascinated, though he had seen it often, Johnny watched the shadow of his world slip down from the mountaintops and into deep canyons below. He had a queer feeling in his stomach, not all from hunger. For the first time in his life he was aware of being alone. Round about him the country loomed in endless desolation, stark hills, barren crags, ridges that rolled on and on with no other living thing if he should follow them forever.

But he clenched his hands savagely, looked at Old Buckshot, and thought of the cruel words. "Bear bait!"

Rain had stopped. He saw the sky

was clear. And yet there was still some thunder. Johnny scowled. Where could thunder be coming from now? It sounded funny. He had never heard it as steady as that. Old Buckshot put his ears forward and stood looking toward the jump-off.

Johnny left him, and walking a short distance, came to a spot where all at once the mountain slope broke away to yawning depths. The drop was sheer for a thousand feet, while beyond that, beginning at the cliff base, stretched a maze of treeless foothills, heaped and tumbled, breaking down at last into a green band marking the Gila River bottom.

Away down there he saw the glint of sun on water. The river had risen a little from rains last night. His eyes followed up its course, and always in his ear was that rumble of distant thunder. Suddenly his glance halted. He stood squinting hard. Then his lips opened. "Gee, Criminy!" he gasped.

The whole river bed was moving! Where its gorge slashed through a gap, the bottom was no longer green, but brown, spotted with white, and it all seemed wriggling like a great, flat snake. Johnny could actually see its blunt head moving along. Then he knew. A cloudburst!

For an instant, he gazed in rigid awe. Now he understood the thunder. That flood was higher than a house, twenty, maybe thirty feet. It was rolling boulders, mountains of them, and that made the noise. He had heard his father tell about——

Suddenly he sprang back to Old Buckshot. He had heard his father tell of a cloud-burst years ago. How it had rushed down the Gila bottom before any one knew of it, roaring like this and killing all the stock that grazed there. Horses, cattle, sheep! Johnny's heart pounded. They were down there now! Just like that! Hundreds of them, scattered in the bend.

With quick determination he drew the cinch tight on Old Buckshot. Vividly the bend country flashed in his mind. The flood must go round the half circle; he could cut across. His father's place was highest up the river, and then Jeff Harrow with his flock of woollies farther down.

He saw it all in one clear vision, judged his chance of beating the water head, knew even the words of warning he would yell at the men. But he was not thinking of those men as he swung upon Buckshot and wheeled back toward the south. A sorrel mare he knew of, hiding in some cottonwoods, was due for twins to-day.

Buckshot snorted cheerfully as he took the direction home. He sensed the boy's excited tension and plunged ahead without need of spurs. They skirted the slope, made soft and treacherous by rain. They dived down a ridge end, climbed and crossed a hogback as pointed as a roof; down again, up again, raced through a boulder field where a slip meant broken bones or death. Here was no need of race-track swiftness, but the sure-footed flight of a mountain goat. Old Buckshot delivered just that.

In two hours they came to the red hills' end. Almost afraid, Johnny looked down to where the river bent back, and rose in his saddle with a sudden yell. They were here ahead of the flood!

He saw his father run from the shanty door. "Kid! Where have you been?" were the man's first words. "I've looked——"

Unchecked, Johnny shouted, "Cloudburst's coming! Flood's in the river! Get the cattle up! Get old Nancy—she's there in the cottonwood grove!"

He raced past the house, going into the low bottomland to do what he could while his father saddled. Circling the first cows he came upon, he started them toward the bank. There, when his father took them, he wheeled away,

plunged again to the river bed and rode down it. Hard sand was better for Buckshot than the desert trail. He could make faster time. Johnny turned in his seat. Behind him faint thunder rolled out of the hills, and it was yet two miles to Harrow's.

Looking back, he saw his father leave the bunch of cattle and ride to a cottonwood thicket. In a moment he came out, driving a sorrel mare who refused to move fast. She put her head down often, halted, went on. It was not until she climbed the river bank that Johnny saw the colts—two of them—wabbling up on long spindle legs. Grinning, he faced again downstream, warmly reassured and happy.

A thousand white woollies were grazing in the bend. For more than a mile they dotted the narrow band of grass that grew between the cut banks of the river bottom. There was not much water here, only a shallow ribbon, turned muddy by last night's rain. A man lay on top the west cut bank. Beside him stood two dogs; a third paced off some distance, looking down at the flock, sniffing the air nervously, growling deep in his throat.

The group was like that when Johnny came upon them. With Old Buckshot lathered white, he dashed toward the man and halted. The dogs leaped up, barking at him. He shouted through their noise: "Mr. Harrow, a cloudburst's in the river! Flood's coming. Get your flock out! Quick! I'll help you!"

Jeff Harrow, red-faced, fat, and slow-moving, rolled lazily on one side. "I guess not, kid," he said. "Wasn't much rain last night."

Johnny danced in his stirrups and swung a clenched fist toward the mountains. "Yonder there was!" he asserted. "I was there. A spout. I saw it this morning!"

Harrow grinned. "Yeah?"

Desperation flooded the boy. "Dang it all!" he cried. "Dang you anyway! Get your woollies up!"

Suddenly the third dog that had been off from the group ran whining to Jeff Harrow. He stood with back fur on end, nose pointed north. It was then that Harrow heard. Johnny, too, caught the low rumble.

The man sprang up. "Yuma!" he snapped, and a dog turned an ear to listen. "Yuma, go fetch 'em!" He pointed one way and the dog raced in that direction. "Pedro—there!" Another obeyed. "Yaqui—you—that bunch!" Three wolflike forms shot down to the low bottom, yelping as they ran. Jeff Harrow stayed on the bank and watched.

Three brave dogs and a thousand stupid sheep—and out of the north a thunder of flood waters. Johnny knew the dogs could never make it. Abruptly he dived down the twenty-foot slope and held Old Buckshot on across the bottom. He circled far from the bank, picked up a bunch of sheep that had broken from the dogs, drove them back, rushed to head off others.

Slowly, so slowly, the flock moved shoreward. Johnny rode tense in his saddle, often on tiptoes, urging Old Buckshot, who had already spent his strength.

"Up, boy, up!" he pleaded. "Get 'em. Hold it! Keep your feet, old fellow. Easy, now, easy."

Bleating filled the air, and the barking of dogs, then something that was no longer thunder. It crashed suddenly like cannon shot, then came on in a roll of echoing guns. Underfoot the earth shook. A breath of wind rushed cold on Johnny's face.

Now he could not see the cut bank. Dust hid it. Down before his eyes the sheep surged dizzily, plunging up onto one another, falling back, butting, crowding—always with their plaintive "Baaa! Baaa!"

At the sudden crash and warning

breath of cold wind, Johnny tried to push ahead. Sheep were endless. He urged his horse again. The pack held him. In blind panic he rose and shouted at the nearest animals. Their own terror drowned his voice. He was blocked, trapped behind their solid mass. Desperately he clutched Old Buckshot's mane. Sheep were surging back against the horse's legs, tripping him. It was then that Old Buckshot took this business upon himself.

With jaws clamped tight on the bridle bit, he whirled from the bleating woollies, threw his nose into the dust cloud, and ran. Johnny let him go free. All the earth seemed crashing about his ears. The dust smelled wet and was whirling downstream. Until they flew over the shallow ribbon of water he did not know which way Old Buckshot was going. Green grass came under the horse's hoofs again. The air had less dust. Johnny clung in his saddle as Buck leaped a rock. A sheer cliff rose ahead. Buckshot turned along it, came to a crevice, wheeled and scrambled up.

What passed behind those flying feet, Johnny did not fully see. One instant the river was only a shallow stream, the next a swollen flood. He saw a great wave sweep by, almost level with the cut bank, top-heavy and rolling like breakers on a beach. He heard rocks grind, and a roar of waterfalls. Across on the opposite bank three dogs raced up with the last sheep. The flood swirled on.

Abruptly Johnny was aware of Old Buckshot trembling beneath him. He slid from his saddle, and on the ground put both arms about Buck's lowered head.

Up from the river bottom, whose waters had dropped as quickly as they had risen, a man rode rapidly to intercept the course of a boy. They met halfway to the red Gila Hills.

"For Heaven's sake, son," Carr asked, "where you going now?"

Johnny faced his father resolutely. "Yonder," he answered, pointing north. "You can't make bear bait out of him!" He nodded at Old Buckshot.

Across the space between their saddles, the man looked at his boy as one might study a stranger. Worry in his eyes became a puzzled frown. It lingered, slowly passed, then kindled into a smile.

"So that," he said, "was it!"

He moved nearer and gripped Johnny's hand in his. Johnny felt the strength of it and squeezed back. Something passed between them, something he had never felt before. His father sat gazing upon him for a long time, still keeping their hands in a hard grip.

"Son," he said at last, "if you want him, Old Buck is yours."

"For keeps?" Johnny questioned, leaving no loophole.

Carr burst into a laugh. "You bet, for keeps!" he answered fervently. "Now let's go home—all three of us."

# The Yukon Drive

## By Robert Ormond Case

**Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.**

**SPURRED by a girl's "perhaps," Bill Rondo decides to drive a hundred steers to Dawson. His boss, McNab, stakes him to the cattle and signs a note for funds advanced by Banker Bodine, Lila's father. Bodine insists that Syd Lawson, Easterner, go with Rondo, and plans with Hank Travis to ruin McNab. Bodine wants Lila to marry Syd. With "Slim" and "Kansas," Alaskan old-timer, the party is complete.**

**By good luck Rondo gets passage for his party on a ship that ordinarily carries no freight. He assists pretty Molly O'Mara and the Widow MacKenna to do likewise. The cattle are driven aboard, and the *Kitty McGinn* heads North. The voyage is uneventful. Molly and Rondo become fast friends. The girl is in search of her runaway brother, Rance. Sardonic Syd suggests that Molly and the widow join the party, and mentions Lila. Rondo, aghast at Lawson's suggestion, leaves him, and slips out on deck.**

### CHAPTER XXI.

RONDO AND THE CROSSROADS.

ON feet firmly planted, facing the mountains and the North, Rondo breathed deep of the cool, crystalline air pouring upon him. It was as though that chill tide swept murky cobwebs from his brain, and cleared his mental vision. Or had it been Lawson's drunken words that had pointed the way?

For the way was plain. Lawson was right. Whatever fiendish impulse had prompted the callous youth to dissect his, Rondo's, most intimate emotions, the conclusions pointed out were self-evident. He must forget Molly O'Mara, put her from his thoughts and life. Anything else would be treason to Lila. The poignant, breathless, wistful interval had drawn to a close. A purple passage had been woven into the fabric of his existence, but here and now, forthwith, he must take up the threads

of the pattern he had temporarily relinquished and weave again the old design. His eyes had been opened just in time. His farewell had been final. He must hew to the line.

Looking about him in the gloom, he became aware that his was not the only restlessness abroad. The tranquillity of the preceding night had passed. Men bulked at the rail, pipes glowing. A mutter of conversation was in the air. Peering aft, he saw that much activity was going forward among the bulk of the stampeders. Some lined the rail. Others grouped about the deck, their mackinaws buttoned about their chins. Others labored over their packs.

At first, Rondo was amazed. Whence all this subdued turmoil, this undercurrent of excitement. Then he saw the psychological forces at work. Already, above the mountains to the southwest the stars were fading at the approach of dawn. For these hundreds of stampeders the first monotonous lap was almost done. Stirring day was already at hand. At Skagway the roaring trail began.

Rondo grinned understandingly and tightened his belt. He pulled his hat lower over his eyes. By these outward gestures, born of ancient habit when a new deal was faced, he reaffirmed an inner pact. The iron that was in him, he told himself, having passed through an emotional fiery furnace, had emerged as steel. The die was cast. The way was plain. Almost guiltily, he looked at the horses in the near-by inclosure. They, too, were restless, ears quivering, pawing the deck underfoot. The cattle loomed in the half light, gaunt, almost emaciated. Even on short rations, the inadequate supply of hay had been exhausted twenty-four hours before. Hungry, stupidly bewildered, the animals milled clumsily in their cramped quarters, muttering, their heads tossing in the invisible tides of air upon whose breath was born the freshness of spruce-clad slopes and foliage bursting into bud.

The drive was at hand. He turned to the thought, like one who belatedly snatches up his weapons and prepares to defend his trust. The old excitement was stealing again through his veins. The drive was the thing. He should rout out the men, assemble and outfit, saddle the horses, prepare to unload at Pyramid Harbor—— But there was plenty of time. An hour would be sufficient. Let the boys have a few precious minutes more of sleep.

He wandered aimlessly down the length of ship. He avoided groups of stampeders, hurried out of earshot of eager, muttered conversation. Molly, too, in that moment was undoubtedly preparing herself in spirit for what lay ahead. Not as these adventurous ones —eagerly, thirstily waiting to come to grips with the hostile environment guarding the golden door—but fighting down her terror, steeling herself against the hour when she must take her place in the ranks of the army mounting through the swollen torrents, the mud and gloom of the White Pass.

"It ain't right," he muttered beneath his breath. "It ain't right. But what's to be done?"

Once in the thick of the drive, he told himself, he would forget Molly utterly. In less than two hours more their trails would fork. Meanwhile, it was no concession to his iron resolution that he should feel sorry for her, no disloyalty to Lila. It was only natural under the circumstances. Any normal man of chivalrous instincts could not help but be sympathetic toward a lone woman whom Fate had hurled into a primitive mêlée such as the Klondike Trail. The Widow MacKenna, for example. She, too, was a pathetic figure, her slender resources pitiful by contrast to the harshness of the environment ahead.

Thus he mounted to the poop deck, which appeared to be deserted; and in

the gloom by the rail, in a secluded place between great boat davits where he and Molly had spent glorious hours, he saw a frail, hunched figure; and his heart leaped.

"Molly!" he whispered.

She started, glanced toward him swiftly, then hid her face in her arms.

"Go away," she said. "Please go away, Rondo."

"Why?" he questioned, drawing closer.

"Because," she said in a somewhat muffled voice, "I'm—crying. You mustn't see me—like this. You thought I was so brave. But I'm not. I m-must be a coward. I didn't want Mrs. MacKenna to see me—feel so sorry for myself. She's so—so matter of fact and brave. I thought I'd be alone here for a little while. I'd have a good cry and get it over with."

"Sho," said Rondo cheerfully, "it ain't so bad as all that. I shouldn't have busted in on you this a way. Wouldn't have, except I figgered you was sleepin' in yore cabin. Thought I'd be alone here, too—I don't like to see you cryin', Molly. But it ain't to yore discredit. I'll drag along, though, if you want me——"

"Don't go, Rondo. I'm almost through. I am through. I won't cry any more. You can stay for a while if —if you won't always remember me as I look now. My eyes red—'n' everything." She smiled at him half shyly through her tears.

"Yore eyes ain't red," Rondo denied. "I've never seen you look prettier." He tried to utter the words as a calm, judicial statement of fact; but something in her affectionate, apologetic glance caused him to avert his own gaze. Leaning beside her against the rail, his shoulder was touching hers, and he moved a little away. He drew forth the makings, as in all moments of stress; rolled a cigarette painstakingly, lighted it, and tossed the match into the churning sea.

"What's it all about, Molly, girl? Tell me what ails you."

"You'll think me silly, I know," she said softly. Her rich voice was under better control now. "Weakness and self-pity haven't any place in your scheme of things. But after we—said good-by a while ago, it came over me all of a sudden—well, a lot of things. I realized I wouldn't be with you any more. It was kind of like waking up from an awfully nice dream. And that terrible trail so close. Right around the corner, almost. You seemed to be so sorry, too, to say good-by. You were sorry, weren't you?" She put the question almost wistfully, as though calling upon him to reaffirm a treasured thought.

"Sure was," said Rondo. "Yeah—a little too sorry for my own good. For our own good. But we got to make the best of it," he continued hurriedly, "what else?"

But the girl had caught something hidden in his words.

"What did you mean when you said —a little too sorry for our own good?" she said, a hand on his arm. "What is it, Rondo? Tell me," she insisted, as he stood rigid. "We seemed to get along so fine and—and understood each other so well and everything. A while ago, when we said good-by and—and just now—you seemed a little different somehow——" She laid a hand on his arm. "Look at me, Rondo."

He faced her squarely. A flush overspread his features, merged in the roots of his tawny hair, receded, leaving his features more pale.

"'Sall right, Molly," he told her, his teeth clamped on his cigarette. "Not now. I'll tell you what I meant—later." Thus, by postponing the moment, he made his first concession to the bitterness of hewing to the line. "Now, now. Hurry on, Molly, gal. There ain't but a few minutes left." He gestured toward the North and used her own

words. "Pyramid Harbor's just around the corner."

Her firm cheeks dimpled into a smile.

"Tell me first," she whispered, beaming up at him roguishly. "You're not sorry you held me in yours arms—even if you didn't kiss me good-by?"

Never so much as in that moment, to Rondo's tortured gaze, had she seemed so good to look upon, so utterly desirable. But within him it was as though tides of emotion beat in vain against a firm, rock wall. He must not hold her in his arms again.

"No," he said truthfully, as one counts a new treasure which neither moth nor rust may corrupt, "I ain't sorry."

"Of course not," she said, patting his arm. "I knew you weren't. I just wanted to hear you say so. Well, after I left you up yonder, quite a while ago, I got to talking to Mrs. MacKenna. She told me something that was just too much. It was the last straw. You know, when I thought about the White Pass and how hard it was to get to the Klondike and everything—back in Seattle, I mean—I kept telling myself that it was all worth while, because I would see Rance in Dawson and be able to take care of him and all. And after I—I met you, I was even more anxious to get to the Klondike, because I would see you again, too. But what she found out makes it look like"—she lowered her head a little, fumbling with the buttons on his sheepskin coat—"in—in spite of all my determination and plans, and Rance's needing me, and—and you being there, I might never get to Dawson."

"Never get to Dawson?" Rondo stared down at her. "Why not?"

"Not till late in the summer, anyway," she said in a low voice. "Perhaps too late to help Rance. Certainly too late to see you again—unless it was back in Oregon. Mrs. MacKenna has been talking to a lot of these men on the ship. Some of them tried to get in to the Klondike last fall and turned back. They know all about conditions on the trail—have all the latest information. She's been talking to one of your men, too—'Kansas.' He seems to have picked up even more data. It seems that the Canadian Mounted Police are afraid of a famine in the Klondike. They're afraid a lot of the stampeders will become a public charge. So they're stopping everybody on the trail who hasn't a year's supplies of provisions with them. Or its equivalent in money. And—and that's more than I've got."

"Son of a gun!" said Rondo. "No wonder you was kind of bore down this a way."

"I was ready to—to meet all the hardships on the trail," said the girl. "I was ready to do anything, if it was necessary; because Rance might need me. I'm used to hardship. But I didn't anticipate anything like this—that officials might turn me back, after I was almost there——" She checked herself, breathing deeply. She smiled up at him. "But that's enough. I'm not going to be weak and silly again. I'll get there somehow. I must—tell me, what was it you almost said a while ago?"

"Wait," said Rondo. "Later." He hastened to divert her attention. "We're sayin' a flock of good-bys, ain't we? Each one gettin' worse—harder to say. Gosh, Molly, I wisht I could take you along. You could side-step all that grief."

"What do you mean?"

"If I'd only met up with you in Seattle," he said, almost with a groan. Knowing its futility, he yet gave expression to the yearning thought. "I might have picked up three-four more critters. Then you could have trailed with us, helped us wrangle the beef over the Dalton Trail."

"Oh, Rondo!" Light flamed in her eyes, as of one looking up toward sun-drenched heights. A rosy blush over-

spread her features. She beamed, dimpling. "I'd thought of that myself," she said in a low voice. "It was nice to hear you say so—but it's impossible, of course."

"It wouldn't have been," Rondo insisted. "We could have taken the Widow MacKenna, too, to kind of keep you company. I dunno's it would have been any easier for you, at that. It ain't going to be any picnic. We might never get through. Nobody knows what'll happen to the beef. But at least I——"

"At least," she said softly, "we would have made the attempt together, is that it? Yes, it would have been wonderful, wonderful! But let's not think about it too much. It's impossible, so let's put it out of our minds. We've got so much else to talk about in—in the few minutes left. No use dreaming over what might have been. It would just make us feel worse. Too sorry for our own good—wasn't that what you said?"

She was smiling still, but her dark eyes were intent. With feminine tenacity, she had swung back to the original topic that Rondo had endeavored to postpone as long as possible. Looking down at her, he realized that a showdown was at hand. No use to dream on as they pursued their separate trails. No use to plan to meet again. He must hew to the line.

And yet, because he knew that what he must say would utterly destroy something that life would never again place in his grasp, he hesitated.

"Were you speaking only in generalities?" she insisted gently. "Or did you mean—something? Tell me, Rondo. I can see it's hard. So, to make it easier, I'll make it an exchange. There's something I ought to tell you, too."

Her words struck him like a blow. She, too, had something to tell him! A rush of primitive emotion surged hotly through his veins. He stared at her, his eyes unwinking.

"I overheard it after you left me a while ago," she explained. "When Mr. Lawson was talking to the captain. I shouldn't have listened, but they were making such a noise I couldn't help it. That was another reason why I was—crying. I felt so sorry for you. It was about the cattle. They were arguing about supermen, or something like that, and Mr. Lawson said that the herd would never reach Dawson. His opinion wouldn't have meant much, because I have every confidence in you. But the reason why he thought you would fail, made it seem possible. I think you ought to know them. But you must tell me first," she admonished.

It was about the cattle! Rondo was staggered anew at his inner reaction to the thought that in her life, too, was a bar to their continued intimacy. By what right should he be shaken with a hot surge of jealousy when he himself could never have a claim to her regard? Was it possible that even yet he hoped to avoid a show-down?

"Listen," he said, desperately resolving to hew to the line once and for all, "I should have told you before, Molly, girl. But things kind of sneaked up on me. No, by gravy, I ain't makin' excuses! It just happened, that's all. But the fact is——"

He hesitated, striving to bring all his stamina and will power to bear on the issue; and footfalls sounded on the deck at their backs. They whirled, to find themselves confronted by the thin-lipped second mate, Larsen.

"Mister Rondo," said the junior officer. "Sorry to disturb you, but I've been searching the ship for the past half hour. That's Pyramid Harbor yonder. We dock in less than thirty minutes. The captain suggests that you get your outfit together so we can unload without loss of time."

At his incisive words, the spell of the preceding interval was broken. They looked about them, blinking. The offi-

cer's cynical eyes were cold and amused as he marked their amazement.

Daylight was upon the world. The ship's course had been changed slightly to the west. Lynn Canal, extending northward toward Skagway, was to their right. They had entered upon a beautiful circular sheet of water flanked on the south by high mountains, and in the shadow of these mountains lay a small huddle of buildings and an outjutting wharf.

"Luckily, we've a twenty-foot tide," observed Larsen. "Otherwise we wouldn't have depth enough to approach the wharf. But it's turning now. So unless you are put ashore quickly you'll have to be lightered, which would mean that the cattle and horses would have to swim for it."

"I'll be with you pronto," said Rondo. The mate nodded and turned away.

"Son of a gun!" said Rondo in awe. "We're here! I got to go, Molly. Listen——"

"Not now!" she said, laying hold on his arm. "You mustn't take any chances. Run along, Rondo. We'll see each other for a minute or two. After you get the cattle off." She gave him a little push, smiling up at him. "Stampede, cowboy!"

He was away, running up the deck toward the bow. They had arrived at Pyramid Harbor. The trail was at hand. That dock, beyond the narrowing strip of muddy water past the port rail, clearly visible through the chill of dawn, was the starting point for the trek whose terminus was the Klondike. A vast excitement surged through his veins, a release of emotions long held in check; and deep within him he was conscious of an even more overpowering and somewhat guilty sense of relief, in that circumstances had postponed, even for a matter of minutes, the thing that he must tell Molly.

The forward deck was teeming with activity. He was not a little ashamed to discover that his men had not dallied, like himself, to the eleventh hour. "Slim" and Kansas were up and about, laboring like demons. Their mounts were saddled and waiting. Equipment, hurriedly assembled, was being lashed to the pack animals. Already their shelter on the hatch cover, that had been their bivouac during the cruise, was down. Even Lawson, heavy-lidded and morose, was hard at work, yawning.

Temporarily closing his mind to all else, Rondo plunged into the mêlée.

Mountains of equipment speedily split up into lesser mounds festooning the backs of their pack string. Stampeders looked on curiously. The bos'n and crew, standing by at the rail to lower the gangplank, watched, grinning, their race against time. But expert hands that had broken many camps performed the seemingly impossible. All was in readiness and the quartet were searching the limited area underfoot for overlooked items when the *Kitty McGinn* warped in slowly against the dock.

When the ship was made fast, the captain bulked on the bridge.

"It's lucky the tide was right, ye blushin' blackguard!" he bawled, with an appearance of great ferocity, shaking a fist at Rondo. "I'm foregoin' the pleasure of heavin' them cattle over the side. But get them to blazes off my ship, an' it'll be a long day before the likes of them ever litter my decks again! Move fast, me bucko!"

"We're on our way," said Rondo, grinning.

The canvas-walled gangplank sloped down to the dock. No difficulty with the herd was encountered here as at the Seattle docks. It was as though the famished animals sensed that land was at hand. The green of spruce-clad mountains beyond the huddle of buildings swam before their dim gaze. It was a problem now of restraining a mad rush shoreward, rather than to urge them on.

Under the guidance of Slim and Rondo, the saddle and pack string descended first. There was a considerable area of ancient dock, narrowed by a squat cannery building on the shoreward side. In this passageway, Rondo placed the horses and waved to Kansas to start the cattle down.

"I'll hold 'em here," Rondo instructed Slim. "Go wrangle 'em, cowboy. When they're all off, come a-runnin' an' leave me get back to the ship. They's some business on board I got to 'tend to."

For he had seen the girl and the Widow MacKenna appear on the bridge; and with the business of unloading proceeding slowly, yet all too fast, he strove to prepare himself for a moment that was now but a matter of minutes distant.

As he thus sat the saddle, holding the herd from charging shoreward, while each fleeting instant brought him closer to a species of show-down from which every fiber of his being rebelled, he became aware that a person was approaching him from the rear. Because of the early hour, no doubt, this one was the only sign of life abroad as yet in the sleeping village. He was advancing at a sauntering gait, like one who comes, not so much out of curiosity, as to observe unusual activity that may serve as a relief to a monotnous routine.

Rondo glanced at him briefly, noting his neatly laced, high-topped boots, his belted, fur-lined coat, his mildly amused, cynical eyes peering forth beneath a stiff-brimmed Stetson. He might be a government official, perhaps an executive in the cannery organization. Rondo nodded in response to his greeting and turned back toward the ship.

"Cattle, eh?" the newcomer stated the obvious. "Another phenomenon of this blasted stampede. You'll attempt to take them over the Dalton Trail, I assume?"

Rondo nodded again, his gaze fastened on that point at the rail where Molly stood. The cattle were filtering down the canvas-walled gangplank. The bulk of the herd were milling on the dock. Three minutes more; perhaps four.

