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THE CALL OF THE CANYON

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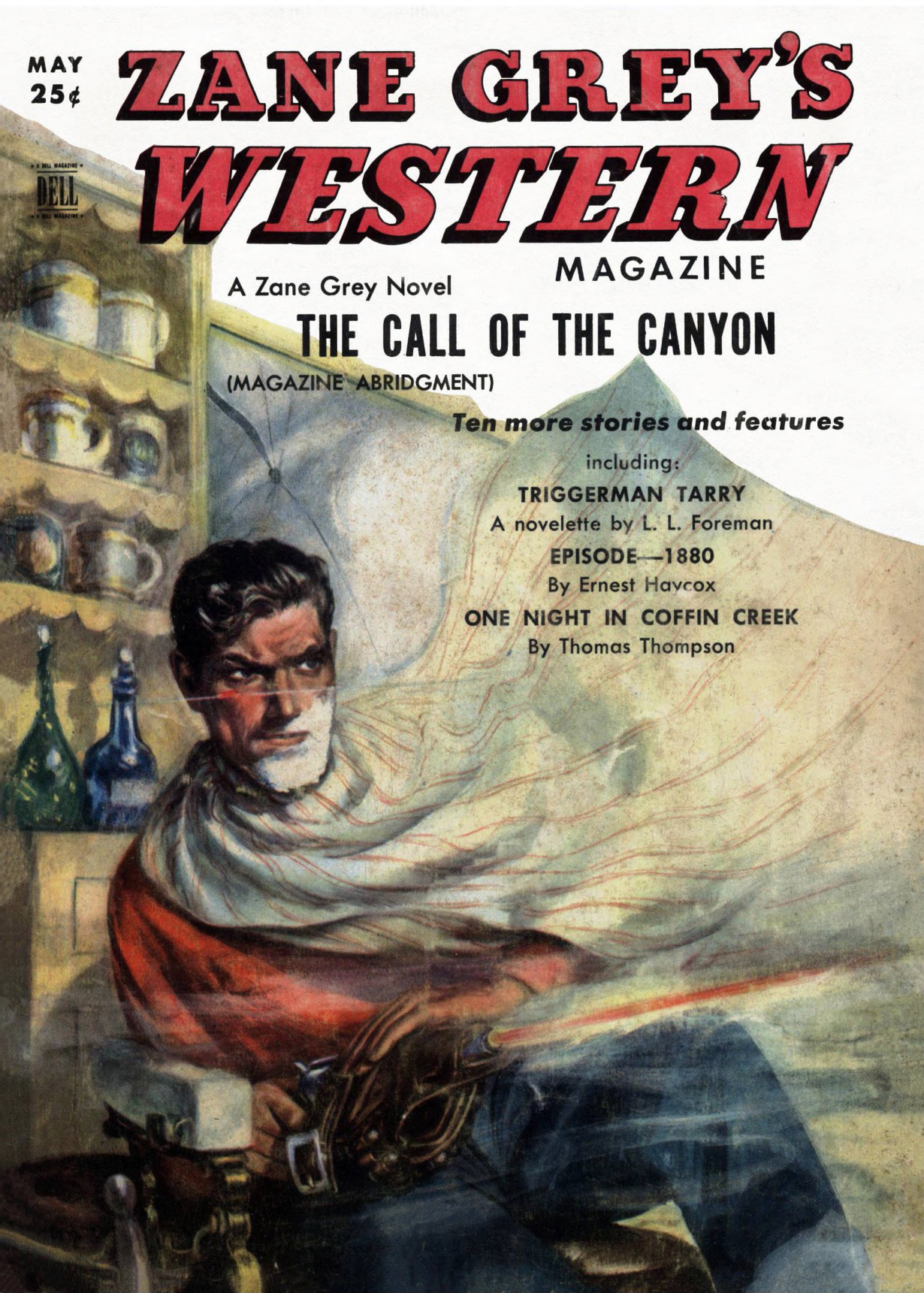

Carley felt Haze Ruff's bold eyes on her.

The Call of the Canyon, Chap. 6

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

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THIS MONTH'S MAGAZINE ABRIDGMENT: *THE CALL OF THE CANYON*

WEAKENED in body and wounded in spirit, Glenn Kilbourne comes home from the battlefields of Europe. The holocaust of world conflict has made him question the materialism of modern life. In search of health and a renewal of spirit, he goes to Arizona, leaving his fiancee Carley Burch and the follies of big-city life behind. Carley, an indulged and spoiled though intelligent woman, follows Glenn, determined to bring him back with her. Carley finds Glenn but is surprised at his refusal to return East. She cannot understand or share his love for the West's rugged grandeur, its sweep of desert and rangeland, its awesome beauty of mountain, canyon, and mesa. The pleasure he finds in simple, honest labor mystifies her. She is repelled by the raw violence of the land, and although she does not hesitate to flaunt her charms in the daring new styles of the day, she is shocked by the resultant attentions forced on her by Haze Ruff, a lustful range worker. Although confident that Glenn still loves her, especially after a day alone with him, she knows that he compares her unfavorably with Flo Hutter, a frank and vivacious range girl. Baffled, Carley goes back to New York to plunge anew into the old pleasure-seeking round, only to find that it has lost its meaning. Will she make the best of things, accepting the suit of the handsome and successful man who courts her, or will she return to the West to start life anew with Glenn, who has found himself in nature's home of mountain and canyon and desert? "The Call of the Canyon" is one of Zane Grey's most appealing stories, presenting high human drama in a setting of natural wonders faithfully and graphically described.

The next issue of Zane GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE will feature

THIS NETTLE DANGER

A magazine abridgment of William MacLeod Raine's tense and exciting novel of rancher Bruce Sherrill's desperate fight for life and love amidst a savage rangeland feud.

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AS GOOD AS ANY MAN, an amusing yarn by Edwin L. Sabin

And other fiction and fact about the Old West.

This June issue will be on sale about May 1.

THE CALL OF THE CANYON

BY
ZANE GREY

CHAPTER ONE

Westward Journey

WHAT subtle strange message had come to her out of the West? Carley Burch laid the letter in her lap and gazed dreamily through the window.

It was early April in New York, rather cold and gray, with steely sunlight. Spring breathed in the air, but the women passing along Fifty-seventh Street wore furs and wraps.

Glenn has been gone over a year, she mused, *three months over a year—and of all his strange letters this seems the strangest yet.*

She lived again, for the thousandth time, the last moments she had spent with him. It had been on New Year's Eve, 1918. They had called upon friends who were staying at the McAlpin, in a suite on the twenty-first floor overlooking Broadway. And when the last quarter hour of that eventful and tragic year began slowly to pass with the low swell of whistles and bells, Carley's friends had discreetly left them alone.

Glenn Kilbourne had returned from France early that fall, shell-shocked and gassed, and otherwise incapacitated for service in the army—a wreck of his former sterling self and in many unaccountable ways a stranger to her. Cold, silent, haunted by something, he had made her miserable with his aloofness. But as the bells began to ring out the year that had been his ruin Glenn had drawn her close.

"Carley, look and listen!" he had whispered.

Under them stretched the great long white flare of Broadway, with its snow-covered length glittering under a myriad of electric lights. Gay and thoughtless crowds surged to and fro, from that height merely a thick stream of black figures, like contending columns of ants on the march.

Ring out the Old! Ring in the New! As one by one the siren factory whistles opened up with deep, hoarse bellow, the clamor of the street and the ringing of the bells were lost in a volume of continuous sound that swelled on high into a magnificent roar. It was the voice of a people crying out the strife and the agony of the year—pealing forth a prayer for the future.

Glenn had put his lips to her ear: "It's like the voice in my soul!" And she had stood spellbound, enveloped in the mighty volume of sound no longer discordant, but full of great, pregnant melody.

The new year had not been many minutes old when Glenn Kilbourne had told her he was going West to try to recover his health.

Now Carley roused out of her memories to take up the letter that had so perplexed her. It bore the postmark, Flagstaff, Arizona.

WEST FORK,
March 25.

DEAR CARLEY:

It does seem my neglect in writing you is unpardonable. I used to be a pretty fair correspondent, but in that as in other things I have changed. I am outdoors all day, and when I get back to this cabin at night I am too tired for anything but bed.

Your imperious questions I must answer. First, you ask, "Don't you love me any more as you used to?" Frankly, I do not. I am sure my old love for you, before I went to France, was selfish, thoughtless, sentimental, and boyish. I am a man now. And my love for you has grown better, finer, purer.

And now for your second question, "Are you coming home as soon as you are well again?" Carley, I am *well. But —the fact is, Carley, I am not not coming—just yet. I wish it were possible for me to make you understand. All that I was seems to have changed. I hate the city, I hate people, and particularly I hate that dancing, drinking, lounging set you chase with. I don't want to come East until I am over that, you know.*

Suppose I never get over it?—Well, Carley, you can free yourself from me by one word that I could never utter. I could never break our engagement. In the chaos I've wandered through since the war my love for you was my only anchor. You never guessed, did you, that I lived on your letters until I got well. And now the fact that I might get along without them is no discredit to their charm or to you.

It is all so hard to put in words, Carley. To come home—an incomprehensibly changed man—and to see my old life as strange as if it were the new life of another planet—to try to slip into the old groove—well, no words of mine can tell you how utterly impossible it was.

My old job was not open to me, even if I had been able to work. I could not live on your money, Carley. My people are poor, as you know. So there was nothing for me to do but to borrow a little money from my friends and to come West. I'm glad I had the courage to come.

Getting on here, in my condition, was as hard as trench life. But something has come to me out of the West. I'm strong enough to chop wood all day. No man or woman passes my cabin in a month. But I am never lonely. I love these vast red canyon walls towering above me. And the silence is so sweet. I never understood anything of the meaning of nature until I lived un-

der these looming stone walls and whispering pines.

So, Carley, try to understand me, or at least be kind. You know they came very near writing, "Gone west!" after my name, and considering that, this "Out West" signifies for me a very fortunate difference. A tremendous difference! For the present I'll let well enough alone.

Adios. Write soon. Love from

GLENN.

Carley's second reaction to the letter was a sudden upflashing desire to see her lover—to go out West and find him. Impulses with her were rather rare and inhibited, but this one made her tremble.

Carley had the means to come and go and live as she liked. She did not remember her father, who had died when she was a child. Her mother had left her in the care of a sister, and before the war they had divided their time between New York and Europe, the Adirondacks and Florida. But she was really not used to making any decision as definite and important as that of going out West alone.

So she carried the letter to her aunt, a rather slight woman with a kindly face and shrewd eyes.

"Aunt Mary, here's a letter from Glenn," said Carley. "It's more of a stumper than usual. Please read it."

"Dear me! You look upset," replied her aunt, mildly and, adjusting her spectacles, she took the letter. She paused once to murmur how glad she was that Glenn had gotten well. Then she read on to the close.

"Carley, that's a fine letter," she said fervently. "Do you see through it?"

"No, I don't," replied Carley. "That's why I asked you to read it."

"Do you still love Glenn as you used to—before—"

"Why, Aunt Mary!" exclaimed Carley in surprise.

"Excuse me, Carley, if I'm blunt. But you haven't acted as though you pined for Glenn. You gad around almost the same as ever."

"What's a girl to do?" protested Carley.

"You are twenty-six years old, Carley," retorted Aunt Mary.

"Suppose I am. I'm as young—as I ever was."

"Well, let's not argue about that," returned her aunt kindly. "But I can tell you something of what Glenn Kilbourne means in that letter—if you want to hear it."

"I do—indeed."

"The war did something horrible to Glenn aside from wrecking his health. He must have suffered some terrible blight to his spirit—some blunting of his soul. Glenn saw you and your friends and the life you lead, and all the present, with eyes from which the scales had dropped. He saw what was *wrong*. He never said so to me, but I knew it. It wasn't only to get well that he went West. It was to get *away*. And, Carley Burch, if your happiness depends on him you had better be up and doing—or you'll *lose* him!"

"Aunt Mary!" gasped Carley.

"I mean it. If I were you I'd go out West. Surely there must be a place where it would be all right for you to stay."

"Oh, yes," replied Carley eagerly. "Glenn wrote me there was a lodge where people went in nice weather—right down in the canyon not far from his place. Aunt Mary, I think I'll go."

"I would. You're certainly wasting your time here. If you want my advice

you will surprise Glenn. Don't write him—don't give him a chance to—well—to suggest courteously that you'd better not come just yet. I don't like his words 'just yet.' "

"Auntie, you're—rather—more than blunt," said Carley. "Glenn would be simply wild to have me come."

"Maybe he would. Has he ever asked you?"

"No-o—come to think of it, he hasn't," replied Carley reluctantly.

Aunt Mary shook her gray head sagely. "Carley, I'd like your idea of the most significant thing in Glenn's letter."

"Why, his love for me, of course!"

"Naturally you think that. But I don't. What struck me most were his words, 'out of the West.' Carley, you'd do well to ponder over them."

Carley Burch possessed in full degree the prevailing modern craze for speed. She loved a motor-car ride at sixty miles an hour along a smooth, straight road. Therefore quite to her taste was the Twentieth Century Limited which was hurtling her on the way to Chicago. The unceasingly smooth and even rush of the train satisfied something in her. An old lady sitting in an adjoining seat with a companion amused Carley by the remark: "I wish we didn't go so fast. People nowadays haven't time to draw a comfortable breath. Suppose we should run off the track!"

A long half-day wait in Chicago was a tedious preliminary to the second part of her journey. But at last she found herself aboard the California Limited, and went to bed with a relief quite a stranger to her.

The glare of the sun under the curtain awakened her. Propped up on her pillows, she looked out at apparently endless green fields or pastures, dotted now and then with little farmhouses and tree-skirted villages.

Later, in the dining-car, the steward smilingly answered her question: "This is Kansas, and those green fields out there are the wheat that feeds the nation."

Carley was not impressed. When she got back to her seat she drew the blinds down and read her magazines. Then tiring of that, she went back to the observation car. The train evidently had a full complement of passengers, who, as far as Carley could see, were people not of her station in life. The glare from the many windows, and the rather crass interest of several men, drove her back to her own section. There she discovered that someone had drawn up her window shades. Carley promptly pulled them down and settled herself comfortably.

Kansas was interminably long to Carley, and she went to sleep before riding out of it. Next morning she found herself looking out at the rough gray and black land of New Mexico. She searched the horizon for mountains, but there did not appear to be any. Where was the West Glenn had written about? One thing seemed sure, and it was that every mile of this crude country brought her nearer to him. This recurring thought gave Carley all the pleasure she had felt so far in this endless ride.

By and by the sun grew hot, the train wound slowly and creakingly upgrade, the car became full of dust, all of which was disagreeable to Carley. She dozed on her pillow for hours, until she was stirred by a passenger crying out, delightedly: "Look! Indians!"

Carley looked. From the car window she espied dusty flat barrens, low squat

mud houses, and queer-looking little people, children naked or extremely ragged and dirty, women in loose garments with flares of red, and men in white man's garb, slovenly and motley.

"Indians," muttered Carley incredulously. "Well, if they are the noble red people, my illusions are dispelled."

Next day Carley's languid attention quickened to the name of Arizona, and to the frowning red walls of rock, and to the vast rolling stretches of cedar-dotted land. Nevertheless, it affronted her. This was no country for people to live in, and so far as she could see it was indeed uninhabited.

At sunset she gazed out to discover what an Arizona sunset was like. Just a pale yellow flare! She had seen better than that above the Palisades. Not until reaching Winslow did she realize how near she was to her journey's end and that she would arrive at Flagstaff after dark.

Not only once, but several times before the train slowed down for her destination did Carley wish she had sent Glenn word to meet her. And when, presently, she found herself standing out in the dark, cold, windy night before a dim-lit railroad station she more than regretted her decision to surprise Glenn.

Men were passing to and fro on the platform, some of whom appeared to be very dark of skin and eye, and were probably Mexicans. At length an expressman approached Carley, soliciting patronage. He took her bags and, depositing them in a wagon, he pointed up the wide street: "One block up an' turn. Hotel Wetherford." Then he drove off. Carley followed, carrying her small satchel.

Gaining the corner of the block, she turned, and was relieved to see the hotel sign. As she entered the lobby a clicking of pool balls and the discordant rasp of a phonograph assailed her ears. The expressman set down her bags and left Carley standing there. The clerk or proprietor was talking from behind his desk to several men, and there were loungers in the lobby. The air was thick with tobacco smoke. No one paid any attention to Carley until at length she stepped up to the desk and interrupted the conversation there.

"Is this a hotel?" she queried brusquely.

The shirt-sleeved individual leisurely turned and replied, "Yes, ma'am."

Carley said, "No one would recognize it by the courtesy shown. I have been standing here waiting to register."

With a cool stare the clerk turned the book toward her. "Reckon people round here ask for what they want."

Carley made no further comment. What she most wished to do at the moment was to get close to the big open grate where a cheery red-and-gold fire cracked. It was necessary, however, to follow the clerk. He assigned her to a small drab room which contained a bed, a bureau, and a washstand with one spigot. There was also a chair.

While Carley removed her coat and hat the clerk went downstairs for the rest of her luggage. Upon his return Carley learned that a stage left the hotel for Oak Creek Canyon at nine o'clock next morning. And this cheered her so much that she faced the strange sense of loneliness and discomfort with something of fortitude. There was no heat in the room, and no hot water. When Carley squeezed the spigot handle there burst forth a torrent of water that spouted up out of the washbasin

to deluge her. It was colder than any ice water she had ever felt.

"Serves you right—you spoiled doll of luxury!" she mocked. "This is out West. Shiver and wait on yourself!"

Never before had she undressed so swiftly nor felt grateful for thick woollen blankets on a hard bed. Gradually she grew warm. The blackness, too, seemed rather comforting.

"I'm only twenty miles from Glenn," she whispered. "How strange! I wonder will he be glad?" She felt a sweet, glowing assurance of that.

Upon awakening she found she had overslept, necessitating haste upon her part. As to that, the temperature of the room did not admit of leisurely dressing. Her fingers grew so numb that she made what she considered a disgraceful matter of her attire.

Downstairs in the lobby another cheerful red fire burned in the grate. How perfectly satisfying was an open fireplace! She thrust her numb hands almost into the blaze. The lobby was deserted. A sign directed her to a dining-room in the basement, where of the ham and eggs and strong coffee she managed to partake a little. Then she went upstairs into the lobby and out into the street.

A cold, piercing air seemed to blow right through her. Walking to the near corner, she paused to look around. Down the main street flowed a leisurely stream of pedestrians, horses, cars, extending between two blocks of low buildings. Across from where she stood lay a vacant lot. Lifting her gaze, instinctively drawn by something obstructing the sky line, she was suddenly struck with surprise and delight.

"Oh! how perfectly splendid!" she burst out.

Two magnificent mountains loomed right over her, sloping up with majestic sweep of green and black timber, to a ragged tree-fringed snow area that swept up cleaner and whiter, at last to lift pure glistening peaks, noble and sharp, and sunrise-flushed against the blue.

"What mountains are those?" she asked a passer-by.

"San Francisco Peaks, ma'am," replied the man.

"Why, they can't be over a mile away!" she said.

"Eighteen miles, ma'am," he returned, with a grin. "Shore this Arizonie air is deceivin'."

She was still gazing upward when a man approached her and said the stage for Oak Creek Canyon would soon be ready to start, and he wanted to know if her baggage was ready. Carley hurried back to her room to pack.

She had expected the stage would be a motor bus, or at least a large touring car, but it turned out to be a two-seated vehicle drawn by a team of ragged horses. The driver was a little wizen-faced man of doubtful years. There was considerable freight to be hauled, besides Carley's luggage, but evidently she was the only passenger.

"Reckon it's goin' to be a bad day," said the driver. "These April days high up on the desert are windy an' cold. Mebbe it'll snow, too. Them clouds ain't very promisin'. Now, Miss, haven't you a heavier coat or somethin'?"

"No, I have not," replied Carley. "I'll have to stand it. Did you say this was desert?"

"I shore did. Wal, there's a hoss blanket under the seat, an' you can have that," he replied. Climbing to the seat in front of Carley, he took up the reins and started the horses off at a trot.

At the first turning a gust of wind, raw and penetrating, laden with dust and stinging sand, swept full in Carley's face. It took considerable clumsy effort on her part with a handkerchief, aided by relieving tears, to clear her sight again. Thus uncomfortably Carley found herself launched on the last lap of her journey.

All before her and alongside lay the squalid environs of the town. Looked back at, with the peaks rising behind, it was not unpicturesque. But the hard road with its sheets of flying dust, the bleak railroad yards, the round pens she took for cattle corrals, and the debris littering the approach to a huge sawmill—these were offensive in Carley's sight. From a tall domelike stack rose a yellowish smoke that spread overhead, adding to the lowering aspect of the sky. Beyond the sawmill extended the open country, evidently once a forest, but now a hideous bare slash, with ghastly burned stems of trees still standing, and myriads of stumps attesting to denudation.

The bleak road wound away to the southwest, and from this direction came the gusty wind. It lulled now and then, permitting her to look about, and then suddenly again whipping dust into her face. The smell of the dust was as unpleasant as the sting. As a leaden gray bank of broken clouds rolled up the wind grew stronger and the air colder. Chilled before, Carley now became thoroughly cold.

There appeared to be no end to the devastated forest land, and the farther she rode the more barren grew the landscape. Carley forgot about the impressive mountains behind her. And as the ride wore into hours she grew mightily unhappy. Now and then she espied dilapidated log cabins and surroundings even more squalid than the ruined forest. What wretched abodes!

Straggling bits of forest—yellow pines, the driver called the trees—began to encroach upon the burned-over and arid barren land. Presently, when the driver had to halt to adjust something wrong with the harness, Carley was grateful for a respite from cold inaction. She got out and walked. Sleet began to fall, and when she resumed her seat in the vehicle she asked the driver for the blanket to cover her.

But the sleet storm passed, the clouds broke, the sun shone through, greatly mitigating her discomfort. By and by the road led into a section of real forest, unspoiled in any degree. Carley saw large gray squirrels with tufted ears and white bushy tails. Presently the driver pointed out a flock of huge birds, which Carley recognized as turkeys.

"There must be a farm near," she said, gazing about.

"No, ma'am. Them's wild turkeys," replied the driver, "an' shore the best eatin' you ever had in your life."

More barren country, more bad weather, and an exceedingly rough road reduced Carley to her former state of dejection. She had to hold on to the seat to keep from being thrown out. A smoother stretch of road did not come any too soon for her.

It led into forest again. A cold wind moaned through the treetops and set the drops of water pattering down upon her. It lashed her wet face. Carley closed her eyes and sagged in her seat, mostly oblivious to the passing scenery. Thought of Glenn strengthened her. It did not really matter what she suffered on the way to him.

"Wal, hyar's Oak Creek Canyon," called the driver.

Carley, rousing out of her weary preoccupation, opened her eyes to see that the driver had halted at a turn of the road, where apparently it descended a fearful declivity.

The very forest-fringed earth seemed to have opened into a deep abyss, ribbed by red rock walls and choked by steep mats of green timber. The chasm was a V-shaped split and so deep that looking downward sent at once a chill and a shudder over Carley. At that point it appeared narrow and ended in a box. In the other direction, it widened and deepened, and stretched farther on between tremendous walls of red, and split its winding floor of green with glimpses of a gleaming creek, boulder-strewn and ridged by white rapids. A low mellow roar of rushing waters floated up to Carley's ears.

What a wild, lonely, terrible place! Could Glenn possibly live down there in that big, ragged rent in the earth? It frightened her—the sheer sudden plunge of it from the heights. Far down the gorge a purple light shone on the forested floor. And on the moment the sun burst through the clouds and sent a golden blaze down into the depths.

Carley had never gazed upon a scene like this. Hostile and prejudiced, she yet felt wrung from her an acknowledgment of beauty and grandeur. But wild, violent, savage! Not livable!

Chapter Two

Reconquest

CARLEY, clutching her support, gazed in fascinated suspense over the rim of the gorge. Sometimes the wheels on that side of the vehicle passed within a few inches of the edge. The brakes squeaked, the wheels slid; and she could hear the scrape of the iron-shod hoofs of the horses as they held back stiff-legged, obedient to the wary call of the driver.

The first hundred yards of that steep road cut out of the cliff appeared to be the worst. It began to widen, with descents less precipitous. Tips of trees rose level with her gaze, obstructing sight of the blue depths. Then brush appeared on each side of the road. Gradually Carley's strain relaxed, and also the muscular contraction by which she had braced herself in the seat. The horses began to trot again. The wheels rattled.

The road wound around abrupt corners, and soon the green and red wall of the opposite side of the canyon loomed close. Low roar of running water rose to Carley's ears. When at length she looked out instead of down she could see nothing but a mass of green foliage crossed by tree trunks and branches of brown and gray. Then the vehicle bowled under dark cool shade, into a tunnel with mossy wet cliff on one side, and close-standing trees on the other.

"Reckon we're all right now, onless we meet somebody comin' up," de-

clared the driver.

Carley drew a deep breath of relief. The murmur of falling water sounded closer. Presently Carley saw that the road turned at the notch in the canyon, and crossed a clear swift stream. Beyond this crossing the road descended the west side of the canyon, drawing away from the creek. Huge trees began to stand majestically up out of the gorge, dwarfing the maples and white-spotted sycamores.

At last the road led down from the steep slope to the floor of the canyon: a wide, winding valley, densely forested for the most part, yet having open glades and bisected from wall to wall by the creek. Every quarter of a mile or so the road crossed the stream; and at these fords Carley again held on desperately and gazed out dubiously, for the creek was deep, swift, and full of boulders.

A sharp turn of the road to the right disclosed a slope down the creek, across which showed orchards and fields, and a cottage nestling at the base of the wall. The ford at this crossing gave Carley more concern than any she had passed, for there was greater volume and depth of water. One of the horses slipped on the rocks, plunged up and on with great splash. They crossed, however, without more mishap to Carley than further acquaintance with this iciest of waters. From this point the driver turned back along the creek, passed between orchards and fields, and drove along the base of the red wall to come suddenly upon a large rustic house that had been hidden from Carley's sight.

It sat almost against the stone cliff, from which poured a white foamy sheet of water. The house was built of slabs with the bark on, and it had a lower and upper porch running all around, at least as far as the cliff. Green growths from the rock wall overhung the upper porch. A column of blue smoke curled lazily upward from a stone chimney. On one of the porch posts hung a sign with rude lettering: *Lolomi Lodge.*

"Hey, Josh, did you fetch the flour?" called a woman's voice from inside.

"Hullo! Reckon I didn't forgit nothin'," replied the man, as he got down. "An' say, Mrs. Hutter, hyar's a young lady from Noo York."

That latter speech of the driver's brought Mrs. Hutter out on the porch. "Flo, come here," she called to someone evidently near at hand. And then she smilingly greeted Carley.

"Get down an' come in, Miss," she said. "I'm sure glad to see you."

When Carley mounted to the porch she saw that Mrs. Hutter was a woman of middle age, rather stout, with strong face and kind dark eyes.

"I'm Miss Burch," said Carley.

"You're the girl whose picture Glenn Kilbourne has over his fireplace," declared the woman heartily. "I'm sure glad to meet you, an' my daughter Flo will be, too."

"Yes, I'm Glenn Kilbourne's fiancée. I've come West to surprise him. Is he here? Is—is he well?"

"Fine. I saw him yesterday. He's changed a great deal. I reckon you won't know him. But you're wet an' cold an' you look fagged. Come right in to the fire."

"Thank you; I'm all right," returned Carley.

At the doorway they encountered a girl of lithe and robust figure, quick in her movements. She had a face that struck Carley as neither pretty nor beautiful, but still attractive.

"Flo, here's Miss Burch," burst out Mrs. Hutter. "Glenn Kilbourne's girl, come all the way from New York to surprise him!"

"Oh, Carley, I'm shore happy to meet you!" said the girl in a voice of drawling richness. "I know you. Glenn has told me all about you."

As Carley murmured something in reply she looked into the face before her. Flo Hutter had a fair skin generously freckled; a mouth and chin too firmly cut to suggest a softer feminine beauty; and eyes of clear light hazel, penetrating, frank, fearless. Her hair was very abundant, almost silver-gold in color. Carley liked the girl's looks and liked the sincerity of her greeting; but instinctively she reacted antagonistically because of the frank suggestion of intimacy with Glenn.

They ushered Carley into a big living-room and up to a fire of blazing logs, where they helped divest her of the wet wraps. Then Mrs. Hutter bustled off to make a cup of hot coffee while Flo talked.

"We'll shore give you the nicest room—with a sleeping-porch right under the cliff where the water falls. It'll sing you to sleep. Of course you needn't use the bed outdoors until it's warmer. You really happened on Oak Creek at its least attractive season. But then it's always—well, just Oak Creek. You'll come to know."

"I dare say I'll remember my first sight of it—and the ride down that cliff road," said Carley.

"Oh, that's nothing to what you'll see and do," returned Flo knowingly. "We've had Eastern tenderfeet here before. And never was there a one of them who didn't come to love Arizona."

Then Mrs. Hutter returned, carrying a tray, which she set upon a chair, and drew to Carley's side. "Eat an' drink," she said. "Flo, you carry her bags up to that west room we always give to some particular person we want to love Lolomi." Next she threw sticks of wood upon the fire, making it crackle and blaze; then seated herself near Carley and beamed upon her.

"You'll not mind if we call you Carley?" she asked, eagerly.

"Oh, indeed no! I—I'd like it," returned Carley, made to feel at home in spite of herself.

"You see, it's not as if you were just a stranger," went on Mrs. Hutter. "Tom—that's Flo's father—took a likin' to Glenn Kilbourne when he first came to Oak Creek over a year ago. Well, he lay on his back for two solid weeks—in the room we're givin' you. An' I for one didn't think he'd ever get up. But he did. An' he got better. An' after a while he went to work for Tom. Then six months an' more ago he invested in the sheep business with Tom. He lived with us until he built his cabin up West Fork. He an' Flo have run together a good deal, an' naturally he told her about you. So you see you're not a stranger. An' we want you to feel you're with friends."

"I thank you, Mrs. Hutter," replied Carley feelingly. "I never could thank you enough for being good to Glenn. I did not know he was so—so sick. At first he wrote but seldom."

"Reckon he never wrote you or told you what he did in the war," declared Mrs. Hutter.

"Indeed he never did!"

"Well, I'll tell you some day. For Tom found out all about him. Got some of it from a soldier who came to Flagstaff for lung trouble. He'd been in the same company with Glenn. John Henderson. He was only twenty-two, a fine

lad. An' he died in Phoenix. We tried to get him out here. But the boy wouldn't live on charity."

At this juncture Flo returned to the room. "I've made a fire in your little stove," she said. "There's water heating. Now won't you come up and change those traveling clothes? You'll want to fix up for Glenn, won't you?"

Carley had to smile at that. She rose.

"You are both very good to receive me as a friend," she said. "I hope I shall not disappoint you. Yes, I do want to improve my appearance before Glenn sees me. Is there any way I can send word to him—by someone who has not seen me?"

"There shore is. I'll send Charley, one of our hired boys."

"Thank you. Then tell him to say there is a lady here from New York to see him, and it is very important."

Carley was conducted up a broad stairway and along a boarded hallway to a room that opened out on the porch. A steady low murmur of falling water assailed her ears. Through the open door she saw across the porch to a white tumbling lacy veil of water, so close that it seemed to touch the heavy pole railing of the porch.

This room resembled a tent. The sides were of canvas. It had no ceiling. But the rough-hewn shingles of the roof of the house sloped down closely. The furniture was homemade. An Indian rug covered the floor. The bed with its woolly clean blankets looked inviting.

"Is this where Glenn lay—when he was sick?" queried Carley.

"Yes," replied Flo gravely, and a shadow darkened her eyes. "Glenn nearly died here. Mother or I never left his side—for a while there—when he was so bad."

She showed Carley how to open the little stove and put the short billets of wood inside and work the damper; and cautioning her to keep an eye on it so that it would not get too hot, she left Carley to herself.

Carley found herself in unfamiliar mood. There came a leap of her heart every time she thought of the meeting with Glenn, so soon now to be, but it was not that which was unfamiliar. There was a pang in her breast which must owe its origin to the fact that Glenn Kilbourne had been ill in this little room and some other girl than Carley Burch had nursed him.

Carley disrobed and, donning her dressing-gown, she unpacked her bags and hung her things upon pegs under the curtained shelves. Then she lay down to rest, with no intention of slumber, but she fell asleep. When she awakened it was five o'clock. The fire in the stove was out, but the water was still warm. She bathed and dressed with care; she wore white because Glenn had always liked her best in white. She threw round her shoulders a warm sweater-shawl, with colorful bars becoming to her dark eyes and hair.

All the time that she dressed and thought, her very being seemed to be permeated by that soft murmuring sound of falling water. She went out upon the porch. The small alcove space held a bed and a rustic chair. Above her the peeled poles of the roof descended to within a few feet of her head. She had to lean over the rail of the porch to look up. The green and red rock wall sheered ponderously near. The waterfall showed first at the notch of a fissure, where the cliff split; and down over smooth places the water gleamed, to narrow in a crack with

little drops, and suddenly to leap into a thin white sheet.

Heavy footsteps upon the porch below accompanied by a man's voice quickened Carley's pulse. Did they belong to Glenn? After a strained second she decided not. Nevertheless, the acceleration of her blood and an unwonted glow of excitement, long a stranger to her, persisted as she left the porch and entered the boarded hall.

From the head of the stairway the big living-room presented warm colors, some comfortable rockers, a lamp that shed a bright light, and an open fire which alone would have dispelled the raw gloom of the day.

A large man in corduroys and top boots advanced to meet Carley. He had a clean-shaven face, and one look into his eyes revealed their resemblance to Flo's.

"I'm Tom Hutter, an' I'm shore glad to welcome you to Lolomi, Miss Carley," he said. His voice was deep and slow. Carley instantly liked him and sensed in him a strong personality. She greeted him in turn and expressed her thanks for his goodness to Glenn.

"Well, Miss Carley, if you don't mind, I'll say you're prettier than your picture," said Hutter. "An' that is shore sayin' a lot. All the sheepherders in the country have taken a peep at your picture. Without permission, you understand."

"I'm greatly flattered," laughed Carley.

"We're glad you've come," replied Hutter, simply. "I just got back from the East myself. Chicago an' Kansas City. Reckon I've not got back my breath yet."

Mrs. Hutter bustled in from the kitchen. "For the land's sakes!" she exclaimed, at sight of Carley. Her expression was indeed a compliment, but there was a suggestion of shock in it. Then Flo came in. She wore a simple gray gown.

"Carley, don't mind mother," said Flo. "She means your dress is lovely. Which is my say, too. But, listen—I just saw Glenn comin' up the road."

Carley ran to the open door with more haste than dignity. She saw a tall man striding along. Something about him appeared familiar. No—this was not Glenn Kilbourne! This was a bronzed man, wide of shoulder, roughly garbed, heavy-limbed, quite different from the Glenn she remembered. He mounted the porch steps. And Carley, still unseen herself, saw his face. Yes—Glenn!

Wheeling away, she backed against the wall behind the door and held up a warning finger to Flo, who stood nearest. Strange and disturbing then, to see something in Flo Hutter's eyes that could be read by a woman in only one way!

A tall form darkened the doorway. It strode in and halted.

"Flo!—who—where?" he began breathlessly.

His voice fell upon Carley's ears as something unconsciously longed for. His frame had so filled out that she did not recognize it. His face, too, had unbelievably changed—in contour of cheek and vanishing of pallid hue and tragic line. Carley's heart swelled with joy.

"Glenn! Look—who's—here!" she called, in voice she could not have steadied to save her life.

Glenn whirled with an inarticulate cry. He saw Carley.

"You!" he cried, and leaped at her with radiant face.

"Carley! I couldn't believe it was

you," he declared, releasing her from his close embrace, yet still holding her.

"Yes, Glenn—it's I—all you've left of me," she replied tremulously. "You—you big sheepherder! You Goliath!"

"I never was so knocked off my pins," he said. "A lady to see me—from New York! Of course it had to be you. But I couldn't believe. Carley, you were good to come."

Somehow the warm look of his dark eyes hurt her. Why had she not come West sooner? She disengaged herself from his hold and moved away, striving for composure. Flo Hutter was standing before the fire, looking down. Mrs. Hutter beamed upon Carley.

"Now let's have supper," she said.

"Reckon Miss Carley can't eat now, after that hug Glenn gave her," drawled Tom Hutter.

"Carley, you must excuse my violence," said Glenn. "I've been hugging sheep. That is, when I shear a sheep I have to hold him."

They all laughed. Presently Carley found herself sitting at table, directly across from Flo. A pearly whiteness was slowly warming out of the girl's face. Her frank clear eyes met Carley's and they had nothing to hide. That moment saw a birth of respect and sincere liking in Carley for this Western girl. If Flo Hutter ever was a rival she would be an honest one.

Not long after supper Tom Hutter winked at Carley and said he "reckoned on general principles it was his hunch to go to bed." Mrs. Hutter suddenly discovered tasks to perform elsewhere. And Flo said in her cool sweet drawl, "Shore you two will want to spoon."

"Now, Flo, Eastern girls are no longer old-fashioned enough for that," declared Glenn.

"Too bad! Reckon I can't see how love could ever be old-fashioned. Good night, Glenn. Good night, Carley."

Flo stood an instant at the foot of the dark stairway. Then she ran up the stairs to disappear.

"Glenn, is that girl in love with you?" asked Carley bluntly.

Glenn laughed. "If that isn't like you!" he ejaculated. "Your very first words after we are left alone! It brings back the East, Carley."

"Probably recall to memory will be good for you," returned Carley. "But tell me. Is she in love with you?"

"Why, no, certainly not!" replied Glenn.

"Humph! I can remember when you were not above making love to a pretty girl. You certainly had me worn to a frazzle—before we became engaged," said Carley.

"Old times! Carley it's sure wonderful to see you."

"How do you like my gown?" asked Carley, pirouetting for his benefit.

"Well, what little there is of it is beautiful," he replied with a slow smile. "I always liked you best in white. Did you remember?"

"Yes. I got the gown for you. And I'll never wear it except for you."

"Same old coquette," he said. "You know when you look stunning. But, Carley, the cut of that—or rather the abbreviation of it—inclines me to think that style for women's clothes has not changed for the better. Where will you women draw the line?"

"Women are slaves to the prevailing mode," rejoined Carley. "I don't imagine women who dress would ever draw a line, if fashion went on dictating."

"But would they care so much—if they had to work—plenty of work—and children?" inquired Glenn, wistfully.

"Glenn! Work and children for modern women? Why, you are dreaming!" said Carley, with a laugh.

She saw him gaze thoughtfully into the glowing embers of the fire, and as she watched him her quick intuition grasped a subtle change in his mood. It brought a sternness to his face. She could hardly realize she was looking at the Glenn Kilbourne of old.

"Come close to the fire," he said, and pulled up a chair for her. Then he threw more wood upon the red coals. "You must be careful not to catch cold out here. That gown is no protection."

"Glenn, one chair used to be enough for us," she said archly, standing beside him.

But he did not respond to her hint and, a little affronted, she accepted the proffered chair. Then he began to ask questions rapidly. He was eager for news from home—from his people—from old friends. She talked unremittingly for an hour, before she satisfied his hunger. But when her turn came to ask questions she found him reticent.

He had fallen upon rather hard days at first out here in the West; then his health had begun to improve; and as soon as he was able to work his condition rapidly changed for the better; and now he was getting along pretty well.

Carley felt hurt at his apparent disinclination to confide in her. The strong cast of his face, as if it had been chiseled in bronze; the stern set of his lips and the jaw that protruded lean and square-cut; the quiet masked light of his eyes; the coarse roughness of his brown hands, mute evidence of strenuous labors—these all gave a different impression from his brief remarks about himself. Lastly there was a little gray in the light-brown hair over his temples. Glenn was only twenty-seven, yet he looked ten years older.

Studying him so, with the memory of earlier years in her mind, she was forced to admit that she liked him infinitely more as he was now. He seemed proven. Something had made him a man. Had it been his love for her, or the army service, or the war in France, or the struggle for life and health afterward? Or had it been this rugged, uncouth West? Carley felt insidious jealousy of this last possibility. She feared this West. She was going to hate it.

Gradually the conversation drew to a lapse, and it suited Carley to let it be so. She watched Glenn as he gazed thoughtfully into the amber depths of the fire. What was going on in his mind? Carley's old perplexity suddenly had rebirth. And with it came an unfamiliar fear which she could not smother. Every moment that she sat there beside Glenn she was realizing more and more a yearning, passionate love for him.

"Carley," he asked presently, "does Morrison still chase after you?"

"Glenn, I'm neither old—nor married," she replied, laughing.

"No, that's true. But if you were married it wouldn't make any difference to Morrison."

Carley could not detect bitterness or jealousy in his voice. She would not have been averse to hearing either. What had she said or done to make him retreat within himself, aloof, impersonal, unfamiliar? Only one thing could she be sure of at the moment, and it was that pride would never be her ally.

"Glenn, look here," she said, sliding her chair close to his and holding out

her left hand, with its glittering diamond on the third finger.

He took her hand in his and pressed it, and smiled at her. "Yes, Carley, it's a beautiful, soft little hand. But I think I'd like it better if it were strong and brown, and coarse on the inside—from useful work."

"Like Flo Hutter's?" queried Carley.

"Yes."

Carley looked proudly into his eyes. "People are born in different stations. I respect your little Western friend, Glenn, but could I wash and sweep, milk cows and chop wood, and all that sort of thing?"

"I suppose you couldn't," he admitted, with a blunt little laugh.

"Would you want me to?" she asked.

"Well, that's hard to say," he replied, knitting his brows. "I hardly know. I think it depends on you. But if you did do such work wouldn't you be happier?"

"Happier! Why Glenn, I'd be miserable! But listen. It wasn't my beautiful and useless hand I wanted you to see. It was my engagement ring."

"Oh!—Well?" he went on slowly.

"I've never had it off since you left New York," she said softly. "You gave it to me four years ago. Do you remember? You said it would take two months' salary to pay the bill."

"It sure did," he retorted.

"Glenn, during the war it was not so—so very hard to wear this ring as an engagement ring should be worn," said Carley, growing more earnest. "But after the war—especially after your departure West—it was terribly hard to be true to the significance of this betrothal ring. There was a let-down in all women. New York was wild during the year of your absence. Well, I gadded, danced, dressed, drank, smoked, motored, just the same as the other women in our crowd. I never rested. Excitement seemed to be happiness.

"Glenn, I am not making any plea to excuse all that. But I want you to know—how under trying circumstances—I was absolutely true to you. Through it all I loved you just the same. And now I'm with you, it seems, oh, so much more! Your last letter hurt me. I came West to see you—to tell you this—and to ask you. Do you want this ring back?"

"Certainly not," he replied forcibly, with a dark flush spreading over his face.

"Then—you love me?"

"Yes—I love you," he returned, deliberately. "And in spite of all you say—very probably more than you love me. But you make love and its expression the sole object of life. Carley, I have been concerned with keeping my body from the grave and my soul from hell."

"But—dear—you're well now?" she returned, with trembling lips.

"Yes, I've almost pulled out."

"Then what is wrong between us?"

"Carley, a man who has been on the verge—as I have been—seldom or never comes back to happiness. But perhaps—"

"You frighten me," cried Carley and, rising, she sat upon the arm of his chair and encircled his neck with her arms. "How can I help if I do not understand? Glenn, I need to be loved. That's all that's wrong with *me*."

"Carley, you are still an imperious, mushy girl," replied Glenn, taking her into his arms. "I need to be loved, too. But that's not what is wrong with me. You'll have to find it out yourself."

"You're a dear old Sphinx," she retorted.

"Listen, Carley," he said earnestly. "Please don't misunderstand me. I love you. I'm starved for your kisses. But—is it right to ask them?"

"Right! Aren't we engaged? And don't I want to give them?"

"If I were only *sure* we'd be married!" he said in low, tense voice.

"Married!" cried Carley. "Of course we'll be married. Glenn, you wouldn't jilt me?"

"Carley, what I mean is that you might never really marry me," he answered seriously.

"Oh, if that's all you need be sure of, Glenn Kilbourne, you may begin to make love to me now."

It was late when Carley went up to her room. And she was in such a softened mood, so happy and excited and yet disturbed in mind, that the coldness and the darkness did not matter in the least. She had won Glenn Kilbourne back. Her presence, her love had overcome his restraint. She thrilled in the consciousness of her conquest.

Chapter Three

A Day to Remember

SHE was awakened by rattling sounds in her room. The raising of sleepy eyelids disclosed Flo on her knees before the little stove, in the act of lighting a fire.

"Mawnin', Carley," she drawled. "It's shore cold. Stay in bed till the fire burns up."

"I shall do no such thing," declared Carley, heroically.

"We're afraid you'll take cold," said Flo. "Please be good."

"Well, it doesn't require much self-denial to stay here awhile longer," replied Carley lazily.

Flo left with a parting admonition not to let the stove get red-hot. And Carley lay snuggled in the warm blankets, dreading the ordeal of getting out into that cold bare room. She had a spirit, however, that was waxing a little rebellious to all this intimation as to her susceptibility to colds and her probable weakness under privation. Carley got up. Her bare feet landed upon the board floor instead of the Navajo rug, and she thought she had encountered cold stone. Stove and hot water notwithstanding, by the time she was half dressed she was also half frozen.

It cost her effort of will and real pain to finish lacing her boots. As she had made an engagement with Glenn to visit his cabin, she had donned an outdoor suit.

Carley went downstairs to the living-room, and made no effort to resist a rush to the open fire. Flo and her mother were amused at Carley's impetuosity.

"You'll like that stingin' of the air after you get used to it," said Mrs. Hutter. Carley had her doubts. When she was thoroughly thawed out she discovered an appetite quite unusual for her, and she enjoyed her breakfast. Then it was time to sally forth to meet Glenn.

"It's pretty sharp this mawnin'," said Flo. "You'll need gloves and sweater."

Having fortified herself with these, Carley asked how to find West Fork Canyon.

"It's down the road a little way," replied Flo. "A great narrow canyon

opening on the right side. You can't miss it."

Flo accompanied her as far as the porch steps. A queer-looking individual was slouching along with ax over his shoulder.

"There's Charley," said Flo. "He'll show you." Then she whispered, "He's sort of dotty sometimes. A horse kicked him once. But mostly he's sensible."

At Flo's call the fellow halted with a grin. He was long, lean, loose-jointed, dressed in blue overalls stuck into the tops of muddy boots. His brow bulged a little, and from under it peered out a pair of wistful brown eyes.

"Wal, it ain't a-goin' to be a nice day," remarked Charley, as he tried to accommodate his strides to Carley's steps.

"How can you tell?" asked Carley. "It looks clear and bright."

"Naw, this is a dark mawnin'. Thet's a cloudy sun. We'll hev snow on an' off."

"Do you mind bad weather?"

"Me? All the same to me. Reckon, though, I like it cold so I can loaf round a big fire at night."

"I like a big fire, too."

"Ever camped out?" he asked.

"Not what you'd call the real thing," replied Carley.

"Wal, thet's too bad. Reckon it'll be tough fer you," he went on. "There was a gurl tenderfoot heah two years ago an' she had a hell of a time. They all joked her, 'cept me, an' played tricks on her. I was sorry fer her."

"You were very kind to be an exception," murmured Carley.

"You look out fer Tom Hutter, an' I reckon Flo ain't so darn above layin' traps fer you. 'Specially as she's sweet on your beau. I seen them together a lot."

"Yes?" interrogated Carley encouragingly.

"Kilbourne is the best feller thet ever happened along Oak Creek. I helped him build his cabin. We've hunted some together. Did you ever hunt?"

"No."

"Wal, you've shore missed a lot of fun," he said. "Turkey huntin'. Thet's what fetches the gurls. I'll take you gobbler huntin' if you'd like to go."

"I'm sure I would."

"There's good trout fishin' along heah a little later," he said, pointing to the stream. "Crick's too high now. I like West Fork best. I've ketched some lammin' big ones up there."

Carley was amused and interested. It took considerable restraint not to lead him to talk more about Flo and Glenn. Presently they reached the turn in the road opposite the cottage Carley had noticed yesterday.

"You take the trail heah," he said, pointing it out, "an' foller it into West Fork. So long, an' don't forget we're goin' huntin' turkeys."

Carley smiled her thanks, and, taking the trail, she stepped out briskly. The trail led her through a grove of maples and sycamores, out into an open parklike bench that turned to the right toward the cliff. Suddenly Carley saw a break in the red wall. It was the intersecting canyon, West Fork.

Carley turned the bulging corner, to be halted by a magnificent spectacle. It seemed a mountain wall loomed over her. It was the western side of this canyon, so lofty that Carley had to tip back her head to see the top. She swept her astonished gaze down the face of this tremendous red mountain wall and then slowly swept it upward again. It looked a mile high. The few

trees along its bold rampart resembled short spear-pointed bushes outlined against the steel gray of sky. Ledges, caves, seams, cracks, fissures, beetling red brows, yellow crumbling crags, benches of green growths and niches choked with brush—the colossal mountain front stood up before her in all its strange, wild, magnificent ruggedness and beauty.

It fascinated her. There were inaccessible ledges that haunted her with their remote fastnesses. How wonderful would it be to get there, rest there, if that were possible! The crumbling crags, the toppling ledges, the leaning rocks all threatened to come thundering down at the breath of wind. How deep and soft the red color in contrast with the green! How splendid the sheer bold uplift of gigantic steps! Carley found herself marveling.

"Well, old Fifth Avenue gadder!" called a gay voice. "If the back wall of my yard so halts you—what will you ever do when you see the Painted Desert, or climb Sunset Peak, or look down into the Grand Canyon?"

"Oh, Glenn, where are you?" cried Carley, gazing everywhere near at hand. The clearness of his voice had deceived her. Presently she espied him a little distance away, across a creek.

"Come on," he called. "I want to see you cross the stepping stones."

Carley ran ahead, down a little slope of clean red rock, to the shore of the green water. It was clear, swift, deep in some places and shallow in others, with white wreathes or ripples around the rocks evidently placed there as a means to cross. Carley drew back aghast.

"Glenn, I could never make it," she called.

"Come on, my Alpine climber," he taunted. "Will you let Arizona daunt you?"

"Do you want me to fall in and catch cold?" she cried desperately.

"My love, Flo could cross here with her eyes shut."

That thrust spurred Carley to action. His words were jest, yet they held a hint of earnest. With her heart at her throat Carley stepped on the first rock and, poising, she calculated on a running leap from stone to stone. Once launched, she felt she was falling downhill. She swayed, she splashed, she slipped; and clearing the longest leap from the last stone to shore she lost her balance and fell into Glenn's arms. His kisses drove away both her panic and her resentment.

"By Jove! I didn't think you'd even attempt it!" he declared, manifestly pleased. "I made sure I'd have to pack you over—in fact, rather liked the idea."

"I wouldn't advise you to employ any such means again—to dare me," she retorted.

"That's a nifty outfit you've on," he said admiringly. "I was wondering what you'd wear."

Carley locked her arm in his. "Honey, I want to have a good time today. Take me to see your little gray home in the West. Or is it gray?"

He laughed. "Why, yes, it's gray, just about. The logs have bleached some."

Glenn led her away up a trail that climbed between boulders and meandered on over piny mats of needles under great, silent, spreading pines; and closer to the impondering mountain wall, where at the base of the red rock the creek murmured strangely; and on through sweet-smelling woods, out into the sunlight again, and across

a wider breadth of stream; and up a slope covered with stately pines, to a little cabin that faced the west.

"Here we are, sweetheart," said Glenn. "Now we shall see what you are made of."

The cabin contained one room about fifteen feet wide by twenty long. Between the peeled logs were lines of red mud, hard dried. There was a small window opposite the door. In one corner was a couch of poles, with green tips of pine boughs peeping from under the blankets. The floor consisted of flat rocks laid irregularly, with many spaces of earth showing between. The open fireplace appeared too large for the room, but the very bigness of it, as well as the blazing sticks and glowing embers, appealed strongly to Carley. A rough-hewn log formed the mantel, and on it Carley's picture held the place of honor. Above this a rifle lay across deer antlers. Carley paused here in her survey long enough to kiss Glenn and point to her photograph.

"You couldn't have pleased me more."

