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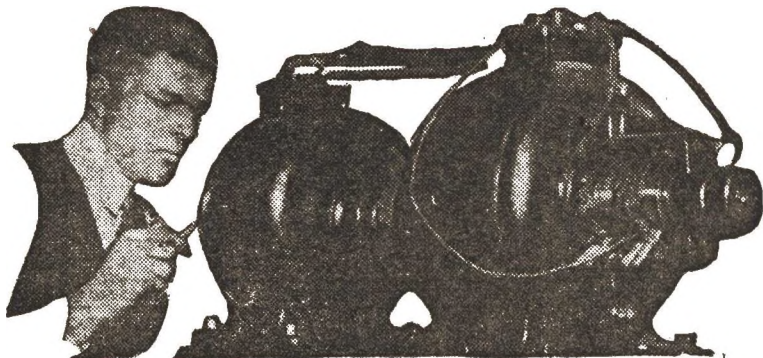
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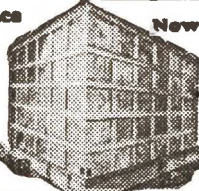
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Vol. LXXX Contents for September 8, 1928 No. 6

ONE NOVEL

Windy's Quest for Quiet *Robert Ormond Case* 1

TWO SERIALS

Dupe of the Desert *George Gilbert* 61
A Three-part Story—Part Two

Pillar Mountain *John Frederick* 90
A Six-part Story—Part Six

FOUR SHORT STORIES

The Gallopin' Kid Slips It Over . . . *Christopher B. Booth* . . . 54

All's Fair *Ray Humphreys* 81

Out of Range *Ben Jeris* 110

A Western Trail (Poem) *Cristel Hastings* 117

Buckaroo Ballots *S. Omar Barker* 118

ONE ARTICLE

Highways Old and New *Edna Erle Wilson* 128
The Coronado Trail

MISCELLANEOUS

Birds of the West and North America How Doth the Busy Bee? 116
(The Short-eared Owl) 53 A Petrified Forest Found in Texas . 127

An Ally Against the Mosquito 89 The Armadillo Makes Itself Useful . 133
A Wild-life Refuge 139

DEPARTMENTS

The Round-up *The Editor* 131

The Hollow Tree *Helen Rivers* 134

Where to Go and How to Get There . . *John North* 137

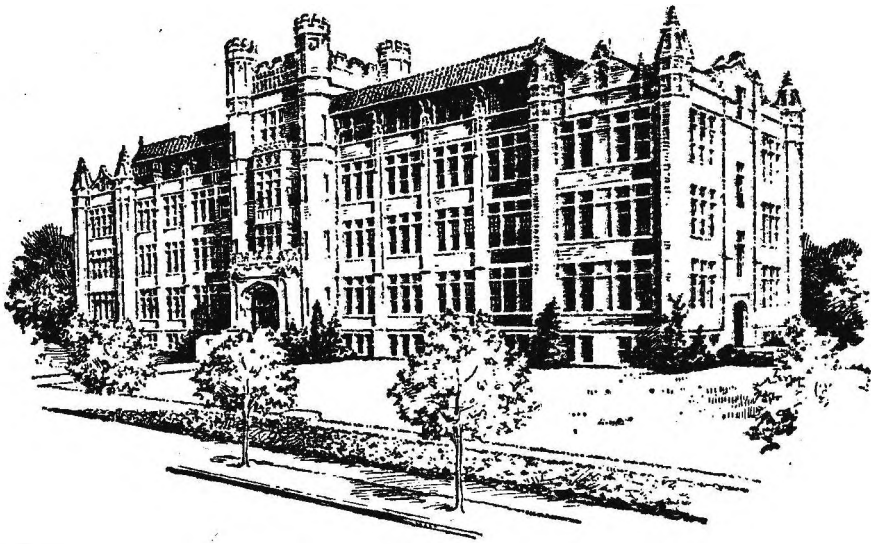
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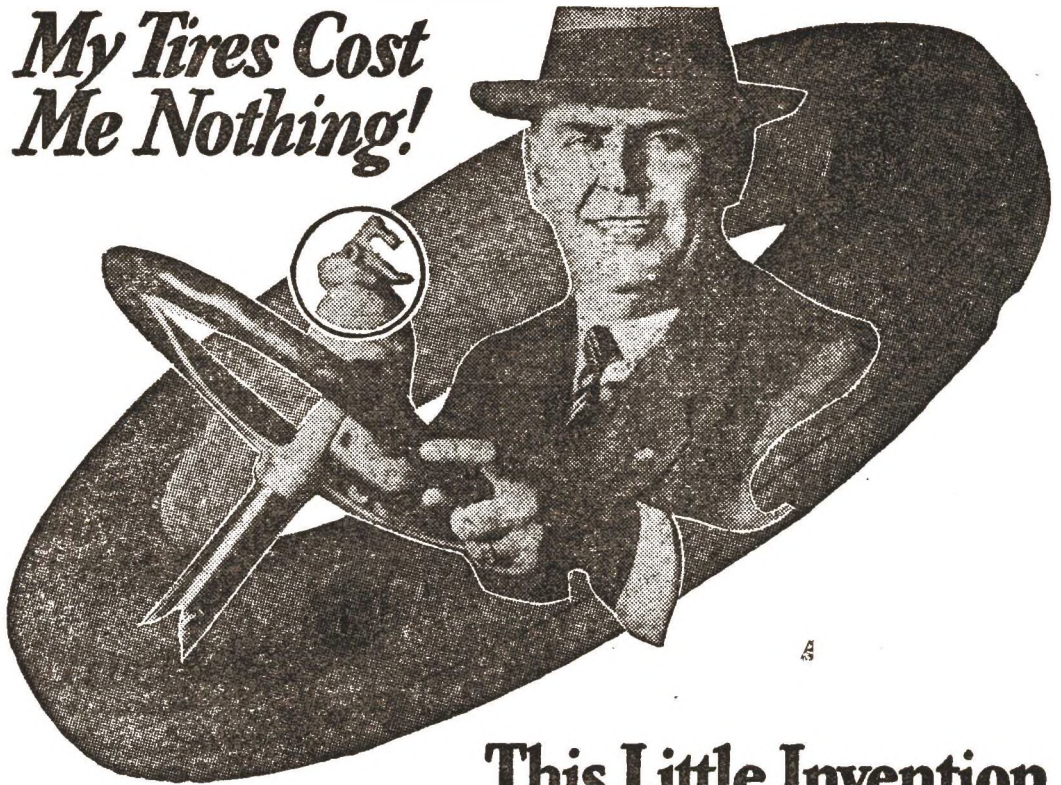
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Everything in HOSEERY UNDERWEAR LINGERIE for Men Women and Children

FREE Everything to Start Complete Selling Equipment, with beautiful, irresistible Catalog of advance styles, new wares! All FREE —no C. O. D., no deposit. Cash bonus, service, travel, vacation, Choice territories going. Write quick.

World's Star Knitting Co., 355 Lake St., New City, Mich.

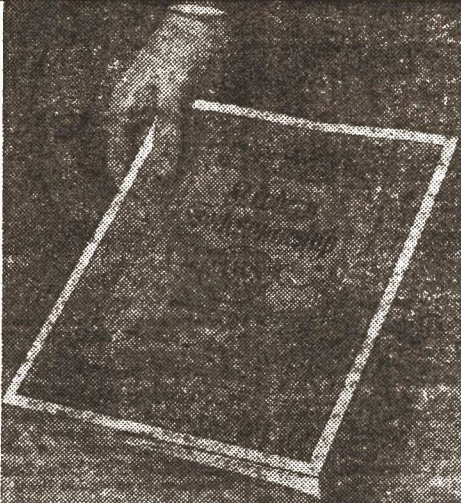
-and They Started By Reading This Amazing Book!



300% Increase

reported by A. F. Thompson of Sioux City, Iowa, former creamery employee, after completing N. S. T. A. Course.

From \$8 to \$125 a Week was the jump made by Mark Barichievich, San Francisco, California who rose from dishwasher to salesman through N. S. T. A.



\$7200 A Year

or a 400% increase is record of L. J. Mather, former clerk of Richmond, Virginia thanks to N. S. T. A.



600% More Money

now being made by L. H. Lundstedt, Chicago, N. S. T. A. training helped raise him from a stenographer to the head of a business.



Where Shall We Send Your Copy... FREE?

A BOOK! Just seven ounces of paper and printers' ink—but it contains a most vivid and inspiring message that every ambitious man should read! It reveals facts and secrets that have led hundreds of men from every walk of life into success beyond their fondest expectations! So powerful and far-reaching has been the influence of this little volume that it is no wonder a famous business genius called it "The Most Amazing Book Ever Printed!"

This vital book, "Modern Salesmanship," contains hundreds of surprising and little-known facts about the highest paid profession in the world. It reveals the real truth about the art of selling. It blasts dozens of old theories, and tells exactly how the great sales records of nationally-known star salesmen are achieved. And not only that—it outlines a simple plan that will enable almost any man to master scientific salesmanship without spending years on the road—without losing a day or a dollar from his present position!

What This Astonishing Book Has Done!

The men who have increased their earning capacities as a direct result of reading "Modern Salesmanship" are numbered in the thousands. For example, there is E. E. Williams of Pomona, Cal., who was struggling along in a minor position at a small salary. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes to opportunities he had never dreamed of—and he cast his lot with the National Salesmen's Training Association. Within a few short months of simple preparation, he was earning \$10,000 a year! Today he receives as much in 30 days as he formerly received in 365!

And then there is J. E. Muzzall, of Hopkinsville, Ky. He, too, read "Modern Salesmanship" and found the answer within its pages. A former freight clerk and department head at \$200 a month, he recently reported yearly earnings running into five figures. B. F. Holton of Columbus, Ohio, wrote that his work as a salesman brought him annual earnings of \$5000-\$7000, an increase of 300% over his former income as a decorator. And F. L. Reel of Wheeling, W. Va., a former cigar-maker, stepped into a position paying him \$4600 a year drawing account alone!

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Any man with average intelligence can duplicate the

success that they have achieved. For their experience proves that salesmen are made—not "born", as some people have foolishly believed.

Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—laws that you can master as easily as you learned the alphabet. Hundreds of men who never had a day's selling experience before acquiring this remarkable training have been extraordinarily successful, often beating the records of men with years of experience from the very first day.

Free to Every Man

If we were asking several dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. So get your copy now. Learn the real facts about the selling profession, and about the tremendous demand for trained salesmen in every line, to fill city and traveling positions paying up to \$5000 and \$10,000 a year. Last year this association received calls for 50,335 N. S. T. A. members from Wholesalers, Manufacturers and Jobbers. "Modern Salesmanship" tells the complete story in a vivid, inspiring way. A copy is yours for the asking, and your request entails no obligation. Simply fill out and mail the coupon. Do it now!



Dept. 581-M N. S. T. A. Bldg., CHICAGO, ILL.

National Salesmen's Training Assn.,
Dept. 581-M, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligating me in any way, send a copy of your Free Book, "Modern Salesmanship", and details of your System of Training and Free Employment Service.

Name

Address

City State

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What Made His Hair Grow?

Read His Letter for the Answer



"Two years ago I was bald all over the top of my head.

"I felt ashamed for people to see my head. I tried different preparations, but they did no good. I remained bald, until I used Kotalko.

"New hair came almost immediately and kept on growing. In a short time I had a splendid head of hair, which has been perfect ever since—and no return of the baldness."

This verified statement is by Mr. H. A. Wild. He is but one of the big legion of users of Kotalko who voluntarily attest it has stopped falling hair, eliminated dandruff or added new, luxuriant

hair growth. KOTALKO is sold by busy druggists everywhere.

FREE Trial Box

To prove the efficacy of Kotalko, for men's, women's and children's hair, the producers are giving Proof Boxes. Address:

KOTAL COMPANY, K-26, Station O, New York, N.Y. Please send me FREE Proof Box of KOTALKO.

Name

Address

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Sea Stories

The only fiction magazine of the romantic sea.

Naval warfare, dark seas, picturesque countries, black rivers, white-sailed ships—all written of by men who know of what they write.

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Buy for Less this Easy Way

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Sent for \$1.00 NO C. O. D. TO PAY

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Send \$1 with order and your choice comes to you prepaid so C. O. D. on arrival. **10 Days Free Trial**

After examination and 10 days free trial, pay balance in 12 equal monthly payments.

A Full Year to Pay No interest. No extras. All transactions strictly confidential. You take no risk—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

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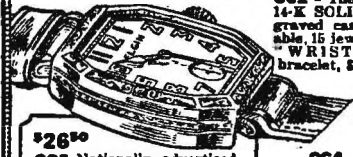


CC1 \$37.50
Exquisitely hand engraved and pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring. Finest quality, genuine blue white diamond. \$3.00 a month.



10 Days FREE TRIAL

CC2 - The "Princess Pat", 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD, engraved case. Accurate, dependable, 15 jewel movement. Genuine "W.R.I.S.T.A.C.R.A.T." flexible bracelet, \$2.00 a month.



\$26.50

CC3-Nationally advertised, Elgin or Waltham, gentleman's strap watch. Handsomely engraved, Green or White Gold filled case. Warranted 20 years. Radium dial, accurate and dependable. Specially priced, \$2.12 a mo.



CC4 Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched, finest quality blue white diamonds, 18K Solid White Gold mounting. \$48.50

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A PERFECT LOOKING NOSE Can Easily Be Yours

Tradeo Model No. 25 corrects now all ill-shaped noses quickly, painlessly, permanently and comfortably at home. It is the only adjustable, safe and guaranteed patent device that will actually give you a perfect looking nose. Over 50,000 satisfied users. For years recommended by physicians. 16 years of experience in manufacturing Nose Shapers in at your service. Model 25 Junior for children. Write for testimonials and free booklet, which tells you how to obtain a perfect looking nose.

M. TRILETY, Pioneer Noseshaping Specialist
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FREE Facts About Gland Failure



Do you know why many men are old at 40, while others are young at 70? Do you know why the prostate gland slows up and why it causes bladder weakness, sciatica, pains in the back, feet and legs? Write today for scientist's new book **FREE**. Learn just what these symptoms mean. Learn of a new kind of drugless treatment. Learn how 40,000 men past 40 have found quick relief without medicine. Learn facts of priceless value to you. Write now for an interesting, illustrated and copyrighted book, "Why Many Men Are Old at 40."

Address W. J. Kirk, 7609 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

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Be a trained
COOKE-TRAINED
AUTO EXPERT

EARN UP TO \$5000 A YEAR

FREE AUTO BOOK

Repair Testing OUTFITS INCLUDED

Start to Make Money Quick Like Morriston
M. J. Morriston, Parkersburg, W. Va. (photo at right), never had a day's experience on cars before starting my training. Read what he says when less than half-way through his "JOB-WAY" course. "What I have already learned is worth over \$500 to me. I have gone into business and I'm making over \$50 a week clear, with wonderful prospects. And what Mr. Morriston and hundreds of others have done I will help you to do!"

M. J. MORRISTON, Parkersburg, W. Va.

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You needn't slave away at small wages another minute—small coupon and I'll tell you how I train you at home in your spare time for positions paying up to \$150 a week. Unlimited opportunities for trained Electrical and Mechanical Auto Experts. Let me show you how my "JOB-WAY" training has prepared hundreds of men just like yourself for a quick, brilliant success in the Auto business.

Earn Up to \$150 a Week!

Don't sell your time for low pay! You don't need to when you have my "JOB-WAY" training. As Directing Engineer of this Institution I know what training you need to succeed, AND I GIVE YOU THAT TRAINING right in your own home. MASTER every branch of Auto, Truck and Tractor work. I train you with JOBS—not books. I bring the original "JOB-WAY" training TO YOUR HOME!

Read My Experience, Money-Back Education Not Needed!

Ten agreements in my big free Auto book. No. 1 is "I will refund every cent of your money if after receiving my training you are not absolutely satisfied." This and nine other wonderful agreements make my "JOB-WAY" course the training for you! Be sure to get my book and read all ten agreements.

I don't care how little schooling you have, I will train you to become an Auto Mechanic or refund your money! Boys and men of all ages have become Garage owners and managers, Superintendents, Foremen, Auto Experts, BIG PAY executives, after completing Cooke's "JOB-WAY" training. I prove to you that I will prepare you to take advantage of the many wonderful opportunities of the great auto business!

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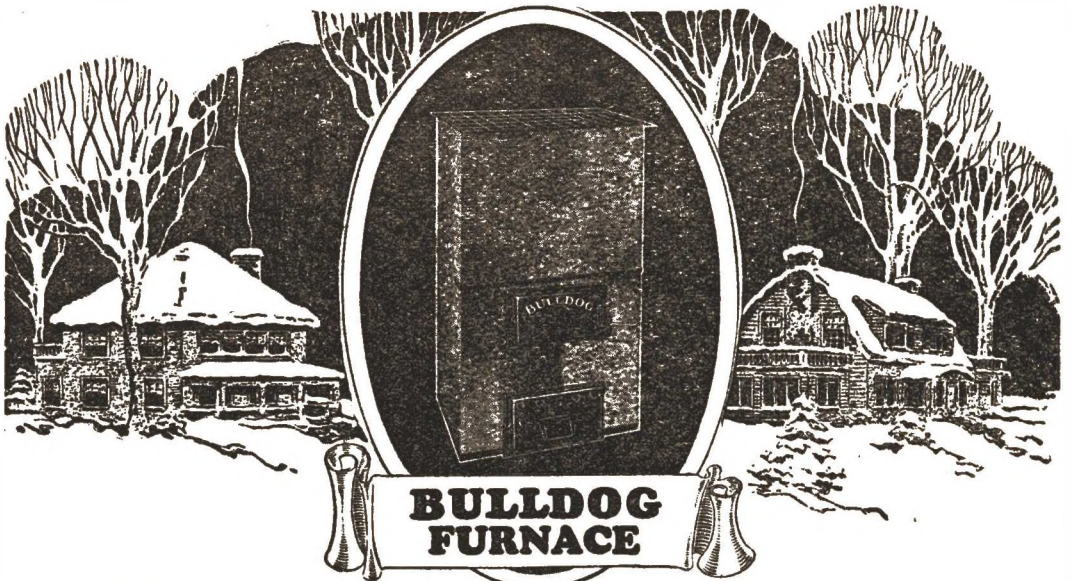
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Address Me Personally **B. W. COOKE** DIRECTING ENGINEER
CHICAGO MOTOR TRAINING CORPORATION
1916 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 17-76, Chicago, Ill.



Heats Home for 25¢ a Week!

"I can run my Bulldog furnace steady for fourteen days in normal weather conditions on the actual cost of fifty cents." So writes F. R. Redetzke, of Cleveland, North Dakota, and he adds: "Hard to believe is it? That's what some of my neighbors thought until I showed them! We have an unlimited amount of grain screenings in this country. That's the fuel I am using."

That's what the Bulldog does with about the lowest grade fuel you can think of! Here's what it does with coal:

After 6 Years—"Heats as Good as Ever"

"Our furnace has been in use 6 years and heats as good as ever."
—Arthur Cloppli, E. F. D. No. 1, Rockport, Mo.

"Does the Work of 3 Stoves"

"This is my third winter with the Bulldog. It does the work of 3 coal stoves that I used, which only warmed up part of the house and not very well at that. My Bulldog not only does that, but 3 rooms upstairs, with great satisfaction. My house is located in a very cold place, with no protection at all. It is the easiest furnace to handle I have yet seen." E. C. Dipplek, 105 Elm St., Camden, Me.

Cuts Coal Bill in Half

"I had a hot air furnace in our 7-room house before I got the Bulldog and our house was always cold. With the Bulldog it only takes half as much coal and we had weather below zero, and the house was nice and warm in the morning when we got up. We never have the draft on more than half an hour at a time, and it has the place red hot. It keeps the fire all day in mild weather."
—Jess T. Conrad, 1211 W. Arch St., Shamokin, Pa.

No Money Down!

Small Monthly Payments—Installed Almost as Easily as a Cook Stove!

The Bulldog is sent to you for free inspection. Then, if satisfied, you make only small monthly payments at our remarkably low price. Write today! Don't miss this chance to cut down your fuel bills! Install a Bulldog Furnace. It comes to you completely erected—goes through any door—fits any height of basement—and you install it yourself in less than two hours! In fact, you can install the Bulldog just about as easily as you

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Send for Free Book

Learn how to have all the heat you want—where you want it—and save money! Remember the Bulldog is different—and better! Complete combustion of gases save 25% of your fuel bill. Exclusive Gable-Top Radiator receives all the direct rays of the fire. Exclusive oblong fire-pot is not only ideal for coal, but enables you to keep a wood fire over night. Remember—the Bulldog is sent for free inspection—then small monthly payments at an amazingly low price! Send for Free Book TODAY!

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who has mystified magicians as well as laymen with his marvelous tricks.

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—before you can study, you must sign the Magician's Solemn Pledge of Secrecy. This means that you are getting the *jealously guarded secrets* of the Magic Profession. Think of that!

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There's a big demand for Magic entertainment. Magicians get big money. Dr. Tarbell gets as high as \$250 for a half hour's work. Unlimited opportunities for you!

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Write! Mail coupon now for big free Magic Book telling all about the great Tarbell Course in Magic. Find out how you can learn to be a real magician—easily and quickly!—at home!—by mail! • Learn what I have done for others—people just like yourself. **Get our Low Prices and Easy Payment Plan. Mail coupon NOW!**

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1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

Gentlemen: Without any obligation send me your free literature and information all about your wonderful "Tarbell Course in Magic". Also tell me about your low prices and Easy Payment Plan.

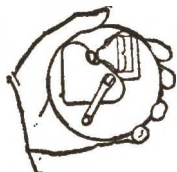
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Feels Like This**
— After You Try This Amazing
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Marvelous Invention Makes Old Blades Keener Than New—Indefinitely! Gives Such Cool, Slick Shaves That Old-Style Methods Seem Like 16th-Century Torture In Comparison! See Valuable FREE OFFER Below! Get Details Today!

No More Blades to Buy!

SLICK, velvety shaves forever and no more razor blades to buy! That's what you can expect from KRISS-KROSS, the amazing *super-stropper* and blade *rejuvenator*! Makes new blades out of old a surprising way—week after week, month after month. Gives them a sharpness they seldom possess even when *brand new*! No wonder experts pronounce it one of the greatest inventions ever patented!

famous diagonal stroke of master barber. Eight "lucky leather grooves" do the trick in 11 seconds. Automatic, decreasing pressure—starts *heavy* and finishes *light*. Nickel jig flies up to notify you when blade is ready with *keenest cutting edge steel can take!*

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Right now, to introduce KRISS-KROSS stropper which is never sold in stores, I am giving with it FREE a unique new kind of razor. Really 3 razors in one! Gives *sliding* instead of *pulling* stroke. Reduces beard resistance 45%. Send for details and offer today. No obligation. Just clip the coupon and mail it now!

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AGENTS! \$30 A
DAY AND UP**

KRISS-KROSS is one of the most surprising money-makers ever seen. Hundreds of agents and demonstrators all over the country are receiving \$200 to \$500 a month just collecting orders in their home towns. Even spare-time workers often make \$6 to \$12 an evening or Saturday afternoon. . . . R. S. Hopkins (Mich.), \$20 his first day. And J. C. Kellogg (Kansas) made \$200 in 7 days spare-time alone! . . . With men everywhere making big easy profits like this, there is no reason why you can't do the same. We show you how and give you an extremely generous offer. . . . Get details today. Check bottom line of coupon and mail it now!

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Without obligation, send me details of KRISS-KROSS Stropper, together with 3-way razor offer FREE.

Name

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Town State

Check here if interested in becoming representative.

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\$1.00 DOWN

Clip the coupon below. Write your name and address plainly. Pin a dollar bill to it—mail at once. We will ship immediately—all three rugs on approval in one complete neat package. No trouble to lay. If satisfactory, just send a dollar a month.

\$10.80

For All Three

No orders filled in cities over 100,000 population.

No. S7C2601
Dollar Down
Dollar a Month
All Three \$10.80
Rugs only

9 FT x 12 FT

Genuine Gold Seal

CONGOLEUM

Art RUG



The Gold Seal means complete satisfaction or money back.

Always look for the Gold Seal. There are floor coverings that look like Congoleum. Many are called by fancy "oleum" names. Often low prices are advertised on "seconds" or damaged goods.

But there is only one Congoleum. There is only one Gold Seal Congoleum. These three rugs are all Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum.

Not just one rug, but three! Three Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs! The prettiest and most artistic Congoleum Rug pattern ever produced.

A great big, beautiful, room size 9 foot x 12 foot Genuine Congoleum Art Rug, and two companion rugs to match. All three rugs for TEN DOLLARS AND EIGHTY CENTS.

You might almost say—All three for ONE DOLLAR! One Dollar down—one dollar a month. Simply pin a dollar bill to the coupon—about a year to pay afterwards, easily and conveniently. Beauty, utility, home comfort, housekeeping satisfaction that no housekeeper should miss, for the odd dollar now and then she will never miss.

Guaranteed Genuine Gold Seal Congoleum Art Rugs! All three Art

Rugs bear the famous Congoleum Art Rug Gold Seal—the famous Gold Seal that can't be placed on "seconds," or damaged goods, or imitations.

Brand New Oval Design
The broad band of this oval border is a rich, velvety midnight blue. Imposed on this superb background is one continuous floral spray, dropping over into the center background in graceful clusters. Delightfully shaded pink flowers, with a stone-gray foliage about the color of Dusty Miller, forms the floral decoration. The background of this rug is about the prettiest blue you ever saw.

Congoleum is the only guaranteed floor covering. Congoleum is the floor covering that changed the housekeeping habits of a nation.

Millions of homes are justly proud of their Congoleum floors. Here, therefore they have paid a great deal more to obtain them. Homes that own Congoleum floors no longer know the back-breaking, heart-breaking drudgery of scrubbing floors.

Waterproof—No Seams—Lies Flat—Never Curls Up—No Scrubbing

\$1.00 Down—\$1.00 a Month

All this for ten dollars and eighty cents, spread over a year's time—ON A YEAR'S CREDIT.

Shop around and make comparisons. Go wherever Congoleum is sold—and Congoleum is sold everywhere.

Our price includes two beautiful companion Rugs. Our price is a CREDIT price—you pay little by little. Our price includes a thirty-day free trial offer.

Be Sure to Ask for Free Catalog Of 10,000 Other Bergins

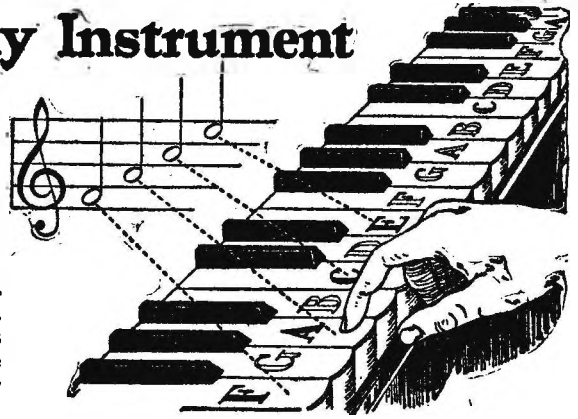
Pin A Dollar to the Coupon

Spiegel, Bergin, Stern Co.
 1250 W. 35th St., Chicago
 Enclose \$1 for 9 ft. x 12 ft. Congoleum rug and two extra companion Congoleum rugs each 12 in. x 36 in.—Offer No. S7C2601
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 If You Wish a Free Copy of Our Big Catalog, Put a Cross (X) in This Space.

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Mey. Stern Co.
1250 West 35th St., Chicago

Easy as A-B-C!

**You Can Play Any Instrument
In a Few Months
This Delightful
New Easy Way!**



Quickest because natural and pleasant. Grateful students say they learn in a fraction of the time old, dull methods required. You play direct from the notes. And the cost averages only a few cents a lesson!

Learning music is no longer a difficult task. If you can read the alphabet, you can now quickly learn to play your favorite instrument! A delightful new method has made it positively easy to become a capable performer within just a few months. And the cost is only a fraction of what people used to spend on the old, slow methods!

You don't need a private teacher, this new way. You study entirely at home, in the privacy of your own room, with no one to interrupt or embarrass you. And, strange as it may seem, you'll enjoy every minute of it—because the new method is agreeable as well as rapid!

No Tricks or Stunts—You Learn from "Regular" Music

You don't have to know the first thing about music in order to begin. You learn to play from actual notes, just like the best musicians do. And almost before you realize your progress, you begin playing real tunes and melodies instead of just scales. There are no "trick numbers," no "memory stunts." When you finish the U. S. School of Music course you can pick up any piece of regular printed music and understand it! You'll be able to read music, popular and classic, and play it from the notes. You'll acquire a life-long ability to please your friends, amuse yourself, and, if you like, make money (musicians are rightly paid for their pleasant work).

Whether you like the piano, violin, 'cello, organ, saxophone, or any other instrument, you can now learn to play it in an amazingly short time. By means of this newly perfected method, reading and playing music is made almost as simple as reading aloud from a book. You simply can't go wrong. First, you are *told* how a thing is done, then a picture *shows* you how, then you do it yourself and *hear* it. No private teacher could make it any clearer. The lessons come to you by mail at regular intervals. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, all the music you need, and music paper for writing out test exercises. And if anything comes up which is not *entirely plain*, you can write to your instructor and get a full, prompt, personal reply!

The Surest Way to Be Popular and Have a Good Time

Do you sit "on the sidelines" at a party? Are you out of it because you can't play? Many, many people are! It's the musician who claims attention. If you play you are always in demand. Many invitations come to you. Amateur orchestras offer you wonderful afternoons and evenings. And you meet the kind of people you have always wanted to know. So don't miss this exceptional opportunity.

Learn to Play by Note

Piano	'Cello
Organ	Sight Singing
Violin	Guitar
Drums and	Ukulele
Traps	Hawaiian
Banjo	Steel Guitar
(Plectrum,	Harp
5-String,	Cornet
or Tenor)	Piccolo
Mandolin	Trombone
Clarinet	Saxophone
Flute	
Voice and	Speech Culture
Automatic	Finger Control
Piano	Accordion

Free Book and Demonstration Lesson

The whole interesting story about the U. S. School course cannot be told on this page. So a booklet has been printed—"Music Lessons in Your Own Home." You can have a copy absolutely free by mailing the coupon below. In the booklet you will find an offer that makes the U. S. course available to you at a very low price. With it will be sent a demonstration lesson which shows better than words how delightfully quick and easy this wonderful Method is. If you are really anxious to become a good player on your favorite instrument, mail the coupon now—today. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3599 Brunswick Bldg. New York City.

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC,
3599 Brunswick Building, New York City.

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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Have you above instrument?.....

Name.....
(Please write plainly)

Address.....

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

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Western Story

Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXX

SEPTEMBER 8, 1928

No. 6



Windy's Quest *for* Quiet

By
Robert Ormond Case

Author of "The Panhandle Wrangler," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AN INSPIRATION.

THE partners, "Windy" DeLong and "Lonesome" McQuirk, stepped down from the weather-beaten threshold of their cabin into the cool brilliance that is morning in the Condon country. Windy stretched his lean length, joints creaking. His black mustache bristled into the semblance of a ferocious snarl as he yawned luxuriously. Lonesome followed suit, his tawny mustache

drooping across his square, fighting jaw. Each seated himself upon the step. Windy drew forth the makings and rolled a cigarette with unconscious ease. Lonesome extracted a black plug of tobacco from his hip pocket and tore off an enormous chew, which he proceeded to enjoy.

"McQuirk," Windy announced, fixing glittering eyes on his partner, "get set for a shock. I got an idea. In the midst of the night, in them dark hours that precede the dawn, it come to me just like that. It's roped, hog tied, and ready for the iron. Yeah, an'

it's so dang simple and logical you'll grasp it right off."

"Let's have it," returned his partner placidly. "Every time you're all swelled up and full of business that a way, a blind man could see yore ungodly imagination is dancing amongst the Shasta daisies. Life's full of problems. Give us the earmarks of this grief which is about to make monkeys out of us."

"It ain't grief," Windy proclaimed. "It's a plumb illuminatin' and upliftin' idea whereby two hard-ridin', hard-fightin', long-whiskered an' weary wild cats named McQuirk an' DeLong can throw off their chains for a spell. Yeah, take our royal ease."

He blew a cloud of smoke upward, and his glance roved about the familiar, dilapidated buildings of the homestead, the spring, the corrals and feed lot where the saddle horses milled restlessly. He squinted at the sky. It was cloudless and of a deep and illimitable blue. The sunlight was not oppressive at the moment, but all too soon the turquoise of the heavens would change to a more brazen hue, the bleak pinnacles on the higher ridges would be etched against a blistering background, and in the lower levels heat mirages would form waterless lakes athwart the baking hills.

"I ain't up on them philosophical gymnastics, McQuirk," Windy pulled his hat lower over his eyes. "But leave us look back for a minute over them years of the past. You and me have always been energetic hombres, burning up the dust, and jumping four ways at once. Gunmen down in the Panhandle we was, when we was younger and more foolish. Wherever there was voices raised in argument, you and me was generally in the thick of it, speaking polite and pointed. When sixshooters was doing the talking, our holsters was empty and our hands was full. We'd shake loose from one jack

pot and find ourselves neck-deep in the next.

"The last few years, since we been in the Condon country, it ain't been much different. We figured we'd settle down to grow old respectable. But somehow or another, peaceful as we are, things kind of move in on us. Dust follows us. Our lives is like them pinnacles yonder, McQuirk." He waved a hand toward the shimmering hills. "They're barren, and uninteresting, and the dust of them is bitter on the tongue. You ride over one hogback and you ain't got nowhere. They's another blistering mesa staring you in the face, and no green valleys in between. Do you follow me, McQuirk?"

"At a considerable distance," admitted Lonesome. "Whereas, this inspiration of yours must surely be a humdinger, when you got to sneak up on it so roundabout that a way."

"Point is," continued Windy, "all our lives has just been one danged thing after another. Yeah, right here in the Condon country we're supposed to be settled down, taking our royal ease. But what's the truth of it? We're still burning up the dust. We only got a shoe-string outfit. But it keeps us busy as wild cats, moving our herds from one range to another, branding calves, cutting out the prime stuff, and shipping 'em out, taking our turn in blizzards, and sinking post holes in frying-pan weather. And between times, in one jack pot or another, seems like we always keep our guns oiled."

Lonesome studied his partner keenly, his pale-blue eyes placid but unwinking. It was obvious that an unusual mood had descended upon Windy. It was the first time in their long partnership that Windy had given the least suggestion that lurid and continuous action was not the precise food upon which his energetic nature fed. There was, moreover, more than a little truth in the other's outline of their lives and

code. Both were hard-riding, hard-bitten men, products of a harsh environment. It had been tacitly accepted by both in those infrequent intervals when they had pondered upon the subject, that the iron decrees of circumstance and habit would hold them to the same trails to the end.

"Name it, DeLong," Lonesome challenged, his tawny mustache curling. "In all this chaff, there must shorely be a little wheat. What's the answer?"

"The answer is," said Windy. "that the time has come for you and me to turn over a new leaf. I don't mean to-morrow or next week, or when snow flies, but right this minute. The hour has struck. When you say, 'Let's go', they's nothing to prevent us from burning up the dust."

"Burning up the dust?" Lonesome echoed. "Whither, caballero?"

"To some more favored region," said Windy, "where they's rest and quiet."

"Yeah, but where?" Lonesome persisted. "And for how long?"

"To Portland," said Windy. "For a week. To the big city where they's bright lights, and the streets are paved, and they're restaurants where a feller can fill up on real grub. Where they's law and order, and folks is contented and happy. Where there's flowers blooming, and birds singing, and the sun ain't so blistering hot, and it rains once in a while. Yeah, where we can take our royal ease and forget for a spell that we're mangy wolves howling out our hearts in the bad lands."

Lonesome stared. "You mean go on a bust? Paint the town red? I'm surprised at you, Windy."

"No," said Windy. "That's precisely what I don't mean. You couldn't have expressed it no worse if you'd put yore mind to it. We don't aim to paint nothin' red. What I'm dreamin' about is to sneak into the metropolis where we ain't known. We may be overgrown toads here in the Condon country

where a gent has got to have tufts on his ears and thumbs on his feet to struggle along; but we wouldn't cause no ripple in the big village. We could ease in kind of quiet and find us a nice hotel where the beds is soft and they ain't any alarm clocks. We could forget the blasted range and they wouldn't be no six-guns hangin' on our hips. We could eat when we was hungry, and go to shows, and sleep till noon the next day, and altogether we'd have a heck of a time doin' nothin' at all and just soakin' it up. D'ye get me, McQuirk?"

Windy leaned forward earnestly and tapped his palm with a bony forefinger. "Point is," he went on, "out in these alleged open spaces where men is men, hombres like us is continually on the alert, with our gun hands ready to reach for the irons. This here is supposed to be a law-abidin' community as the range country goes, but they's only one sheriff to a thousand miles of high desert. A feller carries most of the law on his hip. In plenty arguments hereabouts, old man Colt has the last word. It's the white man's burden—an' that's the precise burden I crave to get shet of for a spell. They ain't no need to be on yore toes in Portland, on account of law and order and a policeman standin' on every other street corner. Folks ain't primitive no more down yonder. A feller can live and breathe quiet and take his royal ease. Do you follow me a-tall?"

"I'm trompin' on yore heels," Lonesome admitted, nodding. "You crave to relax that a way. You're plumb filled up with danger an' action an' burnin' up the dust. You crave to rub shoulders with folks that is law-abidin' and live peaceful amongst themselves. You're yearnin' for a vacation from this said survival-of-the-fittest stuff. You aim to set an' think an' yawn—without keepin' one eye open an' an ear quiverin'. Is that it?"

"Check," agreed Windy. His mus-

tache bristled triumphantly. "You're there, pardner. All a feller's got to do is talk himself blue in the face and after you've pondered it for a spell, you get the idea right pronto. You've done grasped it. What's the answer?" He assumed eager interest.

"It's a humdinger," Lonesome admitted. His pale-blue eyes reflected some of the other's enthusiasm. "But we can't walk out an' leave our outfit this a way, Windy. An expedition such as you've outlined would cost us cash money, an' we shorely don't belong to the idle rich. Yeah, an' how would you explain yore absence to the Widow Hogan, who's got considerable interest in yore sundry activities? Not to mention the schoolma'am." He coughed self-consciously. "I got a mental picture of explainin' to her that I crave a vacation from the Condon country, which same is her range, an' it ain't so good."

"As usual," said Windy instantly, "you're strugglin' in the coils of error. Watch me take each of yore penny-ante objections and knock 'em for a loop. We've just sold off our prime stuff, ain't we, and paid off our debts, an' got our margin in the shape of two hundred iron men salted away in the bank at Condon? Well, sir, we can turn the rest of the beef into the south forty where they's grass an' water, an' they'll take care of themselves till we get back. Likewise our saddle string. So we can leave our outfit, and them two hundred iron men is yellin' for action. As far as the gals is concerned, we'll tell 'em nothin'. If they's any explainin' to be done, we'll do it when we get back. Since when has a couple of long-whiskered gents like you an' me got to punch a time-clock every time he aimed to take a chew? Pretty pronto you'll be figgerin' we'd ought to ask their permission when we craved to go up in the pinnacles and pick us a few wild flowers." Windy snorted and eyed

his partner pityingly. "I'm surprised at you, McQuirk."

"Yeah," said Lonesome, chuckling. "If I hadn't seen you cave in an' quiver like a jellyfish when the widow turned loose one of her dimplin' smiles on you, old-timer, I'd figger you was a roarin' lion when it comes to them sentimental gymnastics. But let that pass. You done advanced some potent conversation, at that. This here's Monday. We don't have to see the gals till Saturday night. What they don't know won't hurt 'em none, particularly when they ain't nothin' to know. Yeah——" He looked reflectively into the dust at his feet. "I reckon the little outfit could struggle along. We're entitled to a vacation. Windy, what's the particular thing you crave the most, down to Portland? Outside of gettin' out from under the swirl of things that a way?"

"Ice cream," said Windy. His saturnine features split into a rare and singularly engaging grin. "Mountains of ice cream crowned with crushed strawberries. I've dreamed of it up in the blasted pinnacles when my tongue was hanging out a foot and I was spittin' dust. I've seen myself restin' my elbows on one of them cool, marble-topped tables, with an electric fan hummin' at my left ear. Just leanin' languid that a way and sayin': 'Garsong, another just like it, an' twice as big'. What's yores, McQuirk?" he inquired.

"In one of them big parks in Portland," said Lonesome, his tawny mustache drooping complacently across his fighting jaw, "I aim to set on a bench in the shade. They's miles of green grass in them parks, Windy, and acres of flowers, and green trees in which the wind is rustlin'. They's fountains sparklin', and children playing, laughin' an' happy an' innocent that a way. I aim to set there, and stretch my laigs, an' yawn, an' rest my eyes on the green grass an' flowers, an' watch them happy

little young ones play. Windy"—he eyed his partner somewhat sheepishly—"they probably ain't no more than a thousand men along the Rio Grande an' points north who'd pass out in squads laughin' at the spectacle of gun-fightin' McQuirk an' greased-lightnin' DeLong nourishin' such ambitions in their bosoms! Ice cream, by gravy, an' children playin'!"

"Let's go." Windy leaped to his feet and snapped his fingers. "It's a deal, huh? Let's travel."

"You're so danged hair-trigger," Lonesome reproved, rising in more leisurely fashion. "You aim to start sprintin' for the train? No time to be lost, huh?"

"Immediately," said Windy. "Forthwith. *Muy pronto*. What's holdin' us back?"

"We ain't got any money," Lonesome pointed out. "We'd best ride to Condon an' take the train there, huh? What do you think?"

"No," said Windy. "The Dalles is closer and is on the main line. We got enough chicken feed to take us to Portland, where we can cash a check. We'll proceed as follows, McQuirk. We'll put on our Sunday harness, ride our critters to The Dalles an' leave 'em in the livery stable. We'll catch the eleven o'clock train, which'll put us in the big village about two thirty. That'll give us time to get organized and find a place to hang our hats. How's that?"

"Fair enough," agreed Lonesome. "We'll leave our guns to home, huh?"

"Which we shorely will," said Windy. "This here is one peaceable expedition. They's probably an ordinance in the big city against carryin' artillery, anyway. Come on, caballero. Release the anchor. If we make that eleven o'clock train we got to burn up the dust."

"As usual," Lonesome sighed. "But from The Dalles on we begin to rest, huh? Let's go, DeLong."

CHAPTER II.

A FRIENDLY GAME.

THE sun was approaching the zenith when the partners rode down a steep trail from a high plateau. Below them, in the hollow, nestled the thriving city of The Dalles, one-time outpost of the wilderness where weary pioneers forsook their ox teams and proceeded by whip-sawed boat on the last lap of their long trek to the free land of the Willamette Valley. Beyond the town the mighty Columbia rolled, and paralleling its rugged banks gleamed the twin ribbons of transcontinental steel.

The pair sat their saddles self-consciously in the unaccustomed glory of their Sunday clothes. Both were clad in dignified blue serge, somewhat baggy of knee and shiny of elbow, its brightness a trifle dimmed by the dust of the high country. Each wore a black felt hat, low of crown and broad of brim, and encircling their muscular, sun-burned necks, beneath the soft collars of their hickory shirts was the badge of slavery in the form of blue-and-white polka-dot four-in-hands. Articles of personal adornment were meager and in the same discreetly subdued key. Across Lonesome's ample vest a heavy chain was suspended, guarding a bulging silver timepiece that ticked importantly in the depths of his pocket. From Windy's lean midsection hung an ornamental fob comprising a nugget grasped in an eagle's claw, cunningly carved from Klondike gold.

Attired thus they were no longer gunmen, master exponents of the arts of the buckaroo, dominant citizens of a harsh environment. Their manner was somewhat abashed and deprecatory. Their dynamic and colorful personalities were hidden. To the casual eye they might have been prosperous farmers girded for an unaccustomed jaunt to town, indigent persons whose sole possessions were faded carpet-bag and

ancient valise strapped to worn saddles, or cattlemen whose current cash balances were high in six figures.

Nevertheless, while they eyed each other furtively, as though each had acquired some of the attributes of a stranger, a vast complacence enveloped them as they rode. Lonesome's tanned cheek bulged with an enormous chew and Windy puffed with energetic enjoyment at a brown cigarette. When a locomotive whistle sounded in the remote distance of the mighty gorge to the eastward, each started involuntarily. Their eyes lighted with the anticipation of boys, circus-bound, who hear the far-off seductive notes of the calliope and the roaring of the animals in the big tent. -

They proceeded at a fast lope through town, and sought a livery stable where they had left their mounts on previous jaunts to the city. Here occurred their last contact with a familiar world. The ancient proprietor, remembering them, spoke to them jocularly as they gave him instructions concerning their horses and laid hold on their baggage preparatory to proceeding toward the depot.

"I can see you lads are glory bound," opined the hardbitten old-timer, almost with envy. "It'll be a poor night for sailors when you hit the big village, huh?"

"You got us wrong, mister," said Lonesome, grinning. "This is one peaceable mission. Just a little business and some relaxation. That's all."

"It's the said relaxation I'm referring to," chuckled the ancient one. "If I know anything about you lads' reputation, wherever McQuirk and DeLong is, they's likewise a crowd. Some is born that a way, and others has it thrust upon 'em." He sighed. "They's worse places than Portland, at that, for gents that crave action on their money."

"Come on, McQuirk," said Windy with some irritation. "If we waste

any more time arguing with this buzzard on how peaceable we are, we'll miss the train, which will make us plumb hostile again. Watch them critters, mister. Don't be afraid to fatten them up a little whilst we're gone. They'll probably forget what oats look like by the time we get back. But do the best you can and don't take no chances by leaving your conscience be your guide."

"If you ain't back in a week's time, I'm losing on the deal," retorted the old-timer. "These goats ain't worth their feed. Watch yore step in the metropolis. Remember, cowboys, you can't just hang wool on a wolf and expect him to eat grass."

"McQuirk," said Windy as the pair headed toward the depot, "that petrified image figures that wherever we go, dust just naturally has to follow us. I reckon most folks up in the Condon country will figure the same way. But we'll fool them all this time, huh?"

"Which we surely will," agreed Lonesome joyously. "We've been living on champagne and them *hors d'oeuvre* too long, in a manner of speaking. All we crave now is beans and near-beer."

"Boy," chortled Windy, "point yore disreputable nose into the breeze. Look alive. It's daylight in the swamps. I know now how them 'slaves felt who was freed at last. We're on our way, old son."

At the ticket window, in the depot, Lonesome turned to his partner.

"Windy," he said, his tawny mustache curling, "I'm getting neck-deep into the spirit of this thing. Whilst we're at it, let's do it right. You and me don't have to ride with the common herd, that a way. We've rubbed shoulders too long with this said hoipollo. What say we get tickets in the observation car? It'll cost us all of four bits."

"It's a deal," Windy agreed. "I'm just that reckless. We'll travel in the style to which we ain't accustomed."

As they moved with conscious dignity down the aisle of the chair car, much daylight, even in their formal attire, showed between their capable knees. Grunting, they stowed their dilapidated baggage in the wall rack, and seated themselves in their respective places, mopping their glistening features. Sleepy tourists eyed them with bored indifference. A traveling man's fishlike stare rested upon them above the edge of his magazine. They felt that the combined gaze of the world was upon them, and unconsciously hitched their chairs closer together.

They felt more at ease when the train started. Other travelers stared out the window at the speeding river or at the mighty walls of the gorge, towering two thousand feet against the sky. They relaxed, settling themselves more comfortably.

"McQuirk," said Windy in a hoarse whisper, "this is the life. Them carpets wouldn't look so bad in the shack, huh? And after we make a ten-strike I surely aim to rest my shoulder blades in a dude chair like this."

"DeLong," questioned Lonesome, more guardedly, "where in blazes am I going to spit?"

"Don't be indelicate," admonished Windy. "You hadn't ought to chaw in polite society, anyway. Whereas, I crave a smoke. Somewheres in this gilded palace, they's bound to be a low-brow smoking room. Let's find it and find it pronto."

They accordingly arose and proceeded somewhat unsteadily toward the rear of the car. The smoking compartment was located without difficulty. In an inner section was a table surrounded by restful, leather-upholstered seats.

Upon entering this section, they discovered a large person slumped in the corner, his blue jowls resting upon his chest, eyes sleepily half closed. The bulky one was fastidiously dressed, and from the ring finger of the pudgy hand

resting upon his knee a solitaire sparkled.

"Excuse us, mister," said Windy politely. "If this ain't your private stall, we'll set down and rest our feet."

The sleepy one stirred. His heavy-lidded gaze inspected the partners from head to foot and came to rest on about the second button of Windy's vest.

"'Sall right with me," he growled. With an effort, he waved a hand. "Sit down."

The partners seated themselves, stretching their legs luxuriously. They felt more at home in this less ornate environment. Windy rolled a cigarette and fumbled for a match, but noting that a small receptacle containing matches was thoughtfully placed near at hand, he lighted his cigarette with one of these, blew it out, and tossed it away with a languid gesture, which implied his complete sense of ease.

Out of respect to the sleepy stranger, they spoke in whispers. But the bulky one roused presently and yawned, displaying many gold-filled teeth. He eyed the partners with gloomy tolerance.

"Nice day," he commented.

"Peach," affirmed Windy, almost eagerly. In the Condon country, encounters with strangers were rare. Part of their anticipation of their present jaunt rested upon friendly contacts such as this—the satisfaction of the gregarious instinct, which is of necessity repressed in the hearts of those who ride lonely trails.

"Probably be raining in Portland," said the big man without interest. "You can always expect it when you get west of the mountains."

"It won't hurt our feelings none," averred Windy. "We'll shorely soak it up. If some of that valley rain could be shipped up to the desert, we'd have the world by the tail."

"Wheat farmers?" inquired the stranger carelessly.

Windy shook his head. "Cattle."

"You don't make a trip to Portland often, eh?"

"First time," Windy admitted. "Excepting when we come down with some beef. On them trips, we never got away from the stockyards."

"You're lucky," said the other morosely. "I've traveled this line so long, it's old stuff with me. I envy you fellows. I wish my business would let me settle down. Spending most of your life on a train is no way to live."

The partners waited politely for him to continue. But the stranger had apparently lost interest in the conversation. He yawned again and his heavy-lidded gaze strayed out the window at the landscape fleeting by.

Another stranger presently entered the compartment. He, too, was bulky and nattily dressed. His heavy jowls were blue from close shaving and a diamond stickpin adorned his faultless cravat. He glanced carelessly at the partners as he seated himself. But his cold eyes rested more keenly on the bulky one, as he produced a cigar, clipped it, and placed it between his thick lips.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before, brother?" he questioned as he lighted his cigar. "I'm Berg, making the Inland Empire territory for Schloss & Company, wholesale suits, Portland."

"Can't place you," said the bulky one sleepily. "Glad to meet you, Berg. We've probably run across each other before. My territory goes clear to Boise. I'm Grathin of the Eastern & Western, hardware and paints. How's business?"

The traveling men talked of their respective lines, while the partners listened. Big business unfolded before them. There was much trade jargon concerning buying power, economic conditions, cutthroat competition, and confidential discount.

Their conversation drifted from busi-

ness to politics, from thence to religion, to the South Sea Islands, to the high cost of imported liquor, and finally to cribbage. It was obvious that both were cribbage addicts. They spoke easily of high scores made in the past, of unusual combinations of hands and playing. Finally, he of the cigar motioned to the porter and ordered a deck of cards. They began to play, and the partners, themselves cribbage players of no small caliber, observed the game with interest.

For a space Grathin, the bulky one, lost some of his habitual gloom. Berg, puffing on his cigar, was oblivious to all save the intricacies of the game. They played several rounds, then Grathin leaned back, his heavy features settling again into apathy.

"Bah!" he yawned, pushing the board away. "This isn't so hot." He peered out the window. "We're past Hood River. More than an hour yet before we get to Portland. What a life!"

"We strive to please," returned Berg in more jaunty vein, shuffling the cards. "Since you're outclassed in cribbage, maybe you can suggest some other game. Name it, and I'll take you down the line." He bestowed a broad wink upon the partners. They beamed under his condescending glance.

"Some penny-ante wouldn't do us any harm," said Grathin, with reviving interest. "I wouldn't mind making a little cigar money off you. You can put it on your expense account along with the other little items."

"Not so good," objected Berg. "There's only two of us. But maybe we can pick up a couple more."

The partners held their breath, hoping against hope that their presence would be noted and a casual invitation extended to take a hand, for the ancient American pastime was dear to the hearts of both. As though sensing their eagerness, Grathin rolled a heavy-lidded eye in their direction.

"Ever play penny-ante?" he inquired.

"It's about our limit," Windy confessed. "Yeah, we'll give it a whirl an' much obliged."

The bulky ones were seated opposite each other. Windy slid in beside Grathin; Lonesome beside Berg. The latter pushed the deck before Lonesome, who shuffled and dealt.

"Understand now," said Grathin, as he produced a cigar and lit it. "This is a cutthroat game. Penny-ante and a ten-cent limit. Play 'em close to your belt."

The partners expanded under the atmosphere of good-fellowship. An understanding glance passed between them. Since they had only a quantity of loose change upon their persons, there was little chance of the gambler's fever carrying them to extremes.

"No holds barred," Lonesome agreed, chuckling. "Ante up, gents; it's jack pots. Cards, if any."

The compartment became blue with smoke as the game proceeded. Grathin and Berg removed coats and collars presently, and rolled up their sleeves. The partners tore off their polka-dot four-in-hands, stuffed them in their pockets, and tightened their belts. With the help of the porter, they opened a window and the welcome breeze played upon them.

"Hot dog!" breathed Windy, reaching for the deck. "Come to pap! Bet 'em high, gents, an' sleep in the streets!"

The partners won at first, then lost, then won again as the tide of fortune shifted. They played with the utmost good humor, reveling in the sheer enjoyment of it; but between the bulky Grathin and the jaunty Berg a certain belligerence seemed to be growing.

"Grathin, old kid," said the latter at length, as the deal came to him. "I can see you're a dyed-in-the-wool gambler. Let's make this a five-cent ante and dollar limit for a whirl or two.

These gentlemen"—he waved a hand courteously toward the partners—"can drop out for a moment if they wish. I want to see what you look like out on a limb."

"Suits me," growled Grathin. He produced a roll of bills. "I'll call and raise Bright-eyes. Make it four bits and five."

"Done," said Berg cheerfully, his cigar tilted at a rakish angle. He began to deal two hands. "Read 'em and weep."

Windy cast a glance of mute appeal at Lonesome, who nodded. The pair had been winning and considerable amounts of silver and bills of small denomination were before them. They had little original capital to lose.

"Hold on, mister," said Windy. "We'll stay with the wagon whilst our money holds out. Deal us in."

"Fine," agreed Berg, taking up the cards. "But don't gouge friend Grathin. He's my meat and I don't mean maybe. Table stakes only, gentlemen. Let's go."

This was a blooded game from the partners' viewpoint. They played cautiously, their faces bland and expressionless. But Berg and Grathin were openly hostile. They heaped maledictions upon each other as they won or lost; bandied insults whose animosity was only thinly veiled.

"Listen," said Grathin, glowering, when successive raises and a devastating show-down had transferred the last of his resources to Berg. "Where did you get that table-stakes stuff? You can't play a five-dollar limit with chicken feed."

"Want to dig down, do you?" inquired Berg complacently, as he counted the currency before him. "Dig, old son. It's O. K. with me. All donations thankfully received. I always knew I'd find an angel some day. I didn't dream he'd be a heavyweight like you."

"Zat so?" snarled Grathin. "Maybe you want to make it no-limit, huh?"

"If you can stand it," returned the other, winking at the partners. "Let's see the color of your money."

"You've got all my cash." Grathin eyed his enemy fixedly. "I'll give you an I O U. Square it when we hit Portland. How about it?"

