J. E. GRINSTEAD ~ W. E. BARRETT ~ CARL TAYLOR

WEST

Early November

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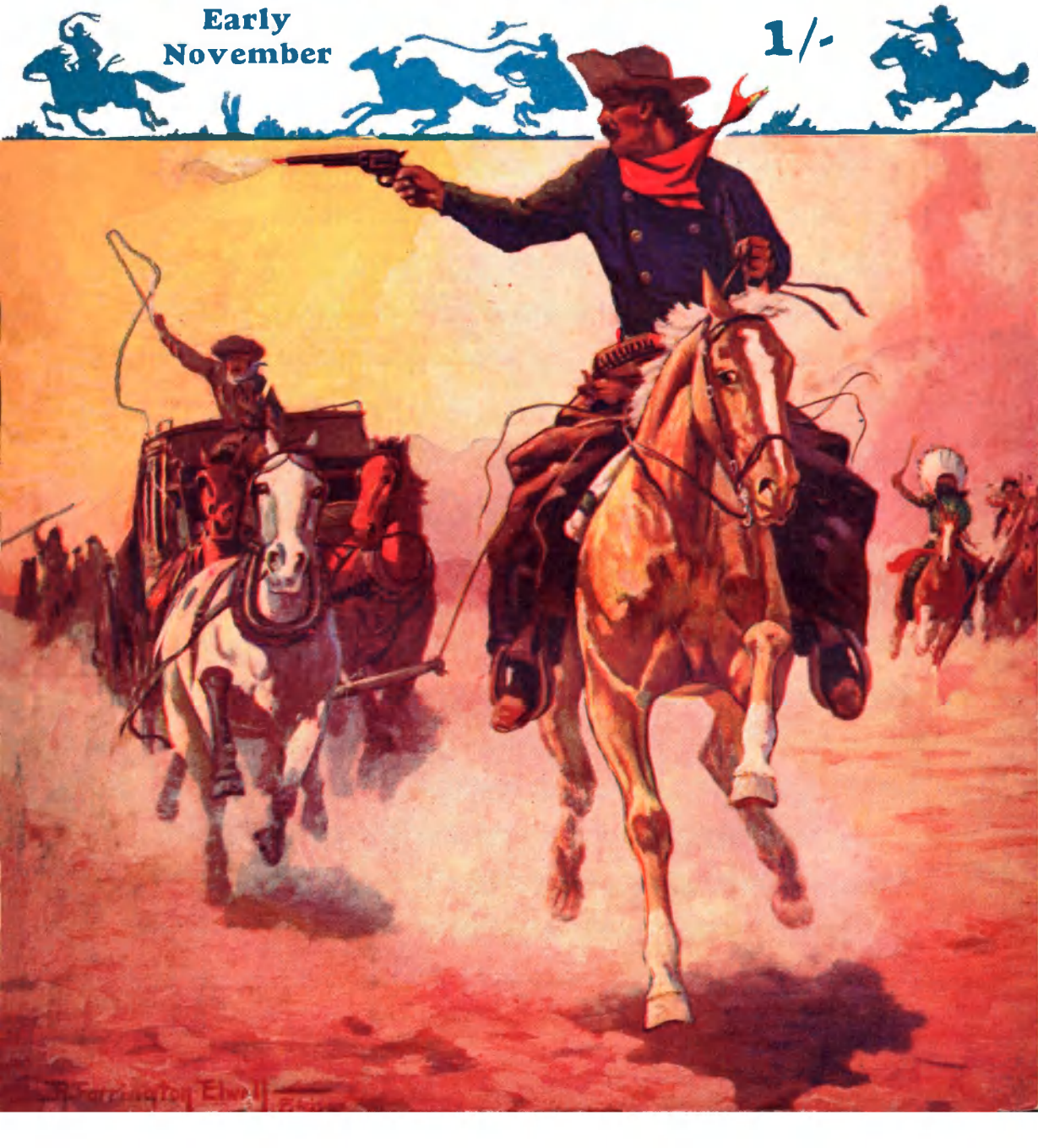

EARLY NOVEMBER, 1934 EVERY OTHER THURSDAY

WEST

Every Other Thursday One Shilling

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WEST

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BUSCADERO LAW

The girl screamed and Lannigan leaped forward.

Law Breaking Was Lannigan's Choice, But The Law Itself Made Him A Lawman—Judge, Jury And Hangman, The Power Of His Office Was The Iron That Filled His Tied-Down Holsters.

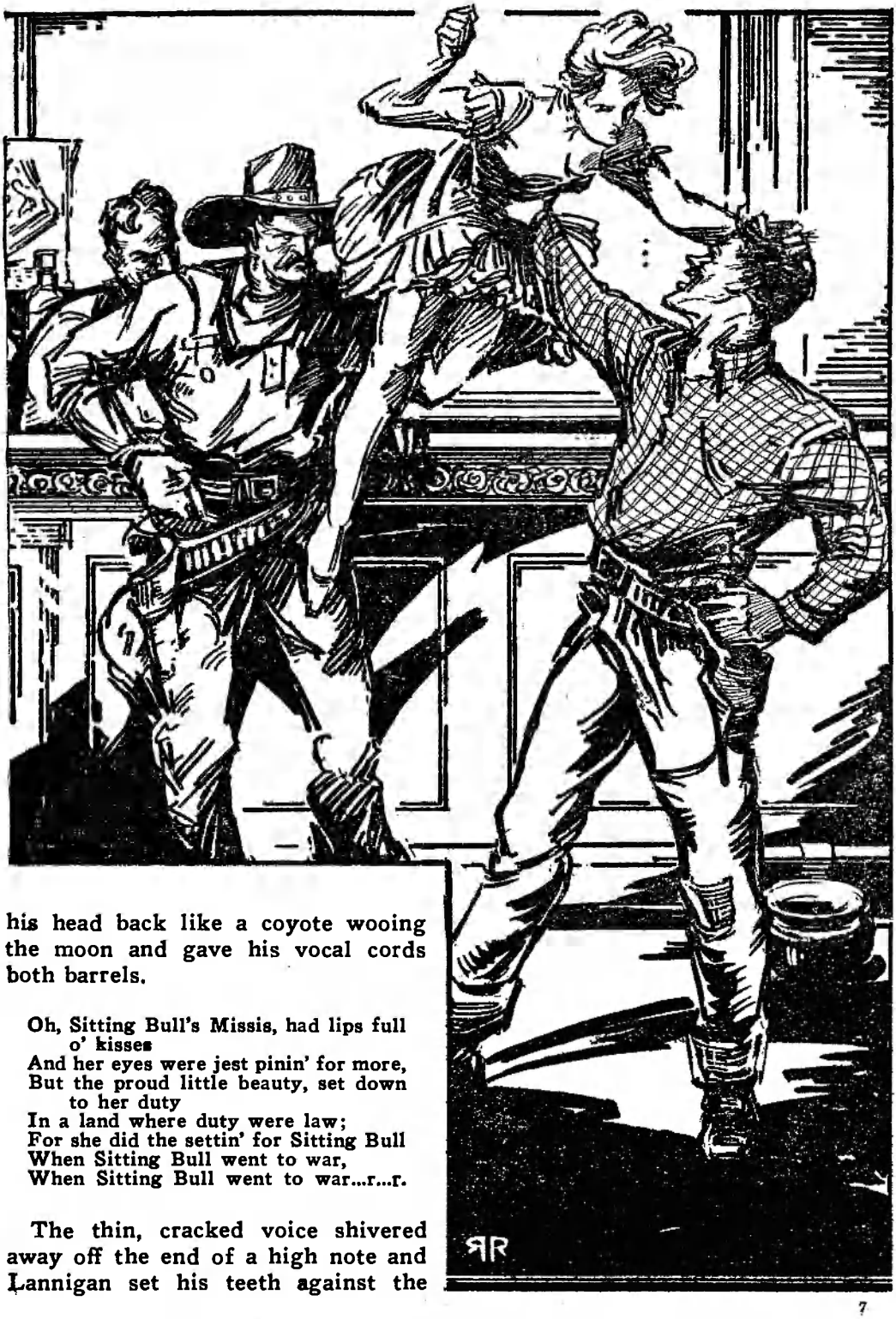
Jack Lannigan sprawled on his bunk in the Crescent City jail and stared resentfully at the ancient desert rat who shared his cell with him. The old man was dirty and disreputable and he had been singing for a solid hour. Lannigan wouldn't have stood for that singing from anybody under normal circumstances, but the old-timer wasn't singing because he was happy. Lannigan could tell. And when a man who isn't happy sings, well it's because he just has to sing.

There was the matter of the marijuana cigarettes, too. The old-timer smoked them when he wasn't bellowing his head off. They stunk and Lannigan didn't like them; but they were like some kinds of singing. A fellow that used them couldn't help himself. Lannigan shifted his lean length irritably. It was almighty tough to have a logical mind. An hombre couldn't get sore when he had a right to.

The old-timer stopped for a moment and looked toward the bunk. The sudden silence was nerve shattering; then he closed his eyes, threw

A QUICK TRIGGER NOVELETTE

By W. E. BARRETT



his head back like a coyote wooing the moon and gave his vocal cords both barrels.

Oh, Sitting Bull's Missis, had lips full
o' kisses
And her eyes were jest pinin' for more,
But the proud little beauty, set down
to her duty
In a land where duty were law;
For she did the settin' for Sitting Bull
When Sitting Bull went to war,
When Sitting Bull went to war...r...r.

The thin, cracked voice shivered away off the end of a high note and Lannigan set his teeth against the

swift dive of its return to lower registers. It was like a man sitting in a hotel and waiting for the jasper upstairs to drop the other boot.

A long minute passed and the voice stayed out there where the last high note had taken it. Lannigan opened his eyes and looked across the cell. The old-timer was wiping his walrus mustache and regarding him gravely. He was also wrapping a cigarette with brown paper; using one hand with a dexterity that would not have disgraced two.

"Ye know, son," he said slowly, "I'm goin' ter like you. You're the first feller I've ever been in jail with that ain't objected to my singin'."

"I do object to it."

Lannigan's voice was uncompromising. The old-timer blinked, then lighted his cigarette. "All right. That's all right. I was through anyway. How come they got you in the calaboose?"

"General principles." Lannigan's voice was bitter. "Nobody knew me and I was wearing two guns. They figured maybe that somebody would get outnumbered."

"Sho now." The old man was smoking dreamily but his eyes were regarding Lannigan with new interest; sharp, keen, alert eyes, they were, for all of the marijuana and the general sloppiness of outfit. "There's them that can use two guns, o' course, but I never met many."

"I can." Lannigan's voice was curt and the old-timer blinked. His voice dropped to a husky whisper.

"No offense, son. I can mebbe give you advice. A two-gun man that's drifting kinda challenges a county as raw as this un. You bein' one o' them and in jail ain't no joke. Me, I'm in jail mostly. It don't count none."

Lannigan nodded. This was getting somewhere. He'd been thinking along similar lines himself. The old-timer interested him. Soft enough and harmless enough, but with something under the surface; a certain hardness, a great despair—a something that urged him to senseless, joyless singing and to marijuana. Instinct whispered that the man had known the whole long trail himself in his youth and that he was safe to talk to. Lannigan shrugged.

"I haven't been so tough," he said. "I was just dumb enough to be too interested in guns. I practiced too much, got too good. When you get good at a thing, it seems like you're sure to run into a spot where you've got to demonstrate."

"That's right. Who was the other feller?"

Lannigan frowned. "He was good, too. His specialty was cards. He'd practiced too much and he could do things with them. He did and I caught him . . . That's what started me drifting."

"Lots o' things start like that; two fellers with specialties comin' together. Feller lives longer when he don't know nothin' right good." The old-timer seemed to lapse into gloom again. Lannigan shifted uncomfortably.

"How do I get out of here?"

There was silence for a long moment; then the oldster lifted his head once more. His voice was weary. "There's only two ways. Sometimes a feller gets a proposition and he takes it. Sometimes he don't and there's charges filed for the court, lots of charges generally."

"But hell! I didn't do a blamed thing."

"Makes no difference." The old man sighed. "There'll be charges. But nobody that I can remember has ever been tried hereabouts."

"You mean they all take—"

"Naw. I recollect three that was shot escaping."

Lannigan blinked. He took a minute to let the statement sink in. The old man was talking half to himself. "I couldn't do it. I ain't scared o' being shot. I probably will be. It's knowin' you're goin' ter be, jest a

waiting for it and knowin' or running away and knowin'—feelin' it in the back afore you get it." He choked and his wind-stained face was suddenly white. Lannigan got up and crossed the floor. The old man was half in a trance, yellow drool running from his lips, eyes wide. Lannigan had to shake him.

"Come out of it. Nobody's plannin' on shooting you."

"Mebbe. I don't care. I jest don't want to know when."

"I savvy. Well, I don't want it that way either. If I get a proposition, I'll take it."

The old man looked up oddly. "It's mebbe better," he said. "Mebbe so. But I like you, youngster. My name's Dan Carmody. I like you. But it don't cut nothin'."

He leaned back against the wall, lifted his head to the ceiling and picked up his singing where he had left off. Lannigan swore softly and turned toward his cot. Keys jangled in the corridor outside and the door swung open. A red-faced jailer stood outside.

"You, cowboy! Yo're wanted up front. Step nice now."

Lannigan stepped. In the front part of the jail, a short, blocky man sat behind a desk. He was weighing Lannigan's two guns in his hands, an intent look in his narrow eyes. The guns were twin single action Colts with walnut butts; gun fighter weapons, balanced to a hair. The man was Tom Rainey, sheriff of Bridger County.

"Nice pair o' cannon." He squinted up at Lannigan. "There was a feller killed last night down in the south end o' the county."

"I wasn't in the south end of the county."

"No. I reckon maybe you weren't. But it don't make no difference. You'd do. And we aim to clean up crime fast." He was looking hard at Lannigan. The lean puncher knew that there was more to come and he waited. The sheriff played with the guns.

"On the other hand," he drawled. "What we need is more law and not just a hangin' or two. I reckon I'd be just as satisfied lettin' you pick your own man for that killing."

"How?"

Rainey flipped a letter across the desk. "Mizpah is about the only town in the south end and it ain't got no more law than a community o' rattlers. It craves some pronto and I can't be more than one place at a time."

Lannigan picked up the letter. It was addressed to the sheriff and it read crisply:

> Dear sir: We are tired of the way things are running along down here and we figure it's time that the law took hold. Unless you send somebody down here or come down yourself to stop all this promiscuous killing and shooting and warring, we're going to have to take some steps of our own that will make your office look mighty bad.
>
> Respectfully,
>
> The Mizpah Cattlemen's Association.
> S. K. Tolliver, Triangle T,
> Joe E. Marsh. Lazy K,
> Hank Bassett, Slash Diamond, (deceased),
> Bob White.

The sheriff was watching Lannigan closely as he laid the letter down. The lean puncher was frowning. "How come that they have deceased members sign a letter like that?"

"He's deceased recent. He's the hombre you maybe did or didn't kill. He's on there to show he belonged to the Association."

"And this jasper, White?"

"Runs the Blue Stack Saloon."

"Which practically puts him in the cattle business, too." Lannigan was remembering what the old-timer had said about men who rejected propositions. "What's the joker if I go down there as deputy?"

"None at all." The sheriff's eyes were suddenly level and frank. He

had been angling before, but Lannigan sensed that, within his own limits, the man was being honest now. "Once you go down there, you're the law. I won't help you none and I won't bother you."

There were wheels within wheels here, dark things that didn't appear on the surface. Lannigan was no tenderfoot and he didn't take a thing by the name that another man called it. "It may cost you votes if I make the play down there the way I see it," he said. Rainey laughed shortly.

"I'm not worried. If you get along with the biggest bunch of votes, I won't let them forget I put you there; if you don't, I'll get them votes by runnin' you out before election."

"And you'll let me alone down there?"

"I will. I don't want none of it. I've got my own arrangements up here." The sheriff pulled a pad across the table. "I don't even give a damn if your name and the place you came from is a secret. I'll write down anything you give me for the book."

Lannigan pulled a deep breath into his lungs. "Mister," he said, "there's a lot that I can't figure out but you've hired yourself a deputy."

CHAPTER II

GUN RANGE TACTICS

Lannigan reined in half way from Crescent City to Mizpah and looked down on the country to which he was bringing the law. Before him the road dropped like a carelessly flung lariat, a winding yellow brown streak that sliced the purple and gray of the sage. Sentinel like in the background stood the jagged spires of the Little Sawtooth Range, natural boundary of Triangle T and D in a Box ranches. Sawdust Creek glittered to the southwest of the Sawtooth and a little north by west of the Canines where Lazy K flowed over into the Bar 2. The sun was dropping low and the red glow was prophetic.

"Right pretty country if only the humans round here didn't go through so awful much hokus pokus."

Lannigan sat his buckskin pony with careless ease. His face beneath the black sombrero was weather-toughened and dark, but his eyes were intensely blue. Faint crow's-feet gathered about his eyes and there was a crescent shaped scar on his chin. His nose had been broken and was slightly out of line but his mouth was wide, pleasant; full lips firm above large, well-shaped teeth.

Before him the road dipped to a wooden bridge over a dry creek. To the right of the road the country sloped upward, brush covered; to the left, it was strewn with boulders and low. He noted the fact idly but some sentinel in his brain was alert. A man who rides with two guns develops certain instincts. This was a prime spot for an ambush.

"Wish I'd had a chance to talk to the old-timer. I'd like to know about this country."

He was riding down to the bridge. It was two days since he had accepted the sheriff's proposition and he had spent those two days in jail and in a cell far removed from Dan Carmody. He couldn't understand that play, couldn't understand the delay. He frowned, lifted his hand to scratch his head—and then suddenly bunched forward.

There was a flash of flame from the brush covered slope and the crack of a rifle. Lead sang across the road a few yards from Lannigan's head.

"Plumb awful shooting—"

He was turning the pony off the road before the words left his mouth and as he went plunging down to the dry creek bed, the rifle cracked again. He swung down from the saddle, hit the pony's flank and crouched. The pony stopped in the shadow of the bridge. Lannigan pulled back into the brush with his eyes on the road. The rifleman would have to change his position if he wanted another shot and Lannigan would see about that.

"All right, Mr. Gunman, that's enough."

He heard the voice almost at his back and he spun with his hands dropping to his holsters. Framed in a crotch of upended boulders was the face and head of a girl. She held a blue-barreled thirty-eight in her right hand, steadied against the rock. Lannigan let his hands drop away from the gun butts. He made an embarrassed gesture as though to touch his sombrero and stopped.

"Shucks, ma'am. I ain't the gunman; I'm the feller that was shot at."

The girl nodded coolly. "I know about that. That was Baptiste. I told him to do it."

"You told him?" Lannigan stared, his face incredulous. The girl who was holding a gun on him did not look like a person who would order a shooting. Her complexion, he decided, would be peaches and cream and delicate pink if it weren't wind brushed and golden brown. He liked the brown better, liked the deep brown of her eyes, too. He thought of Lasca and the Rio Grande. Lasca had been brown-eyed, too, and she'd thrown herself under a stampede to save the man she loved. You'd kind of expect something like that from a girl who held a gun like this one was doing.

A little crease of uncertainty had appeared on the girl's forehead above the bridge of her rather pert nose. She had been regarding Lannigan with much the same gravity with which he had been regarding her.

"You're not quite the type I was expecting," she said.

Lannigan didn't know whether to be glad or to be sorry for that, but he became suddenly aware of the situation in which he stood. The fact that he was under guns had been swallowed up before in the more amazing fact that a girl held the drop. Now, however, he remembered the star on his chest.

"We haven't been introduced any," he said slowly, "but I reckon you know that you're holding a gun on the law."

"Law?" The girl's eyes flamed. She held the gun steady and stepped through the notch in the boulders. She was wearing neat riding breeches which emphasized the boyish slenderness of her figure. Lannigan grinned as she picked her step. The gun had wabbled for a minute and he could imagine a man giving him a chance like that. His hands, however, stayed away from his strapped-down holsters. The girl's eyes, momentarily distracted, flashed back to him and she caught the grin. Her face flushed.

"I wasn't careless," she said defensively. "If you'd touched your guns, you'd have been sorry. Baptiste has you covered by now."

"Do you think he's near enough now to shoot close to me?" Lannigan's drawl indicated his verdict on the rifle shooting of a few minutes before. The hostility in the girl's face increased.

"He missed only because I told him to."

"Oh." Lannigan's mouth hardened. He had been easy and indulgent before because he was not used to meeting girls in situations like this, and his infrequent association with women had not been of a kind to make him suspicious of them. Now, however, he was tired of mysteries and of hocus pocus, and he didn't like being shot at.

"Suppose you tell me what this is all about," he said grimly.

The girl noted the change in him and seemed to welcome it. She was tense like one who responds to the whipping of a strong will. "I was waiting for you," she said. "We heard that you were coming. I knew you'd make for the draw if you were fired at and I waited here."

Lannigan nodded. It had been a shrewd plan and he made a mental

note that he would remember it. If the rifleman had been in earnest, and if he had had a partner who was equally in earnest waiting down in the draw, it wouldn't have made much difference if the rifleman was accurate or not in his shooting. The deck would have been stacked for Lannigan. The girl was leaning against the rock facing him.

"I would like to put this gun away before I talk to you," she said, "but I won't while you are wearing yours."

"I'm the law. I've got a right to wear them."

The girl's lips tightened. "I'll count ten. If you don't drop your belt by then—"

"What?"

"I'll—I'll shoot—"

Lannigan looked at her. She was meeting his eyes gamely but her gun hand was shaking a little and he could see warring impulses come and go in her face. I'll shoot him—I can't—I will—I'll kill him if have to—I'll just wound him—

He grinned again, walked slowly up to her and took her gun with one swift movement. "Now you'll feel better," he said. "Let's talk."

The girl's mouth opened. Her eyes were wide and he was close enough to her almost to hear the wild beating of her heart. He had been aware all along that she was whipping herself up to a course of action strange to her and now he wanted to know why.

"I will, by gar, take those guns."

The voice sounded from the lip of the draw. Lannigan turned slowly toward the sound, his body tense. He had forgotten Baptiste. Now he was looking at him; a bearded giant with the high brow of a thinker and the heavy jaw of a fighting man. Baptiste was holding a 30-30 in his big hands and making it look like a toy. Lannigan's eyes narrowed.

"Come and get them!" he said grimly. The girl took a step forward.

"Keep him covered, Baptiste, I'll get them."

She was reaching out her hand. Lannigan didn't look at her, but his voice cracked like a whip. "Keep away. There isn't anything that wears pants taking a gun away from me. That goes for both of you. Now call your Canuck down here!"

"If I don't?"

"If you don't, I'll give him another chance with that rifle and I'll put him in the creek when he takes it."

The grimness of Lannigan's voice took the brag out of it. He was looking at Baptiste. The man was not afraid. He was merely waiting for orders. It was several seconds before the orders came. The girl sat down suddenly on a rock.

"Come on down, Baptiste," she said. "Never mind his guns."