"That trail's a Jonah," stated his companion. "I hope it serves your plans better than mine. You'll see our stakes thirty miles up the Chilkat. We've built three miles of roadbed. That's all I've got to show for two months in the vilest climate on earth. It's a monument to my own lack of foresight. A tool of those blasted promoters. Me, a reputable engineer——"

It was evident that here was one with a grievance who craved an auditor. Rondo scarcely heard his words. His attention was fixed on the ship. Instinctively he moved his mount farther to the right to haze back the milling cattle; and the stranger moved with him, illustrating his stored-up bitterness with large gestures.

He was an engineer, it appeared, commissioned to construct an alleged railroad from Pyramid Harbor to the Yukon via the Dalton Trail route. But the financial backing of this ephemeral enterprise, it had developed, had existed mainly in the highly powered imaginations of the promoters, languishing behind their mahogany desks in Seattle. Worse than that, he, the irascible engineer, had reason to suspect that the promoters never had intended to make more than a grand-stand play at construction. The whole scheme, in fact, had been perpetrated merely for the purpose of harassing the substantial Canadian capitalists back of the proposed White Pass & Yukon Railroad from Skagway to White Horse, and to force that legitimate enterprise to buy them off as a competing project to the Klondike. It had been a financial game of chess, in which he, the engineer, was a disillusioned and highly incensed pawn.

The last of the cattle were moving in gingerly fashion down the plank. Rondo

paid little heed to the irate one. Slim was striding toward them, and Rondo, with upflung arm, motioned him to hurry. He must see Molly now. With teeth set, he strove to fashion the way in which to tell her that as friends only they must meet again, in Dawson, or in the Oregon country, or ever.

Yet in that interval while Slim was lumbering across the dock to relieve him at his post, the embittered engineer uttered words that registered slowly on Rondo's brain.

"Just a pawn in their blasted game," proclaimed the wrathful one. "And look what a fish I was! Accepted the commission in good faith, deeming it a major project in which I could make a name for myself in railroad construction! And the blasé manner in which they show their hand. Merely a careless gesture, if you understand me, sir! 'Cease operations,' they announce out of a clear sky. 'Pay off the men. Dismantle equipment for shipment to Skagway. Sell the horses to the best advantage.' Bah! It was easy enough to dismiss the men. They're gone to Skagway to join the stampede. The machinery can rust where it sits. Sell the horses to the best advantage? They're worth two hundred apiece at Skagway. I'll sell them to some of these packers to the interior trading posts for forty dollars a head, or give them to the Indians for dog feed. I'm through. Breach of trust? I'll sue those sharks for breach of contract——"

Slim had arrived. Rondo had actually spurred forth toward the *Kitty McGinn* when he pulled up so abruptly that his mount slid to its haunches, rearing. Out of the stranger's profane monologue a single significant word had leaped forth upon him.

"Mister," he said, eying the other unwinkingly. "Did you say—horses? What kind of critter?"

The irate one stared at him in some surprise. "What kind?" he repeated irritably. "It's the worst aggregation of crow bait ever assembled for an alleged grading job. Draft horses, plow horses, range horses, broken down, potbellied cayuses——"

Staring down at him, Rondo, in a flash of measured time, approached, considered, and passed a crossroads of life.

"Forty bucks apiece, you said? An' take my pick of them range hosses? I'll take four of 'em."

"Sold," said the other, with a grim smile. "And if I can interest you in an army of rusty graders, a battery of steam shovels, or a couple of tons of dynamite——"

"Hold the beef, Slim," Rondo instructed his gaunt crony, and was away, thundering toward the *Kitty McGinn*, where the bos'n and his crew were already hoisting the gangplank aboard.

Kansas and Lawson were standing on the dock at the ship's side, the former exchanging genial farewells with the stampeders that lined the rail, and the latter embroiled in a facetious interchange with the red-bearded giant on the bridge.

"Kansas," Rondo hissed, as he dismounted and hit the dock, running, "come with me, cowboy. Pronto."

One look at Rondo's face was sufficient for Kansas. Without question, he leaped in pursuit. Together they sprinted up the plank.

"Hold everything, men!" Rondo directed the bos'n's crew. "We ain't all unloaded yet."

The bos'n looked inquiringly at the second mate, who glanced inquiringly at the bridge. The captain leaned over the rail, scowling, to bellow at the hurrying cattlemen. But already their pounding feet were mounting the bridge.

"Now what?" demanded the redbeard, as Rondo appeared at his side, his features flushed, his eyes blazing with excitement. "Aren't we rid of you yet, ye heathen?"

"Almost," said Rondo. "Captain, I

dang near forgot to thank you for lettin' us bring the beef this far North. It's been an ace-high trip, an' yore helpin' hand is shorely appreciated."

"G'wan wid ye!" The captain's eyes twinkled beneath lowered brows. "An' are you laughin' up your sleeve at me, ye rosy-cheeked pirate? You brought them blasted cattle aboard my ship against my will, an' I'm tellin' ye now to get to blazes ashore an' never let me see the cherub's face av ye again! Out with it——" He smote Rondo on the back, with a roguish leer at the ladies. "You didn't dash up here like an Orangeman outrunnin' his conscience just to say good-by to ol' Captain McGinn, eh, ye blackguard?"

"No," said Rondo, "but I meant what I said." He turned to the girl, whose face had paled a little. Her eyes were fixed on his.

"Molly," he said, breathing heavily. "Have you an' the widow got yore outfits packed?"

"Yes," said the girl. "Why do you ask?"

"Because," said Rondo simply, "I just got four more hosses. You two ain't buckin' the White Pass. You're trailin' along all the way with us to Dawson."

The reaction of his auditors to this announcement was a study in emotions. The captain eyed the youth with instant and grinning comprehension, plucking at his beard. Kansas gulped under the impact; his glittering gaze turned from Rondo to the widow; and he, too, grinned. The widow studied the youth piercingly, glanced at the girl and nodded, her bitter features softening into a smile that was almost beautiful. But Rondo had eyes only for the girl, whose face was radiant.

"Oh, Rondo!" she breathed, then checked herself. "I couldn't——"

"Now, now, darlin'!" interrupted the widow. "Would you argue with the lad when he's set his mind on it?"

"Unreasonable, by the hivins," said the captain, grinning.

"But I—we——" the girl protested. "We can't be a burden to him. It's—it's wonderful, but——"

"Listen," said Rondo. "You want to go, Molly?"

She nodded mutely.

"And you?" Rondo turned on the widow. "It's no picnic, you savvy. Willin' to cook for us savages an' take yore chances with the rest of us?"

"Am I willin'?" repeated the widow, scandalized. "Would you ask a drownin' sailor if he was willin' to accept a life belt? Would ye ask——"

"Let's go," said Rondo exultantly. "Kansas, we'll grab their outfits Ladies ——" He motioned them toward their cabin. "Let's get off before the captain throws us off."

"Ye're a lad after me own heart," the captain bellowed after them. "Strength to your arm, me bucko."

Rondo and Kansas descended with the equipment. The women followed. The mob of stampeders opened to give them way. The bos'n and his crew hoisted up the gangplank as their heels quitted it.

The group halted on the dock. Kansas and Rondo stood with hats pushed back, thumbs hooked in belts. Lawson was near by. The women drew a little together, and the girl cast a furtive, awed glance over her shoulder. It was a scene to remain etched in memory. On the narrow dock the restless cattle milled. On the shoreward edge of the herd, Slim loomed, motionless, leaning on the pommel. Beyond the huddle of buildings rose the encircling mountains, broken to the northwest by a mighty spruce-clad gap that must lead up to frowning Chilkat Pass. That way lay the Klondike. The *Kitty McGinn,* last contact of civilization and the sea, was casting off.

Lawson had moved closer to Rondo He now stood at his elbow.

"Congratulations," he muttered, so that the women could not hear. "But how justify it, old fellow, and still hew to the line?"

"Cinch," said Rondo. "I'm just givin' 'em a helping hand. Postpone the show-down till we hit Dawson." He spoke belligerently and scowled in response to a sardonic twinkle in the other's eye. "O. K., ain't it?"

"H'm," Lawson ruminated, stroking his jaw. "Merely a friendly gesture, eh? It involves no concession to your sterling resolutions. It's no admission that some treasures are too great to give up. No, indeed." He sighed. "Oh, well. What of it? The drive's the thing."

"Yeah," Rondo agreed, almost with relief. "The drive's the thing. An' the gals won't hurt our chances none. The widow'll tend camp an' Molly will take her turn with the beef. Fact is, we've bettered our hands.

Lawson nodded somewhat carelessly, his heavy-lidded gaze turned toward the ship.

The *Kitty McGinn* had cast off. Headed into the surge of the ebb tide, she sidled slowly away. There was something majestic in her bulk, something portentous in the widening strip of muddy water between her and the dock. From the stampeders, massed at the rail, came a genial roar like a parting salute; and one lone stentorian voice was intelligible above the din:

"See you in Dawson, cowboys—maybe!"

"Question is," said Rondo, grinning, as they waved their hats aloft, "did that pessimist mean that maybe he wouldn't be there? Or us?"

Farther and farther the ship moved away. Her huge dimensions shrank, her lines became more graceful. The stampeders on the deck lost their identity, became merely a dark blot of insectlike figures; and on the bridge the giant captain, puny now but clearly visible, flung up an arm in jovial farewell.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A REAL CHORE.

A MOMENT more they watched the *Kitty McGinn* swinging majestically with the current and her own speed, veering northward. It was as though she were turning her back upon them. She had cleared the harbor now, was in the main channel headed for Skagway. Already, they knew, the stampeders were massing on the forward deck, eager for the first glimpse of the threshold of the Klondike.

They turned from contemplation of the ship and looked at each other in silence, then peered about them almost furtively. It was dawn; cool, crisp. Objects were sharply etched. The gaunt cattle crowded together, muttering uneasily. The current sighed against the pilings below. From the distant Indian village along the tide flats came the staccato barking of wolfish dogs. Other than these sounds, a silence as of the peaks enveloped them. During the previous five days their ears had become accustomed to the unceasing throb of mighty engines, their muscular coördination attuned to the ponderous lilt and sway of shifting decks. Now the world was motionless, sharply etched, and the very quiet had in it a brooding, unreal quality.

"Let's go." Rondo grinned as he stated the slogan with which he invariably challenged the future. "Folks, we're in Alaska. It's time to make big medicine on the trail. The cows is hungry, so we got to find grass. But first, we got to get organized. Lawson, fork yore critter an' help Slim hold the cattle. You gals stay put for a spell till me an' Kansas fetch down them horses we just purchased sight unseen. Then we'll scout around a little an' find out the whence, how come, an' why."

His matter-of-fact words served to

break the spell, as though invisible, brooding forces gave ground before a dominant voice. The women remained behind with their equipment, while the trio threaded through the herd toward the waiting Slim.

Rondo was in an exultant, joyous mood, born of stirring emotions. Glorious day was at hand, like an omen for the future and a smiling seal of approval upon the past. Beneath the towering ramparts to the east, the channel still lay in glistening shadow, but the slanting rays of sunlight were upon the circular, mountain-girt bay that was Pyramid Harbor. An all but imperceptible tide of air was rolling down from the gap to the Northwest. It was cool, almost chill with the freshness of early morning, breathing of spruce-clad slopes, and higher, cleaner levels clad in eternal snow.

In spirit, too, Rondo felt that a new day had dawned. Thus far, since leaving the valley of the Crooked River in far-off Oregon, gods of luck had smiled upon the venture. Horses, herd, equipment, and personnel were intact. They had penetrated more than a thousand miles northward. They were now on Alaskan soil and less than three hundred miles intervened between the point where they stood and the Yukon. The past, he knew, was merely child's play compared to what lay ahead, for the third of the trek yet remaining, wherein they must penetrate an all but unexplored wilderness and cross the backbone of a continent, constituted the real test. At this point, when they left the sea, civilization was also left behind. Neither ships, nor trains, nor money-purchased devices of any sort could help them now. Their dependence must be placed upon far more elemental and primitive resources, such as physical strength and courage, the stamina of their horses, and the ability of the herd to survive.

In the far-off Crooked River Valley when he had conceived the project and made preparations to carry it out, and during the trip northward when his thoughts had turned to the drive, he had considered this moment with a feeling akin to apprehension, like that of an athlete waiting for the starting signal. But now that the die was cast, in a manner of speaking, the trail was at hand, and the *Kitty McGinn*—last contact of a familiar world—was disappearing beyond the headlands guarding the channel to the north, he faced the future with the surging confidence of hopeful, dominant youth and his blood leaped as at the call of glorious adventure.

Yet it was not alone the challenge of the trail, the glory of the new day, or the complacence of one upon whom gods of luck have smiled, that made up the full measure of his buoyant spirits. A mental Rubicon had been crossed and it also was exemplified by the fading bulk of the *Kitty McGinn* to the north. For Molly was with him. He had not given her up. Not weakly, but deliberately, he had burned his bridges behind him. It involved no concession to principle, he told himself with a species of guilty exultance. In so far as his feeling toward Molly was concerned, as he had informed the cynical Lawson, he had merely postponed the show-down. He would still hew to the lines.

But deep within him a certain knowledge tingled in his veins like wine. The show-down must inevitably come; but it lay far in the future and beyond the mountains.

Thus, as Rondo strode across the dock, his step was firm and his boyish features alight. His exuberance had in it an infectious quality that spread to the others. Even Lawson's heavy-lidded, "morning after" gloominess evaporated slowly. The inactivity of the late cruise had stored up energy yearning to be released. They attacked

the business at hand with grinning enthusiasm.

It was not necessary, it developed, to start forth immediately to find grass for the hollow-flanked cattle and horses. When the gloomy engineer led the way to the paddock housing the horses used in the short-lived construction scheme, there was also disclosed within the inclosure a mountain of baled hay, somewhat the worse for the ravages of the weather and the wasteful inroads of the foraging animals.

"Mister," said Rondo, appraising both animals and hay in a swift glance, "since you're in a selling mood, how's the chances for a couple tons of that timothy? You got enough fodder here to last them critters all summer."

"Done!" said the disillusioned one. "Twenty dollars a ton, which is the cost laid down here from Seattle."

"Heave it over the fence," Rondo instructed Lawson and Slim. "Bust it up and scatter it around. We'll make camp here for three, four hours. We'll leave our critters take on a hefty load before hitting the trail."

To Rondo's gratification, a thorough combing of the nondescript array of horses in the inclosure yielded four range animals, sturdy and in fair flesh. With a further eye to the welfare of the womenfolks, Rondo also purchased from the engineer two saddles and a small tent and tarpaulin.

"You've done a land-office business, mister," Rondo grinned as he unstrapped his money belt. "If I'd known they was an outfitting depot like this waiting here, I shorely wouldn't have fetched as much loot from Seattle."

"Glad to oblige," said the engineer dryly; and added in gloomily facetious vein, "if I could only interest you gentlemen in one of those clam-shell diggers, I'd feel that the day's transactions had been a success. I'm sure you could use them along a part of the trail you must cover."

The supply of currency, Rondo noted, as he strapped on his money belt, was vastly depleted. He did not pause to count the balance yet remaining after paying for his purchases. What were the odds? In the wilderness they were about to penetrate, money would have little value.

It required no inclosure to hold the cattle. The fodder was magnet enough for the nearly famished animals. The saddle and pack strings were tethered among the timber that bordered the paddock and likewise fed. With the outfit assembled, and the animals munching their hay, all hands, except Rondo, busied themselves with the unloading and reassembling of the equipment to include the sleeping bags and other trail luggage of the women.

To Rondo's inner gratification, the girl and the Widow MacKenna speedily took their places on equal footing with other members of the party, asking no favors on account of their sex, and doing their part with businesslike thoroughness. Molly, it was apparent, was at home with horseflesh, with range equipment, and camp fare. Long years and circumstances had equipped the widow for just such an enterprise as this. Her sharp tongue bandied insult and wittticism on equal terms with Kansas' best efforts, and the movements of her toil-worn hands were equally quick and sure.

Rondo breathed easier as he noted the reaction of his lieutenants to the presence of the women. At first, Kansas and the gloomy Slim had obviously been staggered at the inclusion of two members of the frailer sex in the terrific trek. Though they had given no outward sign, Rondo knew that inwardly they had been shaking their heads at the prospect of this additional burden and responsibility on their slender resources. But moment by moment, their constraint lessened under the banter of good-fellowship and obvious endurance

of Molly and the widow. Before they had been two hours on Alaskan soil, Rondo knew that whatever chuckling reservations they might have made in regard to his motives, his sound good judgment, at least, was approved, until events showed otherwise.

Indians from the village beside the tide flat came up presently to stare curiously at the herd. A handful of men and a few boys drew near, accompanied by wolfish, evil-smelling dogs, while the squaws and little children ogled them from a respectful distance. Somewhat similar in type to the Siwash Indians, they were slovenly of dress and physique, their black eyes singularly beadlike by contrast to the stolid cast of their copper-hued countenance. They were Chilkat Indians, the engineer informed them, degenerate remnants of the once mighty tribe that had here flourished for uncounted centuries before the ravaging footsteps of white men had passed that way.

The Chilkats, it was obvious, had never before seen beef cattle. They eyed the animals with an almost ludicrous intentness, and as they spoke in guttural undertones among themselves it was also obvious that each held himself poised for flight should the strange herd turn suddenly upon him.

The wolfish dogs had no such qualms. They snuffled about the feeding cattle with a species of savage curiosity; and at a sudden flurry in the ranks caused by a too-near approach of the half-tamed brutes, Kansas leaped to his feet.

"I'll tell them Injuns to keep their blasted wolves away," he announced. "If they can't savvy American I'll give 'em an earful of Chinook."

"While you're at it," said Rondo, "see if you can't get one of them natives to hire out as a guide. If they's any short cuts acrost the mountains, we'd ought to know it."

Day by day since they had left the Crooked River, Rondo had gained a greater appreciation of Kansas' varied accomplishments. More than once, looking back to that moment in the shadow of the McNab bunk house when Kansas had pleaded for a chance to join the expedition, Rondo had been aghast at the realization of how close he had come to denying the old-timer a place on the pay roll. But Kansas had justified his own far from modest self-appraisal. His handicap of years and decrepit physique had been more than offset by his immense practical knowledge of human nature and the problems of the frontier, even as he had boasted.

He demonstrated his capability now. He strode toward the Indians who awaited his approach stolidly. When he challenged them in his own tongue, they merely grunted in response. But when he turned to Chinook, that enigma of polyglot dialects that has served as means of intercourse between white men and natives of the north Pacific for two generations, they became more alert and replied in kind. With guttural expletives, they called off the dogs, and with Kansas in their midst, illustrating his discourse with large gestures, they moved away in the direction of the Indian village.

"You may have difficulty in obtaining a guide," opined the gloomy engineer. "Most of the able-bodied men of the tribe are packing over Chilkoot and White Pass. But I assume you are familiar with the general terrain in the North?"

Rondo shook his head.

"You mean to say," questioned the other, "that none of your party have been over the Dalton Trail? How do you know that the cattle can make it? You have no data whatever on the route or its feasibility?"

"Not much," said Rondo, his blue eyes twinkling. "Enough to go on. They're packing in regular to Dalton's Post, ain't they? Well, then, we can drive the beef as far as Dalton's Post.

Somewhere over the hump from the post is supposed to be a river called the Nordenskiold which empties into the Yukon. We find that river and follow it down. Pack outfits have been that way, I understand. Where horses can go, cows can go. We'll pick up a little information along the way if they's anybody along the trail. If there ain't, we'll blaze our own trail."

"By gad, sir," said the other, eying the youth with kindled interest, "I had always considered railroading a species of pioneering, but I can see we are mere tyros. In railroading, we must proceed on the exact information and never by guesswork."

"In driving cattle," said Rondo, unconscious of stating an unwritten principle of frontier industry, "you know where you start and you know where you aim to deliver the beef. In between is just a part of the day's work. Like life that a way, you got to ford each river when you come to it."

Contrary to the gloomy one's predictions, Kansas returned presently with an iron-visaged Indian in tow, a squat, ancient native who appeared at first glance to be far too decrepit and stricken in years to be of much value on the trail. Yet as he stood before them stolidly, wrapped in an impenetrable species of dignity, Rondo noted that he stood more erect than younger and shambling members of his tribe. He was old. He was no longer a mighty hunter or bearer of heavy packs. And yet there was something about him suggestive of an earlier epoch when Chilkats had not yet bowed beneath the heel of a more dominant race.

He exhibited no surprise as his beady eyes inspected the cattle. Being old, he had seen much of the ways of the incomprehensible whites, and their bizarre enterprises, his manner seemed to suggest, were not of his world. Nor did he reveal surprise when Kansas, pointing to Rondo, said, *"Skookum tyee,"* which, in Chinook, meant "big chief"; though such a youthful one, in his day, would not even have been permitted a seat in the councils of the warriors.

"He's the best I could find," Kansas grinningly explained the qualifications of his protégé. "It was a choice between him an' some half-grown bucks who ain't to be depended on. All but the aged an' crippled among them savages is over yonder horsin' freight over the trail. This lobo's kind of toothless an' busted down, but I'll gamble he'll stack up in this guide business. His name would make the average citizen tongue-tied—a couple of coughs an' a snort an' a sneeze meanin' 'The gent with long feet who catches salmon with his hands,' or something like that. So I've done christened him 'Cultus Charley.' He opined he'll see us over the pass to the Alsek Valley for twenty bucks or one rifle."

"Fair enough," said Rondo. "We'll give him the twenty bucks and keep the rifle. Tell him to get organized pronto. We start," he announced, squinting at the sun and unconsciously tightening his belt, "in an hour."

It developed also that Kansas had been able to glean considerable data from the Chilkats pertaining to that section of the trail lying between Pyramid Harbor and Dalton's Post. The gloomy engineer was familiar with the terrain on the seaward slope of the mighty range. While the cattle, which had made vast inroads on the fodder during the preceding two hours, were lazily ruminating on the sun-drenched hillside, the party gathered in a species of brief council of war. With a stick, Kansas illustrated a meager design of the trail on the ground; and as they studied this, their intent faces were turned toward the mountains.

The gap to the northwest, noted in their first glimpse of Pyramid Harbor and visible from where they stood, was the Valley of the Chilkat. From broad

alluvial flats at tidewater, this valley narrowed slowly until, some twelve miles inland, the river bed became a gorge, beginning to ascend. Thence up this canyon the trail led to the junction of the Klaheena, a tributary of the Chilkat flowing from the West. Twenty miles up the Klaheena was Pleasant Camp, which was at the foot of the pass.

"From what I gather," Kansas opined, "the first jump we make from right here to up yonder in the gap, maybe twelve miles, is the only easy going we'll have. When we begin to climb, our grief begins. The snow's been out of the Chilkat maybe a month. It's still melting on the upper Klaheena, an' they's ice an' snow on the pass. The Chilkat's runnin' white water, the Injuns tell me, an' likewise the Klaheena. The pack strings have been havin' grief makin' the fords. Yeah, an' unless them savages have been lyin' to me, they's fords aplenty."

The engineer nodded confirmation of these statements.

"I ain't statin' all this to be pessimistic," said Kansas, "I'm just givin' the facts as I found 'em, so we'll know what we're up against. Them mountains yonder," he gestured, grinning. "are only the foothills. They look big to us, but we're right up against 'em an' we can't see what lies on the other side. Accordin' to the Injuns, these here are only the papooses. Wait till we meet up with the hard-boiled ol' warriors waitin' up above the Klaheena an' we can tell folks we've seen mountains."

"Yeah?" said Rondo. "Sounds interestin'. And what about grass?"

"Plenty," said Kansas. "Along the Chilkat and the Klaheena. When you start up the pass you're gettin' into high country. They's a jump of maybe twenty miles as you go over the hump where they ain't any trees nor bushes nor grass. Nothin' but snow an' ice. If you get a break, the wind is only strong enough to blow the shirt off yore back. If it snows—adios!"

"H'm," said Rondo. "Twenty miles. That's a big jump for the beef, an' over rough country, at that. We'll have to wait our chance on this side, at that place you mentioned. Pleasant Camp, wasn't it?"

"No," said Kansas. "Pleasant Camp is the jumping-off place for the pass, but they's another hole in the wall higher up—right under the snow fields—which the Injuns told me about. If the snow's out of it, there'll be grass."

"Rainy Hollow," the engineer put in. "Yes, it's right under the pass. I haven't been that far into the interior, but Rainy Hollow is where the pack outfits wait for propitious weather conditions, I understand. And Pleasant Camp, by the way," he added dryly, "is a misnomer. To wayfarers heading for the coast, it seems pleasant only by comparison to the pass. Rainy Hollow is also misleading. When it rains anywhere on this side of the divide you also learn the true meaning of rain."

It was at this point that Rondo put a casual question to which the engineer replied as carelessly.

"What's at Pleasant Camp?" he inquired. "There ain't a settlement there?"

"Oh, no," said the engineer. "It's merely a wooded cove on the banks of the Klaheena at the foot of the mountain. Incoming and outgoing pack strings make camp there. The Northwest Mounted Police established their headquarters at that point about a month ago. Built a couple of cabins, I understand."

"Mounted Police?" said Rondo. "How come?"

"Yukon Territory begins at the summit of the pass," the engineer explained. "The Mounties expect a certain amount of traffic over this route and are preparing to patrol it later in the summer, if necessary."

"I keep forgettin' that the Klondike is in Canadian territory," said Rondo, nodding. "It ought to be in the United States, at that. Well, Kansas, after we get over the pass, what then? Where do we go from there?"

"If we can do it as easy as we figger it out, they'd be nothin' to it," Kansas grinned. "After we get over the pass, seems like we hit a kind of haywire valley——"

"Easter Valley," the engineer supplemented.

"Which is the headwaters of the South Fork of the Alsek River. Which we follow down maybe sixty miles to Dalton's Post. From there we strike north into the high country again where they's a flock of lakes headin' for the Yukon Divide. Them Chilkats don't know nothin' about that country. Cultus says it's Stik Indian territory. The Chilkats an' the Stiks have been at odds for a thousand years or more, an' Cultus ain't goin' no farther than the Alsek. He opines maybe we can get one of them no-account Stiks to escort us as far as the Yukon Divide. An' beyond the said Yukon Divide"—Kansas spoke almost wistfully, as one who looks in imagination across a frowning continent—"is the headwaters of the Nordenskiold, which empties into the Yukon River. In other words, we make it to the Nordenskiold. After that, we're on the home stretch. We join the main herd in the sprint to Dawson."

"No," said Rondo. "First, we point for Chilkat Pass. After that, we take it as it comes. Now then, let's get this straight, so we can have a bird's-eye view of what we aim to accomplish an' can check 'em off as we go along. We trail up the Chilkat, then up the Klaheena, then over the pass into the Alsek, an' down to Dalton's Post. Then we go up another river an' after we've passed a flock of lakes in the high country we get to the Yukon Divide, passin' which, we strike the Nordenskiold an' the Yukon River. Is that it, or am I mistaken?"

"That's it," said Kansas. "They's a few details you ain't mentioned. From here to the Yukon is maybe two hundred an' sixty miles. We cross two mountain chains, includin' the Yukon Divide—mountains compared to which them five thousand foot molehills in front of us is only papooses. When we get there, we'll know we've been somewhere. They's other little details, such as fordin' white-water rivers, crossin' glaciers, lookin' for grass up in them bad lands——" He broke off, grinning. "But what's the odds? If we make it, it'll be a drive, friends, such as will make any lobo that ever trailed a herd set up an' take notice."