To the left of the fireplace was a rude cupboard of shelves, packed with boxes, cans, bags, and utensils. Below the cupboard, hung upon pegs, were blackened pots and pans, a long-handled skillet, and a bucket. Glenn's table was a masterpiece. It consisted of four poles driven into the ground, upon which had been nailed two wide slabs. There were two low stools. In the right-hand corner stood a neat pile of firewood, cut with an ax, and beyond this hung saddle and saddle blanket, bridle and spurs. An old sombrero was hooked upon the pommel of the saddle. Upon the wall, higher up, hung a lantern, resting in a coil of rope that Carley took to be a lasso. Under a shelf upon which lay a suitcase hung some rough wearing apparel.

Carley noted that her picture and the suitcase were absolutely the only physical evidences of Glenn's connection with his Eastern life. After another survey of the room, she began to pester Glenn with questions. He had to show her the spring outside and the little bench with basin and soap. She sat on the stools. She lay on the couch. She rummaged into the contents of the cupboard. She threw wood on the fire. Then she flopped down on one of the stools to gaze at Glenn in awe and admiration and incredulity.

"Glenn—you've actually lived here!"

"Since last fall before the snow came," he said, smiling.

"Snow! Did it snow?" she inquired.

"Well, I guess. I was snowed in for a week."

"Why did you choose this lonely place—way off from the Lodge?" she asked slowly.

"I wanted to be by myself," he replied briefly.

"You mean this is a sort of camp-out place?"

"Carley, I call it my home," he replied.

That silenced her for a while. She went to the door and gazed up at the towering wall, more wonderful than ever, and more fearful, too, in her sight. Presently tears dimmed her eyes. She did not understand her feeling; she was ashamed of it; she hid it from Glenn.

This cabin he called home gave her a shock which would take time to analyze. At length she turned to him with gay utterance upon her lips. She tried to put out of her mind a dawning sense that this close-to-the-earth habitation,

this primitive dwelling, held strange inscrutable power over a self she had never divined she possessed. How little she knew of herself! But the vague, haunting memory of something, as of a dim childhood adventure, abided with her and augmented while she tried to show Glenn her pride in him and also how funny his cabin seemed to her.

Once or twice he hesitatingly, and somewhat appealingly, she imagined, tried to broach the subject of his work there in the West. But Carley wanted a little while with him free of disagreeable argument. It was a foregone conclusion that she would not like his work.

"Glenn Kilbourne, I told you why I came West to see you," she said spiritedly. "Well, since you still swear allegiance to your girl from the East, you might entertain her a little bit before getting down to business talk."

"All right, Carley," he replied, laughing. "What do you want to do? The day is at your disposal. What'll we do?"

"Suppose you tramp with me all around, until I'm good and hungry. Then we'll come back here—and you can cook dinner for me."

"Fine! Oh, I know you're just bursting with curiosity to see how I'll do it. Well, you may be surprised, Miss."

"Let's go," she urged.

"Shall I take my gun or fishing rod?"

"You shall take nothing but *me*," retorted Carley. "What chance has a girl with a man, if he can hunt or fish?"

So they went out hand in hand. Half of the belt of sky above was obscured by swiftly moving gray clouds. The other half was blue and was being slowly encroached upon by the dark stormlike pall. Glenn led her down a trail to the brook, where he calmly picked her up in his arms, quite easily, it appeared, and leisurely packed her across, kissing her half a dozen times before he deposited her on her feet.

"Glenn, you do this sort of thing so well that it makes me imagine you have practiced now and then," she said.

"No. But you are pretty and sweet, and like the girl you were four years ago. That takes me back to those days."

"That's dear of you. I'll be glad if this walk leads us often to the creek."

Spring had not yet brought much green to the brown earth or to the trees. The cottonwoods showed a light feathery verdure. The long grass was a bleached white, and low down close to the sod fresh tiny green blades showed. The great fern leaves were sear and ragged, and they rustled in the breeze. Small gray sheath-barked trees with clumpy foliage and snags of dead branches, Glenn called cedars; and, grotesque as these were, Carley rather liked them.

The huge sections of red rock that had tumbled from above also interested Carley, especially when the sun happened to come out for a few moments and brought out their color. She enjoyed walking on the fallen pines, with Glenn below, keeping pace with her and holding her hand. Carley looked in vain for flowers and birds. The only living things she saw were rainbow trout that Glenn pointed out to her in the beautiful clear pools.

The narrow gorges, perpendicularly walled in red, where the constricted brook plunged in amber and white cascades over fall after fall, tumbling, rushing, singing its water melody—these held singular appeal for Carley as aspects of the wild land, fascinating for the moment, symbolic of the lonely

red man and his forbears, and by their raw contrast making more necessary and desirable and elevating the comforts and conventions of civilization.

Lonelier, wilder, grander grew Glenn's canyon. Carley was finally forced to shift her attention from the intimate objects of the canyon floor to the aloof and unattainable heights. The gold-red ramparts against the sky, the crannied cliffs, the crags of the eagles, the lofty, distant blank walls, where the winds of the gods had written their wars—these haunted because they could never be possessed. Carley had often gazed at the Alps as at celebrated pictures. She admired, she appreciated—then she forgot. But the canyon heights did not affect her that way. They made her thoughtful of the vast earth, and its endless age, and its staggering mystery.

The storm that had threatened blackened the sky, and gray scudding clouds buried the canyon rims, and long veils of rain and sleet began to descend. The wind roared through the pines, drowning the roar of the brook. Quite suddenly the air grew piercingly cold.

Carley had forgotten her gloves, and her pockets had not been constructed to protect hands. Glenn drew her into a sheltered nook where a rock jutted out from overhead and a thicket of young pines helped break the onslaught of the wind. There Carley sat on a cold rock, huddled up close to Glenn.

"This is great," he said. His coat was open, his hands uncovered, and he watched the storm and listened with manifest delight.

Carley resigned herself to her fate, and imagined she felt her fingers numbing into ice, and her sensitive nose slowly and painfully freezing.

The storm passed, however, before Carley sank into abject and open wretchedness. She managed to keep pace with Glenn until exercise warmed her blood. When they reached the cabin Carley was wet, stiff, cold, exhausted. How welcome the shelter, the open fireplace! Seeing the cabin in new light, Carley had the grace to acknowledge to herself that, after all, it was not so bad.

"Now for a good fire and then dinner," announced Glenn.

"Can I help?" queried Carley.

"Not today. I don't want you to spring any domestic science on me now."

Carley watched Glenn with surpassing curiosity and interest. First he threw a quantity of wood upon the smoldering fire.

"I have ham and mutton of my own raising," announced Glenn with importance. "Which would you prefer?"

"Of your own raising. What do you mean?" queried Carley.

"My dear, I mean I have here meat of both sheep and hog that I raised myself. That is to say, mutton and ham. Which do you like?"

"Ham!" cried Carley incredulously.

Without more ado Glenn settled to brisk action, every move of which Carley watched with keen eyes. One after another he placed bags, cans, sacks, pans, utensils on the table. Then he kicked at the roaring fire, settling some of the sticks. He strode outside to return with a bucket of water, a basin, towel, and soap. Then he took down two queer little iron pots with heavy lids. To each pot was attached a wire handle. He removed the lids, then set both the pots right on the fire or in it. Pouring water into the basin, he proceeded to wash his hands.

Next he took a large pan, and from a sack he filled it half-full of flour. To this he added baking powder and salt. It was instructive for Carley to see him run his skillful fingers all through that flour, as if searching for lumps. After this he knelt before the fire and, lifting off one of the iron pots with a forked stick, he proceeded to wipe out the inside of the pot and grease it with a piece of fat. His next move was to rake out a pile of the red coals, and upon these he placed the pot. Also he removed the other pot from the fire, leaving it, however, quite close.

"Well, all eyes?" he bantered, suddenly staring at her. "Didn't I say I'd surprise you?"

"Don't mind me. This is about the happiest—and most bewildered moment—of my life," replied Carley.

Returning to the table, Glenn dug at something in a large red can. He paused a moment to eye Carley.

"Girl, do you know how to make biscuits?"

"I might have known in my school days, but I've forgotten," she replied.

"Can you make apple pie?" he demanded.

"No," rejoined Carley.

"How do you expect to please your husband?"

"Why—by marrying him, I suppose," answered Carley, as if weighing a problem.

"That has been the universal feminine point of view for a good many years," replied Glenn, flourishing a flour-whitened hand. "But it never served the women of the Revolution or the pioneers. And they were the builders of the nation. It will never serve the wives of the future, if we are to survive."

"Glenn, you rave!" ejaculated Carley. "You were talking of humble housewifely things."

"Precisely. The humble things that were the foundation of the great nation of Americans. I meant work and children."

He mixed the shortening with the flour, and, adding water, he began a thorough kneading. When the consistency of the mixture appeared to satisfy him he took a handful of it, rolled it into a ball, patted and flattened it into a biscuit, and dropped it into the oven he had set aside on the hot coals. Swiftly he shaped eight or ten other biscuits and dropped them as the first. Then he put the heavy iron lid on the pot, and with a rude shovel, improvised from a flattened tin can, he shoveled red coals out of the fire, and covered the lid with them.

His next move was to pare and slice potatoes, placing these aside in a pan. A small black coffeepot half-full of water, was set on a glowing part of the fire. Then he brought into use a huge, heavy knife, with which he cut slices of ham. These he dropped into the second pot, which he left uncovered. Next he removed the flour sack and other impedimenta from the table, and proceeded to set places for two.

He went outside, to return presently carrying a small crock of butter. Evidently he had kept the butter in or near the spring. It looked dewy and cold and hard. After that he peeped under the lid of the pot which contained the biscuits. The other pot was sizzling and smoking, giving forth a delicious savory odor that affected Carley most agreeably. The coffeepot had begun to steam. With a long fork Glenn turned the slices of ham and stood a moment watching them. Carley might not have been present, for

all the attention he paid to her.

Again he peeped at the biscuits. At the edge of the hot embers he placed a tin plate, upon which he carefully deposited the slices of ham. That done, he poured the pan of sliced potatoes into the pot. Next he removed the lid from the other pot, exposing biscuits slightly browned; and evidently satisfied with these, he removed them from the coals. He stirred the slices of potatoes round and round; he emptied two heaping tablespoonfuls of coffee into the coffeepot.

"Carley," he said, at last turning to her with a warm smile, "out here in the West the cook usually yells, 'Come and get it!' Draw up your stool."

And presently Carley found herself seated across the crude table from Glenn, with the background of chinked logs in her sight, and the smart of wood smoke in her eyes. In years past she had sat with him in the soft, subdued, gold-green shadows of the Astor, or in the sumptuous atmosphere of the St. Regis. But when had he ever seemed like this, wonderfully happy to have her there, consciously proud of this dinner he had prepared in half an hour, strangely studying her as one on trial? But she was hungry enough and the dinner was good enough to make this hour memorable on that score alone. She ate until she was actually ashamed of herself. She laughed heartily, she talked, she made love to Glenn. Then suddenly an idea flashed into her quick mind.

"Glenn, did this girl Flo teach you to cook?" she queried sharply.

"No. I always was handy in camp. Then out here I had the luck to fall in with an old fellow who was a wonderful cook. He lived with me for a while. Why, what difference would it have made—had Flo taught me?"

Carley felt the heat of blood in her face. "I'd rather no girl could teach you what I couldn't."

"You think I'm a pretty good cook, then?" he asked.

"I've enjoyed this dinner more than any I've ever eaten."

"Thanks, Carley. That'll help a lot," he said gaily, but his eyes shone with earnest, glad light. "I hoped I'd surprise you. I've found out here that I want to do things well. Back East you know meals are just occasions—to hurry through—to dress for—to meet somebody—to eat because you have to eat. But out here they are different. You must work to live."

Carley leaned her elbows on the table and gazed at him curiously and admiringly. "I can't tell you how proud I am of you. That you could come West weak and sick, and fight your way to health, and learn to be self-sufficient! It is a splendid achievement. It amazes me. I don't grasp it. I want to think. Nevertheless I—"

"What?" he queried, as she hesitated.

"Oh, never mind now," she replied hastily, averting her eyes.

The day was far spent when Carley returned to the Lodge—and in spite of

the discomfort of cold and sleet, and the bitter wind that beat in her face as she struggled up the trail—it was a day never to be forgotten. Nothing had been wanting in Glenn's attention or affection. He had been comrade, lover, all she craved for. And but for his few singular words about work and children there had been no serious talk. Only a play day in his canyon and his cabin!

Chapter Four

Tenderfoot's Trials

TWO warm sunny days in early May inclined Mr. Hutter to the opinion that pleasant spring weather was at hand and that it would be a propitious time to climb up on the desert to look after his sheep interests. Glenn, of course, would accompany him.

"Carley and I will go too," asserted Flo.

"Reckon that'll be good," said Hutter, with approving nod.

His wife also agreed that it would be fine for Carley to see the beautiful desert country round Sunset Peak. But Glenn looked dubious.

"Carley, it'll be rather hard," he said. "You're soft; you ought to break in gradually."

"I rode ten miles today," rejoined Carley. "And didn't mind it—much."

"Shore Carley's well and strong," protested Flo. "She'll get sore, but that won't kill her."

Glenn eyed Flo. "I might drive Carley round about in the car," he said.

"But you can't drive over those lava flats, or go round, either. We'd have to send horses in some cases miles to meet you. It's horseback if you go at all."

"Shore we'll go horseback," spoke up Flo. "Carley has got it all over that Spencer girl who was here last summer."

"I think so, too. I am sure I hope so."

"See here, Glenn! I may be a tenderfoot, but I'm no mollycoddle."

"My dear, I surrender," replied Glenn with a laugh. "Really, I'm delighted. But if anything happens—don't you blame me."

That was how Carley came to find herself, the afternoon of the next day, astride a self-willed and unmanageable little mustang, riding in the rear of her friends, on the way through a cedar forest toward a place called Deep Lake.

Carley had not been able yet, during the several hours of their journey, to take any pleasure in the scenery or in her mount. For in the first place there was nothing to see but scrubby little gnarled cedars and drab-looking rocks; and in the second this Indian pony she rode had discovered she was not an adept horsewoman and had proceeded to take advantage of the fact. It did not help Carley's predicament to remember that Glenn had decidedly advised her against riding this particular mustang. To be sure, Flo had approved of Carley's choice, and Mr. Hutter, with a hearty laugh, had fallen in line.

Carley had inquired the animal's name from the young herder who had saddled him for her.

"Wal, I reckon he ain't got much of a name," replied the lad with a grin, as he scratched his head. "Us boys always called him Spillbeans."

"Humph! What a beautiful cognomen!" ejaculated Carley. "But accord-

ing to Shakespeare any name will serve. I'll ride him or—or—"

So far there had not really been any necessity for the completion of that sentence. But five miles of riding up into the cedar forest had convinced Carley that she might not have much farther to go. Spillbeans had ambled along well enough until he reached some level ground where a long and bleached grass waved in the wind. Here he manifested hunger, then a contrary nature, next insubordination, and finally direct hostility.

Carley had urged, pulled, and commanded in vain. Then when she gave Spillbeans a kick in the flank he jumped stiff-legged, propelling her up out of the saddle, and while she was descending he made the queer jump again, coming up to meet her. The jolt she got seemed to dislocate every bone in her body. It quickly decided Carley that Spillbeans was a horse that was not to be opposed. Whenever he wanted a mouthful of grass he stopped to get it. Therefore Carley was always in the rear, a fact which in itself did not displease her.

Several times Flo waited for Carley to catch up. "He's loafing on you, Carley. You ought to have on a spur. Break off a switch and beat him some." Then she whipped the mustang across the flank with her bridle rein, which punishment caused Spillbeans meekly to trot on with alacrity.

After Flo's repeated efforts, assisted by chastisement from Glenn, had kept Spillbeans in a trot for a couple of miles Carley began to discover that the trotting of a horse was the most uncomfortable motion possible to imagine. It gradually got unendurable. But pride made Carley endure it until suddenly she thought she had been stabbed in the side. Carley pulled the mustang to a walk and sagged in her saddle until the pain subsided.

She regretted her choice of horses. Flo had said his gait resembled the motion of a rocking chair. This Western girl, according to Charley, the sheepherder, was not above playing Arizona jokes. Be that as it might, Spillbeans now manifested a desire to remain with the other horses, and he broke into a trot. Carley could not keep him from trotting. Hence her state soon wore into acute distress.

Her left ankle seemed broken. The inside of her right knee was as sore as a boil. Besides, she had other pains, just as severe, and she stood momentarily in mortal dread of that terrible stitch in her side. But, fortunately, just when she was growing weak and dizzy, the horses ahead slowed to a walk on a descent. The road wound down into a wide deep canyon. Carley had a respite from her severest pains.

The afternoon grew far advanced and the sunset was hazily shrouded in gray. Hutter did not like the looks of those clouds. "Reckon we're in for weather," he said. Carley did not care what happened.

Glenn rode beside her, inquiring solicitously as to her pleasure. "Ride of my life!" she lied heroically. And it helped some to see that she both fooled and pleased him.

Beyond the canyon the cedared desert heaved higher and changed its aspect. The trees grew larger, with patches of bleached grass between, and russet-lichened rocks everywhere.

At last the men and the pack horses ahead came to a halt in a level green forest land with no high trees. Carley saw the gleam of water through the trees. Her mustang started to trot. Car-

ley hauled him up short. When Spillbeans evinced a stubborn intention to go on Carley gave him a kick. Then it happened.

She felt the reins jerked out of her hands and the saddle propel her upward. When she descended it was to meet that before-experienced jolt.

"Look!" cried Flo. "That bronc is going to pitch."

"Hold on, Carley!" yelled Glenn.

Desperately Carley essayed to do just that. But Spillbeans jolted her out of the saddle. She came down on his rump and began to slide back and down. Carley tried to hang to the saddle with her hands and to squeeze the mustang with her knees. But another jolt broke her hold, and then, helpless and bewildered, she slid back at each upheave of the muscular rump until she slid off and to the ground in a heap. Whereupon Spillbeans trotted off toward the water.

Carley sat up before Glenn and Flo reached her. Manifestly they were concerned about her, but both were ready to burst with laughter.

"That beast is well named," she said. "He spilled me, all right. And I presume I resembled a sack of beans."

"Carley—you're—not hurt?" asked Glenn, choking, as he helped her up.

"Not physically. But my feelings are."

Then Glenn let out a hearty howl of mirth, which was seconded by a loud guffaw from Hutter. Flo, however, appeared to be able to restrain whatever she felt. To Carley she looked queer.

"Pitch! You called it that," said Carley.

"Oh, he didn't really pitch. He just humped up a few times," replied Flo, and then she burst into a merry peal of laughter. Charley, the sheepherder, was grinning, and some of the other men turned away with shaking shoulders.

"Laugh, you wild and woolly Westerners!" ejaculated Carley. "It must have been funny. But I bet you I ride him tomorrow."

Evidently the little incident drew the party closer together. Carley felt a warmth of good nature that overcame her first feeling of humiliation.

She walked about to ease her swollen and sore joints, and while doing so she took stock of the camp ground and what was going on. Near at hand the ground sloped down to a large rock-bound lake, perhaps a mile in circumference. In the distance, along the shore she saw a white conical tent, and blue smoke, and moving gray objects she took for sheep.

The men unpacked and unsaddled the horses, and, hobbling their forefeet together, turned them loose. Twilight had fallen and each man appeared to be briskly set upon his own task. Glenn was cutting around the foot of a thickly branched cedar where, he told Carley, he would make a bed for her and Flo. All that Carley could see that could be used for such purpose was a canvas-covered roll. Presently Glenn untied a rope from round this, unrolled it, and dragged it under the cedar. Then he spread down the outer layer of canvas, disclosing a considerable thickness of blankets. From under the top of these he pulled out two flat little pillows.

"Carley, you crawl in here, pile the blankets up, and the tarp over them," directed Glenn. "If it rains pull the tarp up over your head—and let it rain."

"Glenn, how about—about animals—and crawling things, you know?" que-

ried Carley.

"Oh, there are a few tarantulas and centipedes, and sometimes a scorpion. But these don't crawl around much at night. The only thing to worry about are the hydrophobia skunks."

"What on earth are they?" asked Carley, quite aghast.

"Skunks are polecats, you know," replied Glenn, cheerfully. "Sometimes one gets bitten by a coyote that has rabies, and then he's a dangerous customer. He has no fear and he may run across you and bite you in the face. Queer how they generally bite your nose. Two men have been bitten since I've been here. One of them died, and the other had to go to the Pasteur Institute with a well-developed case of hydrophobia."

"Good heavens!" cried Carley, horrified.

"You needn't be afraid," said Glenn. "I'll tie one of the dogs near your bed."

With the coming of twilight a cold, keen wind moaned through the cedars. Carley would have hovered close to the fire even if she had not been too tired to exert herself. Despite her aches, she did justice to the supper.

Before the meal ended darkness had fallen, a windy raw darkness that enveloped heavily like a blanket. Presently Carley edged closer to the fire, and there she stayed, alternately turning back and front to the welcome heat. She seemingly roasted hands, face, and knees while her back froze. The other members of the party sat comfortably on sacks or rocks, without much notice of the smoke that so exasperated Carley. Twice Glenn insisted that she take a seat he had fixed for her, but she preferred to stand and move around a little.

By and by the camp tasks of the men appeared to be ended, and all gathered near the fire to lounge and smoke and talk. Glenn and Hutter engaged in interested conversation with two Mexicans, evidently sheepherders. Presently Glenn held up a hand.

"Listen, Carley!" he said.

Then she heard strange wild yelps, staccato, piercing, somehow infinitely lonely. They made her shudder.

"Coyotes," said Glenn. "You'll come to love that chorus. Hear the dogs bark back."

Carley listened with interest, but she was inclined to doubt that she would ever become enamoured of such wild cries.

"Do coyotes come near camp?" she queried.

"Shore. Sometimes they pull your pillow out from under your head," replied Flo.

Carley did not ask any more questions. She heard one of the men say, "Big varmint prowlin' round the sheep." To which Hutter replied, "Reckon it was a bear." And Glenn said, "I saw his fresh track by the lake. Some bear!"

The heat from the fire made Carley so drowsy that she could scarcely hold up her head. She longed for bed even if it was out there in the open. Presently Flo called her: "Come. Let's walk a little before turning in."

So Carley permitted herself to be led to and fro down an open aisle between some cedars. Flo talked eloquently about the joys of camp life, and how the harder any outdoor task was and the more endurance and pain it required, the more pride and pleasure one had in remembering it. Carley was weighing the import of these words when suddenly Flo clutched her arm.

"What's that?" she whispered.

Carley stood stockstill. They had reached the furthermost end of that aisle, but had turned to go back. The flare of the campfire threw a wan light into the shadows before them. There came a rustling in the brush, a snapping of twigs. Cold tremors chased up and down Carley's back.

"Shore it's a varmint, all right. Let's hurry," whispered Flo.

Carley needed no urging. It appeared that Flo was not going to run. She walked fast, peering back over her shoulder, and, hanging to Carley's arm, she rounded a large cedar that had obstructed some of the firelight. The gloom was not so thick here. Carley espied a low, moving object, somehow furry, and gray in color. She gasped. She could not speak. Her heart gave a mighty throb and seemed to stop.

"What do you see?" cried Flo sharply, peering ahead. "Oh! Come, Carley. *Run!*"

But Carley was frozen in her tracks. Her eyes were riveted upon the gray furry object. It stopped. Then it came faster. It magnified. It was a huge beast. Carley had no control over mind, voice, or muscle. Her legs gave way. A terrible panic, icy, sickening, rending, possessed her whole body.

The huge gray thing came at her. Into the rushing of her ears broke thudding sounds. The thing leaped up. Then she saw a gray mantlelike object cast aside to disclose the dark form of a man. Glenn!

"Carley, doggone it! You don't scare worth a cent," he laughingly complained.

She collapsed into his arms. The liberating shock was as great as had been her terror. She began to tremble violently.

"Say, I believe you were scared," went on Glenn, bending over her.

"Scar-ed!" she gasped. "Oh—there's no word—to tell—what I was!"

Flo came running back, giggling with joy. "Glenn, she shore took you for a bear. Why, I felt her go stiff as a post! Carley, now how do you like the wild and woolly?"

"Oh! You put up—a trick on me!" ejaculated Carley. "Glenn, how could you? Such a terrible trick! Oh, I'll never forgive you!"

Glenn showed remorse, and kissed her before Flo in a way that made some little amends. "Maybe I overdid it," he said. "But I thought you'd have a momentary start, you know, enough to make you yell, and then you'd see through it. I only had a sheepskin over my shoulders as I crawled on hands and knees."

"Glenn, for me you were a prehistoric monster—a dinosaur, or something," replied Carley.

It developed, upon their return to the camp-fire circle, that everybody had been in the joke; and they all derived hearty enjoyment from it.

"Reckon that makes you one of us," said Hutter genially. "We've all had our scares."

Soon after this incident Hutter sounded what he called the roll call for bed. Following Flo's instructions, Carley sat on their bed, pulled off her boots, folded coat and sweater at her head, and slid down under the blankets. How strange and hard a bed! Yet Carley had the most delicious sense of relief and rest she had ever experienced. She straightened out on her back with a feeling that she had never before appreciated the luxury of lying down.

Flo cuddled up to her in quite sisterly fashion, saying, "Now don't cover

your head. If it rains I'll wake and pull up the tarp. Good night, Carley." And almost immediately she seemed to fall asleep.

For Carley, however, sleep did not soon come. She had too many aches; the aftermath of her shock of fright abided with her. So she lay wide-eyed, staring at the dense gray shadow, at the flickering lights upon the cedar. At length her mind formed a conclusion that this sort of thing might be worth the hardship once in a lifetime, anyway. She had to confess that if her vanity had not been so assaulted and humiliated she might have enjoyed herself more. It seemed impossible, however, to have thrills and pleasures and exaltations in the face of discomfort, privation, and an uneasy half-acknowledged fear. Carley thought she would not be averse to getting Flo Hutter to New York, into an atmosphere wholly strange and difficult, and see how she met situation after situation unfamiliar to her. And so Carley's mind drifted on until at last she succumbed to drowsiness.

A voice pierced her dreams of home, of warmth and comfort. Something sharp, cold, and fragrant was scratching her eyes. Glenn stood over her, pushing a sprig of cedar into her face.

"Carley, the day is far spent," he said gaily. "We want to roll up your bedding. Will you get out of it?"

"Hello, Glenn! What time is it?" she replied.

"It's nearly six."

"Why do girls leave home?" she asked tragically.

"To make poor devils happy, of course," he replied, smiling down upon her.

That smile made up to Carley for all the clamoring sensations of stiff, sore muscles. She essayed to sit up. "Oh, I'm afraid my anatomy has become disconnected! Glenn, do I look a sight?"

"You look great," he asserted heartily. "You've got color. And as for your hair—I like to see it mussed that way. Come, Carley, rustle now."

Thus adjured, Carley did her best under adverse circumstances. And she was gritting her teeth and complimenting herself when she arrived at the task of pulling on her boots. They were damp and her feet appeared to have swollen. Moreover, her ankles were sore. But she accomplished getting into them at the expense of much pain and sundry utterances more forcible than elegant.

"Shore you're doing fine," was Flo's greeting. "Come and get it before we throw it out."

Carley made haste to comply with the Western mandate, and was once again confronted with the singular fact that appetite did not wait upon the troubles of a tenderfoot. Glenn remarked that at least she would not starve to death on the trip.

"Come, climb the ridge with me," he invited. "I want you to take a look to the north and east."

He led her off through the cedars, up a slow red-earth slope, away from the lake. A green moundlike eminence topped with flat red rock appeared near at hand and not at all a hard climb. Nevertheless, her eyes deceived her, as she found to the cost of her breath. It was both far away and high.

"I like this location," said Glenn. "If I had the money I'd buy this section of land—six hundred and forty acres—and make a ranch of it. Just under this bluff is a fine open flat bench for a

cabin. You could see away across the desert clear to Sunset Peak. There's a good spring of granite water. I'd run water from the lake down into the lower flats, and I'd sure raise some stock."

"What do you call this place?" asked Carley.

"Deep Lake. It's only a watering place for sheep and cattle. But there's fine grazing, and it's a wonder to me no one has ever settled here."

Looking down, Carley appreciated his wish to own the place; and immediately there followed in her a desire to get possession of this tract of land before anyone else discovered its advantages, and to hold it for Glenn. But this would surely conflict with her intention of persuading Glenn to go back East. As quickly as her impulse had been born it died.

Suddenly the scene gripped Carley. She saw ragged dumpy cedars of gray and green, lines of red earth, and a round space of water, gleaming pale under the lowering clouds; and in the distance isolated hills, strangely curved, wandering away to a black uplift of earth obscured in the sky.

These appeared to be mere steps leading her sight farther and higher to the cloud-navigated sky, where rosy and golden effulgence betokened the sun and the east. Carley held her breath.

"Carley, it's a stormy sunrise," said Glenn.

The universal gray surrendered under some magic paint brush. The rifts widened, and the gloom of the pale-gray world seemed to vanish. Beyond the billowy, rolling, creamy edges of clouds, white and pink, shone the soft exquisite fresh blue sky. And a blaze of fire, a burst of molten gold, sheered up from behind the rim of cloud and suddenly poured a sea of sunlight from east to west. It transfigured the round foothills. They seemed bathed in ethereal light, and the silver mists that overhung them faded while Carley gazed, and a rosy flush crowned the symmetrical domes.

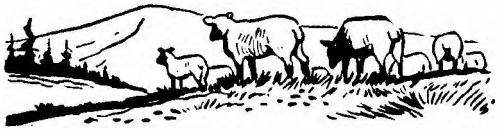
Then as Carley gazed the rifts began to close. Another transformation began, the reverse of what she watched. The golden radiance of sunrise vanished, and under a gray, lowering, coalescing pall of cloud the round hills returned to their bleak somberness, and the green desert took again its cold sheen.

"Wasn't it fine, Carley?" asked Glenn. "But nothing to what you will experience. I hope you stay till the weather gets warm. I want you to see a summer dawn on the Painted Desert, and a noon with the great white clouds rolling up from the horizon, and a sunset of massed purple and gold. If *they* do not get you then I'll give up."

Carley murmured something of her appreciation of what she had just seen. Part of his remark hung on her ear, thought-provoking and disturbing. He hoped she would stay until summer! Carley grew troubled in mind. Such mental disturbance, however, lasted no longer than her return with Glenn to camp, where the mustang Spillbeans stood ready for her to mount.

Carley recalled that she had avowed she would ride him. There was no alternative, and her misgivings only made matters worse. Nevertheless, once in the saddle, she imagined she had the hallucination that to ride off so, with the long open miles ahead, was really thrilling. This remarkable state of mind lasted until Spillbeans began to trot, and then another day of misery

and pain beckoned to Carley with long gray stretches of distance.



At noon the cavalcade ahead halted near a cabin and corral, which turned out to be a sheep ranch belonging to Hutter. Here Glenn was so busy that he had no time to devote to Carley. And Flo rode around everywhere with the men. Carley could not pass by the chance to get off Spillbeans and to walk a little. She found, however, that what she wanted most was to rest. The cabin was deserted, a dark, damp place with a rank odor. She did not stay long inside.

Rain and snow began to fall, adding to what Carley felt to be a disagreeable prospect. By and by Glenn and Hutter returned with Flo, and all partook of some lunch.

All too soon Carley found herself astride the mustang again. Glenn helped her don the slicker, an abominable sticky rubber coat that bundled her up and tangled her feet round the stirrups. She was glad to find, though, that it served well indeed to protect her from raw wind and rain.

Thus began the afternoon ride. As it advanced the sky grew more threatening, the wind rawer, the cold keener, and the rain cut like little bits of sharp ice. It blew in Carley's face. Enough snow fell to whiten the open patches of ground.

In an hour Carley realized that she had the hardest task of her life to ride to the end of the day's journey. But as Spillbeans had taken to lagging at a walk, Carley was enabled to conceal all outward sign of her woes. It rained, hailed, sleeted, snowed, and grew colder all the time. Carley's feet became lumps of ice. Every step the mustang took sent acute pains ramifying from bruised places all over her body.

She rode on, beginning to feel that nothing mattered, that this trip would be the end of Carley Burch. How she hated that dreary, cold, flat land the road bisected without end. It felt as if she rode hours to cover a mile. In open stretches she saw the whole party straggling along, separated from one another, and each for himself. They certainly could not be enjoying themselves.

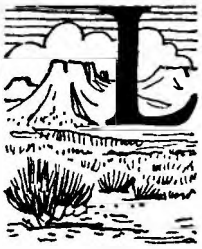
Carley shut her eyes, clutched the pommel of the saddle, trying to support her weight. How could she endure another mile? Suddenly a terrible shock seemed to rack her. But it was only that Spillbeans had once again taken to a trot. Frantically she pulled on the bridle. He was not to be thwarted. Opening her eyes, she saw a cabin far ahead which probably was the destination for the night.

Carley clung on desperately. What she dreaded was the return of that stablike pain in her side. It came, and life seemed something abject and monstrous. She rode stiff-legged, with her hands propping her stiffly above the pommel, but the stabbing pain went right on, and in deeper. When the mustang halted his trot beside the other horses Carley was in the last extremity. Yet as Glenn came to her, offering a hand, she still hid her agony.

Then Flo called out, "Carley, you've done twenty-five miles on as rotten a day as I remember. Shore we all hand it to you. And I'm confessing I didn't think you'd ever stay the ride out. Spillbeans is the meanest nag we've got and he has the hardest gait."

Chapter Five

Ordeal



LATER Carley leaned back in a comfortable seat, before a blazing fire that happily sent its acrid smoke up the chimney, pondering.

To get off a horse that had tortured her, to discover an almost insatiable appetite, to rest weary, aching body before the genial warmth of a beautiful fire—these were experiences which Carley found to have been hitherto unknown delights. It struck her that to know the real truth about anything in life might require infinite experience and understanding. She had been compelled to suffer cruelly on horseback in order to make her appreciate how good it was to get down on the ground.

Carley was wondering if she were narrow and dense to circumstances of life differing from her own when a remark of Flo's interrupted her reflections.

"Well, the worst is yet to come," Flo had drawled.

Carley wondered if this distressing statement had to do in some way with the rest of the trip.

"Flo, are you girls going to sleep here in the cabin?" inquired Glenn.

"Shore. It's cold and wet outside," replied Flo.

"Well, Felix, the Mexican herder, told me some Navajos had been bunking here."

"Navajos? You mean *Indians?*" interposed Carley, with interest.

"He does," said Flo. "But don't mind Glenn. He's full of tricks, Carley. He'd give us a hunch to lie out in the wet."

Hutter burst into his hearty laugh. "Wal, I'd rather get some things anyday than a bad cold."

"I've had both," replied Flo, "and *I'd* prefer the cold. But for Carley's sake—"

"Pray don't consider me," said Carley. The crude drift of the conversation affronted her.

"Well, my dear," put in Glenn, "it's a bad night outside. We'll all make our beds here."

"Glenn, you shore are a nervy fellow," said Flo.

Long after everybody was in bed Carley lay awake in the blackness of the cabin, sensitively fidgeting and quivering over imaginative contact with creeping things. But her pangs of body, her extreme fatigue finally yielded to the quiet and rest of her bed, engendering a drowsiness that proved irresistible.

Morning brought fair weather and sunshine, which helped to sustain Carley in her effort to brave out her pains and woes. Fortunately for her, the business of the men was concerned with the immediate neighborhood, in which they expected to stay all morning.

"Flo, after a while persuade Carley to ride with you to the top of this first foothill," said Glenn. "It's not far, and it's worth a good deal to see the Painted Desert from there."

"Leave it to me. I want to get out of camp, anyhow. That conceited *hombre*, Lee Stanton, will be riding in here," answered Flo.

The slight knowing smile on Glenn's face and the grinning disbelief on Mr. Hutter's were facts not lost upon Carley. She conceived the idea that Flo, like many women, only ran off to be pursued. The purported advent of this Lee Stanton pleased her.

It happened that the expected newcomer rode into camp before anyone left. Before he dismounted he made a good impression on Carley, and as he stepped down in lazy, graceful action, a tall lithe figure, she thought him singularly handsome. He wore black sombrero, flannel shirt, blue jeans stuffed into high boots, and long, big-roweled spurs.

"How are you-all?" was his greeting.

From the talk that ensued between him and the men, Carley concluded that he must be overseer of the sheep hands. Carley knew that Hutter and Glenn were not interested in cattle raising.

"When's Ryan goin' to dip?" asked Hutter.

"Today or tomorrow," replied Stanton.

"Reckon we ought to ride over," went on Hutter. "Say, Glenn, do you reckon Miss Carley could stand a sheep-dip?"

"I should say not!" whispered Glenn fiercely. "Cut out that talk. She'll hear you and want to go."

Whereupon Carley felt mount in her breast an intense and rebellious determination to see a sheep-dip. She would astonish Glenn. What did he want, anyway? Had she not withstood the torturing trot of the hardest-gaited horse on the range?

When the consultation of the men ended, Lee Stanton turned to Flo. Carley did not need to see the young man look twice to divine what ailed him. He was caught in the toils of love.

"Howdy, Lee!" Flo said coolly, with her clear eyes on him. A tiny frown knitted her brow. She did not, at the moment, entirely approve of him.

"Shore am glad to see you, Flo," he said. He wore a cheerful grin that in no wise deceived Flo, or Carley either. The young man had a furtive expression of eye.

"Ahuh!" returned Flo.

"I was shore sorry about—about that—" he floundered.

"About what?"

"Aw, you know, Flo."

Carley strolled out of hearing, sure of two things—that she felt rather sorry for Stanton, and that the course of love did not promise smooth running for him.

Upon Carley's return to the cabin she found Stanton and Flo waiting for her to accompany them on a ride up the foothill. She was so stiff and sore that she could hardly climb into the saddle; and the first mile of riding was something like a nightmare. She lagged behind Flo and Stanton, who apparently forgot her in their quarrel.

The riders soon struck the base of a long incline of rocky ground that led up to the slope of the foothill. Here rocks and gravel gave place to black cinders out of which grew a scant bleached grass. The slope was gentle, so that the ascent did not entail any hardship. Carley was amazed at the length of the slope, and also to see how high over the desert she was getting. She felt lifted out of a monotonous level.

The hoofs of the horses sank in the cinders. A fine choking dust assailed Carley's nostrils. Presently, when there appeared at least a third of the ascent still to be accomplished, Lee and Flo dismounted to walk, leading their horses. Carley had no choice but to do likewise. At first walking was a relief. Soon, however, the soft yielding cinders began to drag at her feet. At every step she slipped back a few inches. When her legs seemed to grow

dead Carley paused for a little rest.

Several times she noted that Flo and Stanton halted to face each other in rather heated argument. At least Stanton's red face and forceful gestures attested to heat on his part. Flo evidently was weary of argument, and in answer to a sharp reproach she retorted, "Shore I was different after he came."

Carley looked off to her right at the green level without really seeing it. A vague sadness weighed upon her soul. Was there to be a tangle of fates here, a conflict of wills, a crossing of loves? Flo's terse confession could not be taken lightly. Did she mean that she loved Glenn? Carley began to fear it. Only another reason why she must persuade Glenn to go back East!

"Carley," called Flo, "come—looksee, as the Indians say. Here is Glenn's Painted Desert, and I reckon it's worth seeing."

To Carley's surprise, she found herself upon the knob of the foothill. And when she looked out across a suddenly distinguishable void she dropped her bridle; she gazed slowly, as if drawn, hearing Flo's voice.

"That thin green line of cottonwoods down there is the Little Colorado River," Flo was saying. "Reckon it's sixty miles, all down hill. The Painted Desert begins there and also the Navajo Reservation. You see the white strips, the red veins, the yellow bars, the black lines. They are all desert steps leading up and up for miles. That sharp black peak is called Wildcat. It's about a hundred miles. Look at that sawtooth range. The Indians call it Echo Cliffs. At the far end it drops off into the Colorado River. Lee's Ferry is there—about one hundred and sixty miles.

"That ragged black rent is the Grand Canyon. Looks like a thread, doesn't it? Away to the left you see the tremendous wall rising and turning to come this way. That's the north wall of the Canyon. It ends at the great bluff—Greenland Point. See the black fringe above the bar of gold? That's a belt of pine trees. It's about eighty miles across this ragged old stone washboard of a desert. Now turn and look straight and strain your sight over Wildcat. See the purple dome? You must look hard. I'm glad it's clear and the sun is shining. That purple dome is Navajo Mountain, two hundred miles and more away!"

Carley slowly walked forward until she stood at the extreme edge of the summit.

Desert slope—down and down—color—distance—space! The wind that blew in her face seemed to have the openness of the whole world back of it. Cold, sweet, dry, exhilarating, it breathed of untainted vastness.

"Oh!—America!" was her unconscious tribute.

Stanton and Flo had come on to places beside her. The young man laughed. "Wal, now Miss Carley, you couldn't say more. When I was in camp trainin' for service overseas I used to remember how this looked."

"You see, Carley, this is our America," said Flo softly.

Carley wrenched her gaze from the desert void to look at her companions. Stanton's eyes were narrowed; his expression had changed; lean and hard and still, his face resembled bronze. The girl, too, had subtly changed, responding to an influence that had subdued and softened her. She was mute; her eyes held a light, comprehensive and all-embracing; she was beautiful then.

Carley wheeled to gaze out and down into this incomprehensible abyss, and on to the far up-flung heights, white and red and yellow, and so on to the wonderful mystic haze of distance. How splendid to see afar! Space, annihilating space, dwarfing her preconceived images, and then wondrous colors! What had she known of color? No wonder artists failed adequately and truly to paint mountains, let alone the desert space. Just to breathe that untainted air, just to see once the boundless open of colored sand and rock—to realize what the freedom of eagles meant—would not that have helped anyone?

"Shore I could stand here all day," said Flo. "But it's beginning to cloud over and this high wind is cold. So we'd better go, Carley."

"I don't know what I am, but it's not cold," replied Carley.

"Wal, Miss Carley, I reckon you'll have to come again an' again before you get a comfortable feelin' here," said Stanton.

It surprised Carley to see that this young Westerner had hit upon the truth. Indeed she was uncomfortable. She was oppressed, vaguely unhappy. But why? The thing there—this infinitude of open sand and rock—was beautiful, wonderful, even glorious. She looked again.

Steep black-cindered slope, with its soft gray patches of grass, sheered down and down, and out in rolling slope to merge upon a cedar-dotted level. Nothing moved below, but a red-tailed hawk sailed across her vision. How still—how gray the desert floor as it reached away, losing its black dots, and gaining bronze spots of stone! Beyond the meandering green thread which was the verdure of a desert river stretched the white sand, where whirlwinds of dust sent aloft their funnel-shaped spouts; and it led up to the horizon-wide ribs and ridges of red and walls of yellow and mountains of black, to the dim mound of purple so ethereal and mystic against the deep-blue cloud-curtained band of sky.

And on the moment the sun was obscured and that world of colorful flame went out, as if a blaze had died.

Deprived of its fire, the desert seemed to retreat, to fade coldly and gloomily, to lose its great landmarks in dim obscurity. It grew flat and, like the sea, seemed to mirror the vast gray cloud expanse. The sublime vanished, but the desolate remained. No warmth —no movement—no life! Carley felt that she was gazing down into chaos.

Carley rode all that afternoon in the rear of the caravan, gradually succumbing to the cold raw wind and the aches and pains to which she had subjected her flesh. Nevertheless, she finished the day's journey, and, sorely as she needed Glenn's kindly hand, she got off her horse without aid.

Camp was made at the edge of the devastated timber zone that Carley had found so dispiriting. A few melancholy pines were standing, and everywhere, as far as she could see southward, were blackened fallen trees and stumps. It was a dreary scene. The sun shone fitfully at sunset, and then sank, leaving the land to twilight and shadows.

Once in a comfortable seat beside the campfire, Carley had no further desire to move. She was so exhausted and weary that she could no longer appreciate the blessing of rest. Appetite, too, failed her this mealtime. She was indeed glad to crawl into bed, and not even the thought of skunks could

keep her awake.

Morning disclosed the fact that gray clouds had been blown away. The sun shone bright upon a white-frosted land. The air was still. Carley labored at her task of rising, and brushing her hair, and pulling on her boots. How she hated the cold, the bleak, denuded forest land, the emptiness, the roughness, the crudeness! If this sort of feeling grew any worse she thought she would hate Glenn. Yet she was none the less set upon going on, and seeing the sheep-dip, and riding that fiendish mustang until the trip was ended.

Getting in the saddle and on the way this morning was an ordeal that made Carley actually sick. Glenn and Flo both saw how it was with her, and they left her to herself. Carley was very grateful to them for this understanding. It seemed to proclaim their respect. She found further matter for satisfaction in that after the first dreadful quarter of an hour in the saddle she began to feel easier. And at the end of several hours of riding she was not suffering any particular pain, though she was weaker.

At length the cut-over land ended in a forest of straggling pines, through which the road wound southward, and eventually down into a wide shallow canyon. Through the trees Carley saw a stream of water, open fields of green, log fences and cabins, and blue smoke. She heard the chug of a gasoline engine and the *baa-baa* of sheep. Glenn waited for her to catch up with him.

"Carley, this is one of Hutter's sheep camps. It's not a—a very pleasant place. You won't care to see the sheep-dip. So I'm suggesting you wait here—"

"Nothing doing, Glenn," she interrupted. "I'm going to see what there is to see."

"But, dear—the men—the way they handle sheep—they'll—really it's no sight for you," he floundered.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Because, Carley—you know how you hate the—the seamy side of things. And the stench—why, it'll make you sick!"

"Glenn, be on the level," she said. "Suppose it does. Wouldn't you think more of me if I could stand it?"

"Why, yes," he replied reluctantly, smiling at her, "I would. But I wanted to spare you. This trip has been hard. I'm sure proud of you. But, Carley—you simply couldn't stand this."

"Glenn, how little you know a woman!" she exclaimed. "Come along and show me your old sheep-dip."

They rode out of the woods into an open valley. A log fence ran along the edge of open ground and a mud dam held back a pool of stagnant water, slimy and green. As Carley rode on the *baa-baa* of sheep became so loud that she could scarcely hear Glenn talking.

Several log cabins, rough-hewn and gray with age, stood down inside the inclosure, and beyond there were large corrals. From the other side of these corrals came sounds of rough voices of men, a trampling of hoofs, heavy splashes, the beat of an engine, and the incessant *baaing* of the sheep.

At this point the members of Hutter's party dismounted and tied their horses to the top log of the fence. When Carley essayed to get off Glenn tried to stop her, saying she could see well enough from there. But Carley got down and followed Flo. She heard Hutter call to Glenn:

"Say, Ryan is short of men. We'll lend a hand for a couple of hours."

Presently Carley reached Flo's side

and the first corral that contained sheep. They formed a compact woolly mass, rather white in color, with a tinge of pink. When Flo climbed up on the fence the flock plunged and with a trampling roar ran to the far side of the corral. Several old rams with wide curling horns faced around; and some of the ewes climbed up on the densely packed mass.

The next corral held a like number of sheep, and also several Mexicans who were evidently driving them into a narrow lane that led farther down. Carley saw the heads of men above other corral fences, and there was also a thick yellowish smoke rising from somewhere.

"Carley, are you game to see the dip?" asked Flo.

"That's my middle name," retorted Carley.

Flo laughed. She led Carley along that log fence, through a huge open gate, and across a wide pen to another fence, which she scaled. Carley followed her.

Flo led down a short lane and climbed another fence, and sat astride the top log. Carley hurried along to clamber up to her side, but stood erect with her feet on the second log of the corral fence.

Then a horrible stench struck Carley almost like a blow in the face, and before her confused sight there appeared to be drifting smoke and active men and running sheep, all against a background of mud. But at first it was the odor that caused Carley to close her eyes and press her knees hard against the upper log to keep from reeling. Never in her life had such a sickening nausea assailed her. Carley gave a gasp, pinched her nose between her fingers so she could not smell, and opened her eyes.

Directly beneath her was a small pen open at one end into which sheep were being driven from the larger corral. The drivers were yelling. The sheep in the rear plunged into those ahead of them, forcing them on.

Two men worked in this small pen. One was a brawny giant in undershirt and overalls that appeared filthy. He held a cloth in his hand and strode toward the nearest sheep. Folding the cloth round the neck of the sheep, he dragged it forward, with an ease which showed great strength, and threw it into a pit that yawned at the side.

Souse went the sheep into a murky, muddy pool and disappeared. But suddenly its head came up and then its shoulders. And it began half to walk and half swim down what appeared to be a narrow boxlike ditch that contained other floundering sheep. Then Carley saw men on each side of this ditch bending over with poles that had crooks at the end, and their work was to press and pull the sheep along to the end of the ditch, and drive them up a boarded incline into another corral where many other sheep huddled, now a dirty muddy color like the liquid into which they had been immersed.

Souse! Splash! In went sheep after sheep. Occasionally one did not go under. And then a man would press it under with the crook and quickly lift its head. The work went on with precision and speed.

Carley saw a pipe leading from a huge boiler to the ditch. The dark fluid was running out of it. From a rusty old engine with big smokestack poured the strangling smoke. A man broke open a sack of yellow powder and dumped it into the ditch. Then he poured an acidlike liquid after it.

"Sulphur and nicotine," yelled Flo up at Carley. "The dip's poison. If a sheep opens his mouth he's usually a goner."

Carley saw Glenn and Hutter fall in line with the other men, and work like beavers. Suddenly Flo squealed and pointed.

"There! That sheep didn't come up," she cried. "Shore he opened his mouth."

Then Carley saw Glenn plunge his hooked pole in and out and around until he had located the submerged sheep. He lifted its head above the dip. The sheep showed no sign of life. Down on his knees dropped Glenn, to reach the sheep with strong brown hands, and to haul it up on the ground, where it flopped inert. Glenn pummeled it and pressed it, but the sheep did not respond.

"No use, Glenn," yelled Hutter hoarsely. "That one's a goner."

Carley did not fail to note the state of Glenn's hands and arms and overalls when he returned to the ditch work. Then back and forth Carley's gaze went from one end to the other of that scene. And suddenly it was arrested and held by the huge fellow who handled the sheep so brutally. Every time he dragged one and threw it into the pit he yelled, "Ho! Ho!"

Carley was impelled to look at his face, and she was amazed to meet the rawest and boldest stare from evil eyes that had ever been her misfortune to incite. She felt herself stiffen. This man had grizzled hair, a seamed and scarred visage, coarse, thick lips, and beetling brows, from under which peered gleaming light eyes. At every turn he flashed them upon Carley's face, her neck, the swell of her bosom. Hastily she closed her riding-coat. She felt as if her flesh had been burned.

"Come, Carley, let's rustle out of this stinkin' mess," cried Flo.

Carley needed Flo's assistance in clambering down out of the choking smoke and horrid odor.

"*Adios*, Pretty Eyes," called the big man from the pen.

"Well," ejaculated Flo, when they got out, "I'll bet I call Glenn good and hard for letting you go down there."

"It was—my—fault," panted Carley. "I said I'd stand it."

"Oh, you're game, all right. I didn't mean the dip. That sheep-slinger is Haze Ruff, the toughest *hombre* on this range. I'm going to tell Dad and Glenn."

"Please don't," returned Carley appealingly.

"I shore am. Dad needs hands these days. That's why he's lenient. But Glenn will cowhide Ruff and I want to see him do it."

They went back to the horses, got their lunches from the saddlebags, and, finding comfortable seats in a sunny, protected place, they ate and talked. Carley had to force herself to swallow. It seemed that the horrid odor of dip and sheep had permeated everything.

"Carley, I don't mind telling you that you've stuck it out better than any tenderfoot we ever had here," said Flo.

"Thank you. That from a Western girl is a compliment I'll not soon forget," replied Carley.

"I shore mean it. We've had rotten weather. And to end the little trip at this sheep-dip hole! Why, Glenn certainly wanted you to stack up against the real thing!"

"Flo, he did not want me to come on the trip, and especially here," Carley

protested.

"I know. But he *let* you."

"Neither Glenn nor any other man could prevent me from doing what I wanted to do."

"Well, if you'll excuse me," drawled Flo, "I'll differ with you. I know what the West does to a man. The war ruined your friend—both his body and mind. Did you know he'd been gassed and that he had five hemorrhages?"

"Oh! I knew his lungs had been weakened by gas. But he never told me about having hemorrhages."

"Well, he had them. The last one I'll never forget. Every time he'd cough it would fetch the blood. The doctor came from Flagstaff and packed him in ice. He sat propped up all night and never moved a muscle. Never coughed again! And the bleeding stopped. After that we put him out on the porch where he could breathe fresh air all the time. There's something wonderfully healing in Arizona air. It's from the dry desert and here it's full of cedar and pine. Anyway Glenn got well. And I think the West has cured his mind, too."