The big man shrugged, tucked the rifle into the crook of his arm and climbed down. He was not easily ruffled. Lannigan put his back against a spire of rock and looked at the girl. There were tears in her eyes but something very like hatred in back of the tears as she looked at Lannigan.

"I think you're the lowest thing that walks," she said bitterly. "A person has to be a killer to deal with you. You take advantage of the fact that decent people don't want to kill. If I were your kind, I'd have killed you and—" A sob caught in her throat. "I wouldn't have been sorry."

Lannigan was disturbed. He'd have known how to handle Baptiste, although a glance had shown him that Baptiste was a handful. He didn't know how to deal with women or tears.

"Decent people don't generally try to take the guns away from a man who is riding for the law," he said softly. "That calls for explaining."

"Law!" The girl flamed again. The tears dissolved in the intensity of that flame. "Law! That's a joke. We don't want your kind of law. We don't want tin star law in this valley. There isn't any law that needs pro-

fessional killers to enforce it. Your kind of law means shooting and killing. That tin star on your chest is just a license to murder."

Lannigan was aghast at the fury of the outburst. He cursed inwardly once more at the streak of logic in his own mind which kept him from getting mad when he had a right to get mad. That streak of his kept insisting that no girl who looked like this one did would act like this one did without a mighty good reason. He wet his lips.

"If you'd put that more reasonably like, I'd try to understand it," he said softly. "I haven't killed nobody down here yet."

"But you're going to. You're going to. That's what you came down here for. That's why I stopped you. You can't!" The girl stopped suddenly as her voice choked up. Her tone changed.

"Won't you go back?" she said softly. "Won't you let us alone down here. It isn't any of your business an'—"

"I took an oath when I put on this star. You wouldn't want a man to go back on his word now, would you?"

There was an earnestness about Lannigan that brought the girl up sharply, that brought the crease of uncertainty back to her forehead and the bewildered look to her eyes. She looked at him intently and bit her lip.

"Who are you protecting? What are you afraid of?"

Almost as the words left his lips, Lannigan realized that he had made a mistake. He and the girl had been on the edge of neutral ground but his words drove her back. She stiffened and the flame came back into her eyes and her voice.

"Nobody needs my protection," she said bitterly. "I tried to prevent you from doing a low, dishonorable thing. If you must do it, then do it."

She turned and walked stiff legged toward the rocks. Lannigan assumed that she had a horse picketed somewhere in the brush. She hesitated a moment at the boulder notch from which she had first covered him.

"Just remember, though," she said slowly, "when you draw your guns, that you wouldn't be able to draw them if—if—"

She didn't finish. Her voice choked up and she plunged over the rocks and away. Baptiste followed slowly. His eyes met Lannigan's and there was slow murder in his eyes.

"I am not a woman," he said softly, "and when I squeeze the trigger, by gar, I do not miss—when I am serious."

Lannigan bowed stiffly. He wanted to know many things but he didn't want to learn them from Baptiste. "I never *talk* about shooting when I am serious," he said grimly.

Baptiste shrugged and followed the girl into the heavy growth along the draw.

CHAPTER III

"AIN'T HE A DINGER?"

Jack Lannigan was blind to the scenery during the rest of his ride into Mizpah. He was young enough to be disturbed about the troubles of a pretty girl and logical enough to see that he was in an unenviable spot as far as the girl was concerned. The odds were that he would make her more unhappy and add to her troubles before he was through in Custer County. Her opposition to the coming of the law meant only one thing to Lannigan; she had someone close to her who was likely to be caught in the toils when the tin star rode.

"Can't blame her none for standing by her kin," he said softly, "and she sure had spunk sticking me up, thinking I was a murderous killer and all—"

He frowned and shook his head. He couldn't afford to think very much along those lines. Sympathy was a poor companion when a man rode for the law. He shifted impatiently. His

job was not officially in its first day yet and he was finding fault with it already.

Before him the road dropped straight down and Mizpah lay at the foot of the hill. He rode slowly and there was a delegation out to greet him when he swung down before the Blue Stack Saloon. A tall, rather boldly handsome, red-faced man stepped forward as official greeter. His voice had a boom to it.

"Greetings to the law! Glad to see you, Mister. You bet. Sky Tolliver's my name, President o' the Association and owner o' the Triangle T. Come in and have a drink. Meet the boys—"

There was hand shaking and crowding. Lannigan saw that the town was crowded, a motley group of men standing back to look on while the greeter group did the honors. He hadn't expected a turnout and it stunned him. The committee hustled him inside.

"Private room, Bob. We got to have privacy. Sure—" Tolliver was still booming. The group straggled in to a large room at the back of the saloon. Drinks were hustled and a short, shifty-eyed man closed the door. This, Lannigan learned, was Joe Marsh of the Lazy K.

Bob White, owner of the saloon, was the type of man who wipes his hand on his pants leg before shaking hands. He had rather full lips and a lazy smile but his eyes were slate-like and without light. The only other man in the room was Ty Morgan of the Bar 2. Morgan was tall and spare, older than the others and with more of the earmarks of the cattleman. He did no talking, but his eyes moved from one speaker to the next like the eyes of a poker player digesting bets. Tolliver dominated the gathering.

"Lannigan," he said, "there never was no law officer no place that was backed up the way you're goin' ter be. That's a fact. We're tired o' bloodshed down here and we don't aim to go vigilante. We want to take care of things clean. That's why we organized and that's why we asked for you. The sheriff speaks of you quite highly."

Lannigan's lips twisted mirthlessly. The sheriff had cared only one thing about him; the fact that he carried nice guns that had balance to them, and that he carried those guns in well worn holsters.

"Suppose you tell me just what's wrong down here," he said softly.

"Sure. Sure. That's the way to start. Ain't he a dinger, boys? Right down to business before he takes a drink even. That's the kind of a deputy to have." Tolliver was booming off like a politician. He had heartiness to spare. It was Marsh, however, who cut in with the information.

"This valley's had a lot of underhand hell," he said wheezily. "The usual kind; cows bringing in triplets some places and developin' nothin' but lonesome looks elsewhere. Beef critters, too, have come up missing and there's been other signs o' fellers not workin' together fer the common good."

"But we fixed that. That's why we got together and formed the Association." Tolliver had waited on Marsh long enough and his booming voice went through the nasal whine. Marsh shook his head.

"It ain't exactly fixed it. Old Splinter Dawson has the D in a Box, biggest outfit down here barring mebbe Tolliver's Triangle T. He won't join up. He's been hoggin' water and when our thirsty stuff crowded up a mite on him, he had his own men cut the critters with his brand out o' one o' the holes and then he cy'nided it."

"No?" Lannigan sat up straight. He had been indifferent before, perhaps a bit suspicious. But he savvied the trick of cyanide in a water hole and he savvied the kind of stockmen who would do such a trick. Tolliver had been watching his reaction. Some

of the boom went out of his voice and he leaned forward earnestly.

"We're not making any accusations, Lannigan," he said. "We're a reputable organization. We ain't saying a thing to Splinter Dawson neither. He's old an' he's tough as a buzzard but it's mebbe some enthusiastic hand o' his that's doing the villainy. We'd rather have a representative of the law find out for sure than go to war agin a neighbor ourselves. Sabe?"

Lannigan frowned. It sounded fair and logical but it was too fair and too logical to be logical. He couldn't explain that and he wasn't trying to. "If I get the hang o' things," he said. "All the range in the south end o' the county is represented here except D in a Box."

"And Slash Diamond." Marsh's comment sounded ironical. Lannigan looked at him and the man lifted his eyes momentarily; faded eyes that contained much water. "Hank Bassett o' Slash Diamond was bushwhacked on his own doorstep the day after he joined up," he said dryly.

Lannigan's mind was busy. That, then, was the murder for which he'd have provided a solution if he hadn't become a deputy. His lips tightened. "You four men, then, organized the Cattle Association down here."

"No, we didn't. I joined up yesterday." Ty Morgan spoke for the first time. There was something challenging in his tone. The other men looked at him sharply. Lannigan made a mental note. He was going to ask Morgan later why he joined.

"Any ideas about who killed Bassett?"

"That's your job." Tolliver's voice had lost most of its heartiness now.

"Thanks. One more question." He flushed a little uncomfortably and cursed himself mentally for doing so. "Where does a girl in riding breeches and a Canuck named Baptiste fit in around here?"

There was a moment of silence. Tolliver's face had been turning harder with every question. It was granite now. "The Canuck works for Splinter Dawson," he said grimly. "The young lady is Miss Dawson. Did you have a reason for that question?"

Lannigan shrugged. "Curiosity is nine points of the law," he said easily. Joe Marsh laughed, a sharp unmusical laugh. Bob White, who had taken no part in the conversation, indulged in a wide, thick-lipped grin. "That there came damn near being a personal question," he chuckled.

Tolliver swore and turned around savagely in his chair. Lannigan rose. "Do I own a jail?" he asked. "Oh what do I do with prisoners?"

Marsh and Tolliver looked startled. Bob White was still grinning. Morgan looked indifferent. It was Tolliver who found his voice first. "There's a frame shack that can be used as a jail *if you need one.*"

He looked at Lannigan's two guns and Lannigan remembered that the girl had called him a gunman and a killer. His jaw set hard. "I am going to need one," he said.

Tolliver flushed and seemed about to speak, but Marsh leaned forward and some message seemed to flash between the two men. As swiftly as it had come, the mood of truculence seemed to depart from the Triangle T man. He laughed and rose to his feet. The boom came back.

"Sorry, Lannigan. I take these little soirees plumb serious sometimes. But shucks, I ain't as bad as I bark. You got to come out and meet the boys." He slapped Lannigan on the back and then stood away from him. "And just to show you what we think o' you, son, we've got every single man jack from every Association outfit in town for the day—and the night, by glory. We're letting the cattle and the fences go to rack and ruin just to put on the welcome big."

"All except Ty here," Marsh cut in. "He didn't get on the bandwagon

quick enough to do his help a mite o' good. They're all out a toiling. Me, I even got my Chink cook in town."

"Me, too," Tolliver was grinning. The party moved toward the door. As they passed through into the bar room, a man in well worn range clothes came up to Ty Morgan. They exchanged some conversation in tones too low for the rest of the party and the man gave Morgan a piece of paper. Morgan read it and wadded it up. He turned toward Lannigan, hesitated and then stuck out his hand.

"I got to leave. Sumpin came up. Shore glad to've met you," he said.

"You ain't leavin', Ty?" Tolliver's voice expressed just the right shade of regret. The man from Bar 2 nodded. "I sure hate to, but I've got to," he said.

He volunteered no information and no questions were asked. The man who brought the message accompanied him through the door. Marsh nodded after him.

"One o' his own men," he said conversationally. "That's what he gets for keeping his business running. His wife most likely burned the biscuits or some fool thing and wants him home to sob with her . . ."

Bob White laughed loudly and Lannigan frowned. He liked men who didn't talk much, but he stopped liking them when they substituted a loud mule laugh for the talk.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST BLOOD

MIZPAH had plenty of reason to know that it was playing host to punchers on a holiday. Liquor flowed in steady streams across the several bars, men sang or shouted along the board walks of the main drag, music throbbed from the crudely constructed dance hall next to the Blue Stack. It all got into Lannigan's blood and he wanted to romp. The tin star on his chest with all of the worries which it represented was slipping from his consciousness in a wild beat of music. He started out of the Blue Stack and Sky Tolliver gripped his arm.

"Want to show you something, Lannigan. Looky here."

He was gesturing to a sour faced man sitting behind a desk in a corner of the saloon. As Lannigan looked, a stocky puncher rolled up, wrote something in a book and swore fluently. Tolliver grinned.

"That there's the register," he said. "Marsh and me, we told our men they'd have to sign 'er every hour they was in town. First man that misses on hour gets fired. Bob White, though he needn't, says as how he'll do anything the Association does. He even makes the bartenders and musicians sign it."

Lannigan frowned. The tin star was getting a grip on him again. "But why?" he said. "What's the idea?"

Tolliver laughed. "Cooperation, son. I told you that no law officer no place ever got the backin' we're giving you. That's a fact. Ain't nothing going to come up while this wild bunch is in town but what you'll know where every man was. These hombres have to write down where they've been when they sign that book."

"Thanks." Lannigan was unenthusiastic. He knew how much he'd care for register signing every hour if he were a puncher on a bust. And he didn't see yet what was behind the scheme. Law is law and it is all right to have respect for it, but this town was carrying the backing too far to be convincing.

He pushed out through the crowds and into the dance hall. A dozen or so girls in cheap cotton dresses were taking on all comers for a dancing match in the center of a roped off square. There was nothing in the scene to suggest the flaming Carmens of fiction with roses in their teeth and slinky gowns. These girls were willing little hoofers with more perspiration than glamour; some of them

rouged, some of them freckled, all of them stamped with a certain hardness.

A grinning, noisy audience crowded outside the ropes and commented on the performance of those who danced. Lannigan worked through the mass as well as he could. A broad-shouldered ox of a man was breasting the rope ahead of him, the bulk of him shutting off a view of the dance floor. He was in an argument with another husky next to him.

"Me, I still got more stren'th than three men," he said truculently. "It takes more than a little accident to soften me up."

The other man laughed and Lannigan could see the face of the man who had spoken; the broad, stupid face of a professional strong man, lacking in humor or intelligence but indicative of a full share of vanity. The man was talking again; more loudly now.

"Ain't nobody can laugh at my strength. I'll show you. Ain't nobody in the hull State can outlift Zach Ferber. I'll show you."

With an impatient gesture, he stepped forward and jerked the rope savagely. It tore away from the upright to which it was fastened and a half dozen of the onlooking punchers fell in a tangled mass. The strong man took two strides out onto the floor. The two violins got out of time with the piano, squeaked shrilly and trailed off. The dancing stopped.

Red faced, his small eyes glittering, the big man came to a full stop. "There ain't nobody can say Zach Ferber ain't the strongest man in the county," he roared. "I'll show you—"

A little dark-eyed girl in a red dress who had been dancing with a runty puncher, shrank back as the big man took a step in her direction. With one sweep, Ferber swung the puncher out of his way. His stupid face lighted with an expression that was a little more than pride. Before anyone was able to fathom his next move, he had seized the girl, gripped her flimsy dress in a bunch across her waist and swept her from her feet. With one heave, he put her up over his head on one hand; holding her there with her thin legs kicking.

The girl screamed and Lannigan leaped forward. He had been taken as much by surprise as anyone in the hall, but he would have interfered even if he hadn't been wearing the star. In one stride, he was confronting the grinning Ferber.

"Put that girl down, you!" he challenged.

The man swung around to face him, spat and deliberately juggled the girl up and down. There was a sharp tearing sound as the dress parted in two places and Ferber grinned like a wolf. He spat again toward Lannigan and brought the girl down in a dizzy arc that brought another scream to her lips. Throwing his other hand out momentarily to ease the strain on his right, he checked her descent and let her drop in a dishevelled heap upon the floor.

Lannigan's fist whipped upward from his waist. It exploded against the man's mouth and left a red blur where it hit. The strong man blinked and reeled back. Lannigan let him get set and then hit him again.

"You're goin' to get down on your knees and apologize or you ain't going to be able to," he said hoarsely.

He was not kidding himself that it was going to be as easy as that, but the situation called for ultimatums. Ferber was dazed now but he was still on his feet after taking all that Lannigan could put in two punches. And he had not boasted idly about his strength. For perhaps a second and a half, he stood swaying; then comprehension came to him and he gave a bellow of rage. Head down and arms swinging, he came into Lannigan. All interest in music and dancing was gone. The dance hall crowd struggled for points of vantage and the ring about the two men was small. That was to Lannigan's disadvan-

tage. Speed needs room in which to be effective.

Stepping away from that first mad lunge, Lannigan flicked out lightly with his left. He turned his man slightly and Ferber came at him again. Lannigan felt the weight of his two guns on his thighs and they reminded him that he need not battle this out with his fists; he had only to draw and take the man to the lock-up. After all, he was the law. He shook his head grimly.

This town was going to know that he wasn't hiding behind that star; he was upholding it.

A clumsy, clubbed right thudded against the side of his head and he pulled his chin down on his chest. His own right found the strong man's wind and his left stabbed to the bloody mouth. Ferber cursed and kept coming. His hands were open now and he was trying for a wrestling grip. That was a mistake. Lannigan hit him four or five times in a row and backed out of range. The crowd panted with the combatants. Ferber was flat on his feet now, his mean eyes narrowed to slits, his chest heaving and a broad blur of crimson smearing the outline of his mouth. There was vicious, depraved cruelty in his face and Lannigan knew what it would mean to let those powerful hands get a grip on him.

It would happen eventually. Only the fact that Ferber, like all muscle specialists, was musclebound had saved Lannigan so far. Already, Lannigan was breathing hard and when he slowed down or slipped once, the man would have him. It would not be pretty. Ferber was boring in. He could keep boring all night probably; Lannigan could not keep dodging and flecking. His arms were getting heavy. The crowd was almost at his back, trying to move and give him room but bothered by its own weight and the confusion of men pushing from the rear forward.

Ferber, sensing a chance of penning his foe, was charging. Lannigan shot his right hard and straight. Ferber took it in the right eye and staggered. Lannigan slipped to one side. He was out of the corner and, what was more important, he had a course of action outlined. He did not wait till Ferber had oriented himself; he closed in again fast and his booming right found the left eye. The left stabbed again and cut the eyebrow over the right.

Ferber howled, lashed out wildly and almost fell down. With his chin pulled against his chest, he stood spread-legged and turned slowly to face Lannigan. He was pawing at his right eye, panting slow curses. The big, steel cable muscles rolled under his wet shirt. A full sixty pounds heavier than Lannigan and three good inches taller, he had been made ridiculous in a test of power and he must have realized that another blow or two would close his eyes for good.

Lannigan circled him warily. The crowd was tense, silent. Then with an oath that woke the echoes, Ferber went berserk A dozen voices sounded warning as the big man's hand went to his boot top. Steel flashed in the light as a long thin blade leaped into his hand. He came in charging wildly with the knife poised.

It is one thing to avoid clutching fingers by stabbing a man off balance with your fists and circling out of his way; it is something else again to avoid a strong man's knife. Lannigan had split seconds to make a decision. His right hand seemed scarcely to move, but he had not been boasting when he told Dan Carmody that he had spent too much time learning to handle guns.

The Colt was in his hand as the steel whined through the air. With one slashing motion, Lannigan whipped the long barrel across Ferber's hairy wrist. The point of the blade ripped through Lannigan's gray shirt just two inches from the gleam-

ing star. Then the knife clattered to the floor . . .

Almost in the same motion, Lannigan brought his gun back and the barrel cracked against the strong man's skull. As the man pitched forward, Lannigan's gun slid back into its holster. He turned away.

"Take him to the calaboose somebody," he drawled. "He's under arrest."

CHAPTER V

MURDER RIDES

A soft hand touched Lannigan's arm hesitantly as he made his way toward the Drag. He turned and looked down into wide brown eyes in a pinched, frightened face. He thought instantly of another pair of brown eyes that had looked at him over a gun. Those eyes had been frightened, too, but it had been the kind of fear which is whipped under control until it has become its opposite, courage. There wasn't a whipping will behind these eyes; but there was something else.

"I am Rita. I want to thank you so much, Señor—"

The words were liquid as they flowed from the girl's lips. The fact that there was a faint lisp did not rob the voice of its music. The big eyes swam in a white face and Lannigan saw that the girl had pulled a gay shawl over her torn red dress. The smooth cling of the silk emphasized the young, rounded lines of her figure.

"You don't owe me thanks. I was merely doing my job."

Lannigan's voice was gruff. He was momentarily alone with the girl and it made him restless to have her hand rest that way on his arm. She hadn't looked as she looked now when she was dancing. She had been then what she most likely was; some unlucky child of a low caste Mexican mining town recruited somehow for the dance halls and content with what she was.

The girl was smiling up at him; frightened and yet bold. There was something old and wise in her eyes but they gleamed with the eagerness of her youth. Lannigan's mouth felt dry and suddenly he knew, knew with a sure knowledge where some city bred connoisseur of women might have been uncertain, puzzled or totally wrong. Lannigan's contacts with women had been few and none had ever looked at him like this, but he had lived close to the wild, free aspect of things as they are and he had nothing to unlearn.

In the girl's eyes he read her acknowledgment of the fact that he had been kind to her, had fought for her. There was nothing in her that was capable of weighing vague things like duty and the law. If Lannigan had drawn a gun and marched Zach Ferber away, he would have been a Sereno, a policeman, and that would have been that. He had not used the tools of the law, he had used the tools of a man who fights for a woman. And he had been fighting for her.

Her eyes told him that she was not used to kindness from men and that no man had ever fought for her before. They told him that she belonged to him.

Lannigan swallowed hard. "If anybody bothers you any more, Rita," he said clumsily, "you just let me know—"

With that he bolted ingloriously out upon the Drag. The girl looked after him with wide eyes and for a moment her eyes glowed hot with anger; then she smiled sadly—and a little confidently—and she shrugged. With one pink finger nail, she flicked the top of a match, her right hand plucked a cigarette from some mysterious recess between her breasts and she lighted up. Then, with smoke trailing behind her, and with the back of her hand resting carelessly against her hip, she sauntered lazily and self consciously back toward the dance floor.

She was no longer a frightened lit-

tle girl; she was a woman, such a one as strong men might fight over.

Outside, Lannigan paused and let the night wind blow across his brow while he held the sombrero in his hand. The fight with Ferber had scarcely fazed him. He expected worse than that before he had baptized his star in Mizpah. It was the fact that he could not move unhampered in a man's world that was unsettling. Somewhere out there on the range was a girl who was his sworn enemy because his presence was a threat somehow to those she loved; behind him was a girl who was already, without his willing it, more than his friend. He had a feeling that that he was going to hurt them both before he was through and that disturbed him more than the storm clouds that he felt gathering about the symbol of his office.

A hand fell upon his shoulder and he turned swiftly, his own hand dropping fast. A big voice boomed. "Whoa! I don't reckon anybody's making any plays on you, son. No, sirree." Tolliver was standing at his shoulder, a grin on his broad red face. "Sorry that one of my men lost his head that way, but you shore handled him."

"He was one of your men, then?"

"Yes. You know how it is when some boys get too much liquor. Zach isn't so bad."

"Uh huh. He's goin' to have a helluva headache."

Lannigan stiffened as a rider swept in from the south road and came galloping up the Drag. Tolliver, too, seemed startled. The booming voice was suddenly stilled. The rider flung himself down before Lannigan. He was breathing hard.

"You're the law, I reckon. Well, there's hell to pay. The old man's been shot and—"

"Morgan? Shot? Who—" Tolliver seemed bursting with excitement. Lannigan waved him down. He thought that this was as good a time as any to establish his authority.

"I reckon I'll handle this," he said. He was looking at the man who brought the message. "You work for Morgan?"

"Yep. Three years. My name's Cordwell."

"Tell us about it."

Other men were gathering around now, those who had seen the rider come in and a group from the dance hall scenting excitement. Cordwell mopped his forehead.

"Ain't much to tell. Somebody brought a message to the house along about dusk that old Splinter Dawson was hankering to see Ty about this Association business."

"Who brought the message?"