"It isn't necessary." The other waved his hand with a mock courtesy that was galling. "You're a business man. So am I. Write a check. That's an excellent form of I O U which precludes any possibility of forgetfulness."

"Yeah," growled Grathin, producing his check book. "Providing I don't sprint to the bank before you do and stop the check."

"You wouldn't do that!" said Berg, with a pretense of being vastly shocked. "On a gambling debt between gentlemen? Oh, my, Mr. Grathin!"

"Deal!" said Grathin between his teeth. He was obviously enraged. "If I don't take you into camp, Bright-eyes, it'll be because I don't know a four-flush when I see it."

The partners had listened to this by-play in silence. In silence they permitted Berg to deal them in. It was now no-limit, and their meager resources patently could not stand a formidable bluff. But on Berg's deal, Windy won the pot, including a small check from Grathin. On Lonesome's deal, Windy again won, Grathin throwing down his cards. It was apparent that the bulky ones, disregarding the partners, were waiting to come to grips. Berg won on Windy's deal, and Grathin wrote another check, muttering, and ill pleased.

It was on Grathin's deal that a peculiar circumstance arose, to be viewed with mingled emotions by all true gamblers. Windy, picking up his five cards, found that he held four aces before the draw.

CHAPTER III.

A REGAL GESTURE.

AS he glanced at his hand with outward carelessness, Windy's thoughts raced swiftly. Having sat in many games of chance in his lurid career, at times in questionable company, his first reaction was inwardly expressed in the single word: "Frame-up." But as he yawned, his mustache bristling, and through narrowed eyes studied the bulky ones, he was not so sure. In the brief interval before the draw, logical step by step seemed to point to the fact that Lady Luck, smiling, was standing at his side.

The bulky ones were strangers to him, he reasoned. By the same token they might be crooks. In appearance they were not card sharps, nor in their handling of the cards, nor in their play. These facts alone would not have been sufficient to allay his suspicions; for at divers times he had encountered representatives of unbeatable games who were gentle of manner and garb, and spiritual of eye; and he had also witnessed, with a touch of awe, the technique of honest-featured gentlemen who dealt clumsily and had the hands of a blacksmith. But the circumstances leading up to the formidable hand he held carelessly between his lean fingers seemed to proclaim that the game was square and that the cards had fallen according to the decrees of fickle chance.

These strangers, for example, were men of substance, representatives of reputable commercial houses in Portland. Their casual conversation on trade matters had proved it. They were playing only for pastime, beginning with cribbage. He, Windy, and Lonesome, had been merely incidental, invited carelessly to make it four hands. When the game had become more blooded, Berg himself had suggested that they withdraw. The belligerent interest of the pair was concentrated

solely upon each other. Even now, while he debated the appearance of the situation, it was obvious that he and Lonesome were disregarded. Grathin, having glanced at his hand, had picked up the deck again. His heavy-lidded gaze was fixed upon Berg, who was chewing on his cigar.

"Well, Bright-eyes," the dealer growled, with more than a suggestion of a sneer. "What's the glad word? Is this the time you're going to try that whizzer?"

"It's against my principles under the gun this way," the other sighed. "But the pot's open, friend Grathin. For five. No cards, if you please." He elevated an eyebrow blandly. "I'll play these."

The dealer grunted and inclined the deck toward Lonesome, but his smoldering gaze was fixed on Berg. Windy's decision became more firmly fixed when Lonesome, too, stayed.

"I'll drag along for percentage," stated that worthy mildly. "It's a fair-to-middling pot. Loan me a five-spot, Windy. Yeah, an' since Mr. Berg is playin' 'em pat, I'll likewise play these."

"And me also," said Windy. "Let 'er buck, cowboys."

"H'm," muttered the dealer, scratching his head. "Lots of business, huh? But I'm with you, Bright-eyes. You're liable to bluff these boys out and steal the pot. I'll play 'em pat, too, so there's no advantage in the draw."

He reached for his check book, but Berg raised his hand. "You hoisting it, friend Grathin? No? Then let me suggest that you don't waste too many checks. You may write it all out at once at the show-down. Under the gun and in violation of all poker standards, I'm betting one hundred simoleons that my openers are better than your pat. Sink your teeth in that, old son."

He laid down his hand and leaned back, his cigar tilted at a rakish angle, and fumbled for a match. Grathin eyed

him fixedly. Lonesome, after a brief pause, tossed his hand into the discard.

"Too steep for me," he announced regretfully, reaching for his plug of tobacco. "I don't want to see 'em that bad."

It was at that instant that Windy, student of horses, poker, and men, caught a faint suggestion that the bulky ones were more interested in the probable procedure of himself and his partner than their previous manner had indicated. Grathin, his surly features turned toward him, was waiting. In the act of lighting his cigar, Berg's cold eyes were fixed upon him with puzzling intentness.

But in the next instant, the suspicion passed. His own hand represented a factor in the game. It was natural that each should consider it. Both were hoping, no doubt, that he, too, would lay down his hand, leaving them to battle it out alone.

"Lonesome," said Windy, eyeing his partner. "I'd shorely like to see 'em."

"Suit yourself," said Lonesome instantly. "Use yore judgment, cowboy."

"Our funds is in a joint account," he told the bulky ones apologetically. "I'll see that hundred."

"Dog-gone!" said Grathin, his thick lips curling. "I was counting on taking you into camp, Bright-eyes, but I didn't figger on this gent. Hoisting it two hundred."

"This," ruminated Berg, chewing on his cigar, "is certainly unusual. A full deck and no joker—and four pat hands! One hand is out. The other will probably pass out. Friend Grathin, you're an obnoxious poker player. Ever since we started to play I've been hoping we'd tangle in precisely this manner. You're called. Three hundred is the bet."

"Not raising?" questioned Grathin, with a sneer. Windy had a hunch at that instant that Berg had Grathin bested; that Grathin and Berg both

knew it. His suspicions returned with redoubled force. But it was too late now to draw back.

"You bloodhounds will have to tangle on the side," he announced. "Two hundred's my limit. I'm seein' it in that amount."

Berg nodded courteously. Grathin growled assent.

"Hundred on the side," he agreed. "Write 'em out, gents."

"Leaving the payee blank," Berg suggested. "The winner can fill it out."

Windy drew forth a Bank of Condon check book and laboriously scrawled the amount. Pens scratched as Berg and Grathin followed suit. The checks were tossed into the pot. In an unconscious attention to detail even in the stress of the moment, Windy noted that Grathin's check was of a light-pink hue, his own pale green.

"What you got?" demanded Grathin, his teeth set.

Windy silently spread his hand. The bulky one stared, then his breath exploded in a vast sigh as he slumped back in his seat.

"Son of a gun!" he breathed, throwing down his cards. "My four tens were the pikers of this lay-out. Bright-eyes, our long-whiskered friend took us both over the hill."

"Oh, no," said Berg airily, spreading his hand. "I have a little flush in spades—which is also a straight!"

It was indeed a straight flush, deuce to six-spot. Windy stared at them, and the black cards seemed to leer back at him sardonically.

He sat back, his lean features expressionless, and produced the makings. His glittering eyes studied Grathin as he placed the cigarette to his lips. The bulky one sat, heavy jowls resting on his chest. If it was acting, it was of finished technique. Grathin seemed utterly crushed, a quivering hulk. He turned his gaze on Berg, who was segregating the currency before him.

"There's a Santa Claus after all," observed the jaunty one, cigar uptilted. "Yes, indeed. And dreams come true. Many, many shirts for the baby in this little pot——"

Windy's gaze shifted to Lonesome, and instantly he stiffened. He knew his partner thoroughly. By the signs he could tell that his own suspicions, in Lonesome, were a certainty. His partner's pale-blue eyes, no longer placid, were cold and intent. Studying Berg, his motionless cheek bulged.

"Shall I continue the deal?" questioned Berg. "No? Gents, I thank you. Particularly friend Grathin. He may be a scholar and a good judge of whisky, but he's no poker player." The smaller currency he placed in his wallet; but Windy's and Grathin's checks he placed in his breast pocket and patted them affectionately.

"Wow!" groaned Grathin. "Better than three hundred! If my frau ever finds this out——" He left the sentence unfinished and wiped his forehead.

"Reckon I'll get a drink," muttered Windy. He pushed past Grathin and out into the passageway, Lonesome at his heels.

"McQuirk," muttered Windy, as their heads were together at the water filter. "What'd you hold?"

"Four queens."

"Four queens," repeated Windy, his mustache bristling. "That bulgin' maverick had four tens, me four bullets, and Berg a straight flush! Shall we just naturally jump 'em on suspicion?"

"Don't have to," Lonesome whispered. "I got 'em cold. Bein' hunched down that a way, I seen Berg's cut. That deuce of spades was on the bottom."

"Great snakes!" breathed Windy, in awe. "Do you think they can pull that penny-ante stuff with old troupers like you an' me? What say, McQuirk?"—he rubbed his bony hands joyously—"shall

we scalp 'em first and parley afterwards? Or sneak up on 'em gradual by bitin' off their ears?"

"If it wasn't the principle of the thing," said Lonesome, "I'd say leave 'em suffer. We can stop that check an' then we ain't out nothin' but chicken feed."

"No, by gravy!" said Windy with decision. "I crave one large-size riot. We'll grab them sharps by the face an' make 'em snap like a whip. What say, hey?"

"I reckon," Lonesome sighed, but his pale-blue eyes lighted. "Life's full of problems."

They strode back into the compartment and resumed their accustomed places. The train was rolling through the suburbs. From an overcast sky, a light rain was falling. Ahead loomed the towering girders of a bridge. It was but a matter of minutes now before the train would pull in at the Union Station.

But even as Windy half rose from his place, and Lonesome shifted his feet beneath him, prepared to pounce upon his man, Berg leaned back, jingling the last of the loose silver into his pocket, and eyed them quizzically.

"Boys," he said, with a courteous wave of his cigar, "I've just been thinking about this deal, and my conscience hurts me. Yes, even when I contemplate friend Grathin. After all, we started our little penny-ante for pastime only. In our enthusiasm, it got beyond us and degenerated into a cutthroat battle."

It was obvious that neither the speaker nor the bulky Grathin had the slightest realization of the dynamic personalities of the pair before them. In the Condon country, men who knew the hard-bitten partners and became acquainted with the facts would have come running from afar to witness the impending imbroglio. But the bulky ones eyed them with a tolerance not a

little tinged with condescension. They were relaxed, and at ease; and only the slenderest margin of chance—that Lonesome and Windy paused to hear what they might have to say—prevented the addition of an immediate and devastating chapter to their experience.

"I play poker for the fun of it," Berg continued. "What I win or lose is secondary. It's the competition that I like, the matching of wits. I couldn't resist the temptation to play that straight flush to the limit. I've held 'em before, and all I won was the ante. Nobody stayed. This time it satisfied my gambling instincts to make it worth five hundred——"

"What are you driving at?" growled Grathin. "You've had your fun and you've got the money. Just rubbing it in a little, eh?"

"Tut, tut," admonished the other. "You've got me wrong, old boy. You can't afford to lose three hundred, friend Grathin. And neither can these gentlemen afford to lose two hundred. That's too much for a couple of hours' pleasure. The chicken feed I won in the pot is sufficient. So I'll just dispose of these checks."

From his breast pocket he drew forth the checks, the light pink and the pale green, and smoothed them out, face down, upon his knee. He tore them across the middle once and again, crumpled the fragments, and tossed them out the window. The train was rumbling across the bridge. The fragments fluttered out with the breeze, danced downward like falling leaves toward the surface of the river.

The partners stared, utterly bewildered. It was a regal gesture indeed, giving the lie to their certainty that they had been victimized by unscrupulous card sharps. Lonesome had seen the deuce dealt from the bottom of the deck; the cards had unquestionably been stacked. Yet no professional sharp would thus voluntarily have

thrown away the fruits of his ruthless tactics.

"That's that," said Berg jauntily, rising. He lighted his cigar, his cold eyes twinkling. "No hard feelings, eh? Glad to have met you, boys. Friend Grathin, we'll tangle again some time, perhaps. You'll play 'em closer to your belt, eh?" Chuckling, he strode away.

Grathin stared after him, jaw dropping, and scratched his bullet head.

"There," he proclaimed ponderously, "is one dyed-in-the-wool sport." He eyed the partners, his thick lips curling into a slow grin. "I wouldn't have done it myself. It was a lucky break for us, huh?"

More briskly, the bulky one drew on his coat and adjusted his collar. Nodding a brief farewell, he strode ponderously out and was gone.

"McQuirk," said Windy, "we shorely misjudged those hombres. They was pretty good scouts, after all, huh?"

"Looks like it," Lonesome admitted. "But what about that deuce of spades?"

"Peculiar ideas about playing, maybe," said Windy. "I knew a buzzard once that cheated himself at solitaire."

"It's funny ideas like them that brings in a continuous crop of widows an' orphans," opined Lonesome. "There ain't nothin' easier to misunderstand." He shook his head, his tawny mustache curling. "Those gents'll never know how close they come to finding out what mince-meat thinks about."

They did not have time to ponder longer on the puzzling incident. The train was rolling to a halt. In great haste, they rearranged their clothing, clutched their hats, and hurried back to retrieve their baggage.

Rain was pounding on the iron roofs of the depot sheds. The roar of traffic beat upon their ears—the warning, many-keyed tones of automobile sirens, the rumble of street cars and trucks on the mighty ramp of another bridge above their heads. A crowd surged be-

yond the barrier, waiting for the incoming passengers. From beyond the babel of voices they could hear taxi-drivers calling stridently for fares. Before them and about and above them, it seemed, the very air vibrated; it was the voice of the city, a long-drawn, continuous undercurrent of sound. To the cosmopolitan and travel-weary, it would have been merely evidence that here an energetic metropolis of three hundred and fifty thousand souls was pursuing its routine and daily business; but to the partners' sensitive ears, attuned to the silence of the high country, it was chaos.

With coat collars turned up against the rain, and slouching closer together in reaction to some vague instinct of self-protection, they followed the crowd toward the iron gates.

CHAPTER IV.

AN HOUR TO GO.

THE Union Station, terminus of five transcontinental rail lines, and of numerous short lines radiating to all parts of the compass in the Pacific Northwest, had long since proved inadequate for the needs of the traffic. But to the partners, the marble floor and soaring columns of the lobby were stupendous. As a small eddy in the ceaseless cross-current of humanity, they paused to take stock of the situation.

"The first thing we got to have is money, McQuirk," Windy pointed out. "Them genteel crooks left us financially embarrassed. We got to cash a check."

"Correct," agreed Lonesome. "But where?"

"Let's leave our baggage over yonder," suggested Windy, pointing to a corner where a hard-featured youth was energetically stowing away parcels and grips into a miniature catacomb built into the wall. "We don't want to tote this loot around till we get organized."

They accordingly fell into line at the

counter, and presently received slips of pasteboard in exchange for carpetbag and ancient valise.

"Son," said Windy in his most pleasant manner, "where can a feller cash a check?"

"I'll bite," responded the youth, eying them coldly. "Where?"

"What I mean is," said Windy with a nervous cough, "we're strangers in town. Is there a bank hereabouts?"

"Up the street eight blocks, they's a flock of 'em," said the youth. "U. S. National, First National, West Coast National. Take your choice."

"Do you reckon they'd cash a check for us, being strangers that a way?"

"Sure they would," responded the youth encouragingly, "you'd be surprised! They're always glad to see strangers and cash their checks. I'd do it myself only I just paid my income tax."

"Eight blocks up the street, huh?" said Windy. "Son, much obliged. McQuirk,"—he told his partner as they moved with the crowd through the swinging doors, evaded the insistent ballyhoo of a long line of taxi-drivers, and proceeded along the glistening street that led toward the towering structures of the business district—"folks ain't so hard-boiled hereabouts. Kind of friendly, in their way. That there lad who checked our loot, for instance. An' Grathin an' Berg on the train. Made us feel right to home. Yeah, we'll get along."

"Not very far," averred Lonesome, "less I get some chewin' tobacco. I done et all my plug in that blasted poker game. You realize we ain't got a thin dime between us, DeLong?"

"Shucks," said Windy confidently, "we'll be wadin' hip-deep in filthy lucre after we've found one of these said banks. McQuirk, take note of this gentle rain. Like dew, ain't it? It's shorely different from the Condon country. Up in that blasted wilderness when

it rains you know something's happenin'. Here folks don't pay no attention to it."

"I don't neither," agreed Lonesome, "long as it's just my shoes that's squashin' that a way. But the minit this hefty dew commences to run down my back, DeLong, I'm liable to get hostile."

Though neither of the partners by any stretch of the imagination could be classified as nervous by temperament, the roaring traffic of the streets troubled them. Crossing one of the thoroughfares assumed the aspects of an adventure, embarked upon only with the exercise of tremendous caution and with muscles tensed to leap to safety. At one particularly busy corner, the fording of the current seemed inconsistent with safety to life and limb. Watching their chance, they plunged into the chaos. They two alone, it appeared, had had sufficient courage to make the attempt, and instantly they were marooned in midstream. Great cars bore down upon them, sirens shrieking; mighty trucks thundered. A shrill, angry whistle from the curb resounded above the din. Only by the thinnest margin were they able to achieve the sidewalk, and a bulky person in a resplendent blue uniform, with a Sam Browne belt and a huge star upon his authoritative chest, glowered wrathfully upon them.

"What's the idea?" demanded the officer of the law, pointing at a red light upon a small iron tower. "Don't yez know nothin' about traffic signals?"

"God save us!" muttered Windy apologetically, mopping his perspiring features. "Give the gent our excuses, McQuirk."

"McQuirk, is it?" said the officer, more tolerantly. "I can see you lads are strangers in town, even if you don't carry no furrin license plates. Watch your step, me laddy-bucks, or ye'll be givin' your excuses to the judge. Hustle

along now, and watch for them green lights before crossin' the street."

"That's a horse on us, DeLong," said Lonesome as they continued on their way. "Life's gettin' more complex all the while. You even got to march across the street in squad formation in this man's town. What's the world comin' to?"

"My gosh, McQuirk!" said Windy, in awe, craning his neck to peer up the ornate facade of a towering structure whose crest seemed to be all but lost in the higher mists. "I shore hand it to the gent that laid that top row of bricks. He had the instinct of an eagle. The brakes of the John Day ain't got anything on this village. These buildings is pinnacles, an' the streets is canyons. Yeah, an' all these folks hurryin' and the hell-bent traffic is a roarin' river——"

"By gravy, Windy," Lonesome interrupted. "Here's that U. S. Bank the feller mentioned. Cast yore eye on them pillars. Big around as a corn-crib. Ain't that a whale of a layout? The lad must have given us the wrong steer. I'll gamble only millionaires would have dealin's in a palace like that."

"We'll give it a whirl," said Windy resolutely. "Our money's as good as anybody else's. We'll just naturally bust in where angels fear to tread. They can't do no more than heave us out on our ear."

They accordingly pushed in through the iron doors and found themselves in a vast marble-pillared lobby of impressive magnificence. Before them, on the right and left, were long rows of iron-grilled cages where tellers wrought, neck-deep apparently, in stacks of currency. The high windows and lofty frescoed ceiling gave to the mammoth establishment a cathedrallike quality, belied by the rattle and din of commerce. From balconies supported by the soaring pillars came unceasing salvos from typewriter and adding ma-

chine. Many people were abroad in the lobby, in lines at the tellers' windows, leaning upon marble-topped counters, or writing busily at long desklike tables in the center of the broad expanse.

"Gosh!" breathed Windy, "when it comes to money factories, we ain't been nowhere nor seen nothin'. The Bank of Condon wouldn't be more'n a squirrel cage in this layout. Question is, where do we go from here?"

"We'll write it out," said Lonesome. "Unlimber that check book, Windy. About twenty-five bucks apiece should hold us for a spell, huh? Make it out to me an' I'll indorse it. That'll show 'em we know a thing or two about this said financial game."

At an adjacent desklike table, they laboriously wrote out the check and dried the ink with meticulous care. Then they furtively examined the long row of tellers' windows.

"By gravy, McQuirk," Windy whispered, "this is worse than a horse race! Must be a dozen of them 'paying and receiving' cubbyholes. Which one of them cold-eyed lads we going to place our bets on?"

Opposite them was a window bearing the inscription:

SI TO T.

TELLER ON DUTY: NEIL M. ROBERTSON.

Lonesome silently pointed to this one and they took their places in the line.

"I dunno about this bozo, McQuirk," Windy muttered over his shoulder. "I'll gamble he's Scotch."

"It ain't to be held against him," Lonesome returned. "He can't help it none. We got to take our chances. Now, just you proceed with confidence, Windy. We got to get them shekels or bust."

Windy was in the lead and, arriving at the window, he thrust the check through the slot, his forbidding features writhing into the semblance of a friendly grin.

"Howdy," he offered. "Nice day, ain't it?"

The teller nodded, with a smile as fixed and impersonal as that of a faro dealer. He glanced at the check, turned it over, and raised his eyes to the partners.

"What's this?" he said. "Bank of Condon. Is this your signature?"

"Sure is," said Windy. "An' that's my pardner's John Henry on the back."

"Do either of you gentlemen have accounts in this bank?"

"Which we shorely do," averred Windy. "Whereas it ain't such a loud-roarin' account, it's hefty enough to copper that bet."

The teller eyed them suspiciously. "I mean *this* bank, the U. S. National."

"Here?" said Windy. "Oh, no! We ain't got to the place where we can salt our wealth in a half-dozen banks. We're strangers in town," he explained. "Got into a little poker game on the way down——"

"Pardon me," the teller interrupted, "can you identify yourselves?"

"Cinch!" said Windy. "I'm DeLong." He jerked a thumb at his partner. "That's McQuirk."

"No, no." The youth tapped the counter. "Personal identification. Know anybody here?"

"Not a soul," said Windy cheerfully. "We only got in a half hour ago. Ain't made any acquaintances yet to speak of. Listen, son, I can see what ails you. They ain't nothin' in it for you, cashin' a Bank of Condon check, huh? Well, sir, just you drag a little out on the side to pay for yore trouble. O. K., McQuirk?"

"Why, sure," agreed Lonesome. "The house has got to have its percentage."

The youth raised a supercilious eyebrow. "Sorry," he said politely, sliding the check back to Windy. "We'd be glad to oblige, but we really can't cash checks for strangers, you know."

"But listen," Windy protested. "We're broke. We just naturally got to have some money. We got good coin of the realm salted away up to Condon. But I'd like to know how in blazes we going to get it?"

The youth shrugged his shoulders and glanced past the pair at the lengthening line. "If you gentlemen will kindly make way, there are other customers waiting for service. Take your check to one of the officers of the bank," he directed, pointing across the lobby. "If he O. K.'s it, I'll be glad to cash it for you. Ah, there, Mr. Rosenbaum!" Turning from the partners to the next in line, the teller's features were wreathed in a genial smile as he asked: "And how's business to-day, Mr. Rosenbaum?"

"Ain't it the bunk?" muttered Windy, as they slouched across the lobby. "We're as welcome here as hoboes at a cake-eater's convention. That buzzard was Scotch, McQuirk. I'll gamble he licks off his glasses after he's et grapefruit."

"He's got to play 'em safe that a way," said Lonesome more tolerantly. "Prob'ly house rules. By gravy, Windy, see the name on that desk yonder—'James H. Brady, Vice President'? Do you reckon that's the Brady who's mixed up in them stock deals up in the Condon country?"

"I reckon," said Windy, with renewed hope. "We've never met him, but he'll probably be able to figger we ain't slickers. He's one of the officers, at that, which the young dude referred us to. If Brady don't listen to our song an' dance, McQuirk, we're sunk."

The banker fixed keen fishlike eyes upon them as the partners, leaning upon the counter, outlined their dilemma. He was a cold, hard, suave man, metallic and emotionless as the gold in which he dealt. The partners felt chilled in his presence. They gleaned an impression

that he was turning aside momentarily from large affairs to consider a detail that was inconsequential indeed.

He questioned them briefly concerning the Condon country. It was apparent that he was familiar with the region and was checking on their story. He listened to them for a space, then halted them with a gesture.

"You understand that this is purely in the nature of an accommodation on our part," he told them. "There is nothing in the er—transaction for the bank, except an investment in goodwill. We will be glad to wire to Condon to verify your account. You will advance the cost of the wire, of course."

"Gosh, mister," said Windy. "It's a whale of an idea. But we ain't got a sou."

"We can't be expected, of course, to assume this expense ourselves," said the banker coldly.

"Come on, DeLong," said Lonesome with decision. "We can raise a couple of dollars somewheres for this said wire business. How long's this joint open, mister? Can we put the deal through to-night?"

"The bank closes in ten minutes," said the banker. "But I'll be here until five. Knock at that side door yonder. We should hear from Condon within an hour after the inquiry is sent."

"That gives us an hour in which to raise two bucks," said Lonesome. "Let's go."

CHAPTER V.

GRIEF.

NOW what?" Windy questioned as they stood on the glistening curb where the dismal rain still fell in a steady drizzle. "You're full of bright ideas, McQuirk. Where do we raise them two bucks?"

"At a pawnshop," said Lonesome. "We got a couple of A-1 watches, ain't we? We'd ought to get some action on 'em."

"You mean leave our silver-plated monogrammed, forty-jeweled Water burys in the clutches of one of them devourin' monsters?" said Windy aghast. "Why this said timepiece ha' done raised me from a pup, McQuirk. My dad carried it in the Indian Wars I'd as soon take chances on losin' my right arm!"

"We won't lose nothin'," retorted Lonesome. "The said devourin' monster just gets to park it in his safe for a couple hours till we hear from Condon. Come on. We got to move fast or we'll be sleepin' in the streets to-night."

On the way from the depot, they recalled, they had come through a somewhat disreputable district. They accordingly moved in that direction, swinging farther toward the river and the older section of town. Thus by the purest chance, they presently spied an establishment over whose doorway three bronze balls were suspended and whose dingy windows were crowded and festooned with nondescript jewelry, musical instruments, articles of clothing—treasures wrested by necessity from an unknown army.

They entered this dismal port of lost hopes and found themselves regarded with piercing intentness by a wizened long-bearded person across a dusty counter. One other was in the establishment, a heavy-jawed individual with bulging shoulders who leaned negligently against a pillar, thumbs hooked in his belt.

Without ceremony, the partners disengaged their watches from their fobs and laid them carefully on the counter. The ancient one pounced upon the treasured timepieces, turned them over with clawlike disdainful fingers.

"How much you vant," he suddenly inquired in a thick voice, "on dese vatches?"

"I reckon, McQuirk," said Windy, eying his partner speculatively, "we

hadn't ought to get too much on 'em, huh? On the other hand, if that bank business don't come through accordin' to Hoyle to-night, we got to have enough to eat an' sleep on. How about five bucks?"

"Five bucks!" the ancient one interjected in a shrill voice. "*Gewalt!* On dese relics?"

"Relics!" repeated Windy, bristling. "You referrin' to those elegant time-pieces as *relics*? Mister, you could travel the world over and couldn't find their equal."

"For the museum, yes," agreed the ancient one, lifting shoulders and palms in an eloquent gesture. "For the collector of antiques, yes. For ballast on dose large freighters, perhaps. But not as vatches. No, no, good friends. I would steal from my own family if I gave you more than a dollar. A dollar and a half, *mebbe.*"

The partners glared at him, then eyed each other unwinkingly.

"McQuirk," said Windy, "our trails is cluttered up with crippled hombres who've insulted us less. You heard him, didn't you? The bewhiskered mummy is makin' the claim he can loan us only one buck on them A-1 treasures. Since when have you an' me sunk so low we got to listen to talk like that?"

"Leave him struggle along," Lonesome soothed. "Take pity on his gray hairs an' benighted condition. Fork over them watches, mister, and hurry up. We ain't got time for your hay-wire ideas."

"A dollar and a half," returned the ancient one, unmoved. "Nowhere in the city, nowhere in the vide world could you do better. Listen," he demurred as the partners would have seized peremptorily upon their treasures. "Five dollars was your asking price only, eh? I tell you something. My heart is too big for my business. I like to oblige. How much you vant?"

"Two bucks," said Windy, firmly. "Not a cent less."

"*Himmel!*" groaned the other. "You will drive me to the poorhouse. I can never look my family in the face. It is too much." Nevertheless, he delved beneath the counter in some hidden treasure-chest, straightened up, and slid two silver dollars and two blue tickets across the counter. Whereupon he beamed upon them expansively, rubbing his hands.

"Come again, my good friends," he invited. "We have good weather, eh? A little vet, *mebbe.*"

The partners glared, and pocketed the coins and slips of pasteboard in silence. Turning away, they encountered the gaze of the bulky person leaning against the pillar. This one nodded, and his battered lips writhed into a slow grin. "Snappy work, boys," he approved, jerking a thumb toward the proprietor. "When you're dealing with this generous man, the last four-bits is always the hardest."

The partners, still vastly disgruntled, made no reply. On the way to the door, as they passed a dusty table, Windy halted, instantly forgetting his hostility of the moment before. Side by side among the miscellaneous hardware lay two long-barreled, single-action .44 Colts. They were graceful, eloquent weapons, even to the uninitiated; long of frame and short of grip, inlaid with bone mellowed by time to the hue of old ivory. They loomed among the débris like the familiar features of old friends.

"Look at them babies, McQuirk," Windy breathed. "In this hay-wire joint is shorely some monuments to busted hearts. I'll gamble some lad sweat blood partin' with them A-1 irons."

Each picked up a weapon and examined it closely, fanning the hammers, spinning the cylinders with expert fingers, balancing them upon their

palms, tossing them in the air, and catching them with dexterous and unconscious ease.

"They're humdingers," Lonesome agreed, as they regretfully returned them to their places. "The only artillery to compare with 'em are hanging on the wall up in the Condon country, huh, cowboy? But let's go, DeLong. We got to get action on them two bucks."

As they turned away, they discovered that the bulky stranger had forsaken the pillar and was following them on the way out. At the doorway he loomed beside them.

"Hold on, boys," he said. He looked intently from one to the other. His manner was blunt. "I can see you lads are gunmen. Do you draw much water up in your neck of the woods?"

"We try to struggle along," said Windy. "What you driving at?"

"I know 'em when I see 'em," said the other. "You lads are on the rocks. I don't know what your plans are, but if you need a little extra money I've a job for you. I'm Lango. Ask for me at Larson's Place, Burnside near Second. To-morrow night."

Windy shook his head. "You got us wrong, mister. Me and my pardner's taking a vacation. We ain't thugs lookin' for a pay roll. We're plumb peaceable an' law-abidin'."

"You've got *me* wrong brother," returned the other. His glance roved up and down the street, then with a quick movement he partly threw back his coat. They caught a momentary glimpse of a silver star. "Federal stuff," he explained from the corner of his mouth. "The chief give me a big job and I'm short-handed. The flat-foots assigned to me are solid ivory from the ears up. When the smoke gets thick, they'll remember they're married men. I need a couple of old-fashioned gun-peelers who can fan 'em——"

"Don't kid us, hombre," said Windy with some irritation. "There may be burs in our whiskers, but we can see through a barb'-wire fence. They ain't nothin' like that going on in this man's town. That stuff belongs out in the high country."

"So?" said the other, with a slow grin. "You'd be surprised. Now don't get peevisish, boys. If you miss a meal or two before to-morrow night, drop in at Larson's. Twenty-five smackers apiece for you if you can deliver the goods. I say that it's right-down easy money. Don't forget the name—Lango."

"McQuirk," growled Windy, as they hastened up the street in the general direction of the bank, "that Lango critter riles me. First crack out of the box whilst we're aimin' to struggle along peaceful and easygoing, this optimistic sleuth tries to hang a gun-fightin' job on us. He's probably got large ideas, at that. I can't figger any job he'd have in this law-abidin' metropolis that would even be interestin'. You an' me have seen some real action in our time."

"I dunno," Lonesome ruminated. "Seems to me I've gotten a hint or two that this here is a kind of hard-boiled village in its way."

"Hard-boiled!" Windy snorted. "They're too dang' busy chasin' dollars down boolevards an' up the alleys, an' dodgin' these loud-roarin' cars and mindin' their own peculiar business generally to be hard-boiled. You got to hand it to these city dudes, at that. They're continuously on the move. Where they're goin' and what it's all about is one of them mysterious things. But they're shorely as busy as bobcats dodgin' hailstones."

"Windy," said Lonesome, his pale-blue eyes twinkling, "I ain't complainin', you understand, nor yet offerin' these thoughts for purposes of profitless debate. But has it done occurred to you

that we ain't even in shoutin' distance yet of the things we started out after?"

"Meanin' which?"

"We burned up the dust gettin' to the train this morning," Lonesome enumerated; "right pronto thereafter we was neck-deep in a poker game in which we sweat blood. Since then we been fightin' these millin' crowds, and coolin' our heels in them dens of finance, an' wadin' hip-deep through this blasted rain. Meanwhile, we ain't et nothin' since morning and I ain't got any chewin' tobacco. When does this said rest an' quiet begin?" he asked anxiously.

It chanced, at the moment, that they were passing a combination fruit, cigar, and magazine stand presided over by a small, sallow-visaged person with dark, melancholy eyes and a thatch of black, bristling hair. In the interior of this establishment, Windy's glittering glance lighted upon a soda fountain. He laid hold of his partner's arm.

"Inside," he directed, "whilst we grab off a hunk of this said rest an' relaxation *my pronto*. We can spare ten minutes before we get back to the bank. Our two bucks is more than enough for the said wire to Condon. You get some chawin' tobacco, and I'll take on a medium-sized load of that said ice cream I dreamt about an' we'll be on our way."

"Fair enough," Lonesome agreed, and added, chuckling, "but we got to hurry, Windy."

Thus casually they turned aside and as casually seated themselves at the counter. They had intended it merely as a species of inconsequential diversion, a few stolen moments sandwiched in, as it were, in the business of hurrying to the bank. But at that instant began a series of unusual, bizarre, explosive, and altogether puzzling incidents which, long afterwards, and in awed whispers, they were wont to refer to as "great gobs of grief."

CHAPTER VI.

THE END OF A PERFECT DAY.

THE origin of what followed was simple enough. It was founded on certain deeply rooted prejudices and generous impulses in Windy's energetic nature. Later there were lurid arguments between the partners as to the responsibility for the affray, Lonesome claiming that it was Windy's inborn thirst for a massacre that led them into devious paths, and Windy affirming as vigorously that the entire proceeding was natural and inevitable.

The pair were seated at the counter. From their meager funds, Lonesome had purchased a new slab of tobacco and he sighed with content as his teeth sank into the weed. Windy had ordered the ice cream, decked in the crushed strawberries of his dreams. As he waited, his restless glance roving about the premises, a heavy-browed, heavy-jowled person, broad of shoulder and bulging of waist line, with a derby set at a pugnacious angle on his bullet head, strolled into the establishment in a leisurely and ponderous fashion.

The little proprietor greeted the newcomer with ingratiating politeness, bowing and rubbing his hands, but the big man only grunted in response. He turned a sinister, fishlike stare upon the partners, surveying them deliberately from head to foot, then turned his back upon them. On huge feet firmly planted, he stood in an attitude of ponderous repose, staring out at the street.

Windy disliked bulky men. They "riled" him. On the train he had dealt civilly with Grathin and Berg in the poker game; yet he had resented their tolerant manner, their polish, their polite assumption of superiority. Lango, in the pawnshop, also a bulky man, had irritated him. He could not have explained the source of this animosity toward massive physical bulk; it was instinctive, like that of a lean

mongrel who bristles and steps with stiff-legged watchfulness in the presence of a heavy, plethoric, bulldog.

Thus, as he waited, Windy fixed glittering eyes on the broad back of the newcomer. There had been something arrogant and domineering in the other's manner, something insolent and self-confident in his fishlike appraisal that had instantly enraged him. The little proprietor's obvious fear of the man had added fuel to his wrath. He glared at the derby, the scarred, bullet head, and the rolls of flesh that bulged above the other's collar.

As he watched, the bulky one shifted his position somewhat, moving closer to the counter. He had been standing like one lost in thought, hands clasped behind him. Now he turned his head languidly, raised his right hand, and tore off a banana from a huge cluster suspended near his shoulder. Still wrapped in thought, he stripped the peeling from the fruit, bit off a huge segment and munched it slowly.

Windy glared with incredulous amazement, then turned to the proprietor. It was plain that the little man, too, had marked the act of vandalism. His dark, melancholy eyes were pained. Catching Windy's eye, he shrugged his shoulders in helpless fashion. Windy turned his smoldering gaze again upon the bulky one in time to see him toss away the banana peel and close his thick fingers on a handful of choice walnuts.

"Listen, Gigolo," Windy whispered, as the proprietor placed a delectable mountain of ice cream before him, "what's the idea of them petty larceny gymnastics?" He jerked a thumb toward the obnoxious one. "Is that bozo one of yore star boarders? Why don't you heave him out on his ear?"

The little man stared, jaw dropping. His swarthy cheek paled. It was obvious that Windy had advanced a paralyzing thought. "Oh, no," he breathed, "it is Meester McGuffy."

"An' who in blazes," Windy demanded, "is McGuffy? Has the bulgin' polecat got you buffaloeed to the extent that you won't raise a hand to protect yore own property? What the Sam Hill's the world comin' to? Is this a free country, or ain't it?"

But the little man shook his head and shrugged his shoulders again. Mute rebellion burned in his black eyes, but he merely stood, trembling, and wrung his hands, as the bulky one scooped up another generous handful of nuts and cascaded them into the cavernous pocket of his coat.

Windy, his spoon poised in the act of delving into the mountain of ice cream, laid the implement down and slid from his chair.

"Now what?" Lonesome demanded, his mild eyes twinkling.

"I don't set up to be an adjuster of things that ain't right," Windy hissed, "nor I ain't any charter member of any uplift society. But the spectacle of this hulkin' bully movin' in on Gigolo this a way plumb riles me. Givin' him a piece of my mind has all the earmarks of a noble deed."

"Please, meester——" warned the dismayed proprietor, his hands fluttering nervously—"hees a ver' bad man. Across the street, the other ees watch—Meester Moran. Hees worse." But Windy strode forward, pulling his hat lower over his eyes.

Jaw outthrust, he planted himself before the bulky one, extended a lean forefinger, and then tapped him on the chest.

"Listen, you big monument," he said softly, "I don't know who you are an' I don't give a dang. I been settin' here watchin' you mooch this lowly furniner's substance, and it's come over me that I don't like yore looks. I don't like yore hat, nor the way you got yore ears trimmed. I don't like yore taking ways. As self-appointed bouncer on these said premises, I'm hereby donatin'

some gilt-edged advice. Ante up, or get out!"

The bullet head of the bulky one had turned slowly during this declaration of hostility. He stared at Windy as though that worthy had risen lean joint by joint from the floor at his feet. Then he threw back his head, opened a cavernous mouth in which many gold fillings gleamed. His shoulders shook, and his chest billowed as he roared with glee.

He wiped his eyes, peered at Windy, at the wrathful, saturnine features and bristling mustache, and roared again. It was a hoarse, rumbling laugh that seemed to shake the very fixtures of the store. Passersby halted and drew near. Men approached swiftly from across the street. Thus a considerable circle of curious ones foregathered in time to see Windy's right fist all but bury itself in the region of the third button of the laugher's bulging coat.

Hurled back by the impact, the ponderous one slid along the tiled floor and crashed against the base of the counter. As he heaved himself up with catlike quickness despite his bulk, he was laughing no longer. His heavy features were purple with berserk rage. But before his hands left the floor, Lonesome, acting on the spur of the moment, as it were, thoughtfully placed a foot against the highest portion of his anatomy and gave a mighty heave which sent him charging headlong forth, bellowing, into the crowd.

Attracted by the uproar, men came running from afar. From the ranks of the crowd, the bulky one emerged, tugging at his hip. A heavy automatic appeared, which Windy struck from his hand. As they clinched, the crowd parted and another large person with a ferocious red mustache charged upon the combatants.

This one laid hold on Windy without ceremony and with some heavy weapon clutched in a hamlike hand smote him

a staggering blow above the right ear. But as he drew back his arm to repeat with better aim, Lonesome was upon him.

"Whoop-e-e!" exhorted that worthy. "Ride 'em, cowboy!"

Thereafter, even the most surfeited among the swelling army of spectators fought for points of vantage from which to witness an affray which speedily took on the sanguine aspects of a riot. It was a questionable section of town, and many hard-bitten persons made up the inner circle which held back the mob and gave the battlers room.

"What's going on?" came a yearning question. "I can't see nothing."

"Two mugs," explained a joyous voice, "cleaning up on McGuffy and Moran!"

For Windy, dazed and reeling, the imbroglia became a red chaos whose origin he had forgotten. He fought and smote. Hoarse shouts of encouragement beat upon his ear. Two men rolled on the pavement at his feet. Lonesome's broad back was uppermost; he was astride his adversary, one hand grasping the horn of a ferocious mustache, the other, clutching his hat, was "fanning" the prostrate one's ears while the crowd applauded.

Through the terrific din, a noisy clamor pierced. It swelled in volume. A vehicle clanged to a stop and blue-coated figures plunged into the fray.

"Police! Police!" came warning yells; but the battlers paid no heed.

Outnumbered, outslugged, Windy fought on. He was beaten down, overwhelmed. He wondered vaguely how McQuirk was faring. Beneath a crashing impact, lurid flame leaped within his brain; and straightway thereafter the sound of conflict grew dim.

The encounter, he recalled, as he slowly regained consciousness, had taken place on a street corner in the

broad daylight of mid-afternoon. Yet here was gloomy shadow, and high walls inclosed him. They were brick walls, white-washed, and from a narrow, barred window, gray light filtered as into a well. He sat up suddenly, rubbing his eyes.

He was not sure, at first, but that some form of delirium yet held him in its grip. It was a large, foul-smelling room, with scarred benches flanking the towering walls. Prostrate upon these benches, leaning against the wall, and huddled upon the floor, were dim figures of human derelicts in various stages of maudlin intoxication or drunken stupor. It was an unreal scene, as of some gloomy underworld where sunlight never shone and slimy, creeping things foregathered. He became aware that much noise surrounded him—animallike mutterings, ribald laughter, groans, and snores.

He stretched his arms and legs and twisted his lean neck. In its larger details, his anatomy appeared to have survived the battle. He muttered an imprecation beneath his breath as his fingers explored a protuberance of the approximate dimensions of a large walnut on the back of his head. He noted that a person whose figure seemed vaguely familiar was seated at his side. Craning his neck, he saw that this one's left eye, which was nearest, was partly closed, the surrounding area being highly colored. The other optic was regarding him fixedly. He made out the outline of a drooping mustache and a bulging cheek. It was McQuirk.

He stared at his partner for a long moment in silence; and as intently Lonesome stared back.

"McQuirk," said Windy at length, with a vague gesture, "what's this lay-out?"

"The bullpen, Windy."

"We're in jail, huh?"

"Correct."

"For fightin'?"

"For disturbin' the peace," Lonesome explained, with an elaborate yawn. "For incitin' a riot. For resistin' officers of the law. But most particularly, cowboy, we're in the calaboose for gangin' up on a couple of plain-clothes policemen, attackin' 'em viciously and without provocation, to wit——"

"To wit what?" demanded Windy. "Which plain-clothes policemen?"

"McGuffy," said Lonesome. "To whose takin' ways you objected. And his pal Moran, a red-whiskered person whom I playfully massacred. Yeah, we're in one large-size jack pot, Windy. Listen"—his voice became more charged with feeling—"I'm only a lowly cowboy, you understand, who aims to struggle along. I'm long-sufferin' an' peaceable an' never make a habit of delvin' into them mysterious things which only yore mighty intellect can comprehend. But I rise to remark——"

"Don't," said Windy, with a groan. "Save them indelicate remarks, pardner, for some time when I'm feelin' more sry. Leave me ponder for a spell over what it's all about, an' some of them other melancholy things."

For a considerable space he sat, chin cupped in bony hands. Lonesome shifted his position, easing his shoulder blades against the unyielding wall.

"Think fast," Lonesome urged. "You'll only have ten years to ponder. Maybe twenty—dependin' on what the judge et for breakfast."

Windy sat thoughtful and silent. Lonesome shifted his position, easing his shoulder blades against the unyielding wall. All about them arose bestial mutterings and the heavy breathing of those who wrestled with disordered dreams.

A distant clock in some other and higher world began to toll the hour. They counted the strokes. There were twelve. As the last of the echoes died away, Windy stirred and peered at his partner through red-rimmed, glittering

eyes. Lonesome braced himself, prepared to make caustic retort to whatever was forthcoming; but Windy had no philosophic utterance or ponderous pronouncement to make. It was merely a simple thought, spoken from the heart.

"This," he said, shaking his head, "is shorely the end of a perfect day."

CHAPTER VII.

PRISONERS AT THE BAR.

THE municipal courtroom on the sixth floor of the city jail was a somewhat dingy hall of justice in which, during the morning session, petty crimes against the peace and dignity of the metropolis were disposed of at an average rate of one case for each four minutes elapsed time. This being Tuesday, the docket was still full as a result of the usual week-end grist, and the business of the day was proceeding with machinelike regularity.

It was at eleven thirty that the judge, a pale, lantern-jawed person with weary, cynical eyes, leaned back in his swivel chair and glanced at the wall clock. It had just occurred to him that he must have a few minutes of the time of his office to prepare for his forthcoming speech at the City Club luncheon.

"How many?" he inquired of the city attorney.

"Ninety-nine, your honor."

"Make it a hundred," the judge instructed. "One more, and then we'll adjourn until after lunch." He nodded, yawning, to the bailiff. "Next, Joe."

The grizzled bailiff shuffled out into the corridor and ushered in two individuals of a type so unusual as to cause the spectators, attorneys, and even the hangers-on who crowded the courtroom, to lean forward with immediate interest.

They were battered of countenance, these two, and their clothing also bore witness that they had recently been embroiled in some emphatic difference of

opinion. They represented merely the hundredth case on a crowded calendar. An army had preceded them—the misfit, the weakling, the vicious, and officially, they were of this army. Yet, in some nameless way, they did not belong to it. Upon them was the stamp of another life and another clime. Their names appeared on the docket as John and George Doe, for Lonesome in his dazed condition, following the imbroglia, had yet retained sufficient presence of mind to hide their identity. He had professed to have forgotten their names, and, having made the assertion, had doggedly stayed with it.

Battered as they were, and somewhat haggard from a sleepless night, they did not stand as prisoners at the bar, but as injured persons to whom redress was due. Hostility radiated from them. They were healthy, robust, bronzed of feature. Both stood erect. Windy's glittering gaze swept the courtroom with unabashed appraisal. Lonesome's good eye was bland but watchful, and his cheek bulged with an enormous chew.

The charges were read. There were many smiling faces in the courtroom as the bulky McGuffey and his fiery-mustached partner, Moran, limped in from the corridor to appear as complaining witnesses. Their features were battered and taped. They glared at the partners in passing. Some of the prisoners' hostility mellowed as they gazed upon their late foes; for of the quartet it was apparent even to casual eyes that the bulky ones were much the worse for wear.

The city attorney in a routine speech advocated a maximum penalty. It was obvious, he declared, that these desperadoes had deliberately waylaid the unsuspecting officers of the law; they had attempted to precipitate a riot in a section populated by vagrants and questionable characters who already held the law in low respect; they had re-

sisted arrest and had only been subdued by force; it was probable that they were gang leaders from some other coast city, prepared to organize and carry out their nefarious designs in the law-abiding metropolis of the Northwest.

McGuffy and Moran offered brief testimony. Having been hilariously twitted by fellow patrolmen concerning the amount of damage inflicted upon them by the far from impressive prisoners, they were somewhat disgruntled and ill at ease. They had been assigned to the inspector's bureau the day before, they declared, at Burnside Street between Third and Fourth, to wait for and apprehend a certain individual much wanted by headquarters. While in hiding on each side of the street, according to instructions, they had been set upon by the prisoners, with the result that they had been incapacitated for duty the rest of the day.

"Are you represented by counsel?" the judge interrupted, glancing at the clock.

"Which we shorely ain't," Windy responded. "I reckon, yore honor, we'll have to represent each other."

"Have you anything to say in your own behalf?"

"Plenty," said Windy, his mustache bristling. "I shorely got an earful to unload on an hombre that can see through a barb'-wire fence. You ready for me to put you right on this business, judge?"

"Proceed," said the judge, his cynical eyes betraying a faint interest. "But be brief. Very brief."

Nevertheless, he leaned back in his chair and did not interrupt, as Windy drew a deep breath and proceeded to give his version of the affray; for the bronzed partners, with their downright forcefulness of manner, their health and physical well-being, their mannerisms of speech which breathed of the high desert, represented an oasis in the

dreary grist of crime passing daily, like a muddy trail, through the dingy hall of justice.

"As an orator," said Windy, "I'm an A-1 blacksmith. My partner is likewise dumb, exceptin' in an argument, when the pair of us generally stack up to one large-size crowd."

"They ain't nothin' unusual about the layout. To hear them buzzards talk"—he indicated the complaining witnesses and city attorney with a gesture—"you'd figger we was a couple of cut-throats who'd steal swill from a blind sow. We're so poison mean that wherever we cast a shadow the grass don't grow no more. We're so crooked we could bite off our own ears. What's the truth of it? We're just a couple of peac'ble old-timers aimin' to struggle along. This jack pot is just one of them things that kind of sneak up on a feller when he's unsuspectin' that a way."

Whereupon, while the spectators grinned and the complaining witnesses squirmed uncomfortably, he gave the details of the imbroglio.

"That's all they is to it," he concluded. "I never seen this jasper McGuffy before. I didn't know he was a policeman. I wouldn't have believed him if he'd told me, bein' simple-minded enough to figger that one of these noble upholders of the law would be the last feller on earth to stand there like a hawg in a corncrib an' eat a lowly fur-riner out of house an' home. So when he laughed, I got hostile. It wasn't no nice kind of a laugh. If he'd called me names I'd have parleyed with him in the same kindly spirit. But that there insultin' warwhoop of his might just as well have said: 'Folks, come a-runnin'. Right smack in front of me, the great waddlin' mogul himself, is a horned toad who figgers he's a roarin' lion. Gather around, citizens, this is shorely going to be humorous.'

"So I socked him." Windy's in-

jured manner contained a hint of complacency. "I reckon he knew something happened. He quit laughin'. His red-whiskered friend came projectin' into the deal and right after that the whole danged world moved in on us. I woke up in the bull pen, with a lump on my head the size of an ostrich egg. An' that's all they was to it."

A suppressed titter greeted this narrative, which the judge quieted with a severe gesture. He bent stern, judicial brows upon the wall clock as he pondered the situation.

After all, here was an anecdote made to order for his address at the City Club on "The Origin of Crime." The phraseology could be worked out as well from the bench as in the privacy of his office.

"It is obvious," he said at length, "that this is not the usual case of disorderly conduct. These men are not of the criminal type. There is no charge of drunkenness against them. I am inclined to believe that their sole motive in assaulting the officers is as they have said, and that they were ignorant alike of the official status of their opponents and of the reprehensible habit of our officers of helping themselves, gratis, to the wares of merchants along their beats. This, after all, is a form of graft unnoticed by us, but which might easily loom large in the eyes of citizens of other—er—less advanced communities who still cling to the quaint belief that a man's property is his own and may be defended. I am also of the opinion that they believed themselves to be acting according to the dictates of Anglo-Saxon tradition in taking the part of one whom they deemed incapable of self-defense.

"On the other hand," he continued severely, addressing the partners, "it is also obvious that you are not of peaceable disposition as you profess, but rather too prone to proceed according to the dictates of your impetuous na-

tures, forgetting that machinery is provided for the protection of society, and that, faulty as that machinery may be, it must nevertheless be respected. You were ignorant of the identities of these officers and of the fact that you were resisting arrest; but ignorance, at law, is no excuse. You did, in fact, resist arrest and assault duly authorized representatives of the law. This is a highly reprehensible proceeding and tends to break down our existing social machinery."

He nodded thoughtfully, his judicial eye roving over the spectators. Abruptly he glanced at the clock and pulled himself together.

"Court adjourned," he announced, "until two."

"What about the disposition of this case, your honor?" the clerk quickly reminded.

"Eh?" said the court. He eyed the prisoners. "Thirty days." Then, as the partners stiffened with horror, he added: "Sentence suspended during good behavior.

"But let me suggest," he admonished the partners, "that you diligently uphold the law in the future. Your next appearance in this court will place the present sentence in effect."

The partners found it difficult to believe that they were actually free. But the bailiff, after leading them to the jailer's desk and restoring their belongings, waved them away. Without hinderance they mingled with the crowd milling in the hallway.

Here reporters for metropolitan papers, scenting a feature story, pounced upon them, demanding their place of residence, true names, and other data not revealed by the meager official record. But Windy's manner was brusque.

"Names?" he snorted. "Doe. We're twins. I'm John." He jerked his thumb toward his partner, "he's George." When they insisted further,

he snarled at them, and they sadly withdrew.

"Gettin' our history plastered over these papers would be a nice jack pot, wouldn't it?" he growled to Lonesome as they emerged upon the dreary street and turned up their coat collars against the rain driven by a gusty wind sweeping up from the river. "It would shorely ruin our reputations up in the Condon country."

"Windy," said Lonesome, his tawny mustache curling, "now that this little incident has done taken its place in the galleries of the past, an' we can parley a little without engenderin' no hard feelin's, I shorely aim to rise up on my hind laigs an' remark——"

"Listen." Windy cut in, "I'm hostile, McQuirk. This ain't the time nor place for you to land on me spread-eagle. I got enough hoofprints on me as it is. They's food for thought in what's happened to us in this blasted village. But I ain't given up hope yet."

"All I aimed to say," said Lonesome, aggrieved, "was that I ain't et nothin' to speak of since yesterday morning. My ribs is shorely raspin' together. If we don't find some nourishment, pronto, I'm liable to absentmindedly bite a hunk out of one of them cast-iron lamp-posts."

"What about me?" demanded Windy. "If somebody was to sock me I'd boom like a drum, I'm that hollow. Let's sprint to the bank and get that cash from Condon which this late unpleasantness has done postponed. McQuirk, do you know the earmarks of the two buzzards which has caused us all our grief? Grathin an' Berg, by gravy! We lost all our chicken feed in that darned poker game. Otherwise, we'd have been settin' pretty. If we'd followed our first hunch we'd have cleaned up on 'em on general principles."

"Never mind ponderin' on them gilded sharps," admonished Lonesome. "Let's make us a trail to the bank. If

any of these optimistic citizens get in our way, we'll tromp 'em down an' come back an' apologize later."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE NAME OF LIBERTY.

AGAIN in the oppressive magnificence of the United States National, they stood somewhat ill at ease at Vice-President Brady's desk. The banker's cold eye appraised their disorderly apparel and battered features with some disfavor.

"Ah, yes, I remember you now," he commented. "You didn't return last night."

"We were delayed," Windy explained tersely. "But we shorely need them shekels worse than ever, Mr. Brady. We got the money for the wire. We'll be obliged if you'll rush it off so we can get some action."

"Dollar sixty," said the banker.

"Well, I'm a son of a gun!" breathed Windy, as he counted out the loose change that represented the balance from their pawnshop expedition. "If it was a red cent more we shorely would have been out of luck. There she lays, mister. How long?"

"Come back in an hour and we should have a reply," said the banker, carelessly sweeping the coins into his cupped hand and turning away.

"Gosh, pardner," said Lonesome yearningly, as they roamed down the gloomy street, "I was hopin' we'd have maybe a thin dime left out of that chicken feed with which to buy us a couple doughnuts apiece. No such luck."

"Don't the sun never shine in this pop-eyed metropolis?" Windy growled. "Nowhere to go lest we stagger around neck-deep in this blasted rain. What a life!"

"Which is one of them blessin's an' emoluments we been lookin' for," Lonesome reminded him. "Out in the high

desert, you understand, Windy, it don't rain enough to suit yore appetite. You craved to soak it up. Like gentle dew, ain't it?"