"Of what?" queried Carley.

"Oh, God only knows!" exclaimed Flo, throwing up her gloved hands. "I never could understand. But I *hated* what the war did to him."

Carley leaned back against the log, quite spent. Her strength had about played out, and her spirit was at low ebb.

"Carley, you're all in," declared Flo. "You needn't deny it. There's no sense in your killing yourself, nor in me letting you. So I'm going to tell Dad we want to go home."

She left Carley there. The word "home" had struck strangely into Carley's mind and remained there. Suddenly she realized what it was to be homesick. The comfort, the ease, the luxury, the rest, the sweetness, the pleasure, the cleanliness, the gratification to eye and ear—to all the senses—how these thoughts came to haunt her!

Carley gazed around her. Only one of the cabins was in sight from this position. Evidently it was a home for some of these men. On one side the peaked rough roof had been built out beyond the wall, evidently to serve as a kind of porch. On that wall hung the motliest assortment of things Carley had ever seen—utensils, sheep and cow hides, saddles, harness, leather clothes, ropes, old sombreros, shovels, stove pipe, and many other articles for which she could find no name. How they had been used! They had enabled people to live under primitive conditions.

Had any of her forefathers ever been pioneers? Carley did not know, but the thought was disturbing. Perhaps somewhere not far back along her line there had been a great-great-grandmother who had lived some kind of a primitive life, using such implements and necessaries as hung on this cabin wall, and thereby helped some man to conquer the wilderness, to live in it, and reproduce his kind. Glenn's words came back to Carley—"Work and children!"

At last Flo returned with the men. One quick glance at Glenn convinced Carley that Flo had not yet told him about the sheep dipper, Haze Ruff.

"Carley, you're a real sport," declared Glenn. "It's a dreadful mess. And to think you stood it! Why, old Fifth Avenue, if you needed to make another hit with me you've done it!"

His warmth amazed and pleased Carley. She could not quite understand

why it would have made any difference to him whether she had stood the ordeal or not. But his praise gladdened her, and fortified her to face the rest of this ride back to Oak Creek.

Four hours later, in a twilight so shadowy that no one saw her distress, Carley half slipped and half fell from her horse and managed somehow to mount the steps and enter the bright living-room. A cheerful red fire blazed on the hearth; the white-clothed dinner table steamed with savory dishes. Flo stood before the blaze, warming her hands. Lee Stanton leaned against the mantel, with eyes on her, and every line of his lean, hard face expressed his devotion to her. Hutter was taking his seat at the head of the table.

"Come an' get it—you-all," he called heartily. Mrs. Hutter's face beamed with the spirit of that home. And lastly, Carley saw Glenn waiting for her, as she dragged her weary, spent body toward him and the bright fire.

Chapter Six

Bare Fists and Plain Talk

IF SPRING came at all to Oak Creek Canyon it warmed into summer before Carley had time to languish with the fever characteristic of early June in the East.

As if by magic the green grass sprang up, the green buds opened into leaves, the bluebells and primroses bloomed, the apple and peach blossoms burst exquisitely white and pink against the blue sky. Oak Creek fell to a transparent, beautiful brook, leisurely eddying in the stone-walled nooks, hurrying with murmur and babble over the little falls. The mornings broke clear and fragrantly cool, the noon hours seemed to lag under a hot sun, the nights fell like dark mantles from the melancholy star-sown sky.

Carley had stubbornly kept on riding and climbing until she satisfied her own insistent vanity that she could train to a point where this outdoor life was not too much for her strength. She lost flesh despite increase of appetite; she lost her pallor for a complexion of gold-brown she knew her Eastern friends would admire; she wore out the blisters and aches and pains; she found herself growing firmer of muscle, lither of line, deeper of chest.

In addition she found a delight in a freedom of body she had never before known, of an exhilaration in action, of a sloughing off of numberless petty little superficialities which she had supposed were necessary to her happiness. But she forced her achievement from her. This West with its rawness, its ruggedness, she hated.

Nevertheless, the June days passed, growing dreamily swift, growing more incomprehensibly full; and still she had not broached to Glenn the main object of her visit—to take him back East. She feared more and more to tell him that he was wasting his life there and that she could not bear it.

Flo Hutter's twentieth birthday came along the middle of June, and all the neighbors and range hands for miles around were invited to celebrate it.

For the second time during her visit Carley put on the white gown that had made Flo gasp with delight, and had stunned Mrs. Hutter, and had brought a reluctant compliment from Glenn.

It was twilight on this particular June night when she was ready to go

downstairs, and she tarried a while on the long porch. The evening star, so lonely and radiant, had become an object she waited for and watched, the same as she had come to love the dreaming, murmuring melody of the waterfall. She lingered there.

Her soft slippers made no sound on the porch, and as she turned the corner of the house, where shadows hovered thick, she heard Lee Stanton's voice:

"But, Flo, you loved me before Kilbourne came."

The content, the pathos, of his voice chained Carley to the spot.

"Shore I did," replied Flo dreamily.

"Don't you—love me—still?" he asked huskily.

"Lee, do you want the honest-to-God's truth?"

"I reckon—I do."

"Well, I love you just as I always did," replied Flo earnestly. "But, Lee, I love—*him* more than you or anybody."

"Flo—you'll ruin us all!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"No, I won't either. You can't say I'm not level-headed. I hated to tell you this, Lee, but you made me."

"Flo, you love me an' him—two men?" queried Stanton incredulously.

"I shore do," she said. "And it's no fun."

"Reckon I don't cut much of a figure alongside Kilbourne," said Stanton disconsolately.

"Lee, you could stand alongside any man," replied Flo eloquently. "You're Western, and you're steady and loyal, and you'll—well, some day you'll be like Dad. Could I say more? But, Lee, this man is *different*. He is wonderful. I can't explain it, but I feel it. He has been through hell's fire. Oh! will I ever forget his ravings when he lay so ill? I saw the wreck of him. I did a little to save his life and his mind. Oh, Lee, can't you understand?"

"I reckon so. I'm not begrudging Glenn what—what you care. I'm only afraid I'll lose you."

"I never promised to marry you, did I?"

"Not in words. But kisses ought to—"

"Yes, kisses mean a lot," she replied. "And so far I stand committed. I suppose I'll marry you someday and be blamed lucky. I'll be happy, too—you needn't worry. Glenn is in love with Carley. She's beautiful, rich—and of his class. How could he ever see me?"

"Flo, you can never tell," replied Stanton thoughtfully. "I didn't like her at first. But I'm comin' round. The thing is, Flo, does she love him as you love him?"

"Oh, I think so—I hope so," answered Flo, as if in distress.

"I'm not so shore. But then I can't savvy her. Lord knows I hope so, too. If she doesn't—if she goes back East an' leaves him here—I reckon my case—"

"Hush! I know she's out here to take him back. Let's go downstairs now."

"Aw, wait—Flo," he begged. "What's your hurry? Come—give me—"

"There! That's all you get, birthday or no birthday," replied Flo gaily.

Carley heard the soft kiss and Stanton's deep breath, and then footsteps as they walked away in the gloom toward the stairway. Carley leaned against the log wall. She felt the rough wood—smelled the rusty pine rosin. Footsteps and voices sounded beneath her. Twilight had deepened into night. The low murmur of the waterfall and the babble of the brook floated to her

strained ears.

Listeners never heard good of themselves. But Stanton's subtle doubt of any depth to her, though it hurt, was not so affecting as the ringing truth of Flo Hutter's love for Glenn. It saddened her, yet did not lessen her confidence in her hold on Glenn. But it stirred to perplexing pitch her curiosity in regard to the mystery that seemed to cling round Glenn's transformation of character.

This Western girl really knew more about Glenn than his fiancée knew. Carley suffered a humiliating shock when she realized that she had been thinking of herself, of her love, her life, her needs, her wants instead of Glenn's.

Thus unwontedly stirred and upset, Carley went downstairs to meet the assembled company. And never had she shown to greater contrast, never had circumstance and state of mind contrived to make her so radiant and gay and unbending.

She heard many remarks not intended for her ears. An old grizzled Westerner remarked to Hutter: "Wal, she's shore an unbroke filly." Another of the company—a woman—remarked: "Sweet an' pretty as a columbine. But I'd like her better if she was dressed decent." And a gaunt range rider asked a comrade: "Do you reckon that's style back East?" To which the other replied: "Mebbe, but I'd gamble they're short on silk back East, an' likewise sheriffs."

Carley received some meed of gratification out of the sensation she created, but she did not carry her craving for it to the point of overshadowing Flo. On the contrary, she contrived to have Flo share the attention she received. She taught Flo to dance the fox-trot and got Glenn to dance with her. Then she taught it to Lee Stanton. And when Lee danced with Flo, Carley experienced her first sincere enjoyment of the evening.

Her moment came when she danced with Glenn. It reminded her of days long past and which she wanted to return again.

"Glenn, would you like to go to the Plaza with me again, and dance between dinner courses, as we used to?" she whispered up to him.

"Sure I would—unless Morrison knew you were to be there," he replied.

"Glenn! I would not even see him."

"Any old time you wouldn't see Morrison!" he exclaimed, half mockingly.

His doubt, his tone grated upon her. Pressing closer to him, she said, "Come back and I'll prove it."

But he laughed and had no answer for her. At her own daring words Carley's heart had leaped to her lips. If he had responded, even teasingly, she could have burst out with her longing to take him back. But the moment passed.

At the end of that dance Hutter claimed Glenn in the interest of neighboring sheep men. And Carley, crossing the big living-room alone, passed close to one of the porch doors. Someone, indistinct in the shadow, spoke to her in low voice: "Hello, Pretty Eyes!"

Carley felt a little cold shock go tingling through her. But she gave no sign that she had heard. She recognized the voice and also the epithet. Passing to the other side of the room and joining the company there, Carley presently took a casual glance at the door.

Several men were lounging there. One of them was the sheep dipper, Haze Ruff. His bold eyes were on her now, and his coarse face wore a slight,

meaning smile, as if he understood something about her that was a secret to others. Carley dropped her eyes. But she could not shake off the feeling that wherever she moved this man's gaze followed her.

She was tempted to tell Glenn. But that would only cause a fight, so she kept her counsel. She danced again, and helped Flo entertain her guests, and passed that door often; and once stood before it, deliberately, with all the strange and contrary impulse so inexplicable in a woman, and never for a moment wholly lost the sense of the man's boldness. It dawned upon her, at length, that the fool's smile meant that he thought she saw his attention, and, understanding it perfectly, had secret delight in it. But once the party broke up and the guests had departed, she instantly forgot both man and incident.

Next day, late in the afternoon, when Carley came out on the porch, she was hailed by Flo, who had just ridden in from down the canyon.

Carley did not lose any time pattering down that rude porch stairway. Flo was dusty and hot, and her chaps carried the unmistakable scent of sheep-dip.

"Been over to Ryan's camp an' shore rode hard to beat Glenn home," she said.

"Why?" queried Carley eagerly.

"Reckon I wanted to tell you something Glenn swore he wouldn't let me tell."

"Oh! Has he been—hurt?"

"He's skinned an' bruised up some, but I reckon he's not hurt."

"Flo—what happened?" demanded Carley anxiously. "Did Glenn fight?"

"I reckon he did," drawled Flo.

"With whom?"

"That big *hombre*, Haze Ruff."

"Oh!" gasped Carley. "That—that ruffian! Flo, did you see—were you there?"

"I shore was, an' next to a horse race I like a fight," replied the Western girl. "Carley, why didn't you tell me Haze Ruff insulted you last night?"

"Why, Flo—he only said, 'Hello, Pretty Eyes,' and I let it pass!" said Carley lamely.

"You never want to let anything pass, out West. Because next time you'll get worse."

"How did you know?"

"Well, Charley told it. He was standing out here by the door last night an' he heard Ruff speak to you. Charley thinks a heap of you an' I reckon he hates Ruff. Besides, Charley stretches things. He shore riled Glenn. You missed the best thing that's happened since you got here."

"Hurry—tell me," begged Carley, feeling the blood come to her face.

"I rode over to Ryan's place for Dad, an' when I got there I knew nothing about what Ruff said to you," began Flo. "Neither did Dad. You see, Glenn hadn't got there yet. Well, just as the men had finished dipping a bunch of sheep Glenn came riding down, lickety-cut.

"'Now what the hell's wrong with Glenn?' said Dad, getting up from where we sat.

"Shore I knew Glenn was mad, though I never before saw him that way. Well, he rode right down on us an' piled off. Dad yelled at him an' so did I. But Glenn made for the sheep pen. You know where we watched Haze Ruff an' Lorenzo slinging the sheep into the dip. Ruff was just about to climb out over the fence when Glenn leaped up on it.

"'Say, Ruff,' he said, sort of hard, 'Charley an' Ben tell me they heard you speak disrespectfully to Miss Burch last night.'

"Dad an' I ran to the fence, but before we could catch hold of Glenn he'd jumped down into the pen.

"'I'm not carin' much for what them herders say,' replied Ruff.

"'Do you deny it?' demanded Glenn.

"'I ain't denyin' nothin', Kilbourne,' growled Ruff. 'I might argue against me bein' disrespectful. That's a matter of opinion.'

"'You'll apologize for speaking to Miss Burch or I'll beat you up an' have Hutter fire you.'

"'Wal, Kilbourne, I never eat my words,' replied Ruff.

"Then Glenn knocked him flat. Ruff got up mad clear through, I reckon. Then they mixed it. Ruff got in some swings, but he couldn't reach Glenn's face. An' Glenn batted him right an' left, every time in his ugly mug. Ruff got all bloody an' he cussed something awful.

"Glenn beat him against the fence an' then we all saw Ruff reach for a gun or knife. But Glenn beat Ruff down to his knees an' swung on him hard. Deliberately knocked Ruff into the dip ditch. Ruff went out of sight. Then he rolled up like a huge hog. We were all scared now. That dip's rank poison, you know. Reckon Ruff knew that. He floundered along an' crawled up at the end, mouth an' eyes tight shut. He began to grope an' feel around, trying to find the way to the pond. One of the men led him out. It was great to see him wade in the water an' wallow an' souse his head under.

"An' Glenn called to him, 'Ruff, that sheep-dip won't go through your tough hide, but a bullet will!'"

Not long after this incident Carley started out on her usual afternoon ride, having arranged with Glenn to meet her on his return from work.

Toward the end of June Carley had advanced in her horsemanship to a point where Flo lent her one of her own mustangs. This mustang she had ridden of late was of Navajo stock, but he had been born and raised and broken at Oak Creek. Carley had not yet discovered any objection on his part to do as she wanted him to. He liked what she liked, and most of all he liked to go. His color resembled a pattern of calico, and his name was therefore Calico.

Left to choose his own gait, Calico always dropped into a gentle pace which was so easy and comfortable and swinging that Carley never tired of it. Moreover, he did not shy at things lying in the road or rabbits darting from bushes or at the upwhirring of birds. Carley had grown attached to Calico before she realized she was drifting into it.

Summer lay upon the lonely land. Such perfect and wonderful weather had never before been Carley's experience. The dawns broke cool, fresh, fragrant, sweet, and rosy, with a breeze that seemed of heaven rather than earth, and the air seemed tremulously full of the murmur of falling water and the melody of birds. At the solemn noontides the great white sun glared down hot—so hot that it burned the

skin, yet strangely was a pleasant burn. The waning afternoons were Carley's especial torment, when it seemed the sounds and winds of the day were tiring, and all things were seeking repose, and life must soften to an unthinking happiness. So long as she did not think she was satisfied.

Maples and sycamores and oaks were in full foliage, and their bright greens contrasted softly with the dark shine of the pines. Indian paintbrush, so brightly carmine in color, lent touch of fire to the green banks, and under the oaks, in cool dark nooks where mossy boulders lined the stream, there were stately nodding yellow columbines. And high on the rock ledges shot up the wonderful mescal stalks, beginning to blossom, some with tints of gold and others with tones of red.

Riding along down the canyon, under its looming walls, Carley wondered if these physical aspects of Arizona could have become more significant than she realized. The thought had confronted her before. Here, as always, she fought it and denied it by the simple defense of elimination.

Carley knew many things seemed loosening from the narrowness and tightness of her character, sloughing away like scales, exposing a new and strange and susceptible softness of fiber. Heart and soul, emotion and spirit, received something from her surroundings. She absorbed her environment. She felt. It was a delightful state. But anything that approached permanent attachment to this crude West Carley would not tolerate for a moment. Reluctantly she admitted it had bettered her health, quickened her blood, and quite relegated Florida and the Adirondacks to little consideration.

Five miles below West Fork a road branched off and climbed the left side of the canyon. It was a rather steep road, long and zigzagging, and full of rocks and ruts. Carley did not enjoy ascending it, but she preferred the going up to coming down. It took half an hour to climb.

Once up on the flat cedar-dotted desert she was met, full in the face, by a hot dusty wind coming from the south. Carley searched her pockets for her goggles, only to ascertain that she had forgotten them. Somewhere along the first few miles of this road she was to meet Glenn. If she turned back for any cause he would be worried, and, what concerned her more vitally, he would think she had not the courage to face a little dust. So Carley rode on.

The wind would blow hard awhile, then lull for a few moments. On the whole, however, it increased in volume and persistence until she was riding against a gale. She had now come to a bare, flat, gravelly region, scant of cedars and brush, and far ahead she could see a dull yellow pall rising high into the sky.

Carley remembered that somewhere along this flat there was a log cabin which had before provided shelter for her and Flo when they were caught in a rainstorm. It seemed unlikely that she had passed by this cabin.

Resolutely she faced the gale and knew she had a task to find that refuge. When the hard dusty gusts hit her, she found it absolutely necessary to shut her eyes. At intervals less windy she opened them, and rode on, peering through the yellow gloom for the cabin. The fiercer puffs of wind carried pebbles large enough to hurt severely. Then the dust clogged her nose and sand got between her teeth. Added to these annoyances was a heat

like a blast from a furnace.

Carley perspired freely and that caked the dust on her face. She rode on, gradually growing more uncomfortable and miserable. Yet even then she did not utterly lose a sort of thrilling zest in being thrown upon her own responsibility. She could hate an obstacle, yet feel something of pride in holding her own against it.

Another mile of buffeting this increasing gale so exhausted Carley and wrought upon her nerves that she became nearly panic-stricken. She was about to give up when right at hand through the flying dust she espied the cabin. Riding behind it, she dismounted and tied the mustang to a post. Then she ran around to the door and entered.

What a welcome refuge! She was all right now, and when Glenn came along she would have added to her already considerable list another feat for which he would commend her. With aid of her handkerchief, and the tears that flowed so copiously, Carley presently freed her eyes of the blinding dust.

She went to the door, relieved and glad to see that the duststorm was blowing by. The great sky-high pall of yellow had moved on to the north. Puffs of dust were whipping along the road, but no longer in one continuous cloud. In the west, low down the sun was sinking, a dull magenta in hue, quite weird and remarkable.

Wearily, Carley walked to a rude couch of poles and sat down upon it. She had begun to cool off. Feeling dirty and tired, she composed herself to wait.

Suddenly she heard the clip-clop of hoofs. Rising, she ran to the door.

She saw a big bay horse bearing a burly rider. He discovered her at the same instant, and pulled his horse.

"Ho! Ho! if it ain't Pretty Eyes!" he called out in a coarse voice.

Carley recognized the voice, and then the epithet, before her sight established the man as Haze Ruff. A shock passed over her.

"Wal, by all thet's lucky!" he said, dismounting. "I knowed we'd meet some day. I can't say I just laid fer you, but I kept my eyes open."

"I'm waiting for—Glenn," she said, with lips she tried to make stiff.

"Shore I reckoned thet," he replied genially. "But he won't be along yet awhile."

His swarthy, seamy face expanded into a good-humored, meaning smile. Then without any particular rudeness he pushed her back from the door, into the cabin, and stepped across the threshold.

"How dare—you!" cried Carley.

This man loomed over her, huge, somehow monstrous, and his knowing smile, and the hard, glinting twinkle of his light eyes in no wise lessened the sheer brutal force of him physically.

"Me! Aw, I'm a darin' *hombre* an' a devil with the wimmin," he said with a guffaw.

Carley could not collect her wits. His pushing her back into the cabin and following her had shocked her and almost paralyzed her will.

"Let me out of here," she demanded.

"Nope. I'm a-goin' to make a little love to you," he said, and he reached for her with great hairy hands.

Carley saw in them the strength that had so easily swung the sheep. She saw, too, that they were dirty, greasy hands. And they made her flesh creep.

"Glenn will kill—you," she panted.

"What fer?" he queried. "Aw, I know wimmin. You'll never tell him."

"Yes, I will."

"Wal, mebbe. I reckon you're lyin', Pretty Eyes," he replied with a grin. "Anyhow, I'll take a chance."

"I tell you—he'll kill you," repeated Carley, backing away until her weak knees came against the couch.

"What fer, I ask you?" he demanded.

"For this—this insult."

"Huh! I'd like to know who's insulted you. Can't a man take an invitation to kiss an' hug a girl—without insultin' her?"

"Invitation! Are you crazy?" queried Carley, bewildered.

"Nope, I'm not crazy, an' I shore said invitation. I meant thet white shimmy dress you wore the night of Flo's party. Thet's my invitation, Pretty Eyes!"

Carley could only stare at him.

"Wal, if it wasn't an invitation, what was it?" he asked, with another step that brought him within reach of her. He waited for her answer, which was not forthcoming.

"You're gettin' kinda pale around the gills," he went on derisively. "I reckoned you was a real sport— Come here."

He fastened one of his great hands in the front of her coat and gave her a pull. So powerful was it that Carley came hard against him, almost knocking her breathless. There he held her a moment and then put his other arm round her. It seemed to crush both breath and sense out of her. Suddenly limp, she sank strengthless. She seemed reeling in darkness. Then she felt herself thrust away from him with violence. She sank on the couch and her head and shoulders struck the wall.

"Say, if you're a-goin' to keel over like thet—I pass," declared Ruff in disgust. "Can't you Eastern wimmin stand nothin'?"

Carley's eyes opened and beheld him in an attitude of derisive protest.

"You look like a sick kitten," he added. "When I get me a sweetheart or wife I want her to be a wildcat."

His scorn and repudiation of her gave Carley intense relief. She sat up and endeavored to collect her shattered nerves. Ruff gazed down at her with great disapproval and even disappointment.

"Say, did you have some fool idee I was a-goin' to kill you?" he queried gruffly.

"I'm afraid—I did," faltered Carley.

"Wal, I reckon I wouldn't have hurt you. None of these flop-over Janes for me! An' I'll give you a hunch, Pretty Eyes. You might have run acrost a feller thet was no gentleman!"

Of all the amazing statements that had ever been made to Carley, this one seemed the most remarkable.

"What'd you wear thet onnatural white dress fer?" he demanded.

"Unnatural?" echoed Carley.

"Shore. Thet's what I said. Any woman's dress without top or bottom is onnatural. It's not right. Why, you looked like—like"—here he floundered for adequate expression—"like one of the devil's angels. An' I want to hear why you wore it."

"For the same reason I'd wear any dress," she felt forced to reply.

"Pretty Eyes, thet's a lie. You wore thet dress to knock the daylights out of men. Only you ain't honest enough to say so. If you had to put that dress on, why didn't you stay in your room? Naw, you had to come down an' strut around an' show off your beauty. An' I ask you—if you're a nice girl like Flo

Hutter—what'd you wear it fer?"

Carley was mute; she felt rise and burn in her a singular shame and surprise.

"I'm only a sheep dipper," went on Ruff, "but I ain't no fool. A feller don't have to live East an' wear swell clothes to have sense. Mebbe you'll learn thet the West is bigger'n you think. I've been rustlin' round here ten years, an' I never before seen a dress like yours —an' I never heerd of a girl bein' insulted, either. Mebbe you think I insulted you. Wal, I didn't. Fer I reckon *nothin'* could insult you in thet dress. You're not what I call either square or game. *Adios.*"

His bulky figure darkened the doorway, passed out, and the light of the sky streamed into the cabin again. Carley sat staring. She heard Ruff's spurs tinkle, a leathery sound as he mounted, and after that a rapid pound of hoofs, quickly dying away.

He was gone. She had escaped something raw and violent. Dazedly she realized it, with unutterable relief. Every word that he had uttered was stamped in startling characters upon her consciousness. But she was still under the deadening influence of shock. This raw experience was the worst the West had yet dealt her. The presence of Haze Ruff, the astounding truth of the contact with his huge hands, had been profanation and degradation under which she sickened with fear and shame.

Yet hovering back of her shame and rising anger seemed to be a pale and indefinable thought, insistent and accusing, with which she must sooner or later reckon. But at that moment of outraged womanhood, and of revolt against the West, she would not listen. She threw off the burden of emotion and perplexity, and forced herself into composure before the arrival of Glenn.

The dust had ceased to blow, although the wind had by no means died away. Sunset marked the west in old rose and gold, a vast flare. Carley espied a horseman far down the road, and presently recognized both rider and steed. He was coming fast. She went out and, mounting her mustang, she rode out to meet Glenn. Presently he came up to her and pulled his loping horse.

"Hello! I sure was worried," was his greeting, as his gloved hand went out to her. "Did you run into that sandstorm?"

"It ran into me, Glenn, and buried me," she laughed.

His fine eyes lingered on her face with glad and warm glance.

"Well, under all that dust you look scared," he said.

"Scared! I was worse than that. When I first ran into the flying dirt I was only afraid I'd lose my way—and my complexion. But when the worst of the storm hit me—then I feared I'd lose my breath."

"Did you face that sand and ride through it all?" he queried.

"No, not all. But enough. I went through the worst of it before I reached the cabin," she replied.

"Wasn't it great?"

"Yes—great bother and annoyance," she said.

Whereupon he reached out an arm and wrapped it round her as they rode side by side. Demonstrations of this nature were infrequent with Glenn. Despite losing one foot out of a stirrup and her seat in the saddle Carley rather encouraged it. He kissed her dusty face, and then set her back.

"Carley, sometimes I think you've

changed since you've been here," he said with warmth. "To go through that sandstorm without one kick—one knock at my West!"

"Glenn, I always think of what Flo says—the worst is yet to come," replied Carley, trying to hide her unreasonable and tumultuous pleasure at words of praise from him.

"Carley Burch, you don't know yourself," he declared enigmatically.

"What woman knows herself? But do you know me?"

"Not I. Yet sometimes I see depths in you—wonderful possibilities—submerged under your poise—under your fixed, complacent idle attitude toward life."

This seemed for Carley to be dangerously skating near thin ice, but she could not resist a retort: "Depths in me? Why I am a shallow, transparent stream like your West Fork! And as for possibilities—may I ask what of them you imagine you see?"

"As a girl, before you were claimed by the world, you had big hopes and dreams. And you had intellect, too. But you have wasted your talents, Carley. Having money, and spending it, living for pleasure, you have not realized your powers. Now, don't look hurt. I'm not censuring you. It's just the way of modern life. The best of you girls regard marriage as an escape, instead of responsibility. You don't marry to help some man make good—to bring a troop of healthy American kids into the world. You bare your shoulders to the gaze of the multitude and like it best if you are strung with pearls."

"Glenn, you distress me when you talk like this," replied Carley soberly. "It seems to me you are bitter against women."

"I say such things because they are true. Carley, on the level now, tell me how many of your immediate friends have children."

Put to a test, Carley rapidly went over in mind her circle of friends, with the result that she was somewhat shocked and amazed to realize how few of them were even married, and how the babies of her acquaintance were limited to three. It was not easy to admit this to Glenn.

"My dear," replied he, "if that does not show you the handwriting on the wall, nothing ever will."

"Do you know that most of the better-class apartment houses in New York will not take children? Women are not all to blame. Men must have automobiles. I know one girl who wanted a baby, but her husband wanted a car. They couldn't afford both."

"Carley, I'm not blaming women more than men," returned Glenn. "But every man or woman who is genuinely American should read the signs of the times, realize the crisis, and meet it in an American way. Otherwise we are done."

"Glenn, let's put off the argument," appealed Carley. "I'm not—just up to fighting you today. Oh—you needn't smile. I'll fight you some other time."

"You're right, Carley," he assented. "Here we are loafing six or seven miles from home. Let's rustle along."

Riding fast with Glenn was something Carley had only of late added to her achievements. She had greatest pride in it. So she urged her mustang to keep pace with Glenn's horse and

gave herself up to the thrill of the motion and feel of wind and sense of flying along. For one long level stretch she and Glenn held hands.

When they arrived at the descent, which necessitated slow and careful riding, she was hot and tingling and breathless, worked by the action into an exuberance of pleasure. Glenn complimented her riding as well as her rosy cheeks. There was indeed a sweetness in working at a task as she had worked to learn to ride in Western fashion.

Every turn of her mind seemed to confront her with sobering antitheses of thought. Why had she come to love to ride down a lonely desert road, through ragged cedars where the wind whipped her face with fragrant wild breath, if at the same time she hated the West? Could she hate a country, however barren and rough, if it had saved the health and happiness of her future husband?

Early twilight purple lay low in the hollows and clefts of the canyon. Like a strain of distant music, the dreamy hum of falling water, the murmur and melody of the stream, came again to Carley's sensitive ear.

"Do you love this?" asked Glenn, when they reached the green-forested canyon floor, with the yellow road winding away into the purple shadows.

"Yes, both the ride—and you," flashed Carley.

"But I want you to love Arizona," he said.

"Glenn, I'm a faithful creature. You should be glad of that. I love New York."

"Very well, then. Arizona to New York," he said, lightly brushing her cheek with his lips. And swerving back into his saddle, he spurred his horse and called back over his shoulder, "That mustang and Flo have beaten me many a time. Come on."

It was not so much his words as his tone and look that roused Carley. Her mustang did not need any more than to know she wanted him to run. The road was of soft yellow earth flanked with green foliage and overspread by pines. In a moment she was racing at a speed she had never before half attained on a horse.

Down the winding road Glenn's big steed sped, his head low, his stride tremendous, his action beautiful. But Carley saw the distance between them diminishing. Calico was overtaking the bay. She cried out in the thrilling excitement of the moment.

Glenn saw her gaining and pressed his mount to greater speed. Still he could not draw away from Calico. Slowly the little mustang gained. It seemed to Carley that riding him required no effort at all. She closed in on Glenn. From the flying hoofs of his horse shot up showers of damp sand and gravel that covered Carley's riding-habit and spattered in her face. She had to hold up a hand before her eyes. Perhaps this caused her to lose something of her confidence, or her swing in the saddle, for suddenly she realized she was not riding well. The pace was too fast for her inexperience. Carley was hard put to it to hang on and keep the flying sand from blinding her.

When Calico drew alongside the bay horse and brought Carley breast to breast with Glenn, and then inch by inch forged ahead of him, Carley pealed out an exultant cry. Either it frightened Calico or inspired him, for he shot right ahead of Glenn's horse. Then he lost the smooth, wonderful

action. He seemed hurtling through space at the expense of tremendous muscular action.

Carley lost her equilibrium. She seemed rushing through a blurred green and black aisle of the forest with a gale in her face. Then, with a sharp jolt, a break, Calico plunged to the sand. Carley felt herself propelled forward out of the saddle into the air, and down to strike with a sliding, stunning force that ended in sudden dark oblivion.

Upon recovering consciousness she first felt a sensation of oppression in her chest and a dull numbness of her whole body. When she opened her eyes she saw Glenn bending over her, holding her head on his knee. A wet, cold, reviving sensation evidently came from the handkerchief with which he was mopping her face.

"Carley, you can't be hurt—really!" he was ejaculating in eager hope. "It was some spill. But you lit on the sand and slid. You can't be hurt."

The look of his eyes, the tone of his voice, the feel of his hands were such that Carley chose for a moment to pretend to be very badly hurt indeed.

"Glenn—dear," she whispered, very low and very eloquently. "I think—my back—is broken. You'll be free—soon."

Glenn gave a terrible start and his face turned a deathly white. He burst out with a quavering and inarticulate speech.

Carley gazed up at him and then closed her eyes. She could not look at him while carrying on such deceit. Beyond doubt, beyond morbid fancy, the truth had proclaimed itself, filling her heart with joy. Suddenly she flung her arms up around his neck.

"Oh—Glenn! It was too good a chance to miss! I'm not hurt a bit."

Chapter Seven

Oak Creek Canyon

THE day came when Carley asked Mrs. Hutter, "Will you please put up a nice lunch for Glenn and me? I'm going to walk down to his farm where he's working, and I want to surprise him."

"That's a downright fine idea," declared Mrs. Hutter, and bustled away to comply with Carley's request.

So presently Carley found herself carrying a bountiful basket on her arm, faring forth on an adventure that both thrilled and depressed her. Long before this hour something about Glenn's work had quickened her pulse and given rise to an inexplicable admiration. That he was big and strong enough to do such labor made her proud; that he might want to go on doing it made her ponder and brood.

The morning resembled one of the rare Eastern days in June, when the air appeared flooded by rich thick amber light. Only the sun here was hotter and the shade cooler.

Carley took to the trail below where West Fork emptied its golden-green waters into Oak Creek. The red walls seemed to dream and wait under the blaze of the sun; the heat lay like a blanket over the still foliage; the birds were quiet; only the murmuring stream broke the silence of the canyon. Only Carley's stubbornness kept her from acknowledging the sense of peace that enveloped her—that and the consciousness of her own discontent.

The trail led along the creek, threading a maze of boulders, passing into the shade of cottonwoods, and crossing

sun-flecked patches of sand. Carley's every step seemed to become slower. Regrets were assailing her. Long indeed had she overstayed her visit to the West. She must not linger there indefinitely. And mingled with misgiving was a surprise that she had not tired of Oak Creek.

The long-delayed visit to see Glenn working on his own farm must result in her talking to him about his work; and in a way not quite clear she regretted the necessity for it. To disapprove of Glenn! She felt uncertainty, vague doubt.

Presently through the shaded and shadowed breadth of the belt of forest she saw gleams of a sunlit clearing. And crossing this space to the border of trees she peered forth, hoping to espy Glenn at his labors. She saw an old shack, and irregular lines of rude fence built of poles of all sizes and shapes, and several plots of bare yellow ground, leading up toward the west side of the canyon wall.

Could this clearing be Glenn's farm? This was not a farm, but a slash in the forested level of the canyon floor, bare and hideous! Dead trees were standing in the lots. They had been ringed deeply at the base by an ax, to kill them, and so prevent their foliage from shading the soil. Carley saw a long pile of rocks that evidently had been carried from the plowed ground. There was no neatness, no regularity, although there was abundant evidence of toil.

Carley persuaded herself that this must be the plot of ground belonging to the herder Charley, and she was about to turn on down the creek when far up under the bluff she espied a man. He was stalking along and bending down, stalking along and bending down. She recognized Glenn. He was planting something in the yellow soil.

Curiously Carley watched him. What a stride he had! How vigorous he looked, and earnest! He was as intent upon this job as if he had been a rustic. Carley watched him striding along and bending down, absorbed in his task, unmindful of the glaring hot sun, and suddenly an unaccountable flashing query assailed her conscience: How dare she want to take him back?

She seemed as shocked as if some stranger had accosted her. She struggled against something in herself. The old habit of mind instinctively resisted the new, the strange. But she did not come off wholly victorious. The Carley Burch of old passionately hated this life and work of Glenn Kilbourne's, but the rebel self, an unaccountable and defiant Carley, loved him all the better for them.

Carley drew a long deep breath before she called Glenn. This meeting would be momentous.

Manifestly he was surprised to hear her call, and, dropping his sack and implement, he hurried across the tilled ground, sending up puffs of dust. He vaulted the rude fence of poles, and upon sight of her called out lustily. How big and virile he looked!

"Sir Tiller of the Fields," said Carley gaily, "see, your dinner! *I* brought it and *I* am going to share it."

"You old darling!" he replied, and gave her an embrace that left her cheek moist with the sweat of his. He smelled of dust and earth and his body was hot. "I wish to God it could be true for always!"

His loving, bearish onslaught and his words quite silenced Carley. How at critical moments he always said the thing that hurt her or inhibited her!

She essayed a smile as she drew back from him.

"It's sure good of you," he said, taking the basket. "I was thinking I'd be through work sooner today, and was sorry I had not made a date with you. Let's find a place to sit."

Whereupon he led her back under the trees to a half-sunny, half-shady bench of rock overhanging the stream. Great pines overshadowed a still, eddying pool. A number of brown butterflies hovered over the water, and small trout floated like spotted feathers just under the surface. Drowsy summer enfolded the sylvan scene.

Glenn knelt at the edge of the brook, and, plunging his hands in, he splashed like a huge dog and bathed his hot face and head, and then turned to Carley with gay words and laughter, while he wiped himself dry with a large red scarf. Carley was not proof against the virility of him then, and at the moment, no matter what it was that had made him the man he looked, she loved it.

"I'll sit in the sun," he said. "When you're hot you mustn't rest in the shade, unless you've coat or sweater. But you sit here in the shade."

"Glenn, that'll put us too far apart," complained Carley. "I'll sit in the sun with you."

The delightful simplicity and happiness of the ensuing hour was something Carley believed she would never forget.

"There! we've licked the platter clean," she said. "What starved bears we were! I wonder if I shall enjoy eating—when I get home. I used to be so finicky and picky."

"Carley, don't talk about home," said Glenn appealingly.

"You dear old farmer, I'd love to stay here—and just dream—forever," replied Carley earnestly. "But I came on purpose to talk seriously."

"Oh, you did! About what?"

"Well, first about your work. I know I hurt your feelings when I wouldn't listen. But I wasn't ready. I wanted to —to just be gay with you for a while. Don't think I wasn't interested. I was. And now, I'm ready to hear all about it—and everything."

She smiled at him bravely, and she knew that unless some unforeseen shock upset her composure, she would be able to conceal from him anything which might hurt his feelings.

"You do look serious," he said.

"Just what are your business relations with Hutter?" she inquired.

"I'm simply working for him," replied Glenn. "My aim is to get an interest in his sheep, and I expect to, someday. We have some plans. And one of them is the development of that Deep Lake section. You remember—you were with us. The day Spillbeans spilled you?"

"Yes, I remember. It was a pretty place."

Carley did not tell him that for a month past she had owned the Deep Lake section of six hundred and forty acres. She had, in fact, instructed Hutter to purchase it, and to keep the transaction a secret for the present. Carley had never been able to understand the impulse that prompted her to do it. But as Hutter had assured her it was a remarkably good investment on very little capital, she had tried to persuade herself of its advantages. Back of it all had been an irresistible desire to be able someday to present to Glenn this ranch site he loved. She had concluded he would never wholly dissociate himself from this West; and

as he would visit it now and then, she had already begun forming plans of her own. She could stand a month in Arizona at long intervals.

"Hutter and I will go into cattle raising some day," went on Glenn. "And that Deep Lake place is what I want for myself."

"What work are you doing for Hutter?" asked Carley.

"Anything from building fence to cutting timber," laughed Glenn. "I've not yet the experience to be a foreman like Lee Stanton. Besides, I have a little business all my own. I put all my money in that."

"You mean here—this—this farm?"

"Yes. And the stock I'm raising. You see, I have to feed corn. And believe me, Carley, those cornfields represent some job."

"I can well believe that," replied Carley. "You—you looked it."

"Oh, the hard work is over. All I have to do now is to plant and keep the weeds out."

"Glenn, do sheep eat corn?"

"I plant corn to feed my hogs."

"Hogs?" she echoed vaguely.

"Yes, hogs," he said with quiet gravity. "The first day you visited my cabin I told you I raised hogs, and I fried my own ham for your dinner."

"Is that what you—put your money in?"

"Yes. And Hutter says I've done well."

"*Hogs!*" ejaculated Carley, aghast.

"My dear, are you growing dull of comprehension?" retorted Glenn. "H-o-g-s." He spelled the word out. "I'm in the hog-raising business, and I'm pretty blamed well-pleased over my success so far."

Carley laughed, and exclaimed against her stupidity. The look of Glenn was no less astounding than the content of his words. He was actually proud of his work.

"Glenn! It's so—so queer," she went on. "That you—Glenn Kilbourne—should ever go in for—for hogs! It's unbelievable. How'd you ever—ever happen to do it?"

"By Heaven! You're hard on me!" he burst out in sudden passion. "How'd I ever happen to do it? *What* was there left for me? I gave my soul and heart and body to the government—to fight for my country. I came home a wreck. *What* did my government do for me? *What* did my employers do for me? *What* did the people I fought for do for me? Nothing—so help me God—*nothing!* I got a ribbon and a bouquet—a little applause for an hour—and then the sight of me sickened my countrymen. I was broken and used. I was absolutely forgotten. So I fought out my battle alone. Alone! I came West to keep from dying of consumption in sight of the indifferent mob for whom I had sacrificed myself. But I got well. And what *made* me well—and *saved* my soul—was the first work that offered—raising and tending hogs!"

The dead whiteness of Glenn's face, the scorn of his eyes, the grim strangeness of him then alarmed Carley.

"Oh, Glenn—forgive—me!" she faltered. "I was only—talking. Oh, I am blind—blind and little!"

She could not bear to face him for a moment, and she hung her head. An awful sense of her selfishness began to dawn upon her. She trembled. How she had babbled about Glenn and the crippled soldiers! How she had imagined she sympathized! But she had only been a vain, worldly, complacent, effusive little fool.

"Carley, that was coming to you,"

said Glenn presently, with a heavy expulsion of breath.

"I only know I love you—more—more," she cried wildly, looking up and wanting desperately to throw herself in his arms.

"I guess you do—a little," he replied. "Carley, let's get back to my work."

"Yes—yes," exclaimed Carley gladly. "I'm ready to—to go pet your hogs—anything."

"I'll take you up on that," he declared. "I'll bet you won't go near one of my hogpens."

"Lead me to it!" she replied.

"Well, maybe I'd better hedge on the bet," he said, laughing again. "You have more in you than I suspect. You sure fooled me when you stood for the sheep-dip. But, come on, I'll take you anyway."

So that was how Carley found herself walking arm in arm with Glenn down the canyon trail. A few moments of action gave her at least an appearance of outward composure. But Carley knew she was farther from normal than ever before in her life, and that a blow had fallen upon her, the nature of which only time could divulge.

Glenn led her around the clearing and up to the base of the west wall, where against a shelving portion of the cliff had been constructed a rude fence of poles. It formed three sides of a pen, and the fourth side was solid rock. A bushy cedar tree stood in the center. Water flowed from under the cliff, which accounted for the boggy condition of the red earth. This pen was occupied by a huge sow and a litter of pigs.

Carley climbed on the fence and sat there while Glenn leaned over the top pole and began to wax eloquent on a subject evidently dear to his heart. Today Carley made an inspiring listener. With an arm round Glenn's shoulders she watched the rooting and squealing little pigs, and was amused and interested, as if they were far removed from the vital issue of the hour. But all the time as she looked and laughed, and encouraged Glenn to talk, there seemed to be a strange, solemn, oppressive knocking at her heart.

"There were twelve pigs in that litter," Glenn was saying, "and now you see there are only nine. I've lost three. Mountain lions, bears, coyotes, wildcats are all likely to steal a pig. And at first I was sure one of these varmints had been robbing me. But as I could not find any tracks, I knew I had to lay the blame on something else. So I kept watch pretty closely in daytime, and at night I shut the pigs up in the corner there, where you see I've built a pen.

"Yesterday I heard squealing—and, by George! I saw an eagle flying off with one of my pigs. A great old bald-headed eagle—the regal bird you see with America's stars and stripes. I ran for my rifle, and I took some quick shots at him as he flew up. But the old rascal hung on to my pig. I watched him carry it to that sharp crag way up there on the rim."

"Poor little piggy!" exclaimed Carley. "To think of our American emblem being a robber of pigpens!—Glenn, even my hide-bound narrowness is susceptible to change. It's never too late to learn. This should apply to the Society for the Preservation of the American Eagle."

Glenn led her along the base of the wall to three other pens, in each of which was a fat old sow with a litter. And at the last enclosure, that owing to dry soil was not so dirty, Glenn

picked up a little pig and held it squealing out to Carley as she leaned over the fence. It was fairly white and clean, a little pink and fuzzy, and certainly cute with its curled tail.

"Carley Burch, take it in your hands," commanded Glenn.

"Why, shore I will, as Flo says," replied Carley, extending her ungloved hands. "Come here, piggy. I christen you Pinky." And hiding an almost insupportable squeamishness from Glenn, she took the pig in her hands and fondled it.

"By George!" exclaimed Glenn in huge delight. "I wouldn't have believed it. Carley, I hope you tell your fastidious Morrison that you held one of my pigs in your beautiful hands."

"Wouldn't it please you more to tell him yourself?" asked Carley.

"Yes, it would," declared Glenn grimly.

This incident inspired Glenn to a Homeric narration of his hog-raising experience. In spite of herself the content of his talk interested her. And as for the effect upon her of his enthusiasm, it was deep and compelling.

Glenn told of his droves of pigs running wild in the canyon below. In summertime they fed upon vegetation, and at other seasons on acorns, roots, bugs, and grubs. Acorns, particularly, were good and fattening feed. They ate cedar and juniper berries, and piñon nuts. And therefore they lived off the land, at little or no expense to the owner. The only loss was from beasts and birds of prey.

Glenn showed Carley how a profitable business could soon be established. He meant to fence off side canyons and to segregate droves of his hogs, and to raise abundance of corn for winter feed. In conclusion Glenn eloquently told how in his necessity he had accepted gratefully the humblest of labors, to find in the hard pursuit of it a rejuvenation of body and mind, and a promise of independence and prosperity.

When he had finished, and excused himself to go repair a weak place in the corral fence, Carley sat silent, wrapped in strange meditation.

Whither had faded the vulgarity and ignominy she had attached to Glenn's raising of hogs? Partly she understood him now. She shirked consideration of his sacrifice to his country. That must wait. But she thought of his work, and the more she thought the less she wondered.

First he had labored with his hands. What infinite meaning lay unfolding to her vision! Somewhere out of it all came the conception that man was intended to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. But there was more to it than that. By that toil and sweat, something great and enduring, something physical and spiritual, came to a man.

She understood then why she would have wanted to surrender herself to a man made manly by toil; she understood how a woman instinctively leaned toward the protection of a man who had used his hands. And suddenly Carley thought of Morrison. He could dance attendance upon her, and amuse her—but how would he have acquitted himself in a moment of peril? She had her doubts.

Carley's querying and answering mind reverted to Glenn. He had found a secret in this seeking for something through the labor of hands. Carley tried to picture to herself Glenn's attitude of mind when he had first gone to work here in the West.

Crippled, ruined in health, wrecked and broken by an inexplicable war, soul-blighted by the heartless neglect of government and public, he had been true enough to himself and God, to fight for life with the instinct of a man, to fight for his mind with a noble and unquenchable faith. Alone—indeed he had been alone! And by some miracle beyond the power of understanding he had found day by day in his painful efforts some hope and strength to go on. For Glenn Kilbourne the health and happiness and success most men held so dear must have seemed impossible. His had been a slow, daily, tragic, and terrible task.

Carley could see him day by day toiling in his lonely canyon—plodding to his lonely cabin. He had been playing the game—fighting it out alone.

So Glenn Kilbourne loomed heroically in Carley's transfigured sight. Out of his travail he had climbed on stepping-stones of his dead self.

Carley's heart seemed full to bursting. Not another single moment could her mounting love abide in a heart that held a double purpose. How bitter the assurance that she had not come West to help him! Unworthy indeed was she of the love of this man. Only a lifetime of devotion to him could acquit her in the eyes of her better self.

She saw him complete his task and wipe his brown moist face and stride toward her, coming nearer, tall and erect with something added to his soldierly bearing, with a light in his eyes she could no longer bear.

The moment for which she had waited more than two months had come at last.

"Glenn—when will you go back East?" she asked, tense and low-voiced.

The instant the words were spent upon her lips she realized that he had always been waiting and prepared for this question.

"Carley," he replied gently, though his voice rang, "I am never going back East."

"*Never?*" she whispered.

"Never to live, or stay any while," he went on. "I might go some time for a little visit—but never to live."

"Oh—Glenn!" she gasped, and her hands fluttered out to him. "Then—this is it—the something I felt strange between us?"

"Yes, I knew—and you never asked me," he replied.

"That was it? All the time you knew," she whispered huskily. "You knew—*I'd never—marry you—never live out here?*"

"Yes, Carley, I knew you'd never be woman enough—*American enough*—to help me reconstruct my broken life out here in the West," he replied with a sad, bitter smile.

That flayed her. Shame and wounded vanity and clamoring love contended for dominance of her emotions. Love beat down all else.

"Dearest—I beg of you—don't break my heart," she implored.

"I love you, Carley," he answered.

"Then come back—home—home with me."

"No. If you love me you will be my wife."

"Love you! Glenn, I worship you," she broke out passionately. "But I could not live here—*I could not.*"

"Carley, did you ever read of the woman who said, 'Whither thou goest, I will go'?"

"Oh, don't be ruthless! Don't judge me. . . . I never dreamed of this. I came West to take you back."

"My dear, it was a mistake," he said

gently, softening to her distress. "I'm sorry I did not write you more plainly. But, Carley, I could not ask you to share this—this wilderness home with me. I don't ask it now. I always knew you couldn't do it. Yet you've changed so—that I hoped against hope."

"Don't try to spare me. I'm slight and miserable. I stand abased in my own eyes. I thought I loved you. But I must love best the crowd—people—luxury—fashion—the damned round of things I was born to."

"Carley, you will realize their insufficiency too late," he replied earnestly. "The things you were born to are love, work, children, happiness."

"Don't! Don't!" she cried passionately. "Glenn, it is the end. You are free."

"I do not ask to be free. Wait. Go home and look at it again with different eyes. Think things over. I will always love you—and I will be here—hoping—"

"I—I cannot listen," she returned brokenly. "I—I cannot face you. Here is—your ring. You—are—free. Don't stop me—don't come. Oh, Glenn, good-by!"

With breaking heart she whirled away from him and hurried down the slope toward the trail. The shade of the forest enveloped her. Peering back through the trees, she saw Glenn standing where she had left him, as if already stricken by the loneliness that must be his lot.

A sob broke from Carley's throat. She hated herself. She dared not look back again. Stumbling and breathless, she hurried on.

An hour later she had bidden farewell to the weeping Mrs. Hutter, and to the white-faced Flo, and Lolomi Lodge, and the murmuring waterfall, and the haunting loneliness of Oak Creek Canyon.

Chapter Eight

Western Memories

AT FLAGSTAFF, where Carley arrived a few minutes before train time, she was too busily engaged with tickets and baggage to think of herself or of the significance of leaving Arizona. But as she walked into the Pullman she overheard a passenger remark, "Regular old Arizona sunset," and that shook her heart.

Suddenly she realized she had come to love the colorful sunsets, to watch and wait for them. And bitterly she thought how that was her way—to learn the value of something when it was gone.

The jerk and start of the train affected her with singular depressing shock. She had burned her last bridge behind her. A sense of irreparable loss flooded over her—the first check to shame and humiliation.

From her window she looked out to the southwest. Somewhere across the cedar and pine-greened uplands lay Oak Creek Canyon, going to sleep in its purple and gold shadows of sunset. Banks of broken clouds hung to the horizon, like continents and islands and reefs set in a turquoise sea. Shafts of sunlight streaked down through creamy-edged and purple-centered clouds. Vast flare of gold dominated the sunset background.

When the train rounded a curve Carley's strained vision became filled with the upheaved bulk of the San Francisco Mountains. Ragged gray grass slopes and green forests on end, and black-fringed sky lines, all pointed to the sharp clear peaks spearing the sky.

And as she watched, the peaks slowly flushed with sunset hues, and the sky flared golden, and the strength of the eternal mountains stood out in sculptured sublimity.

Every day for two months and more Carley had watched these peaks, at all hours, in every mood; and they had unconsciously become a part of her thought. The train was relentlessly whirling her eastward. Soon they must become a memory. Tears blurred her sight. Poignant regret seemed added to the anguish she was suffering.

The next day through New Mexico she followed magnificent ranges and valleys—so different from the country she had seen coming West—so supremely beautiful that she wondered if she had only acquired the harvest of a seeing eye.

But it was at sunset of the following day, when the train was speeding down the continental slope of prairie land beyond the Rockies, that the West took its ruthless revenge.

Masses of strange cloud and singular light upon the green prairie, and a luminosity in the sky, drew Carley to the platform of her car, which was the last of the train. There she stood, gripping the iron gate, feeling the wind whip her hair and the iron-tracked ground speed from under her, spellbound and stricken at the sheer wonder and glory of the firmament, and the mountain range that it canopied so exquisitely.