"Check," said Rondo.

He drew forth the makings and rolled a cigarette as he looked intently about the group.

"Anybody downhearted?" he questioned softly. "Folks, we're ready to roll. You-all got any yeas or nays to offer? All set to play 'em as they fall? Once we face away from the ocean they's no back trail."

"Let's go," said Slim.

"Let 'em buck," said Kansas. "Klondike or bust!"

"Lead on," said Lawson. His sardonic eyes were a little less cynical in that moment. They glowed with an almost boyish enthusiasm. "Gad, but it'll be a game worth playing!"

"We're on our way," said Rondo exultantly. "Try to stop us! Kansas, where's that savage of yours?"

"Up yonder," said Kansas, pointing. "I told him to wait for us by the mud flats."

"Start 'em rolling, Slim, old hoss," Rondo directed. "Lawson, you an' me'll ride the flanks while the critters are skittish. You pound 'em on the tail, Molly. An' you"—he told Kansas, grinning—"are hereby put in charge of the most valuable part of the layout,

namely, the pack string and our cook, the widow. Guard 'em, cowboy, like you'd guard yore life. If they's a stampede, or the whole world caves in on us, keep 'em in the clear. Where'd we be if we lost our outfit? Yeah, or our cook?"

"Let the heathen look out for the horses," said the widow, her sharp eyes twinkling. "I'll take care of myself."

"Gosh, boss," said Kansas in pretended dismay. "Have I got to trail with the widow? I'm sunk. She'll talk an arm off me."

"Talk, is it?" retorted the widow. "I'll have no chance to breathe a word with the likes of you near by. What a time we'll have visitin' if by some miracle ye're stricken dumb, ye blatherskite!"

"I'd be in a jack pot an' no mistake," asserted Kansas, "less I was deaf also. Otherwise, I'd be as out of luck as a bobtailed bull in fly time. No, no, lady. You an' me'll get along fine just so they ain't too much loose an' profitless conversation, which riles me."

"On yore way an' fight it out," ordered Rondo, chuckling. "If either of you need help, holler."

The pair moved away, muttering. Rondo was not in the least deceived by their assumption of belligerence, nor were the others.

All were in high good spirits, as though warmed by adventurous wine. The herd had begun to move. Slim's "Hi-yi" had in it an exultant note. Lawson, hazing the animals in from the side lines, sat the saddle jauntily, his sombrero cocked at a rakish angle. Kansas and the widow were lining out the pack string. The girl had not yet mounted, and as Rondo placed foot in stirrup he felt her hand upon his arm. He turned and looked down at her quizzically, questioningly. It was the first time since landing that they had had a word apart.

"Rondo," she said in a low voice, "listen. It isn't too late yet. The widow and I can still drop out and go to Skagway. It's only around the corner. We can hire some of these Indians to take us over in one of the cannery boats, I'm sure."

"I've been thinking about that," said Rondo. "No, it isn't too late—yet. It ain't right for me to expect you gals to tackle the layout that's ahead of us. Maybe you'd best drop out, Molly. It wouldn't hurt my feelin's none whatever."

"That isn't what I meant," protested the girl. "I don't want to be a burden to you——"

"And that," said Rondo, "ain't what I meant. I don't crave to have you take any chances on this tough layout ahead of us 'less you feel that a way."

Each spoke with the utmost gravity. Yet as they stared fixedly at each other, the gaze of each softened a little. Rondo's blue eyes twinkled; the girl's dark eyes laughed.

"You're a bluffer," she accused. "Do you want me to go?"

"You're likewise out on a limb," Rondo retorted. "You crave to give it a whirl?"

Both laughed outright. There was no further need of words. She gave his arm a little push. He laid hold on pommel and cantle and vaulted into the saddle. She rose up on her horse beside him.

"O. K., lady?" he questioned, his hand light on the rein.

"Stampede, cowboy," she said, her firm cheeks dimpling.

It was an all but meaningless interchange that was to be repeated often on a long trail, in sunshine and shadow, in smiling circumstance and shadow of death—tremulously, at times, as lone voices calling through darkness and desolation, reaffirming and strengthening an unspoken compact; and exultantly, as at this moment.

The herd had begun to move. Lawson and Slim were far ahead with the

lengthening line. Kansas and the widow were bringing up the rear. Rondo and the girl swung in on the flanks of the column; and there was something about their poise in the saddle, as they turned to wave a laughing farewell, that caused the cynical features of the engineer to relax into an envious grin.

Thus casually, lightly, began a drive that was destined, even as Kansas had suggested, to loom as a colorful paragraph in the mighty record of the frontier. To those cast by fate in a softer mold, whose lives unfold along pleasant ways, safeguarded by structures and arts and social orders founded on the works of earlier pioneers, the record would mean little; and justly so according to unchanging facts of human nature which decree that those must laugh at scars who never felt a wound. Merely the adventure of a reckless, energetic, dominant youth assisted by skilled retainers, knowing the odds against him, and inspired by self-interest, who assayed to move a small herd over a long trail. Yet for those who knew the ways of the cattle, of the wilderness and of the Yukon, the attempt was sufficient unto itself. Veteran cattlemen of Rondo's day who had eaten the dust of the Chisholm Trail, grizzled pioneers whose oxcarts had blazed the way to the far-off Oregon country, lone knights of the wilderness who had caused the shadow of their nation's flag to fall along the last frontier—these nodded in silent understanding when the paragraph was written.

To those understanding ones, it was not self-interest alone that was Rondo's inspiration. They knew what Rondo himself did not know, not being given to self-analysis, that it was accomplishment, of itself, that carried its own reward. In the far-off valley of the Crooked River he had conceived the venture as a means of "getting a stake." Lila had said "perhaps." But this motive, sufficient at the moment, long since had been dwarfed and lost, even as his memory of Lila had grown appallingly dim. The drive was the thing. The trail was the challenge. No man had ever before driven cattle to the Yukon. He proposed to take them through. They knew, these understanding ones, that the self-interest of his attempt was similar, within its field, to that of a certain born explorer of an earlier day who, as a paid commission, undertook an imagination-gripping expedition into a dark continent and there found Livingstone; or of a certain youth on a later day who, for a cash prize, winged his solitary way across the storm-tossed Atlantic and so to fame and the acclaim of kings.

No kings acclaimed Rondo. His attempt was merely a sidelight in a great stampede where frenzied men fought through gloom, mud, and ice toward a golden goal, a meager paragraph in the lurid chapter of the frontier that is called the Klondike; but for decades later in the legends of the cattle industry of the West—a world whose history is woven into the very fabric of the wilderness—the attempt was appraised tersely by those who knew the significance of scars: "There was a real chore."

Rondo knew nothing of these things, could not remotely visualize them, on that sunlit day as the herd moved along the tide flats. They were heading for Chilkat Pass. He was young, astride a good horse, assisted by good men whose caliber had been proved, accompanied by an outfit sufficient for the trail; and Molly was at his side. A day's work was before him. Success, failure, life and the future lay beyond the mountains.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CAMP ON THE CHILKAT.

IT had been dawn when they arrived at Pyramid Harbor. The sun had been at the zenith when they made the start along the mud flats. Twilight was

gathering when they arrived at the first ford, where the valley of the Chilkat became merely a gorge sloping up toward the gap.

The herd milled at the edge of the torrent. Slim and Lawson, guarding the flanks, twisted in the saddle to look back, and the former motion to Rondo. Leaving Molly to hold the cattle at the rear and gesturing to Kansas to halt the pack string, Rondo spurred forward to reconnoiter.

The river looked ominous. The broad boulder-strewn channel was brimming with a swollen flood muddy with glacial silt. Perhaps two hundred feet from bank to bank, the water sped swiftly even in the shallows; and in the main channel the sullen surge and momentum of the tossing current spoke of depth.

Rondo pondered for a moment, studying the cattle and squinting at the sky. Since noon, they had come more than twelve miles up the valley of the Chilkat. The cattle were tired and hungry. They were not yet difficult to handle, but another hour would see stragglers and mutinous animals charging from the main herd in search of forage. There was grass here, an excellent place to make a camp, and it was now almost sundown.

On the other hand, the ford represented the first barrier in their path. It must be crossed, either now or at dawn. It might be the part of good generalship to challenge it now and make camp higher up the gorge. Through the coming night hours, the angry undertone of flood beating incessantly upon their ears would serve to magnify its dangers. Also, Rondo knew how treacherous was a river whose flood stage was born of melted snow.

"We'll go across now," he announced his decision. "Just hold them critters, cowboys, while I see what kind of footing we got in this hostile creek."

Whereupon Rondo urged his mount forward and descended forthwith into the flood.

All watched intently. Slim and Kansas twisted in the saddle to watch as they held the herd together. His gaze unwinking, Lawson pulled up on the bank and leaned on the pommel. The girl, too, seeing Rondo disappear from view, spurred forward along the flank of the herd.

With hand and voice Rondo urged his horse ahead. The animal snorted and flinched as the chill water surged above its fetlocks, but obeyed the gentle insistence of the rider and forged on into the current. Knee-deep, belly-deep, the surging flood rose. Rondo swung the animal's head a little upstream. The courageous horse braced itself against the vicious impact of the current and floundered on. Rondo rose in the stirrups, prepared to quit the saddle should his mount lose its footing. For an instant, in mid-channel, it seemed that horse and rider were hurtling with the current; but the animal mounted, snorting, into shallower water. Here, where it was obvious from the boulder-strewn surface that no other channel intervened, Rondo pulled up.

"Nothing to it!" he shouted, twisting in the saddle. "Start 'em over, Slim. Head 'em well upstream. Keep below 'em, Kansas, an' you, Lawson. Pound 'em on the tail, Molly. Tell the widow to hold the pack string till the beef's across."

Rondo himself turned his mount downstream, heading again into the current, and took his stand on the farther edge of the deep water.

Lawson, whose experience in driving cattle was summed up in the trip from the Crooked River to The Dalles in the smiling Oregon country where there had been no rivers to ford, was somewhat at a loss. Yet he followed Kansas' lead closely, helping to hold the herd at the water's edge, while Slim rode into the suspicious advance guard and forced

the leaders farther into the current. Molly, meanwhile, hazed the herd from the rear, her rope end swinging. These rear ranks, close-packed, crowded forward, forcing the leaders, willy-nilly, into the flood.

The business of fording a river, Lawson learned speedily, was simple, provided a bovine leader arose, like Napoleon, to meet the occasion. Such a leader was born in that critical instant when the cringing animals halted at the edge of the deep water, the sullen current piling up against their red, glistening bodies. A bald-faced steer with circular white patches surrounding each heavy-lidded eye, which gave to his lugubrious, bovine features a peculiarly owlish appearance, lunged forward suddenly, heading for the opposite bank.

In a twinkling the deadlock was broken. Others followed. The shouts of the cattlemen urged them on. The channel was alive with the surging, splashing herd. Because they were shorter of leg than the horses, the cattle swung down with the current in midstream. But Kansas and Lawson, assisted by Rondo, fought in the struggling mêlée, keeping the animals headed for the bank. The girl joined them, disdainful of the chill flood.

The threshing feet of the bald-faced steer found bottom; the bulging eyes of the rank and file gained new courage as their leader mounted into shallower water; and presently the entire herd, though stragglers were far below the point where they had entered the river, swarmed up the rocky bank.

"Whoop-ee!" exulted Rondo. "We got a trail herd, folks. See 'em travel!"

As though the icy plunge had given them renewed vigor, the cattle, of their own accord, were moving at a rapid gait up the canyon. In the van stalked the bald-faced leader, dripping head tossing.

"We also got a lead steer," said Slim. "I got a hunch that lobo'll earn his keep. What'll we name the maverick?"

"Cæsar," suggested Lawson, smiling. "The greatset Roman of them all."

"Cæsar it is," said Rondo. "All right, Kansas, fetch yore treasures acrost."

The pack train experienced no difficulty in crossing the ford. Horses with the lightest packs were placed on the downstream side and these helped to hold the heavier burdened animals against the pull of the current. No horse floundered or fell, so that the equipment emerged without a serious wetting. Their iron-visaged guide, perched on the summit of a light pack, fastidiously held his heavy brogans above the torrent.

Slim and Lawson were ahead with the cattle. Kansas and the widow brought up the pack string at the rear. Rondo and the girl spurred forward together to overtake the herd.

They were wet to the waist, as were all the others, and the lowering shadows were chill; yet they looked upon each other as they rode and laughed aloud.

"The evenin' and the mornin' were the first day," Rondo quoted, chuckling. "How's tricks, lady?"

"We're rolling, cowboy."

"I can see we got an outfit," said Rondo. "Good hosses. Good beef. The critters will soon find out we're goin' somewhere an' trail accordin' to Hoyle. That Cæsar maverick'll set the pace. We got real wranglers also. Slim an' Kansas—both O. K. You an' the widow are ace-high: Lawson'll make a regular hand before long. Yeah, we're on our way."

At mention of Lawson, the girl's smile faded a little. She spurred in closer.

"You don't know much about Lawson, do you? When he and the captain were drinking in the cabin last night, I heard him say a lot of things that—that made me sure he didn't have the interests of you or the drive at heart."

"Sho!" said Rondo. "Don't you get

set against Lawson, Molly. No, I don't savvy him. He's a queer one. But he'll stack up O. K. in the long run. Don't you pay no attention to what them hooch hounds was discussin' last night. They was probably havin' one of their superman fits. Both them hombres was long on double-geared conversation when they were lit that a way. In every show-down we've hit thus far, Lawson's stacked high an' wide. If it wasn't for him, we'd still be in Seattle. They ain't many tenderfeet would take to the ford back yonder like he done, huh?"

The girl nodded, her lips compressed a little. It was obvious that, in his present mood, anything further of significance she had to divulge might only serve to arouse Rondo's resentment against herself. Rondo, too, turned from the subject with relief. Lawson's point of view, and what the girl might have overheard when the cynical youth's tongue was loosened by liquor, were fraught with painful possibilities against which he had closed his mind.

They came upon the herd at a bend in the trail. The animals were foraging in a wooded draw that cleft the north wall of the gorge. Slim and Lawson sat their saddles, waiting.

"Looks like a place to camp, boss," the former opined, waving his hand. "Plenty of grass in this hole in the wall. We pitch our tents along the trail here, an' we got ropes enough to reach from wall to wall, leavin' the critters there safe inside."

"Made to order," Rondo agreed, after a brief survey. "No night guard, huh? That's usin' yore head, cowboy. The critters can't get by without us knowin' something happening."

Precedent was established in the gathering dusk, a routine to be followed on future halts on the trail. Since all were experienced hands, save Lawson, few orders were necessary; and Lawson, alert and anxious to take his part, soon found his proper niche in the machinery necessary to the speedy making and breaking of camps.

When the pack train halted, the widow, according to the ancient prerogative of that master of ceremonies, the cook, indicated which way she wished the cook tent to face and where the collapsible stove should be set up. Kansas, as roustabout, or "bull cook," immediately plunged into the business of establishing the kitchen quarters and building a fire. The widow and the girl set up their small tent adjacent to the kitchen, placed their bedding and equipment therein, and emerged to begin preparations for dinner.

Rondo and Lawson, meanwhile, were erecting the large tent and fly that was not only to shelter all excess equipment and provisions but would also serve as sleeping quarters for the four men of the party, exclusive of their Indian guide. That stolid aborigine unrolled his pack at some distance away, setting up a small and somewhat disreputable shelter beneath a spreading spruce.

A roaring fire before the kitchen tent drove back the deepening darkness. By its light, the first meal was eaten. The widow baked her first batch of biscuits, complaining of the oven and the fire Kansas had kindled; but these complaints proved to be a delusion and a snare, for the quality of the biscuits, according to unanimous vote, was beyond dispute. Sizzling steaks from a quarter of venison that Kansas had secured from the Chilkats, steaming coffee, beans, canned fruit and vegetables made up the meal.

All were ravenous; having eaten but once since quitting the ship. All were in high good spirits. Toasts were drunk to the frowning trail. Kansas wagged his head solemnly over the food, opining, with glittering eyes fixed on the widow, that however doubtful their cook's conversational habits, as a "victual-wrangler" she stood on a pinnacle. The good lady professed to be incensed

by his frankness—and heaped his plate high. Rondo and the girl sat side by side on huge boulders that he had rolled up from the water's edge. Across the fire Lawson and Slim squatted; and at the edge of the circle of firelight, the Indian guide contentedly wolfed his food.

Supper over and the dishes washed, they threw more fuel on the fire. But Lawson, being heavy-lidded from the previous all but sleepless night, early retired to the big tent. Slim followed suit, yawning. The Indian had already disappeared silently in the direction of his shelter. Kansas and the widow sat for a space across the fire, entertained Rondo and the girl with a lively and somewhat acrimonious debate. Then the widow, with a final admonition to Kansas to have kindling ready for morning, turned toward her quarters.

"Well," said Kansas, scratching his bristling jaw as he stared quizzically down at the pair, "it's plain you young folks aim to outlast us all. What chance I got to buck a combination like that? I reckon I'll hit the hay. What time we start in the morning, boss?"

"At daylight," said Rondo, grinning. "On yore way, cowboy."

Left alone, they moved a little closer before the dying fire. With a stick, Rondo stirred the coals absently. They looked at each other and smiled without embarrassment or constraint; and Rondo thought he had never seen Molly more beautiful than in that moment, with the warm glow playing upon her firmly molded features and caught in reflected points of light in her dark, lustrous hair and her eyes.

It was an interval to endure long in memory, those moments at their first camp while the embers died. By night their environment seemed more towering and massive, the sky more remote. Almost at their feet, the sullen Chilkat murmured. Through the blackness that choked the gorge, the distant roaring of the river from the higher levels seemed to have swelled in volume. It was an undertone still, yet it was more vibrant, each inflection sharply etched. From the blind canyon came the sound of cattle and horses foraging. An animal crashed through brush. Steel sounded on stone. A lone steer muttered. Above all, like a sibilant background of sound, was the whispering of the forest.

The embers were almost ashes when Rondo and Molly said good night. They did so regretfully, and laughed together in that they felt regret. For this was but the closing of the first day. Many evenings and many camp fires intervened between where they stood and the end of the trail.

As Rondo stood for a moment alone before the big tent, he glanced at the sky. The stars to the northwest were slowly being obliterated as by a rising tide. A gust of wind fanned his cheek, rustled momentarily in the darkened forest and was gone. Borne on its breath was the freshness of spruce and bursting buds, but it also had a chill quality that hinted of snow fields and higher, bleaker realms.

Rain fell during the small hours of the night. Not the Alaskan downpour against which the expedition had been forewarned, but merely gusty advance guards hinting of the mighty elements slumbering in the iron peaks. These howled down the gorge, shook the tent walls beneath their impact, and swept in lashing ranks across the canyon. Between these brief inundations, the wind in the blackness of the forest roared in sullen harmony to the deep-toned muttering of the Chilkat.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE SHADOW OF THE PEAKS.

THE expedition awoke to somber, forbidding day. The sky was overcast. A steady drizzle of rain was falling, and the gorge ahead was dim and

remote through the gray mist. The wind had ceased. Moisture dripped in the forest, ran in rivulets from the tents, glistened on the boulders. The cattle huddled beneath the trees, their wet bodies presenting a gaunt appearance, though they had foraged well during the night. In a disconsolate group the horses stood, heads hanging.

A hasty breakfast was eaten in the shivering dawn. There was something in the aspect of the gray, dripping world, the gloominess of the environs, a raw quality in the murky atmosphere, which was singularly depressing. It was as though the smiling days that had gone before had been merely an interval in which the elements guarding the North had slumbered and were here rousing to reveal a sullen hint of what the future might bring.

Waterproof clothing was donned against the rain. Camp was broken; the wet tents and damp equipment stored on the pack saddles; the wet ropes looped; and in a species of somber twilight that succeeded dawn, the expedition got under way.

The ascent of the Chilkat to the junction of the Klaheena—the first stage of their assault on the frowning pass—proved to be merely an arduous grind, a trial of fortitude and stamina, rather than the braving of danger. It was a proving ground, a test of morale seemingly designed to appraise the ability of animals and men to withstand hardship, interminable discomfort, and gloom.

They crossed the river many times. None of these crossings were more dangerous than the first ford, yet each had to be negotiated with care. It rained incessantly, not a deluge, but a constant drizzle. The whole world seemed to have a spongelike quality, oozing moisture. It was impossible to guard against the ever-present dampness. Every stitch of their equipment was speedily soaked. Camp fires smoldered. Wet to the skin, despite their utmost precautions, they sat the saddle during miserable days, took their turn at night guard in the dripping darkness, or peered at each other, red-eyed, through the miasmic smoke of discouraged fires.

Yet there were compensations for the soul-deadening depression of the weather. Painfully slow though their progress was, each night found a definite stretch of the roaring Chilkat and the soggy world behind them. They were making headway. Forage was plentiful in the dismal swamps and protected slopes, so that the animals, despite the rain, were well-filled and content. Grass, and not the distance the herd was capable of moving, was made the yardstick of each day's advance. Where there was forage, they camped, and when barren slopes intervened they pushed on.

The cattle, too, became more tractable. Their gregarious instinct was magnified by the strangeness of their surroundings. A dim, bovine understanding told them that here was an environment hostile to stragglers. Safety lay with the herd. The bald-faced maverick, Cæsar, made good his bid for leadership and unchallenged led his resolute way. With the herd easier to handle, camp routine became more firmly fixed. Each stop and reassembling of the outfit saw an almost military organization taking form in which each member did his allotted part.

Rondo was secretly elated at the way his fellow-sufferers withstood the test of gloom and depression. Of the caliber of Slim and Kansas he was already certain. The widow and Molly speedily measured up to his previous appraisal. Far from being a burden to the expedition, he saw that they would presently become indispensable. They bore up under the physical discomfort with the same fortitude as the men.

The reaction of Lawson, the only member of the expedition whose poten-

tialities were unknown, were most surprising to Rondo. He had realized that the cynical youth was possessed of force and resolution. Yet Lawson's life had been reared in a gentler clime, his youthful years spent in the protection of a social order far removed from the elemental and primitive. He had been molded by a softer environment. Rondo had expected the cynical youth to turn sullen and disgruntled under the misery of soggy blankets, clothing that clung dankly to crawling flesh, endless days, and shivering nights. But Lawson seemed possessed of an iron-souled perverseness that expanded under adversity. It was as though, with each day's march into the wilderness, he were emerging slowly from an outworn shell of cynicism, indifference, and world weariness. He became more boyish, more human, as though, turning from pampered years, he was learning for the first time the luxury of hardship. It was a point of view incomprehensible to Rondo; yet he marked the readjustment with elation, for with Lawson's stamina proved, he had, in his own parlance, a "regular outfit."

Thus through the eternal drizzle they passed the Indian village of Kluwkan on the opposite bank of the river, achieved a difficult ford of Salmon River, a tributary flowing from the west, and so into the beautiful and awe-inspiring valley of the Klaheena.

Because the mists had hung low over the gorge during their ascent of the Chilkat, and from their camp, in late afternoon, they could see nothing of what lay ahead, the vista unfolded at sunrise was breath-taking. Overnight, the drizzle had ceased. The sky was still overcast, but the clouds were billowy and high, drifting from the north in vast cumulus ranks. The foglike miasma had been erased from the lower levels as though wiped from canvas: and through the crystalline air they gazed upon the vast and terrific grandeur of the St. Elias range which loomed up before them.

Never before had they seen such mountains as these, so sheer, so massive, so towering. All dimensions most staggering to the eye were here grouped like sullen giants looming shoulder to shoulder against the sky. The broad valley of the Klaheena was merely a cleft between spruce-clad walls that rose up and to thunder-built ramparts of living rock; and past these ramparts the eye mounted unbelievingly to snow fields and ice-choked gorges seemingly suspended on a vertical plane, and higher still beyond this frigid desolation to jagged peaks upon which the sunlight glittered sharply, as from polished steel. Infinitely high, cold, and remote these crests seemed, like stupendous, foam-crested billows immobile against the sky.

They knew now what Kansas had attempted to express when he had stated that the ramparts guarding Lynn Canal were only the foothills. They now stood at the base of the loftiest mountain chain on the continent. Massive as those other ramparts had seemed, they were dwarfed by these giants. It was not that the walls through which the ship had threaded were less vivid or majestic in memory; but these dazzling heights were beyond comparison. The mind refused the evidence of the eye, stumbled and failed to grasp proportions that transcended imagination.

Yet the peaks were before them, glittering, sharply etched. As they stood, in the breathless dawn, silently striving to assimilate the species of shock that accompanied the photographic appraisal of these soaring dimensions, thrilling to an awe that was akin to terror, each gained his first vivid and lasting impression of the turbulent environment into which they had proceeded so blithely. Each gained his first abrupt perspective of that savage segment of a northern world, that rock-bound

demesne so rich in rewards and unyielding in wrath, that aloof, sardonic Colossus of smiling, pitiless wilderness that is called Alaska.

And moment by moment, as they stood in the presence of the peaks, came a shifting of callow point of view, a readjustment of values that brought with it a sense of abashed humility. What were human lives, motives, dreams, or ambitions in the presence of such enduring and changeless dignity, such a visual embodiment of infinity as these? Less than the cynical redbeard had suggested; less than ants that crawl. Men's puny lives could be lived in endless sequence, their puny wars fought, their insignificant empires fall, whole cycles and ages and æons of insect effort and "mighty" works could flourish and smolder into dust; and when cultural and physical structures they had reared, and the race itself alike had vanished, these peaks would still stand. They had gleamed first through the "darkness that was on the face of the deep:" they would loom in silhouette against the latter darkness that would mark the close of the world day, aloof, majestic, changeless; while insect race and puny structure long since had merged, unmarked, and unrecorded, into twilight oblivion.

The adventurers could not analyze their reactions to the vista before them. It was felt rather than thought. They peered at each other almost furtively, as though each had shrunk in stature. They looked again toward the north. In their point of view toward the chances of the expedition to survive a subtle change had come. Those distant filmy crests whose summits pierced even the high clouds represented the backbone of Alaska, the barrier to the Yukon. They must be scaled. Somewhere in that glittering chaos was the pass. But they knew now that their ability to cross the barrier was not predicated upon their puny resolution, or preparation, or luck; but upon the whim of those inscrutable ramparts, the smile or frown of the elements slumbering in the iron peaks.

It was the gaunt Slim, most elemental of the group, who put into words a hint of their collective reactions to the terrific majesty of the environment ahead.

"Folks," he said, scratching his head and grinning lugubriously, "when we're up among them pinnacles we'll be a long ways from home."

On the third day of their ascent of the Klaheena, as they were surmounting a high ridge where the trail swerved up from the valley floor to avoid a dangerous ford, they witnessed and felt a titanic phenomenon of nature that left its imprint forever upon their memory.

It began as a low muttering, a vast, terrific sound pitched in so low a key that its impact shook the air in successive waves. It seemed to proceed from the very bowels of the earth, yet it also thundered from the sky. The cattle halted in their tracks, huddled in jostling ranks, too terrified to stampede. Riders pulled up, their trembling mounts rooted to the spot: and all around them a vast chaos of sound rolled and reverberated, increasing in volume, a shuddering, abysmal tempo in which thunder piled on thunder in mounting, tumultous waves.