"I've soaked it up," averred Windy, "till I'm a perambulatin' sponge. If this keeps up, I'll melt an' run into the sand. Yeah, or go jump into the river out of self-protection. Then I wouldn't hear this gentle dew beatin' on the top of my head, which riles me."

"There was an hombre once that fell in the river," said Lonesome, grinning. "A feller told me about it a couple of years ago. I didn't believe the yarn then, but I'm beginnin' to believe it's got its points. It seems this hombre fell off the steel bridge yonder. He couldn't swim, so right pronto he sunk to the bottom. Havin' to think fast in a jack pot that a way, the unfortunate buzzard figgered his only chance was to walk ashore along the bottom. So he done so. But would you believe it, Windy, the benighted maverick walked clean up to Fifth Street before he knew he was out of the river!"

"Yeah," said Windy, somberly. "You couldn't get me to laugh if I was walkin' slow at yore funeral, McQuirk. Let's find us a place to roost before I kick off my shoes an' swim for it."

It chanced, at the moment, that in their aimless wanderings they found themselves before the stone-arched doorway of an ancient structure. Upon one of a series of huge, frosted windows on the second floor of this building was the legend: "AUDITORIUM—LOYAL LABORERS FOR LIBERTY." To their ears came the booming voice of an orator, interspersed with shouts of applause from an unseen audience.

Windy's glittering eyes fixed upon a sign above the door which read:

Open Meeting To-day, 1 P. M.
Come In, Slaves.

"McQuirk," he averred, "I ain't in any mood to listen to some enlightened

hombre enumeratin' the benefits of liberty, but it's any old port in a storm, as the bronc-peeler said when he lit in the hornet's nest. We got a hour to kill. Let's you an' me amble up and rest ourselves, hopin' the roof don't leak, and ponderin' meanwhile on the frailty of mankind."

They climbed the rickety stairs and, guided by the uproar, turned down a dingy hall. A large door was before them bearing in vivid red the letters: "L. L. L." They opened this door and a heavy-browed person with sullen eyes rose before them, his bulk barring the way. Looking past him they saw a score or more of roughly dressed individuals huddled together before a platform upon which a speaker was expounding some exceedingly voluble doctrine.

"Got your red cards, brothers?" inquired the man at the door.

"Red cards?" echoed Windy, puzzled. "We ain't got nothin'. I reckon we got into the wrong stall, mister. I thought this was an open meeting?"

"It is," said the doorman, enigmatically, "to those who are of open mind." He examined them from head to foot, taking note of their disheveled apparel and the day's growth of whiskers on their bronzed and somewhat battered features. "Do you thirst for knowledge?"

"Which we shorely do," said Windy, instantly intrigued by this strange procedure. "We're neck-deep in the coils of ignorance."

"Come on," said the other, evidently satisfied by his inspection.

Somewhat mystified, they entered and eased themselves furtively into chairs on the outskirts of the group.

There was a curious intentness upon the assemblage, as though they sat mesmerized under the spell of the orator's frenzy. The latter was a wild-haired person with flashing eyes and white hands unmarred by toil. His words

were sonorous, rolling smoothly from the tongue; and with clenched fist he smote upon a quivering palm to emphasize the points that bristled in his harangue.

At first the partners, relaxing in their chairs, could make nothing of the speaker's drift. They were lost in a rhetorical barrage. But by degrees, in the forensic eloquence hurled upon them, a peculiar doctrine began to take form.

The speaker, so it seemed, was describing some strange and sinister region where children were snatched from the cradle, as it were, and sold into bondage; where men, in chains, labored in hopeless toil with heads bowed, while the lash of heartless taskmasters cracked above them, and supercilious laughter echoed from spectators passing by in gilded chariots; where octopuslike creatures sat in treasure-houses counting dollars saturated with sweat of toilers and gore of slaves.

Suddenly, to their wrathful astonishment, it dawned on the partners that the speaker was not expounding the horrors of some dark chapter of history, or some nameless country into which the torch of civilization had not yet penetrated, but was referring to their own land. Enraged, and doubting the evidence of their own ears, they heard him denounce institutions which they had long venerated with simple loyalty, assail strongholds they knew beyond doubt to be impregnable, and saw the emblem of a freedom-loving nation pictured as a banner of serfdom waving over a region of heartbreak, corruption, and despair.

"We are slaves!" thundered the frenzied one. "Like Samson of old, we are bound in the prison house, grinding out sorrow, and misery, and shame!" He paused, breathless.

"DeLong," muttered Lonesome, "we've done stumbled into a hot-bed of anarchists. I never dreamt I'd live to see reasonable men listen to such gib-

berish. Up in the range country they'd ride that long-haired spellbinder out on a rail. If he talked any more after they was done with him, it'd shorely be in a whisper."

"By force they have forged the chains!" howled the impassioned one. "By force we must cast them off! And when the day dawns——"

"Bah!"

It was an explosive interjection that burst upon the assemblage like a pistol shot. Chairs scraped as hardbitten persons quickly turned in the direction whence it came. The orator, his fiery utterances halted in mid-career, his clenched fists still upraised in denunciatory attitude, stared, bulging eyes fixed upon Windy, who had risen to his lean height.

"Yeah, that's what I mean," announced that worthy, his mustache bristling. "If I was to listen to any more of this hokum I'd be foamin' at the mouth. How d'ye get that way, brother?" He pointed a bony finger at the paralyzed orator, and spoke with wrathful emphasis. "How in blazes you got the unlimited gall to stand in the protectin' shadow of the greatest country on earth and figger out ways an' means of dynamitin' the works? If you don't like the layout here, what's holdin' you back from sprintin' elsewhere? It's a cinch you ain't wanted here. It's mavericks like you that is thorns in the flesh, cooties on the body politic, warts on the face of creation. If this wasn't the most generous, soft-spoken, an' easy-goin' country under the blue dome o' heaven, you'd be roostin' in a padded cell makin' faces at the spectators an' talkin' to yourself."

The heavy-browed doorman, scowling, was advancing upon them. An angry mutter came from the crowd. Lonesome, rising up silently beside his partner, knew that Windy's righteous indignation had aroused only a sullen

hostility of which they must inevitably be the victims.

"You lads," Windy continued, lifted up by his own eloquence, "are an aggregation of assorted horse-collars to listen to this wild-eyed cake-eater. Do his dainty fingers look like they ever laid holt on a shovel or grasped a pick? I'll gamble he ain't done a lick of work in six months. If he was doin' an honest day's labor he wouldn't have time to talk so darned much. Who pays his way? He's one of them lills of the field which toils not an' only spins haywire conversation. When it comes to impartin' inspired misinformation he's a roarin' lion, but I'll bet even money he runs like a coyote from anything that has the earmarks of work. Why listen to his penny-ante gymnastics?"

The speaker, like one arising from a trance, galvanized into life. His features were livid.

"Traitors!" he shouted, pointing a quivering finger at the partners. "Spies! Hirelings of the master class! Down with them, comrades——"

The room was a vast turmoil of noise. The partners had barely time to lay hold of their chairs and brandish them aloft when the mob, like a slaving pack, was upon them.

Bellows of rage, groans, curses, and the sound of splintering furniture, filled the air. Above the din rose the stentorian voice of the frenzied one, from the rear, exhorting his cohorts to further massacre. Out of the first impact, Lonesome and Windy emerged, each grasping a splintered chair leg with which they smote to right and left.

"Lay on, McQuirk!" Windy whooped. "Come on, you polecats! You're battlin' with two wolves from the barrens!"

But superior numbers drove them back. Though their cudgels wreaked havoc, they were struggling with their backs to the wall. The tide of battle

had forced them past the speaker's platform. A doorway loomed at their left.

"DeLong," Lonesome shouted suddenly in Windy's ear. "We got to make our get-away. Let's travel!"

Windy had no time to question. Lonesome battered back the opponents between them and the door. Windy covered their retreat. They plunged through the aperture with the infuriated mob at their heels.

At first glance it appeared that they were entrapped. They were in a small, dingy cloakroom whose only exit was the door they had just entered. Already its frail panels were crashing in beneath the battering of their pursuers.

"What's the idea, McQuirk?" Windy gasped. "We shorely could have made a bowling alley out of these said premises. How come you run out on 'em that a way? Now we got to make a stand like badgers in a hole."

"No, we ain't," Lonesome retorted. He pointed to a dusty skylight in the lofty ceiling. "Put on yore spurs an' climb, DeLong."

They scrambled up on shelves that flanked the wall, and burst upon the skylight just as the door gave way and the pack surged into the room.

"The police," Lonesome explained, kicking his ankles free of clutching hands. The pair rose to hand and knee upon the flat roof. "You forgotten what that judge said, Windy?"

"By gravy, that's right!" Windy breathed. "We got thirty days hangin' over us. We shorely couldn't explain away this riot. Let's go. These pop-eyed bomb-throwers ain't going to follow us no farther. How in blazes we going to get down less we sprout wings, McQuirk?"

But they had mistaken the caliber of the bloodthirsty mob. Too late they regretted their tactical error in not remaining at the skylight, where their pursuers, coming up from below, would have been at a disadvantage. The

vengeful ones, with an enthusiasm worthy of a better cause, were swarming up through the skylight like bees from the hive.

The partners sprinted across the broad roof and hurdled a low brick wall guarding the slightly lower roof of another smoke-blackened structure. Here, they discovered instantly, was the end of the trail as far as direct flight was concerned. Beyond loomed a sheer, unbroken wall. To the left was nothing but space. The street was below. At the right, the building was flanked by a vacant lot, cluttered with ancient and rusty machinery.

They took in the situation at a glance. It appeared to be, in their own mental phrasing, a jack pot of large proportions. Above the roar of traffic from the street below came the clanging of the patrol wagon and the shrieking of sirens, which announced to the world that the police were charging upon the scene of the riot. The realization spurred them to new and desperate lengths.

In the center of the broad roof was a low cupola from whose open sides belched black smoke and heat. Lone-some darted toward this chimneylike structure, with Windy at his heels. Disregarding the fumes, heat, and smoke, they knelt and peered down.

It was as though they looked into an inferno. A species of iron works was below, a dim, lofty expanse in which red fires glowed, riveting guns roared, and mighty machines pounded rhythmically. Half-naked figures wrought in lurid light, or glistened in shadow; sparks flew from vast forges; blinding streams of liquid fire poured from great ladles supported by giant cranes.

It was not a chimney into which they peered, but a ventilating unit, a common outlet for the fumes, heat, and smoke arising from the chaos below. Iron-souled though the partners were

and desperate withal, they hesitated momentarily at the thought of attempting escape by descending into such an inferno. But the mob was at their heels; each passing second brought the dread police and prison walls closer to the scene. An iron girder, soot-incrusted, was below.

Choking and gasping, each laid hold on an iron rafter that was hot beneath their grasp, and swung down.

Each achieved the girder and collapsed upon it, clinging like squirrels on a limb. The cupola blossomed momentarily with the faces of their pursuers; but none followed. The partners instantly forgot pursuit, and their fear of police and prison, in the business of descending from their lofty perch. It was a crowded interval.

It was the unreality of their surroundings that troubled them most; they were in the presence of giant and menacing forces of which they had had no previous experience. Long afterward, on those occasions when realistic nightmares troubled them, they crawled again across the ceiling of a gloomy pit, blinded and all but suffocated, while strange fires belched upon them and lurid lakes sputtered hungrily.

They swung from girder to girder, slid down supporting pillars whose rivet-studded surfaces tore their clothing and lacerated their fingers, dodged ponderous cranes and lashing chain blocks, and so achieved the sand and cinders of the foundry floor.

CHAPTER IX.

COSTLY EXPERIENCE.

THEY became aware, with solid ground beneath them, that they were the objects of an amazed curiosity. At what point in their descent they had arrested attention they had no means of knowing; but, throughout the gloomy chaos, work was temporarily suspended. At distant furnaces men stood, grimy

faces turned toward them; riveting guns halted their incessant clamor; steam hammers momentarily were silent, and from a high cage on a traveling crane the operator peered down, the whites of his eyes glistening. It was as though the toilers of the pit, in ludicrous unbelief, stared at two alien figures that might have dropped down from the sky.

"They figger we're long-whiskered angels, DeLong," Lonesome shouted in his partner's ear. "Let's travel before they discover we ain't nothin' but goats."

They threaded their way toward the broad doorway that opened upon the street. Men stood aside to let them pass. No restraining hand was laid upon them; and in the rear the mighty voice of the foundry again resumed its clamor.

They peered up and down the street. No police were in sight. They strode forth as casually as they were able, crossed the street, hurried around the corner.

"McQuirk," growled Windy, eying his partner as they proceeded at a fast pace eastward toward the river, "you're a tough-lookin' object."

"You trying to start an argument?" demanded Lonesome with some bitterness. "You wouldn't take no beauty prize yoreself, DeLong. Who got us into this heck of a shape, an' what in blazes we going to do about it? Listen, cowboy. You recall that we eased into that said bomb-throwers' meetin' for the purpose of restin' ourselves and takin' things easy for a spell whilst we're waitin' to go back to the bank. Now that we're all rested——"

"Hold everything," Windy interrupted, savagely. "What I aimed to say was, we got to polish off some of this soot an' kind of get ourselves organized before promenadin' over to the bank. Otherwise, if we undertook to make talk with Brady we'd have to identify ourselves all over again."

With their clothing torn and disordered, and their battered features blackened with soot, they did indeed present a highly disreputable appearance. Feeling themselves momentarily safe from pursuit, they eyed each other with considerable misgiving. From the standpoint of a business call upon a bank executive they felt themselves to be far from correct.

Their flight from the foundry had led them to the older section of town. The street was paved with cobblestones and the heavily ornamented façades of ancient stone buildings peered down at them in passing. In the center of a triangular intersection they came upon a monument raised to an age of horse-flesh—a fountain flanked by stone water-troughs.

With one accord, the partners made for this oasis, divested themselves of their coats, rolled up their sleeves, and presently were snorting and puffing as they performed their ablutions.

"DeLong," Lonesome growled, peering at his partner from beneath dripping brows, "among the million things I crave right now is soap. This darned soot is nine parts coal tar. All I'm able to do is kind of smear it around."

"Ring for a valet," sneered Windy truculently, "I ain't runnin' this pop-eyed hotel. It ain't soap that I need, it's a blow-torch."

Nevertheless, by polishing and rubbing with huge bandannas their beligerent features became more recognizable. So engrossed were they in the work at hand that they took no note of the fact that certain heavy trucks had drawn up near by. The drivers of these vehicles were watching them with grinning interest. A messenger boy on a bicycle had halted, open-mouthed. Gloomy windows in adjacent buildings blossomed with faces, and a growing group of pedestrians encircled them.

But when a blue-coated policeman

lumbered into the foreground, toying with his club, they heard his authoritative voice instantly.

"Hey, you!" demanded the officer. "Wotsa idea?"

Their reaction to the sight of the silver star on the broad blue chest was instant and specific. They seized their coats, plunged through the crowd, dodged between two trucks, and sprinted around the corner at prodigious speed. Finding that they were not pursued, they eyed each other furtively as they slowed to a walk and put on their coats. Safe for the moment!

"You an' me wasn't born to blush unseen, Windy," Lonesome muttered. "What in blazes is the world comin' to when a couple of benighted citizens can't wash their faces at a water trough without fetchin' spectators runnin' from miles around?"

"Yeah, an' them blasted police," Windy agreed. "Them hounds of the law get us goin' an' comin'. If we hadn't stopped to polish our noble brows they'd have arrested us for lookin' so tough. But I'm through askin' questions, McQuirk." Windy spoke with wrathful emphasis. "An' don't you ask me none. I ain't going to think no more a-tall. Life's just one of them mysterious things till we get that money at the bank."

"If, as, and when," Lonesome supplemented, tearing off an enormous chew. "I ain't a pessimist, cowboy, but it does seem to me that less we get them iron men pronto, we're goin' to be busted down, tromped underfoot, or crippled an' aged from onusual activities thrust upon us. I ain't et enough during the last two days to keep a canary alive. I ain't——"

"McQuirk," Windy interrupted, his black eyes glittering, "get a holt of yoreself an' hang on for a little spell longer. We're on the homestretch. Yonder's the bank. Brady's undoubtedly heard from Condon. Look wild,

cowboy. In two minutes we're struttin' forth from that said marble tomb, our pockets bulgin' with filthy lucre, chucklin' at these said insignificant details which has cluttered up the past."

Lonesome merely grunted and made no reply. Yet, as they approached the bank, each unconsciously accelerated his pace.

Confidently they approached Brady's desk, disregarding curious glances cast upon them by well-dressed persons in the magnificent lobby. They knew that they presented an unquestionably disreputable appearance, their clothing grimy and torn, their features battered and unshaved; but these things were merely the badge of an enslaved condition soon to be cast aside.

They beamed upon Brady. That executive, rising slowly from his desk, eyed them with a curiously piercing intentness.

"You told us to come back in an hour, mister," said Windy genially, "an' here we are. You've heard from Condon, huh?"

The banker nodded. Leaning on the counter, his white, well-manicured hand toyed with a slip of paper as he looked them over from head to foot. There was no warmth in his glance. The partners were vaguely chilled by something hostile and accusing in his fish-like stare.

"Yeah, we look like a couple of tramps," Windy apologized. "But you'll be surprised how we'll spruce up when we get that fifty bucks. We're shorely obliged for the trouble you took——"

"Mister," Lonesome cut in—he had been eying the banker unwinkingly—"what's on yore mind? You lettin' us have them iron men, or ain't you?" He spoke earnestly.

By way of reply, the banker laid the paper he had been holding in his hand face up on the counter. The partners put their heads together and studied the

missive. It was a copy of a wire from Condon addressed to Brady. It was brief and to the point:

YOUR WIRE McQUIRK DELONG
ACCOUNT NO FUNDS

The pair read this message without comprehension. They muttered the phraseology aloud, peered at each other, scratching their heads, and turned puzzled glances upon the banker.

"What's this mean?" inquired Lonesome.

"It means," said Brady acidly, "that you men, for some obscure purpose of your own, have been wasting my time. It means that in response to an inquiry from us, the Bank of Condon informs us that there are no funds in the McQuirk-DeLong account."

The partners gaped. Had the banker asserted that black was white, that the sun never shone in the heavens, or that rivers ran uphill, their lack of understanding could not have been more complete.

"No funds!" echoed Windy at length. "Them Condon mavericks is loco. We put two hundred iron men in the bank the day before we left, and we ain't touched it since. What kind of a whizzer they tryin' to pull on us?"

"Of course," said the banker, crumpling the paper in his hand and tossing it in a waste-paper basket, "I can't waste any further time arguing the point with you. Since you have no funds we can't honor your check. Good day, gentlemen."

"Hold on," Lonesome pleaded as the other would have turned away. "Wait a second, mister. They's a mistake somewheres. We ain't aimin' to impose on your good-nature or get generous with yore valuable time. Do you figger for a minute we'd have come gallivantin' around these premises this a way if we hadn't been certain for sure that we had plenty money to back this said check? Shorely as we're standin' here

we put two hundred simoleons in the bank in Condon, day before yesterday, and we ain't touched it since. What's happened to it? When it comes to answerin' that question me an' Windy's wanderin' in an impenetrable forest."

His earnestness impressed the banker. He hesitated and his cold eye lighted with a faint interest that had in it almost human qualities.

"Naturally, I'm not in a position to enlighten you," he said. "It does seem—er—unusual. If you yourselves have not drawn on the account since the funds were deposited, a forged check may have been presented and honored. But that would also be unusual."

"They's some mistake," Lonesome insisted. "It just naturally ain't reasonable. Them Condon financiers have slipped up on some little detail which is shorely embarrassin' to us."

The other shook his head. "Banks do not make mistakes of that nature. A glance at their records show them the status of an account. No, my friends, I believe you are sincere, and you have my sympathy. But speculation from this end can lead nowhere——"

"Great snares and bear-traps!" Windy exploded, having grasped the enormity of the thing that had befallen them. "I'm a patient critter and all that, but I'd trade my shirt for a chance to walk into that said bank at Condon an' listen to their pop-eyed apologies for havin' pulled a boner like this! That two hundred's there. They ain't any two ways about it. Question is, what in blazes is to be done?"

The partners eyed each other hopelessly. The banker studied them, tapping the counter with a pencil. The downright personality of the pair intrigued him. He was struggling against an impulse foreign to his cold and calculating nature.

"Sit down, gentlemen," he said at length with a wry smile, waving to a

bench between two mighty pillars. "Make yourselves comfortable for a half hour or so. I am interested in your case. Miss Jones," he instructed his secretary, "place a long-distance call to Condon."

He turned back to his desk and the partners seated themselves on the bench. They said no word to each other. They merely waited while interminable minutes dragged by. The business of the bank hummed on about them. Many men stopped at Brady's desk. That executive answered many telephone calls while they watched him hungrily. They had decided that he must surely have forgotten them and their colossal problem, when he took the receiver again from the hook. His glance strayed toward them as he talked briefly and upon a pad near at hand made several notations. Replacing the receiver, he arose, he beckoned to them. They leaped instantly to their feet and approached the counter.

"The cashier of your bank," he told them, "informs me that when the bank opened this morning a check for two hundred dollars was presented. Your signatures were genuine. The payee established his identity. So the check was honored."

"Say that again," Windy invited, his mustache bristling, "an' say it slower. You mean that some hombre come into a bank with a check for two hundred, with my name an' McQuirk's on it?"

The banker nodded. Windy would have exploded anew, but Lonesome restrained him with a gesture which proved effective.

"Mister," he questioned softly, "did you happen to learn that hombre's name?"

"I did," said Brady. He glanced at the notation on the pad. "His name was Grathin. J. D. Grathin."

"Grathin!" The partners repeated in a hoarse whisper.

"That's it." The banker eyed them keenly. "You recognize the name?"

"Which we shorely do," said Windy, almost in awe. "That's one of the polecats with whom we played cards on the train. But how in blue-hinged Halifax——"

"Ah, yes!" the banker cut in. "And you wrote this Grathin a check eh?"

"But he tore it up!" the partners protested in unison. "Right smack in front of us that a way——"

"Pardon," Brady interrupted, a faint twinkle in his cold eyes. "This matter may not be as baffling as it appears. You sat in on a little poker game. With strangers, eh? The name of one of these strangers was Grathin? Tell me, briefly, what transpired."

With profane and pointed emphasis, Windy gave a laconic account of the incident. The banker nodded sagely as the exact technique in the disposing of the check was described.

"It happens," he said, eying them with a kind of cynical tolerance, "that I have made a study of the various devices whereby unsuspecting travelers are separated from their money by unscrupulous card sharps. The procedure you have outlined is known among the light-fingered fraternity as the 'tear-up'. It is simple, but effective—as you will henceforth agree."

"But you don't savvy this layout," Windy protested, still unbelieving, "*we seen* the polecat tear it up. An' throw the pieces out the window."

"You *think* you saw it," said the banker testily. "Just as you are prepared to bet which shell the pea is under. But the pea isn't there. No, my friends, the system is really simple. It is founded upon a very keen knowledge of human nature. You wrote a check. The men you were playing with themselves called attention to the fact that the check could be stopped. A gambling debt has no standing at law. The winner placed your check in his pocket.

The game ended, and at the psychological moment he drew out a check of the same size and color as the one you had written, tore it up before your eyes, and tossed the fragments out the window. That ended the incident as far as you were concerned. Why stop a check that had been destroyed? But it had not been destroyed. Your friend Grathin hastened to cash the check. The signature was genuine. And so——" Brady shrugged his shoulders in a peculiarly bankerlike gesture, "your money is gone—and you are richer by the experience."

CHAPTER X.

THE AMBUSH.

FOR a considerable space the partners slumped against the counter in an attitude of bitter dejection.

Their money was gone. This crushing realization dwarfed all else. It was as though the banker's incisive words had snatched away a life belt that had buoyed them up during the preceding twenty-four hours. They felt, in spirit, like weary and battered swimmers who have battled against strange and savage currents too long. The banker waited, tapping the counter with his pencil; and his cold eye roved toward the clock upon his desk.

Out of his bog of depression Windy arose, in a manner of speaking, his mustache bristling. Lonesome squared his shoulders, reached for his plug of tobacco, and tore off an enormous chew. The gaze of the partners met. It was the appraising glance of two crusaders who stand with their backs to the wall.

"Mister," Windy addressed the banker, "you said a mouthful a minute ago. If experience was gold bricks, me an' McQuirk would sink to our knees in solid rock. Whereas yore efforts in our behalf is shorely appreciated. Much obliged."

"Don't mention it," returned Brady

courteously. His mirthless features writhed in the throes of some facial contortion that may have been a smile. "If we can be of further service to you at any time, call on us."

The bank was closed. The pair emerged from the side door upon the dreary street. Windy tightened his belt, and Lonesome turned up his grimy coat collar against the eternal drizzle.

"McQuirk," said Windy, "I ain't a feller that dreams dreams. But I got a vision."

"T-Bone?" queried Lonesome. "Or porterhouse, smothered in mushrooms?"

"I don't refer to vittles," said Windy. His lean jaw was set. "Some day, if I live long enough, I'm going to meet up with a feller named J. D. Grathin. An' his gentle side-kick, that genial critter, Berg. When I do, I aim to wrap myself around them like an avengin' angel."

"Make it two," agreed Lonesome, yearningly. "What else?"

"Also," Windy continued, "shinin' around me is a great white light."

"It'll be shinin' on a couple of corpses 'less we get some action," predicted Lonesome. "What light?"

"Knowledge," said Windy. "I'm hep to myself. The scales has done fallen from my eyes. McQuirk, this town's hostile. You an' me is a couple of long-haired goats all snarled up in a bramble bush."

"That," said Lonesome, his mustache curling, "is the kind of light that comes to an hombre when he's beaned with a short-handled ax. But what's the answer?"

"The answer is," said Windy, "that we call off this deal whilst we still got our scalps left. Let's burn up the dust, make tracks for the high desert."

"Yeah?" said Lonesome bitterly. "It's a whale of an idea! We ain't but a hundred an' fifty miles from home. We'll sprint the first hundred, huh?"

An' come in on the homestretch at a fast lope. Get yore feet on the ground, DeLong. In an hour it'll be mealtime for a half million folks all around us. All we got is our hands in our pockets. Don't you go to dreamin' about the high desert. It's a long ways off. What we got to have, right pronto, is food. I ain't hollow no more. My stummick has done collapsed. What's to be done? Talk fast, or I'll be howlin' like a wolf."

"As usual," said Windy, "I'm the stalwart pillar in this layout——"

"Most pillars," Lonesome interrupted, "support a dome. But proceed, cowboy. I don't aim to make a point of it."

"I got it all figgered," stated Windy. "It's so simple you'll grasp it right off. We got to eat. We got to sleep. We got to travel. To do this we got to have money. How to get money, that's the question. We can't stick anybody up on account of not havin' our guns. Low as we are, we ain't equipped to do any panhandlin'. We got to earn the said money. Well, sir, you remember that buzzard in the pawnshop? That feller Lango. Much as it'll bruise our tender pride, we got to call his bluff. He offered us twenty-five bucks for a little gunwork to-night. How about it?"

Windy peered at his partner somewhat doubtfully, but Lonesome's lugubrious features lighted with instant hope.

"Check," he agreed. "I'd plumb forgotten the critter. If I was mean an' small-caliber by nature, DeLong, I'd call attention to the fact that gun fightin' was one of the precise things we come to this blasted village to avoid. But I ain't; an' we also ain't in any position to pick and choose. It's peace work, at that, him bein' a federal agent. Let's go. Where does this buzzard hang out?"

"Second an' Burnside," said Windy. "Larsen's Place. If we can find his

roost without walkin' too far, we may live yet to see daylight in the swamps."

They located the establishment without difficulty. It was a hangout, apparently, for loggers, longshoremen, and members of other energetic crafts. Swinging doors opened upon a large room, ornate still with the former glory of the latest bar west of Denver. A lunch counter flanked the wall to the right. Gaming tables were to the left. Smoke-blackened arches led into pool rooms, penny arcades, shooting galleries, and other theaters of amusement designed to appeal to those loaded down with pay-checks garnered in the wilderness.

Approaching an employee, they asked for Lango, and were referred to a battle-scarred person, obviously a house "bouncer," leaning against the wall. This one, first eying them suspiciously from head to foot, pointed with his cigar at a door opening upon an upper gallery. They mounted the stairway and knocked upon this door. After an interval during which they felt themselves to be the objects of an unseen scrutiny, Lango himself appeared, grinned upon them slowly, and invited them in.

His manner was businesslike. No time was spent in profitless discussion.

"You're the lads I saw juggling the irons in the pawnshop," said Lango, nodding. "You're just in time. I was all set to start out on the job short-handed. The deal is, twenty-five bucks apiece when the job's done. I'll leave it here with Larsen. You can get it when you come back." He grinned slowly. "You heeled?"

The partners shook their heads. Lango opened a drawer in an ancient desk, disclosing a small arsenal. He tossed two large-caliber automatics upon the table.

"Can't use 'em," Lonesome demurred. "Six-guns is the only artillery I'd touch with a ten-foot pole."

"Suit yourself." The big man swept the automatics back into the drawer and waved his hand. "Take your choice."

The partners selected standard .45 Colts.

"Stick 'em in your jeans," Lango directed. "You don't need any holsters. You'll be carryin' 'em in your laps as soon as we get out of town. Take a box of shells a-piece." He arose, buttoning a raincoat about his throat.

"Wait a second," Windy demurred. "Me an' my pardner ain't et for a week or so. We got to have nourishment before we go anywhere, a-tall."

The big man frowned. Nevertheless, he stepped to the door and shouted down to the fry cook behind the lunch counter.

"What you got in a hurry, 'High-Ball'?"

"Roast beef and beans," came the reply.

"And coffee." Lango directed. "Set 'em up. Listen, you birds," he told the partners, "we haven't much time. Eat that garbage and sprint outside. Big black touring car around the corner, with the motor running. See you there."

"Don't rush us," said Windy, his mustache bristling. "Whilst we're eatin' we'll be obliged if you'll duck over to the pawnshop and get our timepieces. Me an' McQuirk are clock-watchers an' whistle-listeners. We're honest gunmen who've got to know we're keepin' union hours."

The big man muttered an imprecation beneath his breath. "Gimme the tickets," he growled, glaring. "You birds got any more funny ideas? Don't get the notion there's anything humorous in this job. It's brass tacks."

"We thrive on 'em," averred Windy.

At the counter, they gulped down the food before them. The beef was dry, the beans soggy; the portions placed before them were designed for

men of average appetites. But to the famished partners it was food of the gods, and in quantity only a morsel. But as they were debating the proposition of calling for a second order, Lango's muffled figure beckoned from the door. They arose regretfully and followed him out.

In the near-dusk of late afternoon there was something oddly sinister in the powerful touring car throbbing at the curb with all curtains drawn. Lango motioned them into the tonneau, followed them in, and the car leaped away.

The two men in the front seat were small, with caps pulled low and topcoat collars turned up. They conversed in hoarse whispers and one of them coughed at intervals, with an odd, sniffing sound. There was an unhealthy atmosphere about this ill-favored pair, something reptilian. When he on the right turned his head, Windy caught a glimpse of pinched, predatory profile and the glint of a beady eye.

"You say them fellers was loaned to you by the city?" Windy questioned, guardedly. "Seems like they're a mite underweight for reg'lar police work."

"Two of the best gunmen west of Chi," Lango told him. "Snow-birds. They're hopped up to-night. No, they ain't regular police. Specially deputized for this job. Listen, you fellows, while I give you the low-down on what we got to do. I take it you ain't squeamish when lead begins to fly?"

"We're used to it," said Windy virtuously, "providin' our cause is just."

"That's the way I had you figgered," Lango approved. "You're not only earning twenty-five bucks—less what I had to pay for these blasted watches"—he extended the timepieces to the pair, who tucked them carefully in their proper places—"but you're also doing the State and nation a service."

"We're heading down the Lower Columbia Highway." He waved a hand at the landscape careening by at

terrific speed. "This side of St. Helens we'll meet a fast truck coming into town. Loaded to the guards with Canadian liquor. Part of an international rum-smuggling deal. There'll be two men on the front seat, both armed. Two more in the rear of the truck, armed with rifles. Hard eggs, all four. It's up to us to stop this truck, seize the liquor, and take these gunmen, alive or dead."

"Sounds interestin'," Windy murmured. "But will these said eggs risk their lives battlin' peace officers for a mere load of booze?"

"Will they battle?" echoed the other, with a hoarse chuckle. "That truck-load of booze is worth fifty grand—and this is the last lap. Those hop-heads would drill a guy for a plugged nickel."

Night descended upon them swiftly. Far ahead, under the brilliance of the headlights, the glistening pavement sped toward them like an unending ribbon. The car careened sickeningly around curves, righted itself, and plunged on, rocketlike, while the blurred landscape slid by.

As they approached a sharp curve at the crest of a steep grade, the one at the wheel cocked his head questioningly. Lango growled an order. The car slowed to a stop on the edge of the pavement and immediately all lights snapped out.

"Los," directed Lango, "you know the truck. Go up ahead and wait. I'll turn the car around. When you see 'em coming, give us a couple of flashes. You, Danny, go with Los. When they stop, get those yeggs on the rear. Get 'em cold."

"We'll get 'em," promised the driver, wriggling forth, "Eh, Danny? But youse guys gotta watch the mugs on the front, chief. McBain's holding it down himself. Ain't taking chances."

"Don't you worry about the front," Lango boasted. He nudged the part-

ners. "Don't forget, we got to get 'em all. Then McBain's gang'll figure he's double crossed 'em."

The partners had gathered little from this byplay other than that an ambush was being planned. There would be plenty of warning before action began, it was obvious. They slumped lower in their places. The weariness of the preceding hours and the swaying of the car had lulled them into a kind of lethargy.

"Mister," said Windy, yawning, "wake us up when the fireworks commence. I aim to grab a little nap."

"You're either tough babies or bone-headed," exclaimed Lango, admiringly. His big body was trembling. "Yeah, I'll wake you up."

But they did not sleep. Lango, breathing heavily, climbed into the driver's seat. He had scarcely settled himself at the wheel, great shoulders hunched, when a flashlight winked twice from the crest. The partners sat bolt upright, and the calloused thumb of each found the hammer of his gun.

"Here they come," growled Lango.

The motor whined. Gears ground harshly. The car swung around, backed, jockeyed for position across the narrow pavement. The roadway was blocked.

"Get out," directed Lango between his teeth. "We'll duck in the brush. They can't get by us. If they try to buck the car they're wrecked. If they get off the pavement they're mired down."

They plunged into the brush that flanked the road and crouched beneath the dripping branches. The upper background of the highway above the banked curve was bathed in white light that steadily grew stronger. The air throbbed to the drone of a mighty motor.

"Listen, you birds!" hissed Lango. "This job'll be short an' sweet if you follow directions. I know you're crack shots. Don't miss. When they stop,

drill 'em. You"—to Windy, "get the driver. You and me"—he indicated Lonesome—"will get that four-flusher McBain. All set?"

Twin headlights were swinging around the curve. The whole world seemed bathed in vivid light. In the half-illuminated shadow of the underbrush the partners peered at each other, aghast. For the first time the realization had come to them how cold-blooded and pitiless was this thing planned by Lango.

"Listen, you snake in the grass," said Windy, his glittering eyes unwinking. "You aimin' to bushwhack those mavericks without givin' them a chance? What kind of peace work do you call this?"

The car blocking the roadway was etched in vivid silhouette. The roaring truck bore down upon it, slackening speed, skidding, brakes screaming. Its momentum was too great; a head-on crash was imminent. Lango thrust his face close, features livid.

"What you birds want?" he snarled. "Listen—a thousand apiece if we get 'em all. Don't argue. Drill 'em."

With a rending crash the truck plowed into the car, tossed it aside. Frail as the impediment had been by comparison to the weight of the loaded vehicle, the careening truck skidded from the pavement, swayed drunkenly as its wheels sank into the clay embankment, and sagged to a stop. Its lights flashed out.

Lango, at Lonesome's left, fired point-blank at a dim figure bulking beside the driver. Simultaneously, from the right and left, beyond the stalled vehicles, the vicious tongues of automatics streaked forth from the brush. The driver hurtled forth, shooting as he came; the louder roar of high-power rifles crashed from the rear of the truck. Lango's intended victim, crouching behind the wheel, opened fire.

The partners threw themselves flat

upon the ground. Bullets lashed in the underbrush. The turmoil was terrific. Far down the road, headlights of another car appeared and instantly flicked out.

"They's something rotten in Denmark," Windy hissed in Lonesome's ear. "This is one fishy layout. Let's travel."

They bellied through the brush, paralleling the highway. As they were about to crawl forth, they halted, crouching. Mysterious reinforcements had appeared on the scene. Dim figures flitted by, unreal shambling figures, hurrying toward the battle area. A new and greater turmoil arose; at least a score of guns were barking. Tongues of flame split the darkness.

As suddenly as it had begun, the uproar ceased. Commanding voices shouted. The headlights of the truck flashed on. A group of men milled, silhouetted against the white light. The partners, deeming themselves lost in the gloom down the highway, stepped forth to reconnoiter the puzzling scene—and each felt the cold muzzle of an automatic pressed into the small of his back.

"Hands up!" a gruff voice commanded. "You're under arrest."

CHAPTER XI.

THE EAGLES' FLIGHT.

IN the auxiliary seats of a spacious touring car heading for the city, Lonesome and Windy sat with their hands in their pockets. Behind them, three businesslike persons relaxed in the rear seat, discussing the late imbroglio. No guns were in evidence, but the partners knew that they were surrounded by an arsenal.

They had been searched, relieved of their weapons, and hustled unceremoniously into the car. Another machine was ahead, a third behind. It was evident that their mysterious captors comprised a score or more. No questions

had been asked or answered. From the talk about them, they gathered that one of Lango's gang besides themselves—the gunman called "Los"—had been captured, and one of McBain's gang. The two leaders had made their escape. The truckload of liquor was in custody.

Windy twisted himself about, presently, and peered over his shoulder at the dim figures in the rear seat.

"Gents," he said, an apologetic note in his voice that had deceived many skilled man hunters in the past, "we're only a couple of busted-down pilgrims aimin' to struggle along. What's all this about? Who are you lads, anyway?"

Raucous chuckles greeted this query. But an authoritative voice replied, its tones crisp:

"You men understand that anything you say will be used against you?"

"Oh, sure!" returned Windy. "Don't let nothin' like that stand in the way of a little parley. No foolin', mister, me an' my pardner crave a little enlightenment."

"Suppose, then," said the other dryly, "that you tell us about yourselves first. Since when have you been on Lango's pay roll?"

"I'll tell you all we know about this whole layout," said Windy. "We met Lango in a pawnshop yesterday. He seen we was down and out and offered us a job. Claimed he was a federal officer and needed a couple of deputies. Offered us twenty-five bucks apiece to help him take some rum-runners into camp. So we come out with him to-night, but we quit him cold when he wanted us to bushwhack them bootleggers without givin' them a Chinaman's chance. Then we run smack into you gents, an' here we are! Question is, who in blazes are you lads, and how come you horned into the deal? It don't amount to much, but we're plumb curious."

An amazed silence was his only im-

mediate answer. Then he of the incisive voice laughed shortly.

"I don't get your idea, brother," he said. "That kind of a yarn won't get to first base with a jury. If you're kidding me, you can do your laughing now; but this is the dope. You're talking to the assistant federal prohibition director for this district. You were arrested while assisting Lango, one of the most pernicious rum-runners of the Lower Columbia, in an attempt to hijack McBain, who is the most pernicious. Lango and McBain both got away. We got the liquor. You men may be ignorant stiffs like you pretend, Lango's goats, but you'd be surprised, brother, how many goats are herded together up at McNeil's Island."

The partners received this lucid explanation in silence. They were obviously staggered by its impact. For a considerable space they sat slumped dejectedly, chins sunk on their breasts, while the car roared on.

Other lurid incidents in the long chain leading up to this dilemma were dwarfed and insignificant by comparison to the present. They had been captured, red-handed, as members of some lawless crew engaged in a lawless undertaking. This was no case of disorderly conduct such as the city magistrate had frowned upon, no trivial breach of municipal ordinance; but a grave offense against federal law that must inevitably lead to a punishment which, for freedom-loving men, was worse than death. It mattered not that they had been mere tools of the ruthless Lango, inveigled into the imbroglio through their extremity and in the belief that it was a lawful undertaking. In judicial procedure, they were vaguely aware, ignorance was no excuse. They were, from any conceivable angle, in a desperate jack pot.

Yet their reaction to their plight was typical of a breed that rode, fought, and died hard. Lesser men, facing the facts,

might have resigned themselves with what fortitude they could muster. The partners, having pondered the situation and digested its import, still sat, apparently relaxed—two battered, disreputable, dejected, alien figures. But within them swelled a wild, devastating rage.

Their rage was not directed against their captors. It was general rather than specific. It was vague, but searing. It was directed against luck, fate, circumstance, or whatever nameless force had crowded in upon them during the past two days; stepped on their toes, in a manner of speaking; led them into lurid enterprises of which the present was but a sample; beaten them down; battered them; sneered at them, and left them cold, hungry, weary, and penniless in a strange car and at the mercy of strange captors, roaring through the blackness of the night toward prison bars and inclosing walls.

Yet they gave no inkling of their state of mind. There was nothing in their bearing or appearance to suggest even to skilled man hunters that their prisoners might bear close watching. The low esteem in which their captors held them was evidenced by the fact that no irons were upon their wrists. But from lowered heads and through narrowed lids, the partners peered at each other and by the pressure of bony knees reaffirmed a desperate pact.

Whispering would invite suspicion and bring closer scrutiny upon them. Veiled words openly spoken must convey the plan. Windy cleared his throat.

"Pardner," he announced in an apparent attempt at jocularly, "we're headin' for home."

"Check," agreed Lonesome, slumping lower in his seat. "They ain't nothin' can stop us."

The car was careening around a curve. In a natural reaction to the lurch of the vehicle, Windy laid hold of the back of the seat before him and braced him-

self. Lonesome drew his feet beneath him.

"Dog-gone," said Windy, in awe. "These buzzards are shorely speed demons. On one of these curves I'm liable to fly like an eagle."

It was a desperate suggestion indeed. Yet there was no alternative. The myriad twinkling lights of the city were now in full view, like the miracle of stars beneath a lowering sky. Each passing moment brought them closer to a situation from which there could be no escape.

"A pair of eagles, Windy," said Lonesome. He reached swiftly for his plug of tobacco. His battered cheek bulged.

Windy was on the left, on which side the underbrush flanking the highway sloped sharply down into the night. Lonesome waited, his muscles tense, for his partner to lead the desperate play.

The moment came at the next curve. Because of their reckless speed and the slippery pavement, the car swung wide at the turn. From all fours, as it were, Windy leaped, spurning the car door with pistonlike feet. His wild yell echoed as he hurtled into the night.

Lonesome followed, scrambling with catlike swiftness. Forced to cross the seat just vacated by his partner, a split second intervened before he shot into space. Tribute to the watchfulness of his captors, unprepared for such a suicidal break for liberty, was the fact that hands grasped his coat tails in passing. The fabric tore beneath clutching fingers. He was gone. A revolver spat viciously upon him, but the bullet whined into the distance.

Hurling with the impetus given by the speed of the car, plus his own effort, Lonesome's body arched out and down into space. For a terrific instant it seemed that he was falling into a black and bottomless abyss. Then he crashed into an exceedingly hostile thicket whose very toughness and resistant

qualities saved him from serious injury or possible death.

Wet leaves whipped his face; splintered branches shredded his clothing and lacerated his flesh. He plunged on and down, cutting a swath, as it were, down the steep slope; and so came to rest against a great mossy boulder, his feet elevated, his right shoulder and arm all but buried in a miniature quagmire.

At some distance to the left, he heard Windy thrashing in the brush like a wounded animal. Bruised and shaken himself, he yet held his breath and listened for some clue to his partner's status. Then he heard Windy cursing, fluently, and with pointed emphasis, and breathed a sigh of relief.

He struggled painfully to his feet and plunged on down the slope. He could hear Windy's course converging on his own. From high up the bank, where the highway was, a spotlight peered down into the depths. Bullets ripped through the brush about them, fired at random and solely as an outlet for the chagrin of their late captors. But there was no pursuit. In the blackness and the thicket it would be as logical to search for a needle in a haystack.

Even as Windy had said, they had flown like eagles; and, like eagles, they were free.

CHAPTER XII.

KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD.

THEY proceeded down the slope, their haste lessening in direct ratio to the distance between themselves and the highway. Because of the all but impenetrable darkness, they stumbled against unseen objects, barked their shins on great boulders, disentangled themselves, muttering, from creeper-hung thickets, and found themselves ensnared presently upon an ancient enemy, a barbed-wire fence.

They crawled through this impediment and made out, before them, the

dim glint of railroad steel. After wading knee-deep through an unseen pool, they scrambled up the grade and found the firmness of ties and road-bed beneath them.

"Which way, McQuirk?" growled Windy.

"East," said Lonesome.

They plodded along the right of way toward the city. A gusty wind was sweeping up the track, piercing their sodden, tattered garments.

"Where we headin' for?" demanded Windy, halting suddenly. There was a savage note in his voice as of one who, though of iron endurance, inflexible fortitude, and unwavering optimism, has approached certain limits. "Why in Sam Hill we hoofin' along? Why don't we stop? What in blazes is it all about?"

"Don't weaken, Windy," advised Lonesome with bitter relish, "we're searchin' for rest an' quiet."

Windy stumbled on. They made out presently, through the timber that flanked the right of way to the left, the flames of a crackling fire.

"I'm cold," Windy stated. "I'm tired. I'm hostile. Let's squat by that fire, McQuirk."

They turned aside, scaled the fence, pushed through the timber, and so came to a fire, around which several unsavory persons were foregathered. Some were sitting, hunched, staring into the embers; others lay sprawled in attitudes of repose, steam arising from exceedingly disreputable clothing. It was a rendezvous of homeless men! the "jungles" of hobo-land.

"Greetings, snakes!" Windy announced, as the pair strode into the circle of light. "Make room for a couple of weary pilgrims that have missed the glory trail. Nice night, ain't it?"

Some of the sleepers stirred, raised unkempt faces. Shifty glances appraised these newcomers who squatted,

buzzardlike, before the fire, hatless, their sodden, begrimed clothing in shreds, but their eyes mere baleful slits in their battered, unshaved features.

A bearded ruffian, obviously the leader of the nameless crew, reared on an elbow and glowered across the fire. The partners, ignorant of the ethics of hobo-land, glared back.

"Wotsa idea?" growled the bearded one. "Dis ain't any Ritz-Waldorf. What you got?"

"What have we got?" echoed Windy, truculently. "We got the world by the tail. We're millionaires in disguise. We're social butterflies masqueradin' as stingin' lizards. What in blazes you think we got—callin' cards?"

The bearded one's flabby features suddenly writhed into grim and menacing lines.

"Hey, culls,"—he rolled a somber eye about his cohorts—"we'd best tie a can on dese road cats, huh?"

"Listen, Napoleon," said Windy, rocking on his heels, "get heavy with us an' we'll tie you into fancy knots. Yeah, I mean you. Me an' my pardner are peaceable gents, but we been pushed too far. We're poison mean. Maybe it's the world that's loco, an' maybe it's us; but we're hostile. All we crave is to soak up a little heat. If that's puttin' you out any, let us know. Get me?"

"Lay off 'em, 'Kansas,'" drawled an emaciated youth with a seamed, aged face. "These hombres ain't reg'lar stiffs. I know their brand."

Windy peered at this one, caught instantly by an inflection in his apathetic voice that was like an echo from another region infinitely remote. It was noticeable, too, that the big man subsided, muttering.

"You've et some alkali dust in yore time, cowboy," Windy challenged. "Where'd you hang yore spurs?"

"West of the Mississippi," said the other, with a wry grin.

"Excuse it, please," murmured Windy.

"Pardner," Lonesome addressed the youth after some moments, "it appeals to me that you're an hombre that can give us some enlightenin' information. If you was us, and craved to get east of the mountains, an' was busted so flat it was painful to observe, how in blazes would you do it?"

"Cinch," said the youth. "Catch a rattler from the other side of the river, headin' east."

"We're nervous critters," averred Lonesome. "Ain't it skittish business, deadheadin' on a fast train that a way?"

The youth emitted a hollow, cackling sound that might have been a chuckle.

"Tell it to Sweeney," he advised, coughing. "These weary Willies figger they're hard when they're ridin' the rods. But they're in a hammock sippin' pink tea compared to forkin' the hurricane deck of a wall-eyed cayuse which is reachin' for the stars. Yeah, you caballeros'll hold 'er down."

"Let's go, Windy," said Lonesome, rising. "Over beyond the mountains I hear yearnin' voices callin'. Cowboy, come up to the Condon country some time. Look up the McQuirk-DeLong outfit. They's beans an' a bunk, an' you can turn over one of them new leaves you read about."

"Too late," said the youth, shaking his head. "When a chapter's closed, they's no leaves left. I'm only a sniffer now. Happy days. On yore way, caballeros. You got to make dust to catch that mail. Sprint acrost the river and pick it up at the east side yards."

"DeLong," said Lonesome as they crashed again through the underbrush toward the right of way. "Life handed that lad a tough break."

"We know 'em when we see 'em," averred Windy, bitterly. "Tough breaks is our meat. Question is, are we goin' to hold out till we make that said train, or ain't we?"

The warmth of the fire had made their overtaxed muscles lethargic. They wasted no further energy in fruitless conversation, but plodded on like men whose feet are leaden.

The city loomed about them. Street lights shone upon them; scarecrow figures that might have emerged, shambling, from the gloom of some prehistoric swamp. But they were too low mentally and physically to take note of the curious stares of pedestrians in passing. Fear of the police drove them onto less-frequented thoroughfares that led toward the river.

The wind roared and the rain lashed upon them as they crossed a steel bridge. They found themselves presently in a maze of switching engines, cars, and tracks; and in the lee of a gaunt box car they came upon three persons of the "dyed-in-the-wool" variety. With a cunning born of their extremity, they decided to watch these experts of the road and copy their technique.

It was, it appeared, an extremely simple process. A powerful headlight shone down the gleaming rails of the main line and a great mogul of the transcontinental run coasted through the yards, followed by a long, serpentine line of glistening steel cars. As the great engine passed, the three hobos darted from the shadow and disappeared behind the tender. Lonesome and Windy followed.

There was plenty of room, they discovered, and a species of shelter. The three vagrants crowded into the unused doorway of the mail car. The partners took their stand at either side of the bellowlike aperture.

The train moved on, picked up speed. The lights of the town trooped by in orderly procession, and presently they were hurtling through the night and the blackness of the gorge.

It was simple, the partners decided; no feat at all, this business of making the fast train. Momentarily, within

them, raged a savage exultance attuned to the lash of the rain, the howling of the wind, the roar and rumble of the iron monster bearing them on through the night. Circumstances were bowing before them at last; they were heading for home.

The moment passed; they emerged from a fitful doze to find themselves chilled to the bone. The train was slowing to a stop. Their fellow vagrants, they discovered, were gone. This fact made no impression upon them until a trainman appeared below and shone a lantern into their retreat.

"Come outa that, bos," ordered this one. "Hit the grit."

A short-barreled revolver was in his hand. As the partners eyed this weapon sorrowfully, Windy felt a sudden pressure against the back of his neck. He was hurled, sprawling, to the gravel below. Lonesome, crouching, looked up. A grinning fireman stood on the tender, a long clinker bar in his hand. Menaced thus from two sides, Lonesome clambered down.

"Beat it," commanded the trainman tersely. "Stay off this train or we'll bean you."

Windy, picking himself up somewhat stiffly, bristled with a remnant of his usual belligerence; but Lonesome grasped his arm and hustled him away.

"Don't argue, DeLong," he hissed in his partner's ear. "They got the bulge on us. We got to make this train or we're sunk."

The train crew, with the mail clerks as reserves, were evidently making a determined effort to rid the train of vagrants. Down its glistening length, men with lanterns swung from points of vantage. The fireman loomed like a colossus on the tender, armed with his vicious bar.

Lonesome slouched some paces past a watchful trainman, turned suddenly, and dived beneath the car. Windy was at his heels. They scrambled on all

fours over the steel rails just as the train began to move. Rising on the other side, they sprinted ahead and clambered aboard between two cars. Unfamiliar though they were with the structure of the unfriendly rolling stock, they yet found certain hand-holds, and by dint of tremendous effort, achieved the top.

They heard members of the crew running alongside, cursing, as they flashed their lanterns under the moving car. But the train did not stop; it gathered speed and presently was rumbling anew through the night.

The wind, on the exposed top, was of cyclone proportions, bitterly cold. The driving, icy tide, studded with sparks and hot cinders, stung the faces of the shivering pair. Lonesome, gesturing to Windy, crawled forward.

Two cars intervened between themselves and the hostile tender. Between these two, Lonesome lowered himself cautiously. It was a precarious business in the darkness and with the lurching of the roaring behemoth, but finally both achieved comparatively safe footing beside the bellowslike vestibule connecting the cars.

"Won't be disturbed here," Lonesome gloated. "They's a car between us an' that darned tender. Cowboy, we held 'er down when them reg'lar dyed-in-the-wool stiffs was heaved off on their ears."

In refutation of this statement, a shadowy figure appeared above, hurdled the intervening chasm and disappeared forward. Another followed, and another. They were not crawling as Lonesome and Windy had crawled. With the train now at full speed, they ran, crouching, leaning into the wind. The partners stared at each other mutely as the last disappeared.

"McQuirk," said Windy presently, "they don't seem to be any traffic between these cars. What say we step into the alley an' travel in style?" He indicated an aperture some eight inches

in width that separated the two vestibules. Inside, provided they were not disturbed by passing trainmen, was shelter from wind and rain.

"It's an idea," agreed Lonesome. "Lucky we ain't been eatin' heavy lately. We can prob'ly squeeze through."

Windy thrust his gaunt frame through the aperture with ease. It was a distinct effort for Lonesome's bulkier chest; and neither knew, during those instants when the cold steel of the vestibule frames was pressed against chest and back, that seldom, in their colorful career, had they stood closer to death. For had the train slackened speed, or the brakes been applied, the eight-inch opening would have closed to perhaps the thickness of a man's arm as the slack between the car couplings was taken up; and whatsoever of flesh and blood stood between would have been crushed as an insect is crushed beneath a careless heel.

"Great stuff, huh?" whispered Lonesome, as they stood in the calm of the vestibule where the air was warmer and no rain fell. "No question about it, cowboy, we're good."

From beyond the closed doors came sounds of muffled conversation. It dawned on the pair that it would be embarrassing to have unsuspecting trainmen walk in upon them suddenly. Guarding each door were heavy bars ready to slip into place.

"McQuirk," said Windy, "let's make it final. A feller is entitled to some privacy, ain't he? Let's bar them doors."

"Yeah, but suppose they raise a hullo?" Lonesome demurred.

"Let 'em beller," Windy retorted. "To fetch us out they got to stop the train, ain't they? Before they stop, we'll ease out of our boudoir and sprint away."

This was so obvious that it precluded argument. They cautiously slipped the heavy bars in place. Then each, with

a sigh, slumped down to a seated position, chins sunk on their chests.

They were jerked from slumber by a loud tattoo on the door at their backs.

"Open up, you stiffs," came an angry voice. "What's the idea? Open up, or it's the hoosegow for you."

The partners cast a bored glance at each other, eyebrows arched, and Windy stifled a yawn with languid fingers.

"Those hombres ain't had the right fetchin' up," remarked Lonesome, sighing. "Pass them cream puffs, Windy."

"No sugar in my tea, an' much obliged," said Windy, shifting to a more comfortable position. "Just a slice of lemon."

"You bos going to open up?" demanded the voice, hoarse with rage. Profanity followed, pointed and explicit, and footsteps trailed away.

"Round one," murmured Windy. "Gosh, cowboy, ain't it heavenly to have the bulge on some one, if it's only for a couple of minutes?"