A rich and mellow light, singularly clear, seemed to flood out of some unknown source. For the sun was hidden. The clouds just above Carley hung low, and they were like thick, heavy smoke, mushrooming, coalescing, forming and massing, of strange yellow cast of mauve. It shaded west-

ward into heliotrope and this into a royal purple, matchless and rare.

Then came the surpassing splendor of this cloud pageant—a vast canopy of shell pink, a sun-fired surface like an opal sea, rippled and webbed, with the exquisite texture of an Oriental fabric, pure, delicate, lovely as no work of human hands could be. It mirrored all the warm, pearly tints of the inside whorl of the tropic nautilus. And it ended abruptly, a rounded depth of bank, on a broad stream of clear sky, intensely blue, transparently blue, as if through the lambent depths shone the infinite firmament. The lower edge of this stream took the golden lightning of the sunset and was notched for all its horizon-long length by the wondrous white glistening-peaked range of the Rockies. Far to the north, standing aloof from the range, loomed up the grand black bulk and noble white dome of Pikes Peak.

Carley watched the sunset transfiguration of cloud and sky and mountain until all were cold and gray. And then she returned to her seat, thoughtful and sad, feeling that the West had mockingly flung at her one of its transient moments of loveliness.

Nor had the West wholly finished with her. Next day the mellow gold of the Kansas wheat fields, endless and

boundless as a sunny sea, rich, waving in the wind, stretched away before her aching eyes for hours and hours. Here was the promise fulfilled, the bountiful harvest of the land, the strength of the West. The great middle state had a heart of gold.

East of Chicago Carley began to feel that the long days and nights of riding, the ceaseless turning of the wheels, the constant and wearing stress of emotion, had removed her an immeasurable distance of miles and time and feeling from the scene of her catastrophe. Many days seemed to have passed. Many had been the hours of her bitter regret and anguish.

Indiana and Ohio, with their green pastoral farms, and numberless villages, and thriving cities, denoted a country far removed and different from the West, and an approach to the populous East. Carley felt like a wanderer coming home. She was restlessly and impatiently glad.

Carley had wired her aunt and two of her intimate friends to meet her at the Grand Central Station. This reunion soon to come affected Carley in recurrent emotions of relief, gladness, and shame. She did not sleep well, and arose early, and when the train reached Albany she felt that she could hardly endure the tedious hours. The majestic Hudson and the palatial mansions on the wooded bluffs proclaimed to Carley that she was back in the East. How long a time seemed to have passed!

At last the train sheered away from the broad Hudson and entered the environs of New York. Carley sat perfectly still, to all outward appearances a calm, superbly-poised New York woman returning home, but inwardly raging with contending tides. In her own sight she was a disgraceful failure, a prodigal sneaking back to the ease and protection of loyal friends who did not know her truly.

Then the train with rush and roar crossed the Harlem River to enter New York City. As one waking from a dream Carley saw the blocks and squares of gray apartment houses and red buildings, the miles of roofs and chimneys, the long hot glaring streets full of playing children and cars. Then above the roar of the train sounded the high notes of a hurdy-gurdy. Indeed she was home. Next came the dark tunnel, and then the slowing of the train to a stop. As she walked behind a porter up the long incline toward the station gate her legs seemed to be dead.

In the circle of expectant faces beyond the gate she saw her aunt's, eager and agitated, then the handsome pale face of Eleanor Harmon, and beside her the sweet thin one of Beatrice Lovell. They all rushed upon her, and embraced her, and exclaimed over her together. Carley never recalled what she said. But her heart was full.

"Oh, how perfectly stunning you look!" cried Eleanor, backing away from Carley and gazing with glad, surprised eyes.

"Carley!" gasped Beatrice. "You wonderful golden-skinned goddess! You're *young* again, like you were in our school days."

It was before Aunt Mary's shrewd, penetrating, loving gaze that Carley quailed.

"Yes, Carley, you look well—better than I ever saw you, but—but—"

"But I don't look happy," interrupted Carley. "I am happy to get home—to see you all— But—my—my heart is broken!"

A little shocked silence ensued, then Carley found herself being led across the lower level and up the wide stairway. As she mounted to the vast-domed cathedral-like chamber of the station a strange sensation pierced her. Carley shut her eyes, and then she knew. The dim light of vast space above, the looming gray walls, shadowy with tracery of figures, the lofty dome like the blue sky, brought back to her the walls of Oak Creek Canyon and the great caverns under the ramparts. As suddenly as she had shut her eyes Carley opened them to face her friends.

"Let me get it over—quickly," she burst out. "I—I hated the West. It was so raw—so violent—so big. I think I hate it more—now. But it changed me—made me over physically—and did something to my soul—God knows what. And it has saved Glenn. Oh, he is wonderful! You would never know him. Glenn's business is raising hogs. He has a hog ranch. Doesn't it sound sordid? But Glenn is absorbed in his work. I hated it—I expected to ridicule it. But I ended by infinitely respecting him.

"Well, at last I found courage to ask him when he was coming back to New York. He said—'*never!*' I realized then my blindness, my selfishness. I could not be his wife and live there. I could not. I was too small, too miserable, too comfort-loving—too spoiled. I left him free—and here I am. I beg you—don't ask me any more—and never to mention it to me—so I can forget."

With the confession ruthlessly made the hard compression in Carley's breast subsided, and her eyes cleared of a hateful dimness. When they reached the taxi stand outside the station Carley seemed not to be able to get air into her lungs.

"Isn't it dreadfully hot?" she asked.

"This is a cool spell to what we had last week," replied Eleanor.

"Cool!" exclaimed Carley, as she wiped her moist face. "I wonder if you Easterners know the real significance of words."

Then they entered a taxi, to be whisked away through a labyrinthine maze of cars and streets. A congestion of traffic at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street halted their taxi for a few moments, and here in the thick of it Carley had full assurance that she was back in the metropolis. Her sore heart eased somewhat at sight of the streams of people passing to and fro. And all the while her aunt held her hand, and Beatrice and Eleanor talked as fast as their tongues could wag.

Then the taxi clattered on up the Avenue, to turn down a side street and presently stop at Carley's home. It was a modest three-story brownstone house. Peering out of the taxi, she gazed dubiously at the brownish-red stone steps and front of her home.

"I'm going to have it painted," she muttered, as if to herself.

Her aunt and her friends laughed, glad and relieved to hear such a practical remark from Carley. How were they to divine that this brownish-red stone was the color of desert rocks and canyon walls?

In a few more moments Carley was inside the house, feeling a sense of protection in the familiar rooms that had been her home for seventeen years. Once in the sanctity of her room, which was exactly as she had left it, her first action was to look in the mirror at her weary, dusty, heated face.

"Now!" she whispered low. "It's done. I'm home."

What with unpacking and chatting

and telephoning and lunching, the day soon passed. Carley went to dinner with friends and later to a roof garden. The color and light, the gayety and music, the news of acquaintances, the humor of the actors—all, in fact, except the unaccustomed heat and noise, were most welcome and diverting. That night she slept the sleep of weariness.

Awakening early, she inaugurated a habit of getting up at once, instead of lolling in bed, and breakfasting there, and reading her mail, as had been her wont before going West. Then she went over business matters with her aunt, called on her lawyer and banker, took lunch with Rose Maynard, and spent the afternoon shopping.

Strong as she was, the unaccustomed heat and the hard pavements and the jostle of shoppers and the continual rush of sensations wore her out so completely that she did not want any dinner. She talked to her aunt awhile, then went to bed.

Next day Carley motored through Central Park, and out of town into Westchester County, finding some relief from the stifling heat. But she seemed to look at the dusty trees and the worn greens without really seeing them. In the afternoon she called on friends, and had dinner at home with her aunt, and then went to a theater. The musical comedy was good, but the almost unbearable heat and the vitiated air spoiled her enjoyment.

That night upon arriving home at midnight she stepped out of the taxi, and involuntarily, without thought, looked up to see the stars. But there were no stars. A murky yellow-tinged blackness hung low over the city. Carley recollected that stars, and sunrises and sunsets, and untainted air, and silence were not for city dwellers.

A few days sufficed to swing her into the old life. Many of Carley's friends had neither the leisure nor the means to go away from the city during the summer. Some there were who might have afforded that if they had seen fit to live in less showy apartments, or to dispense with cars. Her other best friends were on their summer outings in the Adirondacks. Carley decided to go with her aunt to Lake Placid about the first of August. Meanwhile she would keep going and doing.

She had been a week in town before Morrison telephoned her and added his welcome. Despite the gay gladness of his voice, it irritated her. She scarcely wanted to see him. But a meeting was inevitable, and besides, going out with him was in accordance with the plan she had adopted. So she made an engagement to meet him at the Plaza for dinner.

When Carley went into the reception room of the Plaza that night Morrison was waiting for her—the same slim, fastidious, elegant, sallow-faced Morrison whose image she had in mind, yet somehow different. He had what Carley called the New York masculine face, blasé and lined, with eyes that gleamed, yet had no fire. But at sight of her his face lighted up.

"By Jove! but you've come back a peach!" he exclaimed, clasping her extended hand. "Eleanor told me you looked great. It's worth missing you to see you like this."

"Thanks, Larry," she replied. "I must look pretty well to win that compliment from you. And how are you feeling? You don't seem robust for a golfer and horseman. But then I'm used to husky Westerners."

"Oh, I'm fagged with the daily grind," he said. "I'll be glad to get up

in the mountains next month. Let's go down to dinner."

They descended the spiral stairway to the grill-room, where an orchestra was playing jazz, and dancers gyrated on a polished floor, and diners in evening dress looked on over their cigarettes.

"Well, Carley, are you still finicky about the eats?" he queried, consulting the menu.

"No. But I prefer plain food," she replied.

"Have a cigarette," he said, holding out his silver monogrammed case.

"Thanks, Larry. I—I guess I'll not take up smoking again. You see, while I was West I got out of the habit."

"Yes, they told me you had changed," he returned. "How about drinking?"

"Why, I thought New York had gone dry!" she said, forcing a laugh.

"Only on the surface. Underneath it's wetter than ever."

"Well, I'll obey the law."

He ordered a rather elaborate dinner, and then turning his attention to Carley, gave her closer scrutiny. Carley knew then that he had become acquainted with the fact of her broken engagement. It was a relief not to need to tell him.

"How's that big stiff, Kilbourne?" asked Morrison suddenly. "Is it true he got well?"

"Oh—yes! He's fine," replied Carley with eyes cast down. A hot knot seemed to form deep within her. "But if you please—I do not care to talk of him."

"Naturally. But I must tell you that one man's loss is another's gain."

Carley had rather expected renewed courtship from Morrison. She had not, however, been prepared for the beat of her pulse, the quiver of her nerves, the uprising of hot resentment at the mere mention of Kilbourne. It was only natural that Glenn's former rivals should speak of him, and perhaps disparagingly. But from this man Carley could not bear even a casual reference.

Morrison had escaped the army service. He had been given a high-salaried post at the shipyards—the duties of which, if there had been any, he performed wherever he happened to be. Morrison's father had made a fortune in leather during the war. Morrison represented the not inconsiderable number of young men in New York who had gained at the expense of the valiant legion who had lost.

Carley raised her eyes to gaze steadily at him. He looked well-fed, indolent, rich, effete, and supremely self-satisfied.

"Larry, I fear gain and loss are mere words," she said. "The thing that counts with me is what you *are*."

He stared in well-bred surprise, and presently talked of a new dance which had lately come into vogue. And from that he passed on to gossip of the theater. Once between courses of the dinner he asked Carley to dance, and she complied. Morrison had the suppleness and skill of a dancing-master. But he held Carley too tightly, and so she told him, and added:

"I imbibed some fresh pure air while I was out West—something you haven't here—and I don't want it all squeezed out of me."

The latter days of July Carley made busy—so busy that she lost her tan and appetite, and something of her splendid resistance to the dragging heat and late hours. Seldom was she without some of her friends. She accepted almost any kind of an invitation, and

went even to Coney Island, to baseball games, to the motion pictures, which were three forms of amusement not customary with her.

At Coney Island, which she visited with two of her younger girl friends, she had the best time since her arrival home. What had put her in accord with ordinary people? The baseball games likewise pleased her. The running of the players and the screaming of the spectators amused and excited her. But she hated the motion pictures with their absurd misrepresentations of life, in some cases capably acted by skillful actors, and in others a silly series of scenes featuring some doll-faced girl.

But she refused to go horseback riding in Central Park. She refused to go to the Plaza. And these refusals she made deliberately, without asking herself why.

On August 1st she accompanied her aunt and several friends to Lake Placid, where they established themselves at a hotel. How welcome to Carley's strained eyes were the green of mountains, the soft gleam of amber water! How sweet and refreshing a breath of cool pure air! The change from New York's glare and heat and dirt, thronging millions of people, and ceaseless roar and rush, was tremendously relieving to Carley. But the beauty of the hills and vales, the quiet of the forest, the sight of the stars, made it harder to forget.

For the most part her days held variety and pleasure. The place was beautiful, the weather pleasant, the people congenial. She motored over the forest roads, she canoed along the margin of the lake, she played golf and tennis. She wore exquisite gowns to dinner and danced during the evenings. But she seldom walked anywhere on the trails and, never alone, and she never climbed the mountains and never rode a horse.

Morrison arrived and added his attentions to those of other men. Carley neither accepted nor repelled them. She filled the days as best she could, and usually earned quick slumber at night.

Chapter Nine

News from Arizona

THE latter part of September Carley returned to New York. Soon after her arrival she received by letter a formal proposal of marriage from Elbert Harrington, who had been quietly attentive to her during her sojourn at Lake Placid. He was a lawyer of distinction, somewhat older than most of her friends, and a man of means and fine family.

Carley was quite surprised. Harrington was really one of the few of her acquaintances whom she regarded as somewhat behind the times, and liked him the better for that. But she could not marry him, and replied to his letter in as kindly a manner as possible. Then he called personally.

"Carley, I've come to ask you to reconsider," he said, with a smile in his gray eyes.

"Elbert, you embarrass me," she replied, trying to laugh it out. "Indeed I feel honored, and I thank you. But I can't marry you."

"Why not? he asked quietly.

"Because I don't love you," she replied.

"I did not expect you to," he said.

"I hoped in time you might come to care. I've known you a good many years, Carley. Forgive me if I tell you I see you are breaking—wearing yourself down. Maybe it is not a husband you need so much now, but you do need a home and children. You are wasting your life."

"All you say may be true, my friend," replied Carley, with a helpless little upflinging of hands. "Yet it does not alter my feelings."

"But you will marry sooner or later?" he queried persistently.

"I don't believe I ever will," she answered thoughtfully.

"That is nonsense, Carley," he went on. "You'll have to marry. What else can you do? With all due respect to your feelings—that affair with Kilbourne is ended—and you're not the wishy-washy heartbreak kind of a girl."

"You can never tell what a woman will do," she said, somewhat coldly.

"Certainly not. That's why I refuse to take no. Carley, be reasonable. You like me—respect me, do you not?"

"Why, of course I do!"

"I'm only thirty-five, and I could give you all any sensible woman wants," he said. "Let's make a real American home. Carley, you are not a sentimentalist, or a melancholiac. Nor are you a waster. You have fine qualities. You need something to do—someone to care for."

"Please do not think me ungrateful, Elbert," she replied, "nor insensible to the truth of what you say. But my answer is no!"

When Harrington had gone Carley went to her room, and faced her mirror skeptically and relentlessly.

"I am such a liar that I'll do well to look at myself," she meditated. "Here I am again. Now! The world expects me to marry. But *what* do I expect?"

If she chose to live in the world she must conform to its customs. For a woman marriage was the aim and the end and the all of existence. Nevertheless, for Carley it could not be without love. Before she had gone West she might have had many of the conventional modern ideas about women and marriage. But out there in the wilds her love and perception had broadened. The months she had been home seemed fuller than all the months of her life. She had tried to forget and enjoy; she had not succeeded; but she had looked with far-seeing eyes at her world.

The women did not do any real work; they did not bear children; they lived on excitement and luxury. They had no ideals. How greatly were men to blame? How much of real love entered into the marriages among her acquaintances? Before marriage Carley wanted a girl to be sweet, proud, aloof, not attainable except through love! It would be better that no children be born at all unless born of love. Perhaps that was why so few children were born. Nature's balance and revenge! In Arizona Carley had learned something of the ruthlessness and inevitableness of nature. She was finding out she had learned this with many other staggering facts.

"I love Glenn still," she whispered passionately, as she faced the tragic-eyed image of herself in the mirror. "I love him more—more. Oh, if I were honest I'd cry out the truth! I will always love him. How then could I marry any other man? I would be a lie, a cheat. If I could only forget him—only kill that love. Then I might love another man—and if I did love him—no matter what I had felt or done before,

I would be worthy. I could give him just as much. But without such love I'd give only a husk—a body without soul."

Carley realized how right and true it might be for her to throw herself away upon an inferior man, even a fool or a knave, if she loved him; likewise it dawned upon her how false and wrong and sinful it would be to marry the greatest or the richest or the noblest man unless she had that supreme love to give him, and knew it was reciprocated.

"What am I going to do with my life?" she asked, bitter and aghast. "I have been—I am a waster. I've lived for nothing but pleasurable sensation. I'm utterly useless. I do absolutely no good on earth. Why not give up ideals and be like the rest of my kind?"

She thrust the thought from her with passionate scorn. If poor, broken, ruined Glenn Kilbourne could cling to an ideal and fight for it, could not she be woman enough to do the same?

Three months of the old life had shown her that for her it was empty, vain, farcical, without one redeeming feature. Such so-called social life as she had plunged into deliberately to forget her unhappiness had failed her utterly. If she had been shallow and frivolous it might have done otherwise.

"I've got to find some work," she muttered soberly.

At the moment she heard the postman's whistle outside; and a little later the servant brought up her mail. The first letter, large, soiled, thick, bore the postmark Flagstaff, and her address in Glenn Kilbourne's writing.

Carley stared at it. Her heart gave a great leap. Her hand shook. She sat down suddenly as if the strength of her legs was inadequate to uphold her.

The other letters fell off her lap, to lie unnoticed. This big thick envelope fascinated her. It was one of the stamped envelopes she had seen in his cabin. It contained a letter that had been written on his rude table, before the open fire, in the light of the doorway, in that little log cabin under the spreading pines of West Ford Canyon. She tore the envelope apart and read:

Dear Carley:

I'm surely glad for a good excuse to write you.

Once in a blue moon I get a letter, and today Hutter brought me one from a soldier pard of mine who was with me in the Argonne. His name is Virgil Rust and he's from Wisconsin. Just a rough-diamond sort of chap, but fairly well educated. He and I were in some pretty hot places, and it was he who pulled me out of a shell crater. I'd "gone west" sure then if it hadn't been for Rust.

Well, he did all sorts of big things during the war. Was down several times with wounds. He liked to fight and he was a holy terror. We all thought he'd get medals and promotion. But he didn't get either. These much-desired things did not always go where they were best deserved.

Rust is now lying in a hospital in Bedford Park. His letter is pretty blue. All he says about why he's there is that he's knocked out. But he wrote a lot about his girl. It seems he was in love with a girl in his home town—a pretty, big-eyed lass whose picture I've seen—and while he was overseas she married one of the chaps who got out of fighting. Evidently Rust is deeply hurt. He wrote: "I'd not care so . . . if she'd thrown me down to marry an

old man or a boy who couldn't have gone to war."

Now, the point of this is that I am asking you to go see Rust, and cheer him up, and do what you can for the poor devil. It's a good deal to ask of you, I know, especially as Rust saw your picture many a time and knows you were my girl. But you needn't tell him that you—we couldn't make a go of it.

And, as I am writing this to you, I see no reason why I shouldn't go on in behalf of myself.

The fact is, Carley, I miss writing to you more than I miss anything of my old life. I'll bet you have a trunkful of letters from me—unless you've destroyed them. I'm not going to say how I miss your *letters. But I will say you wrote the most charming and fascinating letters of anyone I ever knew, quite aside from any sentiment. You knew, of course, that I had no other girl correspondent.*

Well, I got along fairly well before you came West, but I'd be an awful liar if I denied I didn't get lonely for you and your letters. It's different now that you've been to Oak Creek. I'm alone most of the time and I dream a lot, and I'm afraid I see you here in my cabin, and along the brook, and under the pines, and riding Calico—which you came to do well—and on my hog-pen fence—and, oh, everywhere! I don't want you to think I'm down in the mouth, for I'm not. I'll take my medicine. But, Carley, you spoiled me, and I miss hearing from you, and I don't see why it wouldn't be all right for you to send me a friendly letter occasionally.

It is autumn now. I wish you could see Arizona canyons in their gorgeous colors. We have had frost right along and the mornings are great. There's a broad zigzag belt of gold halfway up the San Francisco peaks, and that is the aspen thickets taking on their fall coat. Here in the canyon you'd think there was blazing fire everywhere. The vines and the maples are red, scarlet, carmine, cerise, magenta, all the hues of flame. The oak leaves are turning russet gold, and the sycamores are yellow green. Up on the desert the other day I rode across a patch of asters, lilac and lavender, almost purple. I dug up the whole bunch, roots and all, and planted them on the sunny side of my cabin.

I'm home early most every afternoon now, and I like the couple of hours loafing around. Guess it's bad for me, though. You know I seldom hunt, and the trout in the pool here are so tame now they'll almost eat out of my hand. I haven't the heart to fish for them. The squirrels, too, have grown tame and friendly. There's a red squirrel that climbs up on my table. And there's a chipmunk who lives in my cabin and runs over my bed. I've a new pet—the little pig you christened Pinky. After he had the wonderful good fortune to be caressed and named by you I couldn't think of letting him grow up in an ordinary pig-like manner. So I fetched him home. My dog, Moze, was jealous at first and did not like this intrusion, but now they are good friends and sleep together. Flo has a kitten she's going to give me, and then, as Hutter says, I'll be "jake."

Sprawled on the warm sweet pine needles, I breathe through them the breath of the earth and am somehow no longer lonely. I cannot, of course, see the sunset, but I watch for its coming on the eastern wall of the canyon. I see the shadow slowly creep up, driv-

ing the gold before it, until at last the canyon rim and pines are turned to golden fire. I watch the sailing eagles as they streak across the gold, and swoop up into the blue, and pass out of sight. I watch the golden flush fade to gray, and then the canyon slowly fills with purple shadows.

This hour of twilight is the silent and melancholy one. Seldom is there any sound save the soft rush of the water over the stones, and that seems to die away. For a moment, perhaps, I am a primitive savage, feeling the great, silent pulse of nature, happy in unconsciousness, like a beast of the wild. But only for an instant do I ever catch this fleeting state. Next I am Glenn Kilbourne of West Fork, doomed and haunted by memories of the past. The great looming walls then become no longer blank. They are vast pages of the history of my life, with its past and present, and, alas, its future. Everything time does is written on the stones.

Then, descending from the sublime to the humdrum and necessary, I heave a sigh, and pull myself together, and go in to make biscuits and fry ham. But I should not forget to tell you that before I do go in, very often my looming, wonderful walls and crags weave in strange shadowy characters the beautiful and unforgettable face of Carley Burch!

I append what little news Oak Creek affords.

That blamed old bald eagle stole another of my pigs.

I am doing so well with my hog-raising that Hutter wants to come in with me, giving me an interest in his sheep.

It is rumored someone has bought the Deep Lake section I wanted for a ranch. I don't know who. Hutter was rather noncommittal.

Charley, the herder, had one of his queer spells the other day, and swore to me he had a letter from you. He told the blamed lie with a sincere and placid eye, and even a smile of pride. Queer guy, that Charley!

Flo and Lee Stanton had another quarrel—the worst yet, Lee tells me. Flo asked a girl friend out from Flag and threw her in Lee's way, so to speak, and when Lee retaliated by making love to the girl Flo got mad. Funny creatures, you girls! Flo rode with me from High Falls to West Fork, and never showed the slightest sign of trouble. In fact she was delightfully gay. She rode Calico, and beat me bad in a race.

Adios, Carley. Won't you write me?

Glenn.

No sooner had Carley read the letter through to the end than she began it all over again, and on this second perusal she lingered over passages—only to reread them. That suggestion of her face sculptured by shadows on the canyon walls seemed to thrill her very soul.

"He loves me still!" she whispered, and pressed her breast with clenching hands, and laughed in wild exultance, and paced her room like a caged lioness. It was as if she had just awakened to the assurance she was beloved.

Then she snatched up the letter, to scan it again, and, suddenly grasping the import of Glenn's request, she hurried to the telephone to find the number of the hospital in Bedford Park. A nurse informed her that visitors were received at certain hours and that any attention to disabled soldiers was most welcome.

Carley motored out there to find the hospital merely a long one-story frame structure, a barracks hastily thrown up for the care of invalided men of the service.

A nurse admitted Carley into a small bare anteroom. Carley made known her errand.

"I'm glad it's Rust you want to see," replied the nurse. "Some of these boys are going to die. And some will be worse off if they live. But Rust may get well if he'll only behave. You are a relative—or friend?"

"I don't know him," answered Carley. "But I have a friend who was with him in France."

The nurse led Carley into a long narrow room with a line of single beds down each side, a stove at each end, and a few chairs. Each bed appeared to have an occupant and those nearest Carley lay singularly quiet. At the far end of the room were soldiers on crutches, wearing bandages on their heads, carrying their arms in slings. Their merry voices contrasted discordantly with their sad appearance.

Presently Carley stood beside a bed and looked down upon a gaunt, haggard young man who lay propped up on pillows.

"Rust—a lady to see you," announced the nurse.

Carley had difficulty in introducing herself. Had Glenn ever looked like this? What a face! It's healed scar only emphasized the pallor and furrows of pain that assuredly came from present wounds. He had unnaturally bright dark eyes, and a flush of fever in his hollow cheeks.

"How do!" he said with a wan smile. "Who're you?"

"I'm Glenn Kilbourne's fiancée."

"Say, I ought to've known you," he said eagerly, and a warmth of light changed the gray shade of his face. "You're Carley! You're almost like my —my own girl. By golly! You're some looker! It was good of you to come. Tell me about Glenn."

Carley took the chair brought by the nurse, and pulling it close to the bed, she smiled down upon him and said, "I'll be glad to tell you all I know—presently. But first you tell me about yourself. Are you in pain? What is your trouble? You must let me do everything I can for you, and these other men."

Carley spent a poignant and depth-stirring hour at the bedside of Glenn's comrade. At last she learned from loyal lips the nature of Glenn Kilbourne's service to his country. How Carley clasped to her sore heart the praise of the man she loved—the simple proofs of his noble disregard of self! Rust said little about his own service to country or to comrade. But Carley saw enough in his face. He had been like Glenn. By these two Carley grasped the compelling truth of the spirit and sacrifice of the legion of boys who had upheld American traditions.

That night she wrote swiftly and feverishly, page after page, to Glenn, only to destroy what she had written. She could not keep her heart out of her words, nor a hint of what was becoming a sleepless and eternal regret. She wrote until a late hour, and at last composed a letter she knew did not ring true, so stilted and restrained was it in all passages save those concerning news of Glenn's comrade and of her own friends.

"I'll never—never write him again," she averred with stiff lips, and next moment could have laughed in mock-

ery at the bitter truth. Yet shamed one moment at the consciousness she would write Glenn again and again, and exultant the next with the clamoring love, she seemed to have climbed beyond the self that had striven to forget. She would remember and think though she died of longing.

For months she had kept ceaselessly active, by associations which were of no help to her and which did not make her happy, in her determination to forget. Suddenly then she gave up to remembrance. She would cease trying to get over her love for Glenn, and think of him and dream about him as much as memory dictated. This must constitute the only happiness she could have.

The change from strife to surrender was so novel and sweet that for days she felt renewed. It was augmented by her visits to the hospital in Bedford Park. Through her bountiful presence Virgil Rust and his comrades had many dull hours of pain and weariness alleviated and brightened.

Interesting herself in the condition of the seriously disabled soldiers and possibility of their future took time and work Carley gave willingly and gladly. At first she endeavored to get acquaintances with means and leisure to help the boys, but these overtures met with such little success that she quit wasting valuable time she could herself devote to their interests.

Thus several weeks swiftly passed by. Several soldiers who had been more seriously injured than Rust improved to the extent that they were discharged. But Rust gained little or nothing. The nurse and doctor both informed Carley that Rust brightened for her, but when she was gone he lapsed into somber indifference. He did not care whether he ate or not, or whether he got well or died.

"If I do pull out, where'll I go and what'll I do?" he once asked the nurse.

Carley knew that Rust's hurt was more than loss of a leg, and she decided to talk earnestly to him and try to win him to hope and effort. He had come to have a sort of reverence for her. So, biding her time, she at length found opportunity to approach his bed while his comrades were asleep or out of hearing. He endeavored to laugh her off, and then tried subterfuge, and lastly he cast off his mask.

"Carley, I don't want your money or that of your kind friends—whoever they are—you say will help me to get into business," he said. "God knows I thank you and it warms me inside to find *someone* who appreciates what I've given. But I don't want charity. And I guess I'm pretty sick of the game. I'm sorry the Germans didn't do the job right."

"Rust, that is morbid talk," replied Carley. "You're ill and you just can't see any hope. You must cheer up—fight *yourself;* and look at the brighter side. It's a horrible pity you must be a cripple, but Rust, indeed life can be worth living if you make it so."

"How could there be a brighter side when a man's only half a man?" he queried bitterly.

"You can be just as much a man as ever," persisted Carley.

"Could you care for a man with only one leg?" he asked, deliberately.

"What a question! Why, of course I could!"

"Well, maybe you are different. Glenn always swore even if he was killed no slacker or no rich guy left at home could ever get you. Maybe you haven't any idea how much it means to us fellows to know there *are* true

and faithful girls. But I'll tell you, Carley, the good old U. S. needs a lot of faithful girls just now, believe me."

"Indeed that's true," replied Carley. "It's a hard time for everybody, and particularly you boys who have lost so—so much."

"I lost *all*, except my life—and I wish to God I'd lost that," he replied.

"Oh, don't talk so!" implored Carley in distress. "Forgive me, Rust, if I hurt you. But I must tell you—that—that Glenn wrote me—you'd lost your girl. Oh, I'm sorry! It is dreadful for you now. But if you got well—and went to work—and took up life where you left it—why, soon your pain would grow easier. And you'd find some happiness yet."

"Never for me in this world."

"But why, Rust, *why?* You have intelligence and courage. Why isn't there anything left for you?"

"Because something here's been killed," he replied, and put his hand to his heart.

"Your faith? Your love of—of everything? Did the war kill it?"

"I'd gotten over that, maybe," he said drearily. "But *she* half murdered it—and *they* did the rest."

"They? Whom do you mean, Rust?"

"Why, Carley, I mean the people I lost my leg for!" he replied with terrible softness.

"The British? The French?" she queried in bewilderment.

"*No!*" he cried, and turned his face to the wall.

Carley dared not ask him more. His last ringing word had linked her also to his misfortune and his suffering. Suddenly he turned away from the wall. She saw him swallow laboriously.

"Carley, I'm bitter," he said, "but I'm not rancorous and callous, like some of the boys. I know if you'd been my girl you'd have stuck to me."

"Yes," Carley whispered.

"That makes a difference," he went on with a sad smile. "You see, we soldiers all had feelings. And in one thing we all felt alike. That was we were going to fight for our homes and our women. I should say women first. No matter what we read or heard about standing by our allies, fighting for liberty or civilization, the truth was we all felt the same, even if we never breathed it. Glenn fought for you. I fought for Nell. And think! Nell was engaged to me—she *loved* me—and, by God! She married a slacker when I lay half-dead on the battlefield!"

"She was not worth loving or fighting for," said Carley with agitation.

"Ah! Now you've said something," he declared. "If I can only hold to that truth! What does one girl amount to? Carley, I've had comfort and strength come to me through you. Glenn will have his reward in your love. Somehow I seem to share it, a little. Poor Glenn! He got his, too. Why, Carley, that guy wouldn't *let* you do what he could do *for you.* He was cut to pieces—"

"Please—Rust—don't say any more."

"Why not? It's due you to know how splendid Glenn was. I tell you, Carley, all the boys here love you for the way you've stuck to Glenn. Some of them knew him, and I've told the rest. We thought he'd never pull through. But he has, and we know how you helped. Going West to see him! I'm happy for him—the lucky dog. Next time you go West—"

"Hush!" cried Carley.

"You're white—you're shaking," exclaimed Rust in concern. "Oh, I—what did I say? Forgive me—"

"Rust, I am no more worth loving and fighting for than your Nell."

"What!" he ejaculated.

"I have not told you the truth," she said swiftly. "I shall never marry Glenn. I broke my engagement to him."

Slowly Rust sank back upon the pillow, his large luminous eyes piercingly fixed upon her.

"I went West—yes—" continued Carley. "But it was selfishly. I wanted Glenn to come back here. He had suffered as you have. He nearly died. But the West and his work saved him, body and soul. He had learned to love both the West and his work. I did not blame him. But I could not live out there. He needed me. But I was too little—too selfish. I could not marry him. I gave him up. I left—him—alone!"

Carley shrank under the scorn in Rust's eyes.

"And there's another man," he said, "a clean, straight, unscarred fellow who wouldn't fight!"

"Oh, no—I—I swear there's not," whispered Carley.

"You, too," he replied, thickly. Then slowly he turned that worn dark face to the wall.

Carley fled. She could scarcely see to find the car.

Chapter Ten

Haunted Woman

SOMETHING inevitable had forced Carley's confession to Rust. She had reached a point in her mental strife where she could not stand before Rust and let him believe she was noble and faithful when she knew she was neither. Would not the next step in this painful metamorphosis of her character be a fierce and passionate repudiation of herself and all she represented?

She went home and locked herself in her room, deaf to telephone and servants. There she gave up to her shame. Scorned—despised by that poor crippled flame-spirited Virgil Rust! He had reverenced her, and the truth had earned his hate. Would she ever forget his look—incredulous—shocked—bitter—and blazing with unutterable contempt?

Rust threw a white, illuminating light upon her desertion of Glenn. She had betrayed him. She had left him alone. To a man who had given all for her she had returned nothing.

The hours of contending passions gave birth to vague, slow-forming revolt.

She became haunted by memory pictures and sounds and smells of Oak Creek Canyon. As from afar she saw the great sculptured rent in the earth, green and red and brown, with its shining, flashing ribbons of waterfalls and streams. The mighty pines stood up magnificent and stately. The walls loomed high, shadowed under the shelves, gleaming in the sunlight, and they seemed dreaming, waiting, watching.

Vivid and intense shone the images before her shut eyes. She saw the winding forest floor, green with grass and fern, colorful with flower and rock. A thousand aisles, glades, nooks, and caverns called her to come. The populated city was a delusion. Disease and death and corruption stalked in the shadows of the streets. But her canyon promised hard work, playful hours, dreaming idleness, beauty, health, fragrance, loneliness, peace, wisdom, love,

children, and long life.

In the hateful shut-in isolation of her room Carley stretched forth her arms as if to embrace the vision. Pale close walls, gleaming placid stretches of brook, churning amber and white rapids, mossy banks and pine-matted ledges, the towers and turrets and ramparts where the eagles wheeled—she saw them all as beloved images lost to her save in anguished memory.

She heard the murmur of flowing water, soft, low, now loud, and again lulling, hollow and eager, tinkling over rocks, bellowing into the deep pools, washing with silky seep of wind-swept waves the hanging willows. Shrill and piercing and far-aloft pealed the scream of the eagle. The bees hummed, the wind moaned, the leaves rustled, the waterfall murmured. Then came the sharp rare note of a canyon swift, most mysterious of birds, significant of the heights.

A breath of fragrance seemed to blow with her shifting senses. The dry, sweet, tangy canyon smells returned to her—of fresh-cut timber, of wood smoke, of the cabin fire with its steaming pots, of flowers and earth, and of the wet stones, of the redolent pines and the pungent cedars.

And suddenly, clearly, amazingly, Carley beheld in her mind's sight the hard features, the bold eyes, the slight smile, the coarse face of Haze Ruff. She had forgotten him. But he now returned. And with memory of him flashed a revelation as to his meaning in her life.

He had appeared merely a ruffian, an animal with man's shape and intelligence. But he was the embodiment of the raw, crude violence of the West. He was the eyes of the natural primitive man, believing what he saw. He had seen in Carley Burch the paraded charm, the unashamed and serene front, the woman seeking man. But Ruff had found her a lie. She invited what she did not want. And his scorn had been commensurate with the falsehood of her.

Haze Ruff had found her unfit for his idea of dalliance. Virgil Rust had found her false to the ideals of womanhood for which he had sacrificed all but life itself. What then had Glenn Kilbourne found her? That last sight of him standing alone, leaning with head bowed, a solitary figure, returned to flay Carley.

He had loved, trusted, and hoped. And she had been too little—too steeped in the indulgence of luxurious life—too slight-natured and pale-blooded! And suddenly there pierced into the black storm of Carley's mind a blazing, white-streaked thought—she had left Glenn to the Western girl, Flo Hutter. Carley fell prey to a fury of jealousy.

She went back to the old life. But it was in a bitter, restless, critical spirit, conscious of the fact that she could derive neither forgetfulness nor pleasure from it, nor see any release from the habit of years.

One afternoon, late in the fall, she motored out to a Long Island club where the last of the season's golf was being enjoyed by some of her most intimate friends. Carley did not play. Aimlessly she walked around the grounds, finding the autumn colors subdued and drab, like her mind.

The air held a promise of early winter. She thought that she would go South before the cold came. Always trying to escape anything rigorous, hard, painful, or disagreeable! Later she returned to the clubhouse to find

her party assembled on an inclosed porch, chatting and partaking of refreshment. Morrison was there. He had not taken kindly to her late habit of denying herself to him.

During a lull in the idle conversation Morrison addressed Carley pointedly. "Well, Carley, how's your Arizona hog raiser?" he queried, with a little gleam in his usually lusterless eyes.

"I have not heard lately," she replied coldly.

The assembled company suddenly quieted. Carley felt them all looking at her, and underneath the exterior she preserved with extreme difficulty, there burned so fierce an anger that she seemed to have swelling veins of fire.

"Queer how Kilbourne went into raising hogs," observed Morrison. "Such a low-down sort of work, you know."

"He had no choice," replied Carley. "Glenn didn't have a father who made tainted millions out of the war. He had to work. And I must differ with you about its being low-down. No honest work is that. It is idleness that is low-down."

"But so foolish of Glenn when he might have married money," rejoined Morrison sarcastically.

"The honor of soldiers is beyond your ken, Mr. Morrison."

He flushed darkly and bit his lip.

"You women make a man sick with this rot about soldiers," he said, the gleam in his eye growing ugly. "A uniform goes to a woman's head no matter what's inside it. I don't see where your vaunted honor of soldiers comes in—considering how they accepted the let-down of women during and after the war."

"How could you see when you stayed comfortably at home?" retorted Carley.

"All I could see was women falling into soldiers' arms," he said sullenly.

"Certainly. Could an American girl desire any greater happiness—or opportunity to prove her gratitude?" flashed Carley.

"It didn't look like gratitude to me," returned Morrison.

"Well, it *was* gratitude," declared Carley. "If women of America did throw themselves at soldiers it was not owing to the moral lapse of the day. You insult both soldiers and women, Mr. Morrison. I wonder—did any American girls throw themselves at *you?*"

Morrison turned a dead white, and his mouth twisted.

"No, you were a slacker," went on Carley with scathing scorn. "You let the other men go fight for American girls. Do you imagine one of them will ever *marry* you? All your life, Mr. Morrison, you will be a marked man—outside the pale of friendship with real American men and the respect of real American girls."

Morrison leaped up, almost knocking the table over, and he glared at Carley as he gathered up his hat and cane. She turned her back upon him. From that moment he ceased to exist for Carley. She never spoke to him again.

Next day Carley called upon her dearest friend, whom she had not seen for some time.

"Carley dear, you don't look so very well," said Eleanor, after greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh, what does it matter how I look?" queried Carley impatiently.

"You were so wonderful when you got home from Arizona."

"If I was wonderful and am now

commonplace you can thank your old New York for it."

"Carley, don't you care for New York any more?" asked Eleanor.

"Oh, New York is all right, I suppose. It's I who am wrong."

"My dear, you puzzle me these days. You've changed. I'm sorry. I'm afraid you're unhappy."

"Me? Oh, impossible! I'm in a seventh heaven," replied Carley with a hard little laugh. "What're you doing this afternoon? Let's go out—riding—or somewhere."

"I'm expecting the dressmaker."

"Where are you going tonight?"

"Dinner and theater. It's a party, or I'd ask you."

"What did you do yesterday and the day before, and the days before that?"

Eleanor laughed indulgently, and acquainted Carley with a record of her social wanderings during the last few days.

"The same old things—over and over again! Eleanor, don't you get sick of it?" queried Carley.

"Oh yes, to tell the truth," returned Eleanor thoughtfully. "But there's nothing else to do."

"Eleanor, I'm no better than you," said Carley with disdain. "I'm as useless and idle. But I'm beginning to see myself—and you—and all this rotten crowd of ours. We're no good. But you're married, Eleanor. You're settled in life. You ought to *do something*. I'm single and at loose ends. Oh, I'm in revolt!

"Think, Eleanor, just think. Your husband works hard to keep you in this expensive apartment. You have a car. He dresses you in silks and satins. You wear diamonds. You eat your breakfast in bed. You loll around in a pink dressing-gown all morning. You dress for lunch or tea. You ride or golf or waste your time on some lounge lizard, dancing till time to come home to dress for dinner. You let other men make love to you. Oh, don't get sore. You do. And so goes the round of your life. What good on earth are you, anyhow? You're just a—a gratification to the senses of your husband. And at that you don't see much of *him*."

"Carley, how you rave!" exclaimed her friend. "What has gotten into you lately? Why, everybody tells me you're—you're queer! The way you insulted Morrison—how unlike you, Carley!"

"I'm glad I found the nerve to do it. What do you think, Eleanor?"

"Oh, I despise him. But you can't say the things you feel."

"You'd be bigger and truer if you did. Some day I'll break out and flay you and your friends alive."

"But, Carley, you're my friend and you're just exactly like we are. Or you were, quite recently."

"Of course, I'm your friend. I've always loved you, Eleanor," went on Carley earnestly. "I'm as deep in this—this damned stagnant muck as you, or anyone. There's something terribly wrong with us women, and it's not what Morrison hinted."

"Carley, the only thing wrong with you is that you jilted poor Glenn—and are breaking your heart over him still."

"Don't—don't!" cried Carley, shrinking. "God knows that is true. But there's more wrong with me than a blighted love affair."

"Yes?"

"Oh! I don't know what. The women of our set are idle, luxurious, selfish, pleasure-craving, lazy, useless, work-and-children-shirking, absolutely no good."

"Well, if we are, who's to blame?" rejoined Eleanor spiritedly. "Now, Carley Burch, you listen to me. The twentieth-century girl in America holds absolutely an unreal, untrue position in the scheme of existence. Surrounded by parents, relatives, friends, suitors, and instructive schools of every kind, colleges, institutions, is she really happy, is she really living?"

"Eleanor," interrupted Carley earnestly, "she is *not*. And I've been trying to tell you why."

"My dear, let me get a word in, will you," complained Eleanor. "You don't know it all. There are as many different points of view as there are people. Well, this girl approaches marriage, or, for that matter, a more matured life, having had too much, having been too well taken care of, *knowing too much*. Her masculine satellites—father, brothers, uncles, friends, lovers—all utterly spoil her.

"This girl marries. And life goes on smoothly, as if its aim was to exclude friction and effort. Her husband makes it too easy for her. She is an ornament, or a toy, to be kept in a luxurious cage. To soil her pretty hands would be disgraceful! Even if she can't afford a maid, the modern devices of science make the care of her four-room apartment a farce. If she has a baby—which happens occasionally, Carley, in spite of your assertion—it very soon goes to the kindergarten. Then what does she find to do with hours and hours? If she is not married, what on earth *can* she find to do?"

"She can work," replied Carley.

"Oh yes, she can, but she doesn't," went on Eleanor. "*You* don't work. I never did. We both hated the idea. Well, our young American girl or bride goes in for being rushed or she goes in for fads. New York City gets all the great artists, lecturers, and surely the great fakers. The New York women support them. The men laugh, but they furnish the money. Just think, Carley. A girl's every wish, every need, is almost instantly satisfied without the slightest effort on her part to obtain it. No struggle, let alone work! If women crave to achieve something outside of the arts, you know, something universal and helpful which will make men acknowledge her worth, if not the equality, where is the opportunity?"

"Opportunities should be *made*," replied Carley.

"There are a million sides to this question of the modern young woman. I'm for her!"

"How about the extreme of style in dress for this to-be-pitied American girl you champion so eloquently?" queried Carley sarcastically.

"Immoral!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"You admit it?"

"To my shame, I do."

"Why do women wear extreme clothes?"

"We're slaves to fashion," replied Eleanor. "That's the popular excuse."

"Bah!" exclaimed Carley.

Eleanor laughed in spite of being half nettled. "Are you going to stop wearing what all the other women wear—and be looked at askance? Are you going to be dowdy and frumpy and old-fashioned?"

"No. But I'll never wear anything again that can be called immoral. I want to be able to say *why* I wear a dress. Why do you wear what you frankly admit is disgusting?"

"I don't know, Carley," replied Eleanor helplessly. "How you harp on things! We must dress to make other

women jealous and to attract men. To be a sensation! Perhaps the word 'immoral' is not what I mean. A woman will be shocking in her obsession to attract, but hardly more than that, if she knows it."

"Ah! So few women realize how they actually do look. Haze Ruff could tell them."

"Haze Ruff. Who in the world is he or she?" asked Eleanor.

"Haze Ruff is a he, all right," replied Carley grimly.

"Well, who is he?"

"A sheep-dipper in Arizona," answered Carley.

"Humph! And what can Mr. Ruff tell us?"

"He told *me* I looked like one of the devil's angels—and that I dressed to knock the daylights out of men."

"Well, Carley Burch, if that isn't rich!" exclaimed Eleanor with a peal of laughter.

"All right, Eleanor, we understand each other, even if we do not agree," said Carley. "What are you going to *do?* It all comes home to each individual woman. Her attitude toward life."

"I'll drift along with the current, Carley, and be a good sport," replied Eleanor, smiling.

Carley had a visitor one morning earlier than the usual or conventional time for calls.

"He wouldn't give no name," said the maid. "He wears soldier clothes, ma'am, and he's pale, and walks with a cane."

"Tell him I'll be right down," replied Carley.

Her hands trembled while she hurriedly dressed. Could this caller be Virgil Rust? She hoped so, but she doubted.

As she entered the parlor a tall young man in worn khaki rose to meet her. At first glance she could not name him, though she recognized the pale face and light-blue eyes, direct and steady.

"Good morning, Miss Burch," he said. "I hope you'll excuse so early a call. You remember me, don't you? I'm George Burton, who had the bunk next to Rust's."

"Surely I remember you, Mr. Burton, and I'm glad to see you," replied Carley, shaking hands with him. "Please sit down. Your being here must mean you're discharged from the hospital."

"Yes, I was discharged, all right," he said.

"Which means you're well again. That is fine. I'm very glad."

"I was put out to make room for a fellow in bad shape. I'm still shaky and weak," he replied. "But I'm glad to go. I've pulled through pretty good, and it'll not be long until I'm strong again. It was the 'flu' that kept me down."

"You must be careful. May I ask where you're going and what you expect to do?"

"Yes, that's what I came to tell you," he replied frankly. "I want you to help me a little. I'm from Illinois and my people aren't so badly off. But I don't want to go back to my home town down and out, you know. Besides, the winters are cold there. The doctor advises me to go to a little milder climate. Well, I've always had a leaning toward agriculture, and I want to go to Kansas. I want to travel around till I find a place I like, and there I'll get a job. Not too hard a job at first—that's why I'll need a little money. I'll not be afraid of work, presently. Now, Miss

Burch, you've been so kind—I'm going to ask you to lend me a little money. I'll pay it back. I can't promise just when. But someday. Will you?"

"Assuredly I will," she replied heartily. "I'm happy to have the opportunity to help you. How much will you need for immediate use? Five hundred dollars?"

"Oh no, not so much as that," he replied. "Just railroad fare home, and then to Kansas, and to pay board while I get well, you know, and look around."

"We'll make it five hundred, anyway," she replied and, rising, she went toward the library. "Excuse me a moment." She wrote the check and, returning, gave it to him.

"You're very good," he said, rather low.

"Not at all," replied Carley. "You have no idea how much it means to me to be permitted to help you. Before I forget, I must ask you, can you cash that check here in New York?"

"Not unless you identify me," he said ruefully. "I don't know anyone I could ask."

"Well, when you leave here go at once to my bank—it's on Thirty-fourth Street—and I'll telephone the cashier. So you'll not have any difficulty. Will you leave New York at once?"

"I surely will. I want to be where it's quiet. Where I won't see many people."

"I think I understand," returned Carley. "Then I suppose you're in a hurry to get home? Of course you have a girl you're just dying to see?"

"No, I'm sorry to say I haven't," he replied simply. "I was glad I didn't have to leave a sweetheart behind, when I went to France. But it wouldn't be so bad to have one to go back to—now."

"Don't you worry!" exclaimed Carley. "You can take your choice presently. You have the open sesame to every real American girl's heart."

"And what is that?" he asked, with a blush.

"Your service to your country," she said gravely.

"Well," he said, "considering I didn't get any medals or bonuses, I'd like to draw a nice girl."

"You will," replied Carley, and made haste to change the subject. "By the way, did you meet Glenn Kilbourne in France?"

"Not that I remember," rejoined Burton, as he got up, rising rather stiffly by aid of his cane. "I must go, Miss Burch. Really I can't thank you enough. And I'll never forget it."

"Will you write me how you are getting along?" asked Carley, offering her hand.

"Yes."

Carley moved with him out into the hall and to the door. At the door Burton fixed a rather penetrating gaze upon her.

"You didn't ask me about Rust," he said.

"No, I—I didn't think of him—until now, in fact," Carley lied.

"Of course then you couldn't have heard about him. I was wondering."

"I have heard nothing."

"It was Rust who told me to come to you," said Burton. "We were talking one day, and he—well, he thought you were true blue. He said he knew you'd trust me and lend me money. I couldn't have asked you but for him."

"True blue! He believed that. I'm glad. Has he spoken of me to you since I was last at the hospital?"

"Hardly," replied Burton with the straight, strange glance on her again.

Carley met this glance and suddenly a coldness seemed to envelop her. She whispered with dread, with a tremor, with an instinct of calamity.

"How about—Rust?"

"He's dead."

The winter came, with its bleak sea winds and cold rains and blizzards of snow. Carley did not go South. She read and brooded, and gradually avoided all save those true friends who tolerated her.

She went to the theater a good deal, showing preference for the drama of strife, and she did not go anywhere for amusement. Distraction and amusement seemed to be dead issues for her. But she could become absorbed in any argument on the good or evil of the present day. Socialism reached into her mind, to be rejected. She had never understood it clearly, but it seemed to her a state of mind where dissatisfied men and women wanted to share what harder-working or more gifted people possessed.

She devoured books on the war with a morbid curiosity and hope that she would find some illuminating truth as to the uselessness of sacrificing young men in the glory and prime of their lives. To her war appeared a matter of human nature rather than politics. She granted every argument for war and flung against it one ringing passionate truth—agony of mangled soldiers and agony of women and children. There was no justification for offensive war. It was monstrous and hideous.

All through these weeks she longed for a letter from Glenn. But it did not come. Had he finally roused to the sweetness and worth and love of the Western girl, Flo Hutter? Carley knew absolutely, through both intelligence and intuition, that Glenn Kilbourne would never love Flo. Yet such was her intensity and stress at times, especially in the darkness of waking hours, that jealousy overcame her and insidiously worked its havoc.

Peace and a strange kind of joy came to her in dreams of her walks and rides and climbs in Arizona, of the lonely canyon where it always seemed afternoon, of the tremendous colored vastness of that Painted Desert. But she resisted these dreams now because when she awoke from them she suffered such a yearning that it became unbearable. Then she knew the feeling of the loneliness and solitude of the hills.

One day she received a card from an old schoolmate, a girl who had married out of Carley's set, and had been ostracized. She was living down on Long Island, at a little country place named Wading River. Her husband was an electrician—something of an inventor. He worked hard. A baby boy had just come to them. Would not Carley run down on the train to see the youngster?