At first they thought it was an earthquake. It seemed to come from all points of the compass. The ground shook beneath their feet, as though the world were being torn from its moorings. It was their Indian guide, down the line of cattle with Slim, who flung up an arm toward the west.

Far up in the heights across the valley, above the ramparts that towered over the timber line, was a great, crater-like depression, from whose lower lip a roaring waterfall plunged as a milky streamer into the depths. But the waterfall was silent now, its tiny voice blotted out by the battle of the gods

above. It was a snowslide descending from the glittering peaks.

Terrifying as was the sound of that upheaval, the visual spectacle was even more awesome. Like outspread fingers of a hand whose palm was the crater, snow-choked gorges extended toward the sky. Down the middle finger of this giant hand the slide had started, and as the breaking of a keystone allows the whole arch to fall, an avalanche was rolling down each of the five gorges to converge on the crater.

It was as though a world within a world were struggling in death throes. Uncounted tons were moving down at express-train speed. Yet it seemed strangely deliberate, because of the distance. Where the five gorges met, mountains of snow and ice rose up and parted asunder, breaking in ponderous, leisurely waves of immeasurable force; and over all as a prolonged deep-toned note the thunderous echoes reverberated.

It was miles away—miles above the valley floor—yet to the watchers it seemed too close. Would the crater walls be suffiicent to withstand such terrific momentum? Because of their unreasoning terror, which was a throwback to an earlier primordial gloom where forefathers of the race shrank, cowering, in the presence of forces that created continents, it was as if the soaring ramparts must crumble before such an onslaught, the mountains themselves part asunder, and the broad valley be engulfed.

But the battle in the clouds reached its climax. A white mist rose above the crater. Giant forces reached a deadlock and settled into inertia. The great readjustment had taken place; but for long minutes thereafter, it seemed, thunders continued to belch down upon them, and when these reverberations ceased the echoes rolled on and on among distant peaks, subsided into a vast, sustained rumbling that muttered slowly into silence.

As they watched, the white mist dissipated, drifted in gorgeous streamers athwart the glittering ice fields; and presently no evidence of the cataclysm was visible, save the scoured channels angling down from the heights and the changed color of the cascade plunging from the crater's lip. This waterfall, milky-white before the upheaval, had now darkened to a muddy chocolate as though it bore upon its current new glacial silt, powder fine, that lately had been living rock.

The spectacle was over. In the shadow of immeasurable forces, each of the little group on the valley floor had reacted according to his own blind and unconscious instincts. In the profound silence that followed these reactions were now revealed. The Indian guide stood stoically, arms folded. Stirrup to stirrup, Slim and Lawson were facing the mountains, as men stand together in the face of death. Molly had been some distance away from Rondo when the thunders had first reëchoed; she was now at his side, shrinking toward him, her hand on his arm in a childlike gesture of terror. At the top of the slope, Kansas and the widow sat their mounts in the midst of the trembling pack string. The widow's hand was gripped tightly in Kansas' gnarled fist, and he was still patting her shoulder in reassuring fashion as they faced toward the lately thunder-riven heights. There was something comical, yet appealing, in the spectacle of this outwardly hostile pair being thus drawn together at the threat of danger that caused the strained features of all to relax in most tolerant smiles.

It was the widow who first recovered her poise. She thrust Kansas from her, her black eyes glittering.

"You'll hold my hand, ye chicken-hearted blackguard!" she accused. "Saints preserve us, what's the world coming to when the likes of you flock to an auld woman to bolster up courage!

You thought your time had come, eh? Well, ye tremblin' heathen, when you're afraid you're knocking on the pearly gates again just you pat your own back, an' thank you kindly!"

"Well, I'm danged!" quoth the equally agile-minded Kansas. "I'm surprised at such talk. The truth of it is, I was fightin' you off to keep you from fallin' on my neck. I wasn't so far gone but what I seen you comin'. No, no, lady, the next time the world gets set to bust in my face I aim to shine up the nearest tree where they ain't any hysterical females can get set to cling to me like grim death. A gent's entitled to protect himself."

"Up in the treetops is the right place for ye, ye grinning ape!" retorted the widow. "The next time you won't need any protection, I promise you. I'll sure carry an ax an' when I can tell by the signs that you're in the grip of another such fit, I'll put you out of your misery."

Kansas replied in kind as they straightened out the pack string. They were still wrangling when the others started the cattle moving.

Rondo grinned at the girl as they swung in at the rear of the herd. She smiled back tremulously. The shouts of Lawson and Slim had in them a different note that breathed somehow of a new awareness of the majesty through which they moved, as the cattle, in insect column, crawled forth along the valley floor.

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

## NATURE PLAYS A NEW TRICK

NATURE, in a playful mood, is responsible for a new and interesting freak in the shape of a so-called natural "cannon ball," which is almost perfectly spherical in shape, weighs more than half a ton, and measures thirty-three inches in diameter. The specimen comes from Mobridge, South Dakota, and constitutes a recent and valued gift from the St. Paul Railway to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

The massive find was made along the banks of the Cannon Ball River, which derives its characteristic name from the frequency with which sand balls of the aforementioned type appear along its bank. No other locality reports formations of this kind. And an explanation concerning the making of such freak rock pieces has been sent the museum by Doctor Joseph R. Connelly, professor of mineralology at the South Dakota School of Mines.

He explains the phenomenon as follows: "The sand concretions known as 'cannon balls' come from a cretaceous system of rocks. The cretaceous period is estimated to date back to a time about one hundred million years ago. They are weathered out of the sandstone along the course of the Cannon Ball River. And they are merely those parts of the general sandstone formation which are richer in iron oxide, this enrichment in iron having taken place through the segregating action of the ground waters depositing material about a nucleus of some sort.

"They are nearly spherical because they are deposited in that sort of a sandstone formation. And they retain the original stratification of the sandstone bed, but they weather more slowly than the sandstone."

# Ting-a-ling's Mousetrap

## By Paul Ellsworth Triem

**Author of "The Flying Shorthorn," etc.**

AS Lon Chambers came out on a knuckle of the hills and stood looking down into the broad valley at his feet, he felt, just for a moment, the thrill of ownership. The sun had already set down there, hut he could see quite distinctly the long log barn, with its shale-covered roof, and the cabin, apparently one-roomed, with a trickle of smoke ascending from its stick-and-clay chimney.

The smoke meant that some one was down there, waiting for him to take possession. His uncle's lawyer had spoken vaguely of a "China boy." Lon didn't like Chinamen. He was a great believer in Nordic superiority, and he told himself that to-morrow the Asiatic could take himself off.

Then he was slipping and sliding down the steep saddle trail. He had walked out from town, making the journey in two days. Lon was a seasoned walker, having belonged to two hiking clubs back East. Small round rocks of various sizes, some as large as his head, rolled down before him. They made a great clatter as they gathered recruits and gained momentum. Lon was only vaguely aware of the slide he was starting, but next moment a sound reached him that brought him to a stop, his lips parted, his eyes widening.

A rifle shot had rung out from the direction of the cabin. And somewhere over at his right, too close to be comfortable, a bullet struck a boulder and went *zooming* into space.

"What's the matter down there?" Lon shouted angrily. For the moment he thought some one was playing him tricks.

A high-keyed, resonant voice replied: "A'light—you come!"

Lon hesitated a moment, then went sliding more cautiously down the trail. He reached the bottom and paused, staring toward the little log building before him. He could just make out the figure of a tall, lean man, dressed apparently in overalls and jumper, holding a rifle significantly ready for action against his body.

"What's yore name?" this individual demanded.

"I'm the owner of this ranch. Alonzo Chambers was my uncle. My name is Chambers."

Unexpectedly Lon found a propitiatory note in his voice. He stood quite still till the man who was facing him spoke again.

"A'light—you come, Ting-a-ling go! You boss man now, you sabe?"

Lon didn't entirely "sabe," but he grasped in a general way that this long-geared Chinaman wasn't waiting to be fired. He was announcing his imminent departure—and Lon breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. He had expected a scene, but the problem was taking care of itself.

He was even more thankful when he had entered the cabin, and Ting-a-ling had lighted a big brass lamp. Seen by this mellow illumination, the China boy was an object to inspire fear. He was a good six feet tall and was very slim, but lithe and sinewy—almost reptilian. His small, round head was poised like a billiard ball on a broomstick. His almond-shaped eyes were brilliant and penetrating.

With them, for another long moment, he surveyed the newcomer. Then without a word he reached up and caught a rounded pole above his head. His swung himself into the air with the speed of an acrobat, and had disappeared over the edge of a plank platform that partly ceiled the single room of the cabin.

When Ting-a-ling reappeared, he wore a blue-serge suit, tightly buttoned; a white, stiff-bosomed shirt without a collar; and a derby. The effect was startling. In his blue-denim working clothes he had looked only mildly foreign; but in this outrageous rig he looked the very essence of the diabolical East. He carried a brown-canvas kit bag in one sinewy hand, and with it he gestured toward the outer world.

"My mule in stable," he explained. "Goo'-by!"

Two strides carried him to the door. It opened and closed, and he was gone.

Lon Chambers sat down in an obviously homemade chair, removed his soft felt hat, and began to laugh. There had been a touch of comic opera in the swift departure of the Chinaman. And, now that Lon came to think of it, there had been something else. Why had Ting-a-ling been standing guard, with a loaded rifle? Why had he shot, before asking questions? And why was he off, now, with the speed of a released homing pigeon?

The young man's smile was gone. He wanted to go to the door and call after the fellow, but he could not bring himself to it. He was a white man, and therefore the superior of any Chinaman that ever used chopsticks. He sat tensely listening. Presently there came to him the sound of hoofs on gravel. Again he heard a miniature rock slide from the direction of the trail—and he knew that he was alone.

Lon stood up, deposited his heavy coat, with its extensive pockets loaded with personal belongings, on the bunk in the corner, and began the preparation of his evening meal. His usual fare when hiking was raisins, wanuts, and water. But he had consumed all of those emergency rations on the way out from town, and now he must begin life on a new basis. He found plenty of the raw materials: corn meal, white flour, a great slab of salt pork, a sack of unground coffee, sugar, salt, tobacco, soda. Also there was a large can at the back of the stove, but one whiff at the contents convinced the newcomer that he had uncovered something that ought long ago to have been consigned to the earth. The stuff seemed to be fermenting batter. He hastily backed away, and decided on the easiest thing he could think of—corn-meal mush.

That supper was not a success. The

stuff in the big iron kettle lumped, and after that it spattered. Lon shifted the long spoon from one hand to the other. He had filled the fire box of the old cooking stove with wood taken from a little pile at the back. These faggots were heavy with pitch, and soon the entire top of the stove and much of the sides and front were red-hot. Lon danced about, sliding his mush kettle from one place to another. The scent of burning meal was in the air. With a final gasp of desperation, he lifted the heavy pot off to the floor, and stood regarding it, his face red and moist.

But he was hungry, and the mixture of half-cooked, lumpy, scorched mush was better than nothing. Lon ate, and as he sat at the old pine table, worn smooth by long contact with his dead uncle's coat sleeves and elbows, he found that note of fear that had sounded in his heart a few minutes before returning. He laid down the spoon with which he had been eating, and stared toward the window. Was that a sound of stealthy footsteps? Was that a vague, crouching form he saw, out at the edge of the bushes?

He tried angrily to throw off the feeling. He was tired, and he was not used to such intolerable silence. The memory of the long miles that separated him from his nearest neighbor—at least thirty of them—weighed heavily upon his weary mind. And there was the cumulative weariness of his journey, first by train, then by stage, and after that on foot. No wonder he was tired!

He sat back, after a time, filled his pipe with some of his uncle's tobacco, and tried to smoke. Evidently this stuff was not "boy's tobacco." It was like dynamite! After a few puffs he could feel a burning sensation in the neighborhood of his solar plexus, and his throat was constricted. He laid the pipe on the table and settled back, with a sigh of resignation. His eyes closed, opened, closed again—and he was asleep.

Lon Chambers awoke with a scream, and tried to leap from his chair. Something other than the tang of coarse tobacco was gripping his throat, now. And there was a sensation about his waist as if a boa constrictor had him in its grip. He struggled violently to release himself, but he was caught fast. His distended eyes swung upward. He was looking into the grinning, hairy face of a gigantic ruffian, as tall as the Chinaman had been, and broad and deep-chested in proportion. Two other disreputable-looking fellows stood near, also grinning.

Lon perceived that he was held fast by a rope that passed round his middle and, with a full turn evidently, around his neck. It was drawn taut, so that he could hardly breath. Any effort to get loose might strangle him.

"Unfasten me!" he snarled. "What kind of horseplay do you call this?"

"Hossplay?"

The big man's voice was guttural and as unpleasant as his face. His grin suddenly was gone. A surly spark kindled in his eyes, and he stood looking ferociously down at the prisoner in the chair.

"So, you're old 'Flint-lock's' nephy?" he continued, in the same guttural tone. "An' you've come in for his property! All right, then, me an' my pardners mean to have our share of it! Flint-lock was a friend of ourn! He shore must have willed us enough to make us comfortable."

Lon realized that here was something outside of his experience. These fellows belonged to a type he had thought long vanished from the face of the earth. There was an undertone of surly assurance and of determination in the speaker's voice that set his heart to pounding.

"I was my uncle's only heir," he said, trying to speak firmly, but painfully conscious of the tremor in his voice. "He left nothing to any one except me."

"Oh, he didn't, eh? Well, he must

have overlooked us, then. But that's all right. You can see to it. Come on, young feller, we've come for our share of the gold, and we're going to have it! Speak up. You can see we ain't the kind to be kept waiting!"

What Lon saw was that he was terribly out of his depth. For years he had not experienced real fear—not since he was a boy and had had nightmare from eating too much Thanksgiving dinner. But now he was shivering, and in spite of all he could do his teeth began to chatter.

"Gold?" he repeated. "You must be crazy! There isn't any gold around here."

The big man looked significantly at his companions. One of them crossed to the stove and shoved back one of the lids. He put in a few sticks of fat pine, and after that thrust the poker down into the fire box, with only the handle sticking out.

Lon felt his scalp drawing tight over his skull. He stared with terrified curiosity at the stove, which was beginning to crackle with heat. The orange flames came greedily up through the cooking hole, and tar-black smoke spread into the room.

"Unfasten me!" he commanded, his voice tremulous and husky. "You must be crazy to think there is any gold here—or that you can get away with this kind of thing! There's a sheriff in this county, and courts of law. You can't hide where the law won't find you. Unfasten me and get out. I'll promise to say nothing if you go at once!"

The man who had thrust the poker down into the stove now drew it out, by means of a dish towel wrapped over the handle. The poker was cherry-red and little sparkles of light came out from it.

"Give him one on the nose, to begin with," the bearded man said, as his companion approached with the poker. "He's a maverick, an' by the laws of the range we got a right to put our brand on him!"

Again he grinned, showing a set of gigantic, yellow teeth.

The poker was thrust toward Lon's face. He felt the sudden withering heat and tried to wrench himself free, to throw himself sidewise. A hobnailed shoe clamped down on a rung of his chair and held it as if nailed to the floor. The poker touched the tip of his nose—he heard the hiss of burning skin—and as the room turned black and his body went numb, he heard something else: the splinter of glass, and the sharp crack of smokeless powder. A scream, a terrible animal scream, pursued him down the long, dark corridor of oblivion through which he was floating.

Afterward he had a confused memory of voices and of pounding feet. Then he opened his eyes, persuaded that he had just closed them.

He was lying on the bunk in the corner, and above him towered the lean, muscular figure of Ting-a-ling. The Chinaman smiled, showing teeth as white as bleached bone.

Ting-a-ling removed his ridiculous derby and deposited it on the bunk. He turned and looked down at something huddled on the floor—the twisted body of the man with the poker.

"Him catchee plenty bullet in heart!" he observed tranquilly. "You see, Ting-a-ling been watching them fellah three-fo' weeks but they got plenty scare because Ting-a-ling belly bad China boy, shoot like debil with gun. When you come, I hully up, ride off like got plenty enough. I tie mule, come back. Fellah stick out hot poker, burn your nose, pretty quick burn eyes. Ting-a-ling shoot——"

The Chinaman drew himself up, the embodiment of force poised for action. He held an imaginary rifle against his cheek. His tongue clicked and again he was smiling down at the young fellow on the bunk.

Then he turned and crossed to a corner, where a heap of empty grain sacks had been thrown in apparently hit-or-miss confusion. He kicked them aside, stooped, and lifted a smaller sack of tight-meshed canvas. Three strides brought him back to the bunk, where he emptied out the contents of the bag on the dark-gray blanket.

Lon Chambers drew in an astounded breath. Gold—even he knew at a glance that this was the real thing—a sizable heap of coarse dust and nuggets, yellow, shimmering; virgin gold, straight from the veins of old Mother Earth!

"Boss man catch him befo' he die!" Ting-a-ling explained. "When he know he going long way off, he tell me I keep him fo' you. Now I catch you lilly piece supper!"

A flashing smile—six feet of steely sinew capped by a round, competent head—and Ting-a-ling proceeded to clear up his kitchen. This done, he peered into the mush kettle, set it aside, and lifted to the hearth the big can of sour dough.

Lon watched with lazy satisfaction the process of transmuting the mixture in the can into flapjacks. He noted that Ting-a-ling fed the fire from a supply of wood in a big, covered box, and not from the pile of resin-soaked "fat pine." Evidently the latter was reserved for starting fires. And he noted the keen, competent eyes, the humorous, slightly ironical mouth of the China boy. Something had gone wrong with the young man's belief in "Nordic supremacy." He, a white man, had got into a mess which he would never have emerged from alive. He saw again the merciless, predatory eyes of the bearded outlaw. He felt the biting heat of the poker, and tenderly touched the blistered tip of his nose.

"Ting-a-ling!" Lon said huskily.

The man at the stove turned.

"Wha-la-malla, boss man?" he inquired, with his flashing smile.

"You didn't mean what you said—that about pulling out and leaving me here to run things alone?"

The Chinaman was silent for a moment as he dexterously tossed the flapjacks into the air and caught them, uncooked side down, in the skillet. Then he spoke.

"Ting-a-ling die some time, hab to go back to China. Debil get him if he bellied here."

"I think you'll live quite a while. You don't look exactly sickly. But you'll work for me now?"

Ting-a-ling nodded. A faint, almost wistful smile hovered about his mobile lips.

"I stay," he promised.

"Then I'll just turn this gold over to you, till we can get it into town. Half of it is yours, you know."

Again Ting-a-ling nodded.

"Boss man tell me that befo' he die," he said. "But Ting-a-ling wait, see what you say! Mebbe you like him all fo' you'self!"

## EAGLES FIGHT TO THE DEATH

THERE have hitherto been few observers of bird battles in the clouds, and, when the eagles go to war with each other, their mighty combats must go unrecorded. But it was realized that there had been a savage aerial encounter when two mammoth eagles, still locked in fierce grasps, recently fell stunned from a great height.

The warring birds were found near Nanaimo, British Columbia, by a man named Will Martin, who brought them to that town. Their talons and beaks were still locked in mortal combat when he found them, and, before the warriors had a chance to recover or resume the battle, Martin clubbed them to death. The birds are being mounted for preservation.

# Pioneer Towns of the West

## By Duane Clark

### (New Orleans, Louisiana)

IT was in 1718 that Pierre le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, a French Canadian, founded New Orleans. Bienville's engineer, Le Blond de la Tour, laid out the city, which then was known as Vieux Carré. The site is located in a crescent bend of the Mississippi, one hundred and ten miles from its mouth, and about seventy miles by air line to the Gulf of Mexico.

Unique and attractive structures still stand in one quarter of New Orleans, many of these being nearly two hundred years old. This section was once part of the Louisiana Territory, which has been since divided into seventeen States.

In 1764 the French settlement was given to Spain. This change stirred the sturdy French colonists to rebellion. Under their leader, LeFrenière, they revolted and expelled the first Spanish governor, Ulloa. The result of this insubordination remains an unhappy chapter in New Orleans history. Using questionable tactics, the Spanish Captain O'Reilly succeeded in trapping and executing the leaders of this revolt. His home is one of the interesting sights of the city.

The *Filles à Cassette* is said to be the first girl's college in the United States. This was organized by the Ursuline nuns, in 1834. The building, which is still standing, is the oldest structure in the Mississippi Valley. Most of the buildings date from 1788 and 1794, when occurred two fires which nearly wiped out the settlement. For this reason, these buildings are mostly Spanish architecture, few of the French having survived destruction.

In 1803, after the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans entered its American era.

Because of the Spanish and French customs, the first governor, Claiborne, found his task anything but easy. He gave the inhabitants of the newly acquired territory permission to carry on their own traditions and methods. For this reason, many of the quaint places now exist, and the visitor is delighted with the old-world atmosphere which still clings to the city.

From a population of ten thousand—the majority of the white people at that time being Creoles—New Orleans has grown to four hundred thousand inhabitants. It is the metropolis of the South and Mississippi Valley, and is often called the Winter Capital of America.

The early French colony of New Orleans attracted many of the foremost families of France who brought with them priceless treasures of art, some of which have been preserved. The old French and Spanish houses have wide, paved courtyards, tropical vegetation and flowers, antique stores, and quaint shops.

New Orleans is noted for appetizing and varied cookery. Many of its dishes are famous among traveling Americans. New Orleans cooks are descended from the best Spain and France afforded, and assimilating the artistry of the Creole produce viands which are known from coast to coast.

In area, New Orleans is the fourth largest city in the United States. It is drained by the greatest aggregation of pumping machines in the world, and watered by eighty million gallons of the Mississippi waters made pure and crystal clear.

This city is a great port and is served by ninety steamship lines. In 1921, the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal was completed which connects Lake Pontchartrain with the Mississippi River, making the water frontage fifty-two miles long. It was obtained at a cost of twenty million dollars. General Goethals, builder of the Panama Canal, also built this canal. Huge locks on the river side lower vessels from river level to sea level, sometimes a drop of fifteen feet. The important feature of this canal is that it provides water-front sites for industries at a fixed level away from the current in the river.

Other units in the model equipment of the port of New Orleans are: The public grain elevator, holding two million six hundred thousand bushels of grain; the cotton warehouse and wharf, with capacity for three hundred and eighty thousand bales, and a number of high density compresses; a bulk commodity handling plant; a coal tipple; seven miles of covered wharf sheds, including the newly completed two-million-dollar coffee terminal; the steamboat landing; the lugger landing; the banana conveyers; the fire tug *Deluge,* which is the finest piece of fire-eating aquatic machinery in the world and the Federal barge terminal.

Other features of this great port, not publicly owned, are: The great dry docks; the Chalmette slip; the Shipping Board "bone yard"; the big railroad ferries, and the largest car ferry in the world, which runs between Belle Chasse and Cuba, carrying ninety-five loaded freight cars each trip. The river front of New Orleans reaches a width of nearly two thousand feet and a depth of almost two hundred feet.

New Orleans ranks all other ports in the shipment of the following commodities: Canned sausage, canned shellfish, corn, rice, bran, dried beans; onions, vegetable-oil lard compounds, vegetable-soap stock, dark-fired tobacco; sisal cordage, hair manufactures; creosoted ties, dressed pine lumber, ash, gum, hickory, oak, and mahogany lumber; tight staves, barrels, wall board; gasoline, zinc, and concentrated and acetate of lime.

The largest imports of New Orleans are bananas, molasses, sugar-beet seed, sisal, waste bagging, and illuminating

oil. It is reported by dock-board officials that the port of New Orleans is developing so rapidly that it is necessary to add twenty-five hundred lineal feet to the wharf equipment each year.

More than twenty-three million bunches of bananas are imported every year, and it is said that every third cup of coffee drunk in the United States comes in over the New Orleans wharves. Because the current in the river is never swift, and the sands of the river banks are harmless even in the event of grounding, New Orleans is considered one of the safest ports in the world.

New Orleans has twelve hundred successful manufacturing concerns turning out eight hundred and fifty different products. Outstanding among these industries are: The largest sugar refinery in the world operating as a single unit; the largest sugar-cane sirup-canning plant in the world, and also the largest mahogany-lumber mill in the world. The only Celotex plant in the world is located here, making every day over a million board feet of insulating wallboard from sugar-cane refuse. Here is the largest furniture factory in the South. New Orleans' factories make eighty per cent of the men's wash clothing worn in the United States. There are also great oil refineries, rice mills, food-products plants, and paint factories.

According to the United States Bureau of Labor, the cost of living is lower in New Orleans than in any other American city, save one. One reason for this is because only during a few hours of winter nights does the thermometer ever reach the freezing point, thus cutting down fuel bills. The climate is claimed by physicians to be particularly healthful. Cooling breezes from the surrounding waters keep summer temperatures comfortable.

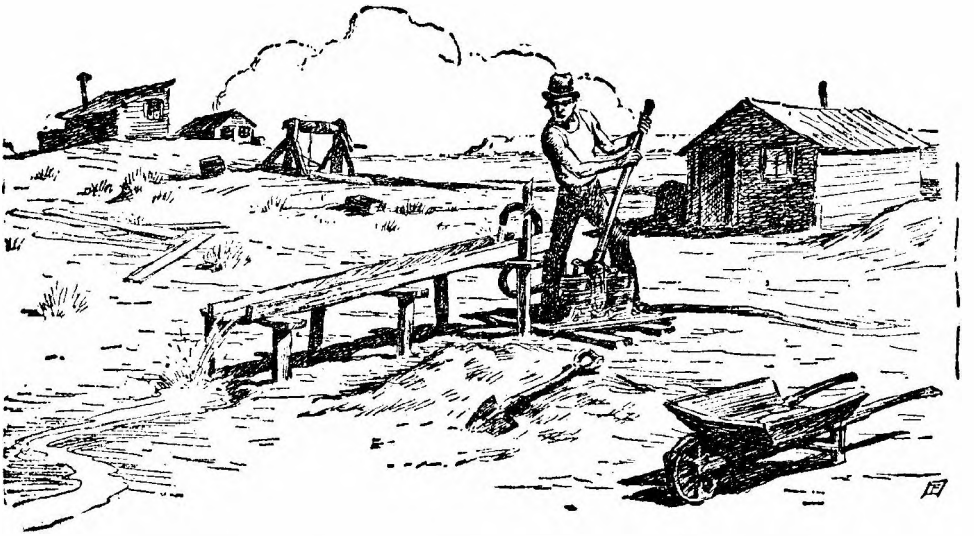
Fresh vegetables are produced from near-by truck farms, which produce three and four crops a year. Tropical fruits are easily imported and sold cheaply.

Educationally, New Orleans ranks high. More than two hundred elementary and secondary schools provide training in all lines. Nearly all these schools give free tuition and books. Here are Tulane University and Loyola University. Of high rank are the College of Medicine and the Newcomb College for Girls. There is also a fine business school, Soulé College.

Summer provides swimming, fishing, yachting, and rowing for the sports lovers, while winter brings the Mardi Gras, hunting, and racing. All the year round, golf and tennis are played. City Park is said to be the sixth largest park in the United States within city limits, totaling more than fourteen hundred acres. Audubon Park contains one of the finest natatoriums in the world and covers two hundred and thirty-four acres. There are seventeen fully equipped playgrounds.