"I dunno. The Chink took it. D in a Box man likely. Anyways the message opined that Blister was coming over. That there was strange because the old man and Blister ain't been talking for nigh a year. Anyway, we sent in and got the old man and he come out . . ."

"Then what?"

"Blister, he didn't show up and the old man got impatient. He reckoned he'd go over to see what the old tarantula meant. Him and me saddled up and headed for the pass through the Canines. It was there it happened . . ."

"What happened?"

"The shootin'. Somebody was hid behind the rocks with a rifle and he drilled Ty slick as a whistle. The old man never knowed what hit him. After a while, I got the old man home and come here . . ."

Lannigan frowned. There was a lot of growling and some heated talk in the crowd. He sensed the feeling that the D in the Box crowd had planned the ambush. Tolliver put it in words.

"I ain't suggesting nothing, Lannigan," he said, "that would throw suspicion or discredit on nobody. But it sure seems funny that Hank Bassett gets killed right after he joins the Association and the same thing happens to Ty Morgan. Ain't nobody fighting

the Association that I know of except one man—"

He had a big voice and it carried. It was having its effect on the crowd. Lannigan's lips were hard. "I'll look into it," he drawled. "I'm not forgetting neither that every Association puncher has an alibi."

Tolliver turned toward him sharply, but Lannigan's face was guileless. "I reckon I'll ride," he said.

"To D in a Box?"

"Nope. There's got to be a corpse before there's a murder. I reckon I'll look at it and at the place where the shooting happened."

Tolliver shrugged. "You're the doctor."

They were under way in fifteen minutes, Lannigan riding in the lead with Tolliver and Marsh and Cordwell bringing up behind. Half way out to the Bar 2, Lannigan waved Cordwell up beside him and asked questions. Cordwell was a typical product of the range; unimaginative, steady. Lannigan felt that, no matter what currents flowed, this man was honest.

From him he found out that Tolliver was comparatively new in the country and that he had acquired Triangle T from the ne'er do well son of a man named Thompson who had established the iron and died; that Marsh was an old timer who had carried on a feud with Splinter Dawson for years, that Dawson was an old hell walker but a first rate cattleman who had established his iron right after God made the country and who had relinquished range rights reluctantly to men he disliked—which was the general run of humanity seemingly. There had been a lot of fuss over range and water but Cordwell professed to know little about it. Morgan had been a good boss but he ran a small spread. Bassett had been a heavy drinker and careless; a man much given to changing his mind.

Talk languished as they approached the Bar 2. Mrs. Morgan, a thin, flat-chested woman, was badly broken up over what had happened and unable to talk coherently. The Chink didn't know the man who had delivered the message to Morgan. The message could not be found and Cordwell said that he had never seen it.

Morgan's body was laid out on a bed. He had been drilled through the left side of the chest by a bullet that ranged downwards. There was little doubt from the appearance of the wound that he had been shot with a rifle. Lannigan's eyes clouded. He didn't want to believe what he was thinking. He went outside to his horse.

"I reckon we'll look at the scene of the shooting," he said

Tolliver, Marsh and Cordwell rode with him. He was aware of the fact that Tolliver and Marsh were watching him closely and with some amazement. He felt himself that, lacking experience, he was handling the case like a cut-from-the-cloth law officer. The Association crowd seemed rather surprised at that. Instinctively his mind went back to the girl who had held him up.

"You're not quite the type I was expecting," she had said.

He wondered now just what type she did expect and why. Whatever the type, it was probably what Tolliver and Marsh had expected, too. He didn't fill the ticket. He had an idea that he knew the answer to that, too, but the cursed logic of his brain forbade much traffic with untested ideas.

Ahead of him the Canines raised their points to heaven; a group of jagged hills with rock spires rising out of them like a dog's teeth. His eyes swept the rocky slopes above the road. There was plenty of shelter up there for a rifleman and with moonlight on the trail, shooting was a cinch. Cordwell made a clucking noise with his tongue.

"Right here, it was. The feller that did the shooting was somewhere up near that notch."

He pointed and Lannigan made a note of the spot. He bent over a place

in the road where a wide stain still showed darkly. His jaw squared and he raised his head.

"You fellows stay here. I'm climbing for a look."

Without waiting for a verdict, he climbed the slope. Near the notch that Cordwell had indicated, he slowed his pace and dropped his head low. Moonlight flooded the rocks and he could see plainly. For ten minutes he searched and then he gave a grunt. There was a spot where the powdered rock had gathered into a circular ridge . . . No . . . It was semi-circular. A man had knelt here.

Lannigan crouched above the mark and squinted at the road. He could see the three men plainly, see their faces turned toward him. With a rifle he could have taken his pick of them. He grunted and stepped back. For several moments he moved around the ledge. It was impossible to see which way the man had gone. The rocky surface gave a poor trail.

As he was about to turn away, however, he saw something foreign in a chink of the rocks about twenty feet away from the notch. He bent over it and picked it out. It was the scorched remnant of a brown paper wrapped cigarette. His eyes narrowed and he sniffed it.

His whole body stiffened and he stood like a statue for a long minute; then his lips straightened grimly and he wrapped the cigarette in paper. As he tucked it away, he dropped to a squat behind the rocks at the point where the cigarette had been discarded.

It was an ideal lookout post. He could look out from there and see the road winding for miles in the direction of Bar 2. The unknown rifleman had evidently done just that—but he had not been able to do without a smoke. Lannigan turned and made his way slowly back to the road. He said nothing about the cigarette. Tolliver nodded up the road.

"You figgering on pushing on to D in a Box?"

Lannigan shook his head. "I'm going out tomorrow," he said curtly. He was not forgetting that Baptiste never missed with a rifle when he was serious. He wondered what Baptiste smoked when he was smoking.

CHAPTER VI

A DEAD HORSE

The road to D in a Box wound through Shadow Gap and dropped across Sawdust Creek where the brushy foothills of the Sawtooth came down to the sage. As he approached the bridge, Lannigan had a premonition. He was not sure whether it was merely the memory of another bridge approach or whether it was a fresh hunch. He crouched low and touched the spurs lightly to his pony's flanks.

Even as he did there was a sharp crack from the slope of the nearest hill, the pony stiffened and went down. Lannigan had a fractional second in which to kick his feet clear of the stirrups and then he was in the dust. He was badly shaken up and for a few seconds his head was whirling too fast for coherent thought. He lay where he fell; a perfect target for a rifleman. There was no further shooting.

When his head cleared, he made a note of that, climbing gingerly to his feet. Silence crowded the gap and he walked stiffly to the fallen horse. It had been drilled cleanly through the head. Lannigan looked down grimly. He had been riding that pony for a year and a man becomes more than a rider in a year; he becomes a friend.

There was a sign sticking on a pole beside the bridge over Sawdust Creek and Lannigan walked to it. The message was terse and to the point.

This is the north boundary of the D in a Box J. D. Dawson

It was neither a threat nor an invitation, but it certainly was a notice. Lannigan looked at it for a moment and returned to his horse. It seemed

rather significant that he should be cut down almost in front of that sign. He went down on one knee and started to strip the hull from his mount. He heard a thud of hoofs on the road and turned, his eyes narrowed.

Madge Dawson swept around the curve beyond the bridge. She was riding a close coupled sorrel. Behind her on a big buckskin was Baptiste.

As they clattered over the bridge, Lannigan came slowly to his feet. His two guns leaped like magic into his hands. "That's close enough," he snapped. "Swing down!"

The girl's face flushed and she stiffened in the saddle. Lannigan forestalled what she was going to say. "I don't care if *you* get down or not," he said grimly. His eyes were narrowed on Baptiste. "But *you* better get down, Canuck!"

Baptiste showed no sign of fear nor any other emotion. Calmly and without undue haste, he swung down. Lannigan moved his gun suggestively.

"I want to look at your rifle."

The girl had been trying to stare a hole in him. Now, her color still high, she, too, swung down. "This is an outrage," she said. "You don't have to show him anything, Baptiste. I'll take care of this." Her fists were clenched. Lannigan still kept his eyes on Baptiste.

"The rifle!" he said.

The Canuck shrugged. "It is better so," he said. He reached into the saddle boot and brought out his .30-.30. He passed it over without a word and Lannigan's guns went away as swiftly as they had appeared. He did not consider it necessary to warn Baptiste that they would come out fast once more if they were needed. He took the rifle.

Stepping off a few paces from the two in the road, Lannigan examined the rifle carefully, keeping an eye on Baptiste and the girl. The examination disappointed him. It was fully loaded and it showed no evidence of having been recently fired. It had been cleaned recently and smelled of fresh oil, but that proved nothing. A man who took a pride in his marksmanship would take a pride in his weapon—and he would take care of it.

If Baptiste was the man who shot his horse, then the girl had to be in on the plot. Not any too much time had elapsed since the shooting and it would have taken careful work to eliminate the odor from the weapon. Lannigan shook his head. He was not making a case for the girl, but he was willing to swear that the rifle had not been fired. Baptiste, of course, might have had another rifle.

He looked sharply at the man. There was neither guilt nor worry in the Canuck's attitude. He seemed bored. The girl, however, was still tense. Lannigan handed the rifle back to Baptiste without a word and Madge Dawson could hold herself in no longer.

"Will you explain what this means?" Lannigan looked up at her gravely.

"Somebody killed my horse under me a few minutes ago," he said. "I thought maybe Baptiste was getting a mite more serious."

"We don't shoot horses." Color flamed in her cheeks and, despite the hot anger that burned in him, Lannigan checked his previous impression. The girl made a disturbing enemy. He wasn't going to hurt her without hurting himself and every meeting with her made the eventual hurt more and more inevitable. He decided against any further word duels with her. He had work to do and he would have to get it over with, no matter who fell. For a moment he had an impulse which urged him to take Baptiste's horse but he fought it down. He had to go to D in a Box and the law could not go in lawlessly. He turned back to his saddle.

"You can go now," he said curtly. "I'm through with you."

The girl gasped and stepped back. Lannigan walked away and resumed his job of removing the hull from his

dead pony. Madge Dawson watched him for a moment and then, when he did not look up, she mounted. The high color had left her face. Her eyes were puzzled.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked at length. Lannigan hung the saddle in a tree off the road.

"I'm going to D in a Box."

"You can't. You haven't a horse. It's five miles. . . ."

"I'll walk."

The girl bit her lip. She had elected to be an outright enemy to this man and it annoyed her to have him indifferent. It left her with nothing to fight and, at the same time, made any overture impossible. She urged her pony over to the side of the road.

"You'll find my father unfriendly," she said. "He has the same opinion that I have and he's—well, he's harder. He wouldn't let you do what—"

"I don't ask people to let me do things, ma'am."

Again she straightened. He was not looking at her, but she looked hard at him. "We'll ride back to the ranch and I'll send Baptiste back with a wagon," she said. "He'll take you to town."

"Thank you. I'm not going to town."

With his saddle hung to his satisfaction, Lannigan shrugged and turned into the road. With a long, swinging stride, he started off down the road to D in a Box. The girl watched him over the bridge; then she made an impatient gesture and turned her horse back toward the ranch. "Come on, Baptiste. We'll go home."

Lannigan did not look up as they passed him.

He was sweating heavily before he had covered a mile and he was limping badly at a mile and a half. A cowpuncher's boots are designed for riding and they make bad work of walking. Lannigan gritted his teeth and forced himself on. Five miles looked like one long pilgrimage and the blisters were already building up.

Less than two miles were behind him when he saw a wagon heading out of the high winding road that led back to D in a Box ranch house. It took some fifteen minutes to reach him. Baptiste sat solemnly with the reins in his hands. His features expressed no emotion whatever but there was a gleam that might have been enjoyment in his eyes.

"I will take you to Mizpah, no?"

"I'm not going to Mizpah." Lannigan strode grimly on. He knew whose idea this was and he resented the fact that she thought he would be willing to quit. The wagon continued on down the road for a mile and turned. As it drew abreast of Lannigan, Baptiste leaned out. There was no amusement in his face now. He seemed rather sympathetic than hostile.

"Mam'selle, she say if you will not go to Mizpah, I should take you where you want . . ."

"Thanks. I'm going there."

Lannigan plodded on and the stubborn set of his jaw admitted of no compromises. He had undertaken the job of wearing a star into a place where the star was not welcome. He was going in under his own power and under no obligations. Somebody had tried to make a fool out of him by unhorsing him. He did not believe that the bullet had been intended for him. All right. D in a Box might not have been responsible for that, but they might have been. He was not compromising. He was going in.

For a half mile, Baptiste stayed well behind him, then—satisfied that his services would not be accepted—he cracked his whip and disappeared down the road. Lannigan's eyes followed him somberly. He wondered a lot about Baptiste. The man's job seemed to be that of bodyguard to Madge Dawson, but the man looked like one who would throw a long shadow on any job.

Lannigan couldn't help wondering

just how good the man was with a rifle and just how much he worked at it.

Somebody in the south end of the county was too good.

CHAPTER VII

TIN STAR JUSTICE

There were quite a few men in evidence when Jack Lannigan took the last lap of his journey and walked up to the D in a Box ranch house. They were clean looking crowd, he noted, and there was no open hostility. They looked at him with more of curiosity than unfriendliness. He was dog tired and his feet were so raw that he could hardly set them down but he walked straight and kept his weakness inside.

A bull of a man with a close clipped gray mustache, heavy jowls and cold blue eyes stepped down from the porch of the house and stood waiting for him. Lannigan was aware of searching scrutiny. The man had poker eyes and he was weighing the man who wore the star. Lannigan met his eyes coolly.

"You're Mr. Dawson."

"You know I am."

"Right. I'm Jack Lannigan, the new deputy. And you know that."

"You've got some business out here?"

"I hope not. There's a few things I'd like the answers to."

"You would? Well, you get the answers from the men that hired your two guns." Dawson's eyes had narrowed and he was leaning forward, his lip lifted slightly on the left side over a yellow set of teeth. "There never was a country needed law till lawyers and professional star toters come into it, and the more o' that kind o' law it gets the more law it needs."

Lannigan stood straight. "The guns are my own," he said softly "and they were bought with honest money. The star belongs to the county. I haven't got anything to sell to you or to anybody else."

"Well, what are you doing down here?"

"Trying to find murderers right now?"

Dawson turned angrily away, then he wheeled back. "You think you'll find them over here?"

"I told you I came here to find the answers to a few questions. Did you send a letter to Ty Morgan last night?"

Dawson's jaw snapped. "I did not; last night or any night. When a man throws in with a bunch of—"

"He got a letter that he thought was from you. It lured him to his death."

For a moment, Dawson was rocked off his balance; but only for a moment. He looked like a very old man one second and then he was all fighter once more.

"You'll get that answer, too, where you got your tin star," he growled. He turned his back deliberately. "See my foreman about borrowing a mount," he said. "They'll feed you at the bunkhouse."

Lannigan's lips thinned and he took two steps after the old man. "I'll accept the loan of a mount. I won't eat here while you believe the way you do. But I want to ask one more question."

Dawson didn't turn but he hesitated with one foot on the step to the porch. Lannigan let his question flow out softly. "Which one of your men smokes marijuana?"

Splinter Dawson turned around slowly and his eyes burned into Lannigan's. "When I hire hands that do," he said deliberately, "I'll join your condemned association."

He went in then and Lannigan rolled a cigarette. It had been a tough interview but it had cleaned up more than Lannigan had expected. For one thing, Dawson had been forcing himself to truculence. He could easily have been friendly. Like his daughter he had been prepared for a different type of man and Lannigan had disappointed his hostility. He had showed, too, that he knew of the incident on

the trail and of Lannigan's pilgrimage on foot. Lannigan knew himself that the type of man who hires out his guns would have taken a ride with Baptiste; Dawson would know it. Only a wall of stubborn pride had kept the two men apart; that and a deep rooted prejudice of Dawson's against tin star law.

Lannigan even understood the prejudice. The most famous of western sheriffs and marshals had won their jobs with their guns; the theory being that a man capable of thwarting the law was capable of enforcing it.

As he turned to the bunkhouse, Lannigan even allowed himself to limp a little. He was feeling more natural and he was seeing things. There was a lot of evidence against the D in a Box and all signs pointed logically to Dawson as the villain of the range; but there are times when evidence is too logical to be believable. Lannigan was wondering, for instance, why he had been shot at where he would be sure to see Splinter Dawson's boundary sign and why—if D in a Box had been responsible—he was not fired on after he crossed the boundary. A little thing, but it is little things that upset logical trains of thought.

Chip Mars, a taciturn individual who chewed tobacco and knew only two words, saddled a horse for Lannigan, and Lannigan rode out. He was wondering about the girl as he hit the back trail. He had not missed the by-play in the Blue Stack Saloon. Tolliver had resented his mentioning the girl and the others had seemed to understand that he had an interest in her.

It was just possible that Madge Dawson had had Tolliver's interests at heart when she tried to keep Lannigan out of Mizpah.

He was rounding the turn to the bridge when he reached that conclusion and she was there waiting for him. Baptiste was nowhere in evidence. Lannigan reined in.

"I had to talk to you." The girl's words came in a rush. The moonlight did things to her face and form that were disturbing. The sun brown seemed to have gone with the sun and Lannigan saw now how she would look if she were peaches and cream and pink. He wasn't so sure any more that he liked brown better. The strength that had been there under her girlishness when she set her will against his was not in evidence either. The night — or something — had wrought a difference. She was as soft as the light that bathed her. Lannigan thought no longer of Lasca and the Rio Grande.

"I had to see you. I think—I don't know—I may have wronged you. You aren't what I thought you would be. You have courage."

"Is that what you wanted to see me about?" Lannigan cursed himself inwardly for the words but they would come. He couldn't forget that this girl had ordered her man to fire on him, that she had been making his hard job harder. For a moment she swayed unsteadily; then she found her voice again. The words came more slowly now.

"No. Not if you don't want me to tell you that. I'll stick to business. My father had nothing to do with any killing on this range."

"No?"

"No." Her voice rang with intensity. "But he's a fighter. He will fight you or anyone else that comes against him. That's why I wanted to turn you back. I had to. I thought I could do something. I was very foolish."

"Why didn't you try to turn him back instead of me. It takes two to make a fight."

He made a helpless gesture with one hand. "You are being difficult. I knew him. I didn't know you, then. He will never give in . . ."

"And you thought that I would."

"I didn't know. I hoped so. I still hope so. I've given up the hope of making you do anything . . ."

"I'm glad of that."

"But I've got to ask you, to make you understand." She edged her pony over close to him, looked into his face. He found her nearness disturbing. "You will try to understand, won't you? This Association isn't honest. Joe Marsh was—well, I can't prove what he was—before Tolliver came. Father despised him. The Association was just an excuse to force my father to the wall and to make it look legal."

"That's a serious charge."

"It's true." The girl's voice rang passionately. "These other men joined only because they were frightened."

"It looks as though they had something to be frightened of." Lannigan was curt while something inside of him protested the curtness.

The girl swallowed hard. "You're making me doubt you again. You're not open to conviction."

"I am. But how do you explain your father cyaniding cattle?"

She sat straight and looked at him. "You ought to have figured that out yourself. Did you ever know of a cattleman who cyanided his own water holes to poison somebody's cattle?"

"No. I didn't." Lannigan was thoughtful.

The girl sensed surely the turning point of the argument. She no longer appealed to him. Her head was high and her pony moved off. "The Association was jamming stock across into D in a Box range," she said slowly, "and using up our water in a dry year when they had plenty on their own ranges. Where they didn't jam stock, somebody stole in at night and poisoned a water hole. We lost fifty head in one night."

"And there weren't any Association cattle lost."

The girl nodded. "There were. Next day. Our men stampeded the herds that the Association had jammed over the west boundary and drove them up toward the poisoned water. We pulled ours out."

Lannigan nodded. It was rough on the cattle but it was legitimate. The girl gave him no time for an opinion. "You've started to think," she said, "and thinking never hurt any man whether he was wearing a star or wasn't."

With a flirt of her hand, she wheeled and was gone. Lannigan stared after her and swore softly. He had ridden a mile before he knew just what he had sworn about—and then he was only guessing.

CHAPTER VIII

MARKED FOR LEAD

Lannigan was bogged with weariness when he reached Mizpah but the stage was leaving for Crescent City and he rode in it. There were many questions that he wanted answers for and there was one logical starting place.

He was too wise to ask Sheriff Rainey why he had been held two days in Crescent City after his appointment before being sent down. If, as he suspected, it was to permit certain preparations to be made, Rainey would not tell him. Nor did he expect any valuable information about Mizpah and the south range from Rainey. Rainey had said that he wouldn't help him or hinder him. Rainey was the type of man who would stick to that statement.

Lannigan had only one question to ask in Crescent City. He wanted to know if Dan Carmody was still in jail.

He got his answer. Rainey laughed and pulled a register across the desk. "The dang cuss is practically always in jail," he said heartily. "He gets his mail here. Too much liquor, too much marijuana, too little brain—"

Lannigan looked at the register. Carmody had not been out, according to the record, since before Lannigan hit the county except for a trifle over two hours; long enough for him to get into an argument with a half breed and to break a bottle on the man's head. He shoved the register back.

"Who is he, Rainey?"

"Just what he looks. He's a rummy.

Once upon a time, he was one of Joe Marsh's hands on the Lazy K, but that was long ago. He just kinda lives on what people give him."

"Thanks."

Lannigan was back in Mizpah the following night. He found that his absence had been resented. Neither Tolliver nor Marsh were around but Bob White greeted him sullenly.

"You're a helluva deputy," he growled. "Sky and Joe are sore as hell. They tried to make things right for you but you ain't workin' at your trade . . ."

Lannigan's eyes bored him. "Yore job is tending bar," he said softly. "Don't go to making wild guesses."

He strolled lazily out through the dance hall. There were only a few casual patrons and few of the girls were busy. As he walked through the dim passageway that led to the street, he heard a soft rustle behind him. He turned.

The girl, Rita, plucked at his sleeve and pulled him into the darker angle of the passageway where it turned back into the hall. He could feel the warmth of her body pressing against him. She gripped his arm tightly and her hair brushed his face as she stood on tip toe to whisper.

"You mus' not go where they ask you tonight," she said. There was fear in her voice.

"Why?"

"I canno' tell." There was fear in her voice. "I tell yo', yo' mus' not go. It is one trick. They will keel you, my caballero."

"Who? Who is going to kill me?" In the sudden intense mood that swept him, Lannigan did not notice that he was gripping the girl's arms. She melted into him. If his steel hard fingers pressed into her flesh and bruised it, she made no complaint. Her white face swam in the dim light of the passageway.

"They—all these men—How do I know them apart? You, only you, are differen'. They weel keel yo' because yo' are differen'—"

Lannigan was too uncomfortably conscious of the girl now, of her warm breath, of the emotional tide that shook her. He held her off from him for a minute.

"I'll be careful, Rita. Thanks. I'll remember this—"

He set her down on her feet, patted her shoulder awkwardly and fled ignominiously. He did not look back.

Outside on the drag there were only a few people in evidence. A rider thundered in from the south as another rider had done on the night that Morgan died. His head and shoulder were bandaged and he rode as does one who has come a long way on urgent business; but Lannigan let his eyes drift from the man to the horse and he smiled grimly. It ought to have occurred to someone that a man doesn't learn to handle two guns without learning to tell when a horse has been ridden far. This one was fresh.