Carley went. She found a country village, and on the outskirts of it a little cottage that must have been pretty in summer, when the green was on vines and trees. Her old schoolmate was rosy, plump, bright-eyed, and happy. Elsie prattled of herself and her husband and how they had worked to earn this little home, and then the baby.

When Carley saw the adorable dark-

eyed, pink-toed, curly-fisted baby she understood Elsie's happiness and reveled in it. When she felt the soft, warm, living little body in her arms, against her breast, then she absorbed some incalculable and mysterious strength. Babies and Carley had never become closely acquainted in those infrequent meetings that were usually the result of chance. But Elsie's baby nestled to her breast and cooed to her and clung to her finger. When at length the youngster was laid in his crib it seemed to Carley that the fragrance and the soul of him remained with her.

"A real American boy!" she murmured.

"You can just bet he is," replied Elsie proudly. "Carley, you ought to see his dad."

"I'd like to meet him," said Carley thoughtfully. "Elsie, was he in the service?"

"Yes. He was on one of the navy transports that took munitions to France. Think of me, carrying this baby, with my husband on a boat full of explosives and with German submarines roaming the ocean! Oh, it was horrible!"

"But he came back, and now all's well with you," said Carley. "I'm very glad, Elsie."

"Yes—but I shudder when I think of a possible war in the future. I'm going to raise boys, and girls, too, I hope—and the thought of war is torturing."

Carley found her return train somewhat late, and she took advantage of the delay to walk out to the wooded headlands above the Sound.

It was a raw March day, with a steely sun going down in a pale-gray sky. Patches of snow lingered in sheltered brushy places. At length Carley came out on the edge of the bluff with the gray expanse of sea beneath her, and a long wandering shoreline, ragged with wreckage or driftwood. The surge of water rolled in—a long, low, white, creeping line that softly roared on the beach and dragged the pebbles gratingly back.

Carley felt the scene ease a clutching hand within her breast. Here was loneliness and solitude vastly different from that of Oak Creek Canyon, yet it held the same intangible power to soothe. The swish of the surf, the moan of the wind in the evergreens, were voices that called to her. How many more miles of lonely land than peopled cities! Then the sea—how vast! And over that the illimitable and infinite sky, and beyond, the endless realms of space. It helped her somehow to see and hear and feel the eternal presence of nature.

Once again Carley fell under the fury of her ordeal. Wavering now, restless and sleepless, given to violent starts and slow spells of apathy, she was wearing to defeat.

That spring day, one year from the day she had left New York for Arizona, she wished to spend alone. But her thoughts grew unbearable. She summed up the endless year. Could she live another like it? Something must break within her.

She went out. The air was warm and balmy, carrying that subtle current which caused the mild madness of spring fever. In the Park the greening of the grass, the opening of buds, the singing of birds, the gladness of children, the light on the water, the warm sun—all seemed to reproach her. Carley fled from the Park to the home of Beatrice Lovell; and there, unhappily, she encountered those of her acquaint-

ance with whom she had least patience. They appeared carefree while she was miserable.

Over teacups there were waging gossip and argument and criticism. When Carley entered with Beatrice there was a sudden hush and then a murmur.

"Hello, Carley! Now say it to our faces," called out Geralda Conners, a fair and handsome young woman of thirty.

"Say what, Geralda?" asked Carley. "I certainly would not say anything behind your backs that I wouldn't repeat here."

"Eleanor has been telling us how you simply burned us up."

"We did have an argument. And I'm not sure I said all I wanted to."

"Say the rest here," drawled a lazy, mellow voice. "For heaven's sake, stir us up. If I could get a kick out of *anything* I'd bless it."

"Carley, go on the stage," advised another. "You've got Elsie Ferguson tied to the mast for looks. And lately you're surely tragic enough."

"I wish you'd go somewhere far off," observed a third. "My husband is dippy about you."

"Girls, do you know that you actually have not one sensible idea in your heads?" retorted Carley.

"Sensible? I should hope not. Who wants to be sensible?"

Geralda battered her teacup on a saucer. "Listen," she called. "I wasn't kidding Carley. I am good and sore. She goes around knocking everybody and saying New York backs Sodom off the boards. I want her to come out with it right here."

"I dare say I've talked too much," returned Carley. "It's been a rather hard winter on me. Perhaps, indeed, I've tried the patience of my friends."

"See here, Carley," said Geralda deliberately, "just because you've had life turn to bitter ashes in your mouth you've really no right at all to poison it for us. We all find it pretty sweet. You're an *un*satisfied woman and if you don't marry somebody you'll end by being a reformer or fanatic."

"I'd rather end that way than rot in a shell," retorted Carley.

"I declare, you make me see red, Carley," flashed Geralda angrily. "No wonder Morrison roasts you to everybody. He says Glenn Kilbourne threw you down for some Western girl. If that's true it's pretty small of you to vent your spleen on us."

"I have no spleen," Carley replied. "I have only pity. For I see something terribly wrong in myself, in you, in all of us, in the life of today."

"You keep your pity to yourself. You need it," answered Geralda with heat. "There's nothing wrong with me or my friends or life in good old New York."

"Nothing wrong!" cried Carley. "Nothing wrong when thousands of crippled soldiers have no homes—no money—no friends—no work—in many cases no food or bed? Nothing wrong when they are not enough schools and children in this city? Nothing wrong when there are not enough schools and teachers to educate our boys and girls, when those teachers are shamefully underpaid? Nothing wrong when money is god? Nothing wrong when some of your husbands spend more of their time with other women than with you? Nothing wrong with you women who cannot or will not stand childbirth? Nothing wrong with most of you, when if you *did* have a child, you could not nurse it? Oh, my God!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In the Volcano's Crater

CARLEY burst in upon her aunt. "Look at me, Aunt Mary!" she cried, radiant and exultant. "I'm going back out West to marry Glenn and live his life!"

The keen old eyes of her aunt softened and dimmed. "Dear Carley, I've known that for a long time. You've found yourself at last."

Then Carley breathlessly babbled her hastily formed plans, every word of which seemed to rush her onward.

"You're going to surprise Glenn again?" queried Aunt Mary.

"Oh, I must! I want to see his face when I tell him."

"Well, I hope he won't surprise *you*," declared the old lady. "When did you hear from him last?"

"In January. It seems ages–but–Aunt Mary, you don't imagine Glenn–"

"I imagine nothing," interposed her aunt. "It will turn out happily and I'll have some peace in my old age. But, Carley, what's to become of me?"

"Oh, I never thought!" replied Carley blankly. "It will be lonely for you. Auntie, I'll come back in the fall for a few weeks. Glenn will let me."

"*Let* you? Ye gods! So you've come to that? Imperious Carley Burch! Thank heaven, you'll now be satisfied to be let do things."

"I'd–I'd crawl for him," breathed Carley.

"Well, child, as you can't be practical, I'll have to be," replied Aunt Mary seriously. "Fortunately for you I am a woman of quick decision. Listen. I'll go West with you. I want to see the Grand Canyon. Then I'll go to California, where I have old friends I've not seen for years. When you get your new home all fixed up I'll spend a while with you. And if I want to come back to New York now and then I'll go to a hotel. It is settled. I think the change will benefit me."

"Auntie, you make me very happy. I could ask no more," said Carley.

Swiftly as endless tasks could make them the days passed. But those on the train dragged interminably.

Carley sent her aunt through to the Canyon while she stopped off at Flagstaff to store innumerable trunks and bags. The first news she heard of Glenn and the Hutters was that they had gone to the Tonto Basin to buy hogs and would be absent at least a month.

This gave birth to a new plan in Carley's mind. She took council with some Flagstaff business men and engaged them to set a force of men at work on the Deep Lake property, making the improvements she desired, and hauling lumber, cement, bricks, machinery, supplies–all the necessaries for building construction. Also she instructed them to throw up a tent house for her to live in during the work, and to engage a reliable Mexican man with his wife for servants. When she left for the Canyon she was happier than ever before in her life.

It was near the coming of sunset when Carley first looked down into the Grand Canyon. She had forgotten Glenn's tribute to this place. But now she saw it and she was stunned.

What a stupendous chasm, gorgeous in sunset color on the heights, purpling into mystic shadows in the depths!

There was a wonderful brightness of all the millions of red and yellow and gray surfaces still exposed to the sun. Carley looked and looked, yet was reluctant to keep on looking. She possessed no image in mind with which to compare this grand and mystic spectacle.

A transformation of color and shade appeared to be going on swiftly, as if gods were changing the scenes of a Titanic stage. As she gazed the dark fringed line of the north rim turned to burnished gold, and she watched that with fascinated eyes. It turned rose, it lost its fire, it faded to quiet cold gray. The sun had set.

Then the wind blew cool through the piñons on the rim. There was a sweet tang of cedar and sage on the air and that indefinable fragrance peculiar to the canyon country of Arizona. How it brought back to Carley remembrance of Oak Creek! In the west, across the purple notches of the abyss, a dull gold flare showed where the sun had gone down.

In the morning at eight o'clock there were great irregular black shadows under the domes and peaks and escarpments. Bright Angel Canyon was all dark, showing dimly its ragged lines. At noon there were no shadows and all the colossal gorge lay glaring under the sun. In the evening Carley watched the Canyon as again the sun was setting.

Deep dark-blue shadows, like purple sails of immense ships, in wonderful contrast with the bright sunlit slopes, grew and rose toward the east, down the canyons and up the walls that faced the west. For a long while there was no red color, and the first indication of it was a dull bronze.

Carley looked down into the void, at the sailing birds, at the precipitous slopes, and the dwarf spruces and the weathered old yellow cliffs. When she looked up again the shadows out there were no longer dark. They were clear. The slopes and depths and ribs of rock could be seen through them. Then the tips of the highest peaks and domes turned bright red. Far to the east she discerned a strange shadow, slowly turning purple. One instant it grew vivid, then began to fade. Soon after that all the colors darkened and slowly the pale gray stole over all.

At another sunrise the crown of the rim, a broad belt of bare rock, turned pale gold under its fringed dark line of pines. The tips of the peak gleamed opal. There was no sunrise red, no fire. The light in the east was a pale gold under a steely green-blue sky. All the abyss of the Canyon was soft, gray, transparent, and the belt of gold broadened downward, making shadows on the west slopes of the mesas and escarpments. Far down in the shadows she discerned the river, yellow, turgid, palely gleaming. By straining her ears Carley heard a low dull roar as of distant storm.

She stood fearfully at the extreme edge of a stupendous cliff, where it sheered dark and forbidding, down and down, into what seemed red and boundless depths of Hades. She saw gold spots of sunlight on the dark shadows, proving that somewhere, impossible to discover, the sun was shining through wind-worn holes in the sharp ridges. Every instant Carley grasped a different effect. Her studied gaze absorbed an endless changing.

She talked very little while at the Canyon. It silenced her. She had come to see it at the critical time of her life and in the right mood. The superficiali-

ties of the world assumed their proper insignificance. Once she asked her aunt, "Why did not Glenn bring me here?" As if this Canyon proved the nature of all things!

In May, Carley returned to Flagstaff to take up with earnest inspiration the labors of home-building in a primitive land.

It required two trucks to transport her baggage and purchases out to Deep Lake. The road was good for eighteen miles of the distance, until it branched off to reach her land, and from there it was desert rock and sand. But eventually they made it; and Carley found herself and belongings dumped out into the windy and sunny open.

The moment was singularly thrilling and full of transport. She was free. She had shaken off the shackles. She faced lonely, wild, barren desert that must be made habitable by the genius of her direction and the labor of her hands. Always a thought of Glenn hovered tenderly, dreamily in the back of her consciousness, but she welcomed the opportunity to have a few weeks of work and activity and solitude before taking up her life with him.

To her amazement and delight, a very considerable progress had been made with her plans. Under a sheltered red cliff among the cedars had been erected the tents where she expected to live until the house was completed. These tents were large, with broad floors high off the ground, and there were four of them.

Her living-tent had a porch under a wide canvas awning. The bed was a boxlike affair, raised off the floor two feet, and it contained a great, fragrant mass of cedar boughs upon which the blankets were to be spread. At one end was a dresser with large mirror, and a chiffonier. There were table and lamp, a low rocking chair, a shelf for books, a row of hooks upon which to hang things, a washstand with its necessary accessories, a little stove and a neat stack of cedar chips and sticks. Navajo rugs on the floor lent brightness and comfort.

Carley heard the rustling of cedar branches over her head, and saw where they brushed against the tent roof. It appeared warm and fragrant inside, and protected from the wind, and a subdued white light filtered through the canvas. Almost she felt like reproving herself for the comfort surrounding her. For she had come West to welcome the hard knocks of primitive life.

It took less than an hour to have her trunks stored in one of the spare tents, and to unpack clothes and necessaries for immediate use. Carley donned the comfortable and somewhat shabby outdoor garb she had worn at Oak Creek the year before; and it seemed to be the last thing needed to make her fully realize the glorious truth of the present.

"I'm here," she said to her pale, yet happy face in the mirror. "I have accepted Glenn's life."

She wanted to throw herself on the sunlit woolly blankets of her bed and hug them, to think and think of the bewildering present happiness, to dream of the future, but she could not lie or sit still, nor keep her hands from itching to do things.

It developed, presently, that she could not have idled away the time even if she had wanted to, for the Mexican woman came for her, with smiling gesticulation and jabber that manifest-

ly meant dinner. This swarthy woman and her sloe-eyed husband favorably impressed Carley.

Next to claim her was Hoyle, the superintendent. "Miss Burch," he said, "in the early days we could run up a log cabin in a jiffy. Axes, horses, strong arms, and a few pegs—that was all we needed. But this house you've planned is different. It's good you've come to take the responsibility."

Carley had chosen the site for her home on top of the knoll where Glenn had taken her to show her the magnificent view of mountains and desert. Carley climbed it now with beating heart and mingled emotions. When she reached the summit of the knoll and gazed out across the open space it seemed that she must stand spellbound.

How green the cedared foreground—how gray and barren the downward slope—how wonderful the painted steppes! The vision that had lived in her memory shrank to nothingness. The reality was immense, more than beautiful, appalling in its isolation, beyond comprehension with its lure and strength to uplift.

But the superintendent drew her attention to the business at hand.

Carley had planned an L-shaped house of one story. Some of her ideas appeared to be impractical, and these she abandoned. The framework was up and half a dozen carpenters were lustily at work with saw and hammer.

"We'd made better progress if this house was in an ordinary place," explained Hoyle. "But you see the wind blows here, so the framework had to be made as solid and strong as possible. In fact, it's bolted to the sills."

Both living-room and sleeping-room were arranged so that the Painted Desert could be seen from one window, and on the other side the whole of the San Francisco Mountains. Both rooms were to have open fireplaces. Carley's idea was for service and durability. She thought of comfort in the severe winters of that high latitude, but elegance and luxury had no more significance in her life.

Hoyle made his suggestions as to changes and adaptations and, receiving her approval, he went on to show her what had been already accomplished. Back on higher ground a reservoir of concrete was being constructed near an ever-flowing spring of snow water from the peaks. This water was being piped by gravity to the house. Hoyle claimed that it would never freeze in winter, and would be cold and abundant during the hottest and driest of summers. This assurance solved the most difficult and serious problem of ranch life in the desert.

Next Hoyle led Carley down off the knoll to the wide cedar valley adjacent to the lake. He was enthusiastic over its possibilities. Two small corrals and a large one had been erected, the latter having a low flat barn connected with it. Ground was already being cleared along the lake where alfalfa and hay were to be raised. Mexicans were chopping the cleared cedars into firewood for winter use.

The day was spent before she realized it. At sunset the carpenters and mechanics left in two old Ford cars for town. The Mexicans had a camp in the cedars, and the Hoyles had theirs at the spring under the knoll where Carley had camped with Glenn and the Hutters.

Carley watched the golden-rosy sunset, and as the day ended she breathed deeply as if in unutterable relief. Sup-

per found her with appetite she had long since lost. Twilight brought cold wind, the staccato bark of coyotes, the flicker of campfires through the cedars.

The cold, clear, silent night brought back the charm of the desert. How flaming white the stars! The great spire-pointed peaks lifted cold pale-gray outlines up into the deep star-studded sky. Carley walked a little to and fro, loath to go to her tent, though tired. She wanted calm. But instead of achieving calmness she grew more and more towards a strange state of exultation.

Westward, only a matter of twenty or thirty miles, lay the deep rent in the level desert—Oak Creek Canyon. If Glenn had been here this night would have been perfect, yet almost unendurable. She was again grateful for his absence. What a surprise she had in store for him! And she imagined his face when she met him. If only he never learned of her presence in Arizona until she made it known in person!

She looked to the eastward where a pale luminosity of afterglow shone in the heavens. Far distant seemed the home of her childhood, the friends she had scorned and forsaken, the city of complaining and striving millions. If only some miracle might illumine the minds of her friends, as she felt that hers was to be illumined here in the solitude!

Carley directed stumbling steps toward the light of her tent. The Mexican, Gino, had lighted her lamp and fire. Carley was chilled through, and the tent felt so warm and cozy that she could scarcely believe it. She fastened the screen door, laced the flaps across it, except at the top, and then gave herself up to the comforting heat.

There were plans to perfect; innumerable things to remember; a car and accessories, horses, saddles, outfits to buy. Carley knew she should sit down at her table and write and figure, but she could not do it then.

For a long time she sat over the little stove, toasting her knees and hands, adding some chips now and then to the red coals. And her mind seemed a kaleidoscope of changing visions, thoughts, feelings. At last she blew out the lamp and went to bed.

Instantly a thick blackness seemed to enfold her and silence as of a dead world settled down upon her. Drowsy as she was, she could not close her eyes or refrain from listening. Darkness and silence were tangible things. She felt them. And they seemed suddenly potent with magic charm to still the tumult of her, to soothe and rest.

By and by the dead stillness awoke to faint sounds not before perceptible to her—a low, mournful sough of the wind in the cedars, then the faint far-distant note of a coyote, sad as the night and infinitely wild.

Days passed. Carley worked in the mornings with her hands and her brains. In the afternoons she rode and walked and climbed with a double object, to work herself into fit physical

condition and to explore every nook and corner of her six hundred and forty acres.

Then what she had expected and deliberately induced by her efforts quickly came to pass. Just as the year before she had suffered excruciating pain from aching muscles, and saddle blisters, and walking blisters, and a very rending of her bones, so now she fell victim to them again. In sunshine and rain she faced the desert. Sunburn and sting of sleet were equally to be endured. And that abomination, the desert sandstorm, did not daunt her.

Three weeks of this self-imposed strenuous training wore by before Carley was free enough from weariness and pain to experience other sensations. Her general health, evidently, had not been so good as when she had first visited Arizona. She caught cold and suffered other ills attendant upon an abrupt change of climate and condition. But doggedly she kept at her task. She rode when she should have been in bed; she walked when she should have ridden; she climbed when she should have kept to level ground. And finally by degrees so gradual as not to be noticed except in the sum of them she began to mend.

Meanwhile the construction of her house went on with uninterrupted rapidity. When the low, slanting, wide-eaved roof was completed Carley lost further concern about rainstorms. Let them come. When the plumbing was all in and Carley saw verification of Hoyle's assurance that it would mean a gravity supply of water ample and continual, she lost her last concern as to the practicability of the work.

The time came when each afternoon's ride or climb called to Carley with increasing delight. But the fact that she must soon reveal to Glenn her presence and transformation did not seem to be all the cause. She could ride without pain, walk without losing her breath, work without blistering her hands; and in this there was compensation. The building of the house that was to become a home, the development of water resources and land that meant the making of a ranch—these did not altogether constitute the anticipation of content.

In her wondering meditation she arrived at the point where she tried to assign to her love the growing fullness of her life. This, too, splendid and all-pervading as it was, she had to reject. Some exceedingly illusive and vital significance of life had insidiously come to Carley.

One afternoon, with the sky full of white and black rolling clouds and a cold wind sweeping through the cedars, she halted to rest and escape the chilling gale for a while. In a sunny place, under the lee of a gravel bank, she sought refuge. It was warm here because of the reflected sunlight and the absence of wind. The sand at the bottom of the bank held a heat that felt good to her cold hands.

All about her and over her swept the keen wind, rustling the sage, seeping the sand, swishing the cedars, but she was out of it, protected and insulated. The sky above showed blue between the threatening clouds. Lying there, without any particular reason that she was conscious of, she suddenly felt shot through and through with exhilaration.

Another day, the warmest of the spring so far, she rode a Navajo mustang she had recently bought from a passing trader; and at the farthest end of her section, in rough wooded and

ridged ground she had not explored, she found a canyon with red walls and pine trees and gleaming streamlet and glades of grass and jumbles of rock. It was a miniature canyon, to be sure, only a quarter of a mile long, and as deep as the height of a lofty pine, and so narrow that it seemed only the width of a lane, but it had all the features of Oak Creek Canyon, and so sufficed for the exultant joy of possession. She explored it.

The willow brakes and oak thickets harbored rabbits and birds. She saw the white flags of deer running away down the open. Up at the head where the canyon boxed she flushed a flock of wild turkeys. They ran like ostriches and flew like great brown chickens. In a cavern Carley found the den of a bear, and in another place the bleached bones of a steer.

She lingered here in the shaded depths with a feeling as if she were indeed lost to the world. These big brown and seamy-barked pines with their spreading gnarled arms and webs of green needles belonged to her, as also the tiny brook, the bluebells smiling out of the ferns, the single stalk of mescal on a rocky ledge.

Never had sun and earth, tree and rock, seemed a part of her being until then. She would become a sun worshiper and a lover of the earth. That canyon had opened there to sky and light for millions of years; and doubtless it had harbored sheepherders, Indians, cliff dwellers, barbarians. She was a woman with white skin and a cultivated mind, but the affinity for them existed in her. She felt it, and that an understanding of it would be good for body and soul.

Another day she found a little grove of jack pines growing on a flat mesa-like bluff, the highest point on her land. The trees were small and close together, mingling their green needles overhead and their discarded brown ones on the ground. From here Carley could see afar to all points of the compass—the slow green descent to the south and the climb to the black-timbered distance; the ridged and canyoned country to the west, red vents choked with green and rimmed with gray; to the north the grand upflung mountain kingdom crowned with snow; and to the east the vastness of illimitable space, the openness and wildness, the chased and beaten mosaic of colored sands and rocks.

Again and again she visited this lookout and came to love its isolation, its command of wondrous prospects, its power of suggestion to her thoughts. She became a being in harmony with the live things around her. The great life-dispensing sun poured its rays down upon her, as if to ripen her; and the earth seemed warm, motherly, immense with its all-embracing arms. She sensed within her the working of a great process through which supreme happiness would come.

Carley rode afar, seeking in strange places the secret that eluded her. Only a few days now until she would ride down to Oak Creek Canyon! A great truth was dawning upon her—that the sacrifice of what she had held as necessary to the enjoyment of life—that the strain of conflict, the labor of hands, the forcing of weary body, the enduring of pain, the contact with the earth—had served somehow to lead her into the realm of enchantment.

One afternoon a dull, lead-black-colored cinder knoll tempted her to explore its bare heights. She rode up until her mustang sank to his knees and

could climb no farther. From there she essayed the ascent on foot. At last she gained the summit.

The cinder hill was an extinct crater of a volcano. In the center of it lay a deep bowl, wondrously symmetrical, and of a dark lusterless hue. Not a blade of grass was there, nor a plant. Carley conceived a desire to go to the bottom of this pit. She tried the cinders of the edge of the slope. They had the same consistency as those of the ascent she had overcome. But here there was a steeper incline.

A tingling rush of daring seemed to drive her over the rounded rim and, once started, she strode down with giant steps; she plunged, she started avalanches to ride them until they stopped, she leaped, and lastly she fell, to roll over the soft cinders to the pit.

There she lay. The pit was scarcely six feet across. She gazed upward and was astounded. How steep was the rounded slope on all sides! There were no sides; it was a circle. She looked up at a round lake of deep translucent sky. Such depth of blue, such exquisite rare color!

She closed her eyes and rested. Soon the laboring of heart and breath calmed to normal, so that she could not hear them. Then she lay perfectly motionless. With eyes shut she seemed still to look, and what she saw was the sunlight through the blood and flesh of her eyelids. So piercing did it grow that she had to shade her eyes with her arm.

Again the strange, rapt glow suffused her body. Reveling in spirit in the glory of the physical that had escaped her in life, she abandoned herself to this influence.

She was a product of the earth—a creation of the sun. Soon her spirit would abandon her body and go on, while her flesh and bone returned to dust. This frame of hers, that carried the divine spark, belonged to the earth.

She had been created a woman; she belonged to nature; she was nothing save a mother of the future. Transcendental was her female power to link life with the future. The power of the plant seed, the power of the earth, the heat of the sun, the inscrutable creation—spirit of nature, almost the divinity of God—these were all hers because she was a woman. That was the great secret, aloof so long.

So she abandoned herself to the woman within her. She held out her arms to the blue abyss of heaven as if to embrace the universe.

That afternoon as the sun was setting under a gold-white scroll of cloud Carley got back to Deep Lake.

A familiar lounging figure crossed her sight. It approached to where she had dismounted. Charley, the sheepherder of Oak Creek!

"Howdy!" he drawled with his queer smile. "So it was you-all who had this Deep Lake section?"

"Yes. And how are you, Charley?" she replied, shaking hands with him.

"Me? Aw, I'm tip-top. I'm shore glad you got this ranch. Reckon I'll hit you for a job."

"I'd give it to you. But aren't you working for the Hutters?"

"Nope. Not any more. Me an' Stanton had a row with them."

"Oh, I'm—sorry," she returned haltingly, somehow checked in her warm rush of thought. "Stanton? Did he quit too?"

"Yep. He sure did."

"What was the trouble?"

"Reckon because Flo made up to

Kilbourne," replied Charley, grinning.

"Ah! I—I see," murmured Carley. A blankness seemed to wave over her. It extended to the air without, to the sense of the golden sunset. "Are—are the Hutters back?"

"Sure. Been back several days. I reckoned Hoyle told you. Mebbe he didn't know, though. For nobody's been to town."

"How is—how are they all?" faltered Carley.

"Everybody satisfied, I reckon," replied Charley.

"Flo—how is she?" burst out Carley.

"Aw, Flo's loony over her husband," drawled Charley, his clear eyes on Carley's.

"Husband!" she gasped.

"Sure. Flo's gone an' went an' done what I swore on."

"*Who?*" whispered Carley, a terrible blade piercing her heart.

"Now who'd you reckon on?" asked Charley with his slow grin.

Carley's lips were mute.

"Wal, it was your old beau thet you wouldn't have," returned Charley, as he gathered up his long frame, evidently to leave. "Kilbourne! He an' Flo came back from the Tonto all hitched up."

Chapter Twelve

The Trail to the Cabin

VAGUE sense of movement, of darkness, and of cold attended Carley's consciousness for what seemed endless time. A fall over rocks and a severe thrust from a sharp branch brought an acute appreciation of her position, if not of her mental state.

Night had fallen. The stars were out. She had stumbled over a low ledge. Evidently she had wandered around, dazedly and aimlessly, until brought to her senses by pain. But for a gleam of campfires through the cedars she would have been lost. It did not matter. She was lost, anyhow. What was it that had happened?

Charley, the sheepherder! Then the thunderbolt of his words burst upon her, and she collapsed to the cold stones. She lay quivering from head to toe. She dug her fingers into the moss and lichen.

"Oh, God, to think—after all—it happened!" she moaned.

She lay there until energy supplanted shock. Then she rose to rush into the darkest shadows of the cedars, wringing her hands.

"It can't be true," she cried. "Not after my struggle—my victory—not *now!*"

But there had been no victory. And now it was too late. She was betrayed, ruined, lost. That wonderful love had wrought transformation in her—and now havoc.

Once she fell against the branches of a thick cedar that upheld her. The fragrance which had been sweet was now bitter. Life that had been bliss was now hateful! She could not keep still for a single moment.

Black night, cedars, brush, rocks, washes, seemed not to obstruct her. In a frenzy she rushed on, tearing her dress, scratching her hands, tangling her hair.

All at once a pale gleaming open space, shimmering under the stars, lay before her. It was water. Deep Lake!

Instantly a terrible longing to destroy herself obsessed her. She had no fear. She could have welcomed the

cold, slimy depths that meant oblivion. But could they really bring oblivion? A year ago she would have believed so, and would no longer have endured such agony. She had changed. She flung wide her arms to the pitiless white stars and looked up at them.

If she prayed to the stars for mercy, it was denied her. Passionlessly they blazed on. But she could not kill herself. She fell back against the stones and gave up to grief. Nothing was left but fierce pain.

The youth and vitality and intensity of her then locked arms with anguish and torment and a cheated, unsatisfied love. Strength of mind and body involuntarily resisted the ravages of this catastrophe. Will power seemed nothing, but the flesh of her refused to surrender. The part of her that felt fought terribly for its heritage.

All night long Carley lay there. The crescent moon went down, the stars moved on their course, the coyotes ceased to wail, the wind died away, the lapping of the waves along the lake shore wore to gentle splash, the whispering of the insects stopped as the cold of dawn approached. The darkest hour fell—hour of silence, solitude, and melancholy, when the desert lay tranced, cold, waiting, mournful without light of moon or stars or sun.

In the gray dawn Carley dragged her bruised and aching body back to her tent and, fastening the door, she threw off wet clothes and boots and fell upon her bed. Slumber of exhaustion came to her.

When she awoke the tent was light and the moving shadows of cedar boughs on the white canvas told that the sun was straight above. Carley ached as never before. A deep pang seemed invested in every bone. Her breathing came slow. Suddenly she shut her eyes. She loathed the light of day. What was it that had happened?

Then the brutal truth flashed over her again, in aspect new, with all the old bitterness. For an instant she experienced a suffocating sensation as if the canvas had sagged under the burden of heavy air and was crushing her breast and heart. Then wave after wave of emotion swept over her. The storm winds of grief and passion were loosed again. And she writhed in her misery.

Someone knocked on her door. The Mexican woman called anxiously. Carley awoke to the fact that her presence was not solitary on the physical earth, even if her soul seemed stricken to eternal loneliness. Even in the desert there was a world to consider. The lesson of the West had been to endure, not to shirk—to face an issue, not to hide.

Carley got up, bathed, dressed, brushed and arranged her disheveled hair. Then she went out in answer to the call for dinner. But she could not eat. The ordinary functions of life appeared to be deadened.

The day happened to be Sunday, and therefore the workmen were absent. Carley had the place to herself. How the half-completed house mocked her! She could not bear to look at it. What use could she make of it now? Flo Hutter had become the working comrade of Glenn Kilbourne, the mistress of his cabin. She was his wife and she would be the mother of his children.

That thought gave birth to the darkest hour of Carley Burch's life. She became merely a female robbed of her mate. Reason was not in her, nor charity, nor justice. She hated with an incredible and insane ferocity. In the se-

clusion of her tent, crouched on her bed, silent, locked, motionless, she was consumed by the fires of jealousy.

That fury consumed all her remaining strength, and from the relapse she sank to sleep.

Morning brought the inevitable reaction. However long her other struggles, this monumental and final one would be brief. She realized that, yet was unable to understand how it could be possible, unless shock or death of mental aberration ended the fight. An eternity of emotion lay back between this awakening of intelligence and the hour of her fall into the clutches of primitive passion.

That morning she faced herself in the mirror and asked, "Now—what do I owe *you?*" It was not her voice that answered. It was beyond her. But it said: *Go on! You are cut adrift. You are alone. You owe none but yourself! Go on! Not backward—nor to the depths—but up—upward!*

She shuddered at such a decree. How impossible for her! All animal, all woman, all emotion, how could she live on the cold, pure heights? Yet she owed something intangible to herself. Was loss of love and husband and children only a test? The present hour would be swallowed in the sum of life's trials. She could not go back. She would not go down.

There was wrenched from her tried and sore heart an unalterable and unquenchable decision. Vessel of blood and flesh she might be, doomed by nature to the reproduction of her kind, but she had in her the supreme spirit and power to carry on the progress of the ages—the climb of mankind out of the darkness.

Carley went out to the workmen. The house should be completed and she would live in it. Always there was the stretching and illimitable desert to look at, and the grand heave upward of the mountains.

Hoyle was full of zest for the practical details of the building. He saw nothing of the havoc wrought in her. Nor did the other workmen glance more than casually at her. In this Carley lost something of a shirking fear that her loss and grief were patent to all eyes.

That afternoon she mounted the most spirited of the mustangs she had purchased from the Indians. To govern him and stick on him required all her energy. And she rode him hard and far, out across the desert, across mile after mile of cedar forest, clear to the foothills. She rested there, absorbed in gazing desertward, and upon turning back again, she ran him over the level stretches.

Wind and branch threshed her seemingly to ribbons. Violence seemed good for her. A fall had no fear for her now. She reached camp at dusk, hot as fire, breathless and strengthless. Such action required constant use of muscle and mind. If need be she could drive both to the very furthermost limit. She could ride and ride—until the future, like the immensity of the desert there, might swallow her.

She changed her clothes and rested awhile. The call to supper found her hungry. In this fact she discovered mockery of her grief. Love was not the food of life. Exhausted nature's need of rest and sleep was no respecter of a woman's emotion.

Next day Carley rode northward, wildly and fearlessly, as if she were embarked on an endless number of rides that were to save her. As before the foothills called her and she went

on until she came to a very high one.

Carley dismounted from her panting horse, answering the familiar impulse to attain heights by her own effort.

It took Carley a full hour of slow body-bending labor to climb to the summit of that hill. High, steep, and rugged, it resisted ascension. But at last she surmounted it and sat alone on the heights, with an unconscious prayer on her lips.

What was it that had happened? Could there be here a different answer from that which always mocked her?

She had been a girl, not accountable for loss of mother, for choice of home and education. She had belonged to a class. She had grown to womanhood in it. She had lived only for herself. At last she had overthrown the self-seeking habit of life; she had awakened to real womanhood; she had learned the thrill of taking root in new soil, the pain and joy of labor, the bliss of solitude, the promise of home and love and motherhood. But she had gathered all these marvelous things to her soul too late for happiness.

"*Now* it is answered," she declared aloud. "And all that is *past*. Is there anything left?"

She flung her query out to the winds of the desert. But the desert seemed too gray, too vast, too remote, too aloof, too measureless. It was not concerned with her little life. Then she turned to the mountain kingdom.

It seemed overpoweringly near at hand. It loomed above her to pierce the fleecy clouds. It was only a stupendous upheaval of earth-crust, grown over at the base by leagues and leagues of pine forest, belted along the middle by vast slanting zigzag slopes of aspen, rent and riven toward the heights into canyon and gorge, bared above to cliffs and corners of craggy rock, whitened at the sky-piercing peaks by snow. Its beauty and sublimity were lost upon Carley now; she was concerned with its travail, its age, its endurance, its strength. And she studied it with magnified sight.

What incomprehensible subterranean force had swelled those immense slopes and lifted the huge bulk aloft to the clouds? Cataclysm of nature—the expanding or shrinking of the earth—vast volcanic action under the surface! Whatever it had been, it had left its expression of the travail of the universe. This mountain mass had been hot gas when flung from the parent sun, and now it was solid granite. What had it endured in the making? What had been its dimensions before the millions of years of its struggle?

Eruption, earthquake, avalanche, the attrition of glacier, the erosion of water, the cracking of frost, the weathering of rain and wind and snow—these it had eternally fought and resisted in vain, yet still it stood magnificent, frowning, battle-scarred and undefeated. Its sky-piercing peaks were as cries for mercy to the Infinite. This old mountain realized its doom. It had to go, perhaps to make room for a newer and better kingdom. But it endured because of the spirit of nature.

The great notched circular line of rock below and between the peaks, in the body of the mountains, showed where in ages past the heart of living granite had blown out, to let loose on all the near surrounding desert the streams of black lava and the hills of black cinders. Despite its fringe of green it was hoary with age. Every looming gray-faced wall, massive and sublime, seemed a monument of its mastery over time. Every deep-cut can-

yon, showing the skeleton ribs, the caverns and caves, its avalanche-carved slides, its long, fan-shaped, spreading taluses, carried conviction to the spectator that it was but a frail bit of rock, that its life was little and brief, that upon it had been laid the merciless curse of nature.

Change! Change must unknit the very knots of the center of the earth. So its strength lay in the sublimity of its defiance. It meant to endure to the last rolling grain of sand. It was a dead mountain of rock, without spirit, yet it taught a grand lesson to the seeing eye.

Life was only a part, perhaps an infinitely small part of nature's plan. Death and decay were just as important to her inscrutable design. The universe had not been created for life, ease, pleasure, and happiness of a man creature developed from lower organisms. If nature's secret was the developing of a spirit through all time, Carley divined that she had it within her. So the present meant little.

I have no right to be unhappy, concluded Carley. *I had no right to Glenn Kilbourne. I failed him. In that I failed myself. Neither life nor nature failed me—nor love. Unhappiness is only a change. Happiness itself is only change. So what does it matter? The great thing is to see life—to understand—to feel—to work—to fight—to endure. It is not my fault I am here. But it is my fault if I leave this strange old earth the poorer for my failure. I will find strength. I will endure. Must I hate Flo Hutter because she will make Glenn happy? Never!*

Carley turned from the mountain kingdom and faced her future with the profound and sad and far-seeing look that had come with her lesson. She knew what to give. Sometime and somewhere there would be recompense. She would hide her wound in the faith that time would heal it. And the ordeal she set herself, to prove her sincerity and strength, was to ride down to Oak Creek Canyon.

Carley did not wait many days. Strange how the old vanity held her back until something of the havoc in her face should be gone!

One morning she set out early, riding her best horse, and she took a sheep trail across country. The distance by road was much farther.

The June morning was cool, sparkling, fragrant. Mockingbirds sang from the topmost twig of cedars; doves cooed in the pines; sparrow hawks sailed low over the open grassy patches. Desert primroses showed their rounded pink clusters in sunny places, and here and there burned the carmine of Indian paintbrush. Jack rabbits and cottontails bounded and scampered away through the sage. The desert had life and color and movement this June day. And as always there was the dry fragrance on the air.

Her mustang had been inured to long and consistent travel over the desert. Her weight was nothing to him and he kept to the swinging lope for miles. As she approached Oak Creek Canyon, however, she drew him to a trot, and then a walk. Sight of the deep red-walled and green-floored canyon was a shock to her.

The trail came out on the road that led to Ryan's sheep camp, at a point several miles west of the cabin where Carley had encountered Haze Ruff. She remembered the curves and stretches, and especially the steep jump-off where the road led down off the rim into the canyon. Here she dis-

mounted and walked.

From the foot of this descent she knew every rod of the way would be familiar to her, and, womanlike, she wanted to turn away and fly from them. But she kept on and mounted again at level ground.

The murmur of the creek suddenly assailed her ears—sweet, sad, memorable, strangely powerful to hurt. Yet the sound seemed of long ago. Down here summer had advanced. Rich thick foliage overspread the winding road of sand. Then out of the shade she passed into the sunnier regions of isolated pines.

Along here she had raced Calico with Glenn's bay; and here she had caught him, and there was the place she had fallen. She halted a moment under the pine tree where Glenn had held her in his arms. Tears dimmed her eyes. If only she had known then the truth, the reality! But regrets were useless.

By and by a craggy red wall loomed above the trees, and its pipe-organ conformation was familiar to Carley. She left the road and turned to go down to the creek. Sycamores and maples and great boulders, and mossy ledges overhanging the water, and a huge sentinel pine marked the spot where she and Glenn had eaten that last day.

Her mustang splashed into the clear water and halted to drink. Beyond, through the trees, Carley saw the sunny red-earthed clearing that was Glenn's farm. She looked, and fought herself, and bit her quivering lip until she tasted blood. Then she rode out into the open.

The whole west side of the canyon had been cleared and cultivated and plowed. But she gazed no farther. She did not want to see the spot where she had given Glenn his ring and had parted from him. She rode on.

If she could pass West Fork she believed her courage would rise to the completion of this ordeal. Places were what she feared. Places that she had loved while blindly believing she hated! There the narrow gap of green and blue split the looming red wall. She was looking into West Fork. Up there stood the cabin. How fierce a pang rent her breast!

She faltered at the crossing of the branch stream, and almost surrendered. The water murmured, the leaves rustled, the bees hummed, the birds sang—all with some sad sweetness that seemed of the past.

Then the trail leading up West Fork was like a barrier. She saw horse tracks in it. Next she descried boot tracks the shape of which was so well-remembered that it shook her heart. There were fresh tracks in the sand, pointing in the direction of the Lodge. Ah! That was where Glenn lived now. Carley strained at her will to keep it fighting her memory.

A touch of spur urged her mustang into a gallop. The splashing ford of the creek—the still, eddying pool beyond—the green orchards—the white lacy waterfall—and Lolomi Lodge!

Nothing had altered. But Carley seemed returning after many years. Slowly she dismounted—slowly she climbed the porch steps. Was there no one at home? Yet the vacant doorway, the silence—something attested to the knowledge of Carley's presence. Then suddenly Mrs. Hutter fluttered out with Flo behind her.

"You dear girl—I'm so glad!" cried Mrs. Hutter, her voice trembling.

"I'm glad to see you, too," said Carley, bending to receive Mrs. Hutter's

embrace. Carley saw dim eyes—the stress of agitation, but no surprise.

"*Oh, Carley!*" burst out the Western girl, her voice rich and full.

"Flo, I've come to wish you happiness," replied Carley, very low.

Was it the same Flo? This seemed more of a woman—strange now—white and strained—beautiful, eager, questioning. A cry of gladness burst from her. Carley felt herself enveloped in strong, close clasp—and then a warm, quick kiss of joy. It shocked her, yet somehow thrilled. Sure was the welcome here, but the voice rang too glad a note for Carley. It touched her deeply, yet she could not understand.

"Have you—seen Glenn?" queried Flo breathlessly.

"Oh, no, indeed not," replied Carley, slowly gaining composure. The nervous agitation of these women had stilled her own. "I just rode up the trail. Where is he?"

"He was here—a moment ago," said Flo. "Oh, Carley, we sure are locoed. Why, we only heard an hour ago—that *you* were at Deep Lake. Charley rode in. He told us. I thought my heart would break. Poor Glenn! When he heard it— But never mind *me*. Jump your horse and run to West Fork!"

The spirit of her was like the strength of her arms as she hurried Carley across the porch and shoved her down the steps.

"Climb on and run, Carley," cried Flo. "If you only knew how glad he'll be that you came!"

Carley leaped into the saddle and wheeled the mustang. But she had no answer for the girl's wild exultance. Then like a shot the spirited mustang was off down the lane.

Carley wondered with swelling heart. Was her coming such a wondrous surprise—so unexpected and big in generosity—something that would make Kilbourne as glad as it had seemed to make Flo? Carley thrilled to this assurance.

Down the lane she flew. The red walls blurred and the sweet wind whipped her face. At the trail she swerved the mustang, but did not check his gait. Under the great pines he sped and round the bulging wall. At the rocky incline leading to the creek she pulled the fiery animal to a trot. How low and clear the water! As Carley forded it fresh cool drop's splashed into her face.

Again she spurred her mount and again trees and walls rushed by. Up and down the yellow bits of trail—on over the brown mats of pine needles—until there in the sunlight shone the little gray log cabin with a tall form standing in the door.

One instant the canyon tilted on end for Carley and she was riding into the blue sky. Then some magic of soul sustained her, so that she saw clearly. Reaching the cabin, she reined in her mustang.

"Hello, Glenn! Look who's here!" she cried, desperately gay.

"Whoopee!" he yelled in a stentorian voice that rolled across the canyon and bellowed in hollow echo and then clapped from wall to wall. The unexpected Western yell, so strange from Glenn, disconcerted Carley. Had he only answered her spirit of greeting? Had hers rung false?

But he was coming to her. She had seen the bronze of his face turn to white. How gaunt and worn he looked. Older he appeared, with deeper lines and whiter hair. His jaw quivered.

"Carley Burch, so it was *you?*" he queried hoarsely.

"Glenn, I reckon it was," she replied. "I bought your Deep Lake ranch site. I came back too late. But it is never too late for some things. I've come to wish you and Flo all the happiness in the world—and to say we must be friends."

The way he looked at her made her tremble. He strode up beside the mustang, and he was so tall that his shoulder came abreast of her. He placed a big warm hand on hers, as it rested, ungloved, on the saddle horn.

"Have you seen Flo?" he asked.

"I just left her. It was funny—the way she rushed me off after you. As if there weren't two—"

Was it Glenn's eyes or the movement of his hand that checked her utterance? His gaze pierced her soul. His hand slid along her arm—to her waist—around it. Her heart seemed to burst.

"Kick your feet out of the stirrups," he ordered.

Instinctively she obeyed. Then with a strong pull he hauled her half out of the saddle, pellmell into his arms. Carley had no resistance. She sank limp, in an agony of amaze. Was this a dream? Swift and hard his lips met hers—and again—and again. . . .

"Oh, my God!—Glenn, are—you—mad?" she whispered.

"Sure—I reckon I am," he replied huskily, and pulled her all the way out of the saddle.

Carley would have fallen but for his support. She could not think. She was all instinct.

"Kiss me!" he commanded.

She would have kissed him if death were the penalty. How his face blurred in her dimmed sight! Was that a strange smile? Then he held her back from him.

"Carley—you came to wish Flo and me happiness?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—yes— Pity me, Glenn—let me go. I meant well, but I should—never have come."

"Do you love me?" he went on, with passionate, shaking clasp.

"God help me—I do—I do! And now it will kill me!"

"What did that damned fool Charley tell you?"

The strange content of his query, the trenchant force of it, brought her upright, with sight suddenly cleared.

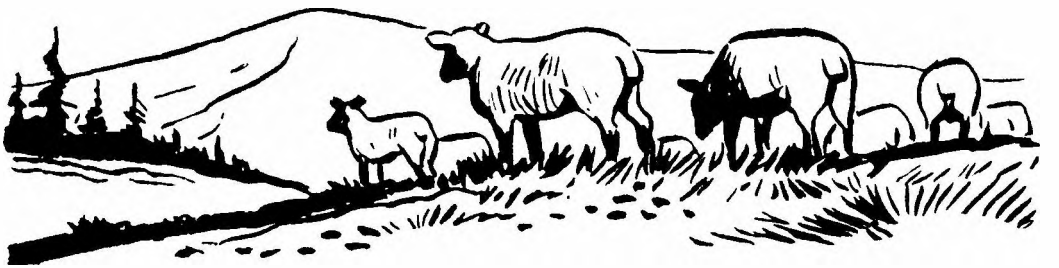
"Charley told me—you and Flo—were married," she whispered.

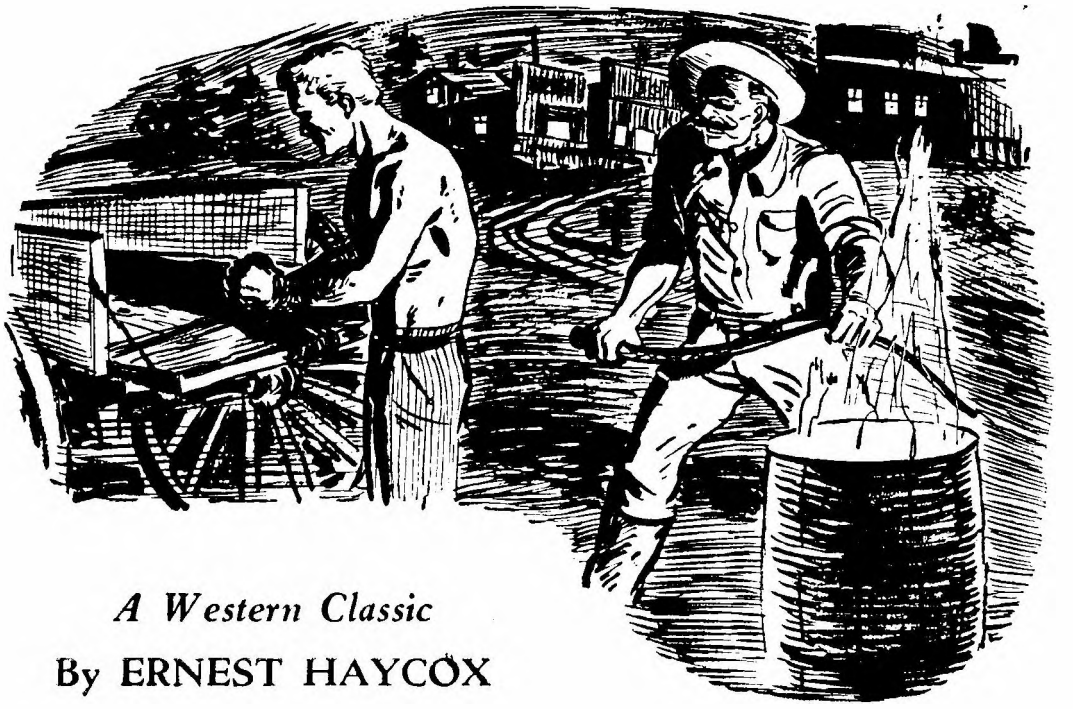
"You didn't *believe* him!"

She could no longer speak. She could only see her lover, as if transfigured, limned dark against the looming red wall.

"That was one of Charley's queer jokes. I told you to beware of him. Flo is married, yes—and very happy. I'm unutterably happy, too—but I'm *not* married. Lee Stanton was the lucky bridegroom. Carley, the moment I saw you I knew you had come back to me."

THE END





A Western Classic

By ERNEST HAYCOX

EPISODE—1880

A gambler crosses the barrier that separates his kind from the community's womenfolk only at his peril.

I HAPPENED to be standing that afternoon under the arch of Billy Hope's livery stable on River Street when Leora Kadderly walked from the Bon Marche and lifted her parasol against the drenching sunlight. Parasol in one hand and package in the other, she started north toward Belle Plaine Street which in New Hope's social scheme was the abode of the gentle-born.

Just beyond the Bon Marche store Herm von Gayl's double saloon doors opened on the walk and von Gayl's roof extended over it; and as she reached this area I saw her pick up her skirts. I do not know why, but all the women of New Hope did this when they passed von Gayl's; it was originally a gesture of protest, I think, that at last had become a matter of etiquette. Her package slipped from her arm and then Ben Tarrade, standing there, quickly recovered it for her and took off his hat.

I saw her lips move slightly—thanking him, I suppose—and for a moment those two looked at each other and then she went on; and as long as she remained in sight Ben Tarrade's eyes

followed, his high body motionless, his blond head motionless.

Of all the incidents of my boyhood, this still remains, after fifty-odd years, the most clearly remembered. When I look back I can see that this was the beginning; and I can acknowledge now that this was bravery. I was only twelve, yet I recall the touch of a feeling almost painful in effect, for young as I was I knew that Ben Tarrade, a gambler at von Gayl's, had no proper right to speak to Leora Kadderly.

Billy Hope, behind me, said "So," in a queer way, and I looked around and saw that his eyes were narrow and not pleased.

I think you should know New Hope, Nebraska, on the yellow river forever eating into its high, sandy shore line. There are no towns like that any more, for the time is gone and the conjunction of that heavy-grained and rather somber 1880 man with a stubborn land no longer exists; or perhaps it is that boyhood's perception of color and smell and sound is gone.

Reviewing that era, I can understand that New Hope's day was at a climax. To north and to south the railroads were beginning to take away much of its freighting traffic and so it was like many another town along that river, middle-aged after two decades of brief existence.

But of this then I knew nothing. To me it was the exciting center of the universe, never dull, never the same. The big river boats brought their cargoes to the landing and the black boys sang as they filed up and down the gangplanks; the freighters, wheel, swing, and lead teams to each bulky wagon, moved out of New Hope in solid lines, kicking up the heavy dust as far as the eye could reach, bound for distant prairie points. This was only four years after Custer and that yonder country was still wild, and beyond the far haze mystery still lived. By day the earth was copper and brass; by night the prairie undulated under the moonlight like slow ground swells at sea, pale and beautiful.

We were a trading-town. I did not see it then, since a boy has little esthetic sense, but I can readily believe now a more unlovely place never existed. There were no grass lawns and very few trees, and the wind drove sand up from the south and turned daylight gray and ground the clearness out of windowpanes and left an ashy sediment on everything.

River Street was the artery of town, solidly built of frame and brick stores and gaunt three-story warehouses without the faintest grace of ornament. Palmer's tannery lay on the north quarter of town and when the wind hauled around a stench swept over us; slightly in the south was the brewery, gray tower dominating the sky, where I used to go to see the big wheel turn. There was a residual grace in these people, of that I am sure, for my own home life was gentle and serene; but men had little use for outward decoration. I think the land made them that way.