Among the interesting things to see in New Orleans are: The Louisiana State Museum, which exhibits the natural products and manufactured articles of the State; the French market; the oyster-lugger landing, where luggers bring oysters from the many lakes of the lower coast; the old—now unused—United States mint; and Spanish Fort, a small village located on Lake Pontchartrain, where General Jackson landed in 1814.

Perhaps the greatest and best-known feature of New Orleans is the annual Mardi Gras, a festivity which has been observed for over three-quarters of a century. It originated in the days when the Louisiana planters and merchants looked to France, their mother country, for their fashions, amusements, and literature. Starting in the early years as a masquerade parade, it has grown to carnival proportions and is looked upon as an event well worth attending by people from all over the world.



# Staked Ground

## By Seth Ranger

**Author of "Grub," etc.**

"YOU are charged," rasped Judge Moore, "with begging. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Bud" Tuttle's gaze shifted from the judge to those in the courtroom. In no face did he detect the slightest sympathy, though it was apparent that he knew every one present. And it was equally apparent that the crowd was there to see what Judge Moore did to the prisoner. Whispered comments reached the youth's ears. "Bud never was no good nohow. Just like his father—wuthless. Always layin' round readin' queer books instead of makin' suthin' of hisself. Only bad boy we've got in Gilman Center. Ought to be run outen town. He's a bad example. Jail's the place for him."

Bud set his jaw. "Not guilty!" he said calmly.

This was followed by a moment's silence, then the hum of gossip was resumed. "Father went West years ago and was never heard of. Come to no good end, I'll wager."

The youth choked back his rage. He did not mind their comments about him. He was used to it. But he resented their remarks about his father. As a little boy, he had known only kindness from the big man whose eyes always seemed to be looking beyond Gilman Center. How Bud detested some of those present! They were petty, narrow in viewpoint and could not understand that others were different. Honest, well-intentioned, they yet were hemmed in and bound by the life of the small mid-West community.

"Silas Prentice will take the stand," said the judge.

Prentice's mouth was hardly more than a narrow slit in his face. His eyes were a cold blue, his bony fingers appeared to be reaching for something. And that which he reached he clutched tightly. He was sworn in.

"Two nights ago it was," he said in

a testy voice, "the prisoner, whom I've known unfavorably from childhood, came into my store and began talking about a gold strike somewhere in Nevada called Agua Malo. He wanted I should give him money to go. He didn't have no security. All he offered was to give me half of what he got. Out and out begging, I calls it." His jaws clicked together as he finished.

"That's the trouble with this town," Tuttle said bitterly, "you don't know what's going on in the world. Never even heard of grubstaking a man."

"Silence!" roared the judge, glaring.

"That's all," added Silas Prentice, "except he went around among the others and begged."

Several other witnesses confirmed Prentice's evidence, and the busybodies in the courtroom nodded their heads with vigor. Bud Tuttle was called to the stand.

"What have you to say for yourself? Have you an attorney?" asked the judge.

"No. I haven't money to hire one. What have I to say for myself? Nothing, except that I tackled several men in this town for a grubstake and they acted like they thought I was crazy. Now I know I was crazy—for asking them."

The judge leaned forward, his eyes boring the prisoner. "I want to know the real reason back of all this. You had more than a search for gold in mind. You are under oath! Speak the truth!" he thundered.

The room became quiet. The youth moistened his lips. "I figured I had as good a chance as the next one to strike gold," he said. "Gold is where you find it, and the chechahco—that is what they call a tenderfoot in Alaska—has as good a chance as the sour dough. But you're right. There was another reason. I want to get out of this cussed town." A gasp of horror swept through the courtroom. "Because I'm different than the mine run of boys, I've had it rubbed into me since I was ten years old. 'Bud Tuttle's like his father,' they say. He's worthless. He'll never amount to a hill o' beans. It's Bud Tuttle this, and Bud Tuttle that, until I'm sick of it. I've been told I'm worthless so many times that I'm beginning to lose faith in myself; beginning to wonder if maybe they're not right. But I do know that another year of it will make me worthless. I want to find out whether I've any courage; whether I'm yellow or not. It's something I don't know. And I'll never know until I'm tested." His jaws clicked. "I'm going to find out, even if I mush until my feet are in the Arctic Ocean."

Those present were amazed at the outburst. Even Bud was surprised at the ease with which he found the needed words as he talked.

The judge broke the silence. "Have you finished defending yourself?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I find you guilty of begging!"

"I expected you'd call it that," Bud said bitterly.

The court pondered a moment, then ordered: "Stand up for sentence!"

Bud stood up. His heart was pounding rapidly. In a few moments he would be branded with a jail sentence. A torrent of protest rushed to his lips, but he remained silent. These people would never understand. And so he stood alone, a tall youth who had grown too fast and was mostly arms, legs, and ears. But plenty of fire smoldered in the dark eyes and there was determination in the lean jaw.

The judge spoke:

"This desire to hunt gold, to seek wild adventure, is a disease of youth, like chicken pox and whooping cough. The way to cure you is to give you a good stiff dose of it; to cram it down your throat until you cry for mercy. After hardships, after you've been

tricked, beaten, and kicked about by the rough characters you will encounter, you'll be ready to return to Gilman Center and settle down." The speaker paused, then added, "If you don't perish of thirst or heat or are not killed by a gunman's bullet! Therefore, I sentence you to go on this Agua Malo stampede. There is to be no whimpering and turning back when disillusion comes. You are to stop at nothing; you are to stake a claim, work it, and remain there at least two months. I shall notify officers in the district to pick you up and return you to Gilman Center if you fail to carry out the letter of this sentence. When returned, you will serve thirty days in jail for begging. Do you understand? No turning back. See it through to the end!" He thundered the words, then handed Bud an envelope. "You may go! Court stands adjourned."

Conversation buzzed; heads nodded approval. "Mark my word, he'll be sneaking back like a whipped dog! Jail will seem better than stampeding, facing thirst, sand storms, and toughs."

Without glancing to left or right, Bud made his way to the door and stepped into the open air. He wanted to yell with joy. The very presence of the townspeople in the courtroom had choked him. He disappeared into the nearest alley and opened the envelope. It contained fifteen hundred dollars in currency, and a note. Astounded by this unexpected aid, Bud read the note:

BUD TUTTLE: One man in Gilman Center believes that no youth should leave his native town feeling that no one is back of him or has faith in his ability to triumph. For the present that man is nameless. The money is a loan, to aid you. It is not a grubstake and is to be repaid, through me, with interest at six per cent. JUDGE MOORE.

Bud read the note through twice. He read it with the eyes of a youth who believed no man in town had faith in him. Slowly the tears rolled down his cheeks. "Now, I've got to make good," he said thickly. "I've got to show these people that the man who backed me wasn't throwing away his money." The longing for masculine sympathy and understanding which had known no outlet since his father's disappearance now poured out to the unknown who had faith in him and backed it with fifteen hundred dollars. Then Bud headed for the only one in town who understood him—his mother. Gilman Center was not such a bad place, after all. Why, he could even see good points in old Prentice! On the way home he paused long enough to buy a ticket for Salt Hole, Nevada.

"Salt Hole! The jumping-off place," announced the brakeman. But Tuttle experienced a curious thrill as he dropped from the train with several others. As the train got under way, he knew he was leaving civilization behind. From now on he would have to rely on himself for everything. For perhaps two seconds he seemed to hesitate and watch the disappearing train. But the hesitation was pardonable. The most courageous youth cannot cut loose from the sheltered life of boyhood without a moment's thoughtful hesitation.

Bud made his way to a general store, where a dozen men were outfitting themselves. The proprietor, after a quick glance, hurried toward Bud. "Another tenderfoot kid," he mused, "I might as well stick him plenty. If I don't get it, somebody will. They all have to cut their eyeteeth on somebody." He rubbed his hands briskly. "Fine day, young man. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I want an outfit." Though Bud had read in magazines, books, and newspapers of the life he expected to follow and had gained much knowledge that would be of value to him in the future, he only knew in a general way what he needed. "I'll leave it to you," he an-

nounced, "you know what I'll need. I want good stuff, but not the most expensive."

"You'll need some good rubber boots," the trader began, "and this pair will set you back ten dollars. They'd cost you fifty at Agua Malo. You'll need heavy blankets for cold weather and a light blanket for the hot. Better throw in a slicker, too. It rains a lot in the fall. Here's a mackinaw. You'll need it when snow flies. Better take a couple of pair of shoes. Here's extra laces—cheap at four bits a pair."

Presently, Bud protested. "I've got to pack this on my back. That's a big pack right now," he said.

"Sure you've got to pack it on your back," the trader said smoothly. "But better carry a heavy load and take your time than pay six prices for everything when you get there. Take my advice and buy now. Not much at Agua Malo but bad water and desert. Well, there's your outfit. And it's a good one."

"Your outfit!" The words thrilled Bud to the depths. His outfit! He looked at the heavy, back-breaking pack with pride. Scores of times he had read and thrilled over some youth who had struck into the unknown with an outfit. He parted with several hundred dollars, then staggered into a flaming world. His pack, clothing, and grin fairly screamed that he was a tenderfoot. New pack, new shoes, new clothing, new blankets, pots and pans that flashed like mirrors in the desert sun and sent heliograph signals as he walked. Many an old-timer with blackened cooking utensils and ragged, soiled blankets smiled softly, thought of his own youth, and speculated on Bud's future. Would he perish within a few days on the desert—perhaps of thirst, perhaps from poisoned water? Would he go on and on, ever hoping, yet never striking it, until old, broken, and almost but not quite beaten, he crawled to the shade of some palm or mesquite and died? Or perhaps the swifter and more merciful ending, a—bullet from a faster man's gun in a fight over some claim.

But the thoughts of the old men soon passed and they swung into the trail that led from Salt Hole to the burning sands and Agua Malo a hundred miles away.

The madness of a gold stampede!

Hundreds of men driving themselves to the utmost, each face tense and drawn; each back bending beneath a great burden. Thirsty, burdened animals; thirsty men; thirsty, scrubby thickets; a thirsty land baking in a blazing sun. A faded signboard with pointing finger was lettered, "Water"!

The trail swung sharply toward it. A low spot between two barren hills contained a quantity of brackish water. The bank about the spot was lined with men dipping up the yellowish fluid and filling canteens. Again and again men shouted warnings to newcomers. "Don't drink this water without boiling it!" Wigglers darted about; each cup contained several, along with decayed vegetable matter, but it was water.

Some went on, others bathed their hot faces, then crawled to the scant shade and rested. Night and day it had been the same—men arrving, filling canteens and water bags with water, resting, and moving on; their tired bodies lashed by the fear that they would arrive too late.

A desert rat with faded eyes had taken himself in hand with an effort. "Got to ease up or I'll play out before I get there!" he exclaimed. "This is the worst I've ever seen. Anybody know how that kid named Tuttle came out? Looked to me like the heat had got him."

"Maybe it was bad water?" suggested somebody.

"No! For a green kid, he's pretty wise. He's read a lot and he's been boiling his water. No, just played out. He's got the frame, but not the meat. He's mostly arms and legs. I dragged

him under a mesquite and left him. Was about all in myself. Seemed to appreciate what I did. Looked to me like a kid that hadn't been helped much." The desert rat lingered a moment, then he felt the lash of the stampede and moved on.

A freighter, cracking the whip over the backs of six mules, pulled in. The wagon was almost obscured by a cloud of dust. The freighter had followed his calling all over the world. "This is the limit," he growled, blowing the dust from his face. "Fellow died back there!"

"A kid named Tuttle?"

"Naw, the kid's coming along, but his water's pretty low. I'd have picked him up, but I'm loaded. We buried the other fellow. The kid helped. He's getting a taste of stampedin' that ought to hold him. Boil your water, gents. Bad water is what got the poor devil that died. Tell that chechahco kid to dump some of his stuff, he's packing too big a load and the worst is ahead."

A half hour after the freighter's departure from the water hole a tall youth arrived, swaying beneath a huge pack. He was more than tired. He was sick. He shed the pack and dropped to the edge of the water. A miner struggled to his feet and hurried over. "Don't drink any of that water," he warned, "it's bad."

"I won't!" Bud Tuttle half smiled. "Just want to wash the dust out of my eyes. Gosh! I'm—tired." His head dropped to the ground and he was sound asleep. "Just a chechahco," he muttered, "just a green boob trying to find what it's all about."

"How's 'The Chechahco Kid'?"

Bud Tuttle opened his eyes and looked about. "'The Chechahco Kid'?" he whispered. "Hot darn! Now I've got a nickname and it's a real one! I'm feeling great. Gosh, I sure was sick when I hit this hole at noon."

"Too much heat," answered the other. Bud noticed it was the same man who had warned him about the water. He shot a glance at Bud's pack. "Too much heat and too much pack put you under," he added. "I'm Mike Porep."

"Glad to know you. I'm Bud Tuttle, now alias The Chechahco Kid. I'm only packing what the trader at Salt Hole told me I needed."

The desert rat swore with feeling. "The trader at Salt Hole is a danged old tarantula. Let me look your outfit over. I'll dump what you don't need." And Mike Porep began by dumping the heaviest blanket, the rubber boots, and the slicker. Other articles followed.

"All that?" Bud demanded. "All that has to be dumped?" He had broken his back and heart getting it here. "It's worth a lot."

"Worth a hundred dollars at a store, but not worth a red cent out here."

"I can't sell 'em?"

"No. Men only pack what they need, unless some trader loads 'em up with too much stuff. That cuss at Salt Hole should be strung up. The extra weight might mean the difference between life and death between water holes. It's an old trick. Son, you've evidently gone into this thing with your eyes open. From what I hear you've read a lot and remembered a lot. But you're going to get a lot of bumps in the next couple of weeks. You're going to see the worst side of human nature, and the best side. What's more, you're going to learn a heap about your own self."

"That's what I'm most curious about," the youth replied. "I'm going to travel nights when it's cool and sleep daytimes. I figure I can get farther on my water supply that way. I'm using canteens. Water bags sometimes wear out."

"Good idea. But don't wait on me; I'm slow! It's every man for hisself and the devil take the hindermost. When I see a likely kid, I like to give

him a word of advice. A feller done that to me forty years ago, and it helped a lot. S'long." Abruptly he called Bud back. "Dang it, son, you face favors somebody I once knowed. What's you say your name was?"

"Tuttle."

"Your pop wasn't knowed as 'Six-gun' Tuttle, was he?"

"How'd you find that out?"

"Gosh all fishhooks," Porep answered, "everybody from Nome to Yuma knowed Six-gun Tuttle. Disappeared up in the Nome country. He prospered, but he always had time to lend some other fellow a hand or run a bad egg to earth. Kid, you've sure got something to live up to when the old-timers find out you're Six-gun's cub. Heh! Heh! Heh! But I'm bettin' you'll deliver the goods, too. Watch your step and don't take no wooden nickels. You're getting your physical test right now. But up at Agua Malo you'll get your courage tested in a lot of ways. Six-gun's boy. I'll be danged if the world ain't small! Six-gun." He smiled reminiscently. "There was a man!"

Bud surprised the old rat by giving him a violent hug. "There're two men I'll never forget," Bud said with feeling. "A man in my home town who had faith enough to advance me fifteen hundred dollars is the first. And you're next. You're the first man I've ever heard speak a good word of my father."

"First man to say a good word for your pop?" Mike was astounded. "Then all I've got to say is that old Six-gun was a stranger in his own home town."

There was renewed strength in Bud Tuttle as he shouldered his pack and prepared to leave the hole. A hundred dollar's worth of equipment lay discarded, but the pack was lighter. But the real lightness was in his heart. He was in a country that measured and weighed its men with care. And that country rated his father highly. As he gained the ridge, Mike's thin voice floated up:

"If you git offn the trail, head for that bright star. That's Agua Malo way. And, say, Bud, hang onto that money. There's a hundred ways at a minin' camp to slick you outen it, and them slick tricks ain't all worked in a gamblin' house either."

There followed four nights of hard travel, four days of feverish sleep in the scant shade of the mesquite. The costly pile of equipment Bud had left at the water hole were not the only discarded articles on the dusty trail from Salt Hole to Agua Malo. As the goal drew near and men drove themselves the harder, they shed all but the most important items. Here and there Bud stumbled onto food caches covered with stones to keep off prowling animals. And then without warning he found himself facing a gun. Instinctively he raised his hands. "Now what?" he demanded, surprised at his own coolness.

The man with a gun was bearded and tough. "I've just staked this ground," he announced. "The new trail swings along the edge of my claim and up to that ridge. It's two miles longer, but it can't be helped."

"Why stake the trail?" Bud demanded.

"I had to stake something," the other explained, "the whole country's staked. This was all I could find left. If I let people cross it, the first thing I know somebody will jump it."

Bud knew the law of the mining camp—a man's staked ground is sacred and he who trespasses must take the consequences. He shouldered his pack and headed for the ridge. At the top he stopped to rest. In every direction men had erected heaps of stones to mark the corners of their claims. Tiny eddies of dust marked the progress of each man as he trudged toward Agua Malo. The camp lay below him. Bud stopped at

the next claim. A middle-aged man with face leathered by many a desert sun, walked slowly toward him. "Don't stop, bub," he warned, "leastwise not on my ground."

"I'm a tenderfoot," Bud frankly admitted. "But, even so, it doesn't seem reasonable that there's gold on the several square miles of staked ground hereabouts."

"There ain't!" The other grew more friendly. "So you're a tenderfoot, eh? Well, you don't have to break down and confess it. I can see it. Listen, bub, chuck this life before it gets you. Look at the hundreds that have failed. That should make you turn back." He waved his hand in a sweep that covered the staked ground. "Outside of Discovery Claim, probably there won't be a thousand dollars' worth of dust taken out."

"Then why do they come?"

"Hope is back of it all. If I wasn't such a tough egg it'd make me cry—these humans treating themselves worse than they'd treat an animal to get where gold ain't. Whenever I see a kid starting out like you are, I tell 'em to turn back. Most of 'em won't. When I see they won't, I give 'em advice. Keep away from the gamblin' games and watch out. If they can't get your money one way they'll get it another. Then where'd you be?"

"I don't know," Bud admitted. "Thanks. I'll be moving along. I've never seen a roaring gold camp."

Bud Tuttle stood on the main street and watched with amazed eyes. The dust was from ankle to knee deep. Crowds milled about; rumors spread rapidly. Each hour came new arrivals—limping men from the cities, who did not know how to care for their feet; desert rats, leading burros; cold-eyed gamblers, picking up easy money; gun fighters and cappers.

A rat-eyed man invited Bud into a little game, but he declined. "Busted," he said shortly. Another capper tried to head him into a saloon. He shook him off, determined not to be taken in by that trick. Once before the bar, the "house" would set 'em up. The bartender, customer, and capper would drink. Then the customer invites the others to have one on him. Every loafer in the room responds.

But did not know it, but he had been spotted the instant he entered camp. Somebody had seen him transferring his roll in a clump of mesquite. That somebody hurried to "Dangerous Dude" Dresden who controlled the gambling, saloon, and dance-hall game in camp. "He's a green kid and he's got more'n a thousand dollars on him," somebody reported.

"Chicken feed," Dangerous Dude had answered, "but the camp's busted already. We need get-away money. Shake the kid down." And with this terse order Dangerous Dude played his usual game of searching the camp for a man who had struck it or a man who had brought it with him.

Gradually Dude learned that the kid "didn't shake down." Sly barbs were sent his way. "Losin' your grip, Dude? Your best man can't get the kid's roll anyway."

Dude personally investigated the matter. From a distance of twenty feet he studied Bud Tuttle. Bud was tired. He had been in camp a week now and had failed to locate a prospect. He wanted to do more than stake ground and hope somebody would buy it. He wanted to stake ground and then go down to bed rock. This day had been a tough one and as he relaxed, his face betrayed his character. "A kid away from home the first time," Dude mused, "tired and discouraged, but not thinking of quitting. Broad between the eyes and smart, but he don't know all the tricks." He walked over to the boy, and Bud Tuttle experienced a thrill as the famous gun fighter addressed him.

"I've watched you, kid," Dresden announced. "You're a good kid."

Suspicion came into Bud's eyes, and Dresden noted but ignored it. "Anybody tried to sell you any claims?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Well, don't buy 'em. There ain't a half dozen claims in camp that are worth a bit cigar. There's Discovery Claim. Then Pete Sanderson has a good prospect, but the stuff all around him is hungry ground. Old Man Preston's struck it, but he won't be likely to sell you any of it." Dresden went on and named a half dozen. "Unless you can get in on them, don't buy. You're a good kid. You've got nerve. I like you, and that's why I'm warning you."

As the gunman walked away, Bud Tuttle's eyes followed him. Tall, powerful, perfectly dressed, Dresden was a man to command attention anywhere. "And they said you were a crook and a man who shot others in the back!" Bud mused. "Well, I know different."

While Bud prepared an evening meal on a bit of fraction ground that had not been staked, Dresden went slowly to his headquarters. "Preston!" he barked. "Come here!"

An old man with kindly, trusting eyes stepped briskly forward. His face bore the stamp of the desert, and the slight stoop of the shoulders he affected made younger men want to do something for him. His appearance was his stock in trade, for he lived at the expense of others. Nor would he hesitate to knife a friend if there was anything to be gained in the knifing. He was one of several men Dresden had gathered about him. If he could not get a victim one way, he could another. "Preston, have you seen that Tuttle kid yet?"

"Yeah!"

"We've tried the old tricks, but they don't work. They're giving us the laugh because we can't take him. And if a camp laughs too hard at our crowd, we're sunk. We've got to hook him for two reasons—to save our faces, and to pick up a little get-away money. I've got it straight. Discovery Claim has played out. It was only a pocket."

"But what a pocket!" Preston cut in. "A hundred thousand dollars in two months' time!"

"I've told the kid you're honest and have pay ground. Now get busy." He shot the old man a warning look. "And work fast, old sport, or you'll walk out."

That evening Preston loaded a half dozen shotguns shells with gold nuggets, then he announced that he was going rabbit hunting at dawn.

Dawn found him on the ground known as Preston Placer, No. 1. At some time an ancient river had flowed through the district. The marks were visible on a wall that extended nearly five miles and made a bend on Preston's claim. Because of this bend the old man had staked the ground, but a hole to bed rock had failed to reveal anything. The hole had been filled and a convenient sandstorm wiped out all traces of the prospecting.

The old man aimed the shotgun at the watercourse marks some forty feet above him and fired. He shifted the gun and fired again. The process was repeated until his ammunition was exhausted. Then he slipped back to Dresden's headquarters and left the gun. This accomplished, he limped toward Bud Tuttle's camp. For several minutes he stood scowling at the youth, and presently Bud flushed. "If he wasn't such an old bird I'd take a punch at him," Bud fumed. "He's getting my goat, staring that way!"

Preston walked over and thrust out his hand. "I'm Preston," he announced. "I want an honest young man, who can keep his mouth shut, to work on my claim. I ain't struck a danged thing yet, but I think I know where there's gold. I'll give you ten bucks a day and grub. If there's gold, I'll give you a

chance to buy in. What you need is experience. What I need is the strength of a young man. What do you say?"

Dresden's words of the previous evening came to Bud. Preston was one who had struck it. "I'm with you. When do we start?"

"Right now!" And the words came right from the speaker's heart.

Preston and Bud were standing before the bank, which at this point towered nearly a hundred feet above them. "There should be gold anywhere along there," said Preston. He traced a map on the smooth sand. "As I figure it, the ancient stream made an eddy and left gold there. That's Discovery Claim. Then it made another eddy here. That's the Preston Claim. I'll lower you down in a rope and I want you to knock that dirt loose. Then we'll pan it for color. No, I don't expect any nuggets right off the bat. If I get plenty of color I'll be satisfied."

Bud's whole body was responding to the thrill of this first chance to dig for gold. What if it was on another man's ground? He would soon be digging for his first gold. He forgot the hardships that lay behind; he gave no thought to the hardships that lay ahead. He was living for the exciting present. Suspended from a rope, he drove the pick into the bank again and again and let it cave off. Two hours' work was sufficient. Preston hauled him up. "Tomorrow we'll see what we've got," he announced.

Bud spent a sleepless night. Faint traces in the sky announced a new day and Bud dug Preston in the ribs. "Let's get at that dirt, Preston."

The enthusiasm of youth would have moved a less unfeeling man than this old rogue. Preston smiled inwardly. "This is going to be a cinch," he mused. Then he dressed.

While Preston cooked breakfast, Bud packed water from the lake for gold washing purposes. He bolted his meal, then squatted down while the white-haired crook selected his dirt, poured it into the pan, added water, and then began the circling movement of the gold washer the world over. Now and again he would grunt and remove a rock. The contents dwindled to a small quantity of sand and two dull bits of metal. "Look!" The old man pretended excitement. "Look! That's gold!" His breath came in sharp gasps. "Can it be?" he sobbed. "Can it be that I've struck it after all these years!"

Bud dropped a sympathetic arm across Preston's shoulder. "Congratulations, old-timer," he said with feeling, "and if crying will help, go to it. In a way I understand how you feel."

Preston's acting was perfect. "Do the next pan," he whispered hoarsely. "I'm afraid. If it don't contain gold, it'll kill me. You see, son, fate is cruel. It lifts a man's hopes high, then dashes them. I guess maybe I'm yellow—my courage is shot."

"You're not yellow," Bud protested. "I'll see what I can find." Almost prayerfully he whispered, "Oh, Lord, give this old fellow a break!"

Awkwardly he panned the next shovelful of earth. His eyes were popping as he looked into the pan. Before all the sand had washed over the rim, he had plucked out another small nugget. "Look, Preston! You've struck it all right."

Preston dropped to his knees, lifted his hands skyward and prayed. Abruptly he turned to Bud. "Will you stick with me, kid?"

"Sure. But I'm afraid I can't buy much of an interest."

"How much have you got?"

"Twelve hundred at the most," Bud answered. "Ain't much!"

"No, it ain't. But——" He hesitated just the right length of time. "I'll tell you what——"

"Yes," Bud said eagerly.

"I'm too old to do the heavy work. I need a young man. I'll sell you a half interest for five thousand. Pay twelve hundred down and the rest when we have our big clean-up."

"Fair enough," Bud answered. "Shake on it."

They shook hands solemnly, then Preston drew up a set of papers, and together they headed for a notary public's office. This done, they went to the tent post office and mailed the papers to the county seat for recording.

With twelve hundred dollars in his pocket, Preston trumped up an excuse and disappeared. Bud saw no attraction in the artificial and forced pleasures of the camp. All he could see was the cliff that contained gold. Whichever way he turned, the picture flashed before his eyes. Then he thought of his mother. Her lot had been tough during the past years—first as the wife of a man declared worthless; then as the mother of a son equally worthless. His lips set in grim lines. "Ma's going to get her chance right now," he snapped. "She's going to be able to tell that gang of me and she gossips that her boy has struck it." He grinned suddenly. "Guess I'll write it on a post card, then everybody will know it."

Bud returned to the fraction of ground on which he had squatted; packed up his outfit, and headed for Preston's claim. Preston had not returned yet. Bud stowed his stuff, then tackled the bank once more. In his mind were plans to work on a large scale. By running a flume to the lake and installing a small pump they could use the sluice-box method. The perspiration poured down his tanned face in streams as he drove his pick into the salted ground. Like the steady low hum of distant bees came the voice of the camp.