The man came unerringly to where Lannigan stood. "Deppity," he gasped. "There's hell to pay and yo're needed. Joe Marsh says as how you're to come at once. Old Splinter has got his men over south o' the Canines and there's goin' ter be war unless they're stopped."

Lannigan's eyes were level but the man did not meet his stare. "Can you lead me out to the trouble?" Lannigan's voice was low. The man swayed a little.

"Can't. Splinter's men shot me up some. But I can show you how to get there . . ."

Lannigan had an impulse to investigate the bandages and see if there were wounds under them but it was hardly worth while. The man was small fry. Instead he listened solemnly while the man detailed the route; then he went for his horse.

As he rode the black trail southward, he thought of Rita's warning. She had known. Well, he would have suspected; but knowledge was a powerful ally on a ride like this.

He was vigilant on the straight road but he hardly expected anything until the road dipped down through Shadow Gap. He remembered the nice clean stretch of road that was visible to a man who crouched at the point where he had found the cigarette. A man who squatted there had plenty of time to line his sights and prepare for a horseman who was riding through. The rifleman would probably know of no reason why he should not operate again from the same spot. Lannigan was not supposed to be suspicious.

Well, Lannigan was not riding through from Bar 2 as the unlucky Morgan had been. The road from Mizpah was not so straight. It forked into the other. Just before he reached the fork, Lannigan dismounted and took to the rocks. His feet were still blistered and the going was agonizing, but he could push his feet on. He had proved that. There would be nothing to push if he stayed out were a rifle bullet could find him.

As he circled Indian fashion and made his way tortuously toward the sheltered cliff of the marksman, he thought of what a perfect stroke his murder would be. He had disappointed and worried the men who had asked for the law. They would not feel his loss. And who but the D in a Box would have a motive for killing him? It would be proved that he was riding out at the request of Joe Marsh to keep Splinter Dawson's men from violence. His death on that mission would swing the county solidly against the snorty old cattleman. It was perfect . . . almost.

He was above the murder spot now and his heart leaped. He had not guessed wrong. There was a man crouched behind the rocks with his eyes fixed on the trail. Lannigan crept slowly down on him and when he was closing in, his foot sent a shower of small rocks cascading. The man gave a startled leap and clutched his rifle.

"Drop that smoke pole and elevate! You're covered."

The man below shuddered and the rifle fell. Lannigan came down and the man turned to him. His identity was not the shock that it might have been two days earlier. Lannigan's mouth was hard.

"You waiting for somebody, Carmody?"

The old man who had sung so dolefully in the Crescent City jail tried to smile. "Shucks, son. You scared me. I'm glad to see you. I was jest—"

"You're a liar. You were waiting to shoot me."

The old man sat down suddenly on the rocks. The hard streak that Lannigan had sensed beneath his despair on that first day back in the jail was uppermost now. "I reckon mebbe you're right," he said wearily. "I told you to take a proposition if you got it. You did. Well, this here is my proposition, the one I took."

For a moment Lannigan was staggered. He had never thought of it in that way even when his suspicions were aroused. It put Carmody and himself in the same boat according to some brands of logic. He didn't go for all the brands. "I didn't take a contract to murder nobody," he said. "You've murdered two; Bassett and Morgan."

The old man was rolling a marijuana cigarette. "I reckon," he said unemotionally. "But 'twasn't me did the murdering any more than the gun did 'em by itself. I figgered that when those fellers marked a man off to die, he was all through. It didn't make any difference who did it; it would have been done—"

Lannigan rolled that idea around in his mind. He decided not to argue. He had work to do yet and Carmody had no moral sense to which he could appeal. "What fellers do you mean? Whose behind all this?"

Carmody's eyes were hooded, lazy with drug. "I ain't talking now or no other time."

He seemed remote, secure. He had neither remorse for his crimes nor fear of retribution. For the moment

he seemed a man above the law, above fear or coercion. Then Lannigan remembered the conversation in the jail. Carmody had confessed one all powerful fear then. He had expressed the belief that he would die by a bullet but he had almost fainted at even the thought that he might know in advance when the bullet was going to strike. Lannigan's mouth tightened and he raised his gun.

"Carmody," he said, "you don't deserve any more mercy than you dealt out. If you don't spill your story before I count three, I'm going to put a slug in your right knee cap. After that I'll count three more and get the other."

The old man dropped the cigarette. He came half to his knees and dropped back before the menace of the gun. His face was almost green in the moonlight. "No! No!" he shrieked. "I can't wait for it, thinking about it. I'll tell you—"

His surrender was absolute. In quick, panting phrases, he told how Tolliver had got hold of young Thompson and encouraged him to gamble against crooked cards until he had lost the Triangle T; how Joe Marsh who had started his spread with a long loop and a running iron had thrown in with Tolliver and with Bob White who had helped to swindle young Thompson. All of them had organized to gain control of the whole range against Dawson who suspected what Tolliver had done and who knew what Marsh was.

The whole sordid story came tumbling out. Rainey was just a crooked politician, too smart to get mixed up in a fight that was in the balance. He had falsified jail records and provided Carmody with an alibi for the killings but he had refused to use his office further for Tolliver. He feared Dawson's influence at the state capital and that had been his reason for appointing a deputy to bear the brunt of the battle in Mizpah. It gave him an out. Tolliver and Marsh gained the cloak of the law for their activities but Rainey was still able to disavow his appointee if anything went wrong. Carmody himself had written the decoy note to Ty Morgan and delivered it at a time when the men were not around.

"Tonight is the finish," the old man said wearily. "Joe Marsh is shoving stock over into D in a Box range and he's got a lot of Tolliver's men to help him. They're goin' ter get old Splinter up there and the shooting will start suddenly. There ain't goin' to be much D in a Box testimony left above ground. You bein' killed—if you was —would have been a cincher for Tolliver . . ."

"Have you got a horse?" he asked grimly. Carmody nodded. Lannigan waved him to his feet.

"We're going to ride," he said.

CHAPTER IX

THE THROW-DOWN

The message that Lannigan received in Mizpah had told him to come out to where Marsh was gathering his men to face Dawson's. When Lannigan rode south of the Canines, he rode to where Dawson's men were gathering to oppose Marsh's. He found himself under the guns before he ever saw Splinter Dawson but he spotted the D in a Box the drop. He had no quarrel with them. Carmody was still with him when he confronted Dawson. The old rancher was hard, hostile, suspicious. Lannigan had no patience with obstinacy now.

He rode rough shod over the rancher's curtness and his speech had a curl to it. In biting language he outlined what he had learned by himself and through Carmody. When he had finished, there was neither fear nor anger in Dawson's face; only a certain grim enjoyment.

"So you found out after all that you were just a gun man?" he said bluntly.

"I'm a deputy and I'm next sheriff of the county." Lannigan's jaw was as hard as Dawson's. "What I want from

you is a good place to lock up this murdering old pelican and some idea of how you're going to keep yourself alive and keep my office from getting the black eye that it would get if you were killed."

Splinter Dawson laughed out loud and the three punchers within earshot looked at him with their jaws hanging. "I've got a load of dynamite up there," he said, "with good men guarding it. Do you reckon a few sticks of it would mebbe start that cattle back where it came from?"

Lannigan grinned. "I reckon there ought to be a right nice stampede." He felt as though Splinter Dawson had shaken hands with him. A man like Dawson doesn't tell his plans to a man he doubts. Dawson nodded.

"There will be a stampede," he said, "and those mangy wolves o' Marsh's will have their hands full. They won't do much shooting."

Carmody was passing his hand across his forehead. "I been trying to recollect," he said. He stiffened. "The girl . . ."

"What about the girl?" Lannigan wheeled on him fiercely.

"I pretty near forgot." Carmody was still stroking his forehead. "Pretty near. Tolliver, he wants the Dawson girl. He reckoned it would be a good time with her pa gettin' taken off and—"

Splinter Dawson started forward, his fists clenched. Lannigan was tense, his eyes on Dawson. "Where is she?" he asked hoarsely.

"At the house. Baptiste is with her. He worships her—"

"I'm going down." Lannigan swung into the saddle. Dawson was starting for his horse. Lannigan cut him off. "This is a job for the law," he said grimly. "You let the law handle it. You've got a cattleman's job here."

Lannigan rode hard along the winding road to D in a Box ranch house. It had a deserted look when he came in sight of it and at the gate he found Baptiste. The man had nearly a dozen bullet wounds in him and the trail of blood told its own story. He had followed up, shooting as long as strength remained in him. Lannigan was too cold now to pity him. He wheeled his horse and straight lined for Mizpah.

Lannigan didn't see the figure that was all but merged with the shadows at the doorway to the darkened dance hall and it would not have occurred to him that a girl had been waiting long hours for a sign that he was safe.

He didn't see Bob White's startled face above the bar either as he lunged across the bar room and made his way to the stairs. Nor did he see the giant figure of Zach Ferber rising grimly from a corner table. He was single track and beyond signs and portents.

He hesitated only a moment where the light shone under a door. He could hear Sky Tolliver's voice, booming in a minor key but still booming with assurance.

"Hell, I don't know why you take on so. I've got everything that any man can give you. I know women and I could give you . . ."

Lannigan took the door with his shoulder and went in. Sky Tolliver had been holding the girl. He tossed her aside like a sack of straw and went for his gun.

Lannigan's hand dipped and rose. There was a livid streak of flame and a booming report. Sky Tolliver died with his gun half out of his holster. His body spun once and he went down on his face. Feet pounded on the stairs and Lannigan wheeled. His gun spat flame again as Bob White plunged through the door, but the man was diving low and it had been a hasty, unaimed shot. It only creased his shoulder. He came plunging in to grips.

Lannigan lashed at him with the barrel of his gun and cracked him across the forehead. The saloon man went down in a heap and then Zach Ferber was into it.

Ferber was a knife man and light danced on his blade as he charged. Lannigan was not in position to stop his charge with a blow on the wrist this time. He twisted to one side and the knife slid off and tore a gash in his sleeve. He gripped the knife hand with his left hand just as Ferber's hand closed on his gun hand and jerked.

Ferber's herculean strength was in that jerk and the men went to the floor. Lannigan felt the steel cable muscles tensing in the knife hand and knew that he would never be able to hold it with his left. Ferber was grinning viciously and his knee came up in Lannigan's wind. The knife was coming down slowly.

Madge Dawson had pressed back against the wall when the shooting started and the subsequent action had taken mere seconds. She was moving though when Ferber and Lannigan hit the floor. With a swoop she possessed herself of the gun that Lannigan dropped. Her face paled, but there was a will within her that could come up to the driver's seat when the going was rough. Her lips pressed tight and she swung.

Lannigan twisted at the moment when the gun barrel cracked against Ferber's skull. He felt the man go limp and the knife sang as it grazed his ribs and buried itself in the floor. He shook the limp body of the giant off with an effort and came groggily to his feet. The girl was looking down in horror at the man she had felled. The gun dropped from her hand.

In the doorway another girl paused, her wide eyes on Lannigan, her lips parted. Lannigan didn't see her. He shook his head to clear it and then looked across the room. His left hand dropped toward the one gun that remained but his brain shrieked that he was late . . .

Bob White, his gray face streaked with blood, his thick lips sneering viciously, was leveling his gun.

In one of those flashes of time that no man can measure, the girl in the doorway sensed the situation. Before Lannigan saw Death reaching for him, she sensed it. In her mind, the hard fighting deputy was hers and that feeling may have given her some deep, intuitive knowledge. With a low cry, she leaped toward the snarling saloon keeper.

A gun boomed and the girl was flung backward by the impact. Lannigan swore hoarsely as his gun flipped from the holster. He was a lightning flash slower than White and his bullet streaked past the falling body of the girl. It took White through the forehead and the man pitched forward.

Lannigan dropped to one knee and turned the girl over. Rita of the dance hall had died as she leaped. It had been swift and, perhaps, more merciful than what would have come to her later. Lannigan looked up misty eyed. Madge Dawson had her hands clasped in front of her, her wide eyes were on his face.

In that moment, Lannigan saw a suggestion of the something that had frightened him in the face of Rita on the night that he saved her from Ferber. He had fought for this girl, too, and he had won. Her eyes told him that she knew it and he was not frightened now, nor did he want to run. After all, she had fought for him, too. He rose slowly to his feet.

On the floor was the body of a girl who could have been Lasca by the Rio Grande. Out by the gate of D in a Box lay the riddled body of Baptiste. Two had died for two they had loved and these two were left.

They had no need of words to tell them why. A sob caught in the girl's throat as she swayed forward. Lannigan took her in his arms. The powder smoke dissolved slowly in the room as trouble was dissolving slowly over the range south of Mizpah.

The instant Baldy's grip relaxed, Woof doubled and kicked the other bear in the belly with both hind feet

BEAR SINISTER

By
GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN

A Shaggy Sweetheart Was What Woof, Black Bear Of Boulder Creek, Wanted—But Another Bear, Bigger And Blacker And Proddy As A Mad Rattler, Wanted The Same Thing.

Woof, the black bear, had important business on his mind, and he had started to attend to it with characteristic persistence. Ordinarily the only thing that interested Woof to any great extent was food; and this time of the year, when the rich bulbs were bursting out of the moist ground along the Santa Maria marshes, and rainbow trout were spawning on the sands of Boulder Creek, food was plentiful and easy to get.

No, the thing that was bothering the bear was the same eternal urge that sends men and women of all ages to the parks on spring evenings, when there is yet a hint of winter's chill in the air. Woof desired a mate, and as there were none of his kind on the rocky slopes above Santa Maria Lake, Woof had turned his back on the den

where he had hibernated for three winters, and started a-wooing.

A person standing on the little rock shelf in front of the den and watching him as he strutted off down the long aisle, between two rows of silver tipped spruce, would have found it difficult to repress a smile. The rear view of a bear is one that never fails to bring a smile to the face of man. There is something inexpressibly droll in the stiff-legged, rolling walk, on legs that bend only at the joints immediately above the absurd feet.

Half way between the deserted den and the shore of Lake Santa Maria, Woof came to a tall, straight aspen tree. Just why Woof should stop today and scratch his autograph as high up in the smooth white bark as he could reach, no two woods dwellers will agree; but the fact remains that the bear had passed this way many times before and had failed to leave any mark on the open page upon which he might have announced his height, the sharpness of his claws and perhaps, to those interested, his sex.

Consequently since you and I have been admitted into the secret yearning of Woof's heart, we may give a better guess than those who think he leaves these marks as high up on the trees as he can in order to frighten away possible enemies.

Woof left the tree and went down to the edge of the lake. For a few minutes he watched a pair of cinnamon teal swimming about among the rushes in the shallow water. He listened to the musical notes of mating birds, and studied the reflection of Bristol Head mirrored on the placid surface of the lake.

To see this familiar outline of the mountain turned upside down in Santa Maria was sufficient to puzzle any bear. Woof looked at it for a long time. He would gaze upward at the peak rising high above timberline, as if to make sure that it was a veritable fixture, incapable of foolish antics, then he would turn quickly to look at the reflection. Failing to solve the riddle of how a perfectly sober and dignified mountain could play such tricks, Woof gave up experimenting and strutted off down the shore of the lake, his whole manner showing that he didn't care a tinker's damn. If the mountain wanted to act the fool that way, that was its own affair. Woof was going to find him a mate and that was his very special business.

All day Woof traveled northwest. He skirted around the stage stand on Clear Creek, climbed the steep hill so as to avoid the cañon beside the falls, and then loped across the open valley towards South Clear Creek, nearly frightening the wits out of a small group of white-faced calves sleeping in the shade of an aspen grove, and bringing the mothers bawling up the slope.

The black bear lengthened his stride and was soon among the spruce, but no sooner had he escaped the threatening horns of the angry mothers, than he encountered a new danger in the person of Whisperfoot, the mountain lion, who had been stalking the calves, and was some peeved because of the ruckus Woof had stirred up, thereby spoiling the cougar's chance for a breakfast of milk-fed veal.

With his mind set on finding a mate, Woof resented any interference that might delay his quest. He gave not one inch to Whisperfoot, and utterly ignored the cussing the lion spewed forth in a series of angry squalls. Whisperfoot had always avoided bears, there was really no reason for the two to quarrel, since the food supply of both was unlimited and there was no conflict. Woof would not kill a calf or a deer, unless he was starving, and Whisperfoot never ate bulbs or berries, so there was no clash of interest. But for some reason today the lion was easily angered.

They met between two trees. Whis-

perfoot, treacherous as those of his breed always are, made a swift pass at Woof, his inch-long claws swishing past the head of the bear and cutting a gash on Woof's shoulder. Instantly Whisperfoot discovered that a black bear is about the most effective rough and tumble fighter to be found on the whole upper Rio Grande. Without even turning his body, Woof landed a swinging uppercut in the belly of the cat, followed it with a cuff on the side of the head that knocked Whisperfoot over on his back, and before the cat could regain his feet, Woof was on him, biting, hitting, hugging.

Small bunches of both black and yellow fur floated above the combatants. The language used was such as to bring Whiskeyjack and Bluejay screeching through the tree tops, broadcasting the news of the fight to every animal on the mountainside. It was a one-round scrap with Woof outpointing Whisperfoot ten to one. In fact the first chance the lion got to spring into the branches of the spruce, he did so. He did not come down again until long after Woof had gone up the valley of South Clear Creek, and line riders had moved the terror stricken cattle farther out onto the open range.

Except for a few cuts and scratches, Woof had come out of the fight uninjured, but Whisperfoot had sustained a broken shoulder. The shoulder would heal slowly and make his hunting difficult for many weeks. Woof's morale was wonderfully strengthened by his victory. Any animal that whips a full grown cougar has reason to feel a bit cocky, and Woof was just a little bit on the prod when he came out on the Crooked Creek flats and almost blundered into the camp of the Turkey Track cow outfit.

Ordinarily Woof would have been traveling up wind, but on the theory that it pays to advertise, he was today traveling with the wind, hoping that if any young female should catch his scent, she might be tempted to wait and give Woof the once over. As a result the cowboys sitting about the campfire waiting for their supper, saw sudden confusion among the saddle stock of the remuda.

When a horse smells bear he does not stop to inquire into whether the animal is horse-hunting or not. He acts upon the hunch that the bear is, and the horse puts as much space as possible behind him, and he does it with great speed. Ten seconds after Woof came to the edge of the forest, within a hundred yards of Satan, top cutting horse of the Turkey Track, the whole remuda was making deep tracks in the sod, heading toward the ranch far down the river. Even the six mules that drew the chuck wagon went hobbling and braying after the flying remuda.

The Turkey Track outfit was plumb afoot, and if there is anything that a range man hates it's hunting horses on foot.

Again Woof's innocent quest for a mate had brought disaster upon him. Every cowboy in the camp grabbed the first firearm he could get hold of. A fusillade of bullets hummed and whined around Woof as he ran fast as he could after the horses. One rifle bullet creased Woof's neck and brought a yelp of pain from him. He could not run as fast as the horses, but he distanced the hobbled mules, and kept on, thus driving the frenzied stock still farther from the camp.

A spent bullet hit him in the shoulder, but did no great damage and Woof did not stop for breath until he had driven the remuda so far that the men who went after them did not return that night.

Two such adventures as Woof had experienced would have been sufficient to discourage a less persistent animal than a bear. Woof, however, was an ardent wooer and was not to be turned from his search. He merely skirted around the open ground until he came into a little mountain park just at dark, and there, calmly pick-

ing fat grubs from a rotten log sat the cutest little black bear Woof had ever feasted his eyes upon.

Jennie pretended at first not to see Woof. Doubtless she had received news of his coming, borne on the breeze; perhaps she had been expecting him or some other bear. Anyway, she did not overlook a single grub, not even when Woof sat close beside her and coolly helped himself to a part of the meal.

Things went well with Woof's wooing and after a day or two he started back for the old home above Lake Santa Maria, his newly acquired mate only half convinced of the desirability of making such a trip but following just the same.

Woof was much more alert now than he had been when traveling under the somnambulant influence of love sickness. He would no more run into a camp of men now, or come close to any of Whisperfoot's ambushes, than a deer would take a similar chance. He not only traveled with the wind in his face, but he listened to the gossip of the birds in the trees, and stopped at the edge of each park in order to survey the open ground before venturing to cross it.

A lone rider crossing a distant ridge was of sufficient moment to cause Woof to make a long detour in order to keep out of sight in the aspens—and in an indirect way this detour was the cause of more trouble.

Jennie was by no means as keen to travel as was Woof. Like many another bride, she found much of interest along the way. She simply could not be coaxed to pass up a freshly dug gopher hole, and a nest of vinegary ants would hold her attention for an hour, until the last tiny egg had disappeared down her throat.

It was while he was waiting for Jennie to clean up such a find that Woof's impatience was augmented by the scent of another bear, coming as Woof had done on his love quest, down wind, and therefore as Woof well knew, looking for a mate.

Woof sat up and sniffed the breeze. The short hairs on the back of his neck stood up and a fierce growl rumbled in his chest when he recognized the odor to be that of Baldy, a much larger and older black bear, that had driven Woof away from a berry patch the summer before. Woof had not fought for the berries, there were more to be found just across the gulch. But this was something else. Female bear are scarce on the upper Rio Grande, and young and attractive brides like Jennie difficult to find, and difficult to impress. Woof would fight for her till the death, something that Baldy should have taken into account.

Baldy was well known to the cattlemen as a killer. Just what had occurred to make him turn from the roots and bugs which are the normal food of black bear, and become a flesh-eater, no one knew any more than they did what adventure had caused the streak of white hair between his ears. But there was a reward of one hundred dollars posted in the Post Office at Antelope Springs for Baldy's scalp, and the appearance of his well known track in the vicinity of a herd of cows with young calves was sufficient to start the whole Turkey Track outfit on a bear hunt.

Several years before Baldy had left two toes behind him when he had escaped from one of Jim Harbison's traps, and to men as expert trackers as a cowhand has to be, this identified Baldy as absolutely as the fingerprints of a kidnapper.

What to do in this crisis caused Woof keen anxiety. Jennie would not be likely to consider the difference in weight between Woof and Baldy, or if she did, this very fact might be adverse to Woof. Females are prone to fall for the heavyweights and caveman qualities still attract the women. A quick decision on Woof's part to avoid a clash with his old enemy by going down the ra-

vine was blocked by Jennie's refusal to leave her feast on the ants. Before Woof could figure out any excuse that might help him in getting Jennie out of Baldy's path, there came the sharp crack of a broken aspen pole in the thicket just ahead. Unquestionably Baldy was coming, in fact he was already here.

When Baldy saw Jennie sitting by the ant-hill, he stopped at a respectful distance. Baldy had wooed many times before, and he well knew the uncertainty of the female temper. He would no more risk the danger of Jennie's rage in case the female were unfriendly, than he would kill a calf in the presence of men. No such indecision restrained Woof. He had quietly moved into the shadow of an old pine stub and was watching Baldy with small pig-like eyes, which fairly burned with fury.