Of the day I speak, I stayed out too long and when I reached the supper table I expected a lecture; but my father was playing the host, which meant that his customary reserve was put aside for an attitude half courtly, half genial. People in those days took their manners much more seriously, wearing them ceremoniously for the occasion much as we now wear our clothes.

Leora Kadderly was there, and Jim

Shugrue; and I knew immediately why. A boy's perceptions are much keener than elders realize, and in that day we youngsters had half the gossip of the town at our finger tips. So I was quite aware that all New Hope was trying to marry Leora Kadderly to Jim Shugrue and that Mother was carrying on the game of matchmaking.

We always had wine at the table. My father raised his glass and proposed the toast. I recall it distinctly. I can even bring back the cheerful, humorous tone he used. He said, "To a certain happy event, which I hope will not long be delayed."

My mother showed a little confusion. She said to Father, "Why, Tod, that's too bold of you," but I could see that actually she was a little pleased it had been put in the open. They sipped at the wine, pale and sparkling in the cut goblets which were heirlooms of the Tennessee Bowies, Mother's side. Then Jim Shugrue spoke.

"If it does not soon happen," he said, "it will not be because I haven't asked," and he looked to Leora Kadderly.

I had always liked him, perhaps because he owned so many of those heavy prairie freighters, and perhaps also because he looked a great deal like my father, who had a bold broad face and a fine cavalry-style mustache. Now that I recall it, many men looked like my father. In the '80s the pattern seemed to be pretty uniform, mustache or beard on a sun-baked skin, a touch of severity about the eyes, and a slow way of talking. I can think of but one man of New Hope of that day who was clean-shaven. This was the gambler, Ben Tarrade.

I think I remember a touch of embarrassment about the table then; for it was always considered indelicate to publicly discuss personal affairs. But of them all, Leora Kadderly seemed least disturbed. She was looking at me and she was smiling.

It seems rather merciless that the years should be this way: that they should drop curtains behind us as the time goes on until in the end all that we knew and loved remains only faintly—a fragment of a voice, a smile, a touch still felt—leaving everything else obscured and half-forgotten.

I do not think Leora Kadderly was beautiful as we understand the word. But there was a power in her, a hunger that shone out through dark eyes and made every feature vividly expressive. It is as strong to me now as it was then; and so it must have been very real. There was laughter in her and gaiety, but it was subdued, it was something hard pressed by all that New Hope stood for.

Little enough gaiety lived in that town, and when I come to search my youth again I remember but one other person whose smile held that same lurking recklessness, and again this was Ben Tarrade the gambler. She was twenty-five, and a widow, and she lived alone; and so because in that land at that time an eligible woman was regarded as something useful and productive going to waste, New Hope laid its almost mandatory will upon her. This is what I know now.

My father said, more soberly, "I hear, Leora, that Ben Tarrade picked up a package for you today."

"I hadn't heard that," Jim Shugrue said, and his face sharpened.

My mother was rather angry. "The man should know his place."

"I thought it an act of ordinary kindness," said Leora Kadderly.

"It will be talked about," my mother

went on.

But Leora Kadderly only smiled and I can still feel the wistfulness of it. They were all looking at her; and now I know that she was quite alone at that moment. "What harm can be in it?" she asked.

They went on talking. Presently I was excused and went to the porch, and later my father and Jim Shugrue came out to smoke. Westward, beyond the end of River Street, the fires of the freighters' camps colored the sky and the moon swam like a caravel on the low horizon. It was very still and the smell of sage and dust and tar lay strong in the night. The shadows softened everything; even the talk of the two men.

"She needs a man to see that these things don't repeat themselves," said my father.

Jim Shugrue was a fair man. "I've always liked him for what he was, Tod. I have always found him square for a gambler."

"That will do, as between men. But he must know the line with womenfolk. If he steps over it he shall be horsewhipped."

Their talk went on, very even, very sure; and in a little while I slipped away, crossed a vacant block westward, and came upon the margin of corral and barn and open space where were outfitted the freighters and freighting teams. I meant to cut by this to gain the quarter of town in which my particular band of boyhood friends usually forgathered; but as I ran between corrals I arrived at a wide circle of men standing about a fire; and across and about this area two teamsters were wickedly fighting.

I could see them very plainly—two huge gaunt men bare to the waist, all muscles coiling and swelling in that crimson light, blood dripping down their bare chests; and I could hear the dull sound of their fists, the crush of bone into flesh. It was not the first fight I had seen, but all this red savagery chilled me, and when I looked around the circle of bystanders and discovered the lust shining in those eyes, and the lips drawn back over heavy, yellow teeth, it was like coming upon a circle of wolves and I pivoted and ran home.

CASTING up accounts now, all the isolated pieces of this affair return in proper sequence; the years have given them meaning, and a clear light surrounds everything. It was the following Sunday that I turned the saddle-shop corner at St. Vrain Street, on my way to Sunday school, and found Ben Tarrade standing idly by the shop wall. I do not know why I stopped, but I did—feeling half guilty and half charmed.

I think the whole secret of Ben Tarrade lay in his eyes. He was a tall man and he wore his black broadcloth suit and stiff white shirt with a certain easy flair, with a gentleman's indifference. His hands, I recall, were white and supple of finger; and underneath the black loose-brimmed hat, edged by yellow hair, were features that at once gave you the impression of being responsive without the need of much facial play. But I think it was his eyes which smilingly encouraged you; and haunted you a little with what was behind them.

He was, I know now, a very lonely man outside the circle of the genteel, yet aloof from the class that played at his table in von Gayl's. There was, I can understand, a need in him New

Hope could not satisfy.

He spoke to me, and I remember being flattered by the equality of his manner. "Tod," he said, "you're looking rather sad for such a fine morning."

"I am going to church," I told him.

"Yes," he said, "I know." And his smile was very strong. "I remember being just as sad on Sunday mornings when I went to church. Older people forget how boys feel. But it's all right. Church is part of growing up, Tod. And the sun will still be shining when you get out."

I do not recall answering him. I stood a little in awe of this man. He was a gambler, someone I had been taught to distrust and abhor, and this he must have known as he stood there talking to me. Again it comes to me that this story lay in his eyes, in the gentleness of his tone.

He said, "Like to fish, Tod?"

"Yes."

"I'll have to ask your dad if you can go up the river with me. Some mighty big cats in the upper channel. Well, you better not be late."

I went on, feeling a little guilty and a little honored. My crowd of boys slowly gathered and we all went in to Sunday school, and after that joined our elders in the main church service.

Even now I can feel the dullness of those New Hope Sundays. Everything in that town closed and everything became still and repressed. That day the elders put on their dark clothes and seemed stiff in them; and there was then a somberness and a quietness, and I can remember being a little shocked when one man laughed aloud on the church steps. We were a literal people with a literal religion. This was the Sabbath, this day we glimpsed the vengeful fires of hell, and in our pew, between my parents, that long hour of service stretched out with a dread monotony.

Ours was a strict town in church matters and it was a high honor to be an elder; and those people of our own class who missed the services were made to feel the evilness of their delinquency. The social hand pressed down.

I do not wish to cast any shadow upon the sincere devoutness of those people: but it seems to me now there was in New Hope's Sunday a faint touch of the sadistic. For six days we lived in a raw world, a world of bald, Elizabethan frankness and frequent brutality on the part of the lower strata handling the heavy goods flowing from steamboat to prairie freighter. Above this were the men, such as my father, who made up the gentle class that governed the town with a certain dignified inflexibility. Yet gentility was a precarious thing, surrounded by heat and heavy dust and lusty evil, and so on the seventh day we went to church in a mood of self-flagellation and looked somberly into the Pit. It was the land that made us so, I think; the land and the centuries of strict religion behind.

After church Mother and Leora Kadderly went home while Father, as was his custom, walked with me toward the river; and I can remember the quietness of his manner as he spoke of the future. In front of the hotel we met Ben Tarrade. Father stopped and it rather surprised me to hear a measure of affability in his voice.

"Ben," he said, "I heard you had high play at the table last night."

"A loser always magnifies his losses," said Ben Tarrade.

My father chuckled at that; there was always a sly vein of humor behind his reserve. "Mark Peachey would —that's true."

"Your boy," said Ben Tarrade, "ought to go fishing with me someday. You've got a fine boy."

"Why now," said my father, "perhaps we can arrange it."

We went on and I tried to reconcile this meeting with all the things Father had previously told me. What he next said did not help—then.

"You are growing up," he told me. "Some things you should know, Tod. A gentleman must understand all classes of people. It is the most valuable asset you will ever have. There's Ben Tarrade, a man with a fine classical education, from a first family in Kentucky. There he is playing cards for a living when he might have been a gentleman. It is very sad, Tod. Be generous in your judgment of the Tarrades of this world, but never grow sentimental over them."

I think now he was trying to tell me that there were many shades between the primary colors of black and white; I think he was. But the strongest impression I have now of my father is of a simplicity in ethics since quite vanished from life. The relations of man and man were in one compartment, the relations of man and woman were in another; and nowhere did they join.

We went on to the river and turned into the brewery and my father filled two glasses from the beer tap—one of which he gave to me.

"I think it is time you knew the taste of this," he said.

I drank very little of it, for it was rather bitter and I could not help feeling embarrassed in front of him. He said then, "A gentleman does all things in moderation. I hope you remember that."

We turned home and along the way he spoke of the early trappers and buffalo hunters whose names many of our streets bore. Sometimes I think my father vaguely felt that the generations were changing and that I was growing away; and that he wanted me to know him before it was too late.

Along the street, a great many men hailed Father, calling him by his first name, and he always replied in kind. Looking back I can see how intense was our lip service to the democratic ideal; and how untrue it was. For though he was "Tod" to the lowest teamster, familiarity ended here and seldom was his quiet dignity penetrated. He knew his place; the teamsters knew their places.

Dinner was waiting at home and we sat down. But my mother stared sharply at me and came to my place and bent over. And I shall never forget how instant was her suppressed anger. She turned on Father as if he were a stranger and her voice shook a little.

"Are there not enough temptations in this town, Tod, without inviting him to share them?"

"He is growing up, Mother."

"I want no more of that nonsense," she retorted, and sat down abruptly in her chair. Leora Kadderly looked at Father, who seemed rather flushed and uneasy, and she said to Mother:

"What harm is in a sip of beer?"

"Speak of the devil," said my mother.

I cannot forget Leora Kadderly's quiet answer for I believe now it expressed all that she was. "The devil," she said, "is a monster only humans could think up."

My father said, "The discussion had better be deferred," and I knew they were all looking at me. But I doubt if I should have paid them much attention just then; for my small world had been unsteadied again. I think it was this night I discovered that my father's will was not absolute in our house; that behind the deference my mother showed to him was a fiery will. The adjustments of boyhood are complex.

They took up another line of talk, but someone was at the door and my father rose and went to it; and looking that way I saw Ben Tarrade standing there, yellow head bare. This too was astonishing. He had a long paper box in his arms.

"I should like to see Miss Kadderly for a moment," he told Father.

My father's voice was oddly unlike the one he had used on Ben Tarrade earlier. It was extremely formal, touched with coldness. "I doubt—" he said.

Leora Kadderly got up quickly and went over and Father turned on his heels, his face very dark. I wish now I had turned to see what expression my mother wore: it must have been one of utter shock. Ben Tarrade held out the box and Leora took it.

He said, "I had hoped to find you here, with company, so that it would not appear I had intruded upon you alone. You were very kind on the street the other day."

That was all. He went away and Leora Kadderly came back and took the box and we all saw a spray of roses nested in fern. My father was silent, but Mother drew in her breath.

She said, "This is—it's unthinkable. Leora, you should have thrown them in his face!"

Leora had lifted the flowers and I saw on her features that strange, saddened glow which I did not then understand. "I was merely polite and he thought it was kindness," she said to us. "Omaha—he must have sent all the way there for them."

My father's answer was like the slamming of a door. "He has stepped over the line."

"What line?" Leora Kadderly asked, and as I review that scene I call up the picture of a dark and full-bosomed girl with aroused eyes. "You people are so kind and honest—and so cruel. Why is it you look at life as though it were indecent, and hate people who laugh? Must we all be miserable to be godly? Must we always turn from what little pleasure there is because it is unseemly? Must we all be plain and never wear bright clothes, and throw stones at a man like Ben Tarrade because he is the only one in New Hope to know that a woman loves flowers?"

My mother said to me, "Tod, leave the room," and I went out and sat on the porch, hearing the three voices rise and fall behind me.

Presently Jim Shugrue arrived, and the voices turned decorous again, and later Shugrue and my father came to the porch and sat there smoking, neither saying much. Both were greatly disturbed. Around five o'clock Jim Shugrue took Leora home; she was, I remember, carrying Ben Tarrade's flowers in one arm.

WHAT happened thereafter happened swiftly, as was the way in our town. We were a people, I now realize, severely conditioned by the land. All nature was restless and extreme and quick-changing. The mild seasons were so brief as to leave us with but a faint memory of mildness;

for the rest it was heat and wind and sandstorms and great snows; it was drouth or swollen river.

This was the mood of the land and this was the mood of its inhabitants, and nothing is fresher in my mind now than the bitter quarrels which at times broke through the courtesy affected by my elders. How soft and even were my father's words; but this was a deliberate manner adopted by him, as by the rest of the gentility, to avoid the clash of violent tempers. It was never wise in that town to stand in front of a man's will unless you were prepared to meet the farthest consequences.

It was within the week of Ben Tarrade's coming to our place, I remember, that I saw him turn out of River Street into Belle Plaine and lift his hat to Leora Kadderly passing by; and then, fascinated by a scene that I knew meant trouble, I watched them stroll on together.

Old Colonel Lindsay at that moment stepped from von Gayl's and he stopped and put back his head and looked at the pair a long while. Afterward he wheeled about and walked, as though in a hurry, toward Messenger's general store. My father came along presently, and we strolled home.

That same night, in the long, still period between sunset and full dark, I went out south of town to a pile of tar barrels which was the rendezvous of my crowd, and Nick Fallon told us the rest of the story. Nick was somewhat older than the other boys and had the gray knowledge of the world at his command. I think now his parents spoke too freely in front of him.

We fired up a tar barrel and sat around it and that image is indelibly stamped in my mind—of a great rush of blood-crimson light against the black mystery of the prairie.

"Ben Tarrade," Nick Fallon said, "came into Billy Hope's to get a saddle horse and Billy Hope told him he'd get horse-whipped if he didn't stay away from Leora Kadderly. Tarrade just laughed at him. There's goin' to be hell to pay."

These were words, I suppose, Nick Fallon had picked up from his father. But Nick spoke them with a certain dramatic originality and we all sat within the glow of the tar barrel and brooded over them. Boys are an odd compound of the purely primitive emotions; and I recall the mixture of fear and expectancy that shot through me.

A little later we all left the tar barrel and walked to the courthouse park where the carpenters had just finished building the scaffold for a teamster by the name of Jeff Dann who was to be hanged the following day because of a killing. It is another scene fresh and unblurred out of boyhood—the high platform, the heavy pole rising upward, the arm which was to hold the rope extending starkly into space. It stood there gaunt and grisly in the graying twilight, exuding a fresh pine odor, the new timbers glowing faintly through this dusk like the pallid shining of a skeleton's weathered bones.

When I think of New Hope, Nebraska, in 1880, I am rather sure that only the boys of that town saw the delight of the world. We were a race apart, we were pure hedonists. The bitterness of the land was not for us, nor the conformist ethics that—as I now understand—laid its iron obligations upon the elders. To us the outward manifestations of New Hope were eternally surprising. Life was rough and uneven but never dull. All colors

were vivid and all the contrasts of that land were fresh shocks, each shock leaving a deep impression.

This scaffold in the twilight was only a dramatic event in a long chain of dramatic events, the very sight of which harrowed us and left us with permanent scars on the memory. Yet, being savages, we lived for this and so we stood silent there awhile and then drifted home.

The next day at noon, my father told me to stay at the house until after supper and the direct glance accompanying the order stilled whatever protest I had. The hanging was at four o'clock and I realize now it had been arranged as a public event and that the hour was for the convenience of the roundabout ranchers who had to drive to town. In that public square the teamster Dann was to be hanged before all eyes; he was to be the flaming cross of an outraged justice.

Law still is harsh, but it no longer possesses the extreme vengefulness of the years of my youth. There was something brutal in those kind, earnest people and now that I recall all the brown and heavy faces, the unsmiling faces, the sad faces, I see the quality of spiritual somberness in each one. Sometimes I think it came from looking too long on the original sin of the race, from seeing so realistically the hell fire reserved for the condemned.

The heavy hand of public opinion bore down on my elders unsparingly, and though we had a sort of individualism which is nowhere seen today—like that of Colonel Lindsay who always carried a sword cane, like George Faul who drank himself senseless each Saturday night and had one of von Gayl's men tie him into his home-going rig—we had very little of that true individualism which lies in the mind. You could not be a dissenter in New Hope; you could not violate New Hope's main body of morals and survive. If you did not conform, wrath descended upon you unmercifully in a dozen ways, from social ostracism to tar and feathers.

I remember that at four o'clock I stood in the parlor and held my breath, to discover how a hanging man must feel; and I noticed that my mother looked long and wistfully out of a window. I did not know what she was thinking; nor do I now. Her affection surrounded me as long as I can remember, strong and changeless, but I have often felt inexpressibly sad in realizing I never knew her at all. Out across the many years I see only the seldom smile of a woman with her hair done straight back from a white forehead.

My father came home rather late for dinner and though his quietness was as usual, his features were sharp and he ate little and when he said grace he was unusually solemn. After we ate he went into the kitchen and I heard him speak to Mother in a guarded voice. Presently he left.

I soon followed, turning off River toward the courthouse square. Ten wild horses could not have dragged me away from the spot, yet I felt a strange dread; and when I came into the square I brushed my eyes rapidly across the scaffold and looked away. Since nothing happened then, I looked again. They had cut the dead man down and the rest of the rope hung straight and motionless from the top bar; the trap door on the platform was dropped open.

I do not know how long I stood there in a twilight that grew deeper and

deeper while my mind gave the dead man life, put him on the platform, dropped him through the trap and killed him again. I suppose I built up that scene a dozen times and would have done it as many more had not Nick Fallon come up on the run. His eyes were wide open and very bright.

He said, not stopping, "If you want to see something, go out to the tar barrels."

It was full dark when I passed across the square—touching the scaffold structure out of boyish bravado—and hurried down Colter's Alley. Beyond it I saw a tar barrel blazing. There was a small crowd around it and a buckboard standing there with one gray horse in the shafts, which I instantly recognized as belonging to Ben Tarrade.

I knew then; and that gave circumspection to my approach, for I realized a boy had no place here. But I went on until I was within the tinged shadows, on the edge of the circle of men, and remained there without being seen.

In the center's circle stood Ben Tarrade and I did not realize for a moment that he had been tied to the buckboard's tail gate. He was bare to the waist and he held himself straight, but his yellow head was bent over, away from us. Billy Hope was beside him, holding a bullwhacker's whip cut in half. I could see the flushed blood in Billy Hope's face. I could see the marblelike set to his lips.

He said, "Give your sort of men an inch and you take a mile. You been warned, which you laughed at. Now, by God, you'll catch on."

He stepped back, one foot straightening behind the other, and the whip slashed across Ben Tarrade's white back with a sound that twists my nerves now to think of it. I was rooted there in horror. I think Tarrade never moved out of his tracks, though his frame shook at each blow and the long, red welts began to bleed.

Billy Hope hit him a dozen times and cursed, and stopped; he was breathing hard and the color had gone from his face. Another man stepped out from the circle and said, "That's enough, Billy," and reached around to untie Tarrade's hands; and it was then I looked about, the spell broken, and got a good view of those in the circle. I knew them all, yet they were strangers to me—strangers with hot eyes and the hardest lips I have ever seen.

Tarrade turned and held to the buckboard a moment. Billy Hope pointed into the farther darkness of the prairie.

"Your trunk is in that buckboard," he said. "We took pains to see you got all your possessions. Now get out and don't ever come back to New Hope."

Tarrade said nothing at all. His cheeks were the shade of ashes and he moved as though he were dead tired. At the buckboard's front wheel he swung to look at us all; and I can say now, long thinking about it, that he had the best of those men. I do not know why, but he had the best of them, and I think some of them must have known it and felt ashamed.

After that he got up to the seat and lifted the reins and drove away into the dark. This is the last sight I ever had of him, bare torso red-streaked, yet square in the seat.

The man nearest me turned and discovered me and took my arm roughly, but when he looked closer and saw who I was he spoke with more consideration. "You had better not let your father know you came here, Tod."

I ran all the way home and tried to conceal the dumb shaking of my body

from my mother. But she saw it and said, "Where have you been?" All I could say was that I had been playing, and went immediately to my room.

We always left the door open that the cross current of night air might carry off the day's heat; and so I heard my father come in. He had not been at the whipping, that I was sure of, but he knew of it.

He said, "Well, he got what he deserved," and my mother murmured, in a grieving voice, "Oh, Tod." Much as she disliked Ben Tarrade, that thought of punishment hurt her gentle soul. But lying there in the dark, the puzzling contradictions of my father's nature troubled me and I could not understand. I do not fully understand now. He was always a kindly man and a fair one, and never would he have soiled his hands in such a scene as I saw that evening; yet he approved of what the rougher ones had done.

There was little sleep for me that night. I think I relived those brief moments of the tar barrel a hundred times. In the morning I was physically sick and could not touch my breakfast.

Father was at the table; Mother was not. But as we sat there she came in from the street, apron folded around her hands, as was her custom. Father looked up, and then stood up. He said, "What is it?" in a concerned voice. Mother was crying, the first time I had ever seen her so.

"Leora left town late last night," Mother said. "She packed her trunk and gave her dog to the Sperrins and left on the Omaha stage. Tod—oh, Tod!"

Father's whole face changed. He shook his head, and kept shaking it. What he said did not then make any sense to me at all. "Not to him, Mother! Surely not to him!"

"We will never see her again," said my mother. And her grief came out and touched me and I felt very lonely and miserable.

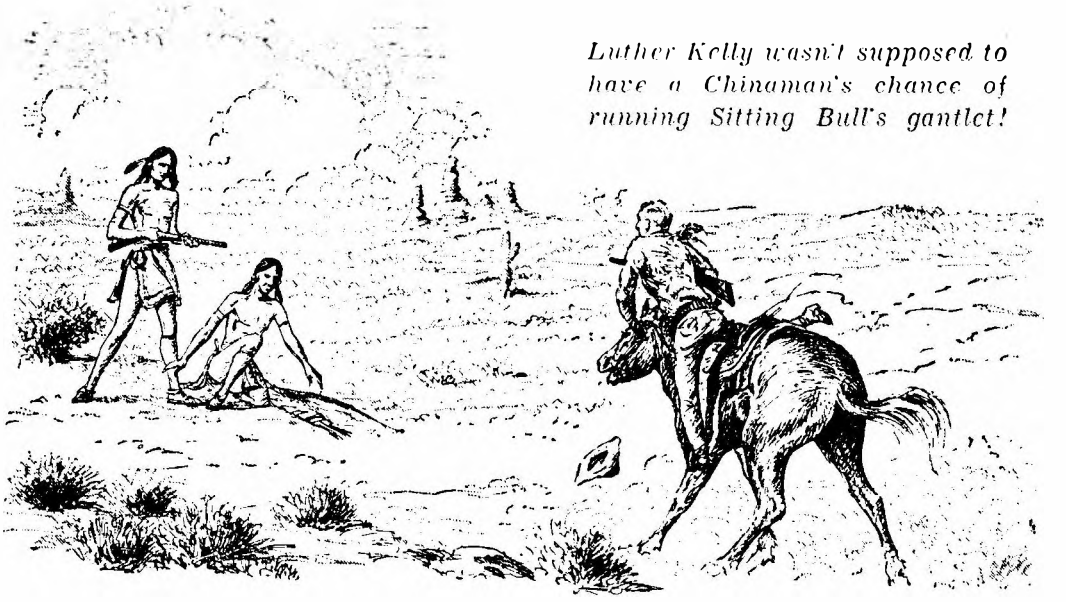
There is little more to say. News came back to New Hope a few weeks later telling us Tarrade had married Leora, and then as far as the town was concerned they were dead. I do not recall either name ever being afterward spoken in our house, and a year later my family moved farther west and time went by and that old incident faded out as all things in time do fade.

I never saw those two again, though one more fact belongs to this chronicle. In 1905 when I was a man grown I passed through Omaha, and stopped off during a twenty-minute wait. Out of curiosity I looked up a city directory and followed the T column down, really expecting nothing; for in the West at that time we were a highly migratory people. But the name was there: *Tarrade, Ben (Leora), grain merchant.*

It was a tragedy out of my boyhood; it was to me then like a death. But the other day, reliving that affair, a feeling of unutterable relief went through me, as though I had come to the end of a tragic tale and had found triumph at last springing out of ruin.

For as I look back into that far-off time I see New Hope as it really was: a town of kindly people living in spiritual shadows, afraid of the light of life, cruel to those they could not understand. And for these two who alone of all New Hope smiled because it was good to smile the end was a happy one. The savor and richness and melody of the world was with them; and gaiety and understanding was with them—too powerful for New Hope either to comprehend or to subdue.

Little-Man-With-a-Strong-Heart



Luther Kelly wasn't supposed to have a Chinaman's chance of running Sitting Bull's gantlet!

By T. J. KERTTULA and D. L. McDONALD

EVERYONE at Fort Buford laughed at Kelly, the skinny kid—laughed loud and long. Send a boy to do the job of a detachment of soldiers? He didn't have a Chinaman's chance of getting to Fort Stevenson!

That was the last time anyone laughed at young Kelly; the boy every Indian in the northwest would come to know and respect by one or the other of the names they gave him—Lone Wolf and Little-Man-With-A-Strong-Heart.

Luther S. Kelly was born in Geneva, N. Y. At the age of fourteen he joined the Union Army and saw considerable action in the last stages of the Civil War. Immediately after the war his company was ordered to Minnesota, and in 1866 it moved to Fort Wadsworth in Dakota. Here Kelly received his discharge. He was just seventeen years old and a seasoned trooper.

Adventure beckoned to the boy. To the north—clear to the Hudson Bay, he'd been told—stretched an endless sea of grass. This he had to see. Alone, against the advice of scouts and soldiers, he set out for Fort Gary in Manitoba. Later, he always said he made the trip without sighting even one Indian.

Fort Gary held no cure for his restlessness. He started back for the Dakotas, alone. Crossing the Assiniboine River, he overtook a party of Canadian half-breeds (Boise Brules) and threw in with them. It proved to be an excel-

lent opportunity for the silent youngster to learn more of the ways of the red men and the frontier.

On Mouse River he faced his first hostile Indians—among them the man who was to hate and respect him for many years—when a Sioux war party rode into camp. His companions assured Kelly that he had nothing to fear as long as he remained their guest. The Sioux were friendly to the half-breeds, but their attitude changed as soon as they saw the American.

Brandishing a tomahawk, the Sioux chief approached the boy until hardly a pace separated them. His face contorted into a hideous grimace of anger and hatred, the Indian shouldered against the slight buckskin-clad figure. Kelly did not waver. Calmly he leaned against his rifle and sized up the prancing warrior.

The Indian's gaze broke first. Lowering the tomahawk, he turned and stalked back to his pony. This was the first meeting of that prairie fox, Sitting Bull, and the little white man who was destined to hound him all over eastern Montana. The Indian never ceased to smart under it.

Reaching Fort Berthold, temporary agency for several Indian tribes, Kelly paused again for some time to study the Indian language and ways. Then he was off again, heading for Fort Buford on the Montana-North Dakota line.

Fort Buford gave him a royal, if amazed, welcome. Veteran troopers shook their heads in baffled wonder. How had a boy who looked barely fifteen managed to make his way alone through hostile Sioux territory? Just then, no white man was safe outside the gates of the fort.

Encouraged by their victories near Fort Kearney, the Sioux were raiding again. Especially troublesome had been their constant harassing of the mail carriers. The mail from Fort Stevenson, the next post downriver, was long overdue. Presumably, the carriers had been ambushed. Urgent dispatches awaited delivery to Fort Stevenson, but Buford's commander dared not spare a detachment of soldiers to undertake the hazardous trip.

When he learned this, Kelly broke his customary silence long enough to volunteer to carry the dispatches. Everyone roared at the idea of a lone rider making it through hundreds of miles of hostile Indian country. And a mere boy at that!

Kelly shrugged. "Suit yourselves," he told them quietly. "I'll make the trip, anyhow. You can send the dispatches or not, just as you like." Turning on his heel, he stalked out the door.

The entire garrison took turns trying to dissuade the quiet kid from making the attempt. Failing in that, they outfitted him with the best horse on the port and wished him well.

As darkness fell, the entire company gathered at the main gate to see him off. Their manner clearly indicated that they weren't expecting to see him again. Slowly the last afterglow faded and the stars took over. There was a whispered command, the creak of the heavy gate, and the army's new "baby dispatch rider" was gone.

Skirting the stockade, he crossed the river on ice and struck a beeline for Fort Stevenson. At midnight he rode into the camp of friendly Mandan Indians, where he paused for a brief rest. Then, as the stars paled, he took up his solitary way deep into the no man's land that teemed with the warriors of Sitting Bull.

Two days later he rode his jaded horse into Durfee and Peck's post, two hundred miles from Fort Buford. A remarkable feat under ordinary circumstances, it was all the more so since he had ridden it at night through country he had never seen and toward a destination that was only a pinpoint on a map.

From the trading-post to Fort Stevenson was only a short, uneventful trip and Kelly took it easy. But two hours after he had delivered his dispatches he was back in the saddle again, astride a fresh horse, ready to carry the reply back to Buford. Once more, troopers and scouts gathered to voice their warnings, and once more the silent kid grinned at them shyly as, with a wave of his hand, he loped away into the darkness.

As he neared Fort Buford Kelly became bolder, traveling more openly by day. Fifty miles from the fort he camped with a friendly Arikara chief, Bloody Knife. The chief too warned Kelly to be on his guard. The Sioux had already learned of his trip to Fort Stevenson and their pride was touched. Kelly had made a fool of them, slipping through their fingers. And their chief, Sitting Bull, hadn't forgotten the boy who had stared him down, the boy Indian etiquette had kept him from scalping that time up north. To any Sioux warrior, Kelly's scalp was a prize worth trying for.

Kelly's next stop was at Red Mike's station. There again he heard the now-familiar refrain, "Sitting Bull wants you bad." He listened politely and rode away.

Five miles beyond Red Mike's station, Kelly rounded a bend and saw two warriors approaching down the trail. It was too late to turn back now, if he had wanted to. Besides, his trail-weary horse would be no match for the fresh Indian ponies. They might, Kelly thought hopefully, belong to a friendly tribe, anyhow.

When the braves saw Kelly they dismounted and sat down on a grassy bank, allowing their mounts to wander. Nothing suspicious about that, Kelly realized. Indians frequently did this to signify their wish to stop for a friendly talk. Still, Kelly was taking no chances. He slipped the carbine from the boot and held it across the saddle.

Slowly he rode toward the seated figures. He could see now they were Sioux. One was armed with a shotgun but the other carried only bow and arrows.

When some fifty yards separated them, the Indian with the gun stood up as if to greet the rider. Kelly tensed and eased the rifle around. The warrior remained motionless as Kelly kneed his horse along, slowly closing the gap between them. Then, suddenly, the Indian threw up the shotgun and fired at the oncoming rider.

At the first move Kelly went into action. He snapped a shot at the warrior and dived from the saddle. Scrambling to his feet, he saw the brave run a few steps and plunge headlong into a patch of high grass. That was a frequently used ruse of the Indians, pretending to be hit and then crawling to attack the enemy from the rear.

Kelly was in a tight spot now. His horse had run off to join the Indian ponies. The other brave had taken shelter behind a large tree. He was well protected while Kelly stood out in the open with a sheer bluff a short distance behind him. Beyond this he could not retreat.

The brave behind the tree was a seasoned and crafty warrior and brought into play every trick of the red man's warfare. He exposed a bit of his robe to draw Kelly's fire. As soon as the shot came, he would answer with an arrow from the other side of the tree. Before Kelly could reload and shoot the Indian would again be out of sight.

A quick shot and a turn sideways to present a smaller target for the arrow that was coming. Then a step or two backward. The ground around Kelly was studded with arrows. Where was the other brave? Unless he had been badly hurt, he should be in a position to attack by now..

Kelly's ammunition was running low. He still didn't know where the other Indian was. The shooting was bound to attract any warrior within hearing. All he needed now was for a war party to ride down upon him!

Gradually the horses drifted farther away. Soon they would be out of sight over the hill. In a last attempt to halt them Kelly shot one of the Indian ponies.

This infuriated the warrior behind the tree. Arrows hissed past Kelly as he reloaded. An exposed elbow, a snap shot, a howl of pain! Kelly saw the warrior's bow drop and guessed he had hit him in the bow arm.

Tomahawk in hand, the brave stepped from behind the tree. His other arm hung limp at his side. With a wild war whoop, he raised his weapon high and charged. Deliberately, Kelly raised his carbine. This had better be good; there would be no time for reloading.

The Sioux staggered and fell as the heavy slug tore through him. Kelly did not even glance back over his shoulder as, at a fast run, he struck out for Red Mike's station five miles away.

Accompanied by Mike, he was back at the scene an hour later. They caught up the horses, finding one with a small but crippling crease high on the shoulder. Both Indians were dead. There had been no danger of Indian tricks, for the first brave lay in the grass where Kelly had seen him fall.

Reaching Fort Buford just at dusk, he was surprised to find everybody waiting at the gate for him. They already knew all the details of the affair near Red Mike's. Friendly Indians had carried tidings of the scrap to the fort.

The silent kid stared at the little crowd and scratched his head in puzzlement. "Ain't you makin' an awful big fuss about an awful small scrap?" he drawled softly. "There wasn't but two of them, anyhow."

The Arikaras loved that! Immediately, in their enthusiasm, they gave him the first of his Indian names, Little-Man-With-A-Strong-Heart.

For months Kelly continued to carry the mail to Fort Stevenson and back, right through the heart of Sioux country. Always alone, always hunted, always noncommital about his experiences, the soldiers called him "Kelly the Silent." But, before many months had passed, Sitting Bull named him "The Lone Wolf" and upped the value of his scalp.

No one ever knew the details of the many stratagems by which Kelly continued to wear his own hair. While in town he did not paint it red, and there was none of the insolent swagger of most scouts and Indian fighters in his walk. His was never the rough talk of the frontier. In fact, he almost never spoke. The kid was both silent and different.

The training begun on the plains of

eastern Montana was to carry young Kelly far—clear to Luzon, P. I., where he served with distinction as an army scout. But it was in the Sioux country, playing tag with the wily old warrior Sitting Bull, that he earned the name by which most Americans know him. The name of Yellowstone Kelly.

Yet, in his own country, he's remembered best as Little-Man-With-A-Strong-Heart. "The greatest of all the Indian scouts," Colonel Miles once called him.

And that is the only point on which the colonel and Sitting Bull were ever known to agree.

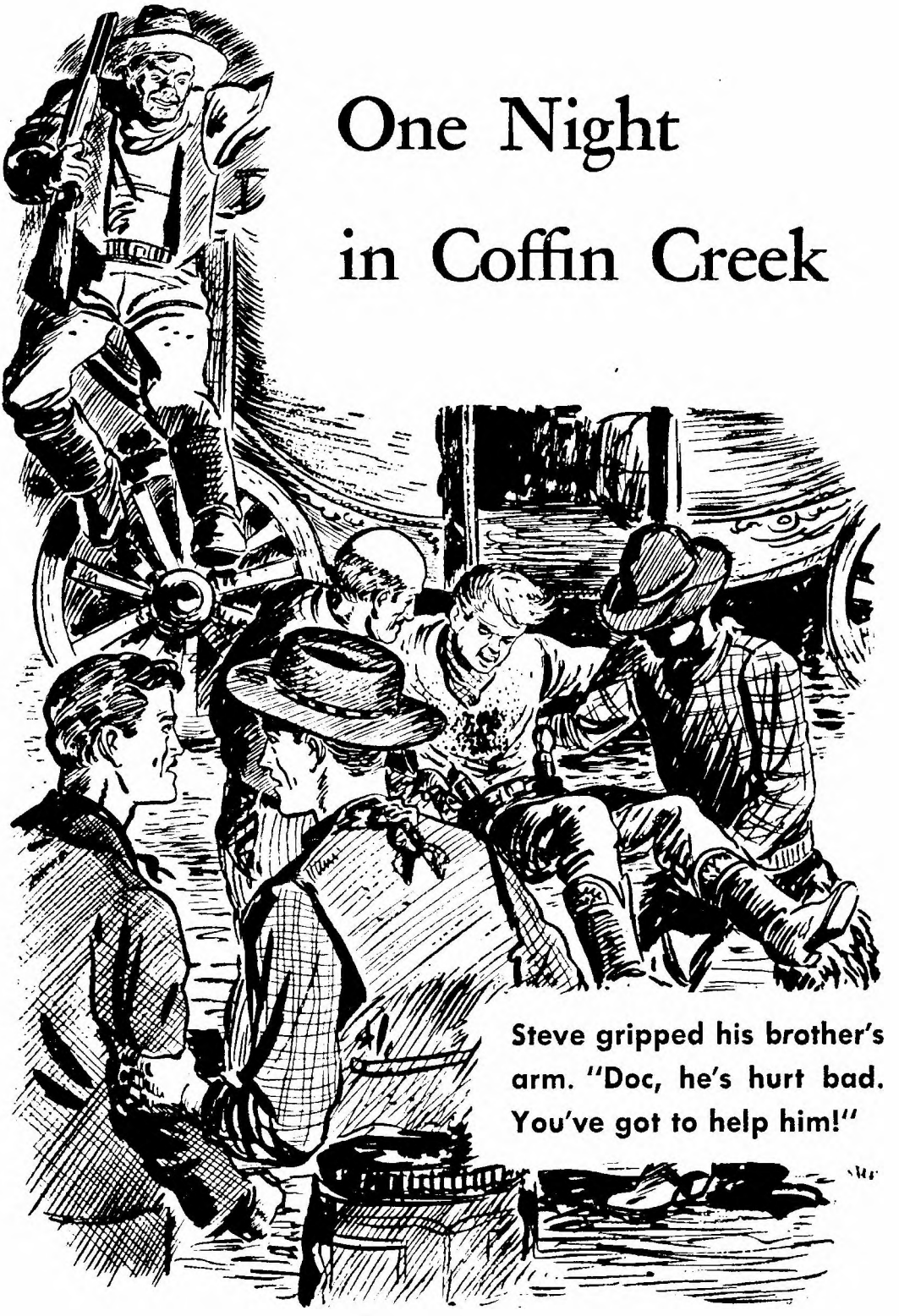
CHOOSE YOUR WEAPONS!

A Western Quiz by Eric Manders

SUPERIORITY of arms was a prime factor in the winning of the West. One reason the Indians lost their war for survival was because the white man was always coming up with a deadlier weapon. Later on, the gun fighter who packed the more efficient hardware was generally the one who lived. Let's examine the ten firearms listed below and try to determine the role each played on the Western frontier. All you have to do is match each with the clues in the left-hand column. Check your "armchair skeet score" with the correct answers, on page 135.

1. Favorite weapon of road agents of the Black Bart stamp. ____ Dreyse needle gun
2. .50-caliber rifle typical of the early breech-loaders of the 1850's. ____ Smith & Wesson revolver
3. Tiny pocket weapon often used by gamblers. ____ Hawken rifle
4. Prussian army rifle popular for its breech-loading and bolt action. ____ Derringer
5. Famous "long rifle" of the Appalachian frontier brought west by early settlers. ____ Colt's "Frontier Model"
6. Pioneered use of metallic cartridges and break-down loading in pistols. ____ double-barreled shotgun
7. First practical repeating rifle, introduced in 1873. ____ Kentucky rifle
8. Variation of the "long rifle," used largely by Rocky Mt. trappers. ____ "Paterson" Colt
9. .44-caliber "brother" of the .45-caliber "Peacemaker"; a post-Civil War favorite. ____ Winchester rifle
10. Cap-and-ball five-shooter introduced to the West by the Texas Rangers. ____ Sharps buffalo gun

One Night in Coffin Creek



Steve gripped his brother's arm. "Doc, he's hurt bad. You've got to help him!"

A Story by Thomas Thompson

Called upon to perform an emergency operation, "Doc" Benton, physician turned saloonkeeper, has to face up to a problem he's been dodging for years.

A SOFT and purple evening, mellow with wood smoke, came down over the mining camp of Coffin Creek and Doc Benton stood in front of his Nugget Saloon and watched it. He glanced down toward the freight and stage office and saw the lamps still burning. Perk Fallon, the agent, came out, turned a key in the lock, and walked up the street. The agent stepped up onto the thirty feet of board walk in front of the Nugget and stamped the dust off his boots.

"An hour and a half late," Perk said. "I'm getting worried." He went on inside for a quick drink.

Some of Perk's worry touched Doc. He looked at the light in the window of Dolly Kirkman's dress shop and he sauntered across the street, throwing away his half-smoked cigar.

The door of the dress shop was locked, and he rattled it noisily. He saw Dolly get up from the hand-operated sewing machine and walk to the window. She shaded her face between her hands and looked out and he called through the door.

"It's me."

The door opened and he pushed inside without being asked and he stood there, his eyes smiling, his nostrils twitching in the smell of new cloth and a hint of coffee making somewhere in the little apartment in back.

"How about marrying me?" he said.

She was a tall, long-limbed girl, and the top of her head came just to Doc's chin. Her hair was dark, her eyes indigo, and there had been a strain of pug-nosed Irishmen mixed up in her ancestry someplace. Her dad had been killed in a hard-rock blast two years back and Dolly had stayed on, maybe because she liked it here, maybe because she didn't have any place else to go. She had turned a talent for sewing into a pretty good business.

She glanced at the window, then stood on tip-toe, and kissed him lightly on the cheek. "What could you offer?" she said. "A job as featured singer in the Nugget?"

"Now starts the lecture," said Doc. "Fifty times I've asked you to marry me and fifty times you've said no and still you make wife sounds."

"Wife sounds my foot," said Dolly. She brushed a piece of lint from the lapel of his coat. "Steve's pretty late, isn't he?"

"Steve can take care of himself," Doc said, but he didn't sound very sure about it.

"You really believe in each other, don't you?"

"Steve and I?" He grinned. "We've been pretty close." He went to the window and looked out. There was still no sign of the stage. "Sometimes I feel like turning that kid across my knee and giving him something he never had at home."

"You better look again," Dolly said. "He's a good two inches taller than you are."

"I'm still Big Brother."

"You're still God, as far as he's concerned."

"Then why doesn't he listen to me?" Doc said, turning toward her. "He's got the opportunity of a lifetime!"

"I suppose," she said. "Did he tell you he was going to buy a partnership in the stage line?"

"I don't mean that," he said, brushing the thought aside with a gesture. "That kid's got one of the best educations in the country. Why, he could become governor if he'd stick to the thing he's cut out to do. We've got nothing in this country now but plain mob rule. I'll bet money there's been as many innocent men hanged around here as there have been guilty ones. A good defense lawyer could make a name for himself and really be doing something big—"

He stopped suddenly, realizing he hadn't expressed an opinion like this for a long time.

"Things move fast around here," she said. "I suppose it's hard for a man to stick to his own field when it is so easy to make money in another."

"Meaning me?" he said.

"Why? Does the shoe fit?"

"It's different with me," he said. "I'm still a doctor. If anyone gets sick enough or gets hurt they know where they can find me."

"At that hospital you were going to build, or at the Nugget?"

He walked over and put his arm around her and squeezed her tight. "Darn it, Dolly, we've gone through this a dozen times. I wanted to make some money so we could get married, you know that. And I'm making it, too, hand over fist. One of these days I'll have enough to build the hospital, as far as that goes. I haven't forgotten it. I'm doing all right."

"A really successful man doesn't have to go around explaining his success," she quoted. She put a finger on the end of his nose and pressed hard. "You told me that the first night I met you. You said something about money not being everything—something about a professional man owing something to humanity—"

"I was trying to impress you."

"That's the trouble," she said. "You did." She pulled away from him and walked toward the apartment at the back of the shop. "Have a cup of coffee?"

"Not tonight," he said. "I'm going over and wait for Steve."

"He might have had a breakdown."

"Sure," Doc said. "That's about the size of it."

"Then quit worrying."

"I'm not worrying." He kissed her swiftly and opened the door.

"Button your coat," she said. "It's nippy out there."

He grumbled and buttoned his coat and went out. Across the street the Nugget was blazing into full life.

This half-serious argument with Dolly had been going on for a year, and although Doc wouldn't admit it even to himself it bothered him. He was in love with Dolly and he had every reason to believe she was in love with him, but every time he tried to discuss marriage she put him off. So the free-and-easy banter had become a sort of defense. It wasn't hard to take "no" for an answer if he was just joking in the first place.

The only trouble was, he knew he wasn't joking and neither was she. She had a crazy idea that Doc wasn't happy, running a saloon. She had the utterly silly notion that he had been

a lot happier when he was working eighteen hours a day for nothing curing runny noses and mashed fingers. He scoffed at the idea and nearly collided with old Ez Prentice, a miner with a chicken-feed claim on Strawberry.

"Whoops, Ez. Sorry," he said, and he detoured around the old man, wanting to be rid of him.

Ez was seventy if he was a day, a bent old man with a horsy face and a voice straight out of a coffin. Nothing was ever right with him. He never had anything to say and it took him a day to say it. Everything he told had to start with how he woke up in the morning and how he felt and which boot he put on first and what he thought about while dressing–

"I was hopin' I'd run into you, Doc," Ez said. "Didn't want to come into the Nugget. You know how I feel about drinkin' and carryin' on–"

Ez was a temperance man, but the patent medicine he bought by the case had an alcoholic content that made some of Doc's cheaper brands of whisky look weak.

"Sure, sure, Ez," Doc said. "Every man has a right to his own opinions." There was a wide band of white cloth tied around Ez's scrawny neck. He usually had some part of his anatomy bandaged.

"I been feelin' poorly," Ez said, touching his hand gingerly to his neck. "Reckon I got all upset and fizzled out over that trouble I had with my claim. You know, Doc, it just ain't right when a man works like I worked. I was sayin' to myself when I got up this morning–"

"Sure, I know, Ez. It's too bad." It seemed to Doc that the time he was wasting here had a direct bearing on the overdue stage.

"Like I was tellin' your brother when I found out he had studied for the law. They ain't got a legal leg to stand on, cuttin' into the flume over me like that, I was tellin' your brother. I was pullin' on my boots this mornin' and I got to thinkin' to myself–"

"Will you excuse me, Ez? I'm pretty busy."

"That's what I said to myself. Doc's busy, I says, but Doc's a man who would want to see a thing like this here swellin' in my neck. I says to myself Doc would want to take a look at this."

"Sure, Ez. Later, eh?"

"I figgered it was jest a plain boil. Pshaw, everybody around here gets boils. It's the water, the way I figgered out. I was standin' there by the stove fixin' my breakfast. Flapjacks, it was. Stirrin' away and fixin' those flapjacks and it got to hurtin' me under the arm and puffin' out there by my neck bone. Right here–" He probed under the rag.

Doc glanced over toward the stage station and saw Perk Fallon standing on the porch, looking down the street, worried. What the devil was Perk waiting for? Why didn't he send somebody down the road to see what was wrong with Steve?

"I figgered to myself you'd want to take a look," Ez said. "The stove jest wouldn't heat up right and you know how it is with a flapjack on a cold stove–"

There was no getting away from Ez. "Come on over here in the light then," Doc said. He led Ez Prentice near Dolly's window, anxious to be done with this. If Perk Fallon didn't send somebody out pretty soon he'd go himself.

"Take her easy when you lift the rag, Doc."

"All right, Ez." He lifted the makeshift bandage, his mind on Steve and what had made him so late. There was a huge swelling on the back of the old man's neck and for just a second Doc's attention was drawn to it completely and words he had forgotten since medical school were in his mind. *Circumscribed inflammation of the subcutaneous tissue, suppuration and sloughing, having a tendency to spread—*

"You've got yourself a big, fat carbuncle, Ez. Not much I can do about it—"

"I figgered maybe you could open it up."

He could, of course, but he didn't have time now. Garth Hamilton, the town marshal, had walked over to the stage depot and he and Perk Fallon were standing there talking. "Make yourself a flaxseed poultice and see if you can't draw that thing to a head, Ez."

He dropped the bandage back in place and hurried across the street. Ez was a devil of a bother. Doc stepped up onto the low porch of the stage depot and Perk and Garth Hamilton stopped talking.

"Are you going to send somebody out to look for Steve?" Doc said.

"I reckon we better," Garth said. Garth was a short, stocky man who never said anything unless he had something to say. He was as tough as nails and proud of it. He had killed a man last month and was proud of that, too. He rolled a cud of tobacco in his cheek and spat at the porch post.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Doc said. "Christmas?"

"Ain't no sense goin' off half-cocked," Garth said.

"Half-cocked about what?" Doc said. "The kid probably broke a wheel or something."

"Maybe," Garth said. "Or maybe he got held up and we'd ride right into an ambush. Did you know he was packin' the Flamingo pay roll?"

Doc felt as if someone had hit him in the stomach. It wasn't that he had any doubt about Steve's being able to take care of himself. Steve could. But Steve wasn't a gunman or a shotgun guard; Steve was a lawyer.

"He's not riding alone, is he?"

"He's got Vance Coombs ridin' shotgun," Perk Fallon said. "Vance is the best shot in this neck of the woods."

"That kid that's been hangin' around your place," Garth said. "Seen him today?"

Doc recalled the kid at once—a thin-faced youth with buck teeth and a downy beard. A kid who tried to cover his inexperience with two cap-and-ball .45's in his waistband and a bowie knife in his boot. He had been throwing his weight around the Nugget for a few days but no one had done much about it except to tell him to go home and get dry behind the ears. He didn't amount to much.

"No, I haven't seen him," Doc admitted. "But what has that got to do with it?"

"I didn't like that kid," Garth said.

"Nobody did. He'll grow up."

"I should have locked him up until I could get a rundown on him."

"Good Lord," Doc said, "you don't think that punk would try to hold up a stage, do you? Why Steve would take off his belt and blister the kid's behind."

"Maybe," Garth said, spitting.

"Well, are you going to stand around here all night thinking about it?"

"We'll be goin' directly," Garth said. "Ain't no sense goin' off half-cocked."

"Pick me up at the saloon, then," Doc said. There was no use arguing with Garth Hamilton. He enjoyed being marshal and he liked to take enough time doing things so folks would notice what he was doing.

Doc hurried back to the saloon and he had a half notion to get a horse and go looking for Steve himself, but he knew that would be crazy. If there had been a breakdown there wasn't much Doc could do alone—

The crowd in the saloon greeted him with the boisterous familiarity he had come to like. He set up a round on the house and for the next few minutes he was busy with a beer salesman from San Francisco. He only half-heard the argument that the San Francisco beer was better known than the local product and he gave the drummer an order for ten kegs just to get rid of him. He looked at the time and realized Steve was nearly two hours overdue.

He began to sweat under his clothes and he couldn't keep his mind off Steve. He and Steve had always been uncommonly close, even during that period of awkward age gap when Doc was twenty, Steve ten. Steve looked up to Doc with the unmasked hero worship of a kid for an older brother; and Doc admired Steve with the quiet satisfaction of knowing that here was a kid brother far above the average. The years had closed the age gap, as years will, and now, if anything, the two were closer than ever.

"Give me a drink, will you?" Doc said to the nearest bartender.

Doc didn't drink often, but perhaps a little jolt would quiet the uneasiness. The whisky was good and he had another and then he went outside and glanced down the street. The damn-fool kid. It was darker than pitch. He saw Perk Fallon and Garth Hamilton lounging on the porch of the stage office and he wanted to go up there and shake some action into them, but he knew they had set a certain length of time to wait and they wouldn't budge before that time.

He went back inside the saloon and had a couple of drinks with some miners from American Bar and he decided he couldn't wait any longer. He started toward the door and met Garth coming in.

"I reckon five or six of us better ride down the road a piece," Garth said.

"It's about time," Doc snapped. "I'll go along." He had a hard time keeping from running to his room at the back of the saloon.