Lonesome leaped stiffly to his feet and peered out the aperture.

"Son of a gun, Windy!" he breathed. "This country looks familiar. We're pullin' into The Dalles. Cowboy, the end's in sight. Let's travel."

A more authoritative knock sounded at the door.

"Listen, bos," said a harsh voice. "Get this straight. We've got .45-caliber guns, steel-jacketed bullets. This door is wood. Open up, or we start shooting."

The partners, grinning, prepared to depart. Lonesome, thrusting an arm through the cleft, halted as though petrified. Windy, too, stared, his eyes bulging.

"Great Cæsar!" whispered the latter, hoarsely. "Have we swelled up since we crawled in, or has that blasted hole shrunk?"

The aperture through which they had entered the vestibule had narrowed to the thickness of Lonesome's arm as the

train slackened speed. It required no sixth sense to perceive that they were entrapped.

"When we count three, lead flies," warned the inexorable voice beyond the door. "One——"

"Hold everything, mister," said Lonesome. He laid hold of the bar. "It's just another one of them things, Windy," he told his partner, wagging his head. "The homestretch, an' we're nosed out at the wire."

"This is the finish," said Windy, with the bitterness of a strong man who at last concedes defeat. "After this, there ain't any more. Turn loose the bloodhounds, McQuirk."

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANCE MEETING.

LONESOME threw open the door. Both raised their hands in response to the unspoken command of two round, unwavering muzzles trained upon them. A pair of heavy-set persons, with hard eyes and outthrust jaws, surveyed them for an instant, then with a curt jerk of the head, ordered them in.

They entered. A weapon was pressed into each of their gaunt mid-sections, and expert fingers searched their persons for concealed weapons. Then the hard-eyed ones glared upon them.

"You bums are in bad," one announced. "Don't you know nothin' a-tall, tamperin' with U. S. mail cars? Buddy," the officer commanded a nervous mail clerk, "dive into my black bag and fetch a couple pair of bracelets. What you stiffs tryin' to pull, anyway?"

Windy merely eyed him with a species of morose disinterest and yawned. But Lonesome assayed a last effort.

"We ain't stiffs," he stated. "Me an' ny partner never dead-headed before. If it makes any difference in the deal, 'll tell you how come."

"Spill it," said the other, "we like bedtime stories."

"We went to Portland," said Lonesome. "We went broke. We undertook to beat our way back. Bein' ignorant mavericks, we eased into this alley yonder, not knowin' that we couldn't get out. Cravin' rest an' quiet"—his tawny mustache curled as he achieved a feeble grin—"we barred the door so we wouldn't be disturbed. That's all. We don't give a tinker's dam about the U. S. mail. We ain't dangerous hombres. Ornerly as we may look, underneath we're gentle as kittens that have got all snarled up in a hornet's nest. We're busted-down an' lowly cattlemen headin' for the home range, which is southeast of The Dalles."

It was obvious that it was the last statement only that carried any weight. In the act of snapping the handcuffs upon the partners, the cynical officers paused.

"You mean you belong here at The Dalles?" one demanded.

"Property owners, an' taxpayers, an' A-1 citizens," declared Lonesome.

Their two captors eyed each other in apparent indecision. Then they tossed the handcuffs aside. The train had slowed to a stop.

"We'll call that bluff," declared the leader. "The train stops four minutes. That's long enough to establish your identity. If your line ain't hokum, some of the home guard at the depot will vouch for you. Otherwise, you're outa luck. Just step outside, buddies. Remember, no funny moves. In this department, we don't take any chances."

Though the partners gave no sign of it, this placed them in something of a dilemma. The Dalles, on the main line, was on the outer edge of their sphere of activities. They circulated mostly to the east and south. Here, they were known only by reputation, save for a few acquaintances.

It was a frail chance indeed that one of these would happen to be at the depot at this late hour; and that such

a casual acquaintance could vouch for them in their present condition was equally problematical.

Nevertheless, they shambled forth, with the suspicious ones at their heels, guns in hand.

Since it was shortly after midnight that the eastbound train made its brief stop at The Dalles, only a small crowd milled beneath the row of arc lights illumining the depot platform. Curious glances focused upon the quartet as they descended from the car. Loiterers moved in that direction. A circle of spectators instantly formed around them, among whom the partners searched in vain for the face of a friend.

"You win," said Lonesome at length, with a weary gesture, his tawny mustache drooping. "Amongst these pop-eyed citizens we don't know a soul."

"Gents," one of their captors addressed the crowd, "these bums, whom we nailed tamperin' with a mail car, say they are established residents of this community, by the names of—what monnikers you claiming, buddies?"

"I'm McQuirk," said Lonesome. He jerked a thumb at his partner, who leaned negligently against the car, his bristling hair unkempt. "He's DeLong."

"Ever hear of 'em?" demanded the officer. The crowd murmured assent. "Would these fellers fit the bill?"

It was obvious, from the spectators' point of view, that the answer to the last question was more than doubtful. These scarecrow figures, hatless, battered, and apathetic, did not correspond to the spectacular, swashbuckling ex-gunfighters whose fame was all but legendary throughout the high country.

"Them McQuirk and DeLong hombres," opined a wizened old-timer, "could prob'ly eat these downcast critters at one bite. They wouldn't be wearin' no such outfit as that. They wouldn't look so bleary-eyed and

chawed up that a way. If they did, folks'd know they'd been somewheres, and could tell by the wounded and maimed there'd been a massacre. Yeah, an' not meanin' no disrespect to you peace officers, it wouldn't be the pair of you that would take 'em into camp. It would be you an' who else. Those critters are wolves."

"Come on," directed the leader of the officers. "Inside, bos. Your act was a flop. We've wasted too much time already and——"

He broke off suddenly as a new development entered the scene with the suddenness of a bursting projectile.

Windy had been leaning against the car, gaunt, dejected, his bony hands in his pockets. His had been the detached air of one who, utterly weary, utterly shattered of spirit, contemplates events with sardonic aloofness and yearns only for sleep. Now, his glittering eyes, roving over the crowd, suddenly became more intent. In their depths, savage fires flared up. Simultaneously, Lonesome's pale-blue eyes were no longer mild. They were unwinking, cold and hard as crumbs of glass.

Gaping, the spectators saw a miracle occur. It was as though the shambling ones swelled in stature, threw off invisible chains of weariness and dejection. Their battered features lighted with the exultance of those who have seen dreams come true. Windy stretched forth his lean arms hungrily, spat upon his hands, and charged. But explosive as was his leap forward, Lonesome was at his side.

The crowd split apart. Two persons were thus revealed, nattily dressed strangers who had just strolled up and joined the outskirts of the crowd. In appearance they were substantial business men, bulky individuals; and from the blue-shaven jowls of one projected a cigar tilted at a rakish angle.

The bulky pair halted, petrified, at sight of the two maniacal figures charg-

ing upon them with a sinister, business-like intentness that was unmistakable.

"Grathin!" howled Windy joyously, as he charged. "Berg!"

But it was not the spontaneous greeting of one meeting old friends. Rather, in its savage abandon, was it the blood-call of a gaunt wolf who, after trailing through bleak and interminable barrens, at last finds his quarry in view.

Belated recognition came to the bulky ones. They whirled and fled. The partners leaped hungrily at their heels, gained upon them, bellowing.

It had happened so quickly that even the officers had been caught off guard.

"Halt!" shouted one of these, raising his weapon; but the other struck it down. "Leave 'em go!" he counseled, grinning. "We don't want 'em. Whatever this is, it is going to be good!"

"Whoop-e-e!" cackled the wizened old-timer, slapping his knee. "When I see 'em in action, mister, I ain't so sure. They *might* be McQuirk an' DeLong!"

Grathin, with Windy at his heels, loped at prodigious speed toward the shelter of the Pullman from which the two card sharps had alighted for a stroll during the brief stop. Berg, seeking wider horizons and forgetful of all else save the necessity of putting distance between himself and his ferocious pursuer, sprinted from the right of way.

What horrified amazement on the part of sleepy passengers greeted the turmoil of the chase that led the length of the Pullman was never revealed. Spectators on the platform saw Grathin hurtle from the farther steps with Windy's lean figure, seemingly all arms and legs, fastened upon his back. They crashed to earth, tore asunder. Grathin rolled to his feet, howling with dismay, and charged toward town. Windy followed, his enthusiasm unabated.

The sound of their pounding feet echoed down the deserted street and both pursuer and pursued were speedily lost to view.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAWN IN THE HIGH COUNTRY.

INTO the gloom that shrouded the south side of the ancient livery stable, a figure penetrated, flattened itself against the wall, poised for a moment to listen, then stumbled with an attempt at caution toward the door. With his hand on the latch, he whirled at the rattle of gravel near by. Another figure loomed at his elbow. They peered at each other; then the tenseness of each relaxed.

"McQuirk," said Windy in a hoarse whisper, "we got to make dust. The marshal's flat-footin' around the village cravin' light on the source of all this uproar."

"Don't I know it?" echoed Lonesome hollowly. "Let's grab our hosses an' travel."

Entering, they strode softly by the night man's quarters. No use to disturb him, they reflected. They could square their livery bills later. They wanted no lights to light at the moment, no uproar, no hullabaloo.

A joyous nicker from their mounts caused Windy to curse softly beneath his breath. They were only dumb animals, but they had not forgotten; faithful friends in a hostile world. The two men saddled quickly and rode into the quiet streets.

They proceeded at a cautious walk over three blocks of pavement. To their frayed nerves, the ring of steel on concrete was sufficient to waken a city of the dead. The implacable federal officers from whom they had departed so unceremoniously in their pursuit of Grathin and Berg might have joined forces with the marshal to hunt them down. With dirt road under foot, each clapped spurs to his mount.

The spirited animals, restive after two days of inactivity, responded with a will. They thundered out through the night, mounting higher toward the crests of the plateau against the sky.

Achieving the summit with no sounds of pursuit behind them, and the long miles of open country ahead, they slowed to a walk. Each slumped in the saddle with a sigh, and Lonesome, looking across at Windy, cleared his throat.

"Partner," he questioned mildly, "how much damage did you do to Grathin?"

"It ain't any burying job," Windy apologized. "Maybe I was chicken-hearted that a way. But the fact is, McQuirk, that after I'd run the critter down over by the iron works, and was straddle of his neck, and him half-buried in the cinders that a way, I got to thinking maybe I'd best go through his pockets. I never did hanker to take nothing off a corpse. So I fetched out a bale of money big enough to choke a cow, and after giving him some pointed advice on the evils of gambling, I staggered away. Hidin' in an alley waitin' for the marshal to go roaring by, I counted this said currency. Eighty-six simoleons. When I got to thinking they took two hundred off us, which was a hundred apiece, it made me hostile. I debated the proposition of going back and tearing his dude clothes off him and leaving this haywire outfit in exchange. But the bulgin' maverick's war paint wouldn't fit me. Too big. Anyway, they was pretty badly out of press by the time I got him worked over thorough. So I called it a day."

"You got me bested six bucks," murmured Lonesome. "Berg only assayed eighty iron men. I drug him down in that tall grass in the vacant lot beyond the courthouse. Yeah, I lectured him some, too. He didn't crave to listen, but I hung onto his ears. I was shorely in the mood to plaster him plenty. But he bellowed and blubbered and bawled so much it kind of ruined me." Lonesome sighed. "I was tired, anyway," he concluded. "So I up and left."

It was odd, each reflected somewhat furtively, that in their saddles, they

should feel so restful, so relaxed. This, too, was familiar, from a past life infinitely remote. They slumped still lower, hands resting on pommels, chins sunk on their breasts.

"McQuirk," muttered Windy drowsily, and it was with no conscious effort that he framed words whose connotation was yearning and elemental as life itself. "I'm tired, and I want to go home. We'd best speed up or we'll never make it."

"Check," agreed Lonesome, as one speaking in his sleep. "Let's burn up the dust."

But neither urged his horse forward. Like men whose overtaxed muscles refuse further response, they sat inert, leaving their horses to select both speed and trail. The sagacious animals moved at a brisk walk and picked the trail for home.

Only men who have spent their lives in the saddle can sleep in the saddle. Coördination more deeply rooted than conscious will holds them fast. Thus pinnacles and plateaus drifted by, canyons were crossed, and hogbacks scaled, while the high stars moved on in stately march and the thin sickle of silvery moon dipped lower toward the west.

It was on the crest of a ridge that Lonesome roused from a dreamless lethargy and looked about him, blinking. He yawned his tawny mustache drooping and peered apologetically at his partner. "What say?" he inquired. "I didn't get you, DeLong."

"I said," repeated Windy in a somewhat awed voice "take a look around you, McQuirk."

The scattered buildings of the McQuirk-DeLong homestead nestled in the hollow below. They were soft of outline in the half light, yet clear in detail. They were merely weather-beaten buildings homely of contour, yet to the watching eyes there was something inexpressibly serene and tranquil about them, to be appraised gloatingly, speculatively.

Beyond, stretched the rolling hills like a far-flung, limitless ocean. Quiet lay upon the homestead and upon the world. To the eastward, a rising tide of color was dimming the splendor of the stars.

Lonesome eyed his partner and Windy glowered back, his mustache bristling.

"Hold everything, McQuirk," announced that worthy, rolling a cigarette from makings that had miraculously emerged from the enterprises of the past. "I'm beatin' you to it. I ain't a gent that does nothin' by halves. In another five minutes we'll be nestlin' in our trundle beds, where I aim to sleep a week. But first, I got to do some sundry admittin', and agreeing thereto, and danged if it ain't the truth."

"You don't have to, pardner," Lonesome murmured. "I get you. We was a pair, at that. I'll admit you sold me on the idea. But I done took it up of my own free will." He gestured toward the brooding homestead, the slumbering world beyond, and the majestic sky. "This is the layout we left, seekin' rest an' quiet. Is that it?"

"Check," agreed Windy, in gloomy awe. "This said high country was gettin' too hostile for us. Too much action, hard ridin', gun-play. An' from the minnit we left till this minnit when we got back, we was set on, high-hatted, plundered, knocked down, beaten up, thrown in the hoosegow, an' battered to a pulp. We ain't had enough sleep to make a jack rabbit lay down his ears. We ain't et enough—by gravy, McQuirk"—his voice sank to a horrified whisper—"I never even got to finish that ice cream, with strawberries on it!"

There was a solemn pause.

"Never you mind, Windy," Lonesome soothed. "They's bacon in the shack. An' beans. Aigs in the haymow. An' our trundle beds— Let's go."

Though neither could express it, each knew himself to be in the presence of certain ultimate truths that towered

above the knowledge of mere physical hunger or weariness. There was more than slumbering plains before them, brooding calm and flawless sky; these things were their lives. It was as though, for a brief interval that would endure long in memory, they had taken their leave of life, and now, miraculously, had returned to a world whose ways they knew, its harshness and genial moods, its shadows and laughter. Here were no teeming thousands, as in a giant ant hill, nor roar of traffic, nor caste nor class, but friends and neighbors, men of their own breed, whose ways they understood. There would be bitter winds here, sudden storms, blistering

days, and weary nights of toil and danger; they knew them all, and knew now that these things were insignificant. There had come to them a clearing of mental vision, a readjustment of values. They had, in short, come home.

They could not express these thoughts, even to themselves. But Windy's battered features writhed into the semblance of a ferocious snarl as he yawned luxuriously, and Lonesome's tawny mustache drooped complacently across his fighting jaw as they rode down the slope toward the quiet homestead through the freshness, the fragrance, the crystalline air that is dawn in the high country.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Short-eared Owl

(*Asio flammeus*)

OF all the owl family this variety is probably the least destructive. When foraging for food, mice, rodents, and insects are preferred to birds, although occasionally a small bird is taken as victim.

In the eastern United States this owl is rarely seen. He is migratory and may be found in winter wandering as far south as Cuba. In the summer, he chooses northern and rather desolate stretches, usually low, swampy land surrounded by small lakes and inlets. For this reason he might well be called the Marsh Owl. Unlike other owls which make their homes in the woods, he prefers open country.

According to the location of the Short-eared Owl, the nesting period varies. It may extend anywhere from March to May, and even as late as June in the colder portions. The nest is a rude affair of loosely constructed grasses. Oftentimes a small hollow is made in a bunch of dead grass or under a bush.

From four to nine white eggs are laid. When the female bird is sitting, it takes actual danger to make her leave her nest. In about three weeks' time the eggs are hatched, presenting tiny, fuzzy balls of whitish down. The mother bird goes out for food which she feeds to her young. The birds do not leave the nest until nearly full grown, and then they usually stay with their parents until time to migrate south.

The Short-eared Owl does most of its hunting during the day, seeming to prefer cloudy days. The flight of this bird is easy and graceful and without noise. Very quietly they dive here and there for a careless field mouse or other prey and continue their flight almost uninterrupted. This bird has never been successfully made a pet of. Persons who have tried it have found that no amount of gentle treatment will tame him. In fact, he grows wilder in his enforced captivity.

Both male and female are marked in varying shades and stripes of brown, the female being darker than her mate. The wings are so long that when flying these owls look larger than they really are.



The Gallopin' Kid Slips it Over

by

Christopher B. Booth

Author of "Dawn in Wilderness Valley," etc.



IS left leg swathed in liniment-soaked bandages, "Shorty" Oliver played solitaire with a worn, soiled deck of cards, puffing noisily at his battered and blackened corncob pipe, while "The Gallopin' Kid" sat beneath the bracket lamp, his chair tilted against the wall, browsing delightedly through the profusely illustrated pages of a mail-order catalogue.

"It shore is amazin'," he murmured, more to himself than to Shorty, "how many things and contraptions, useful and otherwise, can be got up fer the purpose of enticin' money from a feller's pocket."

"Dang it!" Shorty muttered peevishly. "I didn't get out nary an ace that time. Of all the dang fool games that was ever invented!"

The other Circle X boys having gone off to a barbecue and dance at Sagebrush, Gallopin' and Shorty had the bunk house entirely to themselves for

the evening. There wasn't another cow-puncher within a hundred miles who liked a shindig more than Shorty, and it wasn't, of course, his voluntary choice that he had remained behind to-night. In a moment of carelessness he had allowed a bad horse to rake him against the corral fence, giving him a severe bruise and straining a ligament.

The Gallopin' Kid, also, was a most sociably inclined person, but he had stayed on the ranch, partly because he hadn't been long enough on the Circle X pay roll to draw wages, and partly because it was the friendly thing to stay and keep Shorty company.

Tossing the cards into a ragged pile, Shorty gave a snort of disgust. Slowly, and with frowning effort, he added the figures with which he had been scoring his game.

"Gosh, I shore do owe Old Sol a wad uh dough!" he grunted. "Fifty-eight thousand four hundred and sixty-one dollars! And I been told there's fools what actually do play this here

game uh Canfield fer the real mazuma."

The Gallopin' Kid made no response. He had turned a page of the catalogue and his eyes had become fixed in trancelike fascination upon the picture of a silk shirt, reproduced in colors which, so it seemed to him, made a rainbow drab by comparison.

"Pure silk, extra heavy," said the reading matter underneath the illustration; "actual \$12 value, Our Price \$9.10 each, or \$25 for Three."

Gallopin' stared and stared, his rapture growing. His interest and admiration were so pronounced that Shorty felt the stirring of a mild curiosity, so he hobbled painfully to his feet and limped across the width of the bunk house.

"Huh!" he said disgustedly. "I thought mebber it was some new kind of a fancy saddle or somethin'. Don't tell me yuh got a hankerin' fer no truck like silk shirts!"

The Gallopin' Kid was in no wise abashed.

"Pardner," he exclaimed in a tone of awe, "now there's a shirt what would make that King Solomon feller jest natcherally turn over in his grave! I shorely have got a cravin' to own myself one of them dazzlers. Man, howdy! I can see myself——"

"I kin see the boys duckin' yuh in the waterin'-trough the very same and precise minute yuh dast show yourse'f in any such get-out—and I'll be on hand to help 'em. I jest double dare yuh to git one of 'em!"

"Shorty, that shirt is the same as ordered right now," Gallopin' declared firmly. "When I draw my pay on the first of the comin' month, nine dollars and ten cents of it is goin' to be spent an' dispatched to this here outfit in Kansas City, along with the size of my neck and such other facts an' information——"

"Evenin', boys!" The voice from the

open doorway of the bunk house was that of Colonel Pike, owner of the Circle X. Down came the front legs of The Gallopin' Kid's chair and the mail-order catalogue slid to the floor.

"Evenin', colonel," responded Gallopin' and Shorty in unison.

"Where's Donaldson?" asked the veteran of the cow country, Donaldson being the foreman of the outfit.

"He went to Sagebrush, along with the rest of the bunch, colonel," Shorty Oliver answered. "Was there mebber somethin' I could do?"

"Not unless you can ride sixty-five miles," the Circle X owner said, his shaggy brows clipped together in a frown of annoyance. Then his shrewd gray eyes turned from Shorty's much-bandaged leg and rested upon The Gallopin' Kid, sizing him up with a penetrating stare. Shorty had seen Colonel Pike weigh a man like that before and knew it meant some sort of a job calling for a man who could be trusted.

"You're the new hand Donaldson took on last week," the rancher said crisply. "Your name's Baxter, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Gallopin' answered respectfully.

"And yuh can bank on the Gallopin' Kid, colonel," Shorty testified. "He's plumb dependable, Gallopin' is."

The cattleman nodded.

"That would be my judgment," he agreed. "All right, Baxter, get your horse. I'm sending you over to Jackson City with a package. It's got to be there by noon to-morrow. An old friend of mine is in a jam."

The Gallopin' Kid was pretty sure, without being told, that the package entrusted to his care would contain money, and this guess was verified a moment later when Colonel Pike handed him a compact bundle wrapped in heavy paper.

"Got a gun, eh, Baxter? Better pack it. Pretty wild country between here and Jackson, and it's a thousand dollars

cash I'm sending you down there with." The cattleman took three bills, two fives and a ten, from his pocket. "This is for your expenses."

Gallopin', looking pleased as Punch that he was being trusted so completely, shook his head.

"Why, I reckon one of them five-spots will be more'n ample, Colonel Pike. There won't be no expenses outside of mebbe a bit of grub for me and feed for my hoss when I hit Jackson."

That pleased the old cattleman.

"What's left is yours, Baxter," he chuckled, and then gave Gallopin' detailed instructions for the delivery of the thousand dollars.

The moon would not be up for more than an hour and the light from the stars was not sufficient to pick one horse from another when the Gallopin' Kid dragged his silver-mounted saddle to the corral gate. Shorty, who had limped out from the bunk house, shook his head dubiously.

"How do yuh aim to git hold of yore own critter?" he asked. It was a very large corral and nearly twenty head of horses were penned in for the night. It did seem like considerable of a job, but Gallopin' only laughed as he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, put two fingers in his mouth, and gave a sharp, distinctive whistle.

The response was immediate; one of the horses whinnied softly and the Gallopin' Kid's splendid black emerged through the obscure curtain of darkness.

"Yuh shore got him well trained," Shorty exclaimed admiringly. "Jest whistle to 'im and he comes trottin', huh? When a feller's in a hurry, like you are at the present moment uh speakin', it saves him considerable waste of time."

"Once it saved me more'n that," said Gallopin', affectionately stroking the animal's nose; "remind me to tell you,

when I ain't in such a rush, how Flash kept me from gettin' killed. This hoss of mine has got brains!"

Gallopin' saddled swiftly, put his foot in the stirrup and swung up.

"So long, Shorty! See you 'long about day after to-morrow."

Shorty Oliver caught the rein detainingly for an instant.

"Be extra careful with the boss' thousand dollars, Gallopin'," he said earnestly. "Yuh're such a dog-gone trustin' cuss——"

"No, I ain't neither, leastwise when it comes to bein' responsible for somebody else's money!" the Gallopin' Kid retorted, and touched a spur lightly to Flash's ribs. The black leaped forward with his long, distance-eating stride, and man and horse were quickly lost in the darkness.

Gallopin' soon found himself in an unfamiliar country, but by this time the moon had come up and it was simply a matter of keeping to the trail, for Jackson City lies directly south, almost as the crow flies. Flash had the spirit and the gameness of a thoroughbred and the endurance of a buckskin, but sixty-five miles is a long journey for any horse, and Gallopin' did not make the mistake of overtaking his mount.

All through the night he rode at a steady, even pace which would put him in Jackson City with time to spare. Shortly after dawn he struck an ideal place to make camp for an hour's rest. There was a creek offering water, and a cottonwood tree offering shade from the mounting and warming sun, and he was hungry.

Gallopin' was not a fellow who would overlook the matter of food, so before he had left Circle X he had prepared himself for a satisfactory breakfast along the trail. Now a satisfactory breakfast for a healthy cow-puncher is not merely a matter of coffee and toast, and from out of a spacious saddlebag, once he had turned his horse

loose to graze, appeared a considerable list of edibles which included bacon that he could fry in a pan, and six potatoes, already boiled in their jackets, which could be sliced with his pocketknife and quickly cooked to a nice brown in the hot bacon grease. He had a great fondness for fried 'taters, had Gallopin'.

While he was getting his fire built, a small cloud of dust appeared to the southward where the trail met the horizon, and had Gallopin' been less occupied with his culinary efforts he would have noticed considerable haste in the speed with which the evidence of travel drew closer. Not, however, that this would have necessarily forewarned him, for even a man with innocent intent can be in a hurry. Gallopin' was in a bit of a rush himself.

The bacon had been fried and the slices of potatoes were simmering merrily in the pan before Gallopin' actually took cognizance that the other had taken the precaution of halting, many yards away, and surveying him through a pair of binoculars.

"Mornin'!" said the rider, pulling up on the opposite side of the creek.

For a moment the Gallopin' Kid made no vocal response, but stared with his mouth slightly agape, his eyes fixed in spellbound admiration upon the stranger's gorgeous silk shirt, even superior in its dazzling colors to the one he had seen advertised in the mail-order catalogue.

Had he been less hypnotized by the shirt, Gallopin' might have registered certain unfavorable impressions concerning the man, such as an eye that was too hard and too wary for trusting.

"W-why, howdy!" he responded, and grinned. "I reckon it ain't polite to be standin' here, mighty near lookin' a hole through a feller, but it—it's the shirt."

The stranger's eyes narrowed.

"What about the shirt?" he demanded, a note of challenge in his voice.

"Why, nothin'; nothin' a-tall, exceptin' it's kinder took my breath. Did yuh mebbe buy it from a mail-order place in Kansas City? I seen a picture of one in their catalogue, but—pshaw, it wasn't in the runnin' with that 'n' you've got!"

The rider's wary expression relaxed, and he laughed. Had Gallopin's normal powers of observation not been so obscured by interest in the shirt he might have noticed that the stranger's hand no longer remained within quick distance of his unbuttoned gun holster. The latter sniffed at the odor of hot bacon.

"Mister," he said earnestly, "I'd muchly appreciate a taste of that grub you're cookin'. I've come quite a piece on an empty stomick."

"And I'd be pleased to have your comp'ny," the Gallopin' Kid responded heartily. "Climb down and bust open this here can of tomaters while I finish brownin' these spuds. There ain't nothin' like a hot breakfast and plenty of the same to start a day off right fer a feller."

The stranger rode his horse across the creek and tied the bridle reins to one of the smaller trees.

"Looks like you been pushin' yer critter some," observed Gallopin', although a trifle absently, the focus of his interest being the other's shirt. "Better take off yore saddle and give 'im a bit of a breathin' spell."

The owner of the silk shirt, however, ignored this humane suggestion.

"Ain't got far to go," he answered; "jest over there behind them first hills. And I ain't ridin' so hard neither; this worn-out cayuse can't stand the gaff, that's all. Now you, stranger, have got a hoss that is a hoss."

"You bet!" agreed the Gallopin' Kid. "Now pitch into the grub, mister, and mebbe you'd be willin' to give me the name and address of the outfit where you got that there shirt, fer I figger to get myse'f the twin brother to it."

For a moment the owner of the envied shirt concerned himself with eating and made no response.

"They're purty expensive," he warned.

"Nine dollars and ten cents was the price of that one I seen in the catalogue," said Gallopin'.

"Paid fifteen bucks fer this 'n', and I wouldn't have another 'n' as a gift. They ain't practical. Sun eats right through 'em. Nothin' beats flannel in this country."

"Oh, I didn't figger on wearin' mine except on special occasions," Gallopin' explained hastily. "Huh, you didn't think I mean to herd cows in one of 'em?"

The man in the silk shirt turned his head slightly and again stared off in the distance. A small, barely perceptible puff of dust had become visible. His lips tightened and a crafty gleam came into his eyes.

"Cowboy," he said, returning his attention to Gallopin', "have you got five bucks on yuh?"

The Gallopin' Kid was slightly puzzled by such a personal question.

"Mebbe," he answered. "Why?"

"You and me is about the same size, and I kin see you're plumb set on havin' yourself one of these here fancy shirts. This 'n' of mine is mighty near new; ain't been washed more'n two or three times. Ain't got a blemish on it, but, like I just said, they ain't practical."

The Gallopin' Kid's eyes glistened with excited hope, anticipating a proposition that was exactly to his liking.

"I'll trade yuh shirts if yuh're willin' to give five dollars to boot," came the offer, and Gallopin' made haste to get the five dollars from his pocket before the stranger should regret his folly.

"It's a trade, pardner!" he shouted and pressed the five-spot firmly into the other's hand. The latter, grinning

widely, began to loosen the buttons. His was a coat shirt, but Gallopin's was a slip-over, and while Gallopin' was pulling it off over his head, something struck him on the back of the skull, sending him plunging to the ground, flat on his face, swallowed up by a sickening blackness that blotted out all consciousness.

The blow had been struck with the butt of a pistol, and the man stood tensely for a moment, ready to strike again if it was necessary, but the Gallopin' Kid lay limp and motionless, and the fellow holstered his gun, laughing harshly.

"Sure a lucky thing for me I run into this sap," he grunted. "Want this here silk shirt, do yuh? All right, you're goin' to be wearin' it when that posse gets here—and I reckon that let's me out!"

He lifted Gallopin's sagging weight and finished the job of removing his much-worn and many times washed flannel shirt. During the process he came upon the bundle of currency that Gallopin' was carrying to Colonel Pike's hard-pressed friend in Jackson City.

The bad man—for he was no less a celebrity than "Silk Shirt" Sam, a notorious outlaw who specialized in bank robbery—blinked unbelievably as he investigated the paper-wrapped package and discovered that it contained an unexpected windfall. Particularly, too, was it welcome at this time, for his attempted robbery at Jackson City had been a failure, almost a disaster, and Silk Shirt Sam had been lucky to escape with his life.

True, his face had never been seen by one of his victims, but the fame of the silk shirt had become distinctly embarrassing. Too late had he realized that vanity may be a man's undoing.

Inside the package, snapped to the sheaf of bills with a rubber band, Silk

Shirt Sam found a note, written by Colonel Pike to his friend in Jackson City. The outlaw read it, rewrapped the package, and chuckled again.

"This information is goin' to come in handy," he told himself, and measured the distance between himself and the approaching cloud of dust. "That's the posse, all right, and they'll be here purty quick now."

He uncoiled the rope from the Gallopin' Kid's saddle and noted the engraved silver plate which informed the reader that the owner of the saddle answered to the name of Baxter, also important information. He roped the unconscious puncher's horse, saddled the reluctant animal, but made no effort to ride away. His plan was much more cunning than that.

The oncoming riders were near enough to make it clear that there were three of them and that they were burning the wind. Silk Shirt Sam leisurely proceeded to finish off the breakfast and he was, still leisurely, washing out the frying pan in the creek when the grim trio reined up across the stream. On the breast of one glistened a five-pointed star proclaiming him sheriff, and each one of the three sat with a drawn gun.

"Mornin', gents," said Silk Shirt Sam, and pointed to the unconscious Gallopin'. "More'n likely yuh're sort of interested in that feller lyin' over there on the ground, huh? Well, I allow he won't give yuh no trouble; I took care of him purty good already."

The sheriff looked displeased and disappointed.

"Dog-goned if yuh ain't gone and shot him!" he exclaimed complainingly. "That was a little job I was reservin' fer myse'f, dadrat the luck!" He gave the other a questioning stare. "And who might *you* be?"

Silk Shirt Sam had a glib story in readiness.

"Me? My name's Baxter, sheriff,

and I work fer Circle X Ranch—Pike's outfit, yuh know. I'm headin' fer Jackson City, ridin' an errand fer the boss—takin' a message to a feller named John Crawford."

"Huh!" grunted the sheriff. "I allow yuh better produce proof an' evidence to substantiate yore remarks. Anybody found in company with Silk Shirt Sam is called on to explain hisse'f."

Silk Shirt Sam, masquerading as the Gallopin' Kid, promptly and eagerly produced Colonel Pike's note and, as was to be expected, this was sufficiently convincing.

"This feller," explained Silk Shirt Sam, again indicating the unconscious Gallopin', "come ridin' up here as I was gittin' myself some breakfast. I didn't like his looks an' I didn't like his manner, savvy, and when he kinder side-stepped some questions appertainin' to who he was, where he was goin', and what his business was and I seen him kinder lookin' at my hoss like he had stealin' in mind, and also noticin' that he had got his holster unbuttoned—well, I jest clouted him over the head when he wasn't lookin'."

"Then yuh didn't shoot him, huh?" exclaimed the sheriff, looking pleased. "Much obliged fer that, Mister Baxter, fer I kinder pine fer officiatin' at his hangin'. Mebbe yuh don't know how dog-gone lucky yuh are, fer this same Silk Shirt Sam is one of the most des-pirit hombres that ever was engaged in the outlaw business."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Silk Shirt Sam himself, looking impressed. "And a kind of harmless-appearin' cuss, too." The three members of the posse rode forward across the creek to take charge of their unresisting prisoner, and Silk Shirt Sam went to Gallopin's black horse, sliding the frying pan into the saddlebag.

"Reckon I'll be movin' on down the trail," he said. "I'm in a hurry this

mornin', havin' to git this money delivered, yuh know."

The sheriff and his two deputies offered no objection and, in fact, paid no further attention to him, their interest now being centered upon their wanted man. Silk Shirt Sam swung himself into the saddle.

At this moment, the Gallopin' Kid moaned faintly and stirred. With his first movement, three guns were trained upon him and the sheriff darted forward an arm to flick the .45 from the supposed bad man's holster.

Gallopin' groaned again and struggled to a sitting position. His head was whirling and for a few seconds everything was a dancing blur before his eyes.

"W-what fell on me?" he mumbled, and, before his thoughts could clear, both arms were seized with rude force and a pair of handcuffs snapped about his silk-shirted wrists.

"I allow that'll hold yuh, Mr. Silk Shirt Sam!" crowed the sheriff. "Your bank-robbin' and man-killin' days is over, Silk Shirt!"

"Say!" protested Gallopin'. "What kind of crazy talk is this anyhow?" He blinked up at the three grim faces in front of him, became aware that his chest and arms were now wearing the coveted silk shirt, which, he was equally positive, he had not donned himself; and the next instant he saw Flash, his horse, being urged off at a reluctant gallop while the outlaw's worn-out cayuse remained picketed to the near-by sapling.

It didn't require a particularly agile mind to add up this particular sum of two and two to get the correct total of four. Gallopin' staggered to his feet with all possible speed.

"Stop 'im!" he yelled. "That feller's gettin' away with my hoss! Hey, stop 'im, I say!"

"Shet up!" snapped the sheriff.

"B-but, sheriff," yelled the Gallopin'

Kid, "that bird is puttin' one over on you. He hit me over the head with somethin'; he got me into this here shirt, and——"

"Aw, dry up!" rasped the sheriff.

The real Silk Shirt Sam was rapidly putting distance behind him. Gallopin' looked defeated for a moment, and then he wet his lips with his tongue, put his two fingers in his mouth, and gave the long, clear whistle that Flash knew so well and always responded to.

The result was surprising, and to none more than to the fleeing outlaw. The big black abruptly wheeled in a sharp circle and started back at a stubborn gallop which ignored the cruel pressure of spur and the pulling of the reins. Gallopin' whistled shrilly a second time and Flash's gallop became a dead run.

"I reckon," shouted Gallopin', "that ought to prove whose hoss he is!"

It did, indeed. The real Silk Shirt Sam, seeing that he was helpless to direct the black horse in any direction other than back to the posse, leaped from the saddle, drawing his gun as he landed. His .45 spit fire, which was quickly answered, three to one; for one brief, explosive instant the air was punctured by the spitting of bullets, and then Silk Shirt Sam crashed forward on his face with a slug of lead in his shoulder.

The Gallopin' Kid was the first man to dash forward. It had suddenly dawned upon him that the package containing the thousand dollars was missing from his person, and he was pretty sure that he knew exactly where to look for it.

And two days later the Gallopin' Kid returned to Circle X wearing the silk shirt, although, for very obvious reasons, he neglected to narrate the circumstances by which it had been acquired. He didn't want Colonel Pike to know how narrowly he had escaped losing the thousand dollars.



Dupe of the Desert

by George Gilbert

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

STAN KEESLER is mistakenly despised as a coward and dismissed from the Bar K. Scorning to explain that his heart is diseased, Stan decides to occupy a deserted cabin and seek rest. He bravely defends Amelia Troppin from Es Parmlow, henchman of Rosnard, and is surprised at his own courage.

A locket sent to Amelia by her dying father conceals a guide to his rich cache in the desert. Amelia is unaware of this secret, but speaks of the gift to Stan. Rosnard holds the key to this guide and wishes to obtain the locket. He now makes advances to Stan, but his offer of help is refused. That night some men ride by Stan's cabin, supposedly deserted, driving cows.

CHAPTER VII.

CHANCE.



SOON Stan was afoot, making frying-pan bread, crisping bacon, pouring out coffee with care not to get the bitter dregs along with the goodness of the brown berry. Johnnie Hoss, picketed where he could graze down a new circle, whickered as Stan came out to sit on the stone threshold of the cabin and smoke a while. Stan looked up the gulch and down, and noted the fresh signs of the passing of the little band of cattle in the night. He speculated lazily on them, and again judged that about twenty head had gone down the gulch toward the town.

"Funny about drivin' them at night

that a way," he mused; "as if they wanted t' dodge somethin' or somebody!"

He soon saddled Johnnie Hoss and rode slowly down the gulch, for he did not want to be inactive. A vague longing for something never before hoped for was on him. He came to the open country at a slow walk, hardly conscious of his whereabouts. The big white clouds of range land bellied overhead and along the far horizon's rim. He was going to turn toward the town, but did not, for he did not want to be that day among men and their works. He felt no hint of his heart's heaviness that day. It seemed a day of peace and quiet.

Again he thought of Amelia Troppin and he tried to analyze his feelings toward her. He decided finally that he

had no right to let his interest in her become more than friendship.

"I may go any time; it wouldn't be fair t' ask her t' tie up t' a man branded by death," he decided, in a loyal endeavor to do what was best for the girl. "Just t' know a girl like that is blessing enough for a man in my fix. After I'm gone she might meet up with some other man she'd cotton t' and then she'd have me t' forget, and it might bring sadness into her life, and she's made for somethin' besides sadness."

He had sheered to the right of the town and was crossing the main trail leading into it. The town was over the next fold in the rolling land. Johnnie Hoss cocked his ears down the trail. A rider came into view, on a small, cocky pinto pony that at once whickered at Johnnie Hoss.

Stan felt a lift of heart and spirit at once. It was Amelia!

He drew Johnnie Hoss around till he faced across the trail. Amelia recognized him at once and waved her hand gayly.

"I didn't think I'd meet any one; I'm out for a little ride," she explained. "I get a pony from the livery once in a while when I can't stand town any longer, and go for a lope."

"I sure wish I'd known that and I'd asked yo' t' ride with me some time," he said, admiring her in his slow, lazy fashion. He took this meeting as a sheer gift from fate and let her see how pleased he was with it.

"We had so much else to talk about that we didn't get to talk about ridin'," she laughed. "I'm not a rider, like a cowboy is, but I can stay topside if my pony isn't too strong for me."

"That's all a winner in a buckin' contest in a rodeo can do."

"But, of course, they get horses that are horses."

"I been on some of them myse'f," said Stan, laughing. "And now will

yo' ride a ways with me, just for company's sake?"

"Where shall we ride?"

"Perhaps yo' know some place, havin' rode all about close t' town? I've been through on the trail and after cattle, but never just ridin' for the fun of it."

"Let's go out to Red Butte. Down the first right fork of this main trail and it stands all by itself, in the middle of a little sink."

"Suits me, just so we can have a visit," said Stan, and was happy to see the tide of color rise from her pretty neck to her cheeks and brow as he spoke, and then he chided himself for speaking in a way that she might misunderstand. His firm resolve to keep to terms of friendship only, he found to be slipping away as she whirled her pony sharply and started up the trail toward the fork that he now saw plainly. Johnnie Hoss at once went after the pony and they had a merry race down the right fork of the trail, Stan keeping Johnnie Hoss from beating her pony, so that he could watch her ride. This was much to Johnnie Hoss' disgust, as he wanted to be in the lead and took it as a disgrace to eat another horse's dust.

Two miles down that right fork a faint trace showed at the right again. She took that with a merry laugh and challenging eye, and Stan came after. The land dipped, finally broke over a little bluff, down which ran a mere goat track. She fairly hurled her pinto down that and he landed at the bottom in a mild bucking spurt that sent her hat off and her long hair tumbling from its confining bands. She stopped the pinto and began to hunt for hairpins, laughingly alighting to get several that gleamed in the grass. Then she swung up, as he came to her side, and, with several pins in her mouth and her hair in bewitching confusion, she started to talk, but her words were

muffled and garbled, because the pins were in the way. He got her hat and held it for her.

"I saw my sisters that a way, back in Texas," he laughed; "and I used t' tease them for tryin' t' talk with a mouthful of pins in the way."

"I'm sure you were a tease."

"I'm not sure but I'd be now—if I got a chance."

She whipped her long braids into pretty shape again, confining them with deft touches of strong, quick fingers. The pins disappeared; Stan gave her her hat, and then they started for Red Butte, which now appeared in the middle of the sink.

"We'll ride down beyond it a way; there are some Indian signs on the big rocks at the other side of this sink," she told him.

"Anything that suits yo' suits me," said Stan, smiling.

Now they were side by side, and the horses were steady of gait to suit the mood of their riders. They saw signs of cattle having been through there lately and where horses had crossed, unmounted, as their rambling course showed. They came to the Indian inscriptions. Red Butte was a dot on the plain of the sink behind them. The Indian signs on the rocks interested them much. Stan dismounted and wrote his name under them, with a pencil stub, and she wrote hers. They lingered there for some time, almost silent, and then they rode back toward Red Butte. They reached it toward noon. She produced some sandwiches and he agreed to share them, on condition that she let him provide the lunch next time they rode out together.

Johnnie Hoss and the pinto pony grazed as their riders ate. Amelia showed Stan where a little spring could be made to yield a drink by cleaning away dirt from the foot of the butte on the south side. It was just a trickle that filled the rock cup they

hollowed out for it, but it gave them a drink.

"The little thread of water gets smothered when no one cleans it out," she told him; "horses and cattle paw here for water and the dust soon fills it in again. I found it by accident, noticing that there's always a greener spot of grass right here than anywhere else."

Johnnie Hoss and Pinto kept looking up the back trail. Stan said he thought maybe there were a band of horses or cattle where the trace broke down into the sink from the higher level, which attracted them.

From time to time Johnnie Hoss snorted and tossed his head on high. Stan, too busy watching the girl's face as he talked, paid little attention to the good horse.

"I saw Rosnard," he told her, "comin' out of town yesterday. He told me that he was sorry Parmlow acted ranny toward yo' and that he felt responsible, because Parmlow worked for him at times."

"Rosnard never seemed to see me at first, but not long ago he began being very polite when he passed me in town," she said, and as she turned her head, he could see the golden chain that held the locket. "He doesn't stand well with any one in town, except the tough element."

"He acted soft-soapy toward me and I've been wonderin' since just why he should go out of his way t' do that. We cowboys always kept away from his daidfall, and I never even gave him a civil word till yesterday."

"There must be some reason back of it all. Rosnard has the reputation of never doing anything that isn't for his own benefit."

"I guess it will pay t' watch him. Did he ever know yo'r daddy?"

"Not that I ever heard of. Why?"

"I don't rightly know why I asked that," said Stan.

"Do you know that I had a dream last night and you were in it?"

"Me, in a dream yo' had! That's sure amazin'!"

"I dreamed I was sitting with father, beside a little spring, and he kept pointing to something behind us. I looked, and you were in sight, holding out something. I went close and it was my locket that daddy gave me."

"That's sure amazin'. I was thinkin' of yo' and that locket before I went t' sleep last night. I saw yo' reach, draw it out of yo'r dress and felt it warm in my hand."

She drew out the golden trinket and fingered it lovingly. Stan asked to see it and inspected it more closely than he had done the day before.

"That's pretty carvin' on the back," he said. "It's only a single-face locket. I've seen some that opened front and back, so two pictures could be put in them that a way."

"It only opens in front—or that's all I've ever tried."

He looked it over carefully again.

"Some dirt in the carvin' in the back; I'll clean it with my knife point," he proposed. "I'll be careful not t' scratch it."

She leaned over while he drew the point of his knife along the curves of a rose carved on the back of the locket. Suddenly they gasped!

The back of the locket had opened.

"Why I never knew that it did that!" she exclaimed.

"Lookit, a paper's in that oval hollow in it!"

She took it out, her slender fingers making easier work of it than his big ones did. They spread out the tissue paper and studied it as it lay on Stan's knee. It showed numbers, a compass drawn rudely, and the word "yards;" also several words or phrases: *White limb points; Little butte; Sandhill, and Black Canyon.*

"Might be directions on how t' find

that lost ledge your father was after when he died?" suggested Stan.

"But it doesn't show anything worth while."

"If he had another paper, with a route sketched on it, it might fit in with this and show something."

"Father was queer about telling where he went, or how long he had been gone, or anything else about his desert trips."

"All those old-time prospectors acted a bit queer that a way."

"Men were always badgering him about his claims or to find out what he had been doing."

They discussed the matter at some length, while the day drew toward mid-afternoon. Johnnie Hoss and Pinto kept looking toward the rim of the sink, as before, and often Johnnie Hoss tossed his head high and looked upward. Stan noticed this and remarked that a buzzard must be soaring off behind the butte somewhere or something else must be taking the horse's attention. But he was so happy just to be with her that he did not cease his pleasant chat and so, unnoticed, the time passed. The sheet of tissue became for them a matter of second concern; their talk was more important then as the world was flooded with the gold of sunshine, and the shadows of the big white range-land clouds drifted over and away toward the illimitable vastness beyond the horizon.

"I think it's time we went back," Stan at last suggested.

"Yes, it is. I've had a wonderful day with you, Stan."

"It has been a wonderful day."

"Do you think that that sheet of tissue means anything?"

"No tellin'."

He offered it to her.

"Keep it for me and study it over," she said. "It may suggest to you some place you know or have heard about. Black Canyon. Know that?"

"No," he replied, folding the tissue and pocketing it rather absently; "all right, I'll study it over. I'll see yo' to-morrow at home?"

"Do come. I'll show it to Aunt Mercy. It may suggest something to her. Daddy sometimes talked a lot to her about his plans when he passed through."

Presently they rode away. As their horses climbed the rim of the sink, Johnnie Hoss kept looking toward a clump of trees about half a mile below their own trail, and Pinto whickered once. Stan thought he heard a horse answer, but was not sure and, anyway, he was too busy listening to Amelia to want to investigate.

"Some stray from a passin' band of mustangs," he reflected. "No use alarmin' her now by lookin' into it. I may later, when I'm alone."

After they had been gone from the sink for half an hour a bit of loose stuff shaled off the butte and there was a scurrying and scraping sound on top of it. Then some one slid down and the cunning features of Es Parmlow peered around a projecting mass of the butte. He started toward the rim, but not toward the same game trail by which Stan and Amelia had come and gone. Instead, Es went up the rim half a mile below where the young people had gone up it, and there he found his horse. He mounted and struck off without trying to follow any trail. At first he rode carefully, but after a time he lifted his horse into the high lope and kept him at this until he sighted town. Then he alighted, got a bunch of grass and rubbed the horse and let him cool down as he walked him toward town. Soon after, Amelia came in at an easy canter and went to the livery with Pinto. Es smiled evilly at her back and then went into Rosnard's place. His signal to Rosnard had instant effect, for the latter excused himself from a group of

hard-faced men to whom he had been talking in a corner and went with Es into the rear room behind the faro lay-out.

"How'd yo' make out?" he asked abruptly.

"Trailed her till she met up with Kessler."

"Act as if it was a planned meetin'?"

"Hard t' tell. They rode out toward Red Butte. I trailed them. They rode past Red Butte t' those Injun signs on the farther rocks in the sink. I savvied they'd stop at Red Butte comin' back and eat a snack and swap talk, as young folks like t' do."

Rosnard scowled at this and Es chuckled.

"Guess yo' thinkin' of her talkin' with him ain't pleasant?"

"That's all of that!"

He raised his balled fist as though to strike, then drew it in with a muttered phrase. Parmlow cowered under the threat, then went on:

"I hid out my hoss in some low, scrubby trees and got t' the butte before they did. I climbed it, goin' up the back. I lay right over them and heard all they said and saw all they did."

"And what was that?" Fiercely insistent was Rosnard's tone.

"She showed him that locket. The back opened and a bit of tissue came out. They looked it over and speculated on whether it was some kind of a marker for her dad's use."

"That's it! It's the key that'll unlock that map that yo' stole off old Troppin in his delirium when the Injun Parawan was down t' the spring after water."

"That's it. They've got it and don't know what it is."

"Who's got it now?"

"She let him keep it t' study over."

"We've got t' have it."

"Yes, that's it."

"But Keesler's a reg'lar wolf now for fightin'. A week ago I could've taken it away from him by scowlin' at him; now he seems t' be made of chilled steel."

"A different hombre altogether."

"Let me think this over a moment."

They were silent then like two spiders in a dingy web. Out in the gaming room could be heard the click of chips, and the faro dealer calling slowly as when a small time-killing game is on.

Rosnard demanded whisperingly:

"Is Nast Prower game?"

Parmlow nodded vigorously.

"And Zerbern, that trails with him?"

Again that vigorous nod.

"Go get them. They're outside."

While Parmlow was gone, Rosnard sat drumming on the table, his eyes expressionless and his face ironed to a mask of seeming indifference. Parmlow soon ushered the two wanted men into the room and they eased themselves into chairs. Parmlow was going out, but Rosnard signed for him to remain, remarking:

"Es, yo'll bear me out when I tell these fellows something."

"Sure! What we was talkin' about?" agreed Es, adroitly catching his chief's carefully planned lead.

"Yes."

"Prower," Rosnard said to the taller of the newcomers, "Parmlow has just brought me some news that may interest yo' two."

"What is that?" Prower leaned forward across the table.

"Suppose Tom Mowrey had a spy in town or near town, lookin' for signs of 'drifted' cattle?"

Prower's brows went into a dark scowl. Zerbern slapped his hand to his thigh, crushed his hat down over his low forehead, and breathed heavily as he waited for the news.

"What have yo' heard?" Prower demanded.

"Yo' came in by that li'le gulch

where that cabin is?" Rosnard demanded.

"Ye-ah," Zerbern said harshly.

"Well, that cabin was occupied last night."

"We didn't see anything or hear anything. The cattle made a big racket on the loose stones at the end and we might've missed a hoss whickerin', though."

"Didn't see any light in the cabin?"

"No, but it's been vacant so long we didn't pay much 'tention."

"Well, it was occupied, all right"

"Who by?" Prower said, glaring at Parmlow, who looked at Rosnard.

"Yo'd never guess."

"This ain't a guessin' game! It may be a rope-danglin' game!"

Now Zerbern's broad face went white and he clutched at his throat as if he could already feel the tightening of the strangler's noose.

"Tell us, so we can judge," Prower demanded.

"Well, it's that fellow Keesler."

"Oh, him! That coward!" Zerbern began to laugh.

"Hold on! I've heard that he ran quite a blazer in this man's town yesterday," Prower interrupted, looking squarely at Rosnard.

"He sure did; took us all by surprise. And that makes it all the more queer. The tip's out he got fired off the round-up by old Tom Mowrey for bein' short on sand when he was ordered t' sleuth on Es here, because old Tom thought Es had some sleepers on Red Mesa."

Here he paused and Es chuckled.

"Then he turns up in town, brave as a lion. Piece it t'gether if yo' can, Prower."

"Yo' do it," retorted that worthy.

"Well, he turns up in that cabin in that gulch and yo' come past. Wouldn't he see and hear?"

"Yes, but he didn't hail or let any one know——"

"If it had been just a blanket-stiff holin' up for the night, or a stray puncher, he'd hailed, just for the fun of gettin' some one t' talk t'. He was keepin' quiet for a reason."

"What are yo' hintin' at?" Zerbern demanded sharply.

"Just what I've been sayin' right along, only yo' two are too dumb t' take a hint. I think that the big cattlemen have planted him in town as a spy and that he's out t' tip off yo'r hand, if he can."

Rosnard glanced at Prower and Zerbern, and then at Parmlow, who was hit by the news as well. Their faces grayed from fear and their eyes roved like those of cornered wolves.

"And if it was me that was being spied on, I'd go up into that cabin to-night and pay him a visit."

"I guess it's him or us," Prower exclaimed, starting up wildly.

"Yo' said it," Zerbern echoed.

"We'll get him t'-night," Parmlow whispered nervously, glancing around the little room.

"That's the talk." Rosnard encouraged their hatred and fear.

"That's it," Parmlow fell in with the plan.

"I've got a bone t' pick with him myself," Rosnard put in; "and I'm not goin' t' see yo'-all go it alone. He may have some one with him that slips in nights and watches with him. I'll join yo'."

"That's fine, Rosnard," Prower said, offering his hand heartily. Zerbern followed suit.

"Es and I'll go along. Leave town one by one, right after dark and circle off south, then meet near the end of that li'le gulch where the cabin is about ten o'clock. Each set his watch by the others, so there'll be no slip-up on time. Once we get him, I'll fire the cabin. I'll foteh along some oil in a flask. It'll pass off as if he died when his lamp exploded, or his oil caught lighting the

fire. No one'll know. A burned body carries no scars that can be recognized and bullet holes in a burned body sear over so they ain't found."

"That's it," Prower said excitedly; "that's it!"

"We'll not forget this," Zerbern added. "We've always dealt with yo', Rosnard, and we'll keep right on, and send yo' more 'drifted' beef t' pass off t' the town butchers on the quiet."

"That's all right; this is part friendship for yo'-all and part personal, on my own account. We better part now, so no one will suspect us of being in cahoots t'gether on anything."

The two went out. When the door had closed, Parmlow squinted at Rosnard and asked in a low tone:

"Why say that I told yo' and that yo' only knew of his bein' in that gulch in the cabin just now, when as a matter of fact, yo' knew yesterday Keesler was goin' to hole up the'e?"

"That's a reason of my own, Es. By tellin' it that a way, it gave me a chance to bring it out naturally, as if I'd just had a hot tip and was in a hurry t' slip it t' those two range wolves, on the dot, like. We'll let them take the risk in killin' off Keesler and we'll manage some way t' get that key for that map off him, without their knowing a thing about it."

Parmlow twisted his mean features into a grin of approval:

"I got t' hand it t' yo', Rosnard."

"And if Prower and Zerbern get shot up, why, we don't lose any! We don't appear till the real shootin's over. Prower and Zerbern are gettin' t' know too much, anyway; makes it necessary t' split some pots up altogether too fine when we make a killin' on some of our operations."

Again Parmlow twisted his face into that mean grin; then, at a sign from Rosnard, he went out.

No sooner had he gone than Rosnard drew the crude map from a secret

slot in the table and began to study it thoughtfully.

Then he went out into the gaming room.

Prower and Zerbern, from a far corner, smiled at him meaningly.

He answered their grins and sat down at a table alone, where he began to plan in his mind details of the raid on Keesler's cabin. His scheme was to get the tissue paper from Stan without risk to himself.