Two days passed and Bud headed for the camp. Dangerous Dude Dresden was the first man he recognized. "Have you seen my pardner, Preston?" asked Bud.

"Preston? Oh, yes, you're the kid he took in. Well, don't worry, the old boy's on a spree most likely. Go back to work, he'll show up in a week or so."

Bud did not see the trace of mockery on Dude's face as he turned away. Dude was wondering how long Bud would toil in the sweltering sun before he learned he had been tricked.

"So here you are?"

Bud Tuttle looked up as a familiar voice hailed him. It was Mike Porep. "Been lookin' all over for you," said Mike. "Some judge back in your home wired the sheriff to find out if you're stickin' to the job. He sent a deputy out. I told him you could depend on Six-gun Tuttle's cub stickin' it out. The deputy went back and reported. But what in tarnation are you doin' here?"

"We've struck it, Mike. I bought a half interest from Old Man Preston."

"What?" The words came out with a pistollike crack.

"Paid twelve hundred dollars as first payment on a half interest," Bud explained.

"Set down," said the old Irishman kindly. "You're a man, Bud, and I'm going to talk straight from the shoulder. There ain't a dollar's worth of gold in a thousand yards of that dirt."

"But, Mike," Bud protested, "I saw it! It came from the bank."

"Salted!"

"But how could they salt dirt up there? I had to be lowered down to knock it loose."

For answer Mike climbed the bank then slid down the rope. His eyes moved slowly until he found what he sought. "Come down here, Bud!" When Bud had joined him, the old desert rat pointed a gnarled finger. "See that spot of gold on that rock. That's where a nugget about as big as a buckshot hit and glanced off. It's an old

trick, Bud, to shoot gold into ground with a scatter gun. Son, this camp's gone busted already. Dangerous Dude Dresden and his gang, of whom Preston is one, have pulled their freight. Others are going by the hundreds. In another week there won't be a soul here."

"Yes, there will," Bud said in a stunned voice. "I'll be here." He climbed hastily up the rope, threw himself on the ground, and sobbed with fury.

Mike Porep followed. "My gosh, Bud, don't take on like that," Mike said soothingly.

"I could kill the whole Dresden gang for this," said Bud. "It's not me I'm thinking about. I wrote my mother I'd struck it; wrote it on a post card so that snooper, Prentice, would read it when it went through the mail. I knew he'd tell the whole town. And I knew mother would go down the street and look 'em right in the eye. She's always said I'd make good. And now——" Bud groaned from the anguish of soul. "She'll see them laughing because some slickers out West sold her son a salted mine."

"It does make it tough," Mike admitted.

Silence fell between them. Mike puffed on his ancient pipe, while Bud pondered deeply. "I've got to beat the Dresden crowd to save my face here in the West and back home," said the boy at last. "I've got to beat 'em no matter what happens, and I think I see a way."

"Son, if you beat Dangerous Dude Dresden and live to tell the tale, you won't need to give a dang what they think of you back in Gilman Center, because you'll rank so cussed high out here. More power to you, says I. When you going to leave?"

"I don't figure on leaving," Bud replied. "I'm going to stay right here and work this salted ground."

Bud Tuttle watched the last man leave Agua Malo. The dance halls were covered with dust and the only music the woden walls knew was the howl of a dreary desert wind through the open windows. Stores with scant stocks stood as the owners had left them. Gaunt frames, stripped of canvas, marked where tent saloons and dwellings once stood. The dust kicked up by the vanishing miners eddied and died. Bud was alone. There is nothing so suggestive of death as a dead mining camp. For the first time the boy was experiencing utter loneliness. The evidence of civilization left by man added to, rather than detracted from, Bud's feeling. A trapper, looking over a Northern empire that contained neither man nor dwelling, would have been less lonely.

"Even Judge Moore wouldn't expect me to stick now," Bud muttered. "I've a notion to——" He shook his head vigorously. "See this through, old kid, and the next tough proposition won't look as tough. Besides, there's Dresden and that old crook of a Preston who looks like Santa Claus. If the postmaster hadn't cleared out I'd send a letter home and tell 'em I'm now mayor of Agua Malo. That'd give 'em something to talk about."

Bud caught two abandoned burros and hauled all the good water remaining in camp to the claim. Then he began tearing down buildings and converting the boards into sluice boxes. The heavier timbers he cut up for fuel. Lastly he hauled a small boiler and pump down to the lake and set them up. He stoked the boiler; got up steam, and started the pump. As the first water rushed down his sluice boxes he tied down the boiler's whistle and let it blow until coyotes in the neighborhood hill howled mournfully.

Days trailed into weeks. Occasionally people, wishing to view the abandoned camp, stopped and discovered

Bud Tuttle. He fed them, but kept them off the claim. They could see a great hole in the bank, the heaps of tailings. Bud became a topic of conversation the length and breadth of the desert country. Some said the heat had got him and he was touched in the head. A deputy sheriff was sent and found a normal, hard-working boy, who refused to talk about what he was taking from the ground. The deputy brought letters. There were three from his mother, one of which told how proud she was that he had struck it. Another from Judge Moore stated that the man who had advanced the fifteen hundred dollars would expect it soon. Bud smiled bitterly. His mother proud of him; his backer expecting his money soon, and he working a salted claim! He sent letters back by sheriff's deputy and fell to work. He would have liked to have visited home if only for a day, but he had once shouted to a well-filled courtroom that he would not return until he had stepped into the Arctic Ocean. Somewhere the wind blew a door shut with a bang. Bud paused and listened. In the distance a coyote howled. "Wonder if this loneliness will get me before I beat this game," he muttered. "I'm talking a lot to hear my own voice lately." Then he drove the pick viciously into the bank. The worthless dirt cascaded down, the pump squeaked, and poison water poured into the sluice boxes.

Dangerous Dude Dresden had sent for Preston. "I've checked up, Preston," the gunman announced. "That kid's still at Agua Malo."

"So I hear. Crazy as the deuce."

"The sheriff's office says not. He's been there nearly two months, has picked up everything without cost, and has quite a plant. Can you think of any reason why he'd stay there if he wasn't taking gold out? Well, neither can I. You've a half interest and that'll give you the right to look into things. If he's got a mine, we want it. But keep it dark. If we can get control of everything there we'll start another stampede and unload buildings and equipment on the suckers. How soon can you start?"

"Right away!"

"Can you handle the kid?"

"Leave him to me." There was nothing kindly in the smile that spread over the old crook's face. "Leave him to me," he repeated.

When Preston arrived at Agua Malo he was accompanied by several of the Dresden gang. They saw a lone figure glance toward them, then disappear. They heard Bud's voice as the first man stepped foot on the property. "Get off and stay off!" he ordered.

"Now listen to me, Tuttle," Preston shouted, "I've a half interest in that claim and I have a right——"

"You've no interest whatever. You just sold me half to make it look good. You played me for a sucker. Well, I was, but wouldn't you like to know how it's turned out? I won't tell!"

"I'll get a court order——"

"Maybe you will, and maybe you won't. You haven't much of a standing. I've learned plenty about your gang. Do you think I'd be fool enough ever to work with you again Huh! Tell you what, Preston. I'll sell out at a fair price. Give me ten thousand and what I've taken from the claim, and I'll get out."

"What have you taken from the claim?"

"I won't tell. But I'll say this: If you work as hard as I have, you'll do as well."

"He's done all the dead work," whispered a man. "Look at the flume, pump, and boiler. Better grab it before he changes his mind. If he thinks it over and forgets how lonely he's been we'll have trouble. We can't jump this claim, the circumstances are too well known."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Preston said. "You claim you know all about us. Then you know we're tough. It's one against several any way you figure it. I'll give you five thousand to clear out."

Bud Tuttle pondered several moments. "I'll take that," he said.

"Be ready to gang him," Preston whispered, "when he comes into the open."

As Bud stepped into view, several guns covered him. Preston grinned. "Now get off that claim. We're going to see just what you've taken out," he said.

"Not so fast, Preston." Ballinger, a deputy sheriff, stepped into view. "Tuttle's no fool. He asked that a man be sent out in case you fellows came in force. I'll just collect those guns. Thanks!" He tossed the weapons into a sump. "Now we'll all go to Salt Hole and complete this deal. You short-carded Tuttle once and you're not going to do it again."

It was a strange procession that arrived at Salt Hole the evening of the fourth day. Preston and his men were leading, but not leading too far. Behind came Ballinger and Bud Tuttle. They stopped at the deputy's office. Presently a lawyer arrived and drew up certain papers. Then Bud Tuttle was paid five thousand dollars. He dashed to the telegraph office. "I'd like to send it all," he muttered, "but they think I've struck it rich. And for ma's sake and the sake of the man who backed me I've got to keep going until I do strike it rich. What a jolt Judge Moore and old Prentice will get when this arrives!" He sent twenty-five hundred to his mother, and two thousand to Judge Moore, with a message which read:

JUDGE MOORE: You distinctly said this was a loan, not a grubstake. But I regard it as a grubstake. I've sold the claim and this is my staker's share. BUD TUTTLE.

As Bud paid for the telegram, he glanced out of the office window and noticed that Preston was going through his packs. Bud said nothing but went to the nearest hotel for a good meal and the latest news. He ate slowly, and later settled down in the lobby to loaf. A boy from the telegraph office came looking for him. "A couple of messages, Tuttle," he said.

Bud glanced at the first, from his mother, then turned to the second. "Holy howlin' coyotes!" he exclaimed. The message read:

BUD TUTTLE: Many boys quit when they strike an obstacle and thus ruin their lives. We determined to make you or cure you. This explains my severe sentence. The fifteen hundred was a loan, not a grubstake. I should know, as I put up five hundred and got the rest from men around town. Balance returned. When are you heading for the Arctic Ocean to wet your feet? Regards from Gilman Center.

JUDGE MOORE.

In a daze Bud looked about the lobby. Preston had burst through the door. His face was purple. "Look here!" he roared. "We've searched your packs and you didn't bring any gold with you."

"I didn't have any to bring."

"What? Why, you crook, you sold us your half of the claim——"

"Just a minute," cut in the deputy sheriff. "This is the best thing that ever happened—a tenderfoot kid outguessing the Dresden gang. The whole West will be laughing, and it'll do you more good than a sentence in the pen. Read your deed over again. For the sum of five thousand dollars Bud Tuttle releases all rights to the claim and accepts the sum in full payment for labor performed in the erection of sluice boxes, machinery, and so forth. Now hurry and clear out before I throw you into the jail!"

Preston got control of his feelings before he did anything that merited ac-

tion by the deputy. "And you knew that was salted ground?" he demanded of Bud.

"Sure! Mike Porep told me a few days later."

"Then why did you stay?"

"Partly because I hoped to interest you enough so I could collect what you tricked me out of, but mostly because a wise old judge, a friend of mine back East, sentenced me to stick it out for sixty days, bless his old hide!"

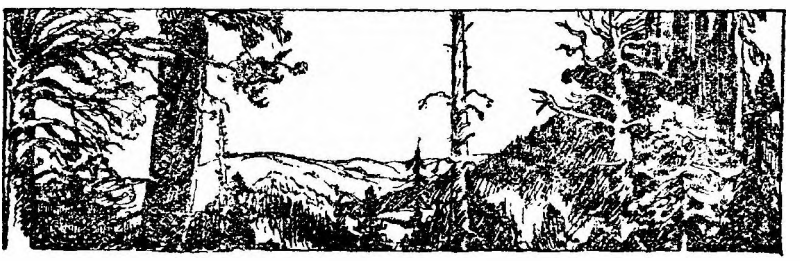
## A SCHOOL FOR FISHERMEN

EVERY one is familiar with the term, "a school of fish," and now we must become accustomed to the idea of a school for fishermen. An attractive course is being offered in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where officials of the biological board of Canada are producing for the Toronto market fish frozen in brine by a new method which is guaranteed to produce the flavor and texture of the product exactly as it is when taken from the sea. The course lasts for six weeks, and already nineteen fishermen from various parts of Canada are taking advantage of it. Three of the applicants come from New Brunswick and one from Prince Edward Island.

There are classes teaching the preparation of pickled fish, dry and boneless. In addition, students are instructed in the care and operation of motors, in navigation, elementary science, and a composite course under the general heading of "Natural Resources." Applicants for the course who are approved by the biological board are furnished with a round-trip railway ticket from their homes and the sum of forty-five dollars.

Fishing which has heretofore been acclaimed as an art and a pleasure, now formally takes its place among the sciences.

# Western Woods



## By D. C. Hubbard

### (Planting Conifer Seeds)

CONIFERS—pines, spruces, firs, and the like—serve a threefold purpose. They may be used for shade in summer, as a splendid windbreak in winter, and as for beauty, there is no all-year-round tree or shrub which can surpass them. It is not always convenient to have young trees transported from a nursery to the ranch or farm, and it is also often too expensive.

A preceding article described how to select conifer seed and its preparation for planting. To grow healthy trees, the soil must be deep, and well drained, and should be reasonably level. A good vegetable soil is a good tree soil. Sandy loam is preferable.

Because conifers must be transplanted, it is best to confine the early growing to a particular spot which is within easy reach of a sprinkling or irrigation system because water is one of the great essentials in getting best results.

The ground to be used should be spaded to a depth of about a foot, and all roots and rocks removed. Then with a rake it should be worked over until the dirt is fine and smooth. In a bed four feet by twelve feet, six or eight thousand seedling can be planted.

If the seed is to be sown in the spring, it is a good idea to soak it in water for about a week. Some of the red cedars will not sprout until the second spring or summer if measures are not taken to hasten germination. These particular kinds of seeds are covered with a sort of resinous pulp which can be soaked and rubbed off with the hands or brushes, or it can be put through a meat grinder, the teeth of which are coarse and will not crush the kernel. In the case of soaking, the good seed will sink to the bottom of the container, while the pulp and poor seed will float on top and may be skimmed off. Another system which is reported to be successful is to place the coated seeds in a gunny sack and place them in a manure vat throughout the winter. The heat and chemicals are said to eat off the pulp and when the seed is put into the ground the following spring, germination takes place easily. Also, the berries may be mixed with moist sand and buried out of doors from one fall until the second spring, and then planted. Any of these methods may be used, the object being to assist the seedling to sprout readily.

Some of the coniferous seeds, like firs and long-leaf pine, are thin-shelled and lose their vitality quickly. It is better to plant these in the fall, instead of holding them over the winter.

If the planter has not gathered his own seed and does not know whether the seed he has purchased is new or old, a simple examination will show him. Old seed is of little or no use. Usually,

if the kernel when cut in half is white, plump, and greenish or yellow in the center, the seed is good. It is well to cut two or three hundred seeds and examine them in this way. A still surer way is to place a few of the seeds on moist cloth or sand and give them about sixty days to sprout. An approximate percentage of productive seed can be estimated in this way.

Coniferous seed can be scattered over the bed or placed in drills. If in the latter, the drills should be four to six inches apart and nearly a half inch deep. In good soil, one hundred to one hundred and fifty seedlings may be grown to a square foot, but they must be transplanted in two years' time. If, because of unfavorable conditions or poor soil, the trees must be left for a period of three or four years, it is better to sow about half that number.

It is advisable to cover the fall sowing beds with some material, such as burlap, or even straw will do, which will keep the seed from being washed out by rains and pushed out of the ground because of expansion due to freezing and thawing. While hay may be used for a covering, it is less desirable than anything else, as it contains grass and weed seeds which must eventually be pulled out. As soon as the seeds commence to sprout, the covering can be removed.

A disease which comes to seedlings is called "damping off." It is caused by too much moisture, which makes the soil cold. However, the beds must be sufficiently moist to insure good growth. Plants affected with this disease become watery and limp.

Spruces, firs, cedars, and hemlocks are most susceptible to injury from the hot sun during the first few weeks of their life. A shade may be constructed by driving stakes into the ground on each side of the bed, and placing strings across, upon which brush, boards, or other material can be placed. In large nurseries, lathed frames are made for this purpose. The hot sun will not so quickly dry out the soil which is shaded. This protection need only be used when water is scarce. After the first year, the trees are strong enough to withstand the sun.

Whether it be animal life or vegetable life, the weak are destroyed by the strong, so that steps must be taken to protect that which cannot help itself. Live stock, mice, and birds are the enemies of the tender coniferous seedlings. Wire screens will even keep out the mice effectively.

As with all growing things, weeds must be taken out constantly. If the conifers are in drills, the extrication of weeds is simplified.

When a seedling is three inches high it may be two years old, although some grow even more in a year's time. When they reach this height it is time to transplant them. The reason for transplanting is to stimulate the root development and retard the growth of the tops. When growth is dormant, and preferably just before the rainy season, is considered the best time to transplant the young trees. In different sections of the country this condition is arrived at during varying seasons. It may be in late fall, early spring, and in some places, especially in the Southern States, winter is the best season to transplant the tree seedlings.

The transplant bed should be as carefully prepared as the first bed in which the conifer seeds are planted. The plants should be two inches apart, set in rows, and the rows six inches apart. The roots of the small trees are very long and tender, so that great care must be exercised in digging them up from the original bed, in order not to break them. This work should be done on a cloudy day, as the hot wind and sun will quickly dry up the sap in the roots and any further transplanting is useless, for the tree has been killed, even though its top still looks fresh and green. It is

best to move only a few plants at a time, and to water the new bed well.

An easy way to insure a straight row of transplants, beside being a quick method, is to take a board one inch in thickness, six inches in width, and six feet in length, and place deep, triangular notches along one edge, two inches apart. Place this board alongside the trench which has been dug to receive the new plants, with the notched edge slightly protuding over the open trench. Then place a plant in each groove or notch. The leaves will hold it in place while the root is allowed to dangle in the opening. The dirt which has been scooped out to make the trench may be quickly pushed back into the space left, securing the roots. Slip the board away, and the plants are firmly and neatly in place. Care must be taken to have the wall of the trench next to the board vertical, as the dirt is only pushed in from the opposite side, of course.

Aside from watering and protecting from live stock, the young transplants require little care, unless the winter is severe, when they should be mulched with leaves, straw, or some such material.

After about a year, the transplanted conifers may be removed to the site where they are to stay permanently. Some of the slower-growing species, such as spruces and firs, may require two years in the bed before it is safe to plant them where they must more or less shift for themselves. With a strong, healthy start, the long life of the conifer is assured.

## A HAVEN FOR THE HUNTED

WHILE much has been done to establish refuges for birds, the chief of the bureau of biological survey has recently made a plea for the development of additional refuge areas. The necessity for affording greater protection to the hunted from the hunters is becoming increasingly apparent to the authorities.

The interests of wild game are not to be neglected either. There is an eighty-three-thousand-acre haven for wild animals from deer to muskrat in the Upper Mississippi River wild-life refuge. Here the fur-bearing animals may roam in freedom and safety, while Federal rangers guard the tract from invasion and fires. The preserve extends along the Mississippi from Rock Island, Illinois, to the foot of Lake Pepin, Minnesota. Many deer have found freedom and safety in the refuge; muskrats have become so numerous that the wardens have had to remove many, and, in the past year, more wild ducks nested there than ever before.

The welfare of the wild life in the United States is the concern of Paul G. Redington, chief of the bureau of biological survey, and great progress in safeguarding wild game and birds has been made under his direction. Among other widely varying activities of the bureau are the establishment of a rabbit experiment station at Fontana, California, research work on the food of the English sparrow.

# Rattling Chains

## By Ray Humphreys

**Author of "Palmed Off," etc.**

"HERE'S a funny one," said Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista, picking up from his batch of morning mail a letter he had just opened. "I'll read it to yuh, Shorty—lissen:

"THE SHERIFF, Monte Vista, Colorado.

"DEAR SHERIFF: In a roundabout way, and while engaged on another case, we have learned that a man long a fugitive from the law is about to go to yuhr town to recover some buried treasure he has thar. We are wonderin' if yuh would be interested in employin' us to run down this man, recover the treasure, and thoroughly investigate the case? Our rates are ten dollars a day per operative. Respectfully yuhrs,

"THE DENCOLO PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY,
Denver."

"Shucks!" said "Shorty" McKay, the deputy sheriff.

"Shucks is my candid opinion, likewise," said the grizzled sheriff, tossing the letter into the wastebasket. "Them fool private detectives has been lissenin' to some cock-and-bull story from some hophaid or practical joker an' they has the nerve to ask us to pay 'em ten dollars a day to waste their time runnin' the hot air to earth."

"When I remarked 'Shucks!' a minnit ago, I didn't mean to shucks the whole matter entirely," put in Shorty complacently. "What I meant was that we didn't need no private detectives to tell us who that fugitive was or to help us ketch him, boss. I guess they ain't a doubt in the world but that they refers to Jefferies Brofman an' the money he is said to have buried——"

"My gosh an' twinklin stars!" exploded Sheriff Joe Cook, pounding the table with a clenched fist. "Why, o' course they does, Shorty, o' course! An' me fergettin' that case entire! By golly, I'm gettin' daffy in my ol' age! Jefferies Brofman, sure enough! The bird as built the haunted house an' then vamosed with the big pay roll o' the Squaw Mountain Mining Co., an' was never ketched?"

"Yep!" said Shorty. "Who else but?"

"Who else but!" grunted the sheriff, and he started to reach into the waste-basket to retrieve the private detectives' letter he had thrown away. But Shorty stopped him.

"Let that letter lay, boss," said Shorty; "I still say shucks to it as far as even answerin' it. We know enough to ketch our own meat, ef that Jefferies Brofman should show up to try to dig up any treasure he is supposed to have buried around here. Huh, he's sure took a long time to get up his nerve to come back after whatever he left!"

"Yeah," agreed the sheriff. "Wait a minnit—I think I remember seein' some data on that case in the ol' file Sheriff Ed Moore left here years ago. Yeah, here it is. Jefferies Brofman, secretary an' treasurer o' the Squaw Mountain Mining Co., disappeared night o' August 6, seven years ago, leavin' his fine home on Gopher Hill fully furnished an' unlocked, but apparently takin' with him, or concealin', more'n five thousand dollars in cash, the company's pay roll, an' cash receipts. Due search fer Brofman failed. House an' furnishin's turned over to mining company."

The sheriff looked at the date on the memorandum.

"He's been gone more'n thirty years," said the sheriff, shaking his head. "It's hard to believe that he could be comin' back now. He probably never buried that money nowhar, but took it, an' spent it, an' this buried treasure tale is all poppycock."

"I remember ol' Sheriff Moore tellin' me years ago, afore he died, about that case," said Shorty. "He had a lot more details he didn't write down. He was a pore writer. But I distinctly recalls that one reason they always thought Brofman had buried the dough around Monte somewhars was because he borrowed railroad fare from the station agent the night he left on the Fairplay train, an' las' trace they ever had o' him was whar he mooched a meal in Alma, way over in the South Park district."

Sheriff Cook nodded.

"Waal, mebbe so," he remarked softly. "Ef he comes we'll nail him, Shorty; we'll nail him darned quick! An' we might force him to kinda explain about that haunted house, too. Guess it is haunted all right—fer I remember the ol'-timers sayin' that even Brofman hisself was kinda scared o' livin' in it prior to his disappearance, an' the theory always was that they must have been a murder committed in it, years ago."

"That's the belief," said Shorty.

But the catching of Jefferies Brofman, once the respected secretary and treasurer of the Squaw Mountain Mining Co., was no easy job, it soon developed. In the first place, those who had known Jefferies Brofman in his dapper days of thirty years before, had either died, moved away, or had forgotten just what the man had looked like. There were no known pictures of Brofman in existence. That fact had hampered the sheriff of that time in sending out proper circulars for him. Not one of the old circulars which had given Brofman's description remained on file in the sheriff's office, it was found. The Squaw Mountain Mining Co., operating on a shoestring anyway, had failed after the theft of the money and the disappearance of Brofman; and though the county court awarded the company the Brofman home and its furnishings, they never took possession of the haunted house, and it had been left to the ravages of time.

The house, a great mansion of red sandstone, two stories and attic, with a large stable in the rear, was on Gopher Hill, just above the railroad yards. For years after the mysterious disappear-

ance of Jefferies Brofman it had been the nightly rendezvous of tramps. At some times of the year the place fairly swarmed with them and they became a nuisance. Shortly after Sheriff Cook and Shorty McKay had gone into office, however, the tramps disappeared from the "haunted house," scared away, it was whispered, by the return of the dormant ghost to roam the bleak old mansion.

There were those in Monte Vista, of course, who laughed at the idea of the place being haunted. But even the most skeptical had been convinced in time, for any one with good ears, approaching the house at midnight, could hear the clanking of chains through the upper rooms. Tramps shunned the place entirely now. It was known, and dreaded apparently, by every hobo in the West. Bats came to be its only occupants. The sheriff, in laying his plans to capture Jefferies Brofman on his return—if he did return—considered the old house carefully.

"Shorty," he said, two days after the Brofman matter had been first discussed, "I been thinkin' this Brofman case over kinda careful. Ef that bird returns we ain't gonna have no cinch knowin' him, seein' we ain't got no description o' him. Ol' Grandma Ames is about the only one who kin remember a blessed thing about him, seein' he was once engaged to her daughter, Sally Ann Ames, who later eloped to Denver with a hoss doctor. Missus Ames says Brofman was a lovely gent, havin' a kind look in his eye, curly hair, an' bein' fond o' readin' Shakespeare out loud on winter evenin's—but she don't remember the color o' his eyes nor hair, or whether he was tall or fat or what. She says he wasn't afraid o' nuthin'; that once he nearly died with scarlet fever; an' he liked pancakes somethin' awful, havin' almost et her outta house an' home when he was there a-courtin' her."

"A lotta help that is!" muttered Shorty.

"Yeah, so without us havin' nuthin' to go on I figger we got to do two things—one, watch the incomin' trains; an 'two, keep a eye on that Chipmonk Gulch between here an' Squaw Mountain."

"Why Chipmonk Gulch?" asked Shorty.

"Common sense," said the sheriff. "Ef he took that money from the minin' company safe up Squaw Mountain, as we know he did, whar would 'a' been a sweller place to ditch it—to cache it—than in one o' those twenty million caves along Chipmonk Gulch? A army never could search 'em all—a lot o' folks has searched in vain—but ef we see a strange hombre pokin' around thar now we kin safely bet that he may be Brofman, come back to git his loot."

"I don't think much o' that idea," said Shorty, "because——"

"Never mind addin' insult to injury," said the sheriff; "o' course yuh don't think much o' the plan, seein' it's my plan. But them's my orders, an' yuh'll carry 'em out. I want yuh to meet the airly mawnin' train from Alamosa each day, an' the afternoon train from Salida each day, inspectin' any suspicious passenger as gits off here; further, at least a coupla times a day take a ride through Chipmonk Gulch. I'll ride through it a coupla times a day, too. Further, I'll keep tab on the livery barns fer hombres ridin' in here on hossback; an' I'll keep a eye on the ol' works at Squaw Mountain—see?"

"Yeah!" said Shorty, without enthusiasm.

The next day Shorty failed to report for duty, sending word that he was sick in bed. When the second day found Shorty still in bed, the sheriff hustled out to his house, and found Eddie Owens, the druggist, there. Eddie answered the sheriff's questions.