He pulled into an overcoat and then as an afterthought opened a bureau drawer and took out a .38-caliber pistol he had bought when he first came here and was still making night calls as a doctor. He felt a little silly about taking the gun and it made an awkward bulge in his pocket. Damn it, if anything had happened to Steve—

He stepped over to the table to blow out the lamp and there was a bottle and glass there. Without knowing for sure why he did it he poured himself a stiff drink and downed it.

Word had spread fast that Garth was taking a posse out to see what had happened to the stage and Doc saw a dozen men he knew getting to their feet, checking their guns. The last time he had seen these men get together on a trip of this kind an old man had died on the end of a rope. There was a certain macabre gaiety about them, a brightness in their eyes that was more than whisky brightness. Doc remembered telling Steve

about that hanging and he remembered how Steve had been sick about it.

"*Sounds to me like the old man was just the goat,*" Steve said. "*They had made up their minds to hang somebody and he was handy—*"

His thoughts were interrupted by a yelling out in the street. In seconds the saloon was empty.

There was a lathered horse at the stage station and a farmer kid from down the valley was standing there, bug-eyed, talking so his words tumbled over each other. Doc grabbed the kid by the shoulders and shook him.

"The stage was late out of Columbia," the kid babbled. "It was almost two hours late passin' our place and right after that the shootin' started—"

"What happened? Is Steve all right?" Doc felt his nerve going to pieces. "Damn you, talk sense!"

"I don't know, Doc," the kid said. "Honest I don't know."

A crowd had gathered around the stage depot and now there was a new yelling from up the street and the crowd surged back toward the Nugget. Garth Hamilton's voice was lifting above the noises. "Open up there. Let the stage through!"

Doc could see the coach but he couldn't make out who was driving. He started running, pushing his way through the crowd. He saw Dolly Kirkman standing in front of her shop, her face drawn with worry, and then he saw the driver. It was Steve.

Something close to a prayer crossed Doc's lips and the feeling turned swiftly to one of angry relief. He ran alongside the stage, looking up, calling to his brother.

"Where you been, bird brain? Sparking some beauty?"

Steve didn't even look down. His eyes were straight ahead and his face was white. He looked old and tired. Alongside him Vance Coombs waved his shotgun to the crowd.

Steve tooled the team to a stop and got down into a thousand questions. He didn't look at the crowd. He didn't look at Garth Hamilton, who had pushed close. He looked straight at his brother, his face white, his eyes asking for help.

"There's a man inside, Doc. For God's sake see what you can do—"

Someone had already opened the door and the body was slouched there on the floor and the blood had spread and formed a pool. There was a sharp intake of breath from the crowd and Steve was gripping his brother's arm.

"Doc, he's hurt bad. You've got to help him."

It had been a long time since Doc had heard a note like that in Steve's voice. As close as they were, Steve had always been a self-sufficient cuss.

"Easy with him," Doc said. "Take him inside and lay him on a table."

Two men lifted the wounded man and Doc saw the shock of blond hair, the knife on the boot, the two pistols—The buck teeth were horribly yellow behind the bloodless lips.

Vance Coombs, the shotgun guard, was swinging down from the box, his sawed-off weapon in his hands. Vance was a gorillalike man, a bad man in a rough and tumble, a good man with a gun.

"Stepped right out in front of us with them damn guns," Vance said with satisfaction. "I cut down on him before he ever knew what hit him."

"He didn't even reach for his guns," Steve said. He said it softly, almost to himself, but Doc heard it.

Vance swaggered his way through the crowd and bellied up to the bar. He looked out at the crowd with squinted eyes and then he set the shotgun down and hitched his belt.

"That'll learn 'em not to monkey with a stage when Vance Coombs is ridin' shotgun," he said. He spat on the floor. A dozen men crowded around Vance and Vance reached behind him and got the bottle the bartender had pushed out.

"Looks like you really nailed him, Vance," a man said. Someone had picked up the shotgun and was looking at it.

Garth Hamilton elbowed through and looked down into the face of the wounded kid. "The damn punk," Garth said. "I had him spotted for a bad one. I should have locked him up."

"Locked him up hell," Vance said. "The only medicine that kid savvies comes right out of old Betsy here." He snatched the shotgun away from the man who had it and kissed the stock. Somebody laughed.

The kid was laid out on the table and Doc was leaning down over him. He heard Steve's voice, close to his ear.

"How is he, Doc?" Steve said. "Can you pull him through?"

"I can try," Doc said.

Steve's voice was desperate. "You've got to pull him through, Doc. He wasn't trying to hold up the stage. He had his hands up, clear away from his guns—"

Doc felt a sudden panic he had never known. It was just as if he had never been called on to doctor a man before.

"How is he, Doc?" Steve said thickly. "Is he—?"

The feeling of terror grew in Doc and this was like a school play that had started off on the wrong cue. Doc wanted to back up and start all over again. He didn't know whether the wounded kid was breathing or not. He hadn't checked—

He fought against the uncertainty and took off his coat. He let it drop to the floor and the pistol in the pocket made a thudding sound when it hit.

"Stand back, all of you—"

"That's right, Doc," Vance Coombs called. "Pull him through for us so we can give him what he's got comin'. String a few of these toughs up along the stage road and let 'em hang there 'til they get ripe and it'll make some of 'em think."

"You're talkin' yourself out of a job, Vance," somebody said, and there was general laughter.

The kid was breathing. Doc saw that now. He had a big load of buckshot in his chest and it had made a horrible mess but he was breathing and now his eyes were open and he was staring up and all of a sudden his lips twisted over those yellow teeth and he started to cry like a baby.

"I didn't do nothin'," the kid said. His voice was almost gone, but Steve and Doc heard it. "My horse broke his leg and all I wanted was a ride back to town—" The words twisted off in a grimace of pain and there was pink foam on the kid's lips.

"Doc! Do something!" Steve's voice was desperate.

"Sure, Steve," Doc said. "I'll do what I can." Again he had that horrible feeling of uncertainty. What was the next move? His instruments—Some help— He turned and found Garth standing there.

"Take that knife out of his boot and cut that shirt away. Tell the bartender

to heat up some water. Get a bottle of whisky."

It was all starting to click, the old pattern of emergency. He looked around and saw Steve's eyes on him, wide, brown, frightened eyes. Steve wasn't any killer. Steve was a lawyer —a lawyer who had freed half a dozen men because of the flimsiness of circumstantial evidence. And here was a man dying just because he had stepped out into the road wearing guns. Wearing guns in this country where everyone wore guns. *I had a gun too,* Doc thought, and then he was running toward the back room.

It took him five minutes to light the lamp and find his instrument case and when he opened it there was dust inside. He felt like crying. He blew on the dust and turned and Dolly Kirkman was standing there in the doorway.

"I've got the hot water and the whisky, Doctor," Dolly said. "Is there anything else I can do?"

Doctor. She called him Doctor. Hell, he was no doctor. He was a saloon owner—

He pushed by her without answering and when he got back to the table Garth had the shirt cut away. It was worse than he had thought and Steve was standing there staring down at the torn flesh.

"Take care of Steve, Dolly," Doc said. He dipped a probe into the whisky.

His hands shook. He needed a drink, he kept thinking, and the thought angered him. The kid made a low, moaning sound and Doc nodded to Garth to give the kid whisky. The kid choked on it and doubled his knees. He should have had someone holding the kid's feet and hands.

"Here. Two of you take his feet and two of you his hands. Give him all the whisky he can take, Garth—" More seconds wasted. Precious seconds.

A thousand thoughts poured through Doc's mind, driving him crazy. The kid was probably wanted in a dozen places. He was a trouble maker. You had to shoot first and ask questions later. Why, it might have been Steve on that table— The thought made him sick to his stomach and suddenly it *was* Steve lying there in his own blood and an old saloonkeeper was bungling about, pretending to be a doctor.

"Get me some clean cloths." Why in hell hadn't he thought of the clean cloths before? Dolly Kirkman handed him a clean cloth.

Now it was coming back—the old confidence, the safety of the familiar. He knew the kid was going but he had to fight for what life there was. No question of guilt or innocence. You worked just as hard saving a man the day before he was going to hang as you did to save a newborn baby.

"Give him more whisky, Garth." The blood was spreading all over the table. There was no way to stop the blood.

"He won't take it, Doc."

For just a second Doc Benton closed his eyes. No, the kid wouldn't take it. The kid was dead. He wouldn't make any more trouble. He wouldn't take any more whisky.

Doc was reluctant to let loose the instruments. Just for a second they had been at home in his hands and now he was feeling that hopeless drive that made a man want to work like mad and bring back the life that had escaped from under his very fingers— He straightened and he saw Steve looking at him.

"No use, Steve," he said softly. "It was too late."

"I knew the kid was a bad one," Garth said, peering down into the dead face. "I can spot 'em every time."

"What the hell?" Vance Coombs said. "Ain't somebody gonna buy me a drink?" A dozen men made the offer, and the kid was alone and dead, there on the table.

Doc looked up and he saw Dolly, her eyes wide, her cheeks drained of color. For a long time their eyes met and he saw all the loyalty in the world in that look, the kind of loyalty a woman gives her man when she knows he has failed.

"You did the best you could, Doc," she said, and then she turned and left because the emergency that had temporarily lowered the bars between women and men was gone now and she was a woman in a saloon and she didn't belong there.

Doc picked up his instruments and closed his case and he picked his overcoat off the floor. The pistol was heavy in the pocket. He was tired. He started toward his room at the back of the saloon and Steve followed him.

He had done his best. Dolly knew that. But his best hadn't been good enough, and Dolly knew that, too, and so did Steve. Maybe he couldn't have saved the kid even with everything going right. He probably couldn't have. But he would have had the satisfaction of knowing he had done everything that could be done. He didn't have that satisfaction now— He entered the room and Steve was close behind him.

They stood there in the room, the two of them, their thoughts running in identical patterns. Steve looked older now and he was thinking of how law came out of the end of a gun barrel. He put his hand on his brother's shoulder and there was no conviction in his voice.

"It's all right, Doc," he said. "I guess the best doctor in the world couldn't have pulled him through."

It was supposed to make Doc feel good, but it was like a slap in the face. "The best doctor in the world couldn't have pulled him through," Steve said. He probably didn't even realize exactly what he had said, but the point was that a year ago Steve wouldn't have said it that way. A year ago Steve would have said, "If *you* couldn't pull him through, Doc, nobody in the world could." That's what he would have said and it would have been a real compliment, the compliment of a man who has faith in another.

Doc stood there, thinking of what Steve had said, and he got to thinking of Steve driving that stage, getting set to buy a partnership in the business, and he kept thinking of how it would have been if it had been Steve on that table in there. Steve had slapped him in the face with that remark, but somehow it felt mighty good and now he knew why. He looked at Steve and said:

"Maybe it's just as well he died, Steve. They had already made up their minds he was guilty. If I had saved him they would have hanged him. There isn't a lawyer in this country who would have been good enough to get him out of it."

He saw the sudden anger flare in Steve's eyes, the color crawl into his cheeks, and it was what Doc wanted to see. For a second he thought Steve would lash back, and then he saw the understanding in Steve's eyes and he knew they were on even ground again.

They stood there silently a long time and then Steve said, "He doesn't

amount to much, out there on the table, but maybe he amounted to a lot to you and me. Shall we drink to him?"

"I'd like to," Doc said. The two brothers poured meager drinks and touched their glasses and then Doc shrugged into his coat.

"Where you going?" Steve asked.

"I've got a patient," Doc said. "Ez Prentice has got a boil on his neck."

"Ez Prentice," Steve said. "He was having some trouble with a couple of brothers cutting into his flume—"

"That's right," Doc said. "Want to come along?"

"Think I will," Steve said.

Ez was still talking to Steve about his legal rights in the flume matter when Doc was finished. Ez had worked up to ten o'clock of the day in question, so Steve would be tied up for some time yet. Doc hadn't seen Steve look so good in a long time.

"I'll be up to take a look at that in the morning," Doc said. "If it gets to hurting too much, take some of that pain killer of yours." He let himself out the door and closed it behind him.

Only a carbuncle, that's all it was. *Circumscribed inflammation of the subcutaneous tissue*— He grinned, remembering a long time back. Nothing highly specialized about what he had done for old Ez tonight, but he had handled it neatly and there was a lot of satisfaction in knowing he had. And there would be a lot of satisfaction for Steve in collecting damages from the Colbert brothers, who had cut into Ez Prentice's flume, depriving him of water. He walked swiftly down the path, his shoulders back.

The light was still on in Dolly's shop and he rattled the door. She opened it immediately and he knew she had been expecting him. It gave him a comfortable feeling. He didn't kiss her. He just stood there looking down at her, wanting to tell her a million things, unable to tell her anything. He shrugged out of his overcoat and his voice was gruff.

"Finally talked some sense into that kid brother of mine," he said. "He's going to handle that case for Ez Prentice."

She looked at him and there was softness and understanding in her eyes. "Is Ez Prentice's neck very bad?" she said.

So he didn't have to tell her a million things. He never would have to tell her, because she not only knew him as the man who owned the Nugget but also as Doctor Benton.

He sat down in a chair and she came and sat on his lap and put her cheek close to his. They sat that way a long time and suddenly he took her shoulders and turned her around so he could look straight into her eyes. He spoke rapidly.

"I've been thinking about selling the Nugget," he said. "Steve and I want to build a little office building and maybe I'd have enough to get the hospital started—"

She stopped his talk with her lips and when she finally spoke to him her voice was husky. "You didn't ask me to marry you when you came in," she said. "Why didn't you?"

"Same reason I didn't ask you when I first knew you," he said. "Who'd want to marry a man my age, just starting out in his profession?"

"I would, Doctor," she said. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

He said he would and she said she'd make a pot, but it was a long time before she got around to doing it.

A "Paintin' Pistoleer" Yarn

Apache's Heir Male

By WALKER A. TOMPKINS

A small-scale riot, a lost jail key, and a belated stork combine to reduce 'Pache to a tempestuous turmoil—a not unfamiliar condition.

IT'S a blessing that February 29th only horns into the colander onct ever four years, if what happent to the citizuns of Apache, Arizona Territory, is any sample. Ever calamity under tarnation waited to bust out on Leap Year Day. To-wit:

(1) The big riot exploded in the Feedbag Cafe, which resulted in might-nigh ever male in town winding up behint bars in the 'Pache jail; (2) Sheriff Rimfire Cudd keerlessly mislaid the only key to said calaboose, requirin' a trip to a locksmith in Tombstone afore said citizuns could resume their normal place in Apache's munisipple affairs; and (3) to caption the climax, the stork decided this was a good time to make a father out of old Sol Fishman, who runs the O. K. Mercantile!

Sol's wife Prunelly couldn't of chose a worse time. It warn't as if the event was a surprise; durin' the months she was prevalent, the Ladies' Knittin' & Peach Preserves Society had kept

busy whompin' up infunt trappings, what they call lay-its, hemmed enough three-cornert pants to patch hell a mile, and the like of that. Old Sol picked a name out early for his first-born—"Moe." Everthing, you would have figgered, was plumb ready for the stork to show up with his bundle from heaven. One thing shore, the impendin' event had kept Apache agoggle with suspenders.

So what does the long-laiged bird do but come rompin' down the chutes a hull week late, on the very day when the only doctor in Stirrup County, Sigmoid Grubb, was languishin' in a jail to which the key was nowhar to be found!

The trouble all started, o' course, with the riot which busted out at the Feedbag Cafe. Like most civil wars, the cause of all the ruckus was a picayune thing. Seems Dyspepsia Dan, the cafe man, had ordered a bunch of fancy menu cards printed up by Inky McKrimp, editor of the *Apache Weekly Warwhoop*. Inky was a mite stewed when he set up the type, and when he delivered the menus Dyspepsia Dan says he'll be dag-blasted ifn he'll pay for 'em. Claimed said menus would be bad for business, and he calls in Plato X. Scrounge, the local justice of the peaces, to referee the squabble.

Lawyer Scrounge takes a gander at the menu Inky had printed, and allows Dyspepsia has a basis for a lawsuit, all right. McKrimp's printin' job looked as follers:

Feedbag Cafe's 35c
De Lucks Dinner:
Bean Soap—Buttered Parrots
Fried Unions—Roast Beer
oiled Eggs—Angle-Food Coke

Well, the upshoots of it was that Inky McKrimp lambasts old Dyspepsia Dan with a jug of his Tarantular Juice, so Plato X. Scrounge, Curly Bill Grane of the Bloated Goat Saloon, and Sol Fishman pile into Inky hammer and tongues. Inky hollers for reinforcements, which arrive pronto in the shape of Jim Groot the banker, Clem Chouder the saddlemaker, and Lew Pirtle the Overland Telegraph operator. Then the fur really begin to fly.

Sheriff Rimfire Cudd hears the ruckus goin' on and knows the situation is out of his control. So he rattles his hocks upstairs over the Longhorn Saddle Shop where the young artist feller Justin Other Smith has his studio. Cudd's reason being that Smith is the champeen pistol shot of Arizona Territory, which same is why he is better knowed hereabouts as the Paintin' Pistoleer.

Well, Justin O. buckles on his famous .32 on a .45 frame and with the sheriff slinkin' along behind him, wades into the pantymonium at the Feedbag. Smith's got his dander up, and inside of two shakes he is marchin' the rioters down to the Apache jail.

"Finish yore feudin' behint the bars," Rimfire Cudd bellers, actin' like *he* jailed the black and blue bunch. "You ain't gittin' out until this foolish augerment is settled permanent."

The Paintin' Pistoleer goes back to his studio, plumb annoyed at bein' interrupted in the middle of a painting he's daubing up to sell to a mail-order catalog for a cover. He's about forgot the Feedbag affair when Rimfire Cudd moseys in, looking sheepish, but also somewhat sly and foxy.

"Justin," the sheriff confesses, "I went to feed them wallopers I arrested, and be-dogged ifn I kin find my keys—must o' lost 'em in the shuffle. Looked high an' low for 'em without

a veil. Only thing I can see to do is ketch the noon stage for Tombstone and have a locksmith whomp up a dupli-kate key."

Rimfire goes on to explain that the local blacksmith, Anvil Aggie, can't do the work, on account of her being over in Bisbee this week attendin' a cornvention of the Bone-Dry Anti-Saloon Corps, along with Hernia Groot and Samanthie Coddlewort, the Apache dellyguts to said powwow.

"And while I'm in Tombstone," Rimfire goes on to say, grinnin' like a chessy-cat caught in a butter churn, "I might as well take in the show at the Birdcage Theater—the Can-Can Queens from Paris. I ain't seed a pair o' dimpled kneecaps in a coon's age."

The Paintin' Pistoleer has a hunch old Rimfire rigged up this excuse to git over to Tombstone a-purpose, chargin' it up to the county as a necessary official trip, but he don't say nothin'. He promises to feed the passle of jailbirds Rimfire has got locked up ontil the sheriff gits back with a key.

After Cudd leaves for Tombstone, Apache simmers down to some peace and quiet. A friendly poker game is goin' on over to the jail, Dyspepsia Dan and Inky McKrimp havin' let doggones be doggones, and Justin O. is puttin' the finishin' touches on his latest masterpiece. And then, without warnin, the studio door flies open and in comes Rosette Cogbottle Chouder, who runs the Busted Flush Dance Hall. She's puffin' like a mare with the heaves.

"Justin, I need yore help desprit," Rosette blabbers. "Missus Fishman is fixin' to have her baby at last, and be dogged ifn I can locate Doc Grubb at his orifice. The saloon's locked up. I know for a fact Doc wasn't involved in that ruction at the Feedbag this mornin'. You have any idea where he might be at?"

The Paintin' Pistoleer shudders. He knows where Doc Grubb is, all right. In the Apache jail, which can't be unlocked until tomorrow! Last night, the good doctor—who is also 'Pache's coroner, vetinary, barber, and dentist—imbibed a mite too much liver tonic, and the boys lugged him over to the Cowboy's Rest Hotel to sleep off his jag. Next thing the gang at the Bloated Goat Saloon knowed, Sigmoid Grubb has like to tore down the hotel, accordin' to the proprietor, Crowfoot Hoskins. Seems Grubb's vision is muddled, and he accuses Hoskins of puttin' him in a double room instead of a single, which costs two bits extry, and Sigmoid won't stand for such extravagance.

Result, Sheriff Cudd had locked up the doctor for the night—and neglected to turn him loose after the Feedbag Cafe riot jammed the hoosegow to the rafters. What a mess!

"I'll fetch the doctor pronto, Missus Chouder," the Paintin' Pistoleer lies like a rug. "You tell Missus Fishman not to worry."

Justin O. shags over to the jail and informs Sigmoid Grubb, who is dealing stud at the moment, that Prunelly has arrived at her personal Labor Day and needs him urgent. At this news, pore old Sol Fishman like to have a conniption fit. Ifn he'd been younger he would of tore out the jail bars by the roots.

Well, Sigmoid allows that the only thing he knows to do is telegraph a doctor to rush over from Lordsburg, seein' as how Rimfire Cudd won't be back to open up the jail until *mañana*, by which time the stork will have

come and went.

"How can I send a telegram," moans the Paintin' Pistoleer, "when Lew Pirtle is locked up along with the rest of you?"

Doc scratches his bald noggin. "This is plumb serious.

"They's only one alternative, under the circumstances," Doc Grubb says. "Most of the babies in Stirrup County of late years have been ushered into this vale of tears by Miss Fallopia Twitchell. And she at the present is workin' out at Skinflint Forth's ranch while Skinflint's wife Sally is laid up with a broke laig. As a midwife Fallopia is top-hand reliable."

Everbody, including Sol Fishman, breathes a heap easier when they remember Fallopia Twitchell. She's a colored mammy from Justin's home state, Alabama, who has delivered so many babies out in the rural districts of Stirrup County, without chargin' a red nickel for her services, that the cowboys hereabouts have nicknamed her "R.F.D."

"You quit tearin' out what little hair you got left, Sol," the Paintin' Pistoleer says. "I'll have Fallopia Twitchell back here in time to usher little Moe into the world."

So Justin O. slaps a hull on his speedy palomino stallion, Skeeter, and hightails out toward Skinflint Forth's two-bit cowspread. He rides Skeeter's hocks into the ground, because the last report he got from the Fishman household, the stork is only a matter of two-three hours off, if that.

Skeeter is nigh dead by the time Smith arrives at Skinflint's run-down homestead. He finds the old man's bedridden wife, Sally, bellerin' with grief.

"My no-'count husbind has gone and fell down the well this mornin'," Sally Forth blubbers. "It's a cinch he's drownt by now, and us with our winter crops not in yet. You got to fish his carcass out o' that well afore it contaminates the water."

Smith says he will, and for Sally to tell Fallopia Twitchell to saddle a nag and head back to Apache quick as she can.

"Fallopia's gone for help to the neighbors t'other side of Razorback Ridge," Mrs. Forth says. "She won't be back for hours."

Well, that's a perty howdy-do, for a fact. Distances bein' what they are betweenst neighbors out here in the West, Fallopia is by now a good twenty mile further away from Apache than she was. And Smith knows he'll have to fish Skinflint out of the well, at a time when minutes was precious beyond price.

The Paintin' Pistoleer goes out and looks down the well. Skinflint Forth is still alive, but he's been treadin' water since ten o'clock, and he claims he's already gone under twict.

Skinflint ain't hardly worth saving, being a penny-pinchin' no-good who put green spectacles on his cow critters so they'll eat excelsior thinkin' it is alfalfy hay. That accounts for his windlass rope bein' so frazzled out it busted and dropped him in the drink.

Anyway, the Paintin' Pistoleer takes his lass' rope offn Skeeter's saddle and passes it down to the old sodbuster, who takes a good holt on the loop and hangs on while Smith starts haulin' him up. By the time Justin O. has Skinflint almost up to the ground level, he has to pause to ketch his breath. While he's restin', the Paintin' Pistoleer explains how the stork is due any time now at Prunelly Fishman's, and how he can ill afford wastin' this time

when he should be trackin' down the baby specialist, Fallopia Twitchell.

"She's gone over to Ezry Stump's place for help," Skinflint pants. "I know a short cut that'll save you half a mile. You reckoleck where Gopher Crick cuts acrost Razorback Ridge?"

Smith shakes his head, being too pooped for further talk.

"Well," Skinflint says, letting go of the rope with one hand so he can p'int, "you go due north till you come to a fork—"

At this spot in his instructions, Skinflint sees the need to let go his other hand, bein' an hombre who can't talk without usin' his hands to give directions with. The result was, of course, that gravity takes over and old man Forth winds up in the bottom of the well agin with a resoundin' splash.

The Paintin' Pistoleer is so disgusted he is sore tempted to let the old hayshaker drown, but he sticks to the job and finally hauls Skinflint out onto terror firmer. By this time Skeeter has got his second wind, so Smith lights a shuck for Ezra Stump's ranch, twenty mile away, prayin' his heart out that Prunella Fishman's stork will get delayed en route.

Fordin' Gopher Crick, Justin O. is overjoyed to meet up with the Stump boys, ridin' hell-for-leather to Skinflint's resycue. But his heart sinks when he sees Fallopia ain't with 'em.

"Seems she got word that one of Chief Ache-in-the-Back's squaws is expecticating a papoose day after termorrow," Ezra Stump explains, "so Fallopia has gone over to perform her midwife duties, as she allus does when any o' them redskins holler for help on their eternity cases."

Ain't nothin' to do but turn Skeeter around and head him for the Cheerycow Injun Reservation. It's gettin' onto the shank end of the afternoon when he finally reins up outside of Chief Ache-in-the-Back's hogan.

Yes, Fallopia Twitchell allows that she is available for emergency duty over to Prunelly Fishman's. But things hit a snag when Fallopia goes to saddle up her crowbait pony and discovers that some pesky varmint has stole her prized red saddle blanket. Fallopia right off accuses Ache-in-the-Back of bein' the thief.

"Ah ain't budgin' one step," Fallopia says, "ontil Ah gits me back that air blanket which cost me a passle of dinero from a mail-order house. You make this mangy redskin give me back my proppity, Mistuh Smith. It's the reddist danged blanket in these parts, an' Ah don't aim to git skun out of it by no heathen."

Old Ache-in-the-Back looks plumb insulked and says he ain't stole nothin' in his life. Which is a damn lie.

"Mebbe the chief ain't a thief," Fallopia flares to Justin, "but ifn Ah was a chicken, Ah'd shore roost high ifn Ah seen him a-snoopin' around the hen yard."

The Paintin' Pistoleer groans, knowing that Miss Twitchell sets a sight of store on her red hoss blanket. He fishes a gold eagle out of his Levis and slips it to the chief's son, a young buck name of Little Gopher Behint the 8-Ball, who hands it over to Fallopia to buy herself a new saddle blanket with. That smooths down her feathers. (Smith finds out later that Ache-in-the-Back hooked that condemned blanket to wrop his newest papoose in.)

Anyhow, along about dark, the Paintin' Pistoleer finally delivers Miss Fallopia Twitchell at the Fishman residunce. He's half a-scairt to go in,

for fear little Moe has already put in his appearance without obstreptical assistance.

Goin' inside, Smith gits the surprise of his life. Seems that Doc Grubb has been on the job all afternoon, and so far, little Moe ain't showed up. The entire passle of Rimfire Cudd's worst-while jail prisoners are hunkered around the Fishman parlor waitin' for news from Prunelly's bedroom.

"Seems that old Rimfire lost his keys a-purpose," Plato X. Scrounge explains. "Leastwise they drapped smack in the middle of our poker table when a pack rat knocked 'em out of a knothole in a rafter. Happent just after you left town, Justin."

Dyspepsia Dan says, "We've already had Lew Pirtle dispatch a tellygrum to Rimfire Cudd, tellin' him not to waste ary more o' the taxpayer's money havin' a new key made over in Tombstone."

The Paintin' Pistoleer has a good idea that telegram will ketch up with Rimfire Cudd at the Birdcage Theater, but he don't tell on the sheriff.

Plumb tuckered, Justin Other Smith decides to stick around and be among the first to corngratulate Sol Fishman when his heir male makes his long-awaited appearance. It seems that approaching fatherhood is a painful process. Sol is in perty bad shape, anyhow; he's stretched out on a sofy, keepin' himself perkin' with the help of some pills Doc Grubb has give him.

Everbody else is feeling tolerable, except Lew Pirtle. Lew has been carryin' a chip on his shoulder the size of a sawlog ever since the *Weekly Warwhoop* printed the news of Prunelly's impendin' motherhood 'way back last June. Lew has the biggest fambly in town, and it appears he cain't tolerate competition and sharin' the paternal limelight with an old gaffer like Sol Fishman. Result is, Lew mopes in a corner and makes sneerin' remarks about how stove up Sol is, flat on his back and moanin' like a colicky calf.

All of a suddent a squall rips out of Prunelly's bedroom like a tomcat with his tail kotched between a rock and a hard place. Folks is lookin' at each other plumb putrified when the door opens and out waddles Fallopia Twitchell, her black face grinnin' like a slice of watermelon. She's totin' a little wigglin' bundle in her arms, at sight of which Sol Fishman comes alive and races over from the sofy like a shot from a gun. Fallopia pulls back a flap of the blanket and lets Sol take a peek at his first-born.

Tears is leakin' down old Sol's cheeks as he sizes up this little tomato-colored bundle of humanity. It has noodle-sized fingers but it bawls like a brimmer bull.

"My little Moe—my beloved little Moe," Sol whispers blubbery-like, strokin' a finger acrost his baby's little shoe-button nose. "My precious little son and heir. Bless yore wrinkled little hide. Why, Fallopia, he's the spittin' image of Prunelly, ain't he?"

Folks look at the floor embarrassed, thinkin' to theirselves it can't be *that* bad. Jim Groot mutters sympathetic, "Babies allus look horrible at first, they tell me. The little varmint will grow in favor, just give him a chanct, Sol."

Clem Chouder tries to patch up Groot's fox puss by remarking, "I cal'clate as how he looks like *you*, Sol. Leastwise, he ain't got a hair on his noggin' nor a tooth in his haid!"

Sol ain't listenin' nohow. He whis-

pers husky-like, strokin' the baby's little postage-stamp ear, "Moe, my son, you don't know how often I've prayed for this moment. A man-child to carry on my name—you're my hull world, little Moe."

Fallopia Twitchell gulps hard, like everbody else within earshot of old Sol, and she says meek, "Dis lil pickaninny ain't lil Moe, suh. She's six pound o' baby girl, dat's wot she is."

Sol Fishman's jaw flaps open. Over in the corner Lew Pirtle lets out a howl and slaps his laig, comin' up with some smart-allick remark as ifn it was a disgrace to father a girl-child. Finally Lew ketches a look from Justin O. that makes him shet up.

Fallopia ducks back into the bedroom, pokes her shinin' black face through the door, and giggles, "Don't yo' git impatient, Marse Fishman suh. Mo's a-comin', Doc say. You jes' wait a shake—Doc say Mo's a comin'."

It taken Sol Fishman a couple minutes to realize what Fallopia has said. Then he busts out in a grin from ear to ear and turns around to face Lew Pirtle over acrost the room.

"You hearn what she said, Lew—Moe's a comin'!" Sol cackles. "Moe's a comin'— Hey! That must mean— I've give birth to—to—"

Sol's voice peters out and he pitches over in a dead faint. Curly Bill Grane revives him with a jag of Blue Bagpipe Scotch he has fotched over from the Bloated Goat Saloon for celebratin' purposes.

Time Sol rallies out of it, the Paintin' Pistoleer says in that soft Alabama drawl of hisn, "Twins aren't a calamity, Sol. Proves what a man you are. I'm the youngest of thirteen, myself, and my mammy didn't produce one set of twins in the whole lot."

"She didn't?" Sol gulps, beginning to grin.

Lew Pirtle sings out sourcrastic-like from his corner over by the heatin' stove, "*I* have fathered *two sets* of twins," he reminds everbody in the room. "So what call has Sol got to brag he's a better man than I be? Huh! It's redickilous!"

Just then the bedroom door opens and back comes Fallopia Twitchell. This time she ain't grinnin' quite so wide. In her arms she's packing *two* squirming little bundles from heaven.

"Ah's sorry, Marse Fishman," she applegizes, "but Doctuh Grubb, he claim dese are girl-chiles too."

Sol blinks his eyes and staggers over to size up Fallopia's armload of little Fishmans. Then he turns to Curly Bill Grane, his eyes so red it appears he'll bleed to death if he don't shet 'em, and complains, "Bill, I'm seein' double. You shouldn't 'a' poured that rot-gut down my gullet whilst I was helpless."

Fallopia titters and confirms the worst. "Yo'-all ain't seein' double, Marse Fishman. Dese yar chilluns is in excess of an' in addition to the little bundle o' job I exhibitated recently previous."

Rosette Chouder, who is hoverin' nearby, lets out a squeal like a goosed polecat, ketching on quicker than anyone else present.

"Sol, you old scallywag," Rosette hollers, "you have sired TRIPLETS! The first triplets in the history of Apache, I do declare. Oh, happy day in the mornin'!"

Well, you would of thought Sol would have passed out on the spot, but it appears he's too numb to register any more bad news. He swings around and p'ints a finger acrost the room to

where Lew Pirtle is sulking.

"Triplets!" he guffaws. "I don't reckon *you* got three of a kind over at the Pirtle residunce, eh, Lucius? Specially on the very first deal—yak, yak!"

Lew Pirtle half-draws his six-shoot pistol out of leather, then thinks better of it and stalks out of the house, and don't come back the rest of the evenin'. Damn good riddance, too.

By now Fallopia has whisked the babies back out of sight. From all the squallin' goin' on behint that door, you'd of thought Sigmoid Grubb had delivered a litter of porkers.

Sol Fishman begins to look glum. He just remembers that Fallopia said all three of his young-uns was girls, and "Moe" was the name he was dead-set on brandin' his first-born.

"Prunelly allus did exaggerate things," Sol tries to laugh it off as a joke. Then his face goes sour. "Think of the expanses I got ahead of me," he wails hollow-like. "Three cribs to buy. Three outfits o' didie-pants. Why, the O. K. Mercantile will go bankruptured supportin' so many shemale kids. I can see it now, when they git to fryin'-size and all three of 'em want party dresses to onct. Oh, whoa is me!"

There ain't no answer to that. Everbody cuddles their brains, trying to think of somethin' cheerful to say. This watch-party is fast turnin' into a funeral wake. Finally Heck Coddlewort, hisself the father of a big brood, comes up with a happy thought.

"You ree-lize what day this is?" he reminds Sol. "The 29th of February. Leap Year. That means you won't have the expense of a birthday party except onct ever four years. Why, you're a fool for luck, ifn you only knew it."

That perts up Sol cornsiderable. Finally he hears the caterwauling quieting down in the bedroom, and he knocks timid-like on the door.

"I'd like to see Momma," he whimpers. "I'd like to know how Prunelly's bearin' up, knowin' she hit the jackpot with trip—"

Just then the door bats open in Sol's beezer and out comes Sigmoid Grubb, rollin' down his shirt sleeves, follered by Fallopia. And Fallopia, monopolous as this may sound, is cuddlin' *another* derringer-sized best-yeller in her arms.

"Well, Sol, yore fourth draw makes it a full house," the Doc sings out. "This one's a boy. McKrimp, you better hike over to yore noosepaper shop and run off an extra. Quadrupeds don't happen in 'Pache every day."

Sol's eyes roll up in his head and there is a heavy thud as he hits the floor again, for cause. This time it'll take artificial restitution to save Sol, which Doc gets busy on pronto.

Inky McKrimp lets out a holler and says to Doc Grubb, "Git back in thar on the job, Sigmoid. If Prunelly has fivetupelets I'll put a stop-press bulletin on the wires to ever editor in the U. S. A. Leave Sol sleep it off—you git back in there!"

Doc Grubb, busy workin' on father Sol, shakes his head.

"The hand has been played," he allows. "Prunelly decided to stand pat on three queens and a jack. I am happy to report she is restin' easy and the little tikes are prime specimens from muzzle to butt-plates. Three heifers and a little bullet—I reckon this is the crownin' achievement of my career as an obstreptician."

Well, the shin-dig breaks up, seein' as how the performance was finished with no encores in prospect, this year anyhow. The Paintin' Pistoleer stables his hoss at the Mare's Nest Livery

Barn, has himself a little nap, and later drags hisself over to the Bloated Goat Saloon to brace hisself up with a glass of buttermilk. He's still perty frazzled out from gallivantin' over half the county and the Injun reservation, chousin' up Fallopia Twitchell. Turned out Doc needed help, though, so his efforts warn't wasted.

The barroom's jam-packed, a shore sign somebody's settin' up the house. Turns out to be Sol Fishman hisself, fully recovered from his ordeal, strut-tin' and braggin' like as ifn Prunelly didn't desarve no credit a-tall.

Rimfire Cudd ain't around, him still oggling pink tights in Tombstone, and Inky McKrimp is busy publishin' an extry edition, the first issue of the *Weekly Warwhoop* to appear in months. Likewise cornspicuous for his absence is Lew Pirtle, the telegraph man.

"I really fixed that stone-of-a-peach proper," Sol cackles like a turkey gob-let. "Done handed him forty-three telly-grums to git on the wire to my relates and Prunelly's. I bet old Lew is pound-in' that tellygraft key until daylight, spreadin' the word that he ain't cham-peen daddy o' 'Pache no more."

Sol hands the Paintin' Pistoleer a see-gar as a momentum of the great occasion. Smith thanks him and says:

"Well, Dad, have you picked out brands for those cute critters yet?"

Sol snaps his gallus and grins like his throat is cut from here to Thurs-day. His vest buttons is long since popped off.

"Shore have," he chuckles, happy as a hawg suckin' eggs. "That is to say, Prunelly named our datters, bless their little pink jaws. She christened 'em Eeny, Meeny, and Miney. Their broth-er," Sol goes on fit to bust, "I aim to call him—"

Smith interrupts weary-like, "Let me guess the boy's name?"

And, of course, Justin Other Smith guesses right, first crackle out of the box. That Paintin' Pistoleer warn't be-hint the door when the brains was passed out, no-sirree!

Answers to "Choose Your Weapons!" Quiz on page 115

1. Road agents like Black Bart used to hold up stagecoaches with a DOUBLE-BARRELED SHOTGUN. 2. The SHARPS BUFFALO GUN, fondly called "Big Fifty." 3. Punctilious gamblers carried the tiny DERRINGER to preclude unsightly bulges. 4. The rare and much sought-after DREYSE NEEDLE GUN. 5. The KENTUCKY "LONG RIFLE" proved its worth on the Appalachian frontier before it moved west. 6. The SMITH & WESSON pioneered use of metallic cartridges; its hinged frame permitted break-down loading. 7. The WINCHESTER '73 model was the first practical repeating rifle. 8. The HAWKEN, an abbreviated "long rifle," was commonly used by the trappers, or moun-tain men. 9. The .44-caliber COLT'S "FRONTIER MODEL" was the favorite post-Civil War six-shooter. 10. The five-shot "PATERSON" COLT was introduced by the Texas Rangers.

A Quick-Fire Novelette by L. L. Foreman

Triggerman Tarry

En route to Old Mexico to avoid the unwanted attentions of a dozen lawmen, a long rider makes a brief but turbulent stop-over in Principe.

Chapter One

Partners of Desperation

HIS eyes stayed cool and remote, scanning the purple-hazed mountain peaks southward. Somewhere down there, where he had to go, there had to be water. In measured miles the distance had no meaning. The meaning rested on many hours of travel on a played-out horse.

There had to be water. He refused to allow his thoughts to extend beyond that definite necessity, except to consider his destination—which was Old Mexico. He had to get there.

His sins were catching up with him at last. The posses were out, animated by heavy cash rewards. He was a badly wanted man. The law had arrived at last—in Colorado and Arizona, and even in Texas. He stood high on the list. He was on the long dodge, taking a chance on the desert of Llano No Sombras, as they called it, because all other routes south were watched and blocked.

Mexico was liberty. His horse, coated with sweat and dust, plodded onward, head at half-mast. A tired horse. He

was sorry for it, and he let it choose its own pace. It was a close scrape, whether the No Sombras would beat him; maybe it would. No anxiety cracked his granite mask of a face. Long ago he had cast out the useless luxuries of hope and fear.

Broad-bodied, powerful in muscle, his tall figure threw a sharp shadow against the tawny glare of No Sombras's sifting sands. His browned face was broad, too; tough. His eyes were deep-set. The muscles bulged around them. He was a fist-scrapper and a gunman.

A shifting speck disturbed the stillness off to the west, where the red cliffs of the Arco Iris overhung the yellow sand. He slid his look there and inspected the tiny mark. It wavered in the heated air.

He spat dust from his lips and said to his horse, "That damn fool's afoot. He might have some water. Let's drift over an' see."

The tired horse lifted its ears to his voice. It changed course to the touch of the rein, snuffing at the grassless sand.

"Howya!"

At the curtly hailed greeting the man on foot swung around so startledly he nearly tripped over his own feet. The shock in his eyes was a measure of his desperate condition. Senses numbed, all effort concentrated on keeping moving, plodding doggedly southward, he had heard nothing. His face, under the stubble of beard and smeared dust, appeared young, but haggard. He stared and the instinctive jerk of his right hand hipward told the rider all he cared to know about his past. Here was another man who for good reasons of his own had elected to bet his last chip against the No Sombras. And lost. This land of no shadows was hard to beat.

"Take it easy, there!" The rider gave the command in a harsh, calm tone. His cold eyes searched briefly. "No water?"

"No." The hand hesitated, dropped, empty. There was a pause while the two regarded each other. "No, my canteen gave out. So did my horse. I'm in a fix if I don't find water soon."

"So'm I. There's a seep-spring just down below the Arcos, if it isn't gone dry. Or used to be. Nothing else, that I recall, till you're off the plain and around the lava beds. Then's when you strike the old fork of the Chisum route, to a town called Principe. Cow country, though I hear some lucky ducks struck gold around there a couple years back. From Principe it's maybe four days' jaunt to Old Mexico. Less, if a man's in a hurry. And less yet, if he takes the main stage road straight south and crosses the Rio Grande at El Paso—but I don't recommend it for privacy."

"Thanks for the information." Licking his cracked lips, the younger man worked up a wry grin. "How'll I reach that seep-spring? It might's well be a thousand miles off."

"This horse won't carry double, shape it's in," was the curt response. "We'd neither of us reach it."

"I guess you're right. Well, so long. My name's York. If you make it to that town, Principe—"

"Uh-huh. Mine is Tarry. Yeah, I'll send help."

Tarry lifted his reins. There was nothing he and this York pilgrim could do for each other. Still, he delayed his departure, scowling off at the blue-hazed Arcos so far away. It

wasn't easy, leaving a man to stumble to death of thirst and exhaustion. He could do it, he knew, without a backward look, as he had done many ruthlessly necessary acts in his life. But it meant closing another door against memory, and memory of late had become a scarred rebel armed with a picklock.

"Hell of a country, this," York mentioned. "And I sure don't rate its folks high, either."

He couldn't have made a much worse remark. Tarry said in an even, biting voice, "That so? These Mexican folks, as I reckon you call 'em in your damn ignorance, don't suit you? By God, they rate higher than most lousy pilgrims dodging down here from Wyoming or Nebraska, or wherever the hell you come from! In the first place, they ain't Mexicans. They're Spanish-Americans, born right here in New Mexico, which, in case you don't know—and you prob'ly don't—is United States territory. It's as United States as your damn—"

"Whoa!" York raised a hand. "What I—"

"In the second place," Tarry pursued, ignoring the interruption, "when I was a kid I was took in and raised by so-called Mexicans, in Texas. I like these folks, *sabe?* I been all over this Southwest country, and they've helped me when things were so tight—hell, I know 'em better'n any Nebraska tramp will ever—"

"Wyoming," York said. "I'm from Wyoming. Phew! Look, I didn't aim to raise a storm. Man! All I meant was, four riders passed this morning, on good horses, with canteens. They didn't even give me a drink. They weren't Mexicans—I mean Spanish-Americans, excuse me."

"Four together? Going south?" Tarry was at once his taciturn self, his eyes bleak and thoughtful. "Which way did they come from?"

"Socorro, I guess, same as me."

"Hum. That accounts for me not seeing 'em. I came down through Carrizozo. Didn't look like law?"

York shook his head emphatically. "Four boogers on the prowl, I'd say. Is that a ridge way over there west? The long one, that looks like a big broken sand dune. They went over it. No sign of 'em since. Seems to me I should've seen 'em after they got to that stretch beyond. Dirty damn buzzards! Looked me over and laughed at me, and rode on!"

"Maybe they know of a shading rock somewhere there. I don't." Tarry scrubbed his broad blue jaw. "Some years since I came this way. Maybe they've made camp till she cools. Had canteens, hum?"

They regarded each other again. York said, "I guess I could hang onto a stirrup strap and walk that far."

Tarry dismounted. "I guess we both will." On the ground he loomed even taller, bigger, than he did in the saddle. He wore two heavy guns in skeleton holsters, suspended from a wide black belt studded with double rows of shells. He hitched the belt up and buckled it tighter.

"If your feet give out, just fall down quiet and don't bother me. I'll bring water back if those ducks have got any and I find 'em. Anybody who won't share water in this country ain't entitled to it."

"You need me, to show where they crossed that ridge."

"No, I don't. Their tracks won't be hard to follow."

They started off, holding onto the

stirrup straps of the horse trudging between them. The pace of the horse was easy, but after a while Tarry wore a scowl of discomfort. Walking he regarded as the lowest form of human activity, and his boots weren't made for it. The close-fitting toes pinched, and the high heels sank into the sand. He guessed York would have to give up soon.

The distance to the ridge was cruelly deceptive, though not to Tarry's desert-wise eyes. On and on went the tracks of the four riders, every mile promising to be the last, the ridge inching slowly higher until it no longer bore any likeness to a sand dune. It became a great backbone of volcanic rock, heaved up from the desert like a reef in the sea. The horse halted discouragedly at the foot of it. Though steep, the slope wasn't impassable. Other horses had gone up and over. But not this horse.

York, all in, leaned against the horse and mumbled, "I don't blame you. Me too." His boots were wrecks that leaked sand and allowed glimpses of blistered, bleeding feet. He had uttered no complaint all the way, while his face was that of a man tortured to the end of endurance. He caught Tarry's considering look. "I'm through. I can't make this, any more'n the horse."

Tarry tried to work up some saliva to ease his parched throat, and swore. "Horse has got to, if I have to quirt him every damn step. Crawl onto the saddle."

"No, you go on."

"Crawl aboard, I said! Or do I have to take the quirt to you, too, you weak-kneed Wyoming quitter?"

Glaring, York obeyed. "Blast you, I'd like to take you up on that when I'm able! What a country! An' I still don't rate its folks high, see?"

"Shut up!" Tarry rasped. "Nobody invited you here!" He led the horse up the slope, after a few pungent words of persuasion.

"Shut up, yourself!" York retorted. "You got me on this nag, in plain sight for those four to shoot at if they're—"

A scatter of shots cracked out, and they both shut up. They flung up their heads, eyes ranging along the rim of the ridge. The shooting went on, the sounds magnified and confused by the echoing rock.

"It's down the other side," Tarry stated, listening. "They're not shooting at us."

"Let's see what they *are* shooting at," said York, and kicked with both heels. The horse scraped past Tarry and all but knocked him down. For a man who had been griping a minute ago over the chance of being shot at, York showed scant shyness in getting to where the guns popped.

Tarry made a flying grab at the horse, missed, and knew the dark humiliation of being left behind to use his long legs. He passed no remark about it when he caught up with York on the rim, but the blunt hardness of his face was somewhat more pronounced.

York exclaimed to him, "I knew those buzzards were on the prowl!" He was dragging Tarry's .58 rifle from its saddle scabbard. "Look! They've dry-gulched a guy in a wagon!"

Tarry nodded. "I got eyes. What d'you figure to do with my long gun? Gimme it here!" He jerked it from York's hands and scanned the situation below.

A wagon had halted in the act of hastily trying to turn, judging from the tracks and the cramping of the

front wheels. Both leaders of the six-mule team were down and kicking, the rest in a plunging tangle. It was a freight wagon, smaller and lighter than most, with high plank sides and a canvas cover. The driver was gone from his seat. He had evidently jumped off and run to the rear of the wagon, for a gun puffed smoke from there.

Tarry looked for the attackers. He spotted four horses down along a shoulder of the slope, hidden from the wagon, but of their owners all he could catch was an occasional glimpse among the fallen rocks below. They had chosen cover carefully, and everything pointed to their having sprung a deliberate ambush on the wagon. It was a puzzle, the presence of the wagon so far off all known trails. Tarry turned his regard back to it.

"There's a water keg roped on the tailgate," he commented. "That fellow's shooting over it. We better bust out those ducks before they puncture that keg."

"How'll we get at 'em?" York queried.

"Well," Tarry drawled, "seeing how you make so free with my belongings, I'll just let you ride down in style!"

He hit the horse a healthy smack on the flank with his open hand, and loosed a cougar growl. The horse, standing hipshot and brooding, whistled its startled snort and its first bound put it well on the downward path. There was no stopping, once it started. Sliding, lurching, its haunches at the squat and forefeet stamping, the horse careened down at the head of a boil of dust and rattling stones. York had the option of rolling off or hanging on. He hung on.

The firing from below came to an abrupt stop. Out from cover scrambled the four men, the blur of their faces turned up toward the rider hurtling down at them. Tarry raised his saddle gun unhurriedly, watching them. One of them chopped a shot at York. The others waited for the target to get closer and clearer. They failed to take into account the sense of the horse. It wasn't going to smash into that jumble of rocks, if it could help it.

Somehow, sliding in an arc, the horse bent its course and avoided the rocks. The four men ran out to catch York in the open, and Tarry nodded, satisfied. They had left themselves without much cover close at hand to jump to. They were not too bright, he decided. Bushwhack thieves—the kind that gave middling-honest long riders a bad name, the law too often failing to distinguish any difference. He placed his contempt on them with his grim judgment.

The .58 rifle exploded shells. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

The Prize of Principe

QUIETLY, the four horses submitted to being led toward the wagon, shying only once, near the rocks. The mules had settled down. The silence of No Sombra had returned.

Tarry inspected the horses and balanced his choice between two buckskins. His own horse wouldn't be much good for a long time to come. The owners of these four wouldn't ever need them again. They weren't going anywhere. From a canteen he drank slowly, rolling the water in his mouth before swallowing, and tried to decide which buckskin was the better

horse. They were both good.

York approached him from the wagon. Tarry eyed him with a tinge of humor, prepared for some reaction from his unwilling charge down the ridge. But York's reactions had become side-tracked by something else.

He said gravely, "Dead man in the wagon. His name is Ramon Torre, and he's from Colorado."

"Makes five to bury," said Tarry. "If he's dead, how d'you know his name and where he's from?"

"His daughter told me."

"His—*wha-at?* Where's she?"

"Over at the wagon. Her name," York reported in a hushed voice, "is Avelina."

Tarry decided on the *bayo coyote*, the buckskin with the stripe down its back, and thought of putting his saddle on it right away. A scared and sobbing woman was more than he cared to deal with. She'd expect him and York to get her and the wagon safely home, standing guard every night on the way in case she had bad dreams. She'd take it for granted that they had been sent by a special providence to look out for her.

On the other hand—

"Here she comes," York whispered softly.

Tarry saw her. He looked hard at her to check his first impression, and doubled it. On the other hand, he thought, it wouldn't be right to pull out. It wouldn't be right to leave it all to York.

Avelina Torre had certainly been sobbing, as her eyes showed. They were dark eyes under long lashes. She wasn't sobbing now because, Tarry guessed, she felt that strangers should not be embarrassed by an exhibition of grief. She was of that kind, he knew at once, he who knew the Spanish people of the Southwest. He visualized her as she'd be when merry, a laughing girl, and his deep-set eyes widened and warmed.

She would tuck in her chin, the way they did. That rounded chin. The laugh would be soft and rich-toned. Her lips would curve fully, generously. Her skin, now pale, would look like cream in the glow of sunset, under the midnight mass of her hair.

She asked in a small but controlled voice, "Will you help me bury my father? I don't like to ask. You have done so much."

It was York she asked, but it was Tarry who answered, "Sure."

She looked at Tarry, her eyes searching his face, and he knew that she saw him clearly for what he was. She was young and had the clarity of youth's untaught insight. And the tolerance of age, he wished, but didn't hope for it. She was so small, he so big, and a dark chasm of cynical wisdom lay between them. The signs were on him. No man could do the things that he had done, and go unmarked by them.

"Thank you," she said.