Woof waited until Baldy was slightly past the old stub, then with a bellow that echoed back from the hills above, he lunged the full force of his four hundred pounds straight at Baldy's head. Baldy ducked the blow aimed for his nose and whirling caught Woof in his arms, twisting him over on his back and falling upon him. The advantage was all with Baldy. He had already gained the wrestler's hold, which is a bear's delight. He outweighed Woof by two hundred pounds, it looked like a one-sided fight. Wrestling, scratching, clawing, they rolled over and over.

In vain Woof twisted in those vise-like arms. He could not budge an inch, and the terrific pressure was stopping the circulation so that Woof's hind legs were becoming numb. Snapping blindly in his fury, Woof made a frantic grab with his mouth. Baldy's one vulnerable spot, his nose, was unprotected. Woof's sharp teeth sunk deep in the soft muscles about Baldy's snout, and stayed there.

Screeching with pain Baldy loosened one-half of his terrible hug and hit Woof a blow that would have broken the neck of a two-year-old steer. Woof took it with a grunt. Baldy whined and let go with his other paw.

The instant Woof felt Baldy's grip relax, he doubled up like an immense jackknife and kicked Baldy in the belly with both hind feet. Baldy grunted, the sound was sweet music to Woof. He pummeled as hard as he could with both hind feet and clawed mightily with his front ones. What had started as a comparatively dignified fight turned into an old lady's hair-pulling contest, with the odds suddenly shifted from Baldy to Woof.

Jennie had finished eating the ant-eggs. During the battle she had glanced coyly up from time to time, to see which of the fighters was gaining a victory, if any.

There are limits to what even a black bear can stand, and Baldy had reached it. His main desire now was to gain relief from the torture on his nose, and the ceaseless kicking against his solar plexus. Dignity had become a dirty deuce with him. Unable to dislodge Woof in any other manner and frantic with the agony on his nose, Baldy plunged into the aspen thicket beating Woof against the saplings until he dislodged his hold.

Woof fell clear, and being quicker than Baldy, he was able to get behind him before the big bear could turn. Next to a nose grip, Woof would have preferred a heel-hold and this he succeeded in getting before Baldy could get out of the thicket.

The fight was renewed with Woof clearly the aggressor. The aspen thicket was rolled flat by the twisting bodies of the bears, while Baldy blubbered and whined like any dethroned bully. Jennie's attitude was now one of unmixed devotion to the cause of Woof. Whether she had only wanted to make sure that her happiness had been placed with a partner who could defend it, or her actions were inspired by the fickle-

ness of her sex, she showed a sudden loyalty to her lover by taking a nip at Baldy's unoccupied heel.

This was too much. Baldy became desperate. Just below the crushed thicket there was a low cliff. Toward this Baldy dragged himself and the two bears who literally hung to his heels. Woof had no desire to roll over a cliff and perhaps be caught again in that awful hug. Besides, since Jennie had shown her preference for him, Woof was not half so afraid of Baldy. He let go his hold and Jennie dutifully followed suit, but not until Baldy was so far committed to leaping over the cliff that he was unable to regain his balance and crashed over into the feathery limbs of a silver spruce.

The change in Jennie was marked. She at once devoted herself to dressing Woof's wounds, little simple attentions that pleased him very much. After a few minutes Woof again started for his old home, and now Jennie walked proudly beside him looking frequently at her hero with worshipful eyes.

If there were a bit of a swagger to Woof's gait, or a cocky tilt to his head we must admit he had earned the right to some self-esteem. It was no ordinary feat that he had performed. The whipping of Whisperfoot was no trifle, and surely to protect one's bride of a day from the lustful intrusions of a bear a third larger than himself was something to gloat over. Anyway, Woof was a very happy bear that afternoon as he and Jennie stood side by side in the little park near where Woof had encountered Whisperfoot. They looked off over the broad meadows of Clear Creek valley into a land peaceful and serene.

Any young couple would have thrilled at the promise of abundant food to be harvested against next winter's hibernation. Woof might have told Jennie of the fat young gophers at the edge of the foothills, of the bee-trees in the forest, of innumerable trout to be caught in the smaller streams during the spawning season. This was hardly necessary though, for Jennie knew mountain parks, and would have been able to judge for herself of the raspberry patches in the slide rock, and the huckleberries in the ravines; but even as Woof chuckled happily at the prospect, a twig snapped in the forest behind him and he turned quickly, just in time to see Baldy dodge behind a spruce a hundred yards to the rear.

Undoubtedly Woof cussed a little. Was it not enough that he had licked Baldy in a fair fight? Why should the big bum persist in his effort to steal Jennie? Yet, on the other hand, how could Woof prevent him from trying? Well, anyway, Woof was not going to lead Baldy into his paradise above Santa Maria. If Baldy wanted to follow, Woof would lead him into the barren mesas west of Antelope Springs.

He turned square off to the right and took a course that ran past the home ranch of the Turkey Track. In doing this Woof was merely following the instinct to protect his home range. Smart as the bear had shown himself to be, he could hardly have foreseen the craftiness with which a casual observer might have credited him. He could not have known that Baldy had a price on his head, and that by leading him past the Turkey Track ranch he might bring disaster to his enemy, any more than he could have known that the moment he appeared in the open meadow a pack of dogs would be howling upon his own trail.

Had the cowboys of the outfit been at home to support the dogs, the couple could never have reached the willows without being lassoed or shot, but that day the whole outfit had been working cattle above the falls, and were just now coming over the crest of the ridge beyond Spring Creek, fully a mile distant.

If Woof had been alone he might

have reached the protecting willows ahead of the mongrels, but Jennie was simply terrorized by the noise and ran a zig-zag course, twice as long as the distance she needed to cover. Woof gallantly kept between her and the danger, with the result that the first airedale to come up with him discovered that it was not necessary for a running bear to stop in order to defend himself.

The dog pressed in close, snapping at Woof's neck. The peculiar rolling gait of the bear was deceptive. In fact the smaller dogs had failed to gain a yard since Woof began to run in earnest. But as the airedale came even with Woof's head, the left front foot of the bear seemed to be diverted slightly from its orbit as if giving the dog a playful push. The airedale turned a somersault, lit on his back, kicked a time or two and lay quiet.

Woof would not stop to fight unless one of the small, spry mongrels should bite his heels. His was an unselfish battle now, with the protection of Jennie the main objective, but when the female airedale unwisely cut in between him and Jennie, Woof rushed forward at twice the speed he had shown thus far. Again he struck, this time a swift downward stroke that caught the dog just behind the shoulders, and broke her back.

Jennie, glancing back over her shoulder, saw her newly acquired mate give these added proofs of his ability to defend his family. Her panic lessened, she dropped back beside Woof and ran more steadily. The police dog caught up and galloped along beside the pair, clowning and barking that he saw nothing to get het up about. Evidently he considered this as merely a good-natured race.

The shepherds thought differently but they were far too smart to run beside or in front of the bear. They did the one thing that would cause Woof to stop—they bit his heels. Instantly both bears sat down about a yard apart and in a few seconds were surrounded by a circle of yapping dogs.

Far away on the dusty uplands the cowboys returning from the day's work heard the racket and spurred forward. Things looked decidedly bad for Woof. He remembered the fusillade of bullets that had greeted him on the Crooked Creek flats.

A few yards farther and the willow bushes would give some sort of protection. There was no time to lose, already he could hear the sound of horses' hoofs bringing those men with their lead-throwing guns. Woof decided to sacrifice his heels for the comparative safety of the willow thicket. Bellowing like a range bull he came down on all fours and charged through the circle, Jennie following. As a result of this maneuver Woof reached the willows unharmed, Jennie bearing the entire attack of the dogs.

Jennie was too scared to mind the pain and dashed into the willows dragging a yellow dog, whose nerve exceeded his knowledge of bear. Never in his life had Woof been anything like as mad as he was when he heard the piteous cries of his bride. He dashed back, caught the dog with one paw and sent him sailing out over a bunch of willows to lie crushed on the hard ground beside the creek.

Two more dogs were crippled by his onslaught, the rest fell back to a respectful distance, and it was then that they heard for the first time the frantic whistles and calls of the men, calling them to help them capture Baldy.

Woof was unable to understand why the dogs suddenly stopped barking at him. When they started on across the meadow, he naturally supposed it was because of the fierceness of his attacks.

Woof gave a growl that must have meant, "Come on, let's get the hell out of here. I've had enough of dogs to last me."

Both bears sprang into the clear water of the stream. Its icy coolness comforted their bruises. They drank greedily every few minutes, but did it by gulping up water as they swam.

Over to the west a terrific barking and bawling was going on. Men were shouting and several times Woof heard the crack of guns. All of which added to his disgust. Not until he was out of the valley and could see the welcome walls of the cañon a short distance away did Woof stop to look back. He sat up, looked for a long time, grunted at first in wonder and then with a note of satisfaction.

At the edge of the meadow just below the slope where Woof had last seen the cowboys, a circle of men and dogs were gathered around a great furry form that lay stretched out on the grass. Jennie left off licking her heels and came up to see what it was that interested Woof. The two sat still for a long time wondering what had happened to Baldy. Finally four men fastened ropes to Baldy's feet, dallied them about their saddle horns and rode away toward the Turkey Track, dragging their prize over the grass. Woof grunted his satisfaction and turned away into the cañon.

The full moon was just coming up over the eastern foothills when the two bears came slowly out of the forest near the southern end of Santa Maria. They stopped at a small creek to feast on spawners, then Woof, now the acknowledged head of his household, led the way to the shore of the lake and sat down. Jennie came up close beside him. There was no breeze, not a ripple disturbed the placid surface of the water.

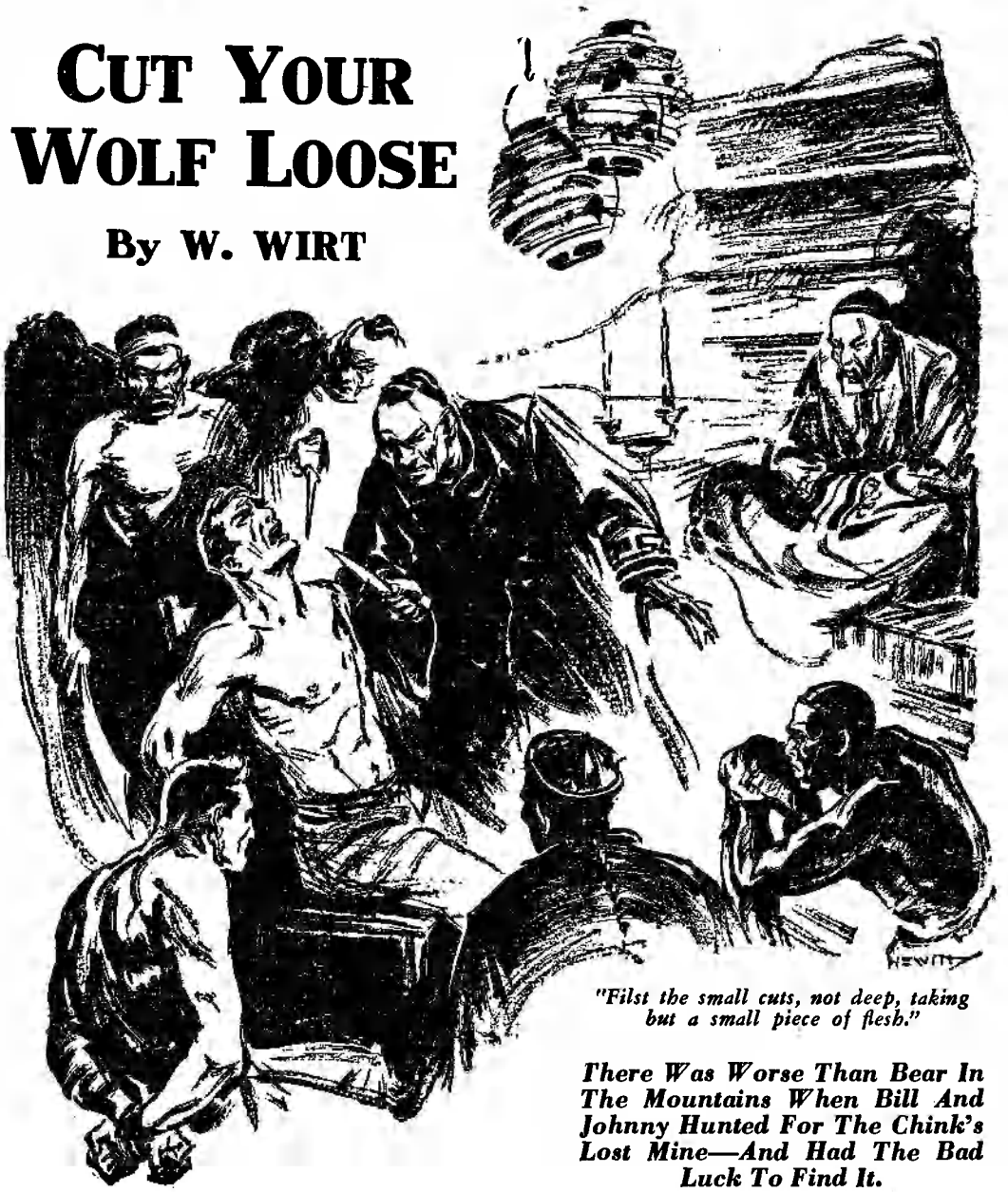
Woof looked up at the outline of Bristol Head standing boldly in the moonlight. Jennie dutifully raised her eyes in the same direction. Suddenly Woof turned again toward the lake, Jennie did the same. Evidently her surprise at the miracle of a mountain moving so quickly was as great as that of Woof's. Anyway, she gave a grunt of surprise and did just as Woof had done on the morning when he had puzzled over the queer freak of the mountain, tried to out-figure the changes. Failing in this, she too accepted the crazy action of this mountain as a phenomenon—too deep for her.

For a long time they sat there side by side, then with a sigh and a puzzled shake of his head Woof turned away and walked with stiff-legged dignity up the slope toward his old home cave. What cared he for mountains that dodged about, he had gotten his mate.

Jennie gave one lingering look at the beauty of the lake and reflection, then dropped on all fours to follow her spouse.

CUT YOUR WOLF LOOSE

By W. WIRT



"Filst the small cuts, not deep, taking but a small piece of flesh."

There Was Worse Than Bear In The Mountains When Bill And Johnny Hunted For The Chink's Lost Mine—And Had The Bad Luck To Find It.

Bob Beardsley, foreman of the Lazy W cow outfit, Yuma county, Arizona, looked at the two slim, deeply tanned young men who stood by their broncs.

"This here," he drawled, "is a last warnin' to you two jaspers. Yo're bein' sent out this bright sunny mornin' to hunt for strays, which same means cows—spelled c-o-w-s. And she don't mean huntin' for lost mines. She means lookin' for cows, c-o-w-s, cows."

"Doggone," answered Johnny Hatfield,-admiringly, "is that the way you spell 'er, no foolin'? I always wanted to learn me how to spell cows. Are you right sure that there ain't two—"

"Certainly he's sure," interrupted Bill Earp. "Don't you know nothin' a-tall, you igno-ranymus? Anytime Mister Beardsley spells him a word,

she's spelt. C-o-w-s spells cows, feller."

"She do," Bob agreed, "and right here is where I spell something else for you two no-count young scoundrels. F-i-r-e-d, which spells fired. I got orders that the next time you two got caught huntin' for that mine and not tendin' to business, to tie a can to your tails. Drift outta here, pronto."

Johnny and Bill mounted and Johnny looked down at the old foreman and said, sadly, "I remember when you was plumb gentle and kind. Like one of them cows that yuh spell c-o-w-s. Now you've got a disposition like a cross between a polecat and a sidewinder. We go, Mister Beardsley, to hunt for ze cow, spelled c-o-w. *Adios, amigo, vaya con Dios.*"

Bob Beardsley, who had known Johnny and Bill since they were born, turned a little so as to hide a grin. "And keep right on goin', also, till yuh bring them in. They're somewhere in the foothill of the Trigo."

Up to the time they came to a box canyon where they hoped to find the strays, Johnny and Bill had been attending strictly to business. Not that they were afraid of being fired but because they had made up their minds to, as Johnny said, "cut out this doggone foolin' around all the time."

On the way to the canyon, though, Johnny saw no reason why he should not talk about the lost mine. "I sure would like to find 'er, wouldn't yuh, Bill?"

"There you go," answered Bill, who was Johnny's first cousin, born five days later than Johnny. "For Pete's sake, can't you think of nothin' else but that blame mine? All the Earps and the Hatfields in Arizona hunted for 'er for a long time. I don't believe that durned old Chink ever had him a mine."

"Which same shows just how loco you are, feller. He used to come in with a sack of ore every so often, didn't he? And the assayer told Capt'n Smoke Hatfield that the stuff ran over ten thousand dollars to the ton, didn't he? And hundreds of hombres tried to trail the Chink, didn't they? And no one ever did, did they? And three of them that tried 'er was found in the hills colder than a wagon tire, wasn't they? What does that mean, yuh idjut? That the Chink was keepin' a chili parlor up there?"

"Didn't he—didn't they—did they—wasn't they," jeered Bill. "You sound like Ma's parrot, you kiote. Maybeso he did have him a mine, but that don't mean that you are—"

"I didn't say that. But I wish I could find 'er, just the same. Doggone, I'd buy me the Bar Dot X range and marry Betty right away and go to—"

"Come on back to the asylum," Bill interrupted. "Sure you're the Czar of Russia. Old Napoleon Boneypart wants to play checkers with you."

"Yeah? Well, if I do find 'er, you'll come up some day with your hat in your hand, sayin', 'please Mister Hatfield, will you give me a job sweepin' up around'—well, dog my cats!"

They had turned into the canyon as Johnny spoke. They both saw the landslide that had practically covered the left side of the canyon with a mass of trees, rocks and dirt.

"Boy, she was a bearcat, wasn't she?" Bill asked as they pulled up their broncs. "Looks like some giant had taken him a whale of a shovel and scraped 'er down with one swing."

"Let's go over and take us a looksee."

"Aw, what's the use? We're out huntin' strays, feller, not landslides. I seen me a million of 'em."

"By strays do yuh mean cows—spelled c-o-w-s?" Johnny asked, anxiously. "If yuh do, maybeso some of them got caught in the slide. Yes, suh, I'll bet yuh that's just what happened. I ain't pinin' away for no extra riding in this hot sun, but she sure is our duty to go and find out, no foolin'."

"Doggone, I never did see me a jas-

per that could talk more and do less than you. Come on."

They rode up to the slide and along the edge for a little ways, looking at the trunks of big trees, some of which were splintered like matches. Others looked as if they had been cut down with one slash of a razor.

"How would you like to have got caught in that—?" Johnny stopped talking. Something that buzzed like an angry bee passed not more than a foot over their heads. And right afterwards they heard a dull *"ka-boom."*

It came from the right side of the canyon. They both turned as one man in time to see a little cloud of smoke drifting lazily away. Whoever was doing the shooting was not using smokeless powder.

Johnny Hatfield and Bill Earp both had .45 Colts in their holsters and both of them had been born in Arizona. Both of them belonged to families famed the length of the border for the gunfighters produced.

Neither of them needed to tell the other that in a long range battle, rifles had it all over pistols; so again as one man, they wheeled their broncs, bent low over the saddle horns and spurred for the mouth of the canyon. They reached it and turned to the right. There were no more shots fired.

"Hold 'er," Johnny shouted. He was a little behind Bill Earp. "Hold 'er, Bill."

Bill pulled up and as Johnny rode alongside, demanded, "What for? I'm goin' to get me my rifle and come back and learn that jasper not to—"

"He'll be gone by then, you durn fool. We can Injun up on him. I know a trail that will take us above and back of him. We'll learn him about crackin' down on us, doggone his ornery hide."

The Hatfields originally came from Kentucky and the Arizona descendants still used a lot of "hill talk."

Two hours later, two Chinamen walked swiftly along an upper trail. It was more of a dog trot than it was a walk. One of them carried an old Winchester 45-90 rifle. They were middle-aged men, with grim, cruel looking faces scarred with sword and dagger cuts.

The one without a gun was talking. "Worthless one. Less than the lowest pariah cur. You told the mighty chieftain that you were familiar with the firearms of the foreign devils. Yet the gun goes off as you kneel to hide."

"The hammer caught in my belt and as I tried to stop it firing the degraded weapon exploded. Do not forget, Wang Chi, that I am an honorable *boo how doi.* Remember it if you think to tell the all powerful one that I do not know guns. I will—"

"Do not threaten, Hsai. I know that you are an honorable hatchet man. I have no intention of telling the—"

Johnny Hatfield and Bill Earp stepped out on the trail about ten feet away from the Chinamen, who halted. To Johnny and Bill, the Chinamen were the same as they were used to seeing around the ranch house kitchens. Harmless creatures to be teased and joked with.

"Caught you, didn't we?" Johnny demanded, sternly. "How come yuh takin' a pot shot at us, Hi Sing Low? Maybeso takee gun away from yuh and give yuh heap plenty spankee."

Neither he nor Bill had their hands anywhere near their gun butts. That there was danger never occurred to them.

"Gimme that gun," Bill growled, ferociously, "I'm goin' to have me Chink pie for dinner, no foolin'."

Both of the Chinamen understood English, but neither of them understood that the two young foreign devils who confronted them were only fooling.

Wang Chi snarled something in Chinese and drew a short sword from under his blouse. Hsai raised the rifle to his shoulder. "Slay," Wang Chi ordered, as he ran at Johnny and Bill.

It took the two young cow waddies absolutely by surprise. It was as if two kittens being played with had

suddenly turned into tigers. But neither of them gave back an inch. Their reaction to the surprise was more than prompt. They both drew and fired as muzzles cleared holsters.

Old Bob Beardsley, himself a noted gunfighter, once said when Bill and Johnny weren't around, "Them two young hellions don't need to tell their names. The way they both can draw a gun sure places 'em as Earps and Hatfields." Bob really thought a lot of Johnny and Bill but took great pains to hide it.

Johnny's bullet hit Wang Chi squarely between the eyes and the swordsman went down, dead before his body touched the ground. Hsai dropped the rifle and fell back under the impact of the heavy .45 bullet which had gone through his heart.

"Dad blame it," Johnny said. "What do yuh suppose made 'em act thataway for, Bill?"

"Dogged if I know. They sure did surprise me, no foolin'. I never did see no Chink act like that before. Maybeso they was loco Chinks."

"Maybeso they was. Well—we sure made good Chinks outta them. Shucks, they ought to be plumb ashamed of themselves, jumpin' us like that. We was only funnin' with them."

"Perhaps they didn't know that," Bill answered, sagely, "Wonder where they came from? I've seen me most of the Chinks around here but I ain't never seen these jaspers before."

"Aw, there's a lot of 'em comin' and goin' all the time. Mostly placer minin'. Dogged if I know what all to do with 'em. Yuh reckon we better go tell Capt'n Smoke?"

"What has the Rangers got to do with 'er? It's only a couple of Chinks. We'll roll 'em down hill and call 'er a day. The buzzards will tend to 'em. Chinks and greasers don't count none. I've heard Capt'n Smoke say so many's the time."

"That's right, so have I. Let's roll 'em, then."