"Playin' Keesler up as a spy for Mowrey was a good stroke," he thought; "those two ducks cain't afford capture. They've been warned before and are only tolerated around these parts now. A single proved charge against them and they swing for it. Mowrey and those big range men are only looking for an excuse before startin' after such as they are. They'll get Keesler for me, and after that I can take care of myself."

CHAPTER VIII.

RAID ON THE GULCH.

TOWARD dark, Prower said to his partner, Zerbern, as they sat playing "California Jack" in the outer room of Rosnard's place:

"Reckon I'll see if the hosses need any extra care."

Zerbern nodded. This was the sentence agreed upon between them as the beginning of their joint attempt to quit town unobserved. Prower sauntered out, whistling. Parmlow, seeing him go, flicked a meaning glance at Rosnard.

Soon Zerbern announced that he had an errand that must be done alone. He drifted out of town alone, going in a direction opposite to that which Prower had taken in riding away from the livery where their horses had been kept.

Now Parmlow got out his own ewe-necked cayuse and shackled along, say-

ing that he wanted to get home before midnight.

Last of all, Rosnard went, giving as his excuse that he wanted to go for a little ride.

Each of them circled about in the open country, making his way toward the end of the little gulch where stood the cabin of Stan Keesler. There they waited, for the night was yet young, and they meant to be sure that their quarry was at ease before they began an attack. They were hidden behind the small apron of washed-down detritus at the foot of the gulch and their horses were tied in a clump of small trees a quarter of a mile out in the open. They did not want them closer, for fear Stan's horse would whicker to them. Now they discussed details of the plan.

"I've been at that cabin several times," Rosnard began. "It's got that one door and one window."

"No window in the back, so a man could scurry out behind?" Prower asked.

"Not any. Fireplace in it. All made of chinked-up stone. It's like a fort if a man's warned."

"Could we call him out on some excuse," Zerbern asked, "and drill him as he opened the door?"

"Not a chance. He's too cagy," Parmlow broke in. "Day or two back, I'd pick him for any kind of a fool, but he's got a new set of brains and a fightin' heart since then. Somethin's changed him."

"Maybe that foolish way he used t' act was part of a game, so he could play the spy better later," Zerbern suggested.

"No; it was natural. He couldn't 'a' kept that up for two years," Rosnard said. "He had the reputation of being too soft, and that's why he never got t' be second under old Tom Mowrey on the Bar K."

"Well, he must've got hold of some

of that prime Mexican stuff that makes a rabbit spit in a rattler's eye, then," Prower growled.

"Then how'll we go at it?" Zerbern demanded.

"First thing's t' find out if his hoss is close t' the cabin. My guess is that he probably staked it close last night because grass was plenty at first. Now he may've moved him up a ways."

"He may've grazed that hoss good late yesterday and then staked him right at the cabin."

"I'm goin' t' Injun around and see if his light's still burnin'," Rosnard told them. "Now don't smoke or talk loud. We don't want t' lose this chance t' get him now that we've started."

He left them, silent as a serpent. They slumped down on the still warm stones. The thread of action had slipped from their fingers now and they had only to wait till Rosnard returned with a report.

The gambler kept to the faint trace that passing horses, cattle and game animals had made to the right of the decline. He went up this like a wolf and saw, on the little bench at the side of the gulch, a faint yellow glow. It was the window, with the paper over it that Stan had not yet removed. A little light came in a knife-blade ray from under the door of the cabin. Rosnard listened, but could hear no sound of a horse snuffing as it grazed. There was a tinkle of water on the stones of the gulch, and a little wind came sobbing down from the upper levels, showing that the lower lands were now cooling off, thus drawing air down to them from the last-warmed slopes above.

Rosnard crept closer still to the cabin. The grating of a stone under his foot made him start and shiver. The steady beam from under the door and the square of yellowed paper behind which shone the light within alternately held his attention. Once he

stumbled and had to remain quiet till he was sure no one was moving in the cabin.

Then he saw a shadow on the yellow square of the papered window—the shadow of a man's head. The shadow took a cigarette and Rosnard could see the thread of smoke pictured on the yellowed square, too.

"Takin' his ease, sitting on a bit of log or box, rockin' back and forth a li'le, like a man will that's at rest. He don't suspect a thing. I guess the lay-outs such that I've got t' take a hand at shootin' myself, with the others," the watcher muttered.

Rosnard then stole back so silently that he seemed but a shadow cast by a scudding cloud. The night was very dark. He listened for any betraying sound from the trio outside, but could catch none.

He appeared among them so silently that they could hardly credit their senses, and they praised him for his skill in approach.

"No use talkin', Keesler never heard yo' with yo' able t' move around that a way," Zerbern said flatteringly. "It's like a Comanche creeping into a hoss herd and cutting the stake rope of the best hoss and gettin' away with it, under the nose of a good nighthawk."

"He's in; I saw his shadow on the paper that's over the one window, boys. Smokin', too, peaceful as yo' please."

They chuckled as they thought of what that meant in furthering their plans for a quick killing and the concealment of the crime.

"I guess all we need is t' creep up, line out whe'e he is from that shadow, and then shoot?" Prower suggested.

"Which is just it, boys. We can judge his position from his shadow on that paper. Then we can shoot. Four of us, emptying our guns like hail, ain't goin' t' miss him none that a way."

"No, not much," Prower agreed. "Looks daid easy for us."

"I'll give the signal; then all together."

They went quietly along the right edge of the decline and reached the open space before the weathered heap of detritus. Now they all could see the bulk of the cabin on the little shoulder or bench above the bed of the gulch. Rosnard pointed out the ray of light from under the door, and the yellowed square of paper, with the shadow of a man's head on it. They whispered their satisfaction over the situation.

"Li'l set of steps in the bank leads up t' the cabin," Rosnard told them; "we'll go up, one by one, and then steal around till we're right opposite that window."

"No signs of his hoss?" Parmlow asked.

"Nory."

"I'm glad of that. His hoss is an awfully keen-scented one and a great one t' whicker, like a watchdog; t' give a warning of any one's comin'."

"He must've taken him up the gulch; a li'l bayed-out place quite a bit above, with dandy deep grass," Zerbern whispered.

They accepted this explanation of the absence of Johnnie Hoss and now they went up the little flight of steps cut into the face of the soil. Rosnard listened, ear at the crack of the door, a full minute, then led the way along the front of the cabin to the side, where the papered window was. They were silent now.

They rounded the cabin, Indian file, Rosnard ahead.

The shadow of the head was on the yellow square of paper still. The bandits bunched before the window, just far enough back to be able to spread out, so they would not interfere with each other's shooting.

The shadow moved, then was still, as if the man had shifted as he sat, for the sheer comfort of stretching his muscles.

Now, in the outlands, a wolf mourned, the sound coming to them on a little gust of wind that sucked up the gulch.

"Once we get these smoke carts goin', we keep them goin'," Rosnard whispered. "I figure he's right straight in from the window by the way his shadow falls. The light must be on t' li'l bracket that's beside the fireplace I know it well. He's in line with it. I could shoot into that window and hit that bracket and he's right in front of it. Aim right for the center of that shadow which is made by his haid, and keep the smoke goin' till we finish."

"Yo' give the signal," Prower said.

"We won't be slow," Zerbern added, with zest.

Parmlow said nothing, but they heard the slight noise his gun made sliding from its holster.

They stood ready with but the thickness of paper between them and their victim. The wind came by them with a sudden whoop and an owl called somewhere up the gulch.

"Line up the guns, boys," Rosnard ordered tense and low.

Four muzzles covered the shadow on the paper.

Inside, a brand snapped in the fire and made a sudden burst of sharper light, and then the shadow seemed to stand out with a quick blackness that made them feel as if the man in there were coming through the paper. Then the brand died and the shadow dimmed.

"I'll count, boys," came Rosnard's tense whisper so low they could hardly catch it.

"Make it short," Prower urged.

"No use waitin'," Zerbern's thin lips muttered.

"One!"

The four weapons steadied.

"Two!"

Thumbs were on hammer prongs; fingers held triggers back.

CHAPTER IX.

A GIRL'S HEART.

RIDING back toward town with Stan, Amelia Troppin felt a happiness that she knew was real. Something in the deep nature of the cowboy appealed to the girl who had been without firm friends so often in the troubled career of her desert-wandering father, and whose contacts with people had been fleeting. She had had little chance to become well acquainted with any one until she lived with her Aunt Mercy. In Pinon she had had a secure home, but she had made no friends there. Now into her life had come this big, lithe cowboy, who had defended her from insult and revealed to her depths of sincerity calling to all the best in her newly achieved womanhood. Stan had escorted her home and left her with a gay laugh and a reminder that he wanted other rides with her under the sun and billowy clouds of range land. He told her that he was going to look over the odd symbols and sketchy tracings on the sheet of tissue and would let her know what they indicated to him.

"Well, I thought if yo' went ridin' that cow person would find yo'," her Aunt Mercy teased, when Amelia appeared after changing from riding things to a pretty house dress of checkered gingham.

"Now, Aunt Mercy, I never went to look for him!"

"Oh, I know how it is. I never looked for a beau when I was yo'r age, but some way I always met up with one when I felt romantic."

"How did it happen one never got right hold of you?"

"I was engaged once; Apaches got him. He rode shotgun for Wells Fargo." Aunt Mercy wiped her eyes with a corner of her apron. "I've had chances enough since, but all of them wanted t' marry my laundry business

and let me run it, so I decided I could take care of myse'f. When I've got t' have a man t' support I'll go get some old cattleman out of the county home and adopt him. Hard experience has taught me that when a woman has a bit of money, men become designing."

"Well, I think you'd had no trouble in picking out a nice man if you'd wanted. A handsome woman like you wouldn't lack for attention."

"Go on with yo'r soft-soapin'! Get along t' supper and tell me all about what he said and how he acted."

"He was real nice," said Amelia as they sat down to table; "quiet and well-behaved, and not too forward. And, do you know, he found a secret slot in dad's locket. He was cleaning with the point of his knife where dirt had gummed up the engraving, and he touched the center of a flower in the engraving, and the back popped open."

"Was the'e a picture in that secret slot?"

"No, a sheet of tissue paper."

"What was on it?" And now Aunt Mercy's eyes were lighted up with keenest interest.

"A lot of figures and references to a tree, Black Canyon——"

"Why, I heard yo'r dad once say that Black Canyon was near the place where he thought that rich strike was located."

"Could it have been that dad got that locket to me as a means of finding something he wanted me to have."

"Was the'e a map on it?"

"No, just figures and some words that seemed to mean nothing. I asked Stan to keep it to study over."

"Asked him t' keep it?" There was a shade of suspicion on Aunt Mercy's broad face. "I'll bet he took it quick enough?"

"Yes," admitted Amelia, wonderingly intent.

"How do yo' know but he had an object?"

"What object could he have had?"

"Well, I remember lots of schemes played t' get hold of secrets of lodes, placer strikes, and caches of treasure."

"Oh, Stan wouldn't stoop to anything like that! Besides I asked him to keep it; he didn't ask me for it first."

"Callin' him by his first name a'ready?"

Aunt Mercy shook her finger in the girl's face reprovingly.

Amelia blushed.

"Well, if he was right in this room and could see that blush, he'd be plumb distracted, Amelia."

This caused the burning blush to become all the deeper.

"First name, eh, first time yo've been out with him. Well, girls sure can travel fast these days. Suppose he don't come back with that tissue?"

"He will, all right. And now quit teasing me, Aunt Mercy," said Amelia suddenly rushing round the table and smothering her aunt with kisses and hugs.

"Huh, Amelia, I felt the same way when I first fell in love! I wanted t' kiss and hug every one. Oh, yo' needn't get mad about it," added her Aunt as Amelia rushed into the kitchen, her face flaming anew.

Several times that evening Amelia opened the locket and worked the spring that revealed the secret slot in the back. She looked at the place that had held the sheet of tissue. She recalled the eager, kind look of Stan as he had discovered it and she could not believe that he had any ulterior motive in taking it.

"I proposed it myself," she thought, "and he'll be in to see me in the morning and then we can talk it over again. From Aunt Mercy's reference to Black Canyon, there may be something to the idea that that tissue is a sort of key to a map that daddy had and never found a way to send to me because he was stricken down so quickly."

So thinking, she went to sleep. In her dreams she saw the lithe cowboy riding beside her—alert, polite, manly. She saw the big, red butte, the Indian signs on the rocks, and she heard Stan's voice.

She woke to find the sun shining and her aunt calling her to breakfast. The morning passed quickly. Then came the hour when she thought Stan would probably make his visit. But he did not come. Her aunt made several comments on Stan's failure to appear. Amelia felt fear tug at her heart as afternoon came, but no Stan. Then it was the evening and still he did not turn up.

"I told yo' so," Aunt Mercy reminded her, without pity for the girl's fears.

"He may be sick," Amelia sighed.

"Shucks, cowboys ain't s'posed ever t' get sick! They either live or die, with no in-between twinges. He's sloped out, with that tissue, I'll bet a cookie."

"Don't say that, Aunt Mercy, and, besides, no one knows if there is any value attached to that miserable sheet of thin paper. I'm sorry I ever saw it, so there!"

CHAPTER X.

ROSNARD COUNTS THREE.

WITH hammers raised and fingers on their triggers, Parmlow, Prower, and Zerbern waited for Rosnard to complete the count of three that would be the signal for a crashing volley into the interior of the cabin in the gulch. The shadow on the lighted sheet of paper over the window was motionless.

"Three!" Rosnard snarled, forgetting to whisper in the intensity of his desire to annihilate Stan Keesler.

At the sound of that last count, four guns roared in unison. The sheet of paper over the window was punctured

four times in line with the dark shadow. Now each man worked his gun fast, throwing shot after shot into the interior of the cabin. The volley ended.

Silence now, intense and oppressive. Then a hollow, shuddering groan.

"We got him!" Rosnard exclaimed.

"Sure, couldn't miss; that shadow gave us the angle t' shoot at and we did it right," Parmlow remarked.

"Let's rush the door," Rosnard commanded.

They leaped around the corner of the cabin like tigers after prey. They flung themselves at the door with full force. The bar gave way and they hurtled inward.

The interior of the cabin was filled with smoke, for after the first shots their muzzles had torn away the paper and then the black vapor of death had billowed inward at each shot.

The light burned on the wall bracket.

They looked for the victim of their attack, listened for another groan to guide them to the corner where the victim must have rolled. They saw no one.

In a corner, hanging from a peg, was a big, yellow slicker. Rosnard sprang toward it and jabbed it with the muzzle of his gun. No one was behind it. Prower, Zerbern and Parmlow poked in all possible places where a man might be—in the corners, under the table.

Then he straightened up and growled:

"Looks bad t' me; we've walked in to a trap."

"We're in the lamplight; he's outside, on the far side of the cabin, where we never looked! He's got the drop on us," Zerbern whispered.

"Look-it," Prower exclaimed, pointing to the window.

The wind, sucked inward by some freak of the air currents, had drawn the tattered paper together, filling up

the window space for a moment. And on the drawn-in paper there shone the shadow of the man's head. They jerked around, expecting to see Stan Keesler behind them, in line with the lamp, but they saw nothing. It was Rosnard, quicker-brained than the others who saw the deceit that had fooled them:

"That towel and dishcloth for the skillet, hangin' right on that peg beside the lamp on the bracket—they're folded in a way that makes them cast a shadow like a man's, haid. That bit of fuzz danglin' from the fold of that towel makes the shadow of the cigarette we thought we saw in a man's mouth. Keesler wasn't at home a-tall."

"How about that groan, then," Prower asked.

"We're in a mighty fool situation," Zerbern whispered; "we've got t' get out of this place."

"One against four wouldn't be much t' face," Rosnard sneered.

"No, but we're in the light and he's in the dark."

"How do we know he's around at all?" Rosnard demanded.

"Who groaned, then?"

Outside the window something moaned. The shredded paper in the window space snapped outward and the shadow vanished.

"He must've put that towel and rag so they'd cast that shadow and fool any one comin' after him," Prower complained.

"How'd he know any one was comin'?"

They glanced all about apprehensively.

"Let's go see if his hoss is up the gulch," Rosnard proposed.

"I guess not; we'll get out of this light and not be fair targets any more," Zerbern declared.

The wind came again, this time with a howl and wail that set their nerves jerking. Yielding to a panic that swept

them suddenly, they bolted from the room and into the open, leaving the door swinging wide. They scrambled down into the creek bottom and back to the decline before they stopped and regained their composure.

"That groan we thought we heard was the wind howlin' in under the eaves," Prower declared.

"Sounded more t' me like a man wounded," Rosnard insisted.

"Well, I've got enough of this expedition; we'll lay for him another time," Prower announced and Zerbern backed him up.

"Don't let the spy get off this a way," Rosnard urged.

"If yo' want t' go after him, go! We're through." Prower rebelled and again Zerbern backed him up.

They peered around the corner and could see through the window and open door a faint light streaming. It all seemed peaceful enough.

"We're goin', and that's whatever," Prower declared. He and Zerbern strode away in the darkness toward the horses. Rosnard called after them softly, but they did not turn back.

"That's a nice pair of weak-kneed coyotes," Rosnard said bitterly. "I still think Keesler's in the cabin or back of it, hit. I'd like t' get my hands on that paper that girl gave him. Yo' say yo' heard them refer t' Black Canyon when they talked over the paper and yo' was on top of the butte listenin'?"

"Sure of that."

"Well, if we had that paper t' fit onto that map yo' stole from old Tropic and that I keep hid in my back room, we'd have the nub of a nice thing in our hands, and I hate t' give it up now."

"So do I, but I hate t' go back and be a target for Keesler."

"Well, I think I'll risk it, if you'll come along."

"What's that——"

"Why some skunk or gopher scuttin' in the dark."

There was a moment of silence, then Rosnard snarled:

"Yo're shakin' like a leaf."

"Yes, I am. This has got me scairt, I'll admit."

"Yo're goin' up t' that cabin again with me," harshly ordered Rosnard.

"I'm not——"

Rosnard's gun thudded against Parmlow's ribs and he begged for mercy. Rosnard prodded him continually as he marched him up toward the cabin again, forcing him to walk ahead, as his shield. At the door they halted. The place was silent. They entered and found it empty.

They went out and scouted around the cabin. On the side farthest from the window they saw a big chink and through it the lamplight made a glowing blade that cut the darkness.

"If he was right he'e, he'd 'a' seen us and could've groaned," Parmlow whispered.

"Yes; it's mighty queer," Rosnard had to admit.

They started back, leaving the light burning. They came to the decline without further alarm. All up the gulch seemed quiet and peaceful.

"I guess it's a fizzle; we'll get him some other time," Rosnard had to admit. "One thing we've not seen anything of his hoss, nor heard him."

"And Keesler's always careful of his horse."

"We could wait till mornin' and lay for him then."

"He may not show up."

"Mighty funny lay-out."

"Queerest I ever saw."

"I guess we'll vamose."

They stole away in the darkness, stumbling along, vaguely apprehensive of something wrong. They sighted the clump of trees against the sky and made for it to get their horses. They listened for the animals, but did not

hear them. They searched all through the trees. They found the very stubs to which their horses had been tied, but the horses were gone.

"Prower and Zerbern steal them?" Parmlow asked.

"No; it would be too risky for them; they have t' keep in right with me and the town officials."

"That's so—say, I thought I heard a hoss then, walkin'."

"I hear it now. They must've pulled their bridle ties and gone off after Prower and Zerbern a ways. We may catch them up."

They started into the open country, hearing the horses always a bit ahead, it seemed. Rosnard called to his horse, but it would not let him come near, being minded to play and frisk. They heard them nip grass and run.

"They don't go like they had their reins down; some one's hooked those reins over the horns of the saddles," Parmlow exclaimed, when they were tired of hazing the horses afoot. They had been close enough to make sure that at least one of the horses was Rosnard's.

"I move we quit this wandering around and wait for light," Rosnard suggested. "The hosses will stay close for company, and we may catch them or drive them back t' town with daylight."

"And get the laugh for bein' set afoot like a couple of fools!"

They sat down and began to smoke the hours away. They dozed by turns, waiting, listening. False dawn came to sharpen their vision and they saw the horses, now grazed full and not disposed to run far. Rosnard held out his hand as if he had a treat and his horse came near. The bridle reins were shortened and taped fast to the horn. Rosnard soon roped Parmlow's cayuse and found his horse with his reins fastened to the horn likewise. They rode toward town in very bad humor.

There was a small corral back of Rosnard's place where they put the horses. So far as they could tell, no one was aware of their coming at that hour as the light was not fully revealing. Rosnard used his pass-key and they entered his house from the rear. Rosnard led the way to his private room. He motioned Parmlow to a chair and sat down himself.

"Leave that window that a way always when yo' go out?" Parmlow asked, pointing to the crack that appeared under the bottom of it.

"No, never," snapped Rosnard, going to inspect the window more closely.

He gave a cry of anger: "This window was forced; jimmed up; the catch's broke."

"What would any one get that a way?"

"The money's in the big safe—I'll look; no one'll be in the game room now."

He darted out and called back that the safe was secure. He went to the front door and found it locked. He came back to Parmlow.

"The back door was locked safe; this room was locked on the outside, leadin' t' the game room. Whoever came in got no farther than this room."

"What would they want in this room?"

"Might been comin' t' tap up the safe and got scared when they found themselves in a room locked on the outside. They'd be apt t' break the door and find themselves in a trap."

"Oh, any one that started a break with a jimmy that a way would never stop till they'd gone through. Yeggs don't turn aside that easy."

"Then what did they want?"

Rosnard sat down and stared hard at the floor.

"Say, Rosnard, whe'e do yo' keep that map of old Troppin's cache?" Parmlow asked. "I ain't seen it in some time, t' study it close."

"It's right at hand here. Why?"

"Oh, I'd like t' see it and see if anything on it suggests anything, after hearin' Keesler and that girl talk over what was on that paper in her locket."

"All right"—and Rosnard reached for the hidden spring that opened the secret slot in the table where he had kept the map. The spring refused to work. He jabbed at it several times impatiently. Then he stooped and uttered a cry of rage that made Parmlow jerk erect in his chair.

"Some one's had this slot open; see the mark of a chisel on the aidge of that li'le drawer? The map's gone!"

They stared at the empty drawer and then at each other.

"No one did this but Keesler; remember how we talked of this map when we were plannin' on goin' back t' the cabin, Rosnard?"

"Yes, we did mention it."

"And I thought I heard some animal scuttlin' away then?"

"Yes, and Keesler outplayed us, all around, both ways from the jack."

"He's got the tissue key-sheet and the map, and he'll beat it t' get that cache."

"Yes, and we'll be right with him! I know where Black Canyon is. Right north of the Gray Desert. He'll haid for that place and that key-sheet will fit on the map in a way that'll tell him how to get t' the cache from that place. That's my hunch. I'll put the joint in care of Sam Bessler, my faro dealer, and tell him I'm goin' on a li'le vacation. We'll get that cache if we have t' shoot a way t' it. No man can run a ranny like this off me and get away with it."

Their hands met in a quick clasp over the table and they began to plan for the trip to the Gray Desert country.

"One thing's sure; we shoot Keesler on sight, if he catch him in the open. But how did he know we were comin'

up the gulch after him?" Parmlow asked.

"That's something that's a mystery yet. We'll find out if the girl knows anything of what he's done, though, before we drift out after him."

"He might go after that cache alone."

"He might," savagely agreed Rosnard. "But he's got us t' reckon with now, and not a girl."

"Yo're talkin' turkey now."

CHAPTER XI.

AMELIA'S DECISION.

AS evening came on, Amelia Troppin decided that on the morrow she would ride to the cabin in the gulch and ask Stan for the tissue sheet. She did not mention this to her Aunt Mercy, knowing that her aunt would twit her about Stan's failure to appear. They sat together on the little porch before the house, but did not talk very much.

"That's a man comin' this way; I hope he's not got any fancy shirts for me t' iron," Aunt Mercy said.

Amelia drew back a little as the man approached. He swept off his hat and spoke politely:

"Miss Troppin, can yo' tell me what has become of Stan Keesler?"

Their visitor was Rosnard.

"No; why should I know?" Aunt Mercy said, before Amelia could frame a word in reply.

"He was seen to come he'e and rode with Miss Amelia yesterday, and I thought he was apt t' let yo'-all know whe'e he'd gone."

"No reason why he should," tartly returned Aunt Mercy. "What's he done?"

"He's disappeared. A friend is lookin' for him with an offer of a job with a big cattle outfit."

"Huh, I guess that triflin' cow person ain't thinkin' of work very much.

He won't be welcome around this place again, either."

"Why, did he do something offensive?" eagerly questioned Rosnard.

"What he did is our business; I'd admire yo'r absence, Mr. Rosnard, too. Men make me plumb sick nowadays." Aunt Mercy spoke crossly.

Amelia did not say a word. Rosnard turned away and went down the street again. At the corner of the main street he was joined by Parmlow, to whom he whispered:

"They've picked up a grouch on Keesler and don't know a thing about him, I'm sure of that. Let's get hosses betwixt our laigs and drift t' haid him off from gettin' that cache in Gray Desert. He's got both map and key now and if we can't get them, we deserve t' lose."

After Rosnard had gone, Aunt Mercy turned on Amelia:

"What did I tell yo'?"

"About what?"

"Stan Keesler."

"What about him, aunt?"

"He started off by rescuing yo' from Parmlow, who is Rosnard's friend and tool. Now Rosnard turns up, friendly as yo' please, wantin' him for a job of work. It doesn't track up with me, Amy."

"I don't get the connection, aunt."

"I see it clear as a butte on a level plain. Rosnard and Parmlow and Keesler are all in cahoots. Keesler has got that sheet of paper and has gone t' get yo'r dad's cache, sure, and that's all that's t' it."

"Then why did Rosnard ask about Stan?"

"All a part of a scheme t' make us think they're not in cahoots. I tell yo', it's a plot and a scheme," decided Aunt Mercy, folding her arms over her bosom and staring at Amelia determinedly as if to defy her to change her set opinion.

Amelia fled from the porch to her

own room. She went over in her mind every speech and act of Stan and could not bring herself to believe that he was a deceiver. She was lying on her bed, fully dressed, when she heard her aunt talking to some one. She recognized the voice of a neighbor.

"Came by night stage, from Ellendale. Postmaster Freel thought you'd like it, as it's marked 'Personal.' None of yo' came downtown t'-day to get mail, and I was down and he asked me t' fotch it along."

"Thanks, Mr. Ely, kind of yo' t' take that much trouble."

Then Ely went away and Amelia wondered what such a letter could mean. She heard Aunt Mercy call and she joined her in the living room where the lamp was burning brightly. Aunt Mercy held a letter, as yet unopened. She tendered it to Amelia:

"Marked 'Personal,' too. Man's hand. Now, who is he?"

"I don't know. Never saw——"

"Saw what?"

"Any such handwriting on paper before."

"Don't be blushin' so then."

"I'm not."

"Don't tell me!"

Amelia looked at the letter. She had not seen that handwriting on paper, but she had seen it made, with a stub of pencil, on Indian Rocks!

"Well, who is it from?"

"I don't rightly know."

"Open it and see." Aunt Mercy sniffed audibly.

Amelia slowly tore the envelope open and read:

DEAR AMELIA: Am going to find what your dad hid up in Gray Desert. Have solved the mystery. Will go in at El Oro. Hurrying because I'm afraid others have clew, too. Come back by El Oro, too, if that's possible.

STAN.

"Huh!" Aunt Mercy tossed her head. "What did I tell yo'? He's go-

in' after it himse'f! What're yo' goin' t' do? Call in the sheriff?"

"No; I'm going to El Oro."

"You! Why, what a thought! El Oro is a desert rat's town. I've heard yo'r daddy talk of it often. It's hot, without a *ho-tell*, and it's no place for a girl."

"I'll be right at El Oro when Stan comes out and help him."

"Yo'll be in his way. I think he wrote that letter so yo'd come. He's a cute cuss, this Stan Keesler is. Got fired off the Bar K, I heard t'-day. He wins yo'r sympathy by a li'le row with Parmlow, gets that paper, now he's off t' get yo'r dad's rich cache! Now yo're talkin' of follering him. Yo'll stay right home and I'll see t' that."

"I won't. I'm of age and can go where I want." The girl's temper was aroused now.

"Yo' won't! I'll see t' that," stiffly declared her aunt. "And I'll see the sheriff in the morning about all this foolishness. He'll fotch Stan Keesler and that paper back, or I'll know why!"

"He won't," Amelia informed her aunt. Then she went to bed.

For a long time the girl was wakeful, thinking over the note and all that had led up to its coming. At times she became indignant over her aunt's suspicions of Stan. She was determined to go to El Oro, with the idea that she could be useful to Stan when he came out of the desert there. He might need money for supplies. She had some saved, tied in a little roll under her pillow, together with some gold and silver coin in a small buckskin bag her father had sent her—a present he had had from Juan Parawan, the Pima Indian, with whom he had been so friendly. She felt the bag and the little roll of bills before she slept. After a time she heard some one in her room. She opened her eyes enough to see her Aunt Mercy gather-

ing up her clothing. There was a faint starlight, enough to see who was in the room.

"What is she doing that for?" Amelia asked herself. Aunt Mercy solved this problem by coming to her bedside and shaking her.

"I'm makin' sure yo' don't go trapesin' over t' El Oro after that triflin' cow person. I'll take yo'r clothes and yo' get them back when yo' promise yo'll let me handle this through the sheriff."

Then she went out, head and chin out, as Amelia could see by the light in the hall. Amelia did not know for a moment whether to laugh or cry. To be treated thus like a child by her strong-willed but kind-hearted aunt made her angry; with this, however, went a feeling of tenderness for the woman who had mothered her when she had so much needed it. But now she resolved to act for herself. A determination to keep to her plan to go to El Oro took hold of the girl's mind and heart.

Just before daylight, Amelia got up, rummaged in an old chest and found a suit of rough and ready clothes she had used when on the trail with her father in earlier years. They were still serviceable. Her aunt had forgotten all about them. Amelia donned them, and took the belt and small gun her father had taught her how to use. She had lately altered the trail suit to fit her, and now she felt that she was suitably dressed for a desert trip, if need be. She climbed out of the upper window, swung herself down from the sill, and dropped down.

She had her money with her. She made for the stable where her pinto pony was, saddled him and swung aboard. Ten minutes later she had left the sleeping town far behind and was headed for Ellendale, the stage town where Stan had paused to mail the note for her.

She felt confident of the outcome of her trip, yet as she thought of her aunt's warnings against Stan Keesler, she felt flashes of doubt. But the courage that came down to her from generations of frontier ancestry made her laugh at danger, and she urged her pony onward, determined to meet Stan at El Oro if it were possible and give him all assistance within her power.

At Ellendale, Amelia mailed a note to her aunt, saying that she was on a visit with friends over there.

"That postmark will show her I mailed it at Ellendale; and we have some friends here. She won't worry now and won't know that I've gone on to El Oro," Amelia thought; "and El Oro is surely 'over this way,' for one has to pass through Ellendale to get to it."

CHAPTER XII.

EL ORO.

BY the edge of the desert that is gray, squatted El Oro. The town looked like a ragged old burro that is shedding and not yet in its new coat. The wind had torn shreds of wood and plaster loose from the few buildings, and these shreds hung, gray and patchy, trembling in the hot breeze that sucked up out of the heated sink on the east. Two staggering chimney-tops seemed to wag over the roof of the Last Chance. The wagging was the effect of optical illusion, as the heat waves shimmered up off the tin roof; the staggering was real, for the chimneys had a decided list away from each other and looked like the ears of a burro. Two windows were in the false front of the place—windows dingy and lacking a pane here and there, where some gun artist had tried his marksmanship. These windows were the sleepy eyes of the burro, and the whole building seemed to lean and sag like a burro at a hitch rail, waiting for some one to move him else-

where. Every other building in the place sagged and leaned.

Into this town came Johnnie Hoss, thirsty, tired, but not showing it. Stan Keesler shook him out a bit as they came to the head of the little street. Many a weary mile lay behind Johnnie Hoss.

Stan rode him to the Last Chance and had him provided with water and some grain. Then he went into the resort. No one seemed about. The town was not stirring so early. A fat man emerged from slumber behind the bar and queried Stan with lackluster eye.

"How about a li'le grub?"

"Beans, chile, coffee?"

"Thanks."

"Lucky; that's all we got," answered the sleepy one, and he bawled an order in Spanish into another room.

Stan sat down, asking: "Can I get a pack hoss in town?"

At once the fat man displayed much interest.

"What for; goin' into the desert?"

"No; back in the high country."

"Prospectin'?"

"Lookin' out sheep range—maybe."

This last word had on it the emphasis that said: "Mind your own business, please."

The fat man refrained from further questioning.

When Stan had finished his meal, he paid his bill and asked:

"Now, can I get a pack hoss?"

"Yes. I've got one."

"He savvy packin'?"

"Go look."

Stan was shown the pack horse by the Mexican stableman. The horse showed marks of the kyack. He was mouse-colored and had a distrustful eye.

"I'll take him," Stan told the sleepy man.

"I ain't rentin' him out."

"I'm buying him."

The owner snapped out his figure:

"Thirty dollars."

"Got packs?"

"Ten dollars more."

"I'll take hoss and packs."

"Yo're plumb foolish; I thought yo'd bargain me down some."

"I'm in a hurry."

He paid the money and got a bill of sale for the horse. Several men came lounging in, plainly attracted by the arrival of a stranger in town. They tried to pump Stan, but he was non-committal. News of his purchase permeated the group. Jokes were passed about how queer it was that a man wanted to go into the high country in such a hurry. One or two proposed poker, but Stan said his hunch was against any game of chance then.

He was tired. So was Johnnie Hoss. But Stan needed information that he could get by questioning these men in a way that would not arouse suspicion as to the real object or perhaps by listening to their chat.

The old heavy feeling round his heart returned. On the way over from Piñon it had gripped him often. Several times he had all but reeled in the saddle. Had Johnnie Hoss gone into a pitching spell, Stan would have been thrown hard. He had fought off the depression, gaining strength from the thought that he was on a mission of good for another, and so was carrying out his promise to go straight and to do good while life lasted in him.

Stan fought down the feeling of weakness and hopelessness as he sat in a corner of the tawdry room, dodging all attempts to draw him out, and yet hoping not to give offense by being too

gruff, for he did not want to get into a fight with some hard-faced seeker after information as to his plans.

The buying of the pack horse indicated that he was going on something more than a trip after work on some ranch. Every one going into or coming out of the desert was a possible source of information as to mineral finds. Stan listened to the talk. Once in a while his heart fluttered like a wounded bird, then was still. At such times Stan could not refrain from putting his hand to his breast.

Some one mentioned Black Canyon. Stan listened closely. The teller of a story was proceeding:

"That slot in the range is dark, mostly basalt rock. Top end of the canyon winds back toward the desert, one branch of it. Other branch makes out on top of Bald Mesa. That's the branch that we took prospectin' last year."

"Fair trail over the Mokiones?"

"Just fair, but a pack hoss can make it."

From remarks the man made in telling his story Stan got an idea of where Black Canyon was and how to go there from El Oro. This was a sheer piece of luck. He inquired for a bed and was told he could roll his blankets anywhere in a corner; there were no rooms, no cots or beds for strangers.

"I'll roll my blanket outside then."

"Suit yo'se'f," the proprietor said brusquely.

Stan went out toward the stable. He tipped the Mexican two bits and told him he was going to sleep with his horse. Johnnie Hoss was nosing the last wisps of some alfalfa.

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

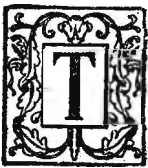




All's Fair

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "By Hook or Cook," etc.



HE sheriff of Monte Vista had the blues, and had them bad. He looked up and scowled blackly as his youthful deputy, "Shorty" McKay came into the office, whistling.

"Ain't nuthin' on yuhr single-track brain," snapped Sheriff Joe Cook, peevishly, "so quit tootin' fer the crossin'!"

Shorty smiled indulgently at his worried boss.

"Sheriff," said Shorty, soothingly, "yuh're jus' broodin' yuhrself sick. I say that my advice is—don't sell yuhr spuds on a fallin' market, an' leave that guy 'Foxy' Fromera to me to handle."

"What?"

"I says to put yuhr pertaters in storage out to yuhr place, an' let me ketch this here smart crook, Foxy, an' yuh pack up yuhr troubles, boss, an' go fishin'!"

The sheriff sat back in his chair and stared at his eager-eyed deputy in

astonishment that was combined with increasing wrath. It was a minute before he could speak.

"Put my spuds in storage," he snorted, finally, as his face grew very red, "an' probably lose more money on the crop than ef I sold 'em at a loss, now, eh? An' whar in heck have yuh learned anything about sellin' spuds, an' when to sell 'em, an' when not to sell 'em?"

"Ef yuh sell 'em now yuh lose," said Shorty; "ef yuh hold 'em fer a while yuh may make some money."

The sheriff exploded. He laughed gruffly.

"Yes, an' ef I leave yuh to ketch that Fromera feller, yuh may ketch him, an' yuh may not! I ain't strong fer that 'may' business, in spuds or crooks. It's too dern uncertain! Ef I hold them spuds I may lose more money on 'em than ef I sell 'em now! May! May! May! Once when I was a young feller I went with a gal name o' May an' I never did know what she was

goin' to say or do next. Yuh take the month o' May in Colorado—it may snow an' then again it may not. Any bird what goes by that rule o' may ain't——”

“He may be right an' he may not!” said Shorty.

The sheriff gave Shorty a gloomy look.

“Ef yuh ain't got nuthin' to do, Shorty,” the sheriff suggested, “supposin' yuh go to the corral an' give yuhr pinto hoss some advice on marketin' pertaters. I got enough woes without arguin' with yuh an' losin' my temper! I gotta do two things blamed quick, an' I gotta do plenty thinkin' before I do 'em—so I reckon I ain't goin' to miss yuh none ef yuh go outside!”

“Have it yuhr way,” said Shorty, backing out of the office. He was rather relieved to get away, at that. He went down to the corral and climbed up on the top rail and sat there, in the sun, musing over the sheriff's twin woes. Shorty knew exactly what was bothering the sheriff. Potatoes, for one thing. Foxy Fromera, for another thing. The sheriff, like a lot of other folks in the San Luis Valley, had a big farm, and on that farm he had raised a bumper crop of the famous tubers that generally topped all potato markets. But other planters had likewise raised huge crops, and now, as the sheriff finished harvesting his, the price had dropped out of the spud market. The price was down to a dollar a bushel and at that return the crop was a loss instead of a profit.

And then there was Foxy Fromera, the San Luis Valley's most undesirable citizen. Everybody knew Foxy and thoroughly despised him. Foxy was a crook, and a crook with brains. His cunning had earned him the name Foxy. He was always up to mischief, and so far he hadn't paid the price for his misdeeds. Again and again he had

succeeded in his crimes—mostly thefts—but each time the sheriff, getting angrier and angrier, had failed to get the goods on him. At last Sheriff Cook had begun to fear that probably he never would get Foxy into jail on real evidence, and that fear had preyed on the old sheriff's mind until it became a nightmare.

And just when the sheriff had the potato market drop out from under his new crop, Foxy Fromera had pulled off another job. He had looted a store in Del Norte and had made a clean sweep. The sheriff had ridden out and found Fromera on his isolated ranch, and Fromera had hotly denied the robbery. The sheriff had searched the ranch and found no incriminating evidence. He knew that Fromera was guilty of complicity in the robbery, but there wasn't even as much as a thread of evidence on which to convict the fellow.

“Waal,” said Shorty, thinking all this over as he sat on the top rail of the corral, “thar's jus' one thing to do afore the old man goes plumb nutty on his worries! I gotta get him out fishin', ef it's only fer a day—take him over to Willer Creek an' let him git his mind off his worries; ef I have to drag him over thar on the end o' a lariat—yessir, I've gotta do it!”

Shorty slid down off his perch and made for the office, determined to argue long and loudly. But he was surprised.

“Shorty,” said Sheriff Cook, as the deputy entered, “as far as yuhr advice about pertaters an' Fromera is concerned, it's not worth lissenin' to with a hoo-man ear! But yuh said one thing afore yuh went out that has kinda impressed me. Yuh said something about me goin' fishin' to fergit my troubles! Waal, I been thinkin' an' I swanny ef I don't believe that it might be a good idear to go fishin'—whar I could really think my worries over in peace!

When a man's fishin' his brain kinda clears."

"Now yuh're talkin'," said Shorty, happily.

"I'll go fishin'," went on Sheriff Cook, "but yuh'll have to stay here an' keep a eye on things while I'm gone. I'll only stay out a day—but that'll give me plenty o' time to think——"

Shorty shook his head.

"Boss," he said, "I'm goin' with yuh. I kin show yuh the swellest trout holes, an' further——"

"Nope!"

"An' further," went on Shorty, "ef I was to stay here as yuh suggest, boss, I would sure be tempted to go right out an' grab that Fromera an' toss him in jail."

The sheriff's scowl returned.

"Yes, I know yuh would, yuh idjut," said Cook, "that ain't no lie! Yuh'd jump in an' make a fool o' yuhrself an' me without layin' no keerful plans as must be laid ef that scamp is ever to be caught. I figger on mappin' out such a plan as I fishes, an' also, ef I have time, I gotta kinda make a personal analysis o' the pertater situation, although I'm goin' to sell my crop Saturday—I'll swallow my loss now instead o' a bigger one later on. Yes, I'll go fishin'."

"An' I'll go with yuh!"

"Waal, I suppose yuh'd better," said the sheriff, wearily, "seein' I ain't any too keen to trust yuh here alone."

The fishing was fine on Willow Creek, away down in the southern end of the valley, far from Monte Vista. The grumbling sheriff and his eager deputy, Shorty, had made the horseback trip in a few hours, despite the fact that Shorty had lugged along a burro laden down with canvas trappings, cooking utensils, and grub. The sheriff had balked at first, declaring that the expedition was a one-day affair only, but in the end Shorty had triumphed. The burro had gone along.

The camping outfit would be handy in case they did have to stay out overnight. Shorty was highly elated. He kept chuckling to himself all the way to Willow Creek. The sheriff asked him about his merriment.

"That four-legged burro in our party," said the sheriff, significantly, "he don't see nuthin' funny to laugh at!"

"I'm jus' thinkin' how surprised that Fromera bird will be when we land him," explained Shorty, quickly. "I kin jus' see the astonished look on his yaller phiz!"

The sheriff grunted. Yes, fine chance of getting the wily Fromera until a well-hatched plan was mapped out! The sheriff got busy thinking right away. He made up his mind on the potato situation quickly. He would sell—at the market price of a dollar a bushel—yes, sell and pocket his losses, rather than hold and lose even more. As for Fromera—that would take some more complicated thought. The sheriff lapsed into silence.

All that day the sheriff remained silent, although he whipped Willow Creek with his rod for many miles. Again and again he played a big rainbow or native trout, and his creel grew heavy with its burden. Shorty, trailing along some two or three hundred feet behind his boss, was also silent—but he was nervous. He tried to fish. All he caught was a willow branch now and then. He lost three Gray Widow flies and half his line before he gave it up as a bad job. After that he just loafed along, well behind the sheriff, and watched his boss in the throes of heavy thought.

"I'll keep him out another day ef I have to strangle him into submission," said Shorty, repeatedly, as time passed.

But there was no need of such drastic measures, after all. Sheriff Cook was fond of fishing. He had never found the Willow Creek trout so re-

sponsive to his flies. And when he got back to where they had left their horses and found Shorty with camp all established, he didn't put up much of a fight. He was willing to remain another day, he finally conceded, and he told Shorty why in a few terse, sharp words.

"I'm still thinkin' over that Fromera matter," he said.

"Fine!"

"I've finished with the pertater matter; I'll sell!"

"I figgered yuh would!"

"Huh!"

But the evening meal of mountain trout, strips of bacon, hot biscuits, and good coffee put the sheriff in better mood. He even admitted that Shorty was a blamed good cook. He intimated, however, that Shorty should take up cooking as a profession instead of deputy sheriffing. Shorty said nothing. So there was no argument that night, nor none the next day, when the sheriff whipped the creek for another nice catch. They started back for Monte Vista toward the middle of the afternoon, with the sheriff in high spirits. He had thought out a plan to capture Foxy Fromera and get enough dope on him to send him to prison.

"Next robbery we has," he told Shorty, triumphantly, "I'll jus' throw every Mexican we got in Monte Vista in jail an' keep him thar until he squawks on Fromera. It's a cinch Fromera don't work alone—he has accomplices among the Mexes—an' ef I kain't land him direct I kin land him through jailin' all the Mex suspects in town. Some one or more o' 'em will finally have to break down an' confess—implicate Fromera—an' we has him dead to rights with signed statements agin' him!"

Shorty shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll have to build a bigger jail," he muttered.

"Eh?" asked the sheriff, turning in his saddle.

"Nuthin'," said Shorty, "I was talkin' to myself. I was sayin' I'd like to bag a quail!"

So the homeward journey continued in peace. The sheriff was in better spirits than he had been for two weeks. His worries were practically settled, he figured. He'd sell his potatoes for what he could get. And he'd act on his new plan for nabbing Foxy. He entertained Shorty with tales of the old days in the San Luis Valley, when Indians and buffaloes roamed the place. That reminded Shorty of something and he spoke up.

"We must go huntin'," he suggested, hopefully.

"Might!"

"Let's plan on it!"

"We'll see!" said the sheriff. "Ef I sell those spuds off without no trouble an' get Fromera, I could go huntin' with a free conscience. Say, Shorty, ain't this a wonderful evenin'?"

"Yes, it is!" agreed Shorty.

But one half hour later the evening was stormier. No sooner had Sheriff Cook hit the office than he found his farm foreman, Jim Stewart, waiting for him there. Stewart was all excitement. He could hardly wait for the sheriff to dismount and enter the office. Shorty's face went white at sight of the foreman. More woe brewing? Yes, that was right, it developed.

"Sheriff," gasped Stewart, wildly, "we've been robbed!"

"Huh?"

"Yessir, I come in here to see yuh yesterday, an' waited until late fer yuh to git back, an' yuh didn't come; so I stayed in town all night an' rode out to the farm this mawnin', an'——"

"Yes?"

"An' some low-lived, worthless, snake-in-the-grass thief has sure enough stole all our—our—that is, your—your——"

"What?"

"Pertaters!"

"Pertaters!"

"Yessir, carted them sacks off clean as a whistle," went on the foreman, "made a good job o' it. Took the whole crop! Cleaned out both store houses! Musta had three or four great, big wagons! I seen wagon tracks as far as Coyote Creek, but I couldn't trace 'em after they hit the main Gunbarrel Pike! Them pertaters are gone—every dern las' one o' 'em!"

The sheriff sat down weakly.

"Fromera!" he gasped, wretchedly.

"No, it wasn't him!" said Stewart, "because I seen him here yesterday when I got in. An' he was here today! An' Josh Wilson hisself swears Fromera was at his hotel all las' night, an' Josh's word is good! It wasn't Fromera, boss, but Heaven alone knows who it was!"

The sheriff lifted angry eyes at Shorty.

"Dang yuh, Shorty, an' yuhr fishin'!" he snapped, hotly. "After I spends hours figgerin' on whether or not to sell them pertaters, an' finally decides to let 'em go at a dollar a bushel, along comes a thief—a pack o' thieves, a caravan o' thieves, ef yuh please—an' carts 'em all off, so I don't git even a dime fer 'em. An' while I'm plannin' to nab Fromera, a bunch o' bigger crooks than even he ever dared to be comes along an' runs off with my property, Shorty, with *my* property!"

"We'll go look fer 'em!" suggested Shorty.

"Yes, we kin go look," said the sheriff, miserably, "but that's about all; an' why in thunder, Stewart, did yuh leave the place an' come in to see me, sir?"

"Yuh called me up an' asked me to, boss," said the foreman, "an' yuh said to wait fer yuh ef yuh wasn't here!"

"What's that?"

"Yuh sure did!"

"I sure did not!" roared the sheriff, losing his last bit of self-control.

"Stewart, yuh're a blamed idjut! Yuh let some crook lure yuh off the farm on a fake call."

Stewart hung his head in shame.

"Seems like I must have!" he admitted.

After that—for days—Shorty and his boss, the sheriff, rode high, low, jack, and the game through the San Luis Valley, looking for potatoes, stolen potatoes. But, while they found many thousands of bushels of sacked potatoes, they did not find the sheriff's. Of course, the sheriff had no way of identifying his particular potatoes. He did know the bags, however. He had purchased them in Kansas City. Most of the other growers in the valley were using a different sack, one obtained in Denver. The two officers poked their noses into unlimited numbers of barns, fields, underground storerooms, basements, and moving wagons—but found no potatoes in Kansas City sacks! And the vast potato warehouses in Monte Vista, Del Norte, Center, Wagon Wheel Gap, and Alamosa revealed none of the stolen stock, either.

But Sheriff Cook was persistent. He had sought out all the suspicious characters in the valley. He had gone out to Fromera's place and put that worthy suspect through a long grilling. Fromera was politely angry. He denied stealing the potatoes. He defied the sheriff to arrest him for that—or for anything else—and prove it on him. He hinted at damage suits against the county and against the sheriff for false arrest. He swore as fluently as the sheriff did—and in the end Sheriff Cook and Shorty rode away and left Fromera alone. They had nothing on him and the sheriff knew it. Further, the sheriff's recent plan of jailing all the Mexican suspects in the valley to catch Fromera had been voted down by the board of county commissioners. They had pointed out that such a plan would alienate all the Mexican votes

in the valley and would be mighty poor politics, indeed!

So time dragged on. One week, two weeks, three weeks passed. And Sheriff Cook and Deputy Shorty McKay still rode and rode and rode. But the sheriff's potatoes appeared to have vanished into thin air. Telegrams to Salida, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, Denver, had failed to unearth any clues of the missing spuds. The railroad shipping records out of Alamosa had shown that no sacked potatoes such as Sheriff Cook had lost had been shipped. Apparently the stolen crop had been taken out in wagons, or else it was still cached in the valley. The latter seemed improbable. But the sheriff and Shorty continued their search. They rode early and late and in between, but still without success.

And it didn't help the sheriff's temper, either, to see the potato market rising steadily as the days went by. The price had gone up to one dollar and twenty-five cents a bushel from one dollar right after the first flow of shipments out of the valley had ceased. A week after the sheriff had lost his crop the price stood at one dollar and thirty-seven cents a bushel. Two weeks after the theft of the potatoes the market quotation was one dollar and ninety-five cents a bushel. In three weeks the price had gone up to two dollars and fifty cents a bushel. Farmers who had held back now sold at a fine profit. But Sheriff Cook just swore. He hadn't sold his—but he didn't have them to sell, either! When the price went on up to three dollars a bushel the sheriff could hold in no longer.

"Waal, Shorty!" he snapped, angrily, "why don't yuh begin crowin' about how yuh told me so? Yuh advised me not to sell, sayin' the market would go up! It has! I'm surprised yuh ain't begun baitin' me afore this. Say something! I've been waitin'—I'm disappointed. I'm alarmed at thinkin'

yuh're ill or something; seein' yuh hasn't started to razz me!"

"Let's go huntin', boss!" said Shorty.

The first suggestion fell on deaf ears. It took Shorty three days to talk the sheriff into riding over to the Big Piney country, where deer abounded, for a hunting trip. And even then Shorty had to ring in the suggestion that perhaps—it was just barely possible—those stolen potatoes might be hidden in some blind canyon in that region. It was just one chance in ten thousand, but Shorty played it for all it was worth. The sheriff sniffed. He had heard the new quotations on potatoes the evening before—three dollars and twenty cents a bushel, the best price in a long time! And he had none to sell! He felt his nerves on edge. He needed a rest.

"Waal, we will go huntin', Shorty!"

They started for the Big Piney country early the next morning, with Shorty in high spirits and the sheriff as gloomy as any man could be and still live. The sheriff recalled his promise of five weeks before—that he would go hunting if he sold his potatoes right away and landed Fromera in jail through his carefully thought out plan. He had neither landed Fromera nor sold his potatoes, but here he was going hunting anyway. He hated himself. He called out to Shorty:

"Son, don't try to cross me to-day, I'm feelin' plenty mean an' nasty! I don't want no arguments, fer I won't be responsible fer what I says or does ef I git worse!"

"No arguments," agreed Shorty affably.

But Shorty, it soon appeared, was wrong. Shorty, who was slightly in the lead, turned down the Duck Lake road. The sheriff pulled up and called to him, lustily.

"Hey, yuh galoot! That's the wrong way!"

"No, it ain't," said Shorty, com-

ing back, "Miles Dwyer hisself told me he saw forty deer over this way last week!"

The sheriff snorted.

"All right, go ahead," he said, "but why didn't yuh say yuh was goin' to Duck Lake in the fust place, Shorty?"

"I fergot!" said Shorty.

It was a two-hour trip to Duck Lake at steady going. The sheriff was surprised when Shorty turned off on an old lumber road after about forty minutes trotting. Again Sheriff Cook pulled up and yelled at his guide and deputy:

"Whoa thar, idjut! Whar yuh goin' now?"

The yell brought Shorty back in a jiffy.

"Sssh!" he warned. "We're in game country now, boss, we jus' gotta go about two miles more to a little valley——"

"I thought we was goin' to Duck Lake!"

"Waal—not all the way; yuh see, Tommy Dean told me that this valley I spoke of was the best place——"

"Go ahead," said the sheriff wearily.

But when the sheriff saw Shorty unlimber a six-gun a few minutes later, as they climbed the old logging road, he took more interest in life. One thing was sure, Shorty was famous as a deer hunter. He probably knew where he was going now, the sheriff decided. Tommy Dean's advice was always good, too, although the sheriff would have been mighty contented with taking Miles Dwyer's advice and going on to Duck Lake. Well, it was immaterial where they actually went, if they got a deer apiece, thought the sheriff, riding along ten or fifteen yards behind Shorty. Getting those deer might banish his thoughts of potatoes and Fromera, hoped the sheriff.

"Stick 'em up, brother!"

The sheriff woke up with a start, as he heard Shorty's yell and saw Shorty

bring a six-gun to shoulder level. That was a funny thing to shout at a deer! The sheriff rode on, curiously, but he almost fell out of his saddle when he saw that Shorty had no deer at bay ahead, but instead had Foxy Fromera. Foxy had both hands lifted. There was a look of surprise on his face.

"What yuh doin' up here, Foxy?"

"Why, nuthin', Mr. Shorty," answered the Mexican, slowly, "except—hunting—deer!"

"Oh!"

"Yessir, that's all!"

"Waal, we're huntin', too, Fromera," said Shorty, while the sheriff gasped. "Yuh'd be sure enough surprised to know what we're huntin', brother! Yuh jus' try to guess what *we're* huntin'—go on—Fromera—guess—guess!"

Fromera caught the glint in Shorty's eyes. He guessed.

"Deer—mebbe?" he suggested, hopelessly.

"No," said Shorty. "Notes!"

"Notes, Sefior Shorty?"

"Boss," said Shorty, not hesitating in the emergency to give Sheriff Cook a rapid order, "would yuh mind drappin' off that hoss an' searchin' this gent, after relievin' him o' his weapons while I holds my cannon on him so he won't try no monkeyshines?"

"Sure," said the sheriff in a mystified tone.

He got down, walked around behind Fromera, and snatched the man's twin six-guns from their holsters. He also relieved him of his knife. Then he allowed the Mexican to drop his hands. He searched him, while Shorty covered Fromera.

"Go through those papers, boss!" urged Shorty, as the sheriff took a handful of folded papers from a pocket.

The sheriff went through them. At the same time Foxy Fromera's expression went through half a dozen changes. He tried to smile. He frowned. He grew sad. He looked sick. He licked

his lips. He puckered them. He groaned aloud—at last.