"My name is Tarry." He inserted a shoulder between her and York. "My man, here, doesn't know enough to introduce us."

"Thank you, Mr. Tarry. My name is Avelina Torre."

He liked her voice. "Yes. Tell me this. How did your father happen to—" he was about to say "be such a damn fool" but changed it to—"be so optimistic as to tackle the No Sombras in a wagon?"

"When we came through Socorro, some men made friends with my father and gave him directions to Principe. He didn't know the way, and

asked. They drew him a map and said it was the best route, and warned him to follow it exactly."

"They weren't friends!"

"No. They—" the girl motioned toward the rocks, without looking—"they were those men."

"Why, the dirty—!" York began, and choked off the final word. "Set you on a desert and jumped you! Get it, Tarry?"

"Yeah. You're bright." Tarry was aware of York moving past him, closer to the girl. He was going to have to fix York. To the girl he said, "Bound for Principe, eh? Why?"

"My uncle, Amado Torre, has died," the girl answered. "He left his ranch to my father, his brother. And to me. The ranch of Las Crucitas. My father sold his land in Colorado, built the wagon for our belongings, and we came."

Tarry nodded. He remembered Las Crucitas—the Little Crosses brand, formed by disjointing the Torre initial T and running a short cross mark over the arms and stem. A big outfit, one of the old Spanish land grants. He had worked there for a spell, as cook's helper, when a boy. He remembered Amado Torre—Don Amado. A *caballero*. A good man. Religious, but broad-minded, smacking a fighty cook's boy on the backside and talking him kindly out of the notion of collaring the cook with a fry-pan.

Homesickness was a gnawing ache. Tarry set his mind and his face against such weak foolishness. Yet the shadow of an old discontent darkened his cynical outlook. Against the wild, brittle-bright years the shadow cast a familiar image, rousing memory to discarded ambitions and abandoned wishes. The shadow threw truth into true focus, and hurt.

His blunt face stayed tough and impassive. He was a fighter and a gambler. He said, "Good outfit, Las Crucitas."

Behind his mask he was thinking that any man who won this girl would have to be a man. A strong man. Able to shoulder her responsibilities. She would be queen of Las Crucitas, now that her father was dead. So young and inexperienced, she wouldn't know how to hold that big outfit together, much less keep it running efficiently. There were bound to be scheming men on the make who would fasten their predatory attention on her, and her beauty would be an added temptation to them.

The man who won and married her would have to know how to be king. The time to begin was now.

He said to her, "It'll take a while to get the wagon rolling. Got to get those two dead mules unharnessed, and persuade the spare horses to pull with the team. You might start coffee, meantime, and a bite to eat. York, you build the fire for her. Then get a spade from the wagon, if there's one, and dig. Jump to it, man! Got to get to Principe!"

In his state, York could no more jump to anything than could one of the dead mules. He flushed at Tarry's command. Still, he couldn't refuse to start a cookfire for the girl and bury her father, no matter how the chores were hung on him. He hobbled off on his sore feet, without a word.

And that, Tarry guessed, was that. There were times when a man had to ride rough and work in the spurs, to let it be known he was holding the upper hand, and this was one of them. It hadn't escaped him that York could

hardly take his eyes off the girl. He figured he could make it tough enough for York to get the drift and quit, long before reaching Principe. He'd let York have the other buckskin and his choice of a saddle, any time that Wyoming wrangatang felt like weaving along.

But York was still on hand when they made camp by the old fork of the Chisum route, the fourth night. He seemed, in fact, Tarry reflected dourly, to thrive on abuse. There he stood on the other side of the fire, talking with Avelina, who sat lightly on the wagon tongue, hands in her lap, looking up at him. Once in a while they laughed quietly together.

Sitting on his heels by the fire, Tarry watched the girl's face. Laughter made her lips curve fully, as he had imagined it would, and her laugh was soft and rich-toned. Her eyes shone in the firelight. Yesterday she had begun calling York by his first name—Ron.

Tarry rose, snapping away the end of his cigarette. He would have to force a showdown on York. Tonight. Now. Tomorrow the wagon would roll into Principe. There was a deal of natural foolishness in women. They needed guarding, not only against outside harm, but against their own mistakes in judgment. Maybe he had used the wrong iron on York—made her feel sorry for the fellow, and put himself in too harsh a light.

"I want to talk to you about a horse, York," he said, and paced away from the fire.

In a moment Ron York left the girl and joined him.

"A horse, you said?"

"Yeah." Tarry nodded. His eyes glimmered. "That buckskin. Not the *bayo coyote*. That's mine. The other one. Put a saddle on him. Any saddle but mine."

"What for?" York asked.

"For yourself," answered Tarry. "From Principe it's maybe four days' jaunt down to Old Mexico, as I told you. Less if you hurry, so don't stop in Principe."

From York's reception of the advice it was clear that he had been expecting it. He said evenly, "I wasn't studying about Old Mexico. You see, up in Wyoming there was some range trouble, and when it was over I had to leave. The other side wasn't satisfied to win. You know how it is. They set out hunting for our scalps. Mine, partic'ly, for some reason. I came down here to get out of any more trouble."

"A real worthy aim," Tarry approved, "but I'm not dead positive this is the right country for you. I recommend Mexico."

Their speech was civil, coolly polite. It was York who skidded off the path of detached discussion, by retorting, "I know what you're up to! I've taken more rawhiding from you than I thought I'd ever take for any reason in the world. I've stuck it out and spiked your game! I'm still sticking! I'm sticking till *you* head for Mexico, Tarry!"

Tarry's eyes grew dangerously blank.

"Sure o' that?" he asked.

York nodded positively. "You bet I am! Your game is to rope her in, any way you can, and get your hands on her ranch. You'd be a big man then, able to stand off the law that's after you, or buy it off. You're a killer! The way you shot down those buzzards back there showed it! And you'd kill her! Slow. Make a slave of her. Break her heart. That's your game!"

"An' what's yours?" Tarry queried gently.

"To see her safe. Safe from the likes of you!" Ron York backed half a step. His right hand edged hipward. "It's you who's leaving! Don't touch your guns or I'll kill you, so help me!"

A low laugh sounded from Tarry. A chilling chuckle, loaded with saturnine mischief. "Hell," Tarry purred, "I wouldn't gun you. I wouldn't waste the shell. They cost six cents apiece, you half-dime pokey!" His left hand flashed out.

He smashed Ron York in the face with his open palm. He followed through with his right fist, almost languidly, and just about stood Ron York on his ear. He reached down and hauled York upright by the front of his shirt, and said kindly, shaking him:

"Wake up, sonny, it ain't bedtime yet. Now, that's better. You'll feel okay after a while, when the pleasing breeze o' the night cools your brow as you ride that buckskin. Come on, I'll help you saddle and see you—"

"Leave him alone!"

The command carried such concentrated fierceness he didn't recognize Avelina's voice, and he whirled half around, his free hand streaking down. He had led York well out of the firelight to attend to him privately, but the girl must have sensed something of his purpose. Anger quickly replaced the sardonic tolerance of his humor—an anger at her concern for York.

"Leave him alone!" she commanded again. In the darkness he could see her eyes blazing in the pale blur of her face. She held her father's big old cap-and-ball shooter in both small hands, leveled at him. "You brute! Bully! You m-murdering savage! *Raffine!* Let him go!"

Staring at her, he jolted his arm straight and released his hold on Ron York's shirt. York, barely on the borderline of consciousness, sprawled helplessly. Avelina gasped a tiny cry and made an instinctive move to go to him, and Tarry chose that unguarded instant to pluck the gun from her hands.

By the rigid set of her slim young body he measured her panic, her desperate fear of him. Impassive, he went on staring at her, till he fought down the wild tempest inside him.

"You don't need to be afraid of me," he told her roughly, tossing the gun aside to the ground. "I won't touch you. I could, devil knows. And you know it. I could take you, the old style, like any man took the woman he wanted, long ago. These days we're different. Pity. But there are other ways."

He went straight to his saddle and carried it to the *bayo coyote* buckskin.

Riding down the old fork in the darkness, he glanced back at the little camp. Against the firelight could just be made out the silhouette of Avelina bending over Ron York. He scowled and muttered, "Dammit, he was right. I'm the one who's leaving."

The sight and the thought urged him to turn back, but a hard core of common sense warned him that he would have to kill York if he did. The idea, in itself, wasn't too unattractive. The trouble was, it would turn the girl forever against him. It was best to pull out, put temptation behind him, and give her time to cool down and think things over while she nursed that would-be champion out of his troubled dreams.

The forceful and high-riding tactics had failed with her. Tarry shrugged. He was a gambler. He knew when to

hedge his bets and wait for the deal to come around again.

"There are other ways," he said into the night. "Got to be!"

He kept seeing Avelina's face, a laughing face, the eyes glistening softly. But the eyes wouldn't meet his, and the low-toned laughter was not for him.

He would change all that, he swore to himself, impatiently trying to defeat a black mood creeping over him. The mood was coming all too often of late, compounded of bleak loneliness and vague, haunting regrets. There was growing on him a deep weariness of his shiftless, violent way of life.

He could still remember when it had been money, the simple desire for money, that drew him into the red wash of the gambling, gun-fighting trade. Easy money. No foreknowledge of the swift and heady life that left a man no time to think till he didn't want to think—till thought was a shunned interloper to be drowned in drink. There had been times then when he had hoped for the day when the last remnant of thought would shrivel and drop into the dark pool of callous indifference. The way to hasten that shriveling was to plunge in deeper, up to the hilt, into the dangerous trade. Plunge whole-hog. Kill the ghosts.

It didn't work.

He raised his head to the faraway howl of a coyote. It sounded like the call of a wolf that he had heard one cold night up in high country while he shivered over a hidden smudge of campfire, and he answered somberly, "G'night, brother."

He wasn't going to quit his claim to the prize, the queen of Las Crucitas, come the gods and devils and men to dispute him. He had to win.

Chapter Three

Welcome, Strangers!

PRINCIPE had been a town of cattlemen, mostly Spanish New Mexicans of the conservative old class, courteous and friendly men of quiet understanding, but whose eyes could get crisply cold on occasion. Tarry hardly knew the place now. The gold strike had mushroomed it to three times its old size. And, he guessed from certain indications, the boom had lately died, as they generally did, leaving Principe cluttered up with vacated buildings and men who lacked occupation. Even at that fresh morning hour, there were loafers everywhere. This wasn't Sunday, either.

He rode at a walk down the dusty, rutted main street, from habit sweeping an impersonal stare over the faces that turned toward him, searching for the flicker of sharp recognition that could mean a hunting lawman, bounty hunter, or forgotten enemy.

Where the street dipped and began rising uphill to the old adobe settlement, he came to a two-storied building of unpainted boards that he had never seen before, and he read the sign on the front: *The Big Crib—Rooms & Refreshment—Cade Rudabaugh, Proprietor.*

The adobe cantina of Miguel Vega still stood at the top of the hill, he supposed. But this Big Crib was closest to him, and it had rooms for rent, which Miguel's didn't. It had a livery shed at the back, too, while Miguel Veda only had a corral for his customers.

Tarry dismounted and led the buck-

skin into the livery, and told the man there, "Grain and rub him down, and walk him round. Five dollars for you if he looks good when I take him out. I like this horse."

"Nice-looking horse. He'll be okay here." Inspecting the buckskin's feet, the liveryman didn't meet Tarry's eyes. But some liverymen were like that. Didn't want to know anything but what concerned them.

"*Bueno.*"

The interior of the Big Crib was a barnlike hall, no partitions between the dance floor, gambling-room, and bar. A typical deadfall for miners. No paint, no mirrors, the backbar built of plain boards, the tables and benches handmade. The gambling-layouts, though, had been expensively imported. Green baize and mahogany.

"Double whisky," Tarry ordered at the bar, "and a room if you got one. Where can I get breakfast?".

"Cafe up the street. Guess it's open." The bartender, too, avoided meeting Tarry's eyes. But some bartenders, too, were like that. This one was fat and getting old, getting bald. A wise one. "Double shot. Dollar. Room three. Two dollars, pay'n advance."

Tarry swallowed the eye-opener, went and had breakfast, and took to his room. It wasn't much of a room. Single bed and a washstand, and a window unwashed since puttied in, overlooking the livery shed. From habit, he stuck his knife into the jamb of the door, as a bolt, and stretched out on the bed with his clothes on.

He threw the soiled pillow to the floor. "Damn miners," he muttered. Miners of gold accepted dirt as a matter of course. They scrabbled in it for a living, and lived everywhere and anywhere. But it was those who came after them who were the worst. The get-rich-quick schemers, the tawdry camp followers, the trash and the scum. They had begrimed and conquered old Principe, damn them. He went to sleep wondering what the Spanish *rancheros* thought of these shabby, grasping strangers, these gold-hungry *gringos*. It was a pity the strangers were of that kind, not cattlemen.

By ten o'clock the bar was filled. Tarry, who slept lightly, was awakened by the noise below. Further sleep was not possible. He rose from the bed and went downstairs, bought a bottle at the crowded bar, and found a table in a corner. The thing to do was to have a few drinks, listen to the noise till his ears dulled, and go back to bed. He was in a drinking mood, a dark mood. At such times he never got drunk. He couldn't.

Behind his heavied countenance and drooping eyes, an alert and guardful intelligence insisted upon taking charge. And so, when his bottle was half empty, he watched carefully a man who kept watching him, a man who at last came over to his table. A blond, handsome, big man. Some of the others in the barroom called him Cade. Some called him Big Crib.

Tarry nodded to him. "Cade Rudabaugh?" he asked, and added raspingly, "The proprietor." It was not unusual for the boss of a deadfall to single him out. He drew attention, at any time. His size and looks guaranteed it. He said, "Howdy, Rudabaugh, how's business? My name's Tarry."

Cade Rudabaugh spread the skirts of his Prince Albert coat and sat down. "Yes," he said, "I'm Rudabaugh. Big Crib Cade. You're Tarry. Triggerman Tarry, right? Glad to meet you." He

offered his right hand.

Tarry gazed at the extended hand, and touched it, using a stiff forefinger. "Glad to meet you." He didn't believe in clasping hands with strangers. It could lead to swift and disastrous consequences. There was a pretty good price on him, and he had no trust in the likes of Cade Rudabaugh, who was anything but a cattleman, anything but square. He asked bluntly, "What d'you want?"

Big Crib Cade smiled expansively. "Not a thing, Triggerman, except to make your acquaintance. I think we could get along."

"We'd get along better," said Tarry, "if you drop that Triggerman handle. I don't care for it. It was pinned onto me when I wasn't much more'n a kid and won five hundred dollars in a shooting match. Later a fool lawman took it up, and it's stuck to me ever since. Tarry is my first and last name. Just plain Tarry, no trimmings."

"Beg your pardon, Tarry. I'll remember." The saloonman was immediately contrite. He coughed and changed the subject. "Aim to stay long, or just passing through?"

Tarry glowered into his empty glass and refilled it. "I aim to stay. Why?"

"Fine, fine! I hope we can make you comfortable." Cade rose, beaming. "The house is yours, Tarry. I'm—ah—honored to have your custom. Anything you need—"

He was interrupted by a man entering hurriedly from the street, calling, "Hey, look what's comin'! Cade, take a look! It's the damndest—"

"Watch your language, there! Watch it!" The command was given by a woman, a statuesque blonde in a red dress, emerging from a door behind the bar. Her glance touched Tarry and traveled on to Cade Rudabaugh. "Ought to stop that kind of talk, Cade. It's only a wagon with a mixed team. Nothing to blow so free about."

Big Crib Cade nodded. "Quite right, Loyce. A wagon, eh?" He paced to the front door, lighting a cigar, his expression mildly curious, and most of the barroom crowd ranged up at the windows. The arrival of an unheralded wagon from the north appeared to be an event worth noticing here.

Tarry kept his seat at the corner table. From there he had a partial view of the street through the window, and that was sufficient. He knew what wagon it was, coming into town. He sent a look at the woman, Loyce, and drew a slow smile in return. Her brittle kind of beauty didn't interest him, but he liked her air of assurance. He smiled back, not as a man to a barroom belle but as one person to another, and her look at him grew reflective, thoughtful.

The wagon, its mules plodding stolidly and the horses jerking disgustedly in their unaccustomed harness, trundled into Principe. It was an odd sight. Anybody could see that the horses were saddle mounts, as rebellious as racers hitched to a plow. They didn't know how to pull, and didn't want to know.

Ron York had strung a rope from the plain buckskin to the wagon. He was riding the buckskin alongside the team and trying to keep the rope taut. He gave an impression of being an outrider for the gilded carriage of royalty. Avelina handled the lines, looking tiny and anxious on the high driver's seat.

Some of the men at the barroom window shook their heads wonderingly. Yet there was no laughter among

them. Big Crib Cade puffed steadily at his cigar, eyeing the girl.

Coming to the dip in the road, Ron York raised a hand and the girl pulled on the lines. The wagon lurched to a slow halt in the ruts. They couldn't see Tarry inside the barroom. The windows were none too clean, and the sun was on them.

York asked Rudabaugh, "How do we get to the Las Crucitas Ranch?"

Taking the cigar from his mouth, Big Crib Cade stepped out onto the boardwalk. He doffed his spotless tan Stetson gallantly to the girl first, and waved it to Ron York.

"Straight ahead, seh, to Boulder Branch—a big rock on the left. Take the left branch, keep on past the big arroyo—the third you'll cross—and bear left again. About four miles, no more."

The directions were accurate. Tarry recalled every foot of the way. Queer, he thought, reaching for the bottle, how he could remember the road to Las Crucitas, and forget so much else.

"Thanks," York acknowledged. He threw his raised hand forward. Avelina slapped the lines. The mules leaned, braced, and the wagon moved on.

"Welcome, seh," said Big Crib Cade. He replaced his hat and cigar, and came back into the barroom. "Harry," he told one of the men, "maybe you should ride after 'em and show the way, eh? Be the nice thing to do."

"Sure, Cade," answered the one called Harry, and left.

The others returned to their places at the bar. They stayed quiet. The woman, Loyce, helped the fat bartender to serve drinks. No money clinked on the bar.

Tarry finished his drink, corked his bottle and shoved it into his pocket, and got up. The wagon had got through and was on the way to Las Crucitas. Nothing to worry about. Tomorrow would be time enough to begin planning how to knock York out of the picture. He nodded to Loyce, who was watching him, and went back up to his room. There he drank the rest of the bottle, dug his knife into the door jamb, and stretched out on the unclean bed. He slept.

The room was dark when he snapped awake, hearing the door creak against the blade of the knife. The noise in the barroom below had grown to a racket without disturbing him, but this, the slight sound, wakened him instantly. He put his feet to the floor, pulled his boots on, touched his guns, and crept to the door.

"Who is it? Speak up!"

"Loyce."

He drew out the knife and opened the door. "Hello, Loyce. Nice of you to call. But look, I don't—"

"Quiet!" she hissed. "Shut up!" She glided swiftly past him into the room. "Shut the door. Quiet!"

The old Spanish ways of days past still held. It made him treat all women with respect, sometimes mocking, but always scrupulous. "Sit down, Miss Loyce." He closed the door softly, keeping his ears alert for further sounds beyond it. This could be a trap. He tried to recall if he had left anything in the bottle. His throat was dry. Too much smoking, no doubt. He guessed it was around eight o'clock. He had slept well.

She seated herself on the edge of the bed. "Don't call me Miss, Tarry. It's nice of you. I appreciate it. But I'm Big Crib Cade's—" she hesitated—"wife."

The early moonlight through the dingy window made his bow visible to

her. "'Scuse me, Mrs. Rudabaugh. No offense, I hope. None meant."

"Thanks. I appreciate that, too. Got a cigarette? I'm nervous. If Cade knew I was here talking to you—Lord!"

He rolled a cigarette and lighted it for her.

She drew deeply on it. "What a jackpot you're in, brother! Listen. Cade sent four men to stop Ramon Torre from ever reaching here. You showed up on one of their horses. Everybody soon knew it. It puzzled Cade. He couldn't make you out. Then the wagon came in. Those horses—"

Tarry whistled softly. "Bad! But what's Cade got against Ramon Torre? He's dead, by the way. Those four got him, before I got them."

She shrugged. "So's this town dead. The gold was only a flash. It's played out. Cade's going broke, staking a lot of the boys to their grub and drinks. Not a dime left among them. You know how it is with our kind—get it easy, spend it easy. He's grabbed that Las Crucitas ranch on a faked bill of sale. It was a good chance, when old Amado Torre died. Cade figures to strip it, selling the cows and horses for plenty enough to make a new start in California. Naturally, he didn't want that Ramon Torre showing up with legal papers and what-all. Everybody knew the guy was on his way here."

"I guess he didn't figure on the girl, though, eh?" Tarry asked. "Ramon Torre's daughter, I mean. She holds a solid claim to the outfit. And she got there."

Loyce laughed hushedly. "Oh, she got there, yes. And Cade's boys were ready to welcome her, because he sent Harry Denton on to let them know. What a bunch of cowhands, those! Some things they know how to do, though. They did a good job of jumping that joker who was with the girl. He's in the jail, all banged up, charged with murder and robbery. He was on a horse belonging to a man presumed killed, see? Friend of yours?"

"Not specially." Tarry built another cigarette for himself, and kept all emotion out of his voice. "How 'bout the girl? She arrested, too?"

"Sure. But Cade got a look at her when they brought her in. He got her released into his personal custody. He's chairman of the town council, and a justice of the peace. Hah!"

"So? Well, well!" The end of Tarry's cigarette glowed brightly. "What're you telling me this for? You're Cade's—wife. You turning against him?"

"No!" The woman leaned forward. "I love the dirty twister! He's got his fancy on that Mexican girl, damn her! He'll quit me if I don't watch out. I've held him off from her, so far, but I can't do it for long. It's up to you, Tarry. You don't fool me. I've been there. I know all the signs. I watched how you looked at her through the window in the bar. All right. She's in room eleven. The door's locked and a man's on guard. The window's nailed shut. Get her out! Take her 'way off where Cade will never see her again! I'll help any way I can, you can depend on that!"

His eyes gleamed, twin pools of deep stillness, shadowed and secretive in the darkened room. He was thinking that this was the way, the chance that he sought. This was the time to plunge, and to win. York was all through, beaten, jailed. The girl was alone, frantically needing help.

"Door locked, man on guard at it, and the window nailed," he mused aloud. "And we can't afford any noise.

Would the guard let you into that room if you smiled nice at him?"

"No. I tell you Cade's staking them to their grub and drinks. Besides, they're scared of him. He's a dangerous devil, don't you mistake it. There's not one of them would dare to cross him. Anyway, the key is in Cade's pocket."

"Hum! That makes it tougher. Well, let's go see what we can do."

"Don't you kill Cade, you hear? I want your promise on that first, Tarry!"

"That makes it tougher yet!"

CHAPTER FOUR

The Forlorn Chance

THE guard at the door of room eleven came alert as the pair approached down the half-darkened corridor. He relaxed again, seeing the condition of the man, who obviously was very drunk, leaning on the woman. The guard recognized the woman, and gave her a nod.

"'Lo, there, Loyce."

"'Lo, Pick. This guy's sleepy. He's got six hundred dollars he's riding close-herd on. Let's get him safe to bed."

The guard grinned. "Sure, Loyce, sure. C'mon, guy, we'll take care o' you. What room, Loyce?"

"Eleven," Tarry said, and hit him. He hit him with a long gun barrel, moderately hard. The guard mumbled surprisedly and stretched out on the corridor floor.

"Now what?" Loyce inquired of Tarry.

Tarry removed his arm from around her neck. "Take his gun," he told Loyce. "You'll have to shoot out the lock. And get her out the window. Twist the blankets off the bed. Smash the window out with the butt of his gun. See? Simple!"

"You're simple," she retorted, "if you think Cade and the boys downstairs won't hear me. They'll come up, running!"

He shook his head at her. "No, they won't. Not with the ruckus that's about to begin. When you hear it, shoot that lock to hell. Go on in. Bust the window. Get her out. They won't hear a damn thing, give you my word."

Her eyes sparkled somberly. "You going down there? You fool! You grand big fool! I wish—oh, dammit, Tarry, they'll shoot you to hell!"

"Watch your language!" he said severely, and walked past her to the end of the corridor, to the head of the stairs.

This was the time to make the bet. This was the time to plunge. A gambler had to snatch that last chance, that forlorn shred of a chance, and lay everything he had on it. Win all or lose all. Shoot the works. If the stakes were worth it, bet the limit. And take the consequences, good or bad. He walked down the stairs.

With his long-legged, silent tread he descended to the Big Crib barroom. Violence and death waited for him. He could sense it, almost smell it. It hung in the air of the place.

He had been the unknown, and now he was known. He was Tarry, the Triggerman, notorious gun fighter, a man who had dared to set himself against the powdersmoke rule of this town of Principe. Cade Rudabaugh and his barroom followers saw him now definitely as an enemy, one who had to be re-

moved before they could clinch the Las Crucitas stake. They knew or could guess what had become of the four dry-gulchers on the No Sombras, and they weren't thinking for a minute that it was Ron York who had attended to that matter.

In thick silence the crowd watched him come down into the big barroom. His blunt, tough face and deep-set eyes contained no expression except a solemn thoughtfulness. He strode toward the front door, fully aware of the crowd's eyes shifting tensely between him and Cade Rudabaugh. Contempt for their kind touched him again. There wasn't one among them gutty enough to start a gunplay. They were all waiting for Cade Rudabaugh to give them the signal.

Some of them had their backs to the bar, elbows hooked on the edge. Others sat motionless, seeming hardly to breathe. The gambling-tables were deserted, and the dance floor made a vacant, unswept space. Only the pair of brass bar lamps had been lighted. The Big Crib had seen its best days and become a dusty hangout for down-at-heel tinhorns and two-bit badmen.

They were waiting, he guessed, for him to show his back going out. Cade Rudabaugh would take first shot. It occurred to him that the buckskin was sure to be watched, too, just in case he made it to the livery at the rear of the building.

He paused before reaching the door, and was coldly amused to see Cade Rudabaugh halt a gliding motion of his right hand. Always, at this last notch, he grew bleakly detached and observant, like a critical onlooker. Reckless fury couldn't be afforded.

He looked meditatively at Cade Rudabaugh, and said, "You'll never get a better chance. What're you waiting for?"

"I—I—" Taken aback, Big Crib Cade stammered, clicked his teeth shut, and rose from his chair. He backed around the end of the bar, staring at Tarry. The bartender eased shyly away from him.

"You back-shooting scum!" Tarry said, his voice even and matter-of-fact. And he began to swear, his eyes on Big Crib Cade's face. His swearing was personal and direct, hard-bitten enough to make a mule kick. "Pull your shooter," he finished, "or eat dirt and let it be known I've pinned the right names on you!"

For a moment the weighted silence ran on. Cade Rudabaugh stood frozen behind the bar, evidently incredulous. Then the blood rushed to his face. He thrust his right hand under his coat, and choked out an inarticulate yell. On the instant, drawn guns flashed in the yellow light of the bar lamps. The crowd exploded with a crash of overturned benches and banging boots.

Tarry didn't dive for the door. That was expected of him. He took a charging leap forward, while his hands sliced down to the skeleton holsters and emptied them. His long gun barrels smashed against the hands of the nearest man, wrecking the bold resolve of that one. The man's face stiffened in abrupt pain and shock. Tarry shoved him aside and triggered both his guns. In the roar of them, Big Crib Cade's armpit shooter ripped at him, a shade ahead of the blaring reports from the barroom mob.

Tarry hurdled the bar. One of his shots had splattered a bar lamp. The other lamp burned on serenely, shedding more light than he had any use for. He landed on the bartender be-

hind the bar. The bartender was nursing a shotgun, a rabbit-eared old sawed-off, double-barreled, but he didn't seem inclined to make use of it just then. He expelled a groan of fright and misery when Tarry's boots clumped down on him. Tarry hit the uptilted shotgun and set off both barrels, and the second bar lamp promptly dissolved.

Somewhere along behind the bar, Big Crib Cade shouted urgently in the darkness, "The back, damn you all, the back!"

At once, Tarry quit the sober side of the bar and raced across the floor. He rammed into a couple of the men, but in the dark confusion and noise they took him for one of their crowd and only cursed him for knocking them down. Big Crib Cade was still shouting, blazing his gun blindly in the direction of the door behind the bar.

The open front door was a visible oblong dimly lighted by the street. Tarry dived at it. Somebody with quick eyes hollered, "There he goes! Not the back! The front, bedamn!"

Tarry hurtled out without touching the steps, and landed sprawling in the street. He rolled over and bounded up, crouching, eyes glaring, his guns hammering at the barroom while he backed off. Staring groups of men along the street broke for cover at sight of him. Two horses at the hitchrack snapped their tied reins and pawed away. A woman somewhere screamed for the sheriff.

He whirled, made it to the corner of the Big Crib, and sprinted around to the rear. A small figure was climbing down a rope fashioned from tied and twisted strips of blankets. Loyce's face appeared at the smashed window above.

"Watch out, Tarry! The livery—!"

Tarry spun around and fired. One of the two men, plunging out from the livery stable, sank without a sound. The other stumbled back, calling thinly for help.

Tarry said to Avelina, "Come on, drop—I'll catch you!"

She obeyed and he caught her.

"Take her, Tarry!" Loyce hissed from the broken window. "Take her 'way off! I've done my part. The rest is up to you!"

He scowled up at her. Women!

There wasn't a chance of getting horses from the livery. He could hear the barroom crowd clattering out into the street, shouting, cursing, on the hunt for him. They didn't know yet that Avelina had escaped from her room. They would know if they noticed the broken window, or if that duck in the livery lived to tell of it. He and the girl were afoot. And that fool woman, Loyce—

He had a thought. Up the hill, perhaps, in the old adobe settlement, there might still be a few friends left who would lend a couple of horses for old time's sake. Miguel Vega's cantina—that was the place, the last and only chance. What had happened to good Sheriff Antonio Baca, anyhow, and all the rest? Were they beaten by the buzzards who had taken Principe?

He took Avelina's arm and ran with her, uphill, through the alley. The straggling alley began showing gaps, empty spaces between false-front stores. The buildings changed, became flat-roofed, and ugly board fences gave way to the warm, tawny hue of adobe walls.

Here at last he felt at home, among the things of the good reddish-yellow earth. He smelled the rich tang of

chile and *frijoles* cooked on open fires of *piñon*, and homesickness wrenched at him. Here he belonged, the *gringo* kid who spoke Spanish like a native, and thought Spanish thoughts.

A man came hurrying out of a small building ahead that Tarry remembered was the Principe jail and sheriff's office. The man carried a rifle. His features couldn't be distinguished in the dark, but Tarry guessed who he was, and called quietly to him in Spanish:

"Sheriff, hold your haste and step this way!"

The sheriff halted, peering. He picked out Tarry and the girl standing together, and approached warily.

"Who is it?" he snapped. "What means all that shooting and noise?"

"Riot in the Big Crib," Tarry replied briefly. "Keep that long gun down and let's go into your *calabozo*. Safest place for us just now."

"So?" The sheriff lowered the rifle. "Why?"

"I started the riot. They're after us. It's your job to take us in. You're the law, aren't you?"

The sheriff hesitated a moment more, then led the way back to the jail and unlocked the door. Following him in, Tarry struck a match, located the oil lamp, and lighted it. Avelina closed the wooden shutters of the only window. The sheriff relocked the door, then turned and inspected Tarry and Avelina in the lamplight.

He was getting along in years, Sheriff Antonio Baca, and his capacity for surprise was about worn out. Still, while the habit of courtesy caused him to doff his hat to Avelina, he stared wonderingly at Tarry.

At last he muttered, "*Mil santos!* Is it Tarrito? How you have changed!"

The Spanish diminutive of his name, familiar to his memory, did its work on Tarry. But he responded harshly, "You've changed, too! I sure never thought to see the day when Antonio Baca would take orders from a picayune barroom boss, and help him rob a decent girl! Don't offer your hand to me! And lay that rifle on the table!"

A slow flush darkened Sheriff Baca's brown face. He gazed at Tarry's hands. He laid the rifle on the table, and said chokedly, "*Por favor, hombre*, say that not again to me! Listen! Cade Rudabaugh has made himself chairman of our town council, also a justice of the peace. I am only sheriff. He informed me that the young lady is an impostor, a girl of no account, and her man a murderer and thief. They had stolen horses, known to belong to four missing men. As I am sheriff—"

"No-'count—her?" Tarry interrupted. "She's Don Amado's niece! She's a lady! Take a good look at her!" He took a look, himself.

Avelina had found the door of the single cell. The upper part of the door had a peephole, and she was murmuring through it to Ron York. There wasn't much visible of Ron York, except a bandaged head and a hand. His hand was through the peephole, holding Avelina's hand.

Tarry sat down on a box, the nearest object. He picked the rifle off the table, and growled at Baca, "Turn that guy loose. It was me gunned those four ducks. With a long gun like this. Want to law me for it? You try! The old town needs a new sheriff!"

Passing a key to Avelina, Antonio Baca said, "These strangers have been too many for me. Too many for us. We have had to be patient. The gold is gone. They will be gone, too, soon."

"They will, yeah. But first—" Tarry

thumped the box with the rifle butt, for emphasis—"they'll strip Las Crucitas and anything else they can lay their hands on!"

Baca winced. "Please do not do that. It is—"

Tarry hit the box again. "Well, won't they?"

"Yes, yes," Baca agreed hastily. "After Don Amado died, we all decided that Las Crucitas was the sacrifice necessary to rid us of these—these *raffines*. Anything to be rid of them. We did not know then of the young lady, nor even that Don Amado had a brother to inherit the ranch. Now I know. She is of the Torres. I see it. I shall so tell the others—the Benavides, Escobars, Carillos, everybody of good account. But please do not—"

"*Bueno!* How soon? Not *mañana*." Tarry up-ended the box because it was too short. He kicked it into position and straddled it. "Where are they?"

Baca replied, his eyes glued on the box, "In Miguel Vega's, no doubt, most of them, at this time. Please, Tarrito, you sit on dynamite!"

"I know it. Not the first time."

"I mean," Baca sighed, "that box. It can go off—boom—so easy."

"Huh?"

"It belonged to Eufracio Gallegos, who traded with the miners. When the gold ended, Eufracio could trade no more. He put this dynamite in my charge. It is dangerous. I am sheriff." Baca shrugged. "The miners had uses for it, one supposes. I do not like such things, not in my office. But I am sheriff."

Ten feet away from the box, in a jump and a half, Tarry inquired, "Why the hell didn't you say so? Fine stuff to have lying around! You ought to throw it away."

"Throw it? Me? Oh, no! Besides, I am taking care of it for Eufracio." Baca moved to the door. "I must borrow horses. You must get out of Principe. Especially the young lady. Make no sound, please. If they suspect you are here, they will rush this place. There will be shooting. If a bullet hits that box of dynamite—!" He spread his hands eloquently, and left.

"Hum!" grunted Tarry. "A first-class jackpot, this, if I ever saw one!"

Avelina had released Ron York from the cell. They were whispering together. They were holding hands.

"Quiet, you two!" Tarry commanded. He added with weary bitterness, "This is no time or place to be swapping mutual regards!"

Chapter Five

The Blow-Up

WHEN Sheriff Antonio Baca returned, he shut the door behind him and met gravely Tarry's inquiring look. "Very bad," he murmured. He opened the drawer of his battered desk, took out a gun and belt, and gave them to Ron York. "Yours."

"Something else gone bad?" Tarry asked.

Baca nodded. "Everything. I went to Miguel Vega's cantina. Everybody was there. The ranchers, I mean, of course. Our people. I told them of Miss Torre. And of you. I told the facts of the matter." He wagged his head helplessly. "*Mil santos!* Who can predict what angry men will do? They are raging! They rage at me! They demand action!"

"Well, it's time they got mad," Tarry

commented.

"But this is madness!" exclaimed Baca. "They demand that I at once arrest Rudabaugh and those with him. Or they swear to take the law into their own hands. With your help, Tarrito! It is a great encouragement to them, that you did what you did in the Big Crib, and escaped with the young lady. It stirs in them a pride and a mad impatience. They have been angry a long time at these swaggering, insulting, thieving strangers. Now they are also angry at me, for refusing to lead them against Rudabaugh. I cannot do it! They would be wiped out, slaughtered!"

"If you don't," said Tarry, "I bet you won't be sheriff tomorrow. How 'bout the Rudabaugh crowd? What they doing?"

"I think they suspect something, and are on the *cuidado*. I think some of them must have heard the loud talk in Miguel Vega's. They are all back in the Big Crib. The doors are shut. The windows show no light. That place is like a fortress. Perhaps Rudabaugh has been too occupied to discover the escape of the young lady from—"

The sheriff's rapid and fluent Spanish was interrupted by an outbreak of firing. Tarry got first to the door and stared downhill. Shadowy figures, some helping others, were retreating from the street before the Big Crib.

"They've started it, sure enough," Tarry said. "Looks like Cade's boys let 'em come in close, then let loose at 'em. We better get down there. Some of 'em are hurt, but they'll try again, now the lid's off. And keep on trying. You know they will. You better make up your mind to lead 'em. I'll stick with you. How 'bout you, York?"

"Count me in," York answered.

"Ron! No, no!" Avelina caught his arm. "It is suicide!" She whirled on Tarry. "Gunman! You want to take him to his death! Ron, no! Let the ranch go! Let them have it!"

It was Antonio Baca who rebuked her, saying, "*Señorita*, you have the Torre looks. Have also, *por favor*, the Torre courage."

He drew himself up, grim and stern. "I am sheriff of Principe! It comes now to me, Tarrito, you are right about the dynamite. It shall be thrown away."

Tarry's eyes glittered with savage comprehension. "Thrown where?"

"At the Big Crib!" stated the sheriff of Principe. "You will help, *Señores*, yes? I make you deputies. I command!"

"*Amigo*, we're crowdin' right on your heels! Bring that box, York! Jump along!" He looked at Avelina, and a scrap of something that he had once read came to his lips: "*I never yet have done so much for any maiden*— Ah, the hell with it! Let's go, fellers!"

Keeping to the shadows, they proceeded in line down the street, Ron York carrying the box. The Big Crib looked dead, as deserted as the empty stores and shacks around it, not a light visible, but voices sounded inside. Cade Rudabaugh and his hangers-on were on the alert. They didn't intend to be driven out. They would leave when they were ready, with the loot of Las Crucitas, laughing at the people of Principe.

Somebody sent a hail to the three walking men. "Hey! Sheriff, you? Is that Tarrito? Over here, quick!"

The Principe townsmen and ranchers had gathered behind the adobe wall of somebody's corn patch. Passing by with Tarry and York, Baca replied frostily, "You wanted action. *Bueno!*

Stay there and watch. I command it in the name of the law! Your sheriff does not need the help of crazy men!"

It was a pretty grand little speech. Ron York spiked it somewhat by mentioning, "I feel I'm a bit crazy, myself, lugging this stuff. Let some joker land a shot on it, and farewell me!"

"Don't worry, you'll have company!" Tarry comforted. "How's this for near enough to start pitching? They haven't seen us so far, and there's no point in—"

A shot lanced from the Big Crib. They jumped around the corner of one of the empty stores diagonally across from the darkened saloon.

"No point," Tarry finished, fingering a bullet-cut sleeve, "in risking a premature blow-up. Don't want to waste the stuff."

The sandy street was wide here at the dip. Wrenching the lid off the box, Baca inquired dubiously, "Can we throw that far? I don't think I can. I have a trifle of stiffness in my joints. But we can get no closer, now they have seen us." He gingerly withdrew a stick of dynamite from the sawdust packing. "You try, eh?"

"Pleasure." Tarry threw it.

They waited, tensed, for the expected explosion. It didn't come. All they heard was a soft thud as the stick fell.

"Hum!" said Tarry. "Give me another one." He let fly with it and got the same results. "Another! York, take a whirl!"

They made eight throws between them. Nothing happened, although one stick rattled against the wooden building. Tarry swore gritty words.

"Damn stuff's gone stale or something! Sheriff, you sure it's dynamite?"

Sheriff Antonio Baca was a crushed man. His fine brag to the embattled men behind the adobe wall had fallen flat. There was nothing to back it up. He booted the box. He spat on it, and mumbled dismally, "That Eufracio Gallegos! That cheat! Liar!"

A voice inside the Big Crib bellowed distinctly, "Say, they're chunkin' stones at us! They're down to stones! Cade, let's get out there an' run 'em off!" A light flickered at a window, and steadied, becoming the glow of a lamp. "Damn this layin' low in the dark from critters like them! Let's take the town an' make 'em dance!"

The sheriff heaved a sigh. "Take the young lady, and go," he told Tarry and York. "There are horses in Vega's corral. I shall stay here and—"

"Wait a minute," York broke in swiftly. "Listen, Tarry. Maybe you're right about the stuff being stale. I don't know much about it. I do know, though, it comes in different kinds. I mean it's like likker—some's high-proof, some isn't. These sticks have been falling in the soft sand over there. One did bang a plank, but I reckon it only rolled. This might be the kind that needs hitting real hard to set it off. Rock, say."

"All right, go find a rock! Then you amble over there till you see those sticks we threw, and hit 'em real hard!"

"Bullets would be better."

"Hum." Tarry turned his head and regarded him. "You putting it up to me? *Gracias!* I 'preciate the compliment. Yeah, I could hit 'em if I could get close enough to see 'em. Could you? For once—just this once—I'll be glad to stand your company! Want to come along for the target shooting?"

"We better hurry," was York's reply. "Those ducks are readying to come out. We've got to beat 'em to it."

"Right," Tarry agreed. He thought fleetingly of the waiting girl. It might be he who would go up the hill to her, or it might be York. Probably neither. It was a fair gamble, as he saw it, worth taking.

"Sheriff, this trip isn't for you. It needs antelope's legs and cat's eyes, and a lot more luck than you've had lately! Ready, York? Let's go."

They took off together, racing at an angle across the street. Glimpsing movement at the saloon door, Tarry weaved, ducking low, but when the gunfire crashed it was he who tripped and scooped dirt. York plunged by, his gun silent, intent on saving his shells for the dynamite sticks that he couldn't yet see. Tarry heaved himself up, triggered a double blast at the door, and hit at a fast limp for the line of shacks flanking the Big Crib.

The men at the saloon door scrambled back, still shooting, and some light showed out from the lamp. Tarry, watching that weak fan of light while he ran, hung a toe and crashed headlong on a strip of broken boardwalk that some enterprising storekeeper had built in the boom days. He cursed it and sat up, and saw York go to his knees in the street. York had made the mistake of heading straight at the Big Crib, and one of the shooters had got him. He tried to rise, and lost balance and fell over. His gun slewed around, steadied, blared. The bullet kicked a feather of sand.

Tarry looked to see what York had fired at. He spotted it, lying in the weak light, in the sand a few steps from the open door, its shape that of a short, fat candle.

"You can't shoot, you Wyoming wrangatang!" he rasped. "Watch this!"

He was Triggerman Tarry, ace shooter, who had won five hundred dollars shooting when he was a kid and got the taste for easy money. Sitting on the broken boardwalk, he drew up one knee and rested a cocked gun on it. He fired, not knowing what to expect, hoping at most for a big bang that would shock those barroom buckaroos out of their belligerent notions.

A great blinding flash and deafening roar startled him so he nearly dropped the gun. The Big Crib appeared to sway. About half of its front had vanished. Through thick dust he could see into the barroom. Murky figures were stumbling about under the wildly swinging lamp. What had happened to Ron York was a question that didn't strike him as being important.

"That stuff," he muttered, blinking his eyes to clear them, "is pretty good!" He guessed maybe the one he had set off had exploded two or three others near it. One candle-sized mite of anything just couldn't make all that damage and racket. The echoes still rumbled in the far-off hills like angry cannons.

He was encouraged to limp off the boardwalk and go looking for other little sticks. There wasn't much risk now of being shot at. Cade Rudabaugh and his short-weight gun slingers were likely too busy thinking that the end of the world had come. He wasn't too sure it hadn't, himself. His ears weren't working.

Around the side of the Big Crib he came upon two more of the sticks. He placed them together for sureness's sake, backed well off and flopped down, and spent a shell. Again the mighty explosion.

He wiped sand and dust from his face, and watched the roof, robbed of its supports, slowly collapse. He

watched panicked men clawing out of the Big Crib and running blindly off, and he hoped that Principe would give them a chance to get away. Those poor ducks were scared crazy and all they wanted now was to make distance.

He was sorry to hear Antonio Baca coming, shouting commands, and the Principe men from behind the adobe wall following him, shooting. You didn't have to kill these two-bit badmen and cheap tinhorns, to whip them. They knew when they were licked. Give them a chance.

"Hell!" he muttered. "Give 'em room for a getaway!"

Sheriff Antonio Baca found him reloading his guns. He helped Tarry out into the open street. The Big Crib was on fire. The lighted lamp must have broken on the second explosion.

"You are hurt, Tarrito."

"One of 'em chipped my knee. How's Rudabaugh? How's York? Dead? Well, we all have to go, soon'r later. Hum?"

Baca gestured. "There is Rudabaugh. With the woman, Loyce. He is hurt. She helps him. We will let them go, yes?"

"Yes," Tarry said, "we will let them go. She is a good woman. In her fashion, *sabe?* Give them help. Give them horses."

But he was staring at another couple. Avelina Torre and Ron York. Avelina was helping Ron, who looked as if he'd come through a hurricane, most of his clothes blown off.

Tarry saw Avelina's face. He said to Antonio Baca, "A drink, 'Tonio? Get me a drink. I am very tired."

"I can get it, Tarrito."

Antonio returned with a bottle. His aging eyes were full of understanding, of *sabe.*

"Drink, Tarrito. My friends—my people—they thank me now. They believe that I did this thing. I am sheriff of Principe. Ah, Tarrito, you must go. I know, I know! But come back, *hijo*—my son—when the winds have blown themselves out. We may need you again, as we needed you now. Your horse has been saved. It is ready. You must go. You are hunted."

He spoke an old Spanish phrase, known to those who knew the Spanish of the old Southwest. "Your coming we remember always, and your return we pray for."

"*Gracias*, 'Tonio."

He rode south, his hurt knee stiffening in the cool night air. There wasn't a chance for him, Triggerman Tarry, to win that girl and set himself up as king of Las Crucitas. There never had been, he guessed. A long rider like himself was a fool to dream of anything like it. Never again.

Ah, well, Principe would be the same good old town again, anyhow. He had that much satisfaction. "*Come back,*" Antonio Baca had said.

He shook his head. "Not me. Never. Wouldn't dream of it."

On the other hand, he began musing a little later, in Mexico he could let his beard grow and take another name. Several things a man could do to change himself over. Might be all right then to drift back. Get a riding job, somewhere near the old Las Crucitas. Be the kind of close-lipped rawhide from nowhere, never mixing much, but always right on hand and ready to pitch in when needed.

He scrubbed his blunt jaw reflectively. "It's something to think on," he muttered, and felt less lonesome. "'Tonio would spot me, but he wouldn't let on. Hum—" THE END

FREE-FOR-ALL

"THE CALL OF THE CANYON," Zane Grey's novel abridged this month, originally appeared as a magazine serial story in 1921 and was first published in book form in 1924. It reflected the author's intense concern over the breakdown in moral standards which his beloved country experienced in the years immediately following the end of World War I, and his great and abiding faith in the spirit-healing powers of the great outdoor West.

● L. L. Foreman's novelette, "Triggerman Tarry," is a prime example of this author's high-grade action writing. "Swirling indestructibility" was the tag pinned by one critic on Mike McLean, hero of an earlier Foreman yarn, and we guess it pretty much applies to Tarry, too. Commenting on his own stuff, wordsmith Foreman says, "Maybe I'm getting romantic in my old writing age. Still, I have a feeling that Westerns have been getting a bit too far away from their old romance and color. The terse and hardboiled type of sentiment is okay, and I subscribe to it a good deal in my own stories; but I think the average reader is still fond of splashes of high romance in Westerns."

Author Foreman has opened up a subject for discussion, it seems to us, and ZGWM readers are invited to send in their own opinions. How about it: do you prefer Westerns with high romance—the swirling-indestructible-hero type of yarn, if you will—or the more realistic, down-to-earth type? Or do you think we should continue mixing 'em up? Don't forget, quotable letters on this or other subjects of ZGWM interest will be rewarded with three-dollar checks.

● ZGWM takes pride in reprinting another of Ernest Haycox's fine stories of the Old West, "Episode—1880." Mr. Haycox wrote many a notable tale of men and women struggling to work out their destiny, but this one, dealing with the clash of convention and the imperative call of love in a frontier town is well up in the van. The field of Western literature sustained a grievous loss in the untimely death of this writer last October.

● Popular ZGWM author Thomas Thompson is back again with "One Night in Coffin Creek," a powerful story of a man's inner conflict. "Doc" Benton is faced with a momentous choice: one between material well-being and moral obligation; and his decision, coming as it does against a

background of brutal violence and dramatic tension, is made believable and right by Tommy Thompson's accustomed narrative skill.

● "Apache's Heir Male," a new adventure in Two-Gun Walker Tompkins's continuing Paintin' Pistoleer saga, eases all tensions, as Sol and Prunelly Fishman's long-awaited blessed event finally materializes (and proves to be plural!)

● D. L. McDonald, second half of the Kerttula-McDonald writing team (see "Little-Man-With-a-Strong-Heart") tells us something about herself:

"Even after all these years I'm still sometimes faintly surprised to find myself a ranch wife. When I fell for the cocky tilt of an 'overseas cap,' the fact that its wearer had grown up on a big cattle ranch didn't mean a thing to me at the time. I soon found out how wrong I'd been about that! My husband introduced me to ranch work by the simple expedient of giving me a hotheaded cowpony who 'could put you up on a critter' in nothing flat. When we got there and I didn't know what to do, the pony would get irked and throw me. After only a couple of trips to the hospital, I learned.

"Our two boys and two girls have grown up and gone. My husband and I are alone again, on a much smaller spread. It's still my ambition to have him tell me I'm 'a good hand with a cow.' The nearest he's come to it so far is 'That Laddie of yours is sure a good cowhorse; I guess you and him together are just about as much use as most of the young punks I could hire, anyhow.' "

● One of Peter Dawson's best books, *The Stirrup Boss*, has been added to the list of Dell Book pocket-edition Westerns. It's now on sale at newsstands. Another top-notch Dell Western, *West of the Rimrock*, by Wayne D. Overholser, will be released soon.

—THE EDITORS.

MONARCH OF THE CRAGS

SELECTING a course impossible for his pursuer, the Rocky Mountain Bighorn seems to defy gravity as he bounds into space. This large wild sheep (a mature ram may weigh three hundred pounds or more) exhibits utter grace and poise in traversing the highest, roughest, most forbidding mountain ranges. A narrow ledge is foothold enough for each space-eating spring. But amazing as his powers are, the Bighorn has been credited with at least one impossible feat: that of using his massive horns to cushion the shock of a hundred-foot headlong plunge. Even if his horns could withstand it, the bones of his neck and the rest of his body could not! Actually, no descending leap will exceed fifteen feet and he lands each time, if only for an instant, on his spongy, specialized hoofs. Early settlers found the Bighorn's flesh most savory, furnishing a welcome addition to their fare; and persistent hunting for food, sport, and trophies has reduced the once large herds. Scope-sighted high-powered rifles reach forth to tumble the Bighorn from his wild and lofty crags.

EARL SHERWAN

In This Issue:

THE CALL OF THE CANYON by *Zane Grey*
(abridgment)

An absorbing novel of a man who makes a new life for himself in the mountains and canyons and deserts of the great West after the holocaust of world war has left him weak in body and wounded in spirit; and of the beautiful girl who does her best to forget him in a round of gay and irresponsible pleasure-seeking. Glenn Killbourne, veteran, loves the rugged grandeur and awesome beauty of rangeland and desert and readily accepts the stern code of the West; but Carley Burch, society butterfly, rejects its frankness and violence until she finds that the men it breeds are virile and vigorous.

TRIGGERMAN TARRY by *L. L. Foreman*

A novelette of slashing action. A long rider interrupts his flight south long enough to strike a series of rousing blows in the service of a dark-eyed señorita.

EPISODE—1880 by *Ernest Haycox*

A Western classic. Acting unconventionally is a grave offense in a frontier community and one not to be excused —even in the case of two young people in love.

ONE NIGHT IN COFFIN CREEK *by Thomas Thompson*

A story of direct and striking impact. A brutal shooting compels Saloonkeeper "Doc" Benton to choose between material well-being and his obligation to his town.

—plus other carefully selected stories and features about the American West.