Johnny, after they came back to the trail from "rollin' 'em," picked up the sword. "Boy howdy, that's some pig-sticker, ain't it? The handle looks like gold. Look, Bill, there is Chink carvin' on it."

"Where?"

"Up here at the top. See, three figures or—"

"Looks like hen tracks in a lime bed to me."

"Know what I'm goin' to do? I'm goin' to take 'er in and see if Chung can read 'er."

"Come on. I don't feel like huntin' for strays right now. Bob will be gone to town. He said he was pullin' for Cibola come noon. I heard him tellin' Curly last night. We can get in and get us some hot chuck and be out before that old sidewinder gets him back."

Chung, the gaunt old Chinese cook of the Lazy W, looked up from peeling potatoes, as Johnny and Bill entered the kitchen.

"Go away," he shrilled. "Go plenty far away. No glub till supper. Get out of my kitchen befole I skin you both and hang hide up on baln door to dly."

There is no "r" in the Chinese language, and few Chinese can make a sound like it. If the "r" is at the end of a word, they can manage it, but if at the beginning or surrounded by other letters, very seldom.

Chung had been at the Lazy W for a long time, dating back to before Johnny and Bill were born. His English, save for the fatal "r" was very good. The reason he so promptly ordered them out was that ever since they were four or five he had accumulated much experience with them. A Hatfield, Johnny's uncle, owned the ranch, and Johnny and Bill were as much at home at the Lazy W as they were on their home ranges.

"Let me catch yuh doin' that skin—" Bill started, hotly. He received a none too gentle kick on the ankle and subsided. Getting mad was no way of getting anything out of

Chung, and Johnny was calling his attention to it. Johnny was holding the sword behind his back.

"All right, Mister Chung," Johnny said, deeply grieved, "That suits us, don't it, Bill? Reckon this lowdown forgets the time that you and me pulled his chuck wagon outta the mud at Two Forks. It took us half a day to do 'er, remember? I never thought he'd do us thisaway."

"I lemember," protested Chung, waving the potato knife. "Plenty lemember, all the time. You good boys then. Who put castor oil in soup, answer me that? Who put leather with glavey pouled over it on table instead of steak I cooked? Who mixed salt with sugar? Go away flom hele, plonto. No get glub—no get dlink—no get anything but tlouble flom me."

Johnny brought the sword around in front. "What does this say, Chung? See, on the handle."

Chung put the peeling knife down and reached for the sword. "Not handle, Johnny. Hilt. A swold has a hilt. Once I was a vely fine swoldsman indeed and—*aie! aie!*" He dropped the sword.

"What's the matter with yuh?" demanded Johnny, picking the sword up. "Anyone would think it was a snake."

"Sule, sule, vely bad, like snake. Take him back whele you found him. Please, Johnny. Be a good boy and take him back."

"What the heck is the matter with him?" asked Bill, his mouth half full of ginger cookie.

"Aw, I dunno. He saw the hen tracks and threw a cat fit."

"No thlow cat fit! No thlow any kind of a fit. You thlow plenty fit if you don't take him back, plonto."

"I will like heck. What does it say?"

"No sabe."

"There he goes with that durn no sabe business," Bill stated, as soon as he could swallow what he had in his mouth. "Next thing he won't know any English a tall."

"Come on, Chung, tell us."

"If I tell you, will you take him back?"

"Maybeso—and maybe not so. What do they mean?" Johnny put the sword on the table.

"This swold is the swold of a master swoldsman. This say—" Chung's finger came close to the hilt but did not touch it, "'Beware of the T'aip'ing bite." Not quite that but as close as I can say it in English. This one say 'He who touches me, unless of the T'aip'ing, will suley die unless he is of the society,' and this one say, 'I am death to all save my blothels.'"

"Go on," scoffed Bill, who had deserted the cookie jar for the table.

"You tryin' to tell us that those blame hen tracks say all that?"

"Sule, Bill. Say all that and plenty mole. In China language, one chalacter mean heap plenty. Now you know what swold say, take him back."

"What's the good of doing that?" Johnny asked. "The Chink that had him is dead. Two of 'em ran at Bill and me and we shot 'em right off the Christmas tree, didn't we, Bill?"

"We sure did, old settler."

"What? Dead? You kill pelson who owned swold? Oh, golly damn hell and blimstone!" Chung used all the cuss words he knew, all at once, as he sank back in his chair. "Lun, Johnny and Bill. Lun and get all the Hatfields and Ealps alound you. Oh, golly damn, maybeso we all be dead by molning."

That was the very worst thing he could have said to Johnny Hatfield and Bill Earp. They were both as full of fight as a couple of young bob-cats and not afraid of anything, anywhere.

"What? Us? Run? Doggone it, now I know yo're loco. Why should—"

"Sule, sule. Plenty loco. Lun and—"

"You say that once more and dogged if I don't bust you on the nose

as old as you are, yuh old polecat," Bill interrupted, hotly, "You sayin' me and Johnny has got us rabbit blood?"

"No say that. Listen, Johnny and Bill. T'aip'ing vely stlong, powelful, dleaded seclet society. Tell me what happened."

Johnny, aided by Bill, told him. Chung listened to the finish, then said, "Maybeso they were alone in the hills. Maybeso not. You have killed T'aip'ing. The lest will toltule you to death if can catch."

"Who will, the Tapins? Any old time."

"Johnny and Bill, please be good boys and do this. Go to the Tulkey Trot and the Glidioln and stay thele until all the Ealps and all the Hatfields find out if thele is any more Chinamen in the hills. If they find any, lun them—"

"Listen to old Giniril Stonewall Jackson Chung," jeered Bill, starting over to the cookie jar to stuff his pockets, "Go on peelin' potatoes, oldtimer. Me and Johnny will take care of the Tapins, won't we, Johnny?"

"Yes, sir, we sure will. Calm down, Chung, you durned old idjut. Nothin' is goin' to happen to yuh with me and Bill around. Hey, yuh think the Chink that owned the mine was a Tapin?"

"At it again," Bill said, very much disgusted as he started for the door. "Come on, King of the Cannibal Islands. The Duke of Texas wants to play ring around the rosey with you."

Johnny tucked the sword under his arm and grinned at Chung. "You stay right here, Chung. Me and Bill will bring you in all the Tapin scalps that are in the hills."

Chung watched them ride away, then he went to a closet and brought out an old muzzle-loading shotgun. He loaded both barrels with a double charge of powder and buckshot. As he placed the gun in a corner near the stove, he announced to the world in general, "Maybeso — maybeso not."

On the way to the Gridiron, Johnny's home outfit, Bill asked, "What we goin to the Gridiron for? We better start huntin' them strays, feller."

"I'm goin' to leave this pigsticker and get my rifle. Then we'll go back and hunt for them dad blamed strays. Maybeso we'll see some more Tapins. I'd sure admire to get me a collection of these here master swords. Boy, that's a right pretty handle—I mean hilt—ain't it?"

"Yeah? And maybeso you get yourself collected," Bill answered, as he rolled a cigarette. "I'll get me my rifle, too."

"Any old time," Johnny stated, positively, "we'll collect us all the Tapins that show, won't we?"

"No foolin'," agreed Bill. "Them Tapins can't come too fast for us."

The hill was covered with timber and second growth and the cabin could not be seen until one was right up to it. It had been built by some prospector who evidently built it for his permanent home. It had one fairly large room, two smaller ones and a lean-to.

In the large room there sat a Chinaman. The chair was on a dais or platform made of hewn logs. In front of the dais there knelt another Chinaman. Back against the wall there stood six other Chinamen. All of the Chinese had the same kind of cruel, scarred faces as the two Johnny and Bill had killed.

The Chinaman on the dais said coldly, "You have my permission to speak."

"I was ordered to go with Wang Chi and Hsai. Wang Chi ordered me to search to the left. I heard a rifle shot and started to join them. As I neared a path I saw them walking down it. Suddenly two foreign devils confronted them. Obeying the orders to keep away from all foreign devils seen in the hills, I sought cover.

Suddenly Wang Chi drew his sword and Hsai raised the rifle. Wang Chi charged and one of the foreign devils, with incredible swiftness, drew a little gun and shot Wang Chi, killing him. The other foreign devil drew also and killed Hsai. Then the foreign devils dragged the bodies of Wang Chi and Hsai to a steep place and rolled them down it. After they had done this, one of them picked up the sword of Wang Chi and took it with him."

"Where?"

"To where they had horses tied, ruler of the world."

"Then what?"

"I followed them until they reached the end of the hills. They rode towards some buildings to the west."

"Describe the foreign devils."

The kneeling man gave a very good description of Johnny and Bill. After he had finished, the man on the dais said, "You have my permission to depart."

The Chinese against the wall had listened with impassive faces and eyes. The kneeling man rose, bowed and backed out of the room before any of the other Chinese moved. Then one of them came forward to the dais and stood as if at attention.

The man on the dais said, "You have my permission to speak, Lao Tzu, Head of the House of Chi."

"I, Lao Tzu, Head of the House of Chi, ask that the foreign devil who has slain a member of the House of Chi who was a member of the all powerful society, be brought here for judgment."

Another Chinaman stepped up beside Lao Tzu. The "You have my permission to speak" was repeated.

"I, Yang Chu, of the House of Hsai, ask that the foreign devil who slew a member of the House of Hsai, also a member of the mighty, resplendent society, be brought here for judgment, oh illustrious chieftain, war captain of the T'aip'ing."

"I grant the requests. The matter will be arranged. You all have my permission to depart."

Johnny Hatfield and Bill Earp sat on a fallen tree trunk near the landslide, on the left side about half way up. Bill was protesting about any more walking or climbing. "What's the idea? These here boots was made for ridin', feller, not climbin' mountains. We been out three days now and are sure heapin' up plenty trouble for ourselves with Bob when we get in. Know what I think? I think the darn old mine has got you plumb loco, you sidewinder."

"Aw, stay with it," coaxed Johnny, "We ain't got started yet. Listen, here's what I think. The Chink was a Tapin. Doggone it, he must have been. He goes to see some of them and while he was there he goes over the one way trail, sabe? Before he does he tells them about the mine. They come up here and start to hunt for it."

"That proves you are loco. You say he told the Tapins and right after you say they start huntin' for it. Come on, let's drift."

"Not me. You can if you want to. I got me a hunch, feller, and I'm goin' to play 'er out. Maybeso he didn't tell 'em right or they didn't get it the way he told 'em. It's sure as shootin' around here somewhere and I'm goin' to keep right on huntin' for 'er."

"Dad blame it. How I ever picked me out a loco kiote like you for a pudner, I dunno. I suppose I got to stick along but my feet are sure killin' me."

"Tell you what. You go down and start up the other side and come up this far. I'll climb up and come down to met you."

"All right, I'll do 'er, doggone it all. I ain't lost me no mines and it's the last time I'm goin' to hunt for one, you hear me?"

"Sure I hear you," Johnny answered with a grin, as he started.

"And you better had believe me,

also," Bill stated firmly, as he started down.

Johnny climbed, looking for a path or traces of a cabin. His idea was that the landslide might have uncovered the mine or some clue to it. He had heard stories of what landslides had done in the way of covering and uncovering things.

Within a hundred yards of the top, he halted and said aloud, "By gosh, that looks like a piece of minin' timber."

No one not standing just where Johnny was and looking along the angle he was, could have seen the splintered end of the piece of timber that was sticking up among the roots of a fallen tree. He went up to it. "Yes, sir, that's just what it is." There were no more pieces within sight and Johnny circled very slowly, his keen young eyes covering every inch of the ground. At last, within fifty odd feet of the first piece, almost covered with dirt, he found another and near that piece, a third. He circled once more and after looking for about five minutes, he saw the mouth of a tunnel that had evidently been cleverly concealed. Even now, if Johnny had not been climbing over a tangled mass of tree branches and dirt and rocks all mixed up, he would have missed it. At the Gridiron he had slipped a candle in his pocket. Whenever he left for the hills, Johnny always packed a candle along, in hopes.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later he came out of the tunnel, putting the candle out and back in his pocket. "I found 'er," he announced, in awestruck tones, "Dog my cats! I found 'er."

Bill was nowhere in sight as Johnny got to the edge of the slide and Johnny got all the way to where the broncs were tied before he saw Bill stretched out under a tree, hat over face.

"Well, you dad blamed onery sidewinder," Johnny began as he neared Bill. "Wake up. I found 'er, Bill, no foolin'. Wake up, yuh polecat. I found the Chink's mine."

He touched Bill's side with the toe of a boot, "What's the matter with you? Wake up. You been drinkin' likker?"

No answer or movement from Bill. Johnny knelt and took the hat off Bill's face. He saw a gray looking face, closed eyes and blood on the forehead. That was the last Johnny Hatfield saw for some little time. Something hit him on the head and something else like a blanket, enfolded his head, shoulders and arms.

The darkness lifted and Johnny opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a Chinaman sitting in a chair on a platform. On either side, there stood another Chinaman. Back of the chair, in a line, stood others. Johnny was too sick and dizzy to count how many. He knew he was naked and that his arms were pulled back of the chair in which he was sitting and tied so tightly that his wrists felt as if they were encircled with red-hot iron bands. His ankles were also tied to the chair and felt the same. At first Johnny thought he was having a nightmare and shook his head and blinked his eyes to get rid of it. In the shaking of his head, he saw Bill Earp sitting beside him in another chair, naked and tied the same way. Bill's eyes were open and he was staring at the Chinese as if he didn't believe there could be such things.

The Chinaman sitting on the platform, spoke in English. His tone of voice was extremely suave. "You have both came back flom the land of spilits?"

"Who are you?" Johnny demanded, hotly. "What you think yo're doin', you onery yellow scoundrel? Yo're just the same as dead, feller, right now."

A Chinaman in the line translated to the others in line. The three on the dais understood English.

"I am Li Hoi Sang—and you?"

Bill Earp turned his head and looked at Johnny, seeing him for the

first time since coming back to life. He had come to a few moments before Johnny had. The Chinese had held a bottle under Johnny and Bill's noses for a second or so to bring them back to consciousness.

"Well, dog my cats! Did they get you, too? Reckon the Tapins have sure got us, no foolin'."

Li Hoi Sang leaned a little forward in his chair, "The who have got you?"

"None of your damn business," Johnny answered. "What you want to figure out, you snake-eater, is what you'll be doin' when the Hatfields and the Earps get you." The Hatfields have never been noted for lack of temper and Johnny's was entirely unleashed.

At the word "snake-eater" more than one hand in the line went to dagger or sword hilt. But Li Hoi Sang's face was as impassive as ever as he said, "You seem vely much wlought up, Mister—what is your name?"

"I'm Johnny Hatfield, and let me tell you one thing. You—"

Li Hoi Sang raised a languid hand, "Later, Mister Hatfield, you will tell us—many things. What is your name?" he asked Bill.

"Bill Earp," Bill answered shortly, "You can't run no sandy on us, Chink. This here is Arizona, not China. Give me my pistol and put that polecat that hit me over the head when I wasn't lookin' in front of me. You can give him a—"

"I am vely solly," Li Hoi Sang interrupted, politely, "but other mattels all mole plessing, Mister Ealp. Filst, you ale the ones who killed two Chinese four days ago in the hills?"

"Doggone right we are," Johnny answered, "and we are goin' to kill us some more just as soon as we get loose, yuh—paliah cur." Johnny had once heard Chung call another Chinaman that and liked the sound of it, so had remembered it.

One of the Chinamen standing beside Li Hoi Sang said something. Li Hoi Sang answered in English. "Wait little blother. Thele is plenty of time. The one who spoke," he said to Johnny and Bill, "is Yang Chu of the House of Hsai. He asks that the one who slew a man of his House be given to him. You," to Bill, "have been named as the one who did it."

"Yeah?" answered Bill. "I don't know whether I did or not. All Chinks look alike to me, feller. I hope I did."

The other Chinaman beside Li Hoi Sang snarled something in Chinese and took a step forward.

"He that speaks," Li Hoi Sang went on to Johnny, "is Lao Tzu. The one you slew was of his House. He asks that you be given to him without fulther talk."

"Yuh must be plumb fools," Johnny answered, "to think you can get away with anything up in the hills. We'll be missed and the hills will be fine combed. And right after there'll be some dead Chinks hangin' from trees."

"You think so?" asked Li Hoi Sang, smoothly, "You come into the hills and disappealed. Thele is no sign of you or your holses. What do we, poor plospectols know of you?" His voice changed and became cold and sinister, "I have played long enough and now am wealy of playing. Whele is the mine? We know that you found it because you announced it to Mistel Ealp. We lan acloss him and thlough him, tlapped you. Speak quickly, foleign devil. If you do it may be that the toltule will be less sevele and plolonged. The T'aip'ing ask?"

"Injun stuff, hey?" Johnny answered, "Try and make me tell, you paliah cur. Cut your wolf loose."

"That's the boy, Johnny. Stay with 'er. I'm ridin' with you, old-timer."

"I do not undelstand what you mean by demanding that a wolf be cut loose. Thele is no wolf hele. It may be that we have something that will take the place of a wolf, Mister Hatfield." He said something to Yang Chu, who bowed and left the room.

"I have given permission to Yang Chu to begin the vengeance of his

House. It may be that after you witness what happens to Mister Ealp, you will—"

"You don't dare to do 'er, you mangy kiote. See if you can make me do—"

"What yuh tryin' to do, take 'er all?" demanded Bill, "These here Tapins can't make me holler Uncle, I bet you."

"He defies the all powerful to make him scream in agony," the translator passed down the line. "Wait until the knives begin to bite deep, stripping the flesh from his bones."

"While we ale waiting for Yang Chu, I will ask you once mole—whele is the mine?"

"And once more," Johnny answered, "I'll tell you it is none of your onery business, you lowdown."

"Once anothel thought that," purred Li Hoi Sang. "He was a stlong man, vely stlong and stubboln."

"Doggone, Johnny, that's what happened to the Chink, I bet yuh," Bill said, "The Tapins got him."

"How do you know that we ale of the T'aip'ing, Mister Ealp?"

"Me? I had me a dream one night about some onery lookin' bandy legged hombres and someone said they was Tapins. I done recognized you right away."

"I will ask the question again a little latel," Li Hoi Sang answered smoothly. "I feel quite sule you will tell me the tluth—then. You ale light about us getting him. His spending of lalge sums of money was blought to oul attention in a city fal flom hele. He also thought that he would tell us nothing. But, at last, he did."

"You done roped yoreself, feller," Johnny said. "If he told yuh, how come you askin' me where the mine is? Yuh might pull that stuff on Chinks, you yellow bellied camp rat, but you can't do 'er on us."

"You did not allow me to finish, Mistel Hatfield. When he decided to tell us he was alleady close to the outel dalkness. The dilections wele confused a little. I think you will tell us vely soon after the knives begin to cut."

"Yeah, you done been told yuh can't run no sandy on us, haven't you? We—"

Yang Chu came back into the room. He carried a tray on which rested at least a dozen knives of various sizes. Behind him came another Chinaman, carrying an iron pot in which red coals glowed.

Johnny looked at Bill and Bill looked at him, then they both tried to break loose but could not loosen their bonds in the least degree.

"You know of Ling'ith?" Li Hoi Sang asked. "It is the death of the thousand cuts. Filst the cuts ale vely small and not deep, taking but a small piece of flesh. Hot ilons ale used to stem the flow of blood. Long befole Mistel Ealp's flesh is cut away, he will—"

"Well, you doggone copperhead," Johnny interrupted. "You o n e r y hound. I'll—" once more he strained at his bonds. The Chinamen watched him, cruel little smiles on their faces.

"You have my permission to commence, Yang Chu."

The Chinaman picked up the smallest knife and stepped up to Bill Earp. "You touch him with that," Johnny yelled, "and I—"

The knife flashed in to Bill's naked right shoulder. A little piece of flesh not bigger than a dime fell to the floor and blood came.

"One," counted Li Hoi Sang.

Bill had not flinched a hair's breadth but Johnny had. Next to his own kin, Johnny loved Bill better than anything else on earth. "Hold 'er," he shouted. "Hold 'er. Turn him loose and I'll tell you where the mine is. You can do 'er to me."

"You will tell us anyway, Mistel Hatfield," Li Hoi Sang answered. "Mister Ealp dies so that the honor of the House of Hsai may be once mole cleal and blight. Ploceed, Yang Chu."

Chung, at the Lazy W, kept going

to the door and looking out to see if Johnny and Bill were in sight. A Turkey Trot rider came along and Chung asked if they were over there. He got a negative answer. A Gridiron man drifted along later and was asked the same question. "Me? I ain't seen them jaspers for three days. They got 'em some chuck and headed for the hills."

Finally, Chung could stand it no longer. He waited until Bob Beardsley and the Lazy W riders had gone about their business and then went into his room off the kitchen. When he came out he was buckling a belt around his lean waist. From the belt there hung a razor sharp machete. He picked up the shotgun and started for the hills.

Chung reached the landslide, looked around, then headed for a spring he knew about. As he went around a big boulder he met two old Apache bucks who were heading for the valley. Both were villainous looking, dressed in ragged overalls, torn, dirty hickory shirts, both with what had once been lengths of clean white cotton tied around their heads as fillets.

One of the Apaches grunted, "How," and the other asked, "Go Lazy W, catchum chuck?"

Chung had fed them several times and once in awhile had bought game from them. "Hullo, you jump leselvation again?"

"*Si.* Agent heap no good. Keep 'em chuck—keep 'em dinero—kept 'em everything. We go to Lazy W and catchum chuck and 'bacco?"

"When I get back thele I will—" Chung remembered that Bob Beardsley had once said the two old bucks could track a killekiloo bird to its lair. "You vely good tlackels?"

"The Apache did not get 'tlackels' and one grunted, "No sabe." "You good finding things? Find holses—find men—find anything lost in hills?"

"*Si,*" one of them answered, promptly, "What you want found?"

"You know Johnny Hatfield and Bill Ealp?"

"Heap know 'um. Many times catchum chuck and catchum 'bacco from 'um. You lost 'um?"

"Maybeso. Vely bad men in hills. Maybeso they catch Johnny and Bill. I look for them. You help and light after catch plenty chuck and evelything. Maybeso fight filst."

Both the old bucks reached under their shirts and produced long knives. One said, "No fightum rangers. *Muy mal* hombres to fight. Fight anything else. Where you last see Johnny and Bill? We find 'um."

"Maybeso you can pick up thele tlacks at the landslide," Chung answered.

Yang Chu's knife went in and again a little piece of flesh dropped from Bill's shoulder.

"Two," counted Li Hoi Sang.

"You dirty lowdown!" yelled Johnny, beside himself with fear for Bill, "Stop that, you—"

From the rear doorway, a shotgun roared. Li Hoi Sang fell sideways, his head half blown off. Two other Chinamen who were in line also fell. The shotgun roared again and two more of the Chinese fell. Before the sound of the second discharge died away there came the bloodcurdling Apache yell. In through the front door came the two old bucks, back once more in the days when they had led war parties. They had stripped and made breech clouts out of their hickory shirts. In their hands were the long knives and their faces were the faces of devils. It may that the Chinese thought the Apaches were devils. Yang Chu dropped the little knife and reached under his blouse for a sword. He did not live to draw it. One of the bucks reached him and the knife darted in like the strike of a snake. Yang Chu, of the House of Hsai, went on High to join his venerable ancestors, sent there by an old Apache buck.