"Say," said the sheriff, holding a yellow slip of paper he had unfolded, "listen to this, Shorty! Here's a note addressed to Fromera an' it says:

"Sheriff Cook an' his kid deputy are goin' out on a two-day fishin' trip to-morrow an' here is yuhr chance to git even with Cook. His farm foreman won't be on the place, but the sheriff's big crop of potatoes will. Bring five wagons an' take 'em. It's a cinch. Hide 'em out up by yuhr place near Duck Lake until I writes yuh again, when I will let you know when it is safe to bring them spuds to market. Save this note to compare with my signature on next to prevent any slip-ups. Yuh better be in Monte Vista while the potatoes are bein' lifted by yuhr men. Alibi, see? Yuh did me a good turn once, Foxy, an' I repay yuh this way.

"CAM TYUPED,

"Yuhr friend.

"Waal, what do yuh know about that?" cried the sheriff, as he finished reading the slip of yellow paper.

"Put yuhr bracelets on Foxy, boss," said Shorty, "an' I guess we've got him dead to rights. I reckon those pertaters are up to yuhr hangout at the valley, Foxy?"

The crook who had never been caught was very meek now that he realized that he was caught—and caught with the goods!

"Yes!"

"March ahead up thar, then!" ordered Shorty, crisply.

Fromera turned and started. The jig was up for him and he knew it. He swore softly under his breath, but he plodded up the trail doggedly. The sheriff, still too surprised to talk much, mounted and rode up alongside of Shorty. He held out his hand and they shook.

"Congratulations, Shorty!" said Sheriff Cook, softly, so that Fromera, well ahead, might not hear. "I know yuh did this somehow—this nabbin' o' Fromera, the foxy—but I reckon afore we're through we'll have to round up

this note-writin' bird, Cam what's-his-name—lemme see ag'in."

He referred to the note.

"Cam Tie-yuh-ped, or something like that—T-y-u-p-e-d, he spells it. Must be a Mex, too."

Shorty shook his head.

"All's fair in love an' war, boss," said Shorty, in a whisper. "Yuh take that 'Cam Tyuped' an' read it around the other way—with the 'Ty' transposed for easy readin'—an' yuh'll see it reads 'Deputy Mac'—that's me. I wrote that note, boss. I planned the potato robbery myself—took yuh off on the fishin' trip to give Fromera a chance to git 'em; an' while I could have laid my hands on 'em right away after we came back—seein' I knowed from a friend o' Fromera's that he had this isolated hide-out valley—I didn't fer two good reasons. I hope yuh ain't sore, boss?"

Sheriff Cook was too astonished to be sore.

"I jus' don't get yuh, Shorty!" he gasped.

"Waal, I'll tell yuh, boss," said Shorty, with a grin. "I figgered all was fair in love an' war, as I jus' said a minnit ago. I knowed yuh was settin' yuhr heart on sellin' them spuds o' yuhrs right when the market was lowest an' I knowed yuh was crazy to nab Fromera here, although yuh didn't have any idear how to do it. I figgered the spud market would go up an' I thought I knowed how to get Fromera. I jus' combined my idears. I decided I had to *make* yuh hold them potatoes. Thar was only one way, to steal 'em from yuh. I decided thar was only one way to git Fromera an' that was to frame him some way legitimate. So I had him steal the potatoes. I wrote him to save that note to compare with my next note, which I was to write him when it was safe to market the potatoes. I figgered to-day that the spud market had gone high enough—

three dollars and twenty cents a bushel—an' that yuh should git 'em an' sell 'em now at a profit; at the same time we nabs Fromera red-handed, an' we'll no doubt find other stolen property up ahead here along with the spuds!"

Sheriff Cook had made some rapid calculations on the difference between three dollars and twenty cents and one dollar per bushel for potatoes.

"Shorty," he said, "I've cleaned up on spuds an' we've cleaned up on Fromera. I guess we won't have to prosecute him on my spud theft—once in jail he'll cough up a confession about his other misdeeds an' we kin run him outta the county, at least. That'll satisfy me, seein' as how he has helped

yuh help me make a killin' on spuds, an' Shorty, I'll make yuh a present o' the very finest saddle hoss yuh kind find in Colorado, no matter how much he costs—is that satisfactory?"

Shorty just grinned slowly.

"Yes," he said, "ef yuh give me one other thing—jus' one o' them nice red spuds, boss, that I kin put in a glass jar an' keep to home—as a souvenir o' the time I beat the potato market an' Foxy Fromera all at one shot, an' proved to yuh that all is fair in love an' war. I loved yuh too much, boss, to see yuh sell spuds at a loss, an' I was bound to win the war we had declared on Señor Fromera!"

"Amen!" said the sheriff, fervently.



AN ALLY AGAINST THE MOSQUITO

A NEW ally has been discovered for man in his war against the mosquito. This valuable find—news of which comes from Colorado Springs—is the spadefoot toad of the Western plains. And legions of toads are now being mobilized for movement to mosquito-infested areas of the East.

Ralph J. Gilmore, professor of biology at Colorado College, has revealed interesting data concerning this toad. Unlike other frogs, it is carnivorous in the tadpole stage. The pollywogs prey upon mosquito larvæ in shallow pools, and for this reason they are expected to destroy the insects before they take flight. Fish have sometimes been used for the purpose of attacking mosquito larvæ, Professor Gilmore points out, but they cannot enter the shallow, stagnant marshes in which the spadefoot toad, with a life cycle of only forty days, multiplies rapidly.

The adult toad is small, being only about two inches long. Its skin ranges in color from a yellowish olive to a dark gray. It derives its name from the horny spades, about one-eighth of an inch long, on the inner soles of its feet. With these spades it can burrow into the ground to a depth of several feet. It makes its appearance after rains and remains hidden during dry seasons.

Professor Gilmore believes that the scarcity of vegetable life in the waters of its habitat, which includes Montana, North Dakota, Idaho, Arizona, and Colorado, has forced the tadpole to change from the herbivorous habit of its ancestors to its present peculiar carnivorous characteristics. The frogs seem to be sparsely distributed, but abundant in limited areas.



Pillar Mountain

by John Frederick

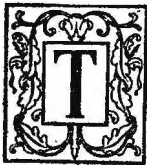
Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

PHILIP, adopted by Oliver Aytoun, leaves the mountains to seek his fortune. Befriended by "Doc" Rivers, he goes home with him. Here he meets Maisie Delmar, hears of the Purchass gang, and of a famous colonel. The susceptible Philip rescues Maisie's brother, Jolly, from the Purchasses, but Jolly is again carried off as he is about to reveal to his family the location of a mine.

Doc and Philip ask the colonel to aid in Jolly's rescue. He refuses, warning Philip to leave the country. Doc and Phil find Jolly, cruelly beaten, a prisoner in the Purchass house. The colonel arrives, but the young men carry off Jolly. They outdistance various pursuers, but just as they feel safe they see the famous colonel himself on their trail.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DUEL IN THE WOOD.



HEY had not gone far before Philip realized that there was no escape. The giant behind them came fast, for he was so mightily mounted that even his enormous bulk did not seem to check the speed of his horse. "Doc" Rivers' mount was a poor one, and the other nag was carrying double.

Meantime, they were riding through a very open wood with the trees silver-flashing under the breadth and the brightness of the moon, and the ground splashed with jet-black shadows. They could not expect to keep away from

the colonel very long in such quarters as these, and they could not expect to dodge him.

But they were two to one!

He had no sooner said it to himself than a gun barked behind them, and the horse of Rivers dropped on its head and turned completely over, shooting poor Doc far out in front, where he rolled like a top.

There were even odds, now. Worse than even, for here was Jolly on his hands!

Poor Jolly was in a frightful state.

"We'd better pull up!" he kept repeating. "It's the colonel, kid. It's the colonel. There's no use fighting. Nobody could beat him. No ten men could beat him! He's worse than any ten!"

He drew rein as he spoke, and Philip looked anxiously back. They were twisting, for the moment, around a curve of that natural roadway through the woods, and the colonel was shut from view. He looked to the front again—and behold, a great branch swayed down above him.

He did not stop for the second thought but followed the first, reaching high and grappling the limb. It sagged only a little under his weight, and as he was jerked high from the saddle he gasped: "Ride, Jolly! Ride!"

In an instant he was stretched along the bough and saw Loafer sitting beneath, his red tongue lolling.

"Go ahead, Loafer!" he called, and waved. Loafer instantly cantered on.

And now he could see the colonel coming. He looked to Philip even more magnificent than he had seemed when dashing across the ridge of the mountain the day before. The same cloak fluttered back from his shoulders in long, sweeping lines. The brim of his hat was furred by the speed of his horse. And he sat tall and straight in the saddle, one hand for the reins, one hand balancing a revolver for a second shot.

That second shot must not be fired!

And snatching out a gun, Philip aimed through the twigs at the charging giant.

He could not fire. It was such a target as any child could have hit, but he would not, or could not, release the hammer—and here was the colonel sweeping closer, a scant stride away, the revolver tipping down for the shot!

There had been no forethought in Philip's mind. He merely had planned to rid the horse of the double burden and thus, perhaps, give poor Jolly a chance for his life. He had not hoped to give himself ambush to fire upon the colonel. Certainly he had not planned on what he now did. But the thought blazed in his brain like the leap of an

electric spark, and he hurled himself down from the branch.

Like a panther leaping, with more than a panther's weight, he crashed against the colonel, and the speed of the horse knocked both men out of the saddle. Philip, blinded and stunned by the shock, prayed vaguely that he might be able to fall clear of the big man, and that prayer was more than answered. For the colonel landed heavily on his side and Philip's impact on the ground was broken by the body of the colonel himself.

Philip, reeling, gasping, hardly able to realize what he had done, dragged himself to his knees and hands and saw the colonel lying flattened against the ground, his enormous arms thrown out crosswise.

That sight inspired him. It cleared his mind and set fierce light of joy in his eyes, so that he leaped up at once and ran lightly to the fallen man. One revolver lay far away, gleaming in the moonshine. The second one was even now in the hand of the colonel—so instinctively had he acted even in that instant of crisis!

That gun, Philip, stooping, snatched away; fumbled at the body of the big man to find another weapon, if possible—and instantly was taken by the throat!

It was as though vast levers had caught him. Crimson flames shot through his head, and he struck half blindly for the face of the colonel.

His fist struck something—the hand relaxed from his throat—and Philip stumbled back to his feet, still dizzy from the paralyzing effect of that grasp. Through the shadows of his half-stunned mind, he saw the colonel lurch upward.

Like a tree, the figure loomed before him, and then rushed in, with arms extended, eager, with the certainty of a rushing avalanche. There was no hope in Philip, but the vast energy which despair gives. He could not flee; the

rush of the colonel was as inescapable as the downward flight of a bird—or so it seemed. So Philip slid suddenly forward, dipped his head, and then smote upward at the beard of the enemy—smote with all the sway of his body, and the lift of his muscles, and the speed and power of hand and shoulder behind that blow.

There was a shock, as though he had smitten a crag of stone. All his arm went numb, and electric pangs raced up and down from wrist to shoulder; but the colonel's rush had ended.

Aye, incredible though it seemed, the whole vast bulk of the man rocked back upon his heels, and his arms fell helplessly to his sides.

He had been knocked out of his stride—knocked almost flat on the ground, and by a single blow!

A shadow came skimming like a bird, a great dark bird, along the ground.

"Keep back, Loafer!" called the boy. "Keep back, Loafer! I—I don't need you!"

And he leaped in headlong at the mighty form, for he felt that the giant was effectually stunned, and that another blow might send him down. Eagerness nearly ended the life of Philip in that instant. Something as huge as a beam, weighty as a log, swift as a striking cat, darted out at him. He threw up his guard. That mighty something beat down his arm, and struck through to his breast with such an impact that Philip was literally picked up and hurled back.

He fell on his hands and one knee, vaguely saw the great form of the colonel lunge toward him, and then gained miraculous strength to spring up and to the side.

Almost he was clear of that sweeping danger, but no quite. The next instant, as a man is caught in a whirlpool, so Philip was clutched by the giant, and they stood breast to breast. The great arms went around him; instinctively he

clasped a barrellike body as vast and as hard as the trunk of a tree, and put forth all his might.

As he had lifted at the black rock, so he strained now, desperately. He had labored, on that day, for the life of a dog, and next for the pride of his heart. Now he had the added might of terror.

Around him were cast arms with the relentless power of steel bands, red-hot and shrinking into place. The flesh was ground against his bones. Red flames of agony leaped into his brain, but even in that misery it seemed to him that the huge body of the colonel was not so rigid, that it gave a little—aye, it undoubtedly yielded—and he heard the half gasp, half groan of exhaled breath.

The crushing grip of the colonel was relaxed. He swayed up a hand like the head of a sixteen-pound sledge and Philip saw that danger swayed darkly above him. He pressed his face into the enemy's shoulder; the blow glanced from his head, and heaving then with all his might, he lifted the massive bulk to a tottering uncertainty, then tipped it, swayed again, and pitched it to the ground, himself drawn down in the fall.

He could hold the big man down no more than he could control a struggling bear. They stood on their feet again, a little distance between them. The breath of Philip came and went rapidly, but he heard a hoarse gasping from the colonel, and it seemed to Philip the sweetest music that ever had sounded in his ear.

"Boy," said the colonel, "I love courage when I find it. You are young. You will grow into a man worthy of the name. On this one night I let you escape from me. You may go! But 'if we meet again——'"

"This is the first time and the last," said Philip, peering at that contorted face. "I've met you fairly, hand to hand, and I've mastered you. And I'll

take you back and show you to my friends like a tame dog on a rope."

He sprang in. Those huge arms rose to strike, but there was a glory of confidence in the heart of Philip, now. It made him light as a feather to whirl between those driving blows and strike again, and again.

The colonel went reeling back under the shadow of the nearest tree, and as Philip followed with tigerish haste, he heard the rending of wood.

There was a small projecting limb that thrust out from the trunk of the tree. It had failed to mature like an honest bough. Stunted, half dead, leafless and twigless, it projected like a spur from the body of the tree, and this the colonel had grasped and torn away with desperate strength.

Philip saw the danger and strove to dodge it, but the blow beat down his arm and fell on his head; and an explosion of blackness covered his brain as he reeled away. He found himself staggering helplessly, as though he walked in deep mud, and there was a deadly weakness behind his knees, threatening to make him fall.

He heard the sudden clangor of a gun, a voice shouting that seemed the voice of Doc Rivers, and then he could see.

It was Doc Rivers, indeed, running forward, and still calling out, but the bulking form of the colonel no longer was before him. Instead, there was a sharp whistle from somewhere in the brush, and then Philip saw a horse gallop into the woods in answer to the signal of its master.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN UNDERSTANDING.

HE was bewildered both physically and mentally by the disappearance of the colonel and by that crushing blow which had fallen on his head. A foul blow, it at first seemed to Philip. For

surely, after he himself had failed to take advantage of a helplessly prostrate foe, the latter might at least have fought out the battle, fairly, hand to hand. As it was, Doc Rivers undoubtedly had saved his life, for the enemy, rushing in, might have shattered his skull like an eggshell at the next stroke. The whistling bullets which Doc fired had put the colonel to flight.

And suddenly it seemed that their work was done. With the colonel removed from the fight, beaten, even all the myrmidons of the Purchass clan seemed a mere nothing.

Doc Rivers fairly embraced Philip.

Then he stood back, dancing grotesquely in the moonlight. Doc himself had been badly mauled in the fall of his horse. Blood was caked with dust down one side of his face, his coat was rent from shoulder to waist, and he limped as he danced. Nevertheless, his thought was not for himself.

"I seen you knocking him before you. It was the colonel, kid? It was the colonel? There ain't anybody else as big as that in the whole world!"

"It was the colonel," repeated Philip slowly, for he himself hardly could realize the miracle of his own strength as it had been revealed on this night. The glory of the lifting of the black rock was lost in this blaze of triumph. So he repeated slowly: "It was the colonel!"

"Sweet — sufferin' — mama!" gasped Doc Rivers.

He added: "Your hands, kid? You was only usin' your hands?"

"I was only using my hands," answered Philip. And then a wave of savage anger and exultation, commingled, passed over him. "And when I meet him again," he said, "I'm going to tie him up and lead him home like a tame dog, to show to the people!"

He remembered, he had told the colonel that. He would tell him again, when they next encountered. But they

never would fight hand to hand again, he could guess. Not if the colonel could leave the decision to weapons!

But even with weapons, Philip no longer feared the big man. He had tested him and found him wanting; now with rifle or revolver he would take his chance with the colonel day or night, sun or shadow!

Now it seemed to Philip as though that dreadful encounter in the moonlight at last had cleared a cloud from his brain. There was a great cut on his head and blood trickled from it; the salt taste of it was in his mouth as he spoke.

"We've got to find Jolly," he said. "Can he last out the trip home?"

"Unless they've blocked him off," answered Doc Rivers. "He'll sure last it out unless they've blocked him away on the road home. It ain't so far off, now!"

"Hurry!" said Philip. "We've got to run"

And run he did, swinging steadily forward through the woodland ways until Doc Rivers staggered and stopped. He leaned a hand against a sapling and gasped for breath.

"I can't run another step," he declared.

Impatient anger flared in Philip. He made a step closer.

"You have to," he said. "You have to run on, Doc!"

Doc Rivers mopped his brow.

"Don't threaten me, kid," he said. "I've done my best. I ain't an iron man, like you. I'm human, thank goodness. Let's walk. Even running, we couldn't catch up with a horse!"

No doubt there was some sense in this, and Philip walked impatiently on through the woods. Even then he set a pace which Rivers hardly could follow, though the latter broke repeatedly into a dogtrot, and then begged his companion to slow down and go more easily. But Philip was relentless and they

pushed on at an even, heartbreaking pace.

They left the woods, at last. They turned onto the highway, a voice called suddenly to them from the shadows, and Jolly Delmar rode out into the moonlight to join them.

"What happened?" he cried. "I came on and waited here. I couldn't go any farther. I should have turned back quicker and tried to help—but boys, I didn't dare to. I was more scared of being taken back to the Purchass place than I'm scared of anything on earth. Kid, you forgive me? But it wasn't the colonel, after all?"

"Jolly," answered Doc Rivers solemnly, "it was the colonel, and the colonel is busted."

Jolly gaped.

"He ain't so much as a major or even a captain. He's only a dog-gone private."

"How come?" asked Jolly in a voice that shook with excitement.

"Me, with my own eyes," said Doc Rivers, "I seen the kid back the colonel into a tree. You could hear the thudding of his fists clear over here, if you'd cocked an ear to listen. He was dodging the colonel's fists and whanging him—it was somethin' to see. You wouldn't believe it, otherwise. Then the colonel peeled a branch off of the tree——"

"Hold on!" said Jolly.

"I seen it myself!" cried Doc vehemently. "With that branch he hammered the kid over the head and stunned him. Good luck brought me along, just then, and I turned loose with a gun, and the colonel turned and run. He was beat. He was fair beat. I seen it. I'll swear to it!"

"I know what I know, too," replied Jolly, "and I believe it. And now, Phil, we've got 'em spread out and helpless. The colonel and the whole Purchass gang is beat hollow. After this, we begin to collect. We begin to get fat!"

And he laughed like a boy.

There might have been ten thousand enemies lurking in the woods; but they would not have cared. They went on talking loudly.

Jolly, forgetful of pain and weakness, even began to sing, and so they topped the last hill and saw in the hollow beneath them the well-remembered outline of the Delmar place.

Doc Rivers halted and leaned wearily on the massive shoulder of Philip.

"When was it that we started out, kid?" asked he. "Was it about fifty years ago, maybe? Was it about that time that we went over and seen the colonel?" He sighed. "You've made an old man of me, kid," said he. "Dashed if you ain't piled a stack of years onto my shoulders!"

And they went happily down the slope toward the house. They entered the yard. They turned to the back, and the broad, thin shaft of light from the kitchen window poured out.

"It's dad," guessed Jolly. "Won't have slept much since I left! Sneak up soft, and we'll see!"

They assisted Jolly from the horse. He could sit the saddle well enough, but he could not walk a step, so Philip picked him up and carried him to the window. Looking through it, they saw old Delmar bowed over the kitchen table, his head in his folded arms.

They were able to open the door and half cross the room before he started up, and Philip never would forget how those long, lean arms were thrown out to welcome his son.

He carried Jolly through the dining room amid a rain of questions, hasty answers. Every one was talking at once.

In the hall a small white cyclone descended—Maisie in a white dressing gown, with flying hair—and so they completed the progress to Jolly's room. There, while Maisie hastily prepared food, the three men undressed Jolly and removed the wrappings from his

legs. What they saw made them turn white.

Tenderly they bathed that bruised and torn flesh, and Doc Rivers, who knew about such things, laid on fresh bandages.

"Well!" said old Delmar suddenly. "Such cruelty as that'll never go unpunished. They'll get what's coming to 'em!" His face wore a grim look.

At last just as they had Jolly settled in bed Maisie came in with a tray covered with edibles. Jolly, exhausted but joyous, lay back in bed, propped high with pillows.

"I'm not gunna talk. I'm not gunna tell you anything to-night," he said. "I'm just gunna be happy and enjoy lookin' at you. Only, before I'm a minute older, I'm gunna tell you where the vein is."

Philip, instinctively, stepped to the window, and stood there with his hand on the butt of his revolver, for it seemed to him that the word which had been so many times on the verge of being uttered was now sure to be interrupted, and interrupted with dangerous force.

There was nothing but the naked moonlight in the back yard beneath him; though it seemed to Philip that a ghost of Jolly and the two horses once more passed beneath and disappeared down the roadway.

He heard Jolly's voice telling the tale briefly. Just what the details were, Philip could not understand, but the names of creeks and hills and mountains were all familiar to the other listeners.

After that, Jolly's supper proceeded merrily. Maisie and his father remained to feed him and take care of him. Philip and Doc Rivers, starved with their long fast, went down to the kitchen to cook their own supper.

They had fried ham and eggs and laid the table with steaming coffee and chunks of bread. They had washed

the grime and dust from their faces as well as they could, and they were about to sit down to the table, when Maisie came in. She went up to Philip with a face as pale as her dressing gown.

"Jolly's told us," she said. "Jolly's told us everything. I'm trying to believe it. But my head swims! I—I saw the shoulder of his coat—where your teeth had cut through the cloth."

"Doc," said Philip, "you step outside for a minute."

Doc Rivers silently vanished from the room, and Philip stood above the girl. She was no longer a dreadfully mysterious creature to him; she was only a pale and slender child.

"When I left," he said, "we had a sort of agreement, Maisie."

Her eyes half closed.

"I know. I'd never go back on it, Phil."

He found that his words were snapping out, sharp and hard.

"D'you say that because you care a lot for me, Maisie, or because you're afraid of me?"

Her eyes closed altogether, at that; she grew whiter than before, and when she looked up at him again, he could see the naked terror in her soul.

"I don't know," said Maisie.

But Philip knew, and all the joy and the glory of that night were snatched away from him, and he was left sad and disappointed.

"We go back to the beginning," said Philip, then, "as if we'd never said a word to one another. Is that better?"

"Are you angry? Are you hating me?" asked Maisie.

When he saw her grip the back of a chair and sway a little, a touch of pity for her came to Philip, but he was hard and cold in his heart.

"Let's talk facts," said he. "I'm beginning to see facts. The other day I was still a young fool. Well, Maisie, I've grown up. You know the story about Midas and the touch of gold.

There's the touch of steel, too. I think that I've had that touch on me. At any rate, I can look through a good deal. When you first met me, Maisie, you saw that I was quite young and quite a fool. Is that right?"

Her lips stirred, as though she were trying to answer, but no answer came; and her eyes wavered on his face, as though she were reading a large and crowded page.

"I'm sorry that I put it as a question," said Philip. "It's simply a fact.

"Of course I'm ridiculous. But you thought that I might be useful. That night among the trees you were drawing me on. You saw that I'd lost my head about you, and you wanted to make sure of me. Am I right?"

"Phil——" she began.

He waited, but she could not speak.

"You had a job for me. It was to bring back Jolly. Well, I've brought him back twice. You'd thrown out a sort of bait for me. Not in words. We were too delicate for that. Only a hint between us—I would have you if you got Jolly back. Is that right?"

She drew a long breath; he felt that she was fighting hard, merely to face him, merely to stand before him.

"As a matter of fact, there's some other fellow, of course.

"You picked me up because you needed me. Don't look so scared, Maisie. I'll never harm you. And the truth—you ought to be able to stand that. You see that I come down to a simple thing, in the end. I let you off the bargain, Maisie. And here's my hand on it!"

He held out his hand. Her own dropped limply into it, and suddenly her lip trembled and tears rushed to her eyes.

Philip half turned from her.

"I don't want to see you cry, Maisie," said he. "I think I'd really despise you, if I did!"

And, when he looked again, she was gone without a sound—only a whisper

was in the hall and then, on the stairs, a faint murmur of a stifled sob.

Philip's lip curled. Stepping to the back door, he threw it open, and called Doc Rivers in. The latter came, shivering and grumbling.

"Dash it, kid," said he, "you've kept us so long, the steam's off the coffee! What's the matter? You and Maisie have a falling out?"

"On the contrary," said Philip. "We've just had an understanding!"

"Oh," murmured Doc Rivers, and suddenly busied himself with his food.

And it seemed to Philip that, like Maisie, Doc Rivers was overcome with fear. Every movement, indeed, was furtive.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

EARLY the next morning they moved to town, with Jolly lying on a mattress in the bottom of the buckboard. Philip sat beside him, partly to care for him, and chiefly as his guard. They felt that once they were safely ensconced in the town, they could shrug their shoulders at the Purchass clan. The sheriff and the law would receive them, and as for Jolly's danger from the law, that was something no longer to be feared. With the money from the mine, they could hire such lawyers as would maintain his innocence successfully. So thought the Delmars, and in the gray of the dawn they hurried toward the town, old Delmar riding in the rear, and Doc Rivers, in the van, riding most dauntlessly and gallantly, while Maisie sat on the driver's seat and put the horses to good speed.

The roads were black and wet with dew, and the fields were glistening gray, for the pale gold had been fading rapidly, as harvest fields will. There was a good, cheerful feeling in the air, a chill that heartened one and brought color into the face.

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Philip marked these details without emotion, as one jots down notes on a pad of paper. He felt detached. He was a mere observer. Jolly, Maisie, they both lived in this world. So did old Delmar. So did even Doc Rivers. What the difference was, Philip began to guess. They had families. They came out of a known past. They were rooted in fact. But he was a plant that had grown in the air, so to speak. He had no relation to society and therefore society would have nothing to do with him. He was held off at arm's length.

The light freshened to pink and bright rose. Maisie talked from time to time, and when the sun rose Jolly had the pillows heaped higher under his head. He wanted to look that sun in the face, he declared, for he had felt the night before that he never would see the warm, kind, honest, cheerful sun again.

So Philip propped him higher, and then Jolly began to talk about the mystery of his disappearance from the house. He had gone up to the map and spent a few moments removing the thumb tacks with which it was fastened to the wall, for they had rusted, and he had to pry them out, carefully, with his knife blade. He had three of them out, he remembered, when he felt something behind him; like a chill striking in from the window, Jolly said it was.

Finally he turned around, and he was amazed and oddly shocked to see Sheldon standing inside the window, looking steadily at him. He asked Sheldon what he wanted, and Sheldon said that he had come to speak about leaving.

"Leave if you want to," said Jolly impatiently. "I'm busy with something else. You talk over your wages with dad!"

"You'd better talk to me," said Sheldon in a queer voice, and Jolly looked at him carefully, in some alarm and in some curiosity.

Sheldon had always been the quietest sort of a man, but now there was a touch of danger in him. Jolly said that it was hard to define. Certainly the eyes of the little man were fascinating. They had changed. They had grown very dark, and they looked flat and black—

"Like black velvet?" put in Philip.

"Just exactly like that," exclaimed Jolly. "How did you guess?"

He went on to say that Sheldon had repeated several times: "I want to talk about leaving the house. You'd better talk with me about it. You'd better talk about leaving it, yourself. Do you hear? You'd better talk about leaving it yourself!"

This he repeated over and over in a monotonous voice and all the time Jolly stared into the face of the puncher until all at once he felt himself growing rather dizzy. Thereafter, he was not sure of exactly what happened, except that Sheldon began to speak about the horses, too. And that he kept saying: "It would be a good thing, when you leave, to ride those horses back to the Purchass place. They'd be glad to see you, there. You'd better ride the horses over. Over to the Purchass place. Do you hear? You're going to ride them over to the Purchass place."

This thought had filled Jolly with horror. But he felt himself impelled by resistless power, and after that, his mind was a complete blank except for two moments.

One was when he walked through the dining room and wanted with all his might to call out for help, to beg people to catch him and keep him from going; but he found that his lips were locked. The next moment was when he heard the voice from the window of his own room calling to him. It had not seemed like another person speaking. It had seemed like his own ghost standing up there above him, and calling to him to come back. But again

he dared not answer. And a strange wonder came to him. Was it really he who sat on the Purchass horse? Or was it his ghost, while the real Jolly Delmar remained in the house?

Then he remembered nothing, except that the senses which had been stolen from him returned, and he found himself in the Purchass house, with armed men all around him, and the malicious face of old Purchass himself before him.

He was lying on a cot, the same cot where Philip finally had found him, and little Sheldon was leaning over him, with the same eyes of black velvet.

He had wakened to find himself totally in the hands of his enemy, and Purchass, in the first minute, had placed his proposal before Jolly.

He would give Jolly his life and forget about the death of the young Purchass whose loss had caused the feud. In return, Jolly was to hand over information about the location of the mine. How the Purchass outfit had learned about it, Jolly never knew. At any rate, he told them gravely that he would rather die. Then old Purchass had the others tie Jolly down on the bed and when that was done he dismissed his followers, and himself remained alone with his prisoner.

"To bring him to reason," as he said.

There followed a torture so dreadful that Jolly confessed he had screamed like a woman, and the old satyr had laughed in his face and told him that he would tear him to shreds unless the secret were revealed.

Shortly afterwards, Jolly fainted, and that saved him further agony for some hours. But again and again he was put under pressure. Until, the day before, when he was on the verge of surrendering beneath this mortal agony, the enormous form of the colonel had burst into the room.

He had taken old Purchass by the back of the neck, as one might lift a terrier, and told him that he would

throw him through the window unless this fiendishness ceased at once. Old Purchass had snarled an answer, but he had perforce submitted and allowed himself to be taken from the room.

The last of their argument, Philip himself had overheard on the roof of the Purchass house.

Now, when Jolly had made an end of his story, they came out of the woods, made a sharp turn, and the town was before them, in the full brightness of the mid-morning sun.

CHAPTER XL.

KEEP YOUR EARS IN.

NOW Philip became all eyes.

This was at last the great goal of his ambition; this was the seat of those lovely stars which he had seen from the height of Pillar Mountain on clear nights. But what he found revealed to him had not a shred of glory attached. It was simply a shambling, wide-spread, broken-down, mountain town, so cheaply constructed that every building was old before it reached its third year. He felt that he could have blown down the general merchandise store with a puff. And as for the wide-spreading hotel, he was sure that he could have kicked his way through its flimsy walls.

There was little paint; there was much dust; there was in every vacant lot a jumble of junk, rusted wire, barrel bands, broken wheels. Chickens scratched up the front yards and dusted themselves in holes which they had scratched in the grass plots. Dogs ran out and barked furiously at the riders and the buckboard. Slatternly women came and leaned in doorways, arms akimbo, and looked after the little procession. And far and near Philip heard the rising of a voice which he never had heard before and which, once heard, he never could shake out of his consciousness. It was composed of the crowing of roosters in the distance, and

the cackling of hens on their nests; the clanging of a hammer on a forge; the rattling of kitchen pans; the banging of doors, and the braying laughter of a man somewhere far off, together with other sounds of human voices. Into this jargon the screaming of stirrup leathers, the groan of the ill-greased wheels of the wagon and the rattling of its loose boards and spokes melted perfectly. It was all a harmony. In spite of its many parts, it was not over-loud. Certainly it was not deafening. It was indeed rather a weight upon the spirit than a burden upon the ears.

But Philip did not need to be told what it was. It was the voice of man, which the poet calls "the still, sad music of humanity, nor harsh nor grating."

He remembered that phrase, and he laughed loudly and bitterly. Maisie turned on the driver's seat and glanced sharply back at him in wonder. It was the first time she had met his eyes that morning, and when he looked boldly back at her, she flashed her gaze away to a spotted dog trying to jump a high front fence to come and bark at them.

They reached the hotel, where they put up.

Philip carried Jolly into the building and he was shown by the fat proprietor where to take the injured man up the stairs. Old Delmar followed, and said abruptly to the owner: "You send the sheriff word, will you? I got my boy in town, and we want the sheriff to take charge of him. He's got a charge against Jolly, you know!"

By the time the sheriff came, Maisie and Philip made Jolly comfortable in bed, piled pillows around him, lighted his cigarette. He had a hand on one arm of each of them.

"Lemme have a chance to look you over," he said. "You rest my mind, to look at you. I don't give a darn about anything else. Except dad. You look like you was made of gold and set off with about a million diamonds. You,

Maisie—you always was a trump. But Phil, here, that was willin' to die—oh, I know that it wasn't for me! I know that it was for you, Maisie! Why d'you blush so much? Look, Phil, she's all red and embarrassed!"

Philip looked, coldly and curiously. He thought that Maisie was a thousand times more beautiful than she ever had been before, but he took a perverse pleasure in keeping his glance cold and level and direct. He was filled with an enormous power. Nothing could daunt or disturb him. He could take his heart out of his own breast and hold it in his hand. He could smile or laugh while he hung in flames!

Certainly no one ever should know that this girl had hurt him.

The sheriff came in. He wanted to have the room to himself, Mr. Delmar, and Jolly, while they examined the wounds and talked about how they had been received. Therefore, Maisie and Philip went outside. She started to hurry away, but he called her back.

"I want to say a few things to you," said Philip. "You're embarrassed about me, of course. Jolly and your father, and even Doc Rivers, seem to think that we're—er—practically engaged. Shall I tell them that we're not?"

"I don't know," said the girl.

She stepped back until she leaned against the wall, with her hands flat against it on either side. She was pale and wide of eye.

"I wish you wouldn't act that way," said Philip bitterly. "I know you're not afraid of me. Why do you act that way, Maisie?"

"I don't know," said the girl.

He grew hot with anger. After all, she had seen that she could twist him around her finger, and this affectation of simplicity and muteness was a sham that made him rage.

"It won't do," said Philip. "I'm not so simple as this, Maisie. You understand that I don't want to bother you.

Just tell me what you want me to do to make things easier for you, and I'll do it."

"Yes," said Maisie.

"But," said Philip, "please let's be open and frank with one another from now on. That's all that I'll ask of you."

To this she said nothing. She had not altered her position. She looked as if she expected him to strike her, and Philip turned on his heel and walked away, angrier than ever.

He went out on the veranda of the hotel and stood with the sun beating against his face. It helped him to confront its burning brightness, for pain kills pain, and the sun for all its power could not reach to the bitter coldness of his heart.

He wanted to despise Maisie for her wife, her cunning, her clever acting of a part; but, instead, he knew that he loved her more than ever. He despised himself, therefore.

Some one lurched from the hotel door with laughter and banged against Philip's back. He had to catch the nearest pillar of the porch to keep from being pitched into the street on his face. He turned and found a huge, red-faced cow-puncher who had been indulging in some horseplay with a pair of companions.

"Don't stand in front of the door, kid, if you want to keep out of trouble," said the big man roughly.

The eye of Philip grew small with a wicked joy. He took the big man by the elbow and the shoulder, flung him across his hip, and sent him spinning to the roadway where he landed flat on his back and the dust spurted out on either side of him like water. He lay still for a moment, then pitched to his feet with a roar and a gun in his hand.

Philip watched him calmly.

"Put up that gun," said he, "or I'll kill you."

The cow-puncher stopped a roar in its midst.

"My stars!" he murmured, and dropped the gun back into its holster.

Then he disappeared around the corner of the hotel.

Philip, turning, saw that half a dozen had looked on at this byplay. They regarded him now with strained attention, but though they looked at him, not one of them dared to look into his eyes.

He noted that, and he felt contempt for their weakness. As he approached the door, they split away silently on either side and he walked slowly through and back up the stairs; behind him he heard a hushed voice say: "Well, that's that!"

He hardly knew what was meant by the speaker; he certainly did not care.

In the upper hall, he was met by old Delmar, who drew him into Jolly's room, saying: "The sheriff's boiling! He says that he'll run the Purchass gang out of the mountains now. He says that this here outrage is enough to get the people together. And—he says that there'll never even be a trial for the shooting of young Purchass. Phil, we're out of the woods! We're out of the woods! The sheriff is going to give us an escort of ten men to get up to the mine and locate it proper! And the game is in our hands!"

Philip found the sheriff in the act of rising from his chair. He came to Philip and shook hands. He, at least, was strong enough to look one in the eye.

"I've met you before," said the sheriff. "I remember. I thought you'd given Dorman a hand. I was wrong. And now, young feller, I've been hearing a lot of amazin' things about you. And I want to tell you a couple of things from my point of view: You keep your ears in and your guns in your clothes and you're gunna be a fine citi-

zen. But if you start runnin' away with yourself, you'll hang before you're much older. I guess that's all. Mind you, I'm your friend, as long as you'll let me be your friend!"

After this rather odd speech, he left the room abruptly, only pausing in the doorway to say:

"I suppose you feel safe enough here, so long as you got the kid with you?"

"Safer than if I had an army around me," said Jolly happily. "You been pretty square with me to-day, sheriff. I'm never gunna forget it!"

"All right," said the sheriff. "You pay me back by keepin' your strong man under his hat."

And he disappeared.

"He didn't seem to like me," said Philip.

"Don't you be scared," said Jolly, reassuringly.

"I'm not," answered Philip.

"But you've been through the mill," said Jolly, "and it's made you like milled steel—a little mite hard, partner. You foller me?"

Philip did not, but he settled down in a chair beside the window and looked across the woods and the rolling of the dark hills toward the heights of Pillar Mountain in the distance. He felt as though twenty years lay between him and his life there.

Jolly began to speak again.

"I'll explain about the sheriff," he said. "Of course, the colonel has been the biggest man in the range for years. Everybody's been afraid of him. And when the sheriff heard that you'd mastered the colonel, it sort of scared him. Made him afraid that you'd start in where the colonel had left off. That's why he talked kind of mean to you. But he don't mean no harm."

Philip made no answer. He was beginning to wonder if the sheriff's suspicion might not be correct.

CHAPTER XLI.

A MESSAGE FOR PHILIP.

THINGS moved fast during the rest of that day. Reports came in that the Purchass gang had fled from their house; then came word that they intended a covert attack on Jolly and Philip in the town itself.

In the meantime, the sheriff had taken matters into his hands. Philip was left with Jolly. The sheriff, with Doc Rivers, old Delmar, and a posse of no fewer than fifteen picked men, rode out to the Purchass house, and found it completely deserted except for two youngsters taking care of the horses which remained in the stables. Then the party rode on to locate the vein which Jolly had discovered. It was found, measured, staked by old Delmar, and he and the sheriff returned to the town alone. Every other member of the posse remained on the spot to prospect for other outcroppings of that monstrosly rich ore.

Even Doc Rivers, quite out of his head with excitement, disregarding the promise of old Delmar that because of his aid in the rescue of Jolly he should have a substantial share in the mine, refused to return. When the sheriff came back to the town that evening, the report of the find went out in all directions; and, before morning, half the men of the community had packed their kits and rushed off in a state of wild excitement for the mine.

The town was mad with gold fever. Every event had been exciting recently. The Purchasses finally had been driven to the bush because of the outrages they had practiced upon Jolly Delmar. And the great colonel himself had been met, matched, and beaten by an unknown youth who, a little later, had picked up a strong man and thrown him from the veranda of the hotel as another would shy an orange into the street. Such things, together with news of gold,

were enough to bring the town up to fever point.

And, twenty-four hours later, the flood returned from the hills with the news that the Jolly Delmar outcrop was the only vein which had been discovered. Old Delmar himself now was on the ground with a force of trained miners, breaking rock. But the rest of the townsmen returned.

They returned, but not to settle down. They were keyed up to a high pitch, as the sheriff very quickly discovered, for three gun fights and an infinite number of promises of more encounters disturbed the citizens. Women began to keep their children indoors, and no man ventured on the streets unless with loaded guns. The sheriff in vain tried to bring every one back to his senses. He interviewed leading men. He organized a standing force of deputies. But still the air was filled with an electric promise of danger. Some great event was expected, and it was to Philip that the particular promise of it came.

He had become a great man overnight. The tale of his adventures had gone abroad from the lips of Doc Rivers. Doc never had had the name of being an enthusiastic friend, but his worship of Philip amounted to idolatry. From his mouth came the story in detail of the crushing of the two Chisholms, and the break through the Purchass lines to get to the Delmar house. From him came, above all, the account of the expedition against the Purchass house. Of part, Rivers was an eyewitness; part he had heard from Philip; part came from Jolly Delmar, and that the most wonderful part of all. There were plenty of temptations for Doc Rivers to talk. Men were willing to set up drinks for the whole house so long as Rivers would narrate the great adventures. Whatever he said was believed, and when whisky colored his vocabulary a little, still he was believed. Above all, men wanted to know again and again how

Philip had carried Jolly Delmar from the Purchass place; and again, they listened hushed and keen of eye when they heard of that struggle with the gigantic colonel. Not one of them but knew that enormous and powerful man, few of them but had seen some exhibition of his strength, but at last the impossible had happened, and he had been matched and overthrown!

A small bit of evidence they accepted willingly as proof of a great thing. The doubters were reminded how Philip had tossed a strong man from the hotel veranda into the street. Indeed, that story was repeated by the victim himself. He was "Chuck" Harmon, a puncher out of work, and the disgrace of his fall ceased to have a sting when he learned that his conqueror was a sort of mysterious hero, and that drinks would be provided when he told about his overthrow. So he told it many times over. He improved on his first versions. He became no more than a feather in the enormous grasp of Philip, in his final form of the story.

And so the whole excited town accepted Philip of fact and Philip of fable at one and the same time; and the boy found himself converted in spite of himself into a legend.

He did not like it. He did not like the way men lowered their voices when he came near. He did not like the manner in which they made way for him. He was troubled by the silences that went before his face and the whispers that stirred behind his back.

People did not smile at him. They merely stared. Only the children were gay and made free of him and his presence whenever he dared to put foot in the street. He no sooner appeared than a shouting procession formed before and behind and around him. They caught at his hands; they tugged at his coat; they shouted at and cheered him.

The town had found a hero, but a hero a little too terrible to take to their

hearts. Every one watched him in the expectation of some immense event.

He himself tried to stop the talk and the excitement. He called on the sheriff and took him to one side.

"I'm very sorry," said Philip, "that people seem to be talking about me."

"Sure you are," said the ironical sheriff.

"I want to tell you—and you can tell others—that the fight with the colonel was *not* easy."

He opened his shirt and showed his throat, bruised brown and black where that terrible grip had fallen.

"I'm bruised all over," confessed Philip. "Every breath is still painful! Just tell them that I'm like everybody else. I'm not a giant!"

"Thanks," said the sheriff, "but I think I'll let them use their eyes for themselves!"

And he nodded wisely.

Philip went back to the hotel more nervous than ever, and more irritated as the children swooped down upon him in a drove. But on the way great news came to him, with Doc Rivers bearing it, and a crowd around him to witness the truth of the tale. It was, simply, that Doc Rivers had been in Grogan's saloon relating the adventures of Philip to an admiring crowd, when the two Chisholms boldly walked into the place and stood one on each side of Doc. It was Bert who spoke, his back to the bar, and his hands on his hips, so that he could keep every one under due surveillance while he talked.

He bore a message from the colonel that the latter had learned of certain false stories now being circulated in town to the effect that he had been fairly beaten by Philip. He branded all such tales as lies. To prove his point, a week from that date he would ride in person into the town and there encounter Philip before the eyes of men, whoever cared to stay and watch.

He would come between the noon

hour and one o'clock, so that his arrival would not keep any man from his work.

Having delivered this message, the Chisholms lingered for one drink—Bert drinking while Archie watched the crowd, and Archie drinking while Bert kept guard. Then they backed along the bar to the rear door, leaped through it, and were gone at once, unpursued. In fact, there was no specific charge against them, except the general charges against all the Purchass clan and their agents. No one cared to play the hand of justice in this case, and the pair went off scot-free.

So Philip received his message and went on to the hotel with Rivers to discuss the meaning of it. Rivers loudly declared that it was sheer bluff. If the colonel intended to right himself and recover his lost ground, he surely would have come straight in, without sending a message before his arrival.

There was something else to talk of when they reached the hotel. For the first mule-loads of ore had been carried into town and assayed. They turned out less rich than had been expected. Also, the vein was discovered to be pinching out rapidly; but, even so, a large fortune was assured from it. Old Delmar had come in with the mules; and that night there was high festivity through all the hotel. There was only one spot of gloom, and that was the face of Philip himself.

CHAPTER XLII.

HEAVEN FORBIDS.

WE live according to a definite scale of values. The old scale for Philip had been composed there on the heights of Pillar Mountain, looking down on a world represented, so far as men were concerned, by the starry twinkling of distant lights. He had come down out of a dream which possessed him so thoroughly that he refused to see the facts until Maisie had awakened him. And,

since that awakening, no other set of values was given to him.

He dwelt now in a sort of limbo, unsure of himself, unsure of everything around him. He was haunted by a constant yearning for the girl, and he suffered from the constant denial of her. She had seemed to him at first a bright and beautiful angel, somewhat given to slang. She seemed to him now a beautiful spirit of evil, treacherous, and dangerous, and filled with all sorts of wiles.

The day after the arrival of the news of the colonel's threat, Jolly Delmar tried to open a difficult subject.

"Look here, Phil," said he, "I want to talk to you a minute about Maisie. It seems that you and her have sort of fallen out, and from what I can gather——"

"Why should you and I talk about it?" interrupted Philip. "Maisie and I are both happy."

"Are you happy?" asked Jolly.

"Of course," lied Philip.

"Then let it go," said Jolly, and closed his eyes, with a frown of trouble.

In the meantime, Maisie avoided Philip sedulously. Twice, passing him in the hall, she had lowered her head and gone by swiftly, silently. There was a sort of slinking guilt in her manner, he told himself. So he made himself hold his head high, and smiled upon her with bland indifference.

But time hung heavily on the hands of Philip. He would above all things have preferred to leave the town simply because Maisie was in it. He wanted to flee to a great distance, in the hope that perhaps intervening leagues would make her memory less sweet. He wanted to commit himself to some new course of action, but he could not think to what he could turn himself. In the meantime, a mortal hardness was growing in his heart. The awe, the reverence, the fear which attended all his goings and comings meant little or nothing. Even

at the danger of the colonel's coming he shrugged his shoulders.

Sometimes, in the mornings, he would walk out to the edge of the town and use his guns on any convenient targets. Otherwise, he gave no heed to the famous colonel. For, after all, he had met and beaten the colonel once with his bare hands, and he had no fear as to what would happen when they were armed. In some manner, he felt that the first encounter had established not so much a physical as a spiritual superiority over the colonel, and he was perfectly willing to wait for the appointed day.

Indeed, it was the one touch of actual interest in his life at that moment.

He was sitting alone in his room in the hotel, with the colonel's coming a day and a half away, when he heard Loafer begin to howl and bark in the street. Then the sound passed on into the hotel and up the stairs until it stopped with a mighty clamoring at his door.

He opened it, and Loafer leaped in on him.

"This gent says he's a friend of yours," said the proprietor.

He stepped back, and Philip saw before him the gray head and the bright eyes of Oliver Aytoun.

It was a mighty shock to him. In the turmoil of these last few days, he almost had forgotten the man of the mountain. Now he drew Uncle Oliver into the room, placed him in a chair by the window, and brought a lamp and set it on the little table near by him, so that he could see Aytoun's face.

"Have you had supper?" he asked.

"No," said Oliver Aytoun.

"Come with me and I'll get you something to eat."

"I've walked down here to talk to you, Philip," said Aytoun. "I'm not thinking of food."

"Has something happened to you?"

"No, not to me; to you!"

"I don't know what you mean!" said Philip.

"You've grown up, in these few days since you left me."

"Has it been only a few days?"

"A handful."

Philip was silent, thinking back.

"It hasn't been long—in time," he admitted.

Loafer was going joyously from one of them to the other, as though he wished to draw them still closer together, and Aytoun smiled on the dog.

"Philip," the old man said suddenly. "You're not happy."

"I?"

"Tell me."

"No, I'm not happy."

"And it's because of the colonel?"

"How do you know about him?" asked Philip curiously.

"All the mountains are ringing with the news that you are to fight the colonel here the day after to-morrow."

"Even Pillar Mountain?"

"I went down to take some wolf pelts and skins. They told me at the trading store. I decided that I'd better come here."

"It's nothing," answered Philip. "I've already met him once."

"Never with guns, I believe?"

"Never, but it will be the same thing."

"You're not afraid."

"No."

"Nevertheless," said Aytoun, "you must not meet him."

Philip waited.

"Will you tell me why?" he asked, when there was no immediate continuation of the talk.

Oliver Aytoun paused to fill his pipe, packing it carefully and solidly, just as Philip always remembered him doing. And that small act, for some unknown reason, brought tears to Philip's eyes.

He waited while the pipe was lighted and until the smoke was drifting upward in a thin mist.

"I've been trying to think of ways

out," said Oliver Aytoun. "I would go to the colonel, but I don't know where to find him. And I've had to come to you."

"Yes," said Philip.

"I've come to ask you not to meet the colonel, Philip."

Philip was silent, astonished. He did not need to ask for a reason, for almost immediately Aytoun added: "Because he's a friend of mine. Is that enough?"

Philip tried to speak. He hardly had thought that there was a thing in the world which could excite him; but now he had found reason enough. It fairly stopped his heart!

"Uncle Oliver!" he cried out.

"Yes, my boy."

"Do you know what it means?"

"Will you tell me, Philip?"

"It would mean sneaking away. After I've told every one that I'm not afraid of the colonel. And I want to tell you about him——"

He paused.

"Go on."

"No, because I haven't many good things to say—and he's your friend."

"Do you think he's a bad man?"

"Do I think? He—he's a man, Uncle Oliver, who hires himself out to the highest bidder."

"He's not a coward, Philip?"

"No, he's not that."

"Does he keep his word?"

"Apparently he does."

"Is he cruel?"

"No, he wouldn't let them torture Jolly Delmar. I suppose you know about that?"

"I know about nothing, except that you're not to meet the colonel."

Philip was silent.

"Will you promise me, boy?"

"No," said Philip, "I'm sorry that I can't promise."

Oliver Aytoun got up from his chair; his face was ghostly behind the thin veil of smoke. Still he kept his voice wonderfully quiet.

"I think I have a right to ask a good deal from you, Philip."

"Heaven knows you have!" cried Philip suddenly. "Ten lives, if I had that many. You have a right to ask anything—except my honor, Uncle Oliver!"

"So—so—so" murmured Aytoun in a voice that was hardly more than a whisper. "I should have guessed that it would be on that plane."

He added aloud: "Then I shall have to pay an enormous price, Philip, to keep you from this meeting?"

"You pay a price, Uncle Oliver?"

"I shall have to pay the price. Hush! Did I hear something under the window?"

He leaned out and looked down.

"There's a veranda there, Philip," he said.

"It opens from the room of a girl who never would listen to voices in my room," answered Philip. "She wouldn't care what was said up here. But you said that you would have to pay the price?"

"The price of your affection and your faith," said the old man. "I am going to show you that I have been a scoundrel, Philip. I go back to the old story of how the rider brought you to my house. You remember that, of course?"

"I remember, of course."

"I told you that he never came back. That was not true. Five years later he returned. He wanted you. At that moment you were playing high up on the hillside with a tame rabbit. I told him that you were no longer with me. I told him that you were dead. It seemed a hard blow to him. I watched his face, and if he had heard your voice coming back toward the shack, I told myself that I would kill him, Philip, and never let you know what had happened. I wanted you for myself! Have you ever heard of a worse thing done by any man?"

Philip was silent.

"And always I was afraid to come down into the world, because you might be taken away from me. But at last I've had to let you go, and now I have to tell you everything. Because heaven itself would cry out if you met the colonel, Philip. He is your father."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SUN SHINES THROUGH.

PICTURES began to flash across the mind of Philip, almost blinding him. He saw the street of the town thronged with watchers in the white, hot hour of noon; he even saw the heat waves rising from the roofs, and the whirlpools of dust racing here and there like little tornadoes; and he saw a huge man on a huge horse, with a cape flung back over his shoulders, coming slowly down that street, a rifle balanced across the pommel of his saddle.

He saw that same form dashing through the woods of the mountainside and reaching the shack with a child in his arms. He saw the same huge form stretched in the invalid's chair, facing the sun. He saw it stagger back into the shadow of a tree, stunned and beaten.

At last he said: "I should have guessed. I could not have got such strength in my hands from any other man."

He had no answer to this, and looking around him he saw that he was alone. Loafer was lying across his feet. Even the wisps of the pipe smoke had floated away out the window, though the fragrance of the tobacco was still in the room.

At that, he ran hastily down the stairs and inquired on the veranda, but the oddly dressed old stranger had not gone out that way.

Philip turned back in despair. Aytoun, of course, had taken his long silence as a heartless condemnation. So

he had slipped away, and now he was working quietly back toward the lonely shack on Pillar Mountain.

Well, what did the world and its opinion matter, compared with one moment of pain in such a soul as that of Oliver Aytoun?

He went straight back through the hotel to the stable, saddled the mustang which had been given for his use by old Delmar, and swung onto the back of the horse. He would have liked to say farewell to Rivers and Delmar, but their faces would have been hard to confront. No, it was much better to go off quickly, like this, without a word. Let them think their own thoughts about him!

Only one thing was of importance. When Uncle Oliver reached his shack the next morning, he must find smoke curling from the chimney to welcome him home. After that—well, let time take care of itself!

Philip found a rear way from the hotel corral behind the stable, and then turned across the open fields. He had to cross two stretches of stubble before he gained the trail among the pines, and as he turned onto it, he heard a horse whinny behind him, but he paid no attention to that noise.

It was very late. A cold wind made him aware that he had come out without a coat or a slicker. The clouds blew across the stars. Rain fell in sheets, icy cold, and drenched him to the skin, but he was aware of his misery only now and again. Then the blanket of his wretched thoughts closed over him again and the flesh was forgotten.

The moon went up, at last, unseen after the first streaks of ghostly light in the east, but yielding a faint glow even behind the clouds. He could see them, mountain-high, driven before the wind, sometimes with their edges turned to translucent pearl by the moon behind, but more often obscure outlines, guessed at rather than seen. The wind

was out in high force. He heard it crashing through the woods, or screaming far off, then leaping suddenly upon him and deafening him with its whistling. He heard the groaning of the boughs against one another; and twice, at least, a frightful crash as some giant was toppled and fell crushing and crushed.

But Philip rode on, keeping the horse grimly to the trail, which now was more easily visible as the moon stood at the height, and made the runlets of rain water gleam like dull silver. For still the rain came down intermittently, now crashing on his face and stinging his body even through his shirt, and now a tender mist.

Through such a mist, at last, he saw the form of a rider in the trail before him, and as he came nearer, he called out. He had a faint hope that it might be Uncle Oliver, but Aytoun on one of his mules was not likely to have covered so much ground as this. No, he was back in the forest, struggling slowly along.

He called more loudly. The rain fell in a dark torrent. It cleared again, and the wild wind in the heavens tore the clouds apart.

His horse stopped of its own volition and touched the nose of the one which was in its way, and Philip found himself looking down on the wet face of Maisie Delmar.

"You!" cried Philip huskily. "What are you doing here? What made you follow me?"

"I found your slicker," said Maisie. "I had an idea maybe you'd want it, a night like this."