"Shorty, he's a purty sick boy. Has a

high fever, away up over 104 las' time I took it. He has chills, too. An' he is jus' exhausted completely. He's been outta his haid, sheriff. We has had one awful time with him but we think that he is comin' around now."

"What has he got?"

"Chicken pox mebbe, or it might be colic," said the druggist; "yuh never kin tell how these diseases act. It could be mumps. He ain't coughin', so it couldn't be whooping cough. I wish it was. I got a dandy remedy fer it. However——"

"Has Shorty seen a doctor, Eddie?"

"He's seen me. I'm a druggist—ain't that enough?"

The sheriff backed off. No use in offending Eddie Owens, who was high in Monte Vista politics and who might prove annoying to the sheriff if the latter wasn't careful. The sheriff went away, grumbling, without having seen Shorty. Eddie had declared that Shorty was asleep and could not be disturbed. The sheriff, therefore, met the early train from Alamosa, likewise the late train from Salida, and also he rode up and down Chipmunk Gulch, keeping his eyes peeled; kept tab on the livery barns for stray wayfarers, and managed to check up on the abandoned mining property on Squaw Mountain. He repeated his tedious routine daily as Shorty failed to return, but there was no trace of the elusive Jefferies Brofman. The fugitive did not appear.

The sheriff dragged into town and met the late train on the fifth day of Shorty's illness. No suspicious character alighted. The sheriff went to Shorty's home, and this time he was able to see the patient. Shorty was in bed, having just awakened from a long sleep. He shook hands limply with his superior.

"Howdy, boss."

"How yuh feelin', Shorty?"

"Better," said the patient, pulling the bedclothes round him, but the sheriff, frowning, bent over the bed. He stared at Shorty in amazement. Shorty pulled the covers closer.

"What in heck, Shorty, yuh got yuhr clothes on in bed?"

"I been delirious," mumbled Shorty vaguely.

"Waal, I declare!"

The sheriff went away, shaking his head. Shorty was in a bad way apparently. The sheriff noticed that fully two dozen bottles—all empty—stood on the little table near Shorty's bed. The poor boy had evidently been trying everything that Eddie Owens, the druggist, suggested. The sheriff shivered in apprehension.

"Owens had a big early autumn sale o' household remedies," recollected the sheriff; "an' I'll bet he palmed off a lot o' that ol' junk on Shorty. To-morrow, by golly, I send Doc Healey over to see the pore boy, no matter what anybody thinks o' it!"

But Fate ruled otherwise. The sheriff, after a light supper—he was too weary to eat much—retired, but not for long. A pistol shot soon brought him upright in bed, and when the second shot echoed through the night the sheriff was at his bedroom window. He saw the flashes of the third and fourth shots almost before he heard the reports. The flashes were across the railroad tracks, fairly well up Gopher Hill and close to the haunted house. The sheriff hurriedly lit a lamp and pulled on his clothes, growling a worried explanation to his wife as he dressed.

"Something wrong up the hill, ma. I gotta go see—some one hurt mebbe. Thar's a heap o' shootin'. Don't worry. I'll be back soon as I kin. Mebbe it was jus' firecrackers—left over from the Fourth. I'll jus' take a look around fer a few minnits."

The sheriff, stepping out into the night, had his gun in his right hand. He knew that the reports he heard and the flashes of flame he had seen did not

come from exploding firecrackers. He advanced carefully down through the bushes toward the railroad track. A light blinked in the depot a quarter of a mile away, but the drowsy operator there had either not heard the shooting or else had been afraid to venture out. The sheriff wondered what time it was, and if the eleven o'clock Denver freight had gone through. But he plodded on, crossed the tracks, and started up Gopher Hill, determined to investigate fully.

"Them flashes were danged near the ol' haunted house," he grunted, as he picked his way along. "I ain't hankerin' to get too near that confounded place —but dog-gone it all, ghosts don't shoot revolvers! Danged funny, that shootin' up here this time o' night."

A shadow rose out of a bush just ahead of the sheriff.

"Careful thar!" cried the sheriff, who had not been taken by surprise. "I got a gun on yuh—whoever yuh are. What's the idear o' all this racket an' raisin' Cain up here, eh?"

The sheriff advanced cautiously. The shadow, taking the form of a man with lifted hands, answered.

"Nuthin'. Who are yuh?"

"I'm the sheriff," said Cook, poking closer to his quarry; "an' I might ask who are yuh, brother?"

"Aw, I'm jus' a bo," exclaimed the stranger wearily. "I was tired an' I drapped off that freight through here a hour ago. I thought I'd flop in this ol' house but somebody kept disturbin' me."

"Yeah?"

"Yes, makin' a lot o' noise. So finally I got kinda scared, an' I beat it; but I took a coupla shots."

"A lot o' good them shots did yuh!" said the sheriff, in a hushed tone. "That's a haunted house, man, an' tramps generally avoid it as they does work. Yuh heard chains rattlin', mebbe?"

"Yes—sounded like that; but I ain't scared o' no ghost, ef that's what it is. I'll go back thar an' flop."

The sheriff put a detaining hand on the man's arm.

"Don't be foolish," said the sheriff. "They say that joint has been queer fer years. I don't want no more shootin', an' yuh kin find a place down the hill to sleep."

"I gotta bum foot," whined the man, "an' I planned to lay over here coupla days. Don't mind me, I'm sorry I disturbed yuh——"

"Don't either o' yuh move or I shoot!" came a sudden sharp warning from behind a tree not five feet from where the sheriff and the tramp stood. The hobo almost jumped out of his skin, but the sheriff, scared as he was, recognized the voice.

"Shorty! What in thunder——"

"Oh, that yuh, sheriff?"

"Yes. What in holy smoke——"

"Nuthin'," said Shorty, stepping out from behind the tree. "I was jus' up here ketchin' a breath o' fresh air, an' I heard yuh two fellers talkin', so I came along to investigate."

"Yuh're delirious, Shorty!" cried the sheriff. "Yuh up here ketchin' some fresh air at this time o' night! Yuh'll ketch yuhr death o' cold instead, that's what! Yuh've been in bed five days with a high fever, an' here yuh're foolin' around in the cool air! Yuh'd better skip fer home, Shorty, right now."

"Aw, in a minnit. Who is yuhr friend here, boss?"

"A tramp, Shorty. Yuh better start fer home——"

"A tramp, eh?" said Shorty. "Oh, sure, I remembers him now. He was in the haunted house, a-prowlin' all around."

"Was yuh thar, Shorty?" asked the amazed sheriff.

"Oh, sure, I was prowlin' around thar, too. I guess mebbe I kinda scared the gent here. Anyway, he ran out an'

took a coupla sets o' shots at the house as he blowed——"

The sheriff interrupted.

"Shorty, yuh're delirious. Yuh prowlin' around that cold ol' house, sick as yuh are! Yuh go on home right now."

"Yeah," said Shorty, "I'll go home directly, but fust I gotta painful duty to perform, boss. I gotta tell yuhr friend thar that I puts him under arrest. Oh, keep yuhr hands up, brother, I got yuh covered nice. Here, let me slip the bracelets on yuh. That's the ticket! Now we're off fer jail——"

"Wait a minnit," interposed Sheriff Cook. "I don't git this, Shorty; this man is jus' a tramp."

"Oh, sure," said Shorty, "but he's the man I jus' scared outta the haunted house! He's the fust tramp that has had nerve to go in thar in a long time. I oughter know. I keep purty close tab on it. Yuh see, when we took office, boss, yuh told me to keep the tramps outta the ol' rendezvous, an' I figgered I would have to stay up every night o' the year to do that ef I didn't work out a better scheme, so I got some ol' trace chains an' I entered the ol' house by a tunnel from the big barn in the rear, an' I'd walk around the upper floor, draggin' an' jinglin' the chains, an' purty soon tramps quit comin' thar."

"Yuh mean yuh was the ghost, Shorty?" cried the amazed sheriff.

"Yes—jus' that; an' I ain't sick neither, boss. That sick business was all a sham to give me time to work at nights. I been workin' the last five nights, waitin' up here in the haunted house fer a visitor. I couldn't see yuhr idear o' ketchin' Jefferies Brofman at the station, seein' we didn't know him; an' I couldn't figger why the bird would 'a' hid anything in Chipmonk Gulch ef he had a big house like he did an' could o' buried it deep in the basement an' no one likely to disturb him or ever find it. I figgered ef Brofman ever did come back, he'd come back to the haunted house—an' he did!"

"What?"

"Yeah—that's Brofman thar with my handcuffs on him. I caught him tonight as he was diggin' in the basement with a shovel an' usin' a shrouded lantern fer light. He ran as I come along jinglin' my chains an' I scared him so bad he lost his haid an' took a few shots at me. Later, I guess—as I heard him tell yuh—he decided he'd stick around a few days an' git a chance at the buried loot ag'in. Brofman, whatever made yuh bury that loot in the fust place?"

The shadow answered readily, in a sad voice:

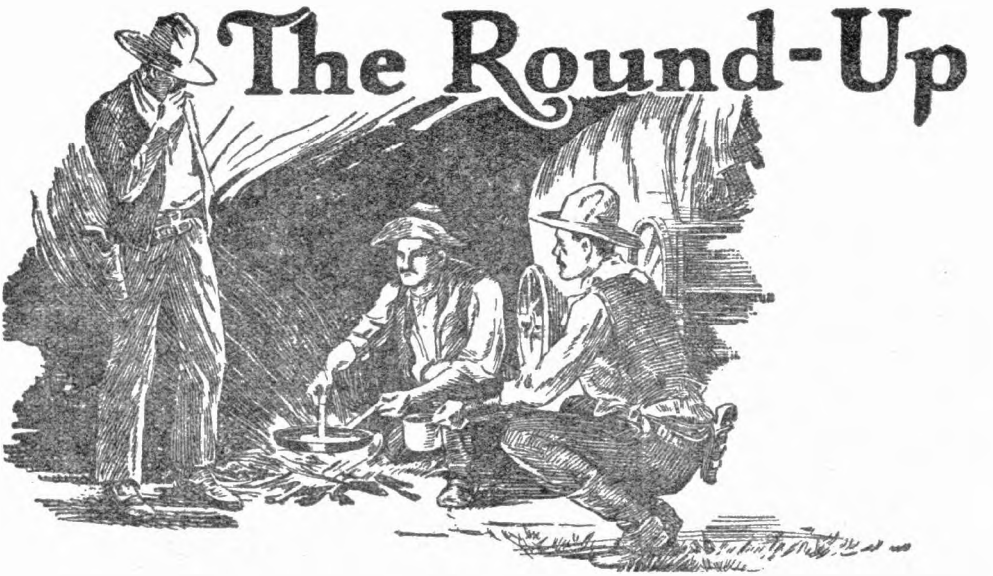
"I dunno. I was scared. Yuh see, I built the house expectin' to marry Sally Ann Ames. She jilted me. I stole the money later, after careful plannin'. It was all in silver an' too heavy fer me to git away then. I had planned to return later—in a year or two—to git it. I had started the ghost story about the place purposely beforehand to keep folks away. I buried the stuff deep—away down seven feet or more—whar I knowed it would be safe. I got to Denver, got in a little jam thar, an' went to the pen—fer murder—fer life. I jus' got paroled a coupla weeks ago."

Sheriff Cook cleared his throat.

"I guess yuh'll go back to the pen fer robbery purty soon, Brofman," said the sheriff, "an' ef I had my say I'd send Eddie Owens, a druggist, along with yuh. It's bad enough to have yuhr own deputy fibbin' to yuh an' puttin' one over on yuh, but to have a dog-gone druggist pullin' the wool over yuhr eyes at the same time is jus' too much! Eddie tellin' me Shorty was bad sick an' recountin' all the diseases he might have! Kin yuh imagine that Mister Brofman, an' me fallin' fer the whole bamboozle?"

Brofman did not answer. His thoughts were elsewhere.

# The Round-Up



FOLKS, it seems, accordin' to William Neil, Monohan, Washington, that we went and let somethin' get into your magazine that wasn't quite right. On the contrary, it was quite wrong. Let Bill slip into the saddle and set us straight:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I saw in the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE a story entitled 'The Kodiak Mystery Solved.' It tells about Father Hubbard's exploring Kodiak Island and finding a vast glacier in the interior and a lake fifty miles wide.

"Now, I am well acquainted with Kodiak Island and have been over a large part of it. There are no glaciers on the island, while the suggestion of a lake fifty miles wide is surely a joke. The island is only one hundred miles long by sixty miles wide, and, at many points, there are bays which go inland twenty miles. The highest mountains are only about four thousand feet, and the snow all melts in the summer.

"There are more bears in the interior than upon the coast; and bear is the only native game there, besides white grouse bear, which have been shot weighing twenty-two hundred pounds, otter, fox, and weasel. The Government has imported thirty-six native deer from Juneau, also beaver and muskrat. There is a herd of reindeer on the southern end of the island, some timber in the valleys, and grass, from three to five feet high, all over the island. It would be a good place for stock. As a matter of fact, the Government has a small herd of cattle at the town of Kodiak, on the eastern side. In the winter zero is about the weather limit.

"I thought that I ought to tell you the truth about the island."

"A. T. F." says: "Here is a clipping from *The Idaho Statesman*, Boise, Idaho, which will be of interest as a result of the controversy concerning the speed of the antelope.

"Keep up the good work; arguments bring out many interesting and instructive points. I have seen many antelopes in my day, but have never had the experience of trying to run one down.

"I'll now read the clipping:

"An antelope that sped fifty miles an hour down the road in competition with a fast modern motor car was the subject of a tale related recently by J. D. Wood, commissioner of public works.

"Wood, en route to California through Nevada, was startled as the animal leaped from the brush and raced alongside the road, attempting to cross in front of the car. The commissioner leaned gracefully on the accelerator, and the car moved ahead, gathering speed. So did the antelope.

"The needle on the speedometer crept to fifty, and yet the antelope angled across the road and disappeared far ahead of the car, flipping his white tail in derision for the slow-poke mortals along the road."

Folks, we are always mighty glad to have any one of you, or any number of you, catch us up when we slip. But here comes Charles F. Taylor, Jr., druggist, Bowling Green, Kentucky, who *thinks* that George Gilbert went and put his foot into it good. We'll let him have his say, and then we'll have ours:

"DEAR BOSS: George Gilbert uses the word 'whicker' in his story, 'The Longhorn Queen,' in describing the neigh or whinny of a horse. I have looked in all sorts of dictionaries and find Gilbert has no authority whatever for the word 'whicker.' Even 'poetic license' won't stand for this."

Charles, old boy, you didn't look in all of the dictionaries. You missed about the most important one, too, Charles. We refer to Webster's "New International Standard Dictionary." If you'd looked into that great work, Charles, you'd have found, on page 2326: "Whicker: To neigh; whinny, bleat; also, snigger." Guess that lets George Gilbert out and Charles Taylor in.

Tell you how it is, Charles. You'd find, if you edited newspapers and magazines for thirty years, as we have done, that a mighty lot of funny words that you never heard of and didn't believe existed kept cropping up—"aint-no-sech-animile" stuff. But, Charles, it's mighty seldom—if ever—that we fail to find that strange and, to us, unheard-of word when we take a squint into the dictionary.

Looks as though we've gone and slipped again. Made a big noise about it this time, too. Just hark to this, that Cyril McEvoy, 798 Beatty Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, is going to touch off.

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Any one who has handled dynamite for a number of years knows that it is as tricky as a birch-bark canoe. One never can tell what it is going to do. Clinton Dangerfield probably knows what he writes about, when we consider the fact that venders of dynamite publish precautionary measures for the purchaser's benefit. It has been my experience that we must not use a metal tool to make the aperture in the side of a stick or inserting the fuse and cap. It must be a wooden peg.

"We are warned against laying sticks around a fire to thaw them out in the winter time. As a matter of fact, I have seen sixty-per-cent sticks in such a condition, in hot weather, that the scratch of a pin would set them off; and, again, in the cold weather I have seen frozen dynamite burn up without exploding. You take a big chance when you clamp the sides of the cap to the fuse with your teeth—a common as well as dangerous habit.

"My advice is to read your Government bulletins on the subject and be careful. The measures for safety imposed by the Government on the manufacturer are carried out so much more meticulously than by the average lone prospector that it is obvious that a factory inspector is not a qualified authority."

Suppose we stop and have a song, right here and now. We're always glad to do just that, workin' or playin'. What say we make it:

**THE TEXAS COWBOY.**

Oh, I am a Texas cowboy,
Far away from home;
If ever I get back to Texas
I never more will roam.

Montana is too cold for me
  And the winters are too long;
Before the round-ups do begin
  Our money is all gone.

Take this old hen-skin bedding,
  Too thin to keep me warm—
I nearly freeze to death, my boys,
  Whenever there's a storm.

And take this old "tarpoleon,"
  Too thin to shield my frame—
I got it down in Nebraska
  A-dealin' a monte game.

Now, to win these fancy leggins
  I'll have enough to do;
They cost me twenty dollars
  The day that they were new.

I have an outfit on the Mussel Shell,
  But that I'll never see,
Unless I get sent to represent
  The Circle or D. T.

I've worked down in Nebraska,
  Where the grass grows ten feet high
And the cattle are such rustlers
  That they seldom ever die.

I've worked up in the sand hills
  And down upon the Platte,
Where the cowboys are good fellows
  And the cattle always fat.

I've traveled lots of country—
  Nebraska's hills of sand,
Down through the Indian Nation
  And up the Rio Grande.

But the Bad Lands of Montana
  Are the worst I ever seen;
The cowboys are all tenderfeet
  And the dogies are too lean.

If you want to see some bad lands,
  Go over on the Dry;
You will bog down in the coulees
  Where the mountains reach the sky.

A tenderfoot to lead you
  Who never knows the way,
You are playing in the best of luck
  If you eat more than once a day.

Your grub is bread and bacon,
  Your coffee black as ink;
The water is so full of alkali
  It is hardly fit to drink.

They will wake you in the morning
  Before the break of day,
And send you on a circle
  A hundred miles away.

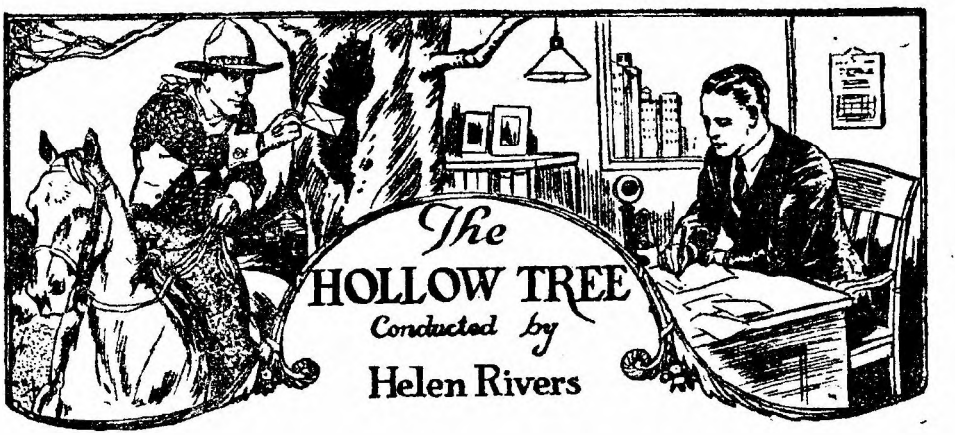
All along the Yellowstone
  'Tis cold the year around;
You will surely get consumption
  By sleeping on the ground.

Work in Montana
  Is six months in the year:
When all your bills are settled
  There is nothing left for beer.

Work down in Texas
  Is all the year around;
You will never catch consumption
  By sleeping on the ground.

Come, all you Texas cowboys,
  And warning take from me,
And do not go to Montana
  To spend your money free.

But stay at home in Texas,
  Where work lasts the year around
And you will never catch consumption
  By sleeping on the ground.




**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.**

WEST of the Front Range is the Cripple Creek country in the Rockies of Colorado. Old-timers rode the range when the Cripple Creek country was a cow layout, before the gold-rush days.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Howdy, folks. Can a hard-rock miner stop a while at the old Holla? I have been a cow-puncher, rancher, and now I am back at the old mining game in Cripple Creek, Colorado, the greatest little gold camp on earth. I am engaged in the most dangerous work of mining, which is sinking a shaft—and I like the work better than cow-punching or ranching.

Cripple Creek is located in the central part of Colorado, just west of what is known as the Front Range. It is about forty miles west of Colorado Springs, a little over a hundred miles southwest of Denver, and about eighty-five miles northwest of Pueblo. The town gets its name from a creek that heads in the northwest part of town and flows through the main part of the camp. Old-timers say that when the camp was a cow layout the cattle would graze along the creek banks and a lot of the dogies would bog down in the swamps and the cowboys would have to snake them out. Of course, a good many of the dogies would get crippled in the attempt to snake them out, and that's how the creek got its name.

I was born in Cripple Creek in '95, and can remember the camp's wild, glorious days. Gold was first discovered here in '85. Moffat, who later built the railroad west of Denver, opened up a vein on Red Mountain and hauled the ore to Denver with ox teams. A little later a strike was made at Cripple Creek proper, and it was discovered that the gold was coated with quicksilver. Then the big rush was on. The Cripple Creek district is about eight by ten miles in extent. There were several strikes near the creek, and many more scattered over the hills in the district. Bull Hill, famous for its part in the trouble known as the Bull Hill war, was the main rich ore-bearing hill. There were others that were rich in the yellow metal, too—Gold Hill, Tenderfoot Hill, Carbonate, Mineral, and Signal Hills.

There is no gold-rush stampede at Cripple Creek now, but as gold mining is looking up these days there is much activity here in the old prospector's stamping ground. Old mines are being reopened and new ones started. The major part of the mining is being done by companies, although there are lots of small outfits at work, too. The old-time prospector is to be seen testing out various locations in the hills. I sure like the thrill of the mining game. You may be rich any morning, when you go to see the result of your last shot of dynamite.

Although Cripple Creek is now a mining camp, and the old range days of the cow-

boy are not likely to return to Cripple Creek country, there are plenty of ranches in the near-by districts, and they are among the most beautifully located outfits in the world. I did my ranching east of Colorado Springs, and the last place I wrangled was on a spread twelve miles east of that city. The Lazy V Diamond spread and the Reverse K Quarter Circle outfit are large ranches in this country.

Hunting and fishing are fine in this part of the range. Deer, elk, mountain sheep, mountain lion, wild cat, bobcat, and lynx are hunted in the mountain country. Now, folks, who'll yarn with this hard-rock miner hombre? JACK KIRK.

320 East Eaton Avenue, Cripple Creek, Colorado.

## Range of the Sawtooth.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live at a mining camp in a range of the Sawtooth Mountains, about twenty-five miles from the main Salmon River, in Custer County, central Idaho. At this camp they mine silver, zinc, and lead. There is a tram line running from the mine to the mill camp, a distance of four miles, and over this line the ore is hauled into the mills. The nearest town is Mackay, with a population of about five hundred. Our mining camp is located in a canyon about a mile in width and about two miles long. The south side of the canyon is covered with pine trees, and although on the north it is rather bleak and forbidding, the high ledges are beautifully colored. There are many lakes, the Frog, Red Fish, Livingston, and many smaller ones. There are many ranches near here, too—cattle and sheep ranches.

I will be very glad to get letters from the girls of the Gang, and will tell about the mountains, mines, and ranches of the Northwest. I'll be glad to exchange snapshots, too. FLO, OF THE PINES OF IDAHO.

Care of The Tree.

## Prospectors and cow-punchers, please take notice.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a hombre who is trekking West in the not-too-far-off future, and I'm especially interested in the southern Utah, northern Arizona, and eastern Nevada sections of the West. I sure would appreciate it if you cow-punchers and prospectors who live in that part of the country would shoot a few letters along.

JERRY FULLEM.

2425 Woodbrook Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.

## Arizonan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Arizona is the "gold" spot of America. I have been in Wyoming, Montana, Missouri, Iowa, Kentucky, and several other States, but old Arizona will always be my home. I can tell about Arizona's desert stretches and about the mountain country, too. I have pretty nearly covered this big State of ours. I'm waiting to hear from all the girls of the old Hollow Tree Gang.

PATSY HOLBROOK.

Route 1, Box 104, Phoenix, Arizona.


**Cripple Creek is the old cow country that turned into a stampede camp. Old-time cowboys and hard-rock miners will be eager to yarn with you about this stamping ground of the old-timers. A friend-maker badge will introduce you to the old-time hombres of the Cripple Creek country.**

**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.**

## Live Oak.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live nearly as far West as the West goes, and can tell about our sunny California to any one who cares to write. I hope to hear from English-speaking women of all the foreign countries, for I would like to exchange scenic cards with folks of other countries. I am twenty-one, folks, and married.

MRS. LIANE A. WEBER.

Live Oak, California.

## High in the Sierras.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Nine miles from the town of Downieville, high in the Sierras, I have my home. Here there is wild game aplenty, and wonderful trout fishing. I would like to exchange a few friendly letters with some of the hombres between twenty and thirty. I am twenty-eight myself. Hombres hailing from the South and the Southwest and the Spanish hombres will be especially welcome. SIERRA HOMBRE.

Care of The Tree.

Hoosier.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Thorntown is quite a thriving town of about fifteen hundred folks, and is one of the prettiest little towns in the old Hoosier State. Now, I'll wager you-all don't know how Indiana came to be called the Hoosier State. Well, back in the pioneer days when some one knocked on the door of a pioneer home, the pioneer would get his gun and, approaching the door, would call out: "Who's 'ere?" And that was shortened to "Hoosier." I am a young hombre of eighteen summers, and I'll undertake to answer all questions about the Hoosier State to the best of my ability, folks. So come along, pronto. ROBERT ANDERSON.

Thorntown, Indiana.

"I have wandered around quite a bit in the last two or three years and have covered practically every State west of the Mississippi. I am a great lover of the outdoors and certainly like the West, with its mountains, wide plains, and great white deserts. At present I am located at Tucson, Arizona, and am looking for a lot of Pen Pals, especially from the Western States. Let's get acquainted, muy pronto, folks." Address A. W. H., Box 878, Tucson, Arizona.

"Is there room in the old Holla for a lonely daughter of sunny Spain? I am seventeen and a lover of all outdoor sports. I came from Spain four years ago, and am now living in Idaho. I have also been in New Mexico," says Juanita Mari. Her address is Box 151, Boise, Idaho.

"I am twelve years old and very much interested in outdoor life. I can saddle a horse *muy pronto*, and can ride one pretty fast. I have lived in Imperial Valley for twelve years, and now I am hoping that we will move somewhere in Wyoming or Montana to a ranch some day." This Gangster hombre is Robert Juvenal, Brawley, California.

"I live in the good old State of Oklahoma," says Norene White, Box 794, Thomas, Oklahoma. This Gangster has also lived in New Mexico and can tell you-all a good deal about the Western States. She will exchange snaps with all who write.

"Maybe there are some Hollow Tree Gangsters in Melbourne, Australia, folks, and if so I'd sure appreciate hearing from some of them," says Marian Flynn, 16 Shealey Avenue, Brockton, Massachusetts.

"We are tired of the cold winters of the Northwest and would like to hear from some of the folks who live in sunny Imperial Valley of southern California. Won't some of the folks who live in the vicinity of El Centro drop us a line?" This Sister Gangster is Mrs. M. Arnold, 214 South Lacey Street, Spokane, Washington.