The Chinaman in charge of the iron pot had drawn a sword. Chung dropped the shotgun and drew the

machete. He had told Bill and Johnny that he was "a vely good swoldsman" —and he proved it.

The Chinaman cut at him only to have the blade met and flung far to one side. Johnny and Bill saw a flash of steel as Chung cut in and up, the deadly cut of a master swordsman. The pot-tender fell across Yang Chu, his body almost cut in half.

There was a messy fight going on near the dais and Chung charged into it. The Chinese left had snapped out of their surprise and were fighting for their lives with swords and daggers. There had been guards posted outside the cabin but the Apaches had slipped up on them one by one. The guards died without having time to even shout a warning.

Lao Tzu met Chung. The sword and the machete seemed to Johnny and Bill to be one blur of light. Suddenly the sword left Lao Tzu's hand and hit the cabin wall. Chung's machete rose and fell and Lao Tzu also went on High to explain to his ancestors just why he had failed to wipe out the insult to the House of Chi.

The two old bucks were at close quarters with the two remaining Chinamen and Chung started to help, but it was not necessary.

Johnny, as Chung killed Lao Tzu, announced, "Well—dog my cats! I never did see me any such thing before, no foolin'."

"You doggone old no count scoundrel," shouted Bill. "Come on over here and untie us. Dogged if I ain't going to beat yuh plumb to death for actin' thisaway to the Tapins, yuh durned old kiote."

"How did you get here, Geronimo?" asked Bill. "For once in your worthless life someone was glad to see you. You come Turkey Trot and Gridiron. Plenty chuck, plenty dinero, plenty likker all the rest of yore life."

The other Apache came up. "Me come, too, Bill?"

"Darn right you come too," Johnny answered for Bill. "Boy howdy, I sure did think the Tapins had us, no foolin'. I thought you was scared of them, Chung?"

"Sule, plenty scaled. But scaled mole that vely bad boys get plenty hult so come to lescue them."

Johnny looked at Bill who was gingerly feeling around the cuts on his shoulder, "You k n o w something, Bill?"

"I know this shoulder is heap plenty sore."

"We found the mine, didn't we?"

"Yuh found 'er. It's yore mine."

"Oh—yeah? I thought you and me was pudners. Excuse me, Mister Earp. From now on, don't you ever speak to me, you polecat."

"Aw—sure we're pudners, Johnny. But you—"

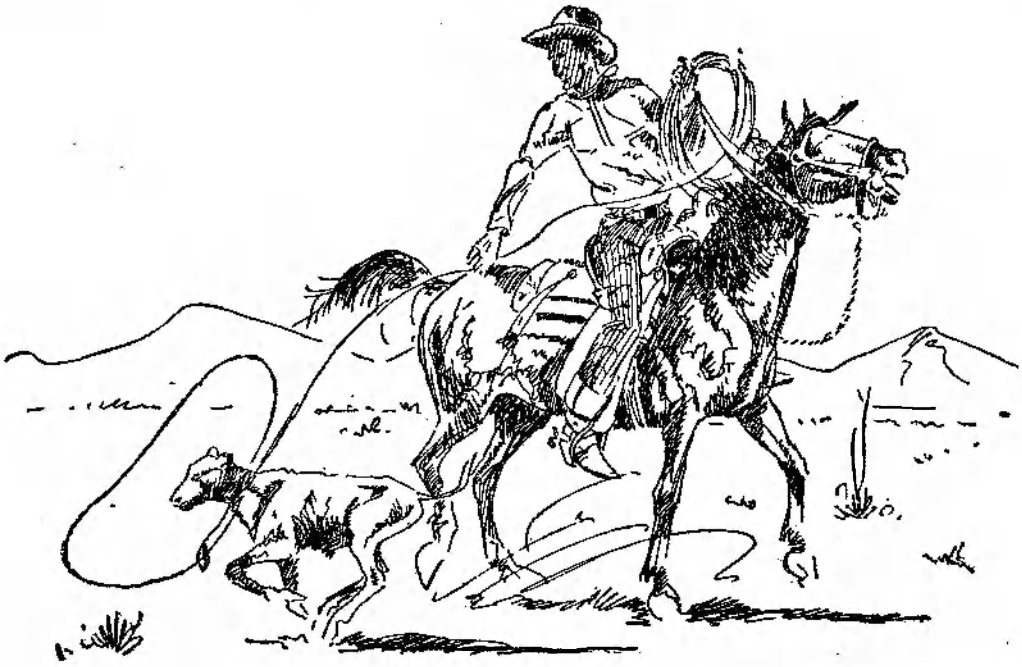
"No 'but you' about 'er. We hunted for it together, didn't we? We always did, didn't we? Just because I run across 'er while you was—"

"Dad blame it, don't start that durn orating. Have it your way. Sure we're pudners and the mine belongs to both of us. Let's drift outta here. I want to get this here shoulder fixed up. She's hurting me like the dickens."

"Catchum leaves, wet 'um—put 'um on," one of the old bucks said. "No hurt then."

"What I was going to say," Johnny said, very dignified, "is that Chung is our pudner, too. He gets him a third of the mine."

"No wantee," Chung answered, promptly. "Got plenty money light now. Only want you two scoundlels to be good boys."



ROPES and ROPING

A Working Cowhand Opens His War-Bag And Pulls Out Some Tricks Of The Trade, Including Illustrations Drawn

By

E. W. THISTLETHWAITE

For an opener this month, I think we'd better have a little to say on the subject of ropes. A rope, you know, is almost as indispensable to a cowboy as is a saddle and, in a cow country, a saddle without a lariat strapped to the fork looks about as queer as a mule without ears.

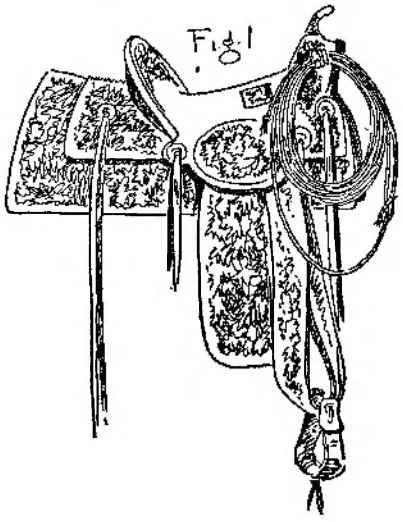
A rope is always carried high up on the right hand side of the saddle fork and every stock saddle is made with a strap there for that purpose. (See Fig. 1.) The noose or loop may be made larger than the coil, as shown, or the same size, but the honda, or eye, always sets to the front and the other end to the rear—a fact that "cowboy" artists might do well to take note of.

If the cowboy is a "dally" man—that is, one who does not actually *tie* his rope to the saddle, but merely snubs it, by making several turns about the horn—the other end of the rope will probably be finished off with a Turk's head knot or possibly merely "whipped" with a piece of string.

A "tie" man, on the other hand, usually makes a sliding loop which he slips over the horn. This loop may be kept on the horn at all times or just slipped on prior to the making of a cast.

If, for any reason, a dally man wishes to tie fast, he usually ties it as shown in Fig. 2—a knot which is perfectly solid, yet one that is easily slackened and taken off no matter how hard it has been pulled.

By far the commonest type of rope is the three-strand Manilla, known sometimes as a "whale line," "yacht line" or "grass" rope, the size being usually three-eighths or seven-sixteenths of an inch. A "scant three-



eighths" is often used as a calf rope. In this type of rope, the eye or honda is almost invariably tied by hand, a popular way being shown in Fig. 3. In order to prevent the loop from wearing out, the end is often covered with leather or rawhide. The one objection to rawhide in this capacity is that, being hard, it is inclined to draw up and pinch the rope, making the loop difficult to slacken. There is, in addition, a patent metal clip on the market which is used in the same manner. Any kind of metal honda, however, is objected to by most ropers.

I might mention that those four-strand lariats with brass hondas like you buy at "Sears and Sawbucks" or "Monkey Wards" are rarely used by genuine cowboys.

Besides the Manilla, there is a rope known as the "Maguey." It is pronounced "ma-gay" and is a Mexican product made from the century plant.

There is one great feature that maguey ropes possess, and that is a certain *stiffness,* even in dry weather. A rope that is really limber does not hold a loop well and is practically useless for lariat purposes. As we say, it has no "life." With a grass rope, this limpness may be taken out in a few seconds by dipping in water, but lots of times water is not available and in any case it's a nuisance to have to do that. Even a Manilla rope of best quality goes limber in dry weather, and this applies to new ropes as well as old.

For some reason or other maguey rope is made small. I've never seen one over a scant three-eighths, and for that reason it is impractical for anything but light work.

In addition to the above, there is a twisted linen rope—widely advertised for the last three or four years—and two kinds of ***braided*** ropes, the familiar cotton "Spot cord" and a braided linen rope.

In the advertisements, great claims are made for the twisted linen rope, but, although it is undoubtedly strong, it is of little use in a dry country. It gets too "raggy."

Braided ropes seem to retain their life or stiffness better than the twisted variety. They do not, moreover, get as stiff in damp weather. A shower, or even a sea breeze makes a Manilla rope as stiff as a wire cable and almost unusable.

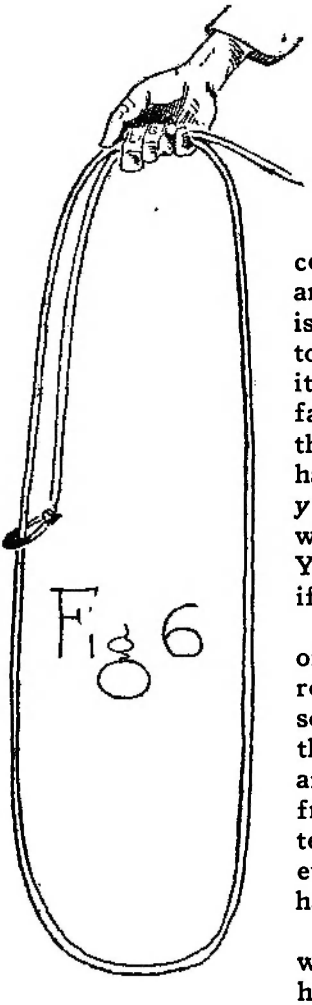
The braided linen is, to me, the ideal

rope. The cotton spot cord would be as good if it were a little stronger. It is, however, stronger than is generally supposed and can be used for roping stock if you're careful. That is,

if you "take your turns," and *not too many* of them, allowing a little "give." I might mention in this connection that one man may use a light rope for heavy stock and get by with it, while another man, using the same rope, would break it roping calves.

So much for machine-made ropes. Now a word about the hand-made rawhide product. It might be mentioned that a rawhide rope is called a *riata*—a word technically incorrect when used to describe any of the ropes mentioned above.

A riata is made anywhere from three-eighths to half an inch in diameter, and maybe fifty or sixty feet long. The reasons for the excessive length are two. One is that, owing to its weight, it will *throw* farther, and the other, you have to *take your turns* with a riata. You'll break it if you tie fast.



The making of a rawhide rope is quite some job and the completed article is worth from ten to fifteen smackers even in these hard times.

To begin with, a cowhide is soaked in water over night. Then it is laid out and the neck, legs, etc., trimmed off till it is roughly oval in shape. A narrow strip is cut around and around till the whole hide is used up. This strip is cut into four equal lengths, the hair scraped off and the edges feathered. Great care has to be taken in this operation or weak places in the

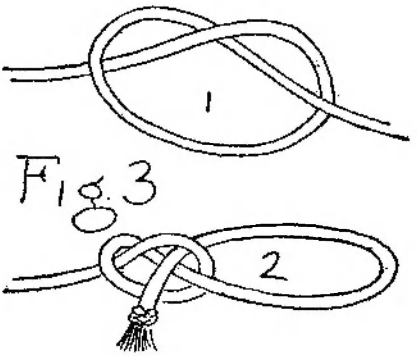


Fig 3

strands will result. There are bound to be some more or less weak places because no hide is of uniform thickness, and care has to be taken in the arrangement of the strands for braiding, so that no two thin places come together.

After the rope is braided, it is greased and worked down and finally limbered somewhat by pulling it back and forth through holes drilled in a board. Finally a honda is made and braided in—itself quite a job—and the rope is ready for use.

That is the kind of rope usually used by Mexican vaqueros and Spanish California buckaroos and, I may say, that for real roping—making difficult catches in corral or in open, rough country—the real Mexican vaquero has the American cowboy skinned forty ways.

There is such a thing as a *twisted* rawhide rope, but they are very uncommon, in this country at least.

I expect we shouldn't close this subject without at least a word about hair ropes, although they are never, owing to their lack of weight, used as lariats.

The average hair rope is made about twenty feet long, is twisted four strand and finished off with a large kind of Turk's head knot with tassel at one end and a leather thong at the other. They are used exclusively as tie ropes or reins for a hackamore, a twenty-foot rope being long enough

for both. The "four strands" are, by the way, in reality but two long strands, doubled back, so that all four ends come together in the Turk's head. I forgot to mention above that the *maguey* rope is also made in this manner and is, too, of necessity, four strand.

Although a hair rope made from a horse's mane is fairly smooth, one made from tail hair is very scratchy, as the stiff ends stick out in every direction. This feature has given rise to the erroneous belief that a snake won't cross a hair rope.

In speaking of the riata, I mentioned the length as being anywhere from fifty to sixty feet. A grass rope, on the other hand, is rarely made over forty feet or forty-five at the most, the reason being it is not heavy enough to carry farther.

A long rope is, of course, used only by a dally man. He needs a long rope because he has to have some left over to take his turns with. A tie man, who throws all his rope out, usually uses a rope anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five feet and I know one *contest* roper—one of the best too — who uses a rope only *eighteen* feet long. It is just enough to make a loop! In using that short a rope it is, of course, necessary to have a horse that will put you right "on top of" the calf or whatever you rope.

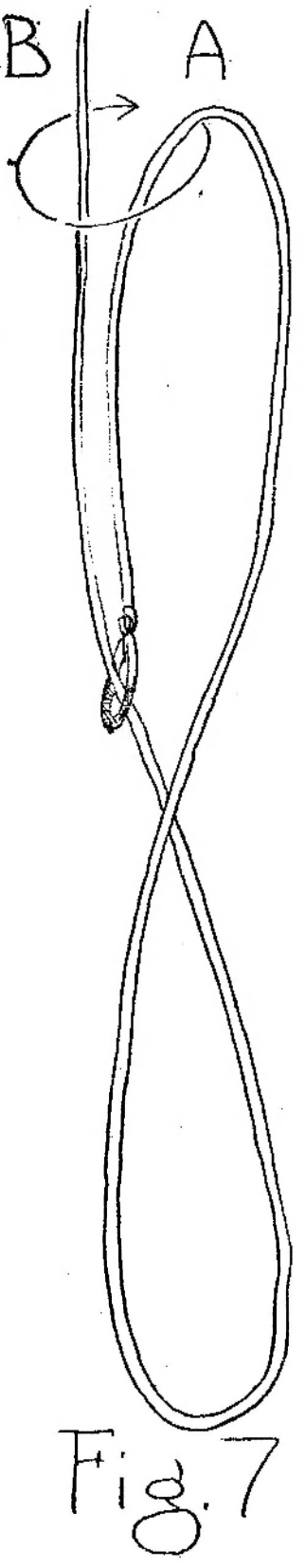


Fig. 7

Well, so much for the rope, now a word or two about the different casts.

In case some of you should want to practice with a rope, and it is a pretty good way to pass time, I might mention, first of all, that in making a cast of any kind, the honda should be a quarter way round your loop. People who don't know invariably hold the rope too close to the honda. Also, the rope should run *straight*. That is, after passing through the honda it should *not* be doubled back on itself. (See Fig. 6.)

"Building" a loop is another thing. Ordinarily, of course, you may have lots of time and one way is as good as another, but occasionally you're in a hurry and need a loop right now. Here's how you get it!

After having made a small loop for a start, hold the *honda* in your right hand about the level of your shoulder. Now bring it forward and down with considerable force, using your elbow as the *axis*. (I *think* that's the word.)

To my notion that's the easiest way to build a loop without kinks, but you'll probably have to practice a little. Possibly you may find more of a full arm swing easier. Some ropers use a whirling motion — like you might whirl a rock on the end of a string. Any old way is a good way if a man can get results with it, so try our own.

I might caution, too, never to attempt to throw a loop that has a suspicion of a *kink* in it. Speaking of kinks, I've seen guys try to take kinks out of a loop by shaking it, holding it down with a foot and stretching it and every other fool way imaginable. For that reason I've made a drawing (Fig. 7) showing just how it's done. "B" is the long end of your rope and "A" the top of the loop. All you do is take hold of A and move it *around* B one way or the other. One turn takes out one kink. You can see at a glance which way to turn it, or at least find out right away by trying it.

I imagine that many of you suppose that a loop is invariably whirled over the head before making a cast. Certainly that is the natural and instinctive way to throw a rope, and it's a good way too, if you're on horseback or want to make a long cast. There are times, however, when such a cast is *no bueno*, as the Mexicans say. As, for instance, when you're roping in a corral full of horses.

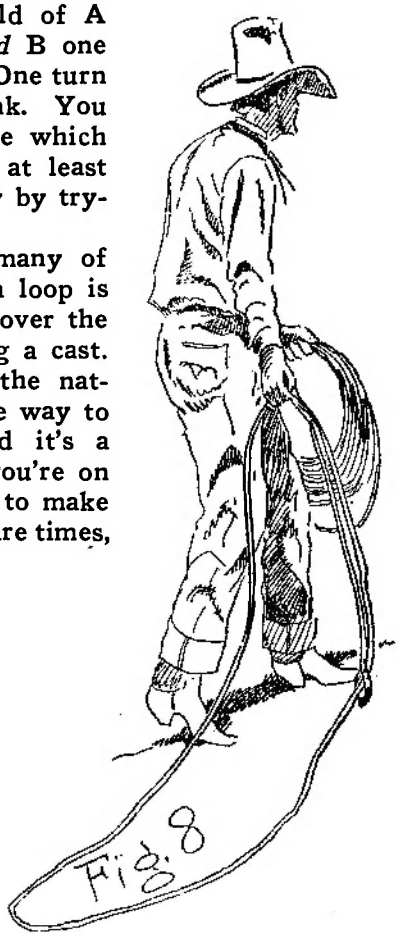
If you're afoot in a corral and want to catch a horse, the best way to do it is get him in a corner —then walk towards him on a line that would bisect the angle formed by the corner. In this way, you're just the same distance from him whether he breaks to right or left.

As you advance, trail your loop. That is, let it drag along the ground, the honda on the outside. (Fig. 8.)

If the horse runs by you from left to right, all you have to do is bring the loop up and out in a straight underhand flip, so that it assumes a vertical position. (Fig. 9.)

It is the easiest thing in the world to catch a running horse with the cast once you get used to judging distance. The whole trick is in throwing the loop far enough *ahead* of the animal.

Should the horse take a notion to break the other way, passing you from right to left, you can make the identical cast described above, but, in such a case, it is more natural for me—and it might be for you too—to make an *overhand* cast, which brings your honda to the bottom of the vertical loop.



If you actually intend to make an overhand cast, the loop should be trailed up the other way from that shown in Fig. 8. I mean by that, that the honda should be on the inside and the hand holding the rope should have the *fingers,* instead of the back, up. An easy rule to follow is to make sure the thumb always points toward the honda.

You hold your loop as described above and make the overhand cast when you want to forefoot an animal—that is, catch it by the front feet. This might sound kind of difficult, but it's really extremely easy if you throw a vertical loop near the ground (honda down) and well in front of a running animal.

The last throw we are to describe here is another overhand cast and one of the prettiest and most graceful there is, if well executed. To do it afoot, the loop should be spread out on the ground on your *left* side. The hand holding the loop should have the back up, which, with the thumb pointing toward the honda, puts the latter on the inside.

In making the cast, you make almost a full arm swing, your hand traveling approximately in the form of an S and coming down overhand, from a point a little above your right shoulder. It's a little difficult to explain on paper, but if you get a rope and try it, you'll see right away how it's done.

There's just one thing to remember. As in all overhand casts, you *turn your loop over* in the air. So, if you're making a vertical cast at a running animal the honda comes to the *bottom* of the loop; or, if a horizontal cast, the honda comes down on the *right* side, not the left as it would in a straight cast.

I expect it is really unnecessary, but I might explain that the loop is turned over by merely twisting the wrist as the cast is being completed. To turn the loop half over, that is, vertical, the wrist is twisted till the thumb points *down,* and to turn it plumb over, the back of the hand must be down, of course.

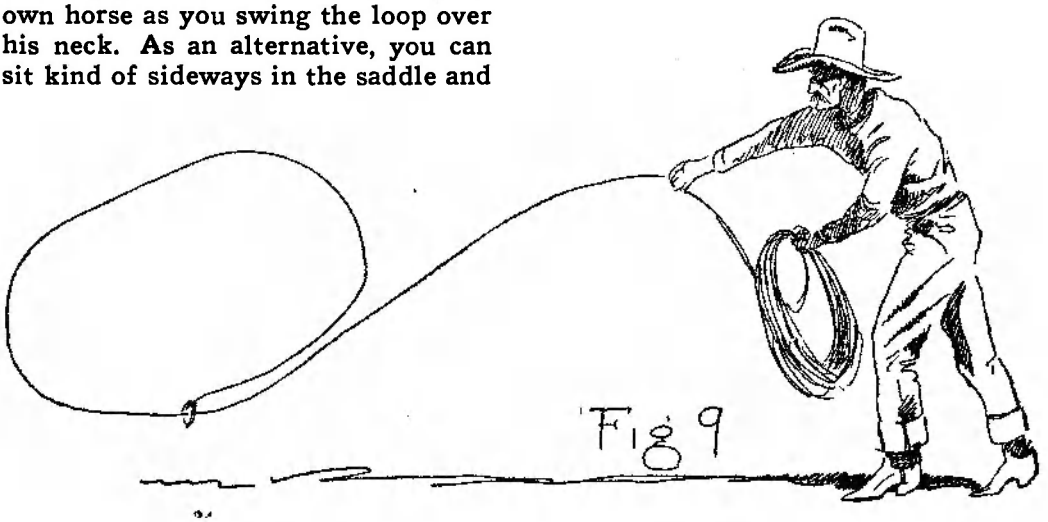
This cast is a good one to use on a horse that keeps its tail toward you or one that hides behind the others, as in a corral when you may have to throw your loop *over* two or three in order to catch the one you want.

I have seen this cast made on horseback, with the loop started from the left side of the horse, identically as described above. But if you're not careful, you're liable to catch your own horse as you swing the loop over his neck. As an alternative, you can sit kind of sideways in the saddle and start your loop from your pony's right shoulder and swing it back over his rump in your S curve. It's a very neat cast when made from a horse and I've made a little drawing—the one at the beginning of the article—to illustrate it. The calf shown has broken back from a herd and the cowboy is dropping a loop on it as it passes. Note the position of the man's wrist, also the honda of the rope.