She held it out to him; he let it fall into the mud. And then the wind hurled the clouds together in such dense masses that little light came down to the gloomy world and what there was, was further dimmed by a blinding downpour of rain. When the thunder of it eased a little, Philip could hear the hissing of the run-

lets as they shot down the face of the trail, scouring the ground away.

He brought his horse a little nearer, and reaching out, his hand found the cold, wet surface of a rubber slicker.

"What made you follow me?" he repeated.

"I don't know," said Maisie. "I sort of needed the air, I guess."

"Maisie, Maisie, are you going to make a joke of me still? Am I always a fool, in your eyes?"

"A fool?" said Maisie. "I'd never let a fool break my heart!" And she added, with a sudden tremor of her voice: "And you've broken mine to bits, Phil."

He drew still closer. The steam of her panting horse came up to him.

He drew still closer. The fragrance of the girl was in his face.

"You were on that veranda!" he said huskily.

"I was," said Maisie.

Then she added: "I'm not a fine, clean-minded, honorable person like you, Phil. I'm just a hard-headed girl that doesn't miss a trick if she can help it. I listened under your window. I heard every word that was said, I think. Poor old man!"

"Ah, yes," said Philip. "Poor Uncle Oliver!"

"And you?" said Maisie. "What about you?"

"I?"

"You wouldn't waste any pity on yourself, I guess."

"I'm a grown man, and a young man," said Philip. "It doesn't matter about me."

"I'll cry for you, then," said Maisie. "I can't help crying. You baby!"

"Maisie," he said, finding her arm and pressing it. "I wish you'd stop crying."

"I would if I could," said Maisie. "I don't want to."

"It makes me dizzy and a little ill," said Philip. "I—I never knew that you

cried—except when there was something to gain by it.”

“And there’s nothing to gain now, I guess,” said Maisie through her sobs.

“Ah, no,” answered he. “I’m a disgraced and ruined man. I’ll never dare to look the world in the face again. I’ve brought shame to my few friends. But what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” said Maisie. “What will you do?”

“I’m going on to Pillar Mountain.”

“I’m going on to Pillar Mountain, too,” said Maisie.

“There’s only a shack there. It’s quicker and easier for you to turn back.”

“Phil!” cried the girl in a suddenly changed and terrible voice.

“Yes, Maisie,” he answered, shocked and abashed.

“Phil, come closer to me!”

He drew still closer. Her hands caught his and shook them savagely.

“Phil, d’you hear me?”

“Yes, yes! Are you ill, Maisie?”

“Ill? I’m dyin’! Phil, don’t you see that I’m wild in love with you? Won’t you tell me if you care the least mite? If you don’t love me, I’ll come along anyway and cook for you and the poor old man, if you’ll let me.”

There are thunderbolts of joy as well as of sorrow. Philip sat transfixed.

“Are you going to tell me that I’m only play-acting now?” cried Maisie. “Will you speak one word to me, Phil? Will you just say ‘yes’ or ‘no’?”

“Hush!” said Philip.

He took her within one strong arm, gently, and the kind moon broke through enough to let him see her face.

THERE was no rain, there was no wind for them, there was no darkness. The golden beauty of autumn, and the green, sweet face of spring crowded about them all that night, and a sun of joy smoothed the path before them. They laughed, while the thunder beat, and they waited for the lightning flashes, to see each other with eyes filled with love.

So the sun rose and found them. The wind, changing, brushed the sky clear above them, and they went winding slowly up the side of Pillar Mountain.

“Will you tell me something?” said Philip.

“There’s nothing left to tell,” said Maisie.

“Ah, but there is.”

“Well, then?”

“I want to know when you really first thought you cared a bit for me, Maisie.”

“I’m ashamed, Phil.”

“I want to know.”

“Well, it was when you held me up and talked to me as if I were a man, and told me that you saw through me. I began to love you then. It went through me—sort of like a shock, Phil.”

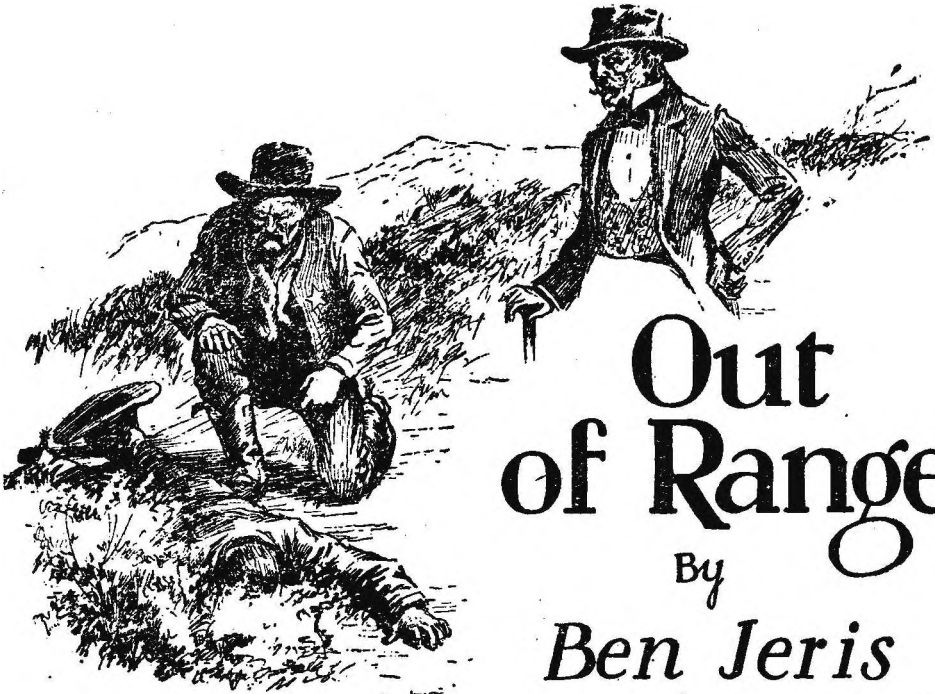
He laughed, and then they laughed joyously together at one another, at the world, at the tall, proud trees, at the glorious sun which hung in the sky, at the flashing creek—

“Look!” cried Philip. “He’s beaten us after all!”

For they had come in view of the shack, and smoke curled slowly from its chimney and blew away, snatched by the wind.

THE END.





Out of Range

By
Ben Jeris

Author of "Sugarfoot Shoots," etc.



HERE ain't no if's an' and's about it. Abe Shreve has fired at me twice. I've sworn out a warrant. It's up to you, as sheriff of Washington

County, to arrest Abe Shreve."

Jason Peverly's thin lips pressed whitely about his snaglike teeth, and his skinny body shook with ill-suppressed rage. He had not intended to let his anger get the better of him, but there was something about the very calmness of the mild-eyed old sheriff that invariably furnished fuel for his quick temper. It was particularly foolish to act up now, because Judge Raidy was present; but it was done, and, after all, what did it matter? Raidy's presence might turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Abe Shreve and Sheriff Bob Martinson were old friends. Sheriff Bob might have refused to arrest Shreve even in face of the warrant. He wouldn't dare to refuse now though,

with Judge Raidy sitting there, a witness to the formal issuing of the warrant.

An ugly grin twisted across Jason Peverly's hawklike face as he realized that the honest old sheriff, harassed by the unpleasant task which was being forced upon him, was still striving to find an answer to the problem which would obviate the necessity of his being called upon to arrest his friend, Abe Shreve.

Sheriff Bob finally cleared his throat noisily.

"But—but—Abe—ain't—like that, Peverly. Wouldn't hurt a fly, Abe wouldn't."

Jason Peverly shrugged and sneered. "When he was younger, Abe Shreve was noted as a gunman. I've heard you say so yourself, any number of times."

"Waal, Abe is right accrit with a six-gun, if that's whut you mean. Even now, he ain't so poor that he'd hev to

shoot twice at anythin' he was real anxious to hit."

"You mean to say I lie? That—he didn't shoot at me?"

Peverly was on his feet now, his angular body shaking from head to foot. So great was his rage that he failed to see Sheriff Bob's eye which pointed toward Judge Raidy, slowly close and open, nor did he detect the answering smile that drifted briefly across the judge's red face.

"There, there, now. Don't go for to get all het up," the old sheriff admonished, as though he were addressing a petulant child. "I'll trot along up into your neck of the woods in a day or so, and kind of look things over."

But Jason Peverly, his quick anger thoroughly aroused, was not readily placated. "Look things over! Look things over, nothin'. You'll arrest Abe Shreve like that warrant tells you to do. And in a day or two won't do. He has fired at me twice already, like I said. Maybe, next time, he'll get me. I'm scared to cross his land. My life is in danger. That's your job, to protect the citizens of Washington. I've come to you for protection, and I need it now—not to-morrow, nor the next day, nor next week."

Sheriff Bob Martinson's leathery face continued to register unruffled serenity. "Don't you fret none," he said calmly; "from now on, you'll be as safe as though you were—ah—locked up down here in my jail. I'm givin' you my word that Abe Shreve won't take no more pot shots at you. And like I say, I'll get on the job, pronto; probably about day after to-morrow. You're needin' me to-morrow, ain't you, judge?"

Judge Raidy nodded ponderously. "Yes, you'll have to testify before the court in that rustler case," he said.

Jason Peverly blew his nose violently. He sensed, somehow, that the judge was playing the sheriff's game. If this were

so, it would not be good policy to push matters too far. Although his plans seemed, to his crafty mind, to be fool-proof, there was always a chance that something might go wrong. If something should slip up, somewhere, it would surely do Jason Peverly no good to have Judge Raidy prejudiced against him.

Without trusting himself to speak again, Peverly finally stamped away, clambered aboard his bony old horse and started for his ranch at the base of the Korssack Hills.

After Peverly had gone, the sheriff and Judge Raidy sat in complete silence on opposite sides of the sheriff's little desk, for several long minutes. Judge Raidy had come to know and respect Sheriff Bob Martinson's leisurely but undoubtedly efficacious methods. There were many questions still resting in channels of doubt in the judge's mind, but he knew better than to put these questions into words. The sheriff would explain things in his own way at the proper time. Judge Raidy was a broad-minded man. The study of human nature was to him an all-absorbing avocation. Outside of the fact that he counted Sheriff Bob Martinson one of his best friends, he looked upon the old sheriff as an interesting specimen of the human bloodhound.

In a general way, Judge Raidy understood something of the curious feud between Abe Shreve and Jason Peverly. Ostensibly a ranchman, Peverly was, in reality, a money lender, hard handed and shrewd in his dealings, his business methods oftentimes so unscrupulous that they bordered on the unlawful.

Peverly was much in evidence in Chester City; he was forever involved in lawsuits or court proceedings of some sort. The judge, in common with Sheriff Bob Martinson, and in fact, the majority of Chester City's variegated population, cordially disliked the man.

Abe Shreve was Jason Peverly's al-

most complete antithesis—a quiet, unassuming little old man. During the five years that he had been county judge, Raidy could not recall having seen Abe Shreve more than once or twice. He recalled, rather vividly, however, that Shreve was a little old man with bushy white hair and white whiskers, and remarkably keen blue eyes.

That Shreve was an amazingly competent individual with a rifle or a six-gun was merely hearsay as far as Judge Raidy was concerned. In the old days, it seemed the little man had achieved a considerable reputation as a gunman, always on the side of law and order, however. Certain it was that now Abe Shreve was a good citizen, quiet, unobtrusive, and to all intents and purposes just the sort of a man he looked to be—a friendly little old fellow, finding contentment in his old age in hunting and trapping and occasionally panning some gold in the Korssack Hills.

The reason for Peverly's antipathy toward Abe Shreve was not difficult to determine. At various times during the past several years, Peverly had foreclosed on two run-down, mismanaged ranches up in Shreve's territory. Abe Shreve's little farm, which he had secured as a homestead grant from the government twenty years before, ran in the shape of a long-tipped, fertile wedge between these two ranches.

Peverly had tried to buy Shreve out several times, invariably at a ridiculously low figure; and Abe Shreve had as invariably refused to sell. Shreve could not be blamed. Finally assured that he would be unable to secure possession of that coveted strip of land, Peverly had done his unpleasant best to make life miserable for Abe Shreve. Of this, Judge Raidy was well aware. Shreve had submitted meekly enough to his unsavory neighbor's disagreeable tactics. That the little man was reaching the end of his infinite patience, the judge did not doubt.

The sheriff, who was Abe Shreve's lifelong friend, had sought to prepare the judge for something along the lines of Peverly's present complaint.

"Abe Shreve's the most even-tempered little coot I ever seen," the sheriff had often said; "but when he busts loose—dog-gone! Me, I want to be on his side of the fence. One of these days, we'll be totin' that shriveled-up little cockydooodle, Jason Peverly, away in a wooden box."

Immediately thereafter, the sheriff had admitted that the chances were that things would never reach this pass. Still, now to-day, according to Peverly's story at any rate, just this thing had happened.

"Looks as though your little friend had finally broken loose," Judge Raidy eventually suggested, after waiting for longer than usual for the sheriff to translate his measured thoughts into speech. Sheriff Martinson merely grunted.

"You'll have to bring him in like that warrant says," the judge pursued, his dark eyes twinkling. The sheriff made no sign that he had heard.

"Well, what's mulling around in that thick skull of yours, anyhow?" the judge pursued. "I can't sit here all day, but I would like to know what you're thinking about—that is, if you're thinking about anything," he finished with a grin.

Sheriff Bob Martinson smiled then. "Waal, I dunno, judge, that's the truth of the matter," he said. "I dunno—danged if I do—what it's all about. But I intend finding out."

Following which pointless comment the old sheriff came leisurely to his feet. Judge Raidy came to his feet, too.

"Continued in the next issue, is that it, Bob?" he queried.

The sheriff nodded abstractedly. "Yeah, suthin' like that," he said.

Two days later, Judge Raidy, re-

lieved of his court duties for the next few days, got into his hunting togs, and, with rifle on shoulder, started off toward the hills on pleasure bent. Slightly inclined to overweight, the judge had planned to make the ten-mile trip to the Korssack Hills on foot, partially because he needed the exercise, and partially because a horse would be of little use in the ragged foothills of Korssack Mountain. As he came out upon the wide porch of his house, he met the sheriff coming up the walk. Martinson carried a small pack on his back and was also armed with a rifle—a very unusual rifle.

"Goin' huntin'?" the old law officer greeted.

The judge nodded.

"How about taggin' along with me?"

"Man hunting?"

"Waal, maybe so. Can't rightly tell. I'd sure enjoy havin' you along, that is——"

That there was something behind the sheriff's invitation which did not appear on the surface, Judge Raidy was sure, and, although his plans called for a real vacation remote from all business matters, he readily agreed to accompany Martinson.

"It's that Peverly business," the sheriff explained, as they strode on through the crisp autumn morning toward the Korssack Hills. "I telephoned Peverly and told him I'd be out to-day."

For upward of an hour, the two men plodded on in silence.

"Got yourself a new rifle, I see," the judge finally said.

This simple statement seemed, unaccountably, to embarrass the old law officer. He acknowledged the fact somewhat reluctantly, Raidy thought.

"Yeah, it's a new one right enough," he finally admitted. "Only one other like it in this neck of the woods. It's a humdinger too; regular dog-gone elephant gun. It don't take such a big slug, but it sure has got the range.

Tried it out some this morning early, and it's got five hundred yards on my Mauser, easy. Telescopic sight, you'll notice, too."

Judge Raidy did not ask any more questions. Being somewhat of an expert on firearms, he did wonder, however, why the sheriff had gone to the trouble and expense of purchasing such a rifle. More detailed inspection convinced the judge that the rifle was not new. "Probably picked it up second-hand," he thought, following which conclusion he let the matter drop.

From the first, the sheriff had led the way, which circumstance indicated clearly to Raidy that there was some definite objective to this particular hunting trip. The judge had gone hunting with Sheriff Bob Martinson before, always, however, for mountain lion or deer or bear. Always before, the sheriff had permitted the judge—who was a skilled hunter and familiar with the ways of the hunted—to dictate the manner of their going. It was noticeably different to-day, however.

Although there seemed no particular reason for so doing, the sheriff turned aside from the rutted roadway half a mile from the Peverly place, crossing the Peverly land within a few hundred yards of the tumble-down ranch house itself. He avoided Abe Shreve's little log cabin, nestling cozily atop a wooded ridge. There was no sign that Shreve's cabin was occupied. Although considerably surprised that they had not at least called on Shreve, the judge followed the sheriff on up into the hills without question, secure in the belief that the old law officer's actions, incomprehensible as they might seem, were dictated by purposeful common sense.

It was midday when they came upon a little cabin tucked away beside a small stream some distance back in the hills. A gray-faced elderly woman greeted them at the cabin door.

"This is Mrs. MacLaren, judge,"

the sheriff said. "Judge Raidy, Mrs. MacLaren."

Even as he acknowledged the introduction, Judge Raidy realized that the woman had been crying.

"Steve was restin' comfortable when I come away, Mrs. MacLaren," the sheriff said. "Two doctors on the job. They found the bullet, and, if Steve only behaves hisself and does what they tell him to do, he'll pull through O. K."

The woman's tired eyes brightened. "And have you got him yet, that—that—"

"No, ma'am, I ain't. But I will get him. Don't you fret none!"

The woman's thin hands tightened into bony fists. "I hope he swings—the sneaking, yellow coyote," she said. "Shot Steve in the back, he did. Steve didn't have a chance."

"Yes, I know. He'll get hisn. Don't you doubt it, Mrs. MacLaren."

The mystified judge, bursting with questions, followed the sheriff on up into the hills. "What happened, Bob?" he finally queried.

"Steve MacLaren was shot yesterday morning at about eleven o'clock, by Abe Shreve."

"Shreve?" The judge could scarcely believe his ears.

"Yep. The identification was conclusive, as you might say. There ain't no mistakin' Abe, you know. Him with his white hair and long, white whiskers. Cole Farnum, MacLaren's partner, and Mrs. MacLaren, both identified Abe. And, too, the bullet that got MacLaren was from Abe's gun, or at least one like it. MacLaren and Abe were always the best of friends. Can't understand it. Of course, there is some evidence in Abe's favor." A half smile twitched across the sheriff's whiskered face. "But more about that anon, as the writer fellers say. Right now, our job is to locate the feller what shot Steve MacLaren. Suthin' seems to tell me he ain't far away."

Less than half an hour later as the two hunters rounded a sharp bend in the mountain trail, a rifle bullet crashed into the rocky wall directly above their heads, spraying them with powdered stone dust. With a quick motion, the sheriff interposed his body between the judge and the distant marksman, for distant the rifleman undoubtedly was. The report of the gun firing that shot had sounded faintly, an amazingly long time after the bullet itself had crashed into the wall above their heads.

The judge, unwilling to take advantage of protection at the expense of the sheriff, protested somewhat angrily and pushed Martinson aside. The old sheriff was palpably disturbed. "Wasn't lookin' for nothin' like that, judge," he explained apologetically. "Didn't aim for to run into no danger. You crawl in behind them rocks and keep out of sight. This here is my job."

"Don't be silly, Bob," the judge protested. "You invited me to go along, and now, when we uncover the game, you try to sidetrack me. Nothing doing! I go right along with you. Where did that shot— There he is, Bob! See him?"

A stooped figure, bending low, scurried across an open space along the mountainside across the valley.

"But no, that can't be the fellow, Bob. No rifle made can carry that far."

Sheriff Martinson nodded vigorously. "That's him right enough," he said, "and there is rifles that can carry that far."

"And it's Shreve?" the judge muttered excitedly. "Sure as you're born, Bob, it's Shreve."

That hurrying figure was a little man with snow-white hair and a long, white beard—Abe Shreve.

Much to the judge's surprise, Shreve did not attempt to seek shelter in the spruce thicket, toward which he had been running. Instead, he stopped in the middle of the open space up there

on the rock-littered hillside, and crouching in plain sight, brought the rifle to his shoulder, and, after sighting carefully, fired. Convinced that they were out of range, Judge Raidy would have somewhat contemptuously stood his ground. He was surprised when the sheriff caught him by an arm and yanked him bodily behind an uprearing boulder. The judge's surprise gave way to a startled shiver as the bullet thudded into the wall less than a foot from his head.

"My gosh," he muttered, "that certainly is some rifle, Bob."

Sheriff Martinson did not reply. He was kneeling behind the jagged boulder. Rifle couched in a crevice of the rock, he was taking careful aim at Abe Shreve. Judge Raidy's confused thoughts groped for understanding. Even if the sheriff's gun could carry that distance, it hardly seemed possible that Martinson would shoot at his best friend, Abe Shreve. Assuming that Shreve had broken forth upon a rampage of killing, due initially perhaps to Peverly's hectoring, it hardly seemed that Martinson would shoot Shreve until every other means of apprehending the little man had been given a thorough trial.

But shooting he undoubtedly was, slowly, deliberately—once, twice, thrice. The judge's staring eyes saw a puff of dust appear on the face of the flat rock behind Shreve. The white-haired little man jumped to his feet. Sheriff Bob Martinson fired again. An undoubtedly human cry answered that shot. The long-barreled rifle dropped from Abe Shreve's hands.

The little man clutched at his breast with both hands. He fell, rolled over and over down the steep slope, his body finally coming to rest, sprawled at a grotesque angle, at the bottom of the slope. Sheriff Bob Martinson grunted.

"You—you—hit him!"

Judge Raidy could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses. Two

incomprehensible things troubled him, those rifles, two of them—the one used by Shreve and the one used by the sheriff! Never would the judge have believed, had he not seen it with his own eyes, that any rifle could have delivered a bullet with killing effect for such a distance.

Both guns were undoubtedly capable of just that, however. He had seen the evidence with his own eyes. Even with this point settled, however, what had persuaded the sheriff to shoot Shreve when a little careful stalking—for which the sheriff was famous—might have permitted capturing the little man alive? It was a well-known boast of the sheriff's that he always brought his man in—alive.

Judge Raidy found no opportunity to give voice to his many questions, however. With unusual haste for such a leisurely moving individual as the sheriff usually was, the old law officer started down the slope and across the valley at a sharp run. Breathing hard, Judge Raidy followed.

Three quarters of an hour later, after much scrambling effort, they started up the rocky slope toward the spot where Abe Shreve's still body lay stretched upon the ground.

The sheriff was bending over the fallen man when the perspiring judge arrived. The injured man was breathing hard. A splotch of red showed on his right side. The reddened fingers of one clawlike hand clutched at the wound.

As Judge Raidy stared down into that peaceful face with its innocent covering of patriarchal white whiskers, the injured man's eyelids fluttered. Then those lids fluttered open. For some reason unknown to himself at the moment, Judge Raidy was fascinated by those eyes. Even as he sought for an answer to his puzzlement, Sheriff Bob Martinson stooped quickly, caught the injured man's flowing white beard firmly, and yanked sharply.

To Raidy's speechless surprise, the white whiskers came away bodily in the sheriff's grip, and the judge looked down into the thin, pain-twisted face of—Jason Peverly. Next, the sheriff removed the battered felt hat and pulled aside the voluminous wig which had served to transform Peverly's bald poll into a most accurate duplication of Abe Shreve's snow-white head.

"He'll live," the sheriff repeated positively; "bullet only grazed him; he's just dazed from the fall."

Judge Raidy's judicial mind craved enlightenment. "You knew you would find this, of course. Still, how could you be sure that you were not shooting at the real Abe Shreve?"

Sheriff Bob Martinson's eyes twinkled. "Waal, you see, judge, it was like this: I knew, of course, that Peverly was out after Abe's scalp, so, the same day Peverly swore out that warrant, I sent out word to Abe to come in and rest peaceablelike in jail. Scared the little rooster might get hurt. Abe, he done just that; he's been in jail since yesterday morning at exactly six o'clock."

"Steve MacLaren was shot some time

just before noon yesterday," the judge interpolated.

"That's right," the sheriff agreed.

"Evidently Peverly did that?"

"Right again."

A smile spread slowly over Judge Raidy's red face. "That's what you might call an air-tight alibi, Bob," he said.

Sheriff Bob Martinson modestly agreed. "And you're probably wondering, too, about these here fancy guns," he said. "Waal, this one I got belongs to Abe. He brought it in with him, and I borrowed it after he told me that Peverly had got hisself a gun just like it. Lucky I brought it along! Peverly never suspected I had Abe's gun; he camped in plain sight up here on the hill, feelin' plumb sartin as how he was beyond the range of our guns, at the same time we bein' well within the range of hisn."

Judge Raidy nodded understandingly. "And you sort of wanted me along as a witness after the fact?"

"That's right. Sorta figured things would turn out kind of trickylike, and they sure did."



HOW DOTH THE BUSY BEE:

WILD bees have, for a year or more, been annoying women students in one of the dormitories at the University of North Dakota, and there has been none who could give a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon.

Now, however, it is recalled that two years ago caretakers at the dormitory noticed a number of bees flying in and out of a small hole in the brick wall of the structure. Attempts were made to get rid of them, but their innermost nests could not be reached. Nothing was thought about the incident until recently, when the walls of one of the rooms of the dormitory became stained. Refinishing did no good, since the stain immediately reappeared over a larger area than before. Eventually the walls became moist, so a more thorough examination was made.

When the plaster came off, it was discovered that there were pounds and pounds of honey in every little niche between the walls, lath, and studding. A little of it had grown musty with age, but the greater part had been well preserved. In the improvised hive were, also, discovered many bees, inactive on account of winter.

A WESTERN TRAIL

By Cristel Hastings

PURPLE mountains lift their shoulders
And white rivers murmur by;
Burnished golds of sun and hills meet
All along a sunset sky;
And I know a trail that's windin'
Where the manzanita grows—
And it's there my heart's a-flyin'
Like the salty wind that blows.

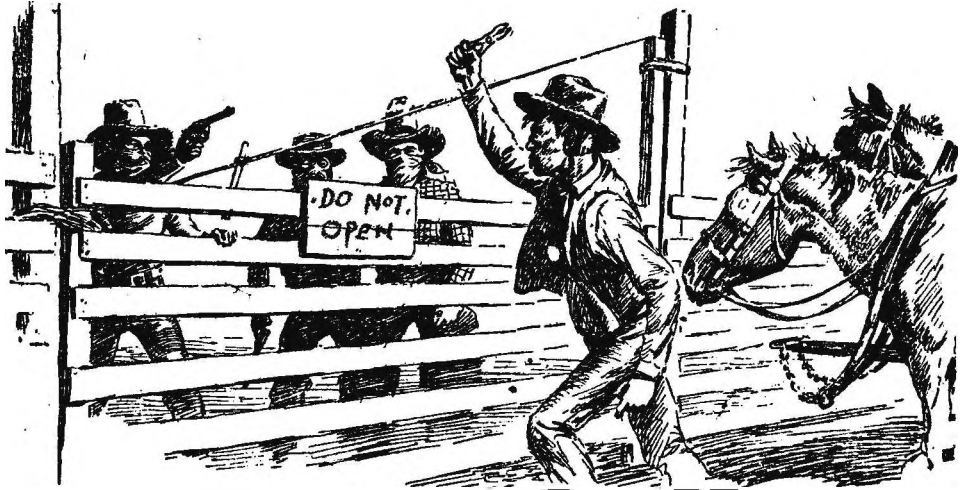
Trails that God made in His wisdom
Wind around my homesick heart,
And my eyes get sort o' misty,
And the stingin' teardrops start,
For I see the rollin' ranges
And my pinto browsin' nigh—
Seems I see a phantom pine tree
And a river singin' by.

Seems I see the hazy mountains,
Dusky trees and shinin' streams,
And my eyes—oh!—how they're achin'
For the things that seem like dreams.
I can hear the tumblin' waters
And a lone coyote's cry,
And the silence there is music
That will hold me till I die.

I can feel the little breezes
That go flyin' fast downhill,
Little winds that pull my heartstrings—
Little winds that break my will.
And I know I must go ridin'
Out along some moonlit ridge,
With my pinto as my pardner
And a foot-log for a bridge—

Where the eager rivers hurry
Down the western slopes to sea,
And the wavin' grass makes music
That is Heaven's own melody.
So I'm off with pack and pinto
And I'm leavin' all the rest,
For I'm sort o' numb with longin'
For a trail that's headin' West.





Buckaroo Ballots

by S. Omar Barker

Author of "The Mountains Were His Brothers," etc.



WHAT I called you boys up here for," announced Old Dunk Corkle, coming out of the ranch house where he had been in conference with Jake Grinstead, his foreman, "is this: If these bean-hoein' nesters gits enough votes on their side to carry this here bond issue for a consolidated schoolhouse, the taxes it'll put on my ranch is goin' to be so high that I won't have money left to pay wages to cowboys. Me an' Jake has counted up who's who on both sides an' how they'll vote at election next Tuesday. It'll be close. With the whole dad-burned eight of yuh votin' agin' the bonds we'll outcount 'em. But if yuh vote with the nesters, we lose; an' in that case I'm warnin' yuh now that they'll be eight cowhands an' a foreman without no more of a job on the DK Ranch than they is hair on a rutabaga turnip! Is that plain enough?"

Old Dunk looked as stern as his tomato-shaped face would permit and

waited for a response. Presently he got it.

Jack Corben arose from his boot heels until he stood as straight as a fir tree.

"Plenty plain, Mister Corkle," he said gravely. "You're givin' us orders to vote against the school bonds or get fired. Well, I never got no schoolin' myself, but I don't aim to help hinder even a bean-grower's kid from havin' his chance, an' when I vote, I vote like I please! I reckon maybe you'd better jest hand me my time now!"

"Don't ack like yuh'd et loco, Jack!" spoke up grizzled old Micah Griffin, oldest of the DK cowboys. "Time yuh git as weathered as me yuh'll learn it don't pay to allus be doggin' other folks' hawgs outa their own cawn patch. If these here bean wrastlers wants a new school let *them* worry 'bout how to git it, not you! Yuh go throwin' up the only job in miles jest to vote more taxes onto the ranch that pays yore wages so's a lotta little sniffle noses kin throw spitballs in a fine school-house 'stid o' the ol' plank one! Dunk

ain't orderin' nobody how to vote. He's jest remindin' yuh how the land lays with him. Better quit rarin', Jack, an' stay put!"

Some of the others nodded agreement, some remained doubtfully silent. It was inbred in them to look with disfavor on all homesteaders, and though some were friendly with the bean farmers of the Mesitas district, they felt little obligation to mix in their struggle for a new schoolhouse, either one way or the other.

The DK boys were bachelors all. Old Dunk never hired any other kind. He was an exacting boss, but he knew cows, and he paid good wages.

The younger punchers—big, bearlike "Red" Winick; black-haired "Shanky" Smith; small-eared, chunky "Whitey" Taylor—somehow felt little inclination to quit the DK Ranch. It was just about three weeks since old Dunk's niece, blue-eyed and refreshing as clear sky in May, had come for a prolonged visit. And Sibyl Corkle's smiles were like lariat loops that had caught and anchored them upon the DK range.

"To heck with the squatters anyhow!" snorted Whitey. "If Jack wants to mother 'em let him! I ain't the kind of a guy that'll buck agin' the ranch I work for, Dunk! An' I reckon the boys is with me!"

"Now you're talkin'!" approved Foreman Jake, his short-nosed, square face broken by a white line of small, grinning teeth.

"Thanks, boys!" said the boss. "That'll be all this mornin'!"

Seven of them clumped away toward the saddle sheds and corrals. Jack Corben waited alone in silence. The foreman was figuring on a scrap of paper. Presently he gave it to Corkle; and the boss pulled out a deep wallet, took out some bills, and handed them to the waiting cowboy.

"That pays yuh up, Corben," he said. "Yuh kin pull out any time yuh want.

If yuh change yer mind, come back an' we'll talk it over!"

As Jack put out his hand for the money, a bay pony whisked around the corner of the house, and a girl whose hair glinted like a golden sunrise got down from the saddle and came up the steps. She had a ready smile for the three men. When she saw the money, and the sober, embarrassed look on the puncher's face, she looked questioningly first at him, then at the foreman, then at her uncle. As the cowboy, with a stammered, "Good morning," turned down the steps, her smile vanished for an instant and something like whimsical disappointment seemed to take its place on her rosily tanned face. She watched him a second as if about to speak, then turned, smiling again, to the other two men.

"Oh, Uncle Dunk!" she exclaimed. "I'll bet you can't guess what good news I've got for you!"

Her uncle didn't try, but Sibyl was bubbling over with enthusiasm.

"It's the school!" she cried. "I've been over talking to Mr. Haralson—you know, chairman of the school board—and he promised me they'd hire me for one of their teachers—principal, maybe—when the new building is done next fall! Isn't that wonderful?"

But her uncle's roundish face showed little enthusiasm.

"Suppose," he suggested, with a wink at Jake, "jest suppose, they shouldn't turn out to be no new schoolhouse? Don't git yer heart too set on anything that far ahead, Sibby!"

"You teachin' them sniffin' beanhoers, Miss Sibyl!" exclaimed the foreman. "It'd be too much a case of beauty an' the little beasts! You'd ought to——"

Without waiting for him to finish. Sibyl gave Old Dunk's cheek a pat and ran on into the house.

"Jake," said the boss when she had gone. "they ain't no use lettin' on to

Sibby that they ain't goin' to be no new school! Leave her make plans an' kick up her heels all she wants. She ain't only a kid noway!"

With a nod of agreement, the foreman clumped off toward the corrals. Dunk Corkle turned again into the house. Always kept clean and orderly by Hing Wah Lee, it had recently, since the arrival of his brother's daughter, taken on a number of feminine frills to boot—frills that Old Dunk's confirmed bachelor eyes failed even to notice consciously.

Sibyl Corkle came out to her horse again in a few minutes and mounted. Out by the corrals she overtook young Corben riding his own iron-gray, mustang pony, a sizable bed roll tied on behind the saddle, and a full saddlebag bumping at his knee in front. Sibyl had met all the cowboys when she first came and had ridden out with various ones since. She had not been blind to the admiration for her in their eyes, and already tall Shanky Smith had frankly become her suitor. She liked most of them, but Jack Corben alone had given her moments of uneasily fluttering eyelids when he looked at her, grave-faced, and with a peculiar directness in the glance of his hazel eyes. He looked at her so now, smiled the faintest of smiles, and put out his hand.

"Good-by, Miss Corkle," he said, "an' good luck!"

"Why—why, you're not leaving? I saw uncle paying you off and I wondered. What's happened?"

"Cowboys come an' cowboys go, Miss Corkle," he answered, "an' this is just a case of one goin'."

"But what for? You're not—fired, are you?"

"No, ma'am, I—I resigned."

Jack Corben, suddenly aware that he had been holding onto the girl's hand all this time, could hear his own heart thumps and feel his face reddening. He released her hand, but his eyes held

hers. He was wishing heartily that she were not Old Dunk's niece; that he could be free to tell her why he was leaving; that, looking into her eyes, he no longer wanted to leave the DK Ranch at all.

"Oh! Then maybe you'll reconsider it? Why don't you? I—Uncle Dunk would like you to stay, I know. You—you don't realize how much he needs you—your services here on the ranch!"

The cowboy smiled ruefully.

"What I realize, Miss Sibyl," he said, "is not how much he needs me, but how little he *wants* me! I do hate to go—now—but—I reckon I can't very well reconsider!"

Before she could answer, he put spurs to his horse, said good-by almost brusquely, and went loping off down the road, leaving the girl wondering, not only about his going, but also at her own feelings.

At dinner she asked her uncle why Jack Corben had left the ranch, but she got no answer more than a kindly, grumbling suggestion that she go on and have a good time without worrying her pretty head about ranch business she didn't savvy. Sibyl had intended to talk to him about her plans to stay out West and teach in the new school, but his way of treating her as if she were a mere baby both irritated and silenced her.

It was when she rode over the next day to see the Haralson youngsters that she learned why Corben had left the DK.

"You're Mr. Corkle's niece, Miss Sibyl," said Mrs. Haralson doubtfully, "and I s'pose I hadn't ought to say nothin' to you about it, but seems like you've been so interested in our gettin' the new schoolhouse that you're kinder—I dunno—one of us. I s'pose you know your uncle is going to make all his cowboys vote against the bonds. Mr. Jack was the only one that wouldn't agree to it. He jest quit. What with

them nine votes added to the folks that's already against it, we ain't got a chance to carry it. An' that means no schoolhouse fitten for wintertime. Seems like I did want so bad for my babies to git started off right toward a good schoolin'! Maybe you could talk to your uncle."

The big, work-hardened woman, her face kindly and motherly for all its sun-reddened harshness, had tears in her eyes as she talked.

Sibyl rode home that afternoon with her heart torn between conflicting feelings, not the least of which was anger at her uncle. She hunted him up at once.

"Uncle Dunk," she said, "is it true that you are fighting the bond issue for a new schoolhouse?"

He answered her half angrily.

"Well, if I am, what of it? It's my land that'll have to put up most of the taxes to pay 'em off! I can't afford to educate all their little sniffle noses for these squatters, can I?"

"But, Uncle Dunk," she insisted, "I've got the figures from Mr. Haralson, and the tax on your place will be so small you'll never notice it! And these poor children *do* need the schoolhouse—desperately!"

Corkle grunted and went on with the saddle skirt he was mending. But Sibyl had her dander up.

"That's why Jack Corben left—because you ordered your men to vote against the bonds, and he quit rather than do it—wasn't it?"

"Now, listen here, young lady," said Corkle sternly, "I don't want to be cross with yuh, but if yuh're goin' to stay at my house yuh'll have to keep yer nose outa my business! All this here foolishness about them pore bean-raisers' kids! They went an' had the brats, didn't they? I didn't! Then let 'em pervide fancy schools fer 'em, too, if they hanker fer sech hifalutin' nonsense! I won't! An' if yuh're set on

pesterin' the life outa me about it, I reckon maybe yuh'd better pack up! I never was no hand fer women messin' into my business!"

Quick tears came in the girl's eyes, but with them a light of quiet determination.

"Very well, Uncle Dunk! I'm sorry to hurt your feelings—but—but I think I'd better pack up now and go."

"Jest as yuh like! Micah'll drive yuh to the railroad to-morrow!"

The ranchman got his horse from a stable, saddled, and rode away toward the gathering pastures northward.

There was a heavy ache in Sibyl Corkle's heart as she packed her grips, but she had no thought of giving in. She did not even stay to say good-by. She commandeered one of the men from windmill repair work at the blacksmith shop and had him load her things in the car and drive her to the Haralson place across the mesa. She left this brief note for Corkle:

It isn't because I don't love you, Uncle Dunk, but because I believe you are wronging both yourself and your neighbors. I'm going to stay with Mrs. Haralson and help her fight for a school for her children. Please—please change your mind about it, uncle, and let me come back!

Dunk Corkle read the note and stuck it into his pocket without comment. Neither did he send any word to his niece; and the next morning, with the bond election only four days off, he reminded his punchers what he expected of them. They received his reminder in silence.

That same day Sibyl saw Jack Corben again. He had not left the Mesitas country, but was camped with one of the small ranchmen who favored the bond issue. He came to Haralson's, supposedly to report to Eric Haralson that he had been doing some talking among the ranchmen and farmers of the district and had won over at least three more votes for the school.

"It ain't none of my business, really," he told the big Danish farmer, "but I'm a-makin' it mine jest because it kinder gits under my skin to think of all these here kids growin' up ignorant like I done."

It was as he was leaving, disappointed at not having seen her, that he met Sibyl riding in from the direction of the DK pastures. He thought he had never seen so queenly a figure in his life, as she came loping down the trail. His heart pounded as she came up to him, her cheeks rosy with the wind and sun, and her eyes alight with something like victory. She had a smile for him and a ready hand to shake his.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked at once. "I think it's—it's wonderful of you—to sacrifice your job and everything this way to help these poor people get their school!"

The cowboy found himself wordless, though a score of words like "wonderful," "eyes like the sky," "hair like a mesa sunrise," "you," tumbled through his mind. He had become a champion of the new school in the first place largely as a matter of fair play and principle. Now it seemed suddenly like the crusade of a knight for a princess—only he somehow saw himself more as an awkward clown than a knight, and he doubted if there had ever really been, even among the regal daughters of kings, such a glorious princess as Sibyl Corkle.

"We're going to win the election," she said. "I've been talking to two of uncle's cowboys and I've persuaded them—Mr. Smith and Old Micah Griffin—so they'll vote on our side. Tomorrow I'm going to try to see the big red-haired one, too."

She laughed gaily.

"Such a bargain! I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself, but I'm not!" She tossed her head spiritedly, then smiled a bit sorrowfully. "Poor Uncle Dunk! If he hadn't always hated

women and children so, he wouldn't be in for it like he is!"

At the DK Ranch house Old Dunk Corkle sat alone nursing his rheumatism and storming at Hing Wah Lee, unwilling to acknowledge, even to himself, just how much he was missing the golden-haired girl who had come to his lone bachelor establishment about a month before. Nor had he any idea of relenting in his determination to defeat the new school bonds at the coming election. But when Shanky Smith and old Micah came to him the next morning with the news that they had decided to quit and vote in favor of the school, he told them to vote as they darned pleased but to stay on at work anyway.

Then he called in Foreman Jake Grinstead, Whitey Taylor, and a silent puncher named Wurzel who was said to have been a man-killer up north, and had a conference; after which something of his old assurance returned.

Eric Haralson and a dozen other small ranchers and farmers at the south edge of the Mesitas awoke the morning of election day to find their north line fences cut and DK cattle by the score scattered about their fields.

Men who had planned to load up their families in buckboards and wagons the first thing that morning and drive the five miles northeastward to the polling place at Mesita post office on the Adams ranch, now saddled horses instead—some of them only work nags—and galloped to their fields to drive out the crop-destroying cattle.

Few of these men, if any, had ever been cowboys, and their job was not an easy one. The cows were stubborn. There was a new flavor to the green weeds and young grain that they were loath to leave for the mere grass of their range. The morning hours passed by as the farmers worked, hot and

angry. They thought they knew well enough who was responsible for this trespass, but they had no time to waste either in accusation or in battle. They must get the stock out of the fields and the fences patched early enough to get to the polls and vote.

If Jack Corben had been there, their work might have gone faster, but he had gone to Adams' the night before so as to be on hand all day at the voting place and make sure that Corkle's and other ranchers' men should make no trouble there.

Sibyl Corkle, her face rose-red with anger and exertion, rode at first with Haralson after the cattle in his fields, and then, at the farmer's suggestion, galloped off to the Adams ranch to tell young Corben what had happened and get his advice. She had another reason for going, too. Red Winick, Shanky Smith, and Old Micah Griffin had promised her to vote "yes" on the bond issue—on certain whimsical conditions—and she wanted to get there as soon as they did and make sure of those three votes at least.

It was getting past noon when she arrived. Quickly, she found Corben and told him about the cut fences and the DK cattle. He told her that her uncle and his men had already been there and gone. They had all voted, he said, except Shanky Smith and Old Micah.

"Red Winick too?" she asked.

"Yes," answered the cowboy-electioneer. "I talked to him. Told him you were counting on him to vote with us, but Corkle seemed to have the whip hand over him some way and marched him in. *Maybe* he voted our way anyhow, but I doubt it. Your uncle looked to me kinder down—kinder ashamed—but he sent Jake and the boys off to hunt up Smith and Griffin. Seems they'd slipped off some way."

Sibyl and the young cowboy had withdrawn to a big cottonwood by a

spring some fifty yards from the store building where the voting was going on, so as not to be overheard. Now, almost as Jack spoke their names, Shanky Smith and Old Micah appeared from behind another tree a few feet away. Smith looked nervous and anxious, but Old Micah was snickering and blushing like an embarrassed kid.

"We feared ye wasn't comin', Miss Sibyl!" he sniggered. "Me an' Shanky has been waitin' to vote till—till——"

"Oh!" cried the girl. "So you didn't go back on me! Good old cowboys! You keep your promise and I'll keep mine! Go on up now and vote. Word of honor it'll be 'yes'!"

The two punchers, Micah frisking and poking Shanky Smith in the ribs as they went, left and ambled up toward the buildings. Jack Corben watched the girl's eyes looking after them with puzzlement and something like dismay in his own mild brown ones. Her promise? What did she mean by "yes"? Their vote, or—something else? Now he remembered more keenly than ever the evenings when Shanky Smith had sat on the porch with Sibyl or ridden out with her to watch the moon rise.

There was a rueful little smile on the girl's face as she turned back to look up at him. Anxious seriousness replaced it at once.

"Quick, Jack!" she exclaimed, putting a hand on his arm. "I'll stay here! You ride back to help them get the cattle out and the fences fixed. They're so awkward at it—even good old Haralson! It's already after noon and they must get through and get here to vote!"

Jack took the girl's soft hand and held it for a moment tightly. Her eyes dropped as he looked down at her. The cowboy's ears roared with the pounding of his heart. For a second he stood thus, hesitating. And then, with a quick, "I'll be back," he turned and went rapidly to his horse at the hitching rack beyond the house.

On the trail a few minutes later he reined up to look back, his eyes somehow wanting a last look at the slim girl down by the cottonwood. What he saw plunged darkness upon his dreams like a sudden cloud that shuts out starlight. He saw the lean neck of Shanky Smith encircled suddenly, impetuously, by the arms of Sibyl Corkle, as he came down from the house, Old Micah just behind him, to the shadows of the big cottonwood.

It was but a half-second flash, but Jack Corben wanted to look no longer. He whirled around, stuck his spurs with unaccustomed sharpness into his mustang's ribs, and the pony carried him at a gallop out of sight.

Haralson and his companions, hot and swearing, finally got the last cow out of their fields, fastened up the last section of down fence, ate hasty, late lunches, and set about hitching up their buckboards and wagons to take themselves and their families to Mesitas to vote. Two of them stayed to guard the fences until two others should come back.

Their road led around a jog in the DK fence for half a mile, then turned northeastward to the top of a little mesa, whence it slanted down a sharp, cliffy draw through a wire gate onto the DK Ranch which the road traversed. Haralson, driving the lead buckboard of the little caravan, had jumped down to open the gate before he saw the new sign on it:

THIS ROAD CLOSED. DO NOT
TRESPASS.
DO NOT OPEN THIS GATE.

The gate had a chain and padlock on it. Haralson's pliers were still in his pocket from the fence work of that morning. He hesitated but a second and then stepped up and cut the top wire.

With the snap of the wire there came also the boom of a six-shooter. A bullet

spurred dust at Haralson's feet. Three masked men, extravagantly ragged and obviously disguised, yet cowboylike in their walk, stepped out into the road. There were pistols in their hands. One of them, whose forehead showed square-cut and heavy above his red bandanna mask, spoke up in a husky, disguised voice.

"This here road's dang'rous, gentlemen!" he announced. "We ain't lettin' nobody through since noon! Back up them rigs an' go roun'—or else home! An' no back talk, savvy? Our powder's dry!"

Big Haralson, already harassed almost to the breaking point, made a great grunting noise of rage and with his pliers snapped another wire in two.

"I go through! Dunk Corkle and all of ye be darned!" he shouted, waving the pliers above his head.

But the next instant a bullet sent them whirling from his grasp to the dust of the road. His arm, tingling from the shock, stayed high in the air and his other hand joined it. Then suddenly from one of the buckboards, came the sharp crack of a .22 rifle. Some one of the farmers had brought it along to shoot rabbits on the way. One of the masked men flinched and cringed and all three stepped quickly back to the shelter of the jutting ledge whence they had first emerged. For a moment they spurted bullets here and there among the wagons. Frightened woman screamed. Men cursed. Children who had come along for the ride flattened themselves down trembling out of sight in the wagon beds.

These were peaceable folks and they did not realize, in the commotion, that the men who blocked their way were shooting to miss and frighten and not to kill. What they did realize, however, was that their chances now of getting to Mesitas to vote for their much-wanted school building had dwindled to nothing. They held council.

"It von't be no legal election!" exclaimed one. "Ve'll land Corkle and all hiss men in jail!"

It was Haralson that decided what to do. They turned their teams back until they were out of sight. Then, leaving the women and children, the men came down the road. Hot blood had driven caution to the winds. There were but two guns in the crowd, yet armed with clubs, stones, buggy whips, they came determinedly on, ready to charge in mass. One man leaped the gate. Another followed. Yet hardly had their feet touched the ground again when a bullet spurted dust before one of them and lead thudded into the foot of the other.

"Stay back, yuh nesters!" called a voice from the rocks. "One more step an' yuh'll git hot lead in a wuss place than a foot!"

The farmers hesitated. Haralson stepped forward. He could see the round nose of a pistol aimed point-blank at him from around the edge of the rock, and beady eyes behind it. The big farmer leaped suddenly to one side, turned, and hurled a rock almost like a cannon ball at the pointing gun muzzle. The hidden gunman fired and missed.

Then, like the swoop of a hawk out of nowhere, a rider swept up the road from beyond the hidden gunmen. The reins were loose on his pony's neck and faint gun smoke and fire spatted from a gun in his hand as he came.

"It's Corben!" shouted Haralson. Then, as the hidden men—in plain sight to the approaching horseman—turned to meet his fire, the big farmer and his companions leaped upon them.

Jack Corben's horse went down, but he sprang free of the fall and came on. As Haralson and the others came to grips with the masked men—four of them now—the cowboy ceased shooting and leaped into the midst of the fight. A gun muzzle prodded at his

midriff, but the hammer clicked on an empty shell. Young Corben's hand winged out and yanked down the bandanna mask from the man's face. It was the face of Jake Grinstead, Corkle's foreman.

"By grab, Jake!" cried Corben. "I thought you were more of a man than to ambush a bunch of harmless farmers an' women! You durned polecat!"

He pinned the struggling foreman's arms to his side. One man broke loose and scurried out of sight over the ridge. In another five minutes two masked gunmen were unmasked prisoners, one of them bleeding from flesh wounds, the other groggy from Jack Corben's fist punches in his face. One was Jake Grinstead, the other Whitey Taylor. The third, besides the unidentified man who had escaped, was the silent, morose Northerner who had gone by the name of Wurzel. He was dead.

The whole encounter had taken time, and now long shadows of late afternoon were slanting down across the buttes and mesitas. Jack looked at his watch. His startled voice rang out.

"Quick, Haralson! All you folks!" he shouted. "The polls close in another hour! Load up an' le's go!"

They came careening up the crooked road to the Mesitas post office like a hurricane on wheels. They piled out and crowded to the door of the room where the voting booth was. The election judges and clerks had put in one busy period for a few minutes early that morning when Corkle and his anti-school people had crowded in shortly after the polls opened. Now, almost at time for closing, they had a busier one.

An hour later, when they had counted the votes, there was no longer any doubt that there was going to be a fine new schoolhouse for the "bean-hoein' youngsters" of the Mesitas district. The bond issue had carried by half a dozen votes.

But not even their jubilation over

victory had calmed the anger of all of them against their cattleman neighbor.

"It was Corkle's doing—the cut fences, the holdup—all of it! We're going to go to the DK Ranch and give him his medicine!"

The sudden arrival of Dunk Corkle himself, haggard-faced, unarmed, coming into their midst with his hands up, saved them the trouble.

"Men," he said, breathing hard and huskily, "I've been stubborn an' I've been low-down, but I know when I'm whipped! I ordered the fence cuttin' an' the gate padlocked, but I want yuh all to know I never authorized no shooting of any kind in this here business! An' it ain't yer winnin' of the election that's licked me, nor neither am I skeered out! It's mostly the way I been missin' the girl an' realizin' she was fightin' fer what she figgered was right as agin' me an' my stinginess! I tell yuh I been through misery these last few days an' it's showed me a heap o' things about right an' wrong I never realized before!"

"Aw, corn-shucks!" interrupted one of the farmers. "You wait till you know you're licked an' then come around blattin' for mercy! I say to heck with——"

Jack Corben placed a quick hand over the man's mouth.

"Shut up an' give him a chance!" he ordered, and after a moment's silence Old Dunk Corkle went on.

He pulled a big, well-filled wallet out of his pocket.

"I want to make things right, men. Here's five thousand toward makin' the new school a good un! An' any damage as has been done I pay for! I'm done bein' enemies with my neighbors an' my kin! Where's"—his voice wavered—"where's Sibyl?"

Big Haralson stepped forward and put out his hand.

"We're takin' ve at yer word, Corkle," he said, "an' as for me, by-

gonos will be bygones! As for Miss Sibyl—if it hadn't 've been for her—her an' Jack Corben—I don't know what we'd 've done! We'll forgit what all's past, Corkle, on one condition: that you don't make no kick on Miss Sibyl's bein' principal of the new school! She's slated for that job!"

They found Sibyl busy dressing the wounds of Jake and Whitey and the farmer whose foot had been shot.

She gave one look at her uncle's haggard, pleading face and then threw her arms about his neck.

Incoherently he told her why he had come to Mesitas.

"Poor Old Uncle Dunk!" she cried, and forgave him.

Yet somehow, even now, the new peace in her heart seemed empty and incomplete—all the more so when she went outside again with Old Dunk and found that Jack Corben was gone.

Moving her things the next morning from Haralson's back to the DK Ranch, with Old Micah Griffin at the wheel of the flivver, she met Corben, his bed roll and full saddlebag tied onto the saddle. He rode, instead of his mustang pony, a farmer's nag, and he was heading southward on the out road. She stopped him.

"You—you're not leaving?"

The cowboy gave her a grave, wistful smile.

"Work's done here, I reckon, Miss Sibyl—as I ain't a school-teacher—so—so I'm driftin' on! Good-by an' good luck! I——" He hesitated, looked wistfully away across the little mesas and buttes hazy-bright in the May sun, then put out his hand.

"I—I wish you—you an' Shanky right much happiness, Miss Sibyl!"

He spurred his horse gently as if to go on, but the girl looked up at him uncomprehendingly and did not release his hand.

"Me an' Shanky? I—don't know what you mean, Jack!" she stammered.

His brown eyes looked down into hers, the adoration in them ill-concealed despite his lean smile.

"Why—why, sure!" he replied, forced joviality in his tone. "I reckon I know about it! Y'see, I saw you—kiss him yesterday down by the cottonwood, an'—an' so of course——"

A cackling howl of laughter from Old Micah in the flivver interrupted him, and to the cowboy's amazement Sibyl's face was suddenly wreathed in amused smiles too.

"*That?*" she cried, blushing rosily. "Why, Jack—I thought you knew! That kiss was the price of one vote—Shanky's vote—for the new school-

house! Why—why, I gave Micah *one* of those, too. Didn't I, Mister Micah?"

"I'll whisper an' holler she did!" chuckled the old cowboy. "Best pay I ever drawed fer a vote! An' as fer——"

Embarrassed surprise silenced him. For Jack Corben had slipped suddenly from his horse and taken the blue-eyed, golden-haired niece of Old Dunk Corkle in his arms.

It was the second time in two days that Old Micah had witnessed Miss Sibyl's arms around another man's neck, but this time even he could see that the kiss she gave Jack Corben wasn't just "one of those"!



A PETRIFIED FOREST FOUND IN TEXAS

EVIDENCE that gigantic trees once grew in the Texas Panhandle is found in a petrified forest that has recently been discovered near Amarillo, Texas. The forest, which is ten miles long, extends into the newly discovered Palo Duro canyons. It comprises many stone logs, some of which range in length up to one hundred feet. The Panhandle has, of course, long been known as a treeless area, where small mesquite sprouts and scrub brush fight for a precarious existence. Only trees planted in carefully irrigated land now grow in the arid area.

Those who have visited the old forest believe that this region once enjoyed abundant rainfall and that great forests consequently covered the plains. Then, it is thought, the land sank and the sea rushed in. As the forest lay on the bed of the sea, capillary action drew the mineral salts of the water into the logs until stone replaced the wood.

The further theory is advanced that some subterranean upheaval, probably the one which formed the Rocky Mountains, brought the land back above the level of the sea and with it the remains of the forest. The forest has, of course, been occasionally visited by cowhands, who looked upon the petrified rocks as just so many rocks. It was only recently, however, that geologists came across the stony tree trunks.