"We are living in Washington, but would like to move to Montana, Idaho, or to some higher and dryer climate. We have farmed in both prairie and bush countries. We have two children, both of school age, and we would appreciate hearing from some of the married folks of the Gang who can help us to work out our problems with a little of their advice." Address your letters, folks, to Mrs. Almer Sellsted, Kelso, Washington.

"I live way up here in Wyoming, at the edge of the foothills of the Rockies," says Dorothy Elwood. This Gangster's address is Glendo, Wyoming.

"Here's a hombre who'd like to join the old Holla and make as many Pen Pals as possible. I'm at present at Port Armstrong, Alaska, where we get mail only once a week. I'll be glad, folks, to answer any questions about this part of the North country." Address your letters to Arthur Johnson, Port Armstrong, Alaska, folks.

"I am a Londoner, and have lived here for the entire twenty-seven years of my life," says Alfred T. Young. This hombre's address is 11 Ryland Road, London, N. W. 5, England. He will exchange snaps, post cards, and newspapers with any one.

# 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.**

LANDSEEKERS are a mighty numerous tribe, judging from the letters in our mail bag. One of the last of this group to be heard from is John MacQ., of Sussex, England, who is sort of anxious to join the Canadian homesteaders and is asking for some advice along this line. "In a recent issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE I notice that you offer to give some information about homestead lands in Alberta," writes John. "Now I hope, Mr. North, that you don't object to favoring me that a way. I got sidetracked from Texas way back in 1914 and have been here most of the time since. But I've got a hunch—and she's growing powerful strong—that this here ain't no kind of country for a feller to live and take his beans in.

"I've been considering Alberta for some time, but ain't got no real 'clost to home' particulars, and that's why I'm writing to you. You see, I'm married now and have to look for a landing some place before I jump, instead of afterward, which is the way I used to work it. We ain't so awful particular about being close to the railroad. Anywhere where hawses ken drag a waggin will suit us. But I'm sure partial to trees, so let there be a few standing around, please."

After thinking John's case over at some length I've decided that with his pioneer tendencies he might be interested in the Waterhole District of Northern Alberta. The first real settlement of this section began back in 1910 when a number of hardy pioneers arrived overland from Edmonton, via Grouard and Peace River Crossing, with loaded sleighs drawn by bull teams. During the next four years many newcomers followed these hardy settlers and splendid progress was made. Then the war came along and sort of put a crimp into things, as there was a general exodus of the young and sturdy men.

Along about this time railroad building came to a standstill, too, fortunately, however, not before steel had been laid as far as Peace River Crossing and a

large steel bridge built across the river at that point. There the railway ended until 1921, when thirty-two miles of the Canadian Central Railway were built to Berwyn. Meanwhile, the district had been making steady headway, and during the years when Berwyn was "end of steel," many thousands of bushels of wheat and oats were hauled there for loading, besides large numbers of hogs and cattle marketed through that point.

Another burst of energy brought the railway to Whitelaw, thirteen miles southwest of Berwyn, and it is certain that before long railway facilities will be extended right into the center of the most intensively farmed portion of the Peace River Country.

Now that I come to think of it, John, did opine that he wasn't so powerful keen about railroads anyhow, but I think when it comes to the point he'll find them sort of handy to have around. Maybe he will be interested to know that the name Waterhole originated from a small natural reservoir or ravine, where the first settlers watered their stock in the early days. The name was bestowed upon the first hamlet in that section, and to-day Waterhole is the main trading point of this district.

The Waterhole District is a plateau or table-land, nine hundred feet above the river and about two thousand feet above sea level. The surface of this plateau is level park land, broken here and there by ravines or coulees which extend back from the river for several miles. These provide excellent drainage by allowing surplus water to run off quickly in the spring, thereby enabling the land to be worked very soon after the spring thaw. They are also made use of by the farmers for storing water by way of dams.

For some distance from the river and also from the coulees it is deep to water, so that so far water is obtained by digging reservoirs or by making dams. A few miles farther back water may be obtained by dug or drilled wells.

As John acknowledges a fondness for trees, he will be glad to hear that the northern part of the Waterhole District is covered with timber which rises into the Cedar Hills. There are several lumber mills established in this timber belt, and excellent building materials are available at very reasonable prices. The lumber is mostly spruce and jackpine. For a small fee a permit can be obtained from the Agent of the Dominion Lands, Peace River, to cut fence posts, building logs, and firewood.

And now for a few words about that important item, the climate. During some winters very cold weather has prevailed for short periods. Generally speaking, however, the winters are milder than in either Manitoba or Saskatchewan. There are no blizzards and the snowfall is usually moderate, sufficient for sleighing only.

The soil is a deep clay loam, practically inexhaustible and very drought-resisting, remarkably uniform throughout the whole district. It is free from stones, gravel, potholes, and muskeg. The main crops so far are wheat and oats, although vegetables and small fruit do well. Hog raising has been a profitable line and has been followed extensively. Sheep raising is gaining headway and promises steady growth. The total absence of disease in live stock, has resulted in a good grade of all classes, and the horses throughout the district are particularly fine.

John will find a main highway through the Waterhole District from Dunvegan to Peace River, over which "hawses" have no trouble in dragging a "waggin." This is a standard dirt highway maintained by the provincial government and it is kept in good shape. There are post offices at the following points: Waterhole, Whitelaw,

Bluesky, Lothorp, Friedenstal, Erin Lodge, Red Star, Vanrena, and Dunvegan. Thirteen rural public schools are operating.

Prices on farm lands in this district range from six dollars to thirty-five dollars per acre, according to location and improvements. Parcels of land consist of from one hundred and sixty acres to nine hundred and sixty acres of well-improved, semi-improved, and raw lands. All prospective purchasers are advised to come and look everything over before buying. Reports from that section state that there are millions of acres of good arable agricultural and grazing lands available for settlement north of the Peace River, from sixteen miles north and west of Waterhole to the mountains.

Well, we got so enthusiastic about this subject that we talked more than we intended to, and here is another landseeker waiting around for information. "I'm interested in Montana, Mr. North," says Sam G., of Baltimore, Maryland, "and would like to know what opportunities a chap would have out that way, especially along farming lines. Can you give me some information as to what crops are raised, how land sells, and how wages are?"

We are going to answer Sam by quoting part of a letter we have just received from a hombre out in Winifred, Montana. This citizen of the Treasure State says: "Now, Mr. North, there are some wonderful opportunities out here in different lines, especially in farming. We raise nearly everything they do in Illinois, Iowa, or any place in the Middle West. Land is cheap out here, ranging in price from three dollars an acre up. I have seen farms paid for with the first crop. There are still some homesteads to be taken, but one can buy cheaper than one can prove up on one. If you are a renter back East, believe me, son, you can do well by coming West. Wages are good in Butte, Great Falls, or in any of the larger towns.

"I will be glad to correspond with any one desiring information and all questions will be cheerfully answered."

Here's a chance for you hombres who are interested in settling out in the Treasure State to get some first-hand facts. Address your letters to Montana Tom, in care of this department.

The wonders of the West are never-ending, as Walter H., of Portland, Maine, has discovered. "I'm interested in knowing about the famous prehistoric ruins out in the vicinity of the Moapa and Virgin Rivers in southeastern Nevada, Mr. North. What can you tell me about them?"

Thanks to one of Uncle Sam's recent bulletins we know that the land on which these ruins are, has been temporarily withdrawn from settlement, as the advisability of including all or part of it within a national monument is being considered. Within the valley of the Moapa River, tributary to the Virgin River, which will be a part of the reservoir when the Colorado is dammed, Walter will find vestiges of early man in America in virtually every significant stage of his development. There are at least two known caves containing evidences of occupation by the first peoples archæologists have thus far identified—the Basket Makers, a nomadic tribe who in their earliest stages knew neither the use of the bow and arrow, the making of pottery, nor the art of agriculture.

Here, too, are the remains of the Pueblo people in an early stage of their civilization, as evidenced by the characteristic pottery of the period. The most spectacular antiquities of the valley, however, are the large villages of clay, wood, and stone made by the Pueblo people some thousand years ago. Of these the best known is the so-called Lost City, or Pueblo Grande de Nevada. This Indian village at one time had several thousand inhabitants.

# 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 grant 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," or extra, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

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**CARMODY, ROBERT.**—Twenty-six years old. Last heard from six years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. A. E. Carmody, 228 North Custer Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

**WILSON, MOLLIE.**—Last seen in 1899, in Napoleon, Ohio. Please write to an old friend, Mrs. Mary Files, 2047 West Forty-eighth Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

**BILL.**—Dad has moved to West Palm Beach. Important news for you. Please write to Hunter, 6241 North West First Place, Miami, Florida.

**ENBANK, S. J.**—Building contractor and mining prospector. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, four years ago. Information appreciated by I. H. H., care of this magazine.

**McINVALE, JOHN W.**—Was discharged from the United States navy, at Pensacola, Florida, in 1923. Lived for some time in Pensacola. Information appreciated by W. D. Cooper, 1095 Madison Avenue, Athens, Georgia.

**SCHWIER, BERT.**—Married B. H. in St. Louis, in 1910. They separated in 1913. Please write to B. H., care of this magazine.

**PATTERSON, A. B.**—My letters to Somer returned. Cannot understand your silence. Please write to Hilly, care of this magazine.

**KUANDART, MRS.,** nee **MARTHA MILES,** and brothers, **GEORGE** and **BILL.**—Information appreciated by her son, George Kuandart, 1602 South Seventeenth Street, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

**MacDONALD, ALLEN J.**—Little Allen keeps asking for you. My letters to New York were returned. Please write to Cassie and the kids, at the same address, or care of this magazine.

**SERGEANT GORDON.**—Was in the Sixteenth Infantry, at El Paso, Texas. Please write to Vi, care of this magazine.

**JAKE.**—Charley died in May. I am still at the same address. Please come home or write to M. L., care of this magazine.

**BARTRAM, WILLARD.**—You were not told the truth. Please write to C. C., care of this magazine.

**SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.**—Fifty-five years old. Formerly of Jackson, Michigan. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Alice Scott Hankins, Route 2, Jackson, Michigan.

**PEEK, WILMA.**—Twenty-six years old. Lived in Tecumseh, Nebraska, fifteen years ago. Left there for Kewanee, Illinois, with our mother. Later heard from in Wichita, Kansas; St. Louis, Missouri, and, in 1927, was in Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Zola Peek Williams, 3007 West Fifty-sixth Street, Chicago, Illinois.

**KOLATOR, EDWARD.**—Tall, light complexion. Left home five years ago. Believed to be in Newark, New Jersey. All is forgiven. Please come home or write to your mother, 477 Miller Street, Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

**PIERCE, JACK.**—I am ill and want you. Jackie cries for you all the time. The Carrs, in Verguso City, will know where I am. Please come home or write to Jo, care of this magazine.

**HEWITT, HARLAN.**—Important news for you. Please write at once to Alma Hewitt, 1176 Louisiana Avenue, Shreveport, Louisiana.

**KID.**—Have not heard a word from you. Have news. Please write to L., care of this magazine.

**WALDO.**—Only your note to W. J. received. Anxious to hear from you. Am back on the old job. Have information for you. Please write to Ralph, care of this magazine.

**BLACKMAN, ARTHUR.**—Thirty-six years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Information appreciated by his stepbrother, Harry Morris, 424 Federal Building, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**MANDEL, STANLEY J.**—Have sad news for you. Mother is grieving. Please come home or write to Edward Friedman, 980 Linn Drive, Cleveland, Ohio.

**NOTICE.**—About five years ago, a boy visited in Clifton, Illinois. He would be about eighteen years old now, and is believed to be in Chicago, Illinois. Do you remember Sister Annabel? Please write to Luella Lihnig, R. R. 1, Clifton, Illinois.

**ROBY, SYLVESTER LULLIN.**—Twenty-four years old. Five feet, seven inches tall, dark complexion, brown hair and eyes. Weighs about one hundred and fifty-five pounds. Last heard from in Port Arthur, Texas. Information appreciated by his sister, Dove Pine, Box 28, Parsons, West Virginia.

**HIMMER, HARRY.**—Worked for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Last seen when he separated from my mother, seventeen years ago, in Paducah, Kentucky. Information appreciated by his son, Russell Himmer, U. S. S. "Holland," Box 7, San Pedro, California.

**MINTELL, LEONARD E.**—Left Camp Normoyle, San Antonio, Texas, in October, 1926, for Bridgeport, Connecticut. Information appreciated by T. R. Hupp, Box 55, Gatum, Canal Zone.

**E. M. C. P.**—Yes, that was for E. I was never in Seattle. You would remember January 10, 1928. E. doesn't mean Evans. Please write to J., care of this magazine.

**STRASSBERGER, BERNARD, Sr.**—Last seen in June, 1907, in Baltimore, Maryland. Information appreciated by his son, Bernard Strassberger, Jr., 4208 Arizona Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.

**DE CASTRO, EARL.**—Please write to your mother, Mrs. De Castro, 3101 Twenty-eighth Avenue, Tampa, Florida.

**EELP, JOHN.**—Twenty-four years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, brown hair and eyes. Left Toledo, Ohio, in July, 1926. Information appreciated by his aunt, Lillian Frisbie, 2308 Laurel Street, Shreveport, Louisiana.

**ANDERSON, LESLIE.**—Last heard from in Payette, Idaho. Please write to your friend, Esther Clem, 144 South Filbert Street, Exeter, California.

**CLAYCOMB, HAROLD HUNTER.**—Left home in 1924. Information appreciated by his father, James A. Claycomb, 1128 South Wheeling Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**JESSUP, CONVIN.**—Last heard from, while in the army, at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. Please write to an old friend, M. M. G., 673½ East Fifty-second Street, Los Angeles, California.

**SIGILOFSKY, ISIDORE BAER.**—Left Zhivitiv, Ukraine, in 1901, for Argentina. Information appreciated by his cousin, Mrs. Jennie Taper, 691 River Street, Mattapan, Massachusetts.

**MOHL, DAVID TRAVIS.**—Mother is still longing for you. Please come home or write to Mrs. Marie Mohl, 2302 Boller Avenue, Bay Chester, Bronx, New York.

**THOMAS, CLIFFORD ELAND.**—Please write to your mother, Mrs. M. D. Thomas, 3134 Yumi Street, Denver, Colorado.

**ROSENCRAUSE, MARGIE DELORES.**—Last heard from in San Diego, California, in 1926. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to Friend, care of this magazine.

**RANDALL, MRS. ANNIE,** nee **YOUNG,** and her children, **EUGENE, VERA, JOHNNIE,** and **LLOYD.**—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, twelve years ago. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. P. Young, 206 Convent Street, San Antonio, Texas.

**CHANDLER.**—Sister of Mrs. George Martin, nee Estella Margaret Chandler. Married a sailor in the United States navy. Last heard from, several years ago, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Information appreciated by Mrs. S. Martin, care of this magazine.

**USSEY, CLARENCE.**—Member of Company F, Eleventh Infantry, at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, in 1922. Please write to Bert Manifold, 2267-A Grand Avenue, Granite City, Illinois.

**SAYLOR, JEAN A.**—Six feet tall, brown hair, blue eyes, and weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Former member of Company F, Eleventh Infantry, at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. When last heard from was working for the Firestone Rubber Company, at Akron, Ohio. Information appreciated by Bert Manifold, 2267-A Grand Avenue, Granite City, Illinois.

**NOTICE.**—My father, Lacey Harmon, left his home in Texas when he was young and went to Arkansas. In Arkansas he married my mother, who died when I was two years old. Father died in September, 1922. He was five feet, seven inches tall, had black hair and brown eyes. He had one sister, Myrtle. Information concerning any of his people appreciated by Laura Whitney, Box 1191, Smackover, Arkansas.

**BLACK, FRANK B.**—Born in Canyon City, Colorado, in 1882. When last heard from, just before the San Francisco earthquake, he was working for the Southern Pacific Company, at San Francisco, California. Information appreciated by a college friend, C. A. H., care of this magazine.

**LEWIS, JOHN CLARENCE.**—Colored. Last heard from at Albert Lee, Minnesota. Mother needs you. Please write to Mrs. Jessie Lewis White, 1233 Delaware Street, Leavenworth, Kansas.

**POTTER, MRS. FLORENCE M.**—Last heard from in Plainfield, New Jersey, in 1922. Do you remember the disabled soldier you took care of and called son Billy? He still thinks of you as mother. Please write to Son Billy, Box 67, Bonham, Texas.

**STONE, BERRY.**—A contractor. When last heard from, in July, 1886, was building a church in Midland, Texas. Information appreciated by his niece, Mrs. J. A. Reeves, Route B, Ashburn, Georgia.

**JUNE, W. A.**—Please let me hear from you. B. T., care of this magazine.

**ASHER, or GOLDEN, HARRY.**—Six feet, two inches tall, light hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Left West Virginia, for Boyce County, Idaho, twenty-eight years ago, to take up a claim on government land. Information appreciated by his niece, Margaret, 1225 Worley Avenue, N. W., Canton, Ohio.

**CUMMINGS, HAZEL.**—Last heard from at Bright Sides, Plymouth, Indiana. Please write to Carol, Edna and Charles, 360 Spencer Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

**HUTTO, LOUISE.**—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, in December, 1928. Everything is O. K. Please write to George, care of this magazine.

**DUANE, or DUAZANE, ALBERT RUSSELL.**—Fifty-two years old. French descent. A carpenter. Has two brothers, Otto and Arthur, and one sister, Sue. Last heard from twenty years ago. Believed to be in St. Joseph, Missouri. Information appreciated by X. Y. Z., care of this magazine.

**HALL, MARION GLADE.**—Please write to your sister, Zara, care of this magazine.

**DIXON, ETHEL.**—Of Missoula, Montana. Last seen in Portland, Oregon, in February, 1927. Please write to Eva, care of this magazine.

**F., AUDREY.**—Where are you? Please write to Sis, Lock Box 542, Stroud, Oklahoma.

**SMITH, CHARLES A.**—Civil engineer. Worked on Iron Rivet Tunnel in Montana, in 1895. Information appreciated by L. F. Smith, 48 Maple Street, New Britain, Connecticut.

**SMITH or GRINDELL, MRS. AGNES.**—Lived for some time in San Diego, California. Moved from there to San Francisco, California, ten years ago. Information appreciated by John Burcham, 844 West Tenth Street, Los Angeles, California.

**STEWART, LELIA.**—Was in San Jose, California, in August, 1926. Information appreciated by Mrs. A. Henry, Star Route, Box 10, Ashland, Oregon.

**HELLINUS, MRS. J. E.**—Was in San Jose, California, in August, 1926. Information appreciated by Mrs. A. Henry, Star Route, Box 10, Ashland, Oregon.

**JOHNSON, PET.**—Last heard from in Fort Worth, Texas, thirteen years ago. Information appreciated by B. P. Willis, 221 East Williams Street, Wichita, Kansas.

**PRESTON, JAMES VICTOR.**—Last heard from in Hazelton, British Columbia. Information appreciated by Vernon Vancleave, Route 4, Box 86, Vine Grove, Kentucky.

**JIM.**—Arleen was home for Christmas. She showed me that everything is O. K. Please come home or write to your mother, care of this magazine.

**O'DELL, PAUL J. or PERLE.**—Thirty-one years old. Five feet, six inches tall, blond hair and blue eyes. Joined the Marine 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 Summitt, 1734 East Nineteenth Street, Apartment 33, Cleveland, Ohio.

**CHAPMAN, JAKE.**—Left Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in 1911, en route for Canada. Please write to daughter and son, Lola and Eugene, care of this magazine.

**SIMMONS, BUD.**—Thanks for the picture. Please let us know where you are. Everything is forgiven, and we will do all we can to help you in anything you want. Write soon to Mother and Dad, same address, or care of this magazine.

**LUNDY, MORRIS RICH.**—Please write to your sister, Edith Amelia Lundy, care of this magazine.

**WYATT, IDA.**—Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Please write to your cousin, 1125 Shipping Street, Salem, Oregon.

**NORTHCRAFT, ED.**—Forty-eight years old. Six feet tall, blue eyes and light hair. Scar on left side of chin. Last heard from in Texas. A bridge builder. Information appreciated by his son, Glenn Northcraft, Box 107, Fort Pierce, Florida.

**SMITH, MARY.**—I wrote to McCamey, but my letter was returned. Please write to your sister, Jeanette Smith, care of this magazine.

**BURLEY, JOHN and WILLIAM.**—Father and son. Have not been heard from for twenty years. Information appreciated by daughter and sister, L. V. G. B., care of this magazine.

**HARRIS, LESTER.**—Eighteen years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Hiked from Boston, Massachusetts, to Cleveland, Ohio. Last heard from December 2, 1927. Mother ill with worry. Information appreciated by his father, Frank B. Harris, 64 Manhattan Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

**JACKSON, JACK PAUL.**—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, blue eyes, dark hair and ruddy complexion. Last heard from in Alliance, Ohio, in July, 1927. I love you. Please come back or write to Betty Reed, care of this magazine.

**BOBS.**—My letter to Billings returned. Hope no trouble was caused. Did not go to India. Saw an ad in San Francisco paper, but did not answer. Thought it might be a trick. Am miserable, not knowing what to think. Please get in touch with me, then we will both be happier. Address Crazy, care of this magazine.

**BOB, R. H. S.**—I am all alone and don't know what to do or where to go. Please write to Kittie Steele, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

**SCOTT, or TAPESCOTT, HARRY.**—Forty years old. Brown curly hair and brown eyes. Had a younger brother, Frank. Harry left his mother when he was fourteen years old. Mother is ill and wants to see him. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Ola Flint, R. R. 1, Paris, Illinois.

**SMITH, JOHN W.**—Thirty-six years old. Six feet, two inches tall. An electrician. Papa died May 29, 1927. Harry died December 29, 1928. Earl was with Harry. Please write to your sister, Mary, Quincy, Kansas.

**PENCE.**—Some time between 1888 and 1892, a little boy, Richard Pence, was placed in the Vine Street Orphanage, at Chattanooga, Tennessee. In 1892 he was adopted by a Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Johnson, of Somerset, Kentucky. He is now looking for his people. Information appreciated by R. C. Johnson, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada.

**WITTKOP, GEORGE A. W.**—Last heard from in July, 1924. At that time he was on duty in Headquarters Ninth Corps Area, Presidio of San Francisco, California. Please write to your old buddy, W. B. Montgomery, Lincoln, Alabama.

**NOTICE.**—I am twenty years old, and my sister, Orpha, who is with me, is twenty-six. I have two other sisters, Etta and Bessie, and several brothers. We lived in Guthrie, Oklahoma, and were adopted from our parents, whose name was Ballard. Information concerning my people will be appreciated by Charley Purcell, Box 114, Perryton, Texas.

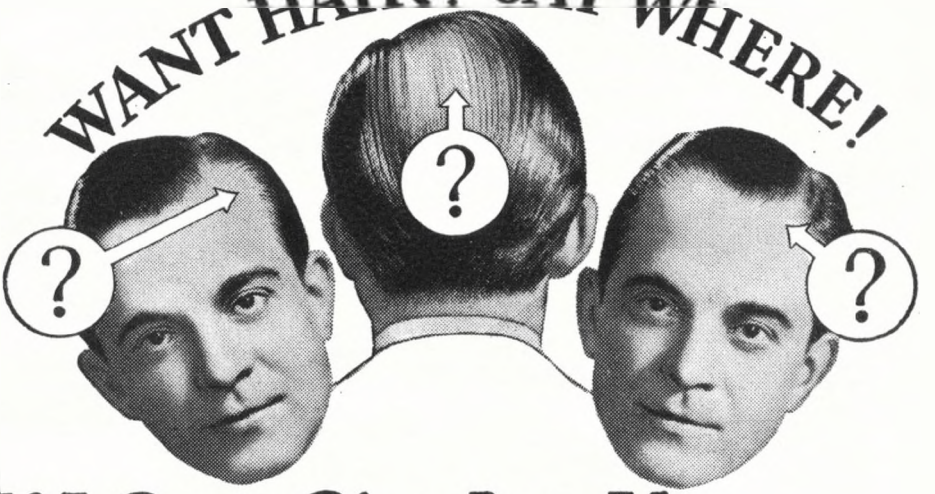
**BEDFORD, LIONEL.**—Thirty years old. Last seen in Oklahoma, when he was two years old. Information appreciated by his mother. Please write to Mrs. Howard Woodall, Route 2, Venus, Texas.

**BEDFORD, ADDIE.**—Last seen near Comanche, Oklahoma, a few years ago. Your mother wishes to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. Howard Woodall, Route 2, Venus, Texas.

**FUTTS, FRANK W.**—Sixty years old. Six feet tall, weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds. Formerly of Valatie, New York, and later of Syracuse, New York. His wife would like to hear from him. Please write to her sister, Mrs. Alice Russel, Ghent, New York.

**GARNETT, JOHN R.**—Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Ruby Garrett Hooe, Box 584, Blythe, California.

**LARSON, CHARLIE.**—Left Negaunee, Michigan, about sixteen years ago, after his mother died, and has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by his brother, Frank, care of this magazine.




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

*By Alois Merke*

## To Those Afflicted With Thinning Hair, Dandruff, Itchy Scalp

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Falling Hair Cannot Be Stopped By Ordinary Surface Treatments!*

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

### Simple as A . . B . . C

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

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

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

What a shame that so many dollars and hours are wasted on useless surface treatments. *Not only that.* Hair is actually removed and scalps injured by doubtful salves and tonics. If a man came up to you in the street and said, "Here's a tonic that'll grow hair!" . . . would you buy it? Of course not. You wouldn't know the maker, the ingredients, nor would you have any redress in case of injury. In other words, when you buy ordinary "hair-growers," you buy "a pig in a bag." You GAMBLE! Not only with scalp health, but with *your* hard-earned money.

### Thousands Know Me

My treatment is based on scientific facts . . . facts that you can check up with your family physician or medical reference books. My treatment is backed by years of research, and the gratitude of thousands who invested a mere few minutes a day in my effective treatment.

Very important, too, I have the Merke Institute behind me, an ethical institution known everywhere for its accomplishments in growing hair. And last of all, I say in the strongest way I can, I DON'T WANT A PENNY OF YOUR MONEY IF I FAIL TO GROW NEW HAIR. I assume the burden of proof, not you!

### Before It's Too Late

Run your fingers through those thin spots on your head. Then reflect: What will happen if you let yourself become actually bald . . . changed appearance, lost prestige, years older looking. Is indifference worth it? No! Tear out the coupon and MAIL IT TODAY for my free booklet filled with complete details of my treatment, and scientific facts. Not theories—but convincing, guaranteed statements backed by leading dermatologists. Send for the booklet NOW! It's yours by return mail. Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 424, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

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**Allied Merke Institutes, Inc.,**
**Dept. 424, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City**

Please send me, without cost or obligation—in plain wrapper, copy of your book, "The New Way to Grow Hair," describing the Merke System

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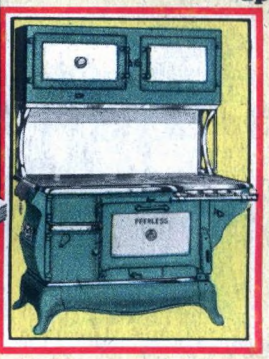

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