Highways Old and New (The Coronado Trail) by Edna Erle Wilson

Author of "Trails of the '49ers," etc.—

STARTING down below the border in old Mexico and making its way up into the southwestern part of the United States winds the historic route of the old Coronado Trail. This highway was first traveled some three hundred and eighty-eight years ago by the Spaniard whose name it bears and owes its origin to this gallant explorer's thirst for gold. Perhaps no lesser passion would have given birth to this early expedition, filled with difficulties and hardships, but when word came to Don Francisco de Coronado that fabulous wealth was to be had in the Seven Cities of Cibola, situated somewhere in the vast unexplored country to the north, he blithely set out on his long and adventurous trek.

It was, in fact, with a fine glow of expectation that the don left Compostela on the 22d day of February, 1540, determined to bring back to New Spain, as Mexico was then called, much precious metal and many spar-

klings gems. Coronado was captain-general of the expedition, his force including about two hundred and fifty Spanish horsemen and seventy-five foot soldiers, the latter armed with harquebuses and crossbows. In addition, there were fully one thousand Indian and negro servants and camp followers, together with a great train of pack mules, oxen, sheep, and swine.

The long caravan that followed at the heels of this early explorer of the West was a brave and glittering sight. As might be expected, however, under the circumstances travel was slow and the end of March approached before the town of Culiacan was reached. In order to make progress safer and quicker the don here reduced his forces considerably. Then, after a month's delay, he again set out on his quest.

The route was overland at some distance from the sea and lay through the Valley of Hearts, over the mountains,

and down the San Pedro River into the region which was nameless then but is now Arizona. Onward past beautiful rivers, through rich valleys, and across broad mesas the intrepid Spaniard pressed until after weary months of travel he reached Hawiku, the first of the seven cities, which historians later identified as one of the Zuni pueblos of New Mexico.

Here a spirited battle took place in which the Indians were routed and in the course of which the don sustained several injuries. The renowned seven cities proved to be nothing more impressive than seven little Indian villages; and although Coronado found there the food of which his exhausted followers were much in need, he did not discover any of the fabulous riches he had expected. He did succeed in making one of the most remarkable marches in the early history of the West, and he was the first man to report truth instead of fiction about the country lying to the north of old Mexico.

To-day many motorists travel along the don's own highway and take delight in the same matchless scenery and natural beauty that the Spanish *conquistadores* enjoyed hundreds of years ago. The United States section of the Coronado Trail of the present follows very closely the actual route taken by the Spaniard and his cavaliers. Starting at Nogales on the international boundary line, it pushes northward, passing on its way to Tombstone the adobe ruins of old Fort Crittenden, an army post established in 1867 to protect early settlers from marauding Apaches.

From Tombstone, famous in the '80s as the wildest and wooliest of all Western mining towns, the highway winds on through Gleeson, Courtland, Pearce, Cochise, Willcox, Safford, and Clifton to Springerville, a distance of three hundred and fifty-four miles. This

southwestern highway connects with all transcontinental motor routes passing through Arizona, and by first-class roads it is reached from every city in Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

It was in 1926 that the last lap of this trail, that part stretching from Clifton to Springerville, was completed at a cost of one million dollars. In honor of this event a celebration was held at Hannagan's Meadows in the heart of the great Apache National Forest, at which time a monument was unveiled and the highway was dedicated and given over to present-day adventurers. This last link in the Coronado Trail makes it possible for motorists to traverse the Blue Range region of the Apache National Forest, a virgin bypath which previously could be negotiated only with pack animals and saddle horses.

It also leads the traveler over beautiful country. Leaving Clifton, which has an elevation of three thousand and four hundred feet, the route winds along the scenic Metcalf Canyon, with its rugged mountain wall and copper mines from which millions of dollars' worth of ore have been taken. Then it climbs upward, picking its picturesque way toward the Apache National Forest, while to the left may be seen the outlines of Coronado Mountain. At length the traveler motors into the forest itself and continues on up to Grey's Peak, which towers heavenward some seventy-five hundred feet. Here the monarchs of the forest grow bigger and more numerous, and the views become more inspiring. Next, one descends to Pine Flat, five thousand feet above sea level, after which the long ascent to Rose Peak, nine thousand feet high, is begun.

It would be a strange traveler indeed who did not feel a thrill of exhilaration as he journeyed up to the peak of the Blue Range, some ninety-five hundred feet above the sea. One

seems veritably on the top of the world when he reaches Hannagan's Meadows, a broad, natural opening of many level acres shut in on all sides by a heavy screen of big trees.

No more appropriate spot could have been chosen for the dedication ceremonies of the Coronado Trail, for the Apache National Forest is as unspoiled as it was in the don's day, when he and his Spanish warriors trekked thence from Culiacan and made camp under the mighty trees. It is one of the world's great mountain tracts, unsurpassed for rugged grandeur. Together with a small neck of the Crook National Forest, it covers approximately eighty-five by twenty-five miles in Arizona and extends over the line into New Mexico. Within its borders is the largest uncut timber area in the United States and one of the last big-game countries left in America. Here one finds such predatory animals as the bear, cougar, and wolf, as well as such protected game as the deer and wild turkey. A herd of elk from the Jackson Hole country in Montana has been transplanted here also and is thriving and multiplying, while the rapidly flowing streams literally teem with mountain trout.

So successful was this first fiesta that it has become an annual event in the Southwest and about the middle of June many automobiles head toward this enchanting spot on the Coronado Trail. The affair is thoroughly Western in character, the program including a barbecue, rodeo, horseback riding

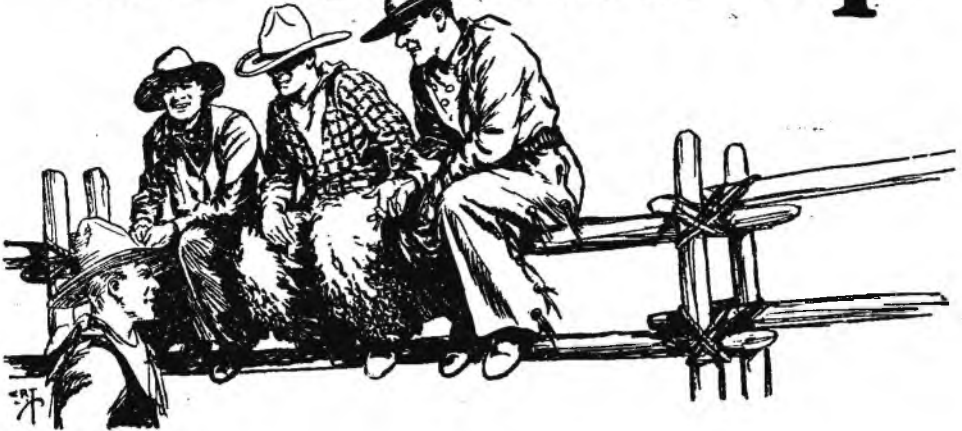
over government trails, fishing, and hunting. Perhaps the high mark of the celebration is reached in the Apache Indian Devil Dance, a rite participated in by one hundred and twenty-five redskins. This dance, which starts at dusk, continued throughout the night until dawn, the weird, barbaric ceremony taking place in the warm glow of bonfires to the monotonous beating of tomtoms. Those motorists who traverse the Coronado Trail at this time will see such a sight as the don and his followers doubtless witnessed on the same highway centuries ago.

The present-day trail of the Spanish *conquistadores* ends at Springerville, but if one desires to trek on to the ruins of old Hawiku he may do so by continuing to St. Johns, thirty miles beyond Springerville, and thence onward for a distance of fifty-nine miles to the pueblo of Zuñi. From here a drive across country in a more or less straight line takes one direct to the ruins of the old Indian village. This settlement, which was abandoned by the Indians after the battle with Coronado, has been excavated within recent years. All that remains to-day, however, is the ground-floor plan and some rock walls which are still standing, the upper stories of adobe having long since disappeared. The Zuñis raise corn in the flats below the village just as they did in Coronado's day, although they do not live close by.

Altogether, the Coronado Trail is one of the most interesting and scenic highways in the historic Southwest.



The Round-Up



EVENIN', folks! How about startin' this off with a song? Good idea, so say all of ye. Right! Then let's let go, with that fine old-timer, "A Home On the Range."

Ready? Let 'er go:

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Where the air is pure, the zephyrs so free,
The breezes so balmy and light,
That I would not exchange my home on the range
For all of the cities so bright.

The red man was pressed from this part of the West,
He's likely no more to return
To the banks of Red River where seldom if ever
Their flickering camp fires burn.

How often at night when the heavens are bright
With the light from the glittering stars,
Have I stood here amazed and asked as I gazed
If their glory exceeds that of ours.

Oh, I love these wild flowers in this dear land of ours,
The curlew I love to hear scream,
And I love the white rocks and the antelope flocks
That graze on the mountaintops green.

Oh, give me a land where the bright diamond sand
Flows leisurely down the stream;
Where the graceful white swan goes gliding along
Like a maid in a heavenly dream.

Then I would not exchange my home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Fine, boys and girls! Fine, men and women! And it sure did tickle us to note how many of you knew the words and the good old tune so well.

It's been some time since any of you have been looking for wild animals. But such requests are sure to crop up; most often in bunches. This time there is just one person who wants an animal.

He is Lawrence Burrows, General Delivery, Newtonville, Ohio. Lawrence will speak for himself:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: In a recent Round-up, one of the folks was telling about wolves and where to write to get them. I would like to get a male wolf pup. Will you please tell me where to write to get one?"

Who's got a wild wolf pup for Lawrence? If any of you happen to have one here to-night with you, don't turn it loose, for you might get some of the ladies excited—and, no doubt, some of the men, too. Jest deliver the wolf pup to Lawrence in a box—a strong box. No gunny sack delivery, please.

Told you that these wild-animal fellers come in clusters and bunches. This one jest wants to talk about 'em, though.

Frank Richardson Pierce rises to tell this interesting and rather touching scene he recently witnessed. Frank Pierce, Folks:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: He was probably seventy years old, but looked around fifty-five or sixty, and he stood on the forward deck with the steerage passengers, eagerly scanning Seattle's sky line. His beard and hair had been recently trimmed, but there was no trimming the tan of many years spent in the North. His eyes, once bold, were blue and kindly; his square jaw bore a scar, and the knuckles of the hands he rested on the ship's rail were scarred from contact with mining, steel, boulders, and fellow men. He was dressed in 'store clothes,' with a black shirt and dark tie.

"When all the passengers had filed down the gangway, he turned to a steward. The man was young, but he could not lift the great pack that lay on deck.

Two others helped, while the old man squirmed into the pack straps. There were furs and some gold, no doubt, as well as his outfit, in the pack. He carried a worn rifle in his hands. His eyes missed no detail as he stepped briskly down the gangway. I turned to watch him swing down the dock. And there, stuck through the topmost lashings of the pack was a late copy of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

"I thought the Boss and the Folks might like to hear of this little incident of Northern life."

Of course this pleases us, and we are sure it pleases you. When we started WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, we first determined upon two things: The magazine was to be *clean*, and it was to be *right*. After that, the best stories of the West that authors could write and money could buy were to be ours. The fact, and it is a fact, that millions of persons read WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE every week, is largely due, we think, to the fact that we succeeded in making the publication *clean* and *right*. We are sure the old miner that Pierce tells about, reads WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, mostly because it's *clean* and *right*. Modesty prevents us from saying as to whether he also finds the best stories, printed anywhere, in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Joseph Holland, 186 Day Street, San Francisco, California, up and speaks of those he likes among the writers, as follows:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I have been a reader of your splendid magazine for a long time, and I thought it was about time I should say something about it. Concerning your authors, I think that they are all up to the dot, especially Max Brand, Johnston McCulley, and George Owen Baxter.

"The stories are all very good, and I

especially enjoy your serials. 'Baby Beef,' by Johnston McCulley, was a humdinger, and 'The Forgotten Hills,' which I have just finished, was another; the same goes for 'The Brass Man.' The 'Shorty' stories, by Ray Humphreys, are dandies.

"Yours for a successful magazine."

Here come some rattles from C. M. Custer, Brandentown, Florida:

BOSS AND FOLKS: In reply to Doctor Welker's statement in a recent issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, I do not know where the rattler came from that Doctor Welker experimented with, but I know that it did not come from Florida.

"The Florida rattler can strike over his length backward, if he is stretched out. When he strikes back, he can strike high. One struck my bird dog last winter at least three feet from the ground. The snake was crawling, and the dog jumped over his tail. He struck the dog as it went over.

"I know seven people that have been bitten by rattlers. Six of them died; one lived. We used potassium permanganate on the one that is livig. Per-

manganate is the only known cure in the South for the bite of the rattler. If you have that with you when you are bitten, you have a chance; if not, you are not long for this world.

"I believe Doctor Welker should make an exception in his book in regard to the Florida rattler. If not, he may cause some one to be killed."

Here is Louis R. Hickmott, Jr., R. F. D. No. 1, Box 78 Tilton, New Hampshire. He's our kind.

"BOSS AND OUTFIT: I'm a tenderfoot or greenhorn of the brightest hue—a farmer, too. I noticed in the Round-up that one of the hands said that no young gent ever wanted to be a broncho snapper. That person had better swallow those words, 'cause here's one. I won't be satisfied until I occupy that position. It always makes me boil over when I hear of a herd of horses being killed. The trouble is that I'm only a kid, and I live in New Hampshire. I never had the pleasure of meeting up with Miss Spanish Bit.

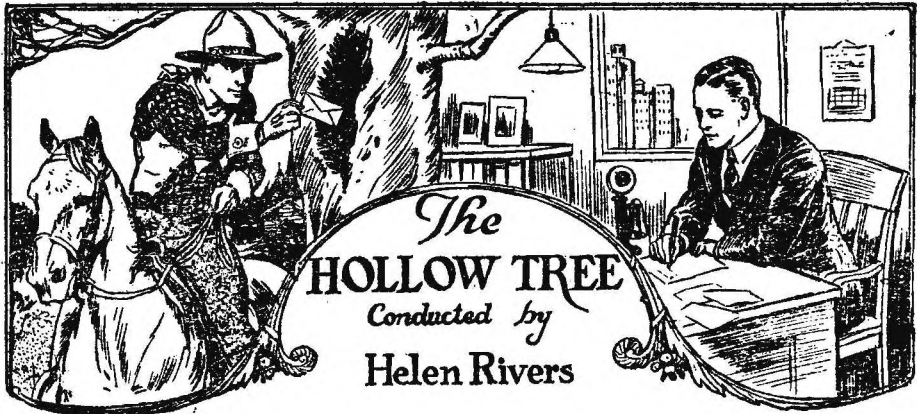
"Good luck to WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. Bring on the next one."

THE ARMADILLO MAKES ITSELF USEFUL

THE animal who manages to elude the eye of the manufacturer nowadays will have to make itself very scarce. With reptiles of all kinds being used as shoe materials, and even the domestic cat turned into a precious fur, it is time for the animal kingdom to wonder, "Whose turn next?"

The armadillo, however, is being used only for baskets and there is quite a flourishing industry in the articles for gifts and souvenirs.

The armadillo, which is native to southwest Texas and Central America, was so named by the Spaniards on account of its coat of armor. It is a member of the ant-eater family and lives underground. Formerly it lived in the woods and only ventured out at night in search of provender, but now this wild thing has been domesticated. Dogs, firmly muzzled, chase the armadillos down. They are then captured by the hunters, who use every precaution not to injure the shell. The animals are caught by the tail and then struck across the breast. After the carcass has been removed, the shell is treated and polished, and after further elaboration is made into the baskets which seem to have become remarkably popular. It is said that fifty thousand baskets are yearly shipped to all parts of the country and abroad.



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.

THE top of the timber line! There's no question about the wild-steer roper and bucking-bronc rider having plenty of endurance and grit. But the same hombre who forks a pitching bronc, and who rides herd in a Montana blizzard, is the hombre who leads a pack horse up to the top of the timber line and unpacks the bear-paw snowshoes, ready for the blinding blizzards and the six feet of snow in which to run his trap line.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Having been born and raised among cowboys, horses, and cattle—I was born on a ranch in Wyoming—it is not strange that I gradually drifted into the class of rodeo rider and roper. I've been over the entire Western States, have hiked, canoed, and ridden horseback many thousands of miles. I've tried my hand at many things besides bronc busting and being a cow hand—have been sheep-herder, trapper, and guide. My chief occupation is, of course, professional roping and riding, but second to that comes trapping, at which I claim to be an expert also.

You may or may not know that a trapper specializing in marten must go high up in the mountain region, almost to the top of the timber line, where the winters are very severe, and all grub and supplies must be packed in on pack horse during the summer,

as, once winter sets in, a marten trapper is totally isolated, with the exception of the mail, which comes at least once a month. Marten trapping is very profitable when a remote district is located, but it also calls for every ounce of strength, vitality, and energy, as well as a bit of nerve, to withstand the thirty to forty-two degrees below zero temperature, the biting, blinding blizzards, and the four to six feet of snow to be traversed on bear-paw snowshoes.

During my stay up in the high altitudes I will not come in contact with a human soul for months at a time, outside of my pardner, and a lot of pen pads of our Gang will sure be welcome. I'm an hombre of thirty years, and I've crammed a good deal of experience in trapping and hunting into 'em. I have trapped everything from muskrat to grizzlies, and all the way from northern Wisconsin to Washington. I am ready, also, to give a good bit of general information regarding the West, as well as being acquainted with ranch and rodeo life thoroughly.

RAY BOLLMANN.

99 Brown Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The Oregon country is a "wild-hoss' country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This here Oregon country is shore the State for the hunter, the fisher, the prospector, the traveler, and all hombres interested in forking the wild hoss.

I'd shore like to lasso a few pen pals—especially those interested in the Oregon country. Believe me, pardner, I'll try and answer all the letters that drift my way.

W. T.

Care of The Tree.

The Texas prairies.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live near Fort Worth, Texas, where the West begins. Yes, I can tell much about ranch life on the Texas prairie, and yarns about buried treasure, too. I've been practically all over the State from the Panhandle to the Rio Grande.

Oh, I'm nineteen, and like the great open spaces.

D. EDWARD WOOD.

R. F. D. 1, Benbrook, Texas.

Cody, Wyoming.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have been in the United States only the better part of two years, the first year studying and teaching languages, and the last year working on a ranch. As a little boy on my father's farm in Denmark, and later, while studying at college and university, I dreamed about the wild West. There I wanted to go and make my home. Now I'm here. My studies are finished, and I want to start work on a cattle ranch—a real big one.

You waddies of the plains! Have you a good bit of advice that tells me where, when, and how? Then let me hear from you pronto. I will be glad to answer letters from any one and can possibly tell a little about Denmark, Germany, Norway, and Sweden.

X. F. L.

Box 941, Cody, Wyoming.

The painted desert.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I know the West, and I love it as every one does who has once traveled the great painted desert of New Mexico, Arizona, and California, and camped among the mountains of Washington and Oregon. But now I have left the West and all that wonderful country behind me and have come to Hawaii. Yes, Hawaii has its beauties, too, and I'm hoping that the Gangsters who are lovers of nature and of beauty will give me a chance to answer all their queries about the Western States and about the Hawaiian Islands.

D. E. WOOD.

Service Co., Nineteenth Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Riding wild horses.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm an hombre of twenty summers and my best sport is horse-back riding. Yes, I've ridden wild ones, and I've ridden for a fall, too, many a time. Have done quite a lot of traveling with a show. I like the rough life a hundred per cent more than the city life, and I've tried both. My life has been about equally divided between ranch life and the city existence.

Just now I'm trying to corral a herd of ranch snapshots. Punch your pens, ranch pals, and fill the ol' mail box for me.

BILLIE ANDERSON.

410 East First Street, Fort Worth, Texas.



To be a good Gangster is to be a good friend. The little friendship-maker badge will identify you at once as being a Hollow Tree Gangster and the friend of all.

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.

The city of the "thousand delights."

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have traveled a good deal in India, Egypt, and Arabia, and I've spent fifteen months in the city of the "thousand delights"—namely, Bagdad. Altogether, I've spent five years in the East. I have had many varied experiences and would like to swap yarns with the members of the Gang. I have quite a number of snaps, of various places, too, which I would like to exchange.

I'm twenty-five, have served seven years in the British army, and am expecting to go to Australia at the end of the year.

CORPORAL H. A. JERVIS.

2 Bedfs. and Herts. Regiment, A. V. T. C., Chisledon Camp, Wiltshire, England.

The new homesteader.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I expect in a few years that I will have my home in the West once again, with a nice bunch of white-faced cattle. Then I'll let the rest of the world go by.

I'm a Westerner and always like to know what is being done out there, especially by the new homesteaders, if any would care to write. Come, let's hear from you old-timers and new-timers, for you are lonely and I am lonely, too.

E. TERLINDE.

R. R. 4, Dayton, Ohio.

This Gangster wants a homesteader pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have a fair education combined with some knowledge of home building and farming. Added to that I have a downright love for hard work, and I believe I would be a good man on a homestead. Any pard who would have enough of a stake to furnish a few farm implements, et cetera, would find that we would make a good team for a homestead proposition. I'll be glad to hear from some of you homestead hombres.

LEE ODELL.

Berwind, West Virginia.

Hitting the trail for the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I intend selling out my belongings here and hitting the trail for the Southwest. I am a widower with two grown boys, and our aim is to take over a ranch or farm, either on shares, or outright. If any of The Hollow Tree members know of such an opportunity in the Far West or Southwest, we'll appreciate hearing pronto from them.

W. D. ENGLISH.

Box 78, Felicity, Ohio.

A Gangster miss who knows about the farm.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was raised on a farm and know a good deal about stock raising, et cetera. Ten horses are just as easy to handle as one, for me.

I like all outdoor sports, especially hunting, fishing, trapping and camping. I'm twenty years of age, and am seeking lots of correspondence among the cowgirls and rodeo girls, but will welcome all letters from girls about my age who live in any of the Western States. Wyoming, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, and old Mexico take first place with me.

I am fond of music, and play the Spanish and Hawaiian guitars, the violin, harp, and accordion.

CEICEL HOWLAND.

Route 2, Box 54, Hillsdale, Illinois.

Sagebrush and sand.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This place here is a small mining camp of about four thousand population. The country around is hilly, and there is nothing for stretches but sagebrush and sand. But, of course, there is a lot of that all over Wyoming! I am a lover of all outdoor sports, but best of all are horse-back riding and hunting. I sure can handle horses and guns. I'm nineteen, and am considered a good-natured kid.

HANNAH E. FINCH.

Box 416, South Superior, Wyoming.

"I am nineteen and would like to correspond with a girl living in Canada, the United States, or South America. I have a great thirst to know what the world, out of England, is like," says Miss Bess, care of The Tree.

"The Ozarks, the 'Shepherd of the Hills' country, is where I live," says twenty-one-year-old Albert Ratliff, Edgar Springs, Missouri. This Gangster has some interesting snapshots to send from the "land of a million miles."

"I am a southern Michigan farm boy of eighteen, and I'd like to correspond with some boys of my own age, who live on cattle ranches in the West," says Leonard Aarlick, R. F. D., Willis, Michigan.

The Pacific's crossroads.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are three soldiers doing our dear old uncle's bidding in foreign territory, on the islands known as "the Pacific's crossroads"—dreamy Hawaii. We wonder if the Gang wants to hear what Hawaii is truly like, and get snaps to back our information. All letters will be answered pronto.

PRIVATE A. J. TAYLOR,

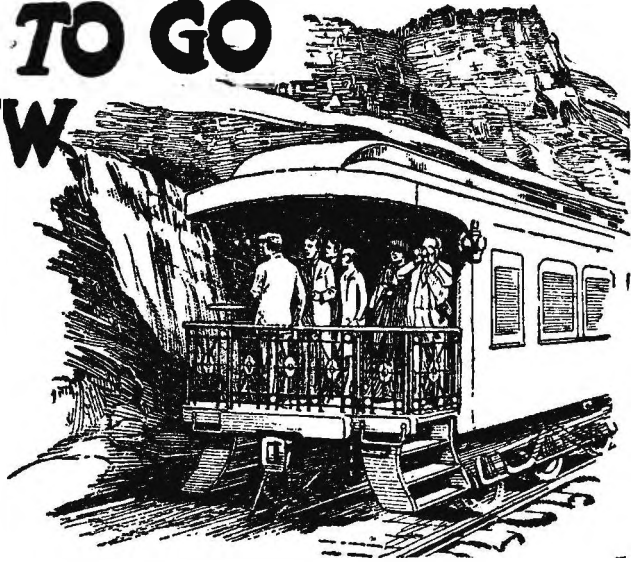
JOEL STODDARD,

CHARLES E. WALTERS.

Thirteenth F. A., Battery E, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii.

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.

THE West is so full of promising towns that it does seem that we should all be able to find just the right spot in the sun there. K. G. D., of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is looking for an active community where he will have a good chance of carving out a new home for himself and family. "What can you tell me about the town of Hatch, New Mexico, Mr. North? Just where is it situated? Is it a likely spot for a young man who is not afraid of hard work? Above all, is it a growing place?"

To answer the last question first, we would say yes-sir-ree! Hatch lies in the Rincon Valley of New Mexico, about eighty-five miles north of El Paso. For years this was just a small way station, but as the irrigated land in the valley came under cultivation in ever larger areas from year to year, Hatch took on new life. A spirit of enterprise and activity entered the community. Fine brick business blocks

were erected; streets were improved; new residences shot up; and a good hotel was built. Recently, a new school building had to be added to take care of the swelling school enrollment. Altogether, the change that has come over this southwestern town in the last few years is marvelous.

The farm population of the vicinity is growing along with that of the town. There are about twelve thousand acres under cultivation and new land is being cleared and brought under the plow. The district is under the Elephant Butte Dam and gets its water for irrigation from the Percha Dam, the first diversion dam below the great reservoir. We should think that Hatch might be a likely town for an ambitious young man to investigate.

We have our home seekers and our health seekers, all bound for the outdoor West. Oscar W., of Mobile, Alabama, is looking for a spot where he can regain his old-time robustness.

"The doctor has advised me to go to Southern California, Mr. North, for lung trouble. He thinks that I can be cured, if I take this disease in its early stages, so I am making tracks for the West as soon as possible. I have always been a hearty chap until this thing struck me and mean to put up a good stiff fight to regain my health. Can you suggest a place and how to get there?"

It seems to us that Banning, California, might be a good bet for this Southerner. This town is situated on the edge of the Colorado Desert, at an altitude of two thousand three hundred feet, and its climate is wonderful for the tubercular. The summers here are warm and dry, and the nights are wonderful. Winters are cool, occasionally cold, but there is much sunny weather all through the winter months.

Banning is located ninety miles east of Los Angeles, one hundred and fifty-five miles from Blythe, and is on the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad. It is connected by first-class highways with the cities of the coast and of the adjacent valley, and is on the transcontinental motor highway. Physicians have for years been sending patients suffering from asthma, bronchitis, and all kinds of tuberculosis to this southern California town, with the most excellent results.

And results are what we are all looking for, whether it be better health or good game. The latter topic is one that is interesting Bob D., of Houston, Texas, these days. "I am planning a hunting expedition this fall for big game, Mr. North, and want to know what the prospects would be in Wyoming. If promising, will you please tell me what region in the State would be the best bet."

In Wyoming may be found perhaps more big game than in any other section of the United States. The Jackson Lake region south of Yellowstone Park is a famous hunting ground. Virginia

deer, coyotes, and wolves inhabit the plains of the Equality State, while in the mountains are found elk, moose, blacktail deer, antelope, mountain sheep, bears, pumas, wolverene, and many lesser animals. There is also a great variety of game birds in Wyoming, and the lakes and streams are well stocked with rainbow and native trout.

And while we are discussing this interesting subject of hunting I must answer the queries of G. D. C., of Norfolk, Virginia. "Is hunting allowed in the Lassen Volcano National Park, Mr. North? I'm trekking out in that direction this fall. Can you tell me how to get there?"

Hunting is not allowed in this national park, as it is a sanctuary for wild life of every sort. Killing, wounding, capturing, or frightening any bird or wild animal in the park is prohibited. Firearms are prohibited in the park except on written permission of the superintendent. The Lassen Volcano National Park is situated in northeastern California and may be reached both by railroad and automobile. The Shasta Route of the Southern Pacific Lines, the Western Pacific over the Feather River route, and the Southern Pacific Lines from points in the East, as well as the Sacramento and Northern Electric, locally, all connect with modern auto stages at convenient approach cities only two or three hours' journey from the park.

By automobile it may be reached from the Park to Park Highway from Red Bluff, California, as well as by connecting roads from several near-by cities. Connections can also be made from the Lincoln Highway at Reno or Truckee, Nevada, and the northwestern part of the park may be reached by road from Redding on the Park to Park Highway.

From California to Alberta is something of a jump, but we Westerners are

used to doing things in a wide, high, and handsome manner. Archie G., of Butte, Montana, is considering undertaking a little pioneering and so is firing some questions on Canada our way. "Can you tell me anything about the Peace River Country around old Fort Vermilion, Mr. North? I've heard that there is some fine unsettled land up that way and would like to have the facts."

Well, no one has been spoofing Archie. The last great area of virgin plains still remaining practically untouched by the tide of settlement that is sweeping over other portions of the Peace River Country lies away to the north around the old trading post of Fort Vermilion.

For one hundred and fifty miles along the Peace River, from Carcajou to Vermilion Chutes, and extending twenty-five or thirty miles on either side, lies one of the most fertile plains of the American continent. The surface is level or gently rolling, and the

soil is a rich deep loam on a sandy clay subsoil. Many hay meadows are found, and a small percentage of the surface is light muskeg. A few sandy ridges occur usually covered with jack pine. Much of this area is prairie, but the predominating feature is its parklike nature.

Building logs, fencing material, and fuel can be found within easy reach of any location, while the shelter for stock obtained from the light woods is an advantage which the bald prairie does not possess. Most of the land requires but little clearing and the soil is remarkably easy to break. The choicest park lands comprise over a million acres, while another million acres of excellent land will require but little clearing to fit them for cultivation.

There is not space here for more, but I shall be glad to send additional information to any hombres interested in the possibilities of the great Peace River Country.

A WILD-LIFE REFUGE

BIRD and wild-animal life is to have a new refuge and breeding ground in southern Oregon, embracing the hitherto unappropriated public lands near Upper Klamath Lake. The reservation has been set aside by recent executive order of President Coolidge and will be administered by the Bureau of Biological Survey of the United States department of agriculture.

The refuge includes over five thousand acres and embraces an area of very varied topography. The reservation, however, consists more of marshland than of the higher wooded territory. This swamp country contains a dense growth of tules, sedges, and other aquatic vegetation, which affords abundant cover for the nesting wild fowl of the region. Migratory waterfowl, especially wild ducks and geese, will probably be attracted by the resting and feeding grounds available in the watered areas.

The establishment of the refuge will be of particular importance to the waterfowl of the region, since most of the adjacent territory has recently been drained in connection with the reclamation of lands for agricultural purposes. The reservation will be of interest to conservationists generally, as well as to sportsmen who are familiar with the drainage operations that have brought about the elimination of Lower Klamath Lake, embracing about eighty thousand acres, which was formerly one of the most important breeding and resting grounds for waterfowl in the United States.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, 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 "easy" 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 changes 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 ceters, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

FREEMAN, MINNIE.—Married my brother, Leo, in St. Louis, Missouri. Please write to Mrs. Freda Brazil, 1216 Oak Street, Beardstown, Illinois.

HENSE, MRS. ANNA.—Last heard from in Texas. Fear you were hurt in the storm last year. Please write to your friend, Mrs. Freda Brazil, 1216 Oak Street, Beardstown, Illinois.

DAVIS, EARL.—Last heard from in 1926, at West Carrollton, Ohio, and Newport, Kentucky. Information appreciated by Louise, care of this magazine.

SANDERS, GEORGE G.—Irish descent. Was corporal of Machine Gun Troop in the Thirtieth Cavalry, stationed at Fort Clark, Texas, in 1919. A civil engineer. Believed to have gone to Brazil, in 1920, on a railroad job. Information appreciated by Cowboy, care of this magazine.

JOHN.—Please come home. We want to see you and need you. Mamma, care of this magazine.

MILLER, HARRY.—Last heard from in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Has a half sister named Florence Hogg. Information appreciated by Bessie, care of this magazine.

DEAN, GEORGE.—Left England on the "Empress of Ireland," fifteen years ago and lived in St. Almain Street, Toronto, Canada. Information appreciated by Mrs. M. A. Roberts, Chapel House, Northrop Hall, Flintshire, Wales.

JENSEN, TORVAL A.—About thirty-five years old. Left Utah nineteen years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Esther Wilson, 823 Ramona Avenue, Bellflower, California.

STARRETT.—Would like to hear from any one of this name residing in Philadelphia or California. Mrs. Mary Short, 122 Maple Street, London, Ontario, Canada.

WILLIAMS, JEWETT.—Thirty-one years old. Last heard from in Columbus, Georgia. See news about Annie. Information concerning him appreciated by his mother, Mrs. R. L. Williams, Clarkville, Florida.

HAAS, RICHARD DICK.—A pattern maker. Left Fresno, California, December 1, 1919. Last heard from in Illinois when in the army, in 1920. Has a sister in Philadelphia. Information appreciated by Charles H. Bondola, 910½ East Orange Grove Avenue, Glendale, California.

BROWN, MRS. FRED, or MRS. ED BREYERS.—Father died February 18, 1928, at St. Joseph, Michigan. Have something to tell you, so please write to your daughter, Julia Rowland, care Mrs. E. Symonds, Benton Harbor, Michigan.

WARE, HELEN.—Last heard from in Missouri. Information appreciated by Friend Burwell, care of this magazine.

UNDERWOOD, CHARLES LINLEY.—About fifty-five years old. Last heard from about ten years ago in Walla Walla, Washington. Has relatives in Missouri. Have something to tell him about his son, Paul. Information appreciated by Jack Commins, 4020 Texas Street, San Diego, California.

CATTO, BEONA.—Do you remember your old pal, Peggy? Would like to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. Jack Commins, 4020 Texas Street, San Diego, California.

PEP.—Baby Jack very ill. We may lose our home. Please come back; we want you. Girl, care of this magazine.

PATSY, RUTH.—Last heard from when in a hospital at Elk City, Oklahoma. Remember the tattoos and our promises to each other. I am still sick in the hospital. Have written, but received no reply. Lonesome and sorry. Please write to your Jack T., care of this magazine.

BOLDON, CLARENCE and CLARA.—Last heard from in Spokane, Washington, in 1927. Anxious to hear from you. Please write to E. L. McQuiston, 40 Center Street, Santa Cruz, California.

HANSEN, MRS. NELLIE.—Information concerning her appreciated by her daughter, Mildred Hansen, Box 119, Rushford, Minnesota.

WHITE, ELLA.—Lived in Waterville, Maine, six or seven years ago. Information appreciated by Arthur McKinnon, 841 Congress Street, Portland, Maine.

KIDDER, ARCHIE.—Thirty years old. Red hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Kamiah, Idaho, about three years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Dolly, care of this magazine.

VOATELLO, VERLE V.—Last heard from in 1917, when she was traveling with a show. At this time she was staying at the Raymond Hotel in Denver, Colorado. I have been in Honolulu since then. Am anxious to hear from you. Please write to Collin E. Catlin, care Hospital, Fort Logan, Colorado.

HAMILTON, ALICE.—Twenty-nine years old. Has a scar on thumb. Worked in a Santa Fe Railroad restaurant in Dodge City, Kansas, in 1918. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado. Believed to be in San Francisco. Information appreciated by E., care of this magazine.

McCAW, ROBERT LAVERN.—Last heard from in Walker, Minnesota. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. George McCaw, Aleo, Illinois.

DAWSON, TOMMY.—Last heard from in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1908. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Mary Killoran, 50 Perry Avenue, Worcester, Massachusetts.

PARKER, RUFUS ANDREW.—Last heard from in Big Lake, Washington. Information appreciated by his son, Ray Parker, Route 2, Temple, Texas.

HARTZ, ALBERTA.—Please write to your old pal, Irene, 205 Runnel Street, Big Spring, Texas.

GOZIER, JOHN.—Last heard from in June, 1926. Believed to be traveling with a circus as a dome acrobat. Sad news about your father. Please come home or write to your mother, Helen Cinko, Eagle River, Wisconsin.

BALLOU, ADELBERT W.—About forty-nine years old. Born in Dover, Kansas. Last heard from in 1912, when he was working for the Spokane and International railroads, in Spokane, Washington. Your father and two half sisters are eager to see you. Can explain why your father was unable to do different in Spokane. Your sister, Mrs. Otto B. Uhlmann, Box 57, Globe, Oregon.

MESSNER, GEORGE CARL.—Twenty-three years old. Mother and sister anxious to hear from you. Please write to your sister, Mrs. June Messner Black, care Mrs. Boyd R. Darnell, Star Route, Madras, Oregon.

NAUS, THEODORE.—Last heard from when living at 2100 North Broadway, St. Louis, Missouri. Information concerning him appreciated by Inquirer, care of this magazine.

LEE, JACK.—Please write to the girl whose name is tattooed under an Indian girl's head on your arm and send your address. Wildflower, same address.

MICKELL, OWEN.—A cowboy. Travels with father, who shows old-time pictures on a slide. Last heard from in Texas. Information appreciated by a close friend, Dorothy Williams, 428 West Chestnut Street, Walla Walla, Washington.

NESS, TOM.—Lived in Deer Lodge, Montana, in 1922. Last heard from in Portland, Oregon. Information concerning him or any of his family appreciated by Otto Bengal, care of this magazine.

GIBBON, VIERRA, ANDERSON and RAY YOUNG.—Shipmates of the U. S. S. "Burns" and "Wicks" in 1919-20. Please write to Glenn W. Cannon, care of Mid-west Cap Company, 816 Court Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa.

WHEELER, P. A.—Was my science teacher at Fairview School, near Burk, Texas, in 1925-26. Information concerning him appreciated by Lola Hackler Jones, Box 324, Roxana, Texas.

ALP, JACOB A.—Last heard from thirty years ago, when living in Grand Forks, North Dakota. In 1892 he was living in Red Lake Falls, Minnesota. Information appreciated by H. W. Koller, McVeystown, Pennsylvania.

ROSS, EDDIE.—Did not receive your last letter, as I had to leave Newark, New Jersey, and come home. Don't be angry, I still love you and will explain all when I hear from you. Please write to Ada V., care of this magazine.

AQUILERA, ALFREDO.—Twenty-three years old. Has a scar over his right eye. Left Cuba for New York, in September, 1923, worked in the Hotel Sevilla, and later in the ten-cent store. About a year ago he passed through the Panama Canal en route to California. Please write to J. H. B., care of this magazine.

CARPENTER, BOB.—Twenty-eight years old. Tattooed on arms, and on left hand with W. H. near wrist and two beads on ring finger making an imitation ring. Also had bullet-wound scar between forefinger and thumb. Usually travels with Wild West Shows and carnivals and is known as "Alamo Bob Hart." Last heard from in New Windsor, Illinois, in February, 1928. Information appreciated by his wife, who needs him. Please write to Mrs. Bob Carpenter, care of this magazine.

CAMPBELL, DONALD.—A native of Flat River, Prince Edward Island, Canada. Went overseas with the Seventh Canadian Battalion. Last heard from in a logging camp near Vancouver City, British Columbia. Please write to M. E. C., care of this magazine.

BLOUNT, MRS. EMMA.—Last heard from in 1909. Believed to be in Kansas City, Kansas. Please write to your niece, who is anxious to hear from you. Mrs. Elizabeth Lollar, R. F. D. 1, Pilot Point, Texas.

REED, GARDNER.—Eighteen years old. Dark hair, eyes and complexion. Son of Walter and Tinney Reed. Last heard from in Phoenix, Mississippi, in 1915. Information concerning him appreciated by his brother, Willie Walter Reed, Diamond Hotel, Hillyear Station, Spokane, Washington.

HILL, CARMEN.—Formerly of Arapahoe, Nebraska. Was teaching school in 1916-17. Believed to be married. Information appreciated by W. E. B., care of this magazine.

HELEN D.—Do you remember the one you met at "Pete's" in L. A.? Wrote to you at Frisco, but letters returned. Please write to Blackie, care of this magazine.

TAYLOR, ERNEST MALCOLM.—Forty-seven years old. One eye was burned with lye when a child, so that the pupil in which it lives in Boston, Washington, in 1912. Information appreciated by Gladys Rivers, 724 Woodland Avenue, Centrailla, Washington.

CHEVALIER, FRANK A.—Last heard from June 1, 1926. Please write to your mother, who needs you. Mrs. Calina Chevalier, Apartment D, 421 Tenth Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

SUNDHOLM, CHRISTINA CHARLOTTE.—Born in Hermosand, Sweden. Had three brothers, Peter, who went to New Zealand, Carl and Johan. Information concerning any of them appreciated by Mrs. Fred Klehn, 7848 Branden Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

STEVENS, HAROLD.—Will the parents or sister Connie of my late husband, Harold Stevens, who are believed to be in Canada, please communicate with Freda Stevens, 112 Russell Street, Peterborough, England.

ROBERT L. H.—Am back in Texas. Received your card from N. O. Wrote to your Chicago box. No reply. Have important news. Please write to Lester C., care of this magazine.

MURPHY, GEORGE ELLIOTT.—Twenty-two years old. Left Kalamazoo, Michigan, in April, 1927. Please let me know if you are well. Information appreciated by his anxious mother, Mrs. Elsie Murphy, 738 Forrest Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

HAY, CHARLES.—Left home five years ago. Mother grieving and in poor health. Please write to Mrs. Alice Stanford, R. F. D. 2, Beloit, Ohio.

RANDALL, GEORGE.—Went West forty-eight years ago. Married Hannah Hendrix in New Milford, Connecticut, in 1876. Please write to your daughter, Lillian M. Seelye, 32 Shelter Rock, Danbury, Connecticut.

POWERS, FLOYD.—Served in Company L, Twenty-third Infantry, Second Division, and in Company H, Composite Regiment (Pershing's Own), during the World War. Please write to your buddy, Sergeant E. G. Nachtergaele, Battery H, Second Coast Artillery, Fort Sherman, Panama, Canal Zone.

GIBSON, AL.—Please come home, everything is fixed up. If not, let me know where you are and I will come to you. Your wife, Mrs. A. C. Gibson, care of this magazine.

JAMESON, JOSEPH.—Have important news for you. Sorry for all that has happened. Please come home for mother's and father's sake or write to your sister, Veronica J. H., 331 Prospect Avenue, Long Beach, California.

SHEPPARD, LOLA.—Left home February 27, 1928. Believed to have married. Last heard from in Washington, D. C., in March, 1928. We are worried. Please write to your mother or your pal of Frisco, Mac, care of this magazine.

JOHN.—Please come home. We all want you. Eddie, care of this magazine.

MAREK, JOHN.—Last heard from in Oyster Bay, New York. I still love you. Your mother said if things turned out, as we thought, she would turn everything over to us. Please write to Sadie Camp, Carson City, Nevada.

WARD, CHARLES.—English descent. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Sister, brothers and mother anxious. Please write to Mrs. William Wincoot, care E. N. Bissell, 219 Kathleen Avenue, Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

DAVIS, GLADYS KECK.—Last heard from in 1923, in Wheeling, West Virginia. Information appreciated by Oran F. Baker, Box 115, Paden City, West Virginia.

THICKSTON, Sergeant DORCEY, and Lieutenant HOMER F. McDANIEL.—They were stationed at Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, in 1916-17. Please write to your buddy, who knew you at Benford's. J. J. James, 2038 South Gamsey, Santa Ana, California.

DENNO, JOSEF.—Left Vancouver, British Columbia, about six years ago. Believed to be in Michigan. Has relatives by name of Barron, Lang and Perry, who were employed in the Henry Ford Auto Works, and who lived in River Rouge, Michigan. Information appreciated by M. E., care of this magazine.

"NYSTROM," CLARENCE.—Traveled with a carnival two or three years ago. Danced at the Clambus Stock Company in Albany, New York. Last heard from in Canada. I still love you. Please come back before it is too late. Information appreciated by your own and true Mary, care of this magazine.

SCOTT, JAMES WESLEY.—Sixty-seven years old. First and third fingers on right hand off at second joint. A carpenter. Information appreciated by his only sister, Mrs. Cora A. Thayer, 10 Shell Road, Coney Island, New York.

HANKE, WILLIAM F.—Formerly employed as a forest guard at Cokeville, Wyoming. Please write to Lena, care of this magazine.

SHERLOCK, McMALLIE, or GILE, OLLIE.—Twenty-three years old. A blonde from Kentucky. Information appreciated by David C. Gile, Box 1153, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

FERMAN, MRS. GERTRUDE, and JIM.—German. Bakers. Last heard from when living at 566 Baltic Street, Brooklyn, New York. Believed to have moved to California. Information appreciated by H., care of this magazine.

MYERS, MERRIE.—A native of Texas. In April, 1927, lived in an apartment at 20 Broadway, Denver, Colorado. Have good news for you. My letter to you returned. Please write and send your address to A. F. Lawn, care S. C. Edison Company, Camp 5, Big Creek, California.

STARMER, ORVAL.—Seventeen years old. Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri. Your mother is anxious to hear from you. She is alone. Please write to L. Dial, 1406 West Eighty-fourth Street, Los Angeles, California.

LEA-BON, J. H.—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Forgiven. I love you. Please write to Mildred S., care of this magazine.

DREW, IDA ETHEL.—Born August 2, 1884. Taken to Denver, Colorado, by her stepmother on August 14, 1891, and later taken to her relatives in Franklin County, Indiana, where all concerned were led to believe that her father was dead. Last heard from in 1894, in St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by her father, H. Drew, Box 45, Columbus, Montana.

BRACKNEY, ROBERT.—About sixty years old. Broad shoulders, high forehead and gray eyes. Information appreciated by his faithful friend, now a widow, Mrs. Leona Chidester, Puxico, Missouri.

JAMISON, EDDIE.—Please write to your brother, Walter J. Jamison, Route 4, Blum, Texas.

DADDY.—We all want you. Ida still at Magalla. Please write to Addie, Box 866, Seaside, Oregon.

MILLS, MRS. LEONA.—Last heard from in Portland, Oregon, in September, 1927. Her folks, the Blarcom's, lived in Everett, Washington, at that time. Has a daughter named Olive. Please write to your old sweetheart and pal, Harold L. Quantrille, care of this magazine.

SIEDENBERG, CHARLEY and HERMAN.—Last heard from twenty-four years ago. Please write to your father, Louis Siedenbergh, Route 8, Box 110, Houston, Texas.

WATTS, LEWIS CHESTER.—Important news for you. Please write to C. C. Gayden, 726 Stanford Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

DOAK, TOM N.—Last heard from in Winathee, Washington, in 1900. Information concerning him dead or alive appreciated by his sister, Ida LeMoore, Chico, California.

CUSHMAN, CARL WESLEY.—About thirty-nine years old. Left Clarksville, Tennessee, on January 15, 1915. Information appreciated by his brother, W. E. Cushman, Box 374, Clarksville, Tennessee.

JOHNSON, HARRISON.—About twenty-two years old. Last heard from in 1908, when father and mother separated at Allen's Hill, New York. His mother was Jessie Wood, of Victor, New York. Information appreciated by his sister, Eleanor, care of this magazine.

HARROD, MARIE.—Was in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1919. Later went to Dubuque, Iowa. Information appreciated by C. W. Taulman, 117 West B Street, Ontario, California.

WRIGHT, LUCILLE.—Information concerning her appreciated by her son, John Hattell, U. S. S. "Chase," 323, San Diego, California, care of Postmaster.

MYERS, WILLIAM E.—Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. I know you will be the man you can be and help the children, otherwise will have to make different arrangements. Please write to Anne, care of this magazine.

ROBBINS, MARVIN or ROY.—Please write at once to your pal, Bemell Hall, Box 70, Gainesville, Texas.

HILL, JOHN FRANKLIN.—Born in Burlington, Iowa. Raised by family named Carrol. Was in the blacksmith business in Leadville, Colorado, in 1888. Am anxious to know the particulars of his death and place of burial. His daughter, Sarah A. Lenahan, 480 Hawthorne Avenue, Oakland, California.

VERMILLION, WALTER.—Thirty-four years old. Slightly bald from forehead back. Has a gold tooth in front. Lived at one time at 395 West First Street, Dayton, Ohio. Won't you please help in some way for the sake of your boys? Aren't you anxious to see them? Shall always love you. Your wife, Mrs. Goldie Vermillion, 1117 East Market Street, Lima, Ohio.

WILLIAMS, BERT W.—Has dark curly hair, dark eyes and wears glasses. Last heard from in Kellogg, Idaho. Information appreciated by his worried wife, I. B. W., care of this magazine.

WRIGHT, MR. and MRS. SARAH, MARY, MARGARET, TIMOTHY and CHARLIE.—Formerly of Vancouver, British Columbia. Left for Los Angeles, California, in 1920, where they lived on Red Street. Information appreciated by Kathleen Garland, 1032 West Forty-seventh Street, Los Angeles, California.

GRADY.—Do you remember Box 253? If so, write to me, no matter what you do, where you go or what you are. I will always feel the same. Vera G. Towner, Apartment T, Washington Apartments, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

FINNERAN.—Am looking for my father's brothers, who are believed to be somewhere in the East, so would like to hear from anyone who have this name. Address John M. Finneran, Box 140, Camarillo, California.

RIVERS or WILLS, TEDDY.—Please write to Anna, Box 114, North White Plains, New York.

CLARKE, CHARLES P.—Last heard from in Indianapolis, Indiana, September 23, 1926. Do you remember the Spiritual reading and the girl that went to Oklahoma City the next day? Am home again and would like to hear from you. Peggy Stockdale, Route 3, Milton, Kentucky.

O'LEARY, JOSEPH T.—Remember the boat from Erieau to Seattle and Pocatello, Idaho? Please write to friend from Omaha, care of this magazine.

CUMMINGS, NORA.—Last heard from in Chickasha, Oklahoma. Have good news for you. Please write to Tommie G. Snedden, Box 417, Chicago, Illinois.

WHITE, WILLIAM.—Born in Ireland. Wife's name is Lydia. Children's names are Margaret, Leona, Ethel and Elizabeth. Last heard from when living on Belmont Avenue in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1904. He was then a machinist in the Rogers Locomotive Works. Information appreciated by his brother, James H. White, Route 2, Cheelahs, Washington.

RUTLEDGE, MRS. NELLIE, nee ALLEN.—Husband's name was James. Her daughter, Edith, was born in Bay City, Michigan, April 26, 1900, and was brought up by her grandmother, Mrs. A. Henderson, who lived in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1909. Information appreciated by her daughter, Edith, care of this magazine.

ELMER, RUSSELL.—Anxious to hear from you. Please write to Edith, care of this magazine.

LUBBY, WILLIE.—About twenty years old. Irish descent. Blue eyes and wavy black hair. Last heard from in Houston, Texas, in 1922. Joined the army or navy. After his discharge was heard from in San Francisco, California, and in December, 1927, was in Brooklyn, New York. Important news for him. Information appreciated by T. E. Brown, 4929 Walker Avenue, Houston, Texas.

LYLV, SPENCER.—Last heard from in Caspar or Cummings, California, in March, 1923. Please communicate with your mother, Mrs. E. Reich, 414 Bevero Road, West Palm Beach, Florida.

CLARK or RILEY, MRS. JENNY.—My mother, whom I have not seen. I was born in Carterville, Missouri, in 1897, and as my father had been recently killed, I was taken to Carthage, Missouri, by the family of George W. Aahby, who later moved to Joplin, Missouri, and then to Des Moines, Iowa. Anxious to find my mother, Hazel Marie Ferris, 3239 East University Avenue, Des Moines, Iowa.

BIRD, MRS. LOUISE E., or son WILLIAM.—Formerly of Fresno, California, and Portland, Oregon. Information appreciated by H. M. K., care of this magazine.

SNOW, ROBERT H. and J. D.—Of Dallas, Texas, and a sister, named Mal. Please write to your old friend, Theo, care of this magazine.

KLIMECHAK, MARY.—Please let your sister, Erlne, know where you are and write to Malcolm J. Wiggins, 5901 Thirtieth Street, Tampa, Florida.

HICKS, THOMAS and ELIZABETH.—Lived at one time in Burlington, Vermont. Mr. Hicks was a daughter of Doctor Bryant. They had a son and daughter, who were at one time taken from them without their knowledge and later abandoned. Would like to hear from them or any of their relatives. Mrs. Nellie King Morse, Box 58, Enfield Street, Enfield, Connecticut.

BAKER or BECHER, MRS. SARAH JANE, nee MURPHY.—Born in Anaghmore, Goosebridge County, Antrim, Ireland. Believed to have died in Jersey City, New Jersey, some years ago. Information concerning her husband and family appreciated by her cousin, Nell M. Eriane, State Hospital, Kings Park, Long Island, New York.

PARKER, EDDIE.—Left home in 1910. His father's name was George and mother's Gertrude, sisters and brother—Ella P., Mabel J., Pleasant F. Rose and Charles W. The children were put in care of the Children's Aid Society, Tillamook, Oregon, on March 11, 1911. Important news for him. Information concerning him appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Rose Abercrombie, care of Tom Eglin, Lakeview, Washington.

MILLER, MRS. W. M.—Last heard from in Lawton, Oklahoma. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. S. L. McDowell, 3872 Hemphill Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

PETERSON, MARSHALL and RICHARD.—Last heard from in Lawton, Oklahoma. Please write to your sister, Mrs. S. L. McDowell, 3872 Hemphill Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

PETERSON, CHARLIE OSBORNE.—Last heard from in Granite, Oklahoma. Please write to your sister, Mrs. S. L. McDowell, 3872 Hemphill Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

PETERSON, DOUGLAS EUGENE.—Last heard from in Fort Bliss, El Paso, Texas. Please write to your sister, Mrs. S. L. McDowell, 3872 Hemphill Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

DIETRICH, WOODROW WILSON.—Was last heard from in Lansing, Michigan, four years ago, when he was eight years old. Information concerning him appreciated by his sister, Hanna Dietrich, 810 Logan Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

HOROWITZ, BEN.—Of China. Please write to your old friend, Fred Smith, Wheeler, Oregon.

GONZALEA, MANUEL.—A Spanish United States soldier. Last heard from in San Antonio, Texas, in August, 1927. Was to be discharged on September 25th. Junior needs you. Information appreciated by his wife, C., care of this magazine.

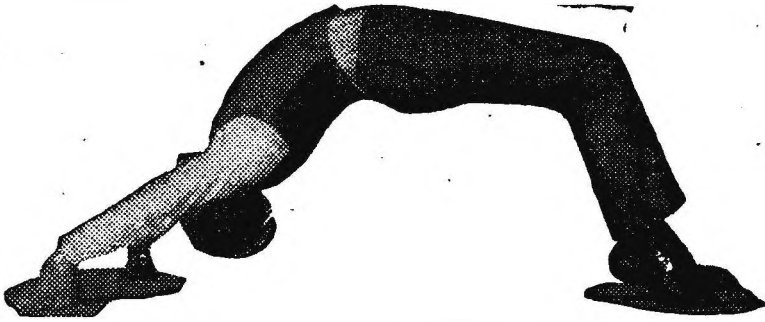
JOLLEY, JAMES.—Was a soldier under Reno at the time of the Custer massacre and had a twin brother William. Information appreciated by his nephew, J. W. J., care of this magazine.

GRIFFITH, LEOTA.—Mother of Velma and Floyd. Please write to a friend that wishes you well. Do not live in Y now. J. W. J., care of this magazine.

BOTTCHER, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Shelby, Montana. Have news for you. Information appreciated by your cousin, Evelyn, care of this magazine.

PIERSON, ADA.—Wife of A. W. Pierson. Last heard from in Gridley, Kansas. We were neighbors in Roswell, New Mexico. Came north together in September, 1921. My letters returned. Please write to M. L. Anderson, 630 1/2 North Washington Street, Aberdeen, South Dakota.

MILLER, ANNA.—Formerly of Olean, New York. Her father, Fred Miller, is a butcher. They are of German descent. She is a blonde. Last heard from in 1910. Information appreciated by Dottie, care of this magazine.



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