Well, this roping business has taken up a whole lot more space than I intended when I started, but roping *is* important and if you want to be a cowboy you can't do anything better than buy a rope and practice with it. And while we're on the subject of *practice* I might mention the half hitch.

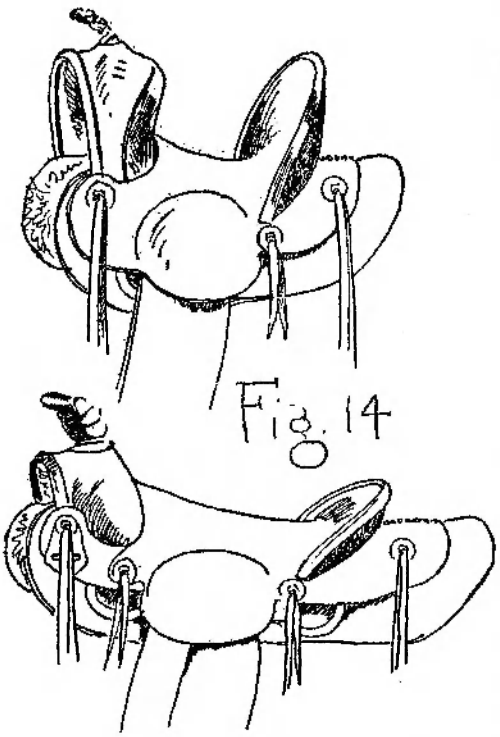
The half hitch has a hundred practical uses which we don't need to go into here. Suffice it to say that it *is* handy to be able to throw them, besides being entertaining, and I think while I'm at it, I might devote a little space to a description of how it's done.

One of the easiest ways of learning to throw a half hitch is to drive a stake into the ground, tie one end of a thirty-foot rope to it, then stand back about fifteen feet and make overhand casts at the stake. By overhand casts I mean full-arm swings after the manner in which the ball is "bowled" in the English game of cricket—if you've ever seen that played.



Once you can throw half hitches well, an interesting little trick is to tie a man up with them.

To do this, get someone to stand about fifteen feet away, then drop your loop over his head, pulling it snug around the waist. Now get him to hold one arm out sideways and throw a half hitch over it. That arm is then dropped to the side, the rope pulled tight and a half hitch thrown over the other arm in the same manner. Next, throw one or more hitches over head and shoulders, binding arms to his sides.



The feet come next. They may be held out sideways or directly toward you, the half hitches being drawn tight about the ankles. Having caught both ankles separately, you make the "patient" hold his feet together and jump into the air while you snap one or more half hitches about both ankles together.

A good way to practice this is to tack a cross arm to a post at about the height of a man's shoulders. You can rig something to take the place of feet, too, in order to practice throwing your half hitches up from the bottom, although, of course, you can't very well make your post jump!

So long as we're playing with a rope I might as well mention another little trick—that of throwing knots. There are lots of ways of doing this, but the easiest to learn—or so it seems to me—is to use a fairly long rope, say twenty-five or thirty feet. When you get the hang of it, you'll be able to throw knots one after another in a rope three or four feet long.

All you have to do is throw your rope out straight along the ground, and, holding one end in your hand, jerk the other end towards you, so that it passes a little to your right and a foot or so off the ground. As the end comes by, throw a half hitch in front of it so that the end of the rope passes through the loop thus formed and presto! you've tied a knot! (See Fig. 12.)

The end of your rope comes back much better if it is a little weighted—say with a knot in the end. And you'd better practice the "flipping back" process quite a bit before you attempt throwing the half hitches. When you *do* throw the latter, make them big enough.

Speaking of saddles—since beginning this series of articles for ALL WESTERN, I've received quite a number of letters from readers asking for names and addresses of saddle makers. After getting a catalog I had recommended, one reader sent it to me with the request that I pick him out a saddle.

This particular catalog illustrated some fifty different saddles and, being unfamiliar with range conditions, this fellow just didn't know which one to get.

The most important part of a saddle is, of course, the tree it is built on, and the most important feature of the tree is the front part or *forks*—whether high, low, wide, or narrow, etc.

There are certain trees made exclu-

sively for riding bucking horses and other trees made just as exclusively for roping—and *contest* roping at that. Neither of these types is very practical for regular range work. In Fig. 14 we show the extremes of both.

The bronk saddle shown (the one at the top) is what is popularly known as a "Form Fitter." This name, by the way, was originated by Hamley & Co. of Pendleton, Oregon, some ten years ago, and finally patented by them, but not before practically every other saddle company in the country had adopted it.

After Hamleys got the name patented, the other outfits were forced to abandon it, substituting instead such names as "Fits Em," "Fits U," "Body Fitter," "Perfect Fitter" and the like.

The saddle shown is one of these latter—an exaggeration of the original Hamley design—and suitable only for riding the bad ones.

The original Hamley product is not a bad all round saddle if you like that type of rigging, but they have since introduced a "low" Form Fitter which is much better if you have any roping to do.

There are, of course, other bronk saddles besides all these "form fitters," and many of them are good enough for all round work. About the oldest and best known of these is the Tipton.

The one objectionable feature of all bronk saddles is the high, dished cantle. I might mention that almost any saddle company will have a special tree made for you, eliminating this feature. There is usually no extra charge for a special tree.

Our second drawing in Fig. 14 shows a regular roping tree of the Lee Robinson type—strictly a contest tree. There is practically no swell to the fork—hence no leg grip—and no cantle worth mentioning. It is an ideal rig for contest roping—where you ride your own horse and rope in a level arena. But on the range, where you have to rope in rough country, ride half broke horses, etc., it's not so good.

Almost any of the "low" bronk trees, a few of the regular bronk trees (those not too radical in design), and most of the standard stock trees like the Taylor, Visalia, Montana, etc., are suitable for all round work.

I have, of course, ridden a great many different saddles myself and my own choice of a tree is the Ellensburg with a fourteen-inch swell and a four-inch cantle.

The Ellensburg has a medium height, slightly undercut swell and, before any real bronk trees were designed, was a favorite for riding bad horses. I believe the Tipton tree—introduced in 1916—was developed from the Ellensburg and next to the latter I like the Tipton.

In our next article we may have a little more to say about saddles and I'm going to answer several requests by illustrating a real Mexican saddle, such as was rode by Pancho Villa and is rode today by the real Mexican vaqueros. I'll try to get around to a little dope on horse breaking too.

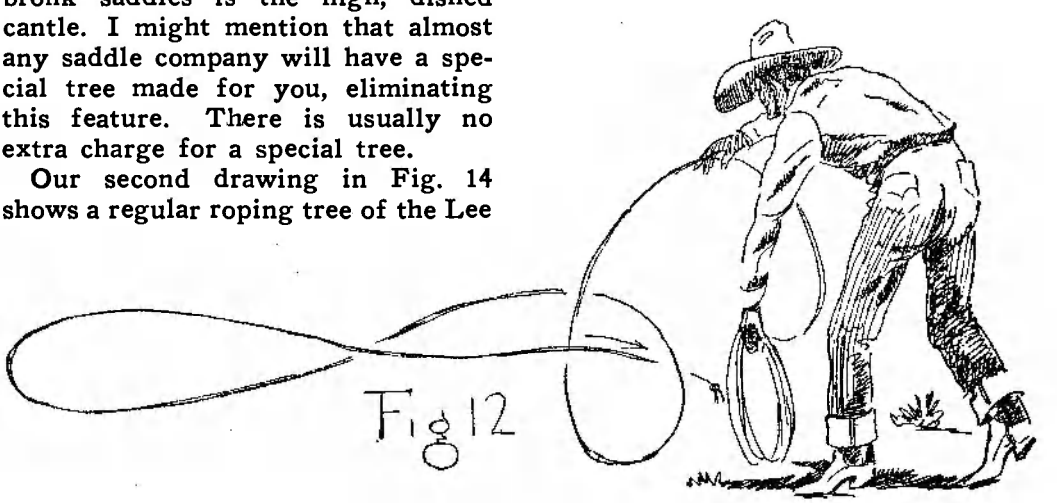


Fig 12

LOST GOLD

I should be blowin' th' crowd to drinks,
While buckin' th' games at th' 'Frisco Chink's;
I should be wearin' th' finest clothes
An' eatin' th' fanciest grub, hell knows,
But, instead, I'm wanderin' up an' down
A-tap-tap-tappin' around th' town,
A-hearin' th' barkeeps cuss an' shout,
Because they can't throw a blind man out.

Remember Carney? Old locoed Ben,
With his pockmarked face an' his ugly wen?
With his long, hooked nose an' his flappin' ears?
Remember our heapin' th' fool with jeers,
When he would cackle, "As sure as whoops,
There's plenty of gold in th' Guadaloops,
An' I'll make my strike," then grow grim,
"Before I check out!"—remember him?

Sure you do! Well, one sizzlin' night
He came saunterin' into Malone's Delight
In Odessa, an' he gave us a jar,
When he flopped a poke on th' gleamin' bar
An', clawin' it open, spilled gold to view,
While, plumb excited, he shrilly blew
His nose an' chuckled, "Line up, you troops!
I've struck it rich in th' Guadaloops!"

We asked questions, he grinned an' stared;
A clam was a talkin'-machine compared
To him, drunk or sober, so we soon found
We had to be followin' him around,
But nobody learned anything a-tall,
For he was some foxy, until one fall
My luck was with me—that's what I thought—
When I stumbled on him an' th' place I sought.

With an oath he dropped his gold-filled sack
An' went for his guns with his face rage-black,
While I flashed my sixes an' in th' roar
He crashed down dead to th' canyon floor,
As a hot slug slashed me across th' eyes;
I reeled an' stumbled, lost earth an' skies;
Though I'm knowin' where Ben sprawls on his face,
It's hell—without eyes I can't find th' place!

—Edgar Daniel Kramer.

The Cactus City Gazette

VOL. 10 NO. 28

FANG PULLER OPENS OFFICE

New Nippers for Man or Beast Available

Cactus City can now boast of a brand new industry. (And one that Mesa Springs ain't got.) Dr. Kincaid is the newest settler here. He is a dentist, and has set up an office next to the Stud-horse Bar, which is convenient. Doc is plenty experienced with teeth, he says, and is ready to patch 'em up, pull 'em, or put in new ones at any time in man or beast. He also has a complete stock of new and second-hand sets of false teeth, which he guarantees will chew bull-beef or crack nuts without d a m a g e thereto, (meaning the teeth.)

In behalf of the folks who has been buying their teeth from a mail-order house, the *Gazette* welcomes Doc Kincaid to Cactus City, and hopes he will have a long and prosperous bus'ness, though of course I ain't wishing any of the subscribers any hard luck.

MRS. BAILEY JUMPS TO A CONCLUSION

Bumps Her Head

People have got theirselfs hurt in a lot of peculiar ways, but Mrs. Bailey wins the rubber bridle reins for the peculiarest accident of the year. Mrs. Bailey has a split lip and a big bump on her head the size of a turkey egg, which injuries she received by jumping to a conclusion.

Last week Bill Bailey went down to Yuma on one of hsi regular trips to buy groceries and dry goods and hardware for his store. Ordinarily that only takes him a couple of days, but this time he didn't show up when he should have.

After worrying about it some, Mrs. Bailey was just about ready to go looking for Bill, when there arrives a shipment of goods which Bill has evidently bought in Yuma. Among other crates and boxes, there was a long, heavy box about 6x3—just coffin-size — which attracts Mrs. Bailey's attention. She couldn't figure out at first what was in it—until she saw something wrote in big black letters on one end.

And right then is when she jumps to a conclusion and faints, splitting her lip and putting a bump on her head as she hits the floor. And no wonder she collapsed, for what she read on the end of the box was: BILL INSIDE.

There was a bill inside all right enough, but it was the bill for the goods, it wasn't her husband.

Deabill Draws a Big Belly Laugh

A big laugh was had by all at Deacon Diggs' church last Sunday night. After the sermon, the Deacon was trying to raise a hundred pesos to buy a new organ. He gave a big spiel about the glory of giving and then asked for donations.

Somebody started it off by planking down a simoleon. "That's the spirit!" praised the Deacon. "We got $1 to start it off, now who's going to make it $100?"

Away in the back somebody got up and raised his hand. It was Delirium Deabill, who had staggered in unnoticed to sleep off a dizzy spell in a rear pew.

"I will, Deacon. I'll make it a hundred!" he calls out. "Jus' put me down for two zeros. Along with that $1 you already got, that'll make it $100."

DUDES HAVE OWN HUNTING RANGE

Fenced Area Keeps Cows From Getting Shot by Nimrods—Maybe

The Six-point Shooting Star and Crescent Dude Ranch now has a place for their dude customers to hunt. After driving all their stock to the west range, so they won't be losing any beef, they now turn the dudes loose on the north range with a rifle and a good horse and let them hunt to their hearts' content. It's lots of fun for the tenderfeet, and it don't bother the deer and other game very much, though once in a while a dude will bring something down, like one did the other day.

Just about sundown one of the dudes who has been hunting all day comes riding in. Calico Cox was at the corral taking care of the horses and he inquires of the dude, "What luck today? Did yuh get a deer?" (This optimistic stuff is part of the business.)

The dude sort of hesitated a minute before he answers: "Well, I don't really know."

This was funny of course, but before Calico could interrogate him, the dude changes the subject by asking: "Are the rest of the hunters back yet?"

"Yeah," says C a l i c o. "They've checked in."

"And what about the regular riders? I saw two of them riding around the hunting range. Are they back?"

"Yeah, they've come in," says Calico. He's getting kind of impatient with this hombre, even though he's pretty much used to the fool things a dude can ask about. "Why do you ask?"

"Well," says the dude, looking relieved, "if there ain't nobody missing, then I guess I got a deer."

THE CACTUS CITY GAZETTE

Not Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. Published monthly by the Cactus City Printing Co. Bronco Blynn, Owner, Editor, and Head Reporter.

AUGUST, 1934

Subscription rates: one dollar per year (or the equivalent in cartridges, oats or dogies.)

Slick-Eared Editor Tries Skullduggery

The Cactus City Gazette wishes to warn the people about a dirty, lowdown piece of skullduggery which a rival of the Gazette is trying to pull off. Not mentioning any names, but there is a newspaper within forty miles to the east of us which has started a contest offering a month's subscription to the person bringing in to the editor the biggest T-Bone steak.

Now, neighbors, that is an old trick. A paper down in Brimstone county tried that last year, and before the contest was over the editor had—on the Q T—sold to a butcher shop about 500 pounds of the nicest steaks you ever saw.

So you folks who has just butchered a steer better think it over before you donate.

Rawhide Slips Dude Dame the Rear End Truth

Rawhide Rawlins got fired from the Six-point Shooting Star and Crescent Dude Ranch. They said that Rawhide had insulted one of the female customers who is staying there, but it looks like to me that Rawhide was only speaking the truth.

It seems that Rawhide was assigned to teach this female dude to ride. She had never been on a horse before and she was plenty nervous. As Rawhide brought up an old, gentle plug for her to try, she inquiries, "Oh, Mr. Rawhide, do you think I'll get a headache from bouncing up and down in the saddle?"

"Headache? Why, no, ma'am," says Rawhide, thinking to assure her a little. "I don't reckon you'll get a headache—cause it an't yore head that'll be slappin' the saddle."

Jackass Jake Gives Stranger the Works

The old saying that truth sounds stranger than fiction was proved again the other day. A sickly-looking stranger happened into the Cantina and allowed that he was looking for some real healthy town to live in.

"Well, then, stranger," answers Jackass Jake, "Cactus City is the place you're lookin' for."

"Is this a healthy town?" the hombre inquiries.

"Healthy! Look at that!" bellows Jackass, swelling out his hairy chest, which is about the size of three kegs of beer. "And looky here!" he goes on, picking up a horseshoe and twisting it up so's it looks like a steel pretzel. "I guess you'll agree, stranger, that I'm in pretty fair shape."

The man is sort of wall-eyed from the exhibition, and he nods without saying anything.

"Well, let me tell you something," orates Jackass. "When I first come to this town I was a weakling. I didn't have hardly any hair. I couldn't say a word. I couldn't walk across the room. Walk hell! I couldn't even stand up! Now do you think this is a healthy town?"

"I must agree that it is," admits the newcomer, though he still ain't quite convinced that Jackass ain't telling a tall one. "May I ask how long it took you to recuperate? How long have you been in this town?"

That was the one question that Jackass didn't want asked, although the answer would prove that he hadn't been lying. However, being a honest citizen, Jackass tells him "Stranger, I was born here."

LEGAL GAMBLING

According to Solo Seton, homesteading is more of a gamble than bucking the tiger. A homesteader, says Solo, is just betting the government three years of his life against 160 acres of land that he don't starve to death before he proves up.

That's plenty of odds.

UTAH BREAKS NEWS GENTLY

Calls a Spade a Spade About the Harkness Brat

It's a dead cinch that Utah Timmons won't ever get a medal for being diplomatic. The other day he knocks at Mrs. Harkness' door, and when that lady answered Utah blurts out: "Mrs. Harkness, I hate to tell yuh about it, but it's my duty to inform yuh that yuh have a spoiled child."

"Why—why, I was never so insulted in all my life!" she gasps, her eyes shooting out sparks that should have warned Utah to go easy. "Why, my child is a perfect angel."

"No, I wouldn't say that now, Mrs. Harkness. It ain't that bad. I'd say he was just spoiled. If he ain't completely spoiled, then he's badly busted up—'cause a six-horse team just run over him."

(LATE BULLETIN: Young Harkness really come out of the accident better than was first thought. Outside of losing a handful of teeth and a few inches of scalp, he ain't none the worse.)

It's All White

Short-weight Weston wishes to announce to his customers that if they notice a funny flavor in the flour he has sold them recently, why not to pay no attention to it. It is only some whitewash which Short-weight accidentally dumped into the wrong bin.

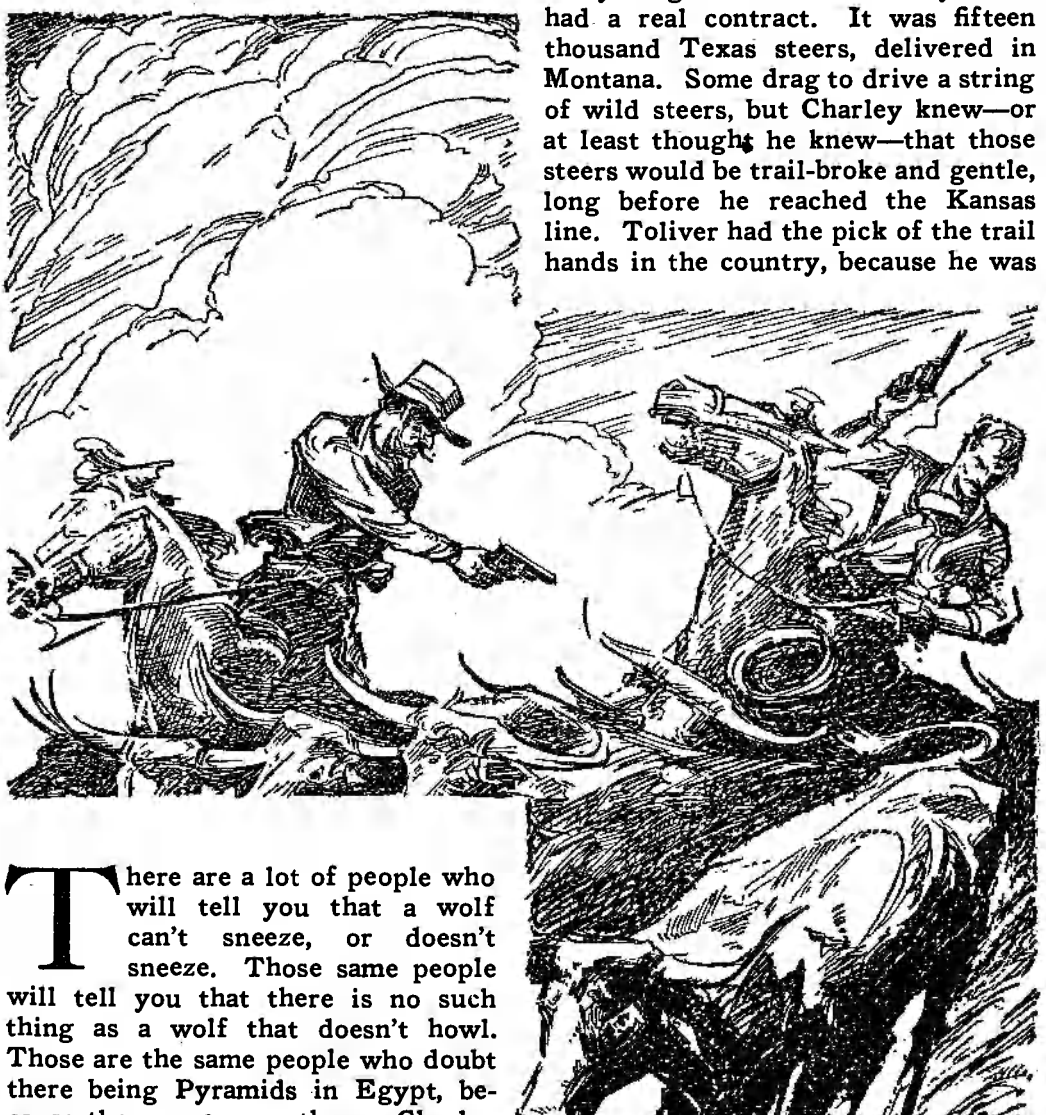
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING O.K.

Poker Game Holds Interest of Everyone

The regular meeting of the Town Council last night was almost a fizzle. Besides the Mayor only Councilman Hayes showed up for the meeting. Outside of the Mayor making a personal deal with Hayes for a stretch of range near Poison Springs there wasn't much done. Finally though, a couple of citizens dropped in and a stud-poker game was started, so the evening wasn't a total loss after all.

COMPLETE NOVELETTE

"HANG AND



There are a lot of people who will tell you that a wolf can't sneeze, or doesn't sneeze. Those same people will tell you that there is no such thing as a wolf that doesn't howl. Those are the same people who doubt there being Pyramids in Egypt, because they never saw them. Charley Toliver, six foot, red-haired, blue-eyed, a handsome giant of forty, and the finest trail boss that ever forked a horse, had some doubts about those wolves for a long time, but he was finally convinced that some wolves do sneeze, and do *not* howl—because they can't howl.

Charley Toliver was such a fine fellow that he got about the best of everything he wanted. That year he had a real contract. It was fifteen thousand Texas steers, delivered in Montana. Some drag to drive a string of wild steers, but Charley knew—or at least thought he knew—that those steers would be trail-broke and gentle, long before he reached the Kansas line. Toliver had the pick of the trail hands in the country, because he was

RATTLE"

By
J. E. GRINSTEAD

Toliver Couldn't Savvy Wolves That Sneezed; He Was Sure, Though, Critters Didn't Chaw Grass That He Couldn't Break To The Trail—But That Was Before He Shagged The Ten-Year-Old Mossie Horns From Enloe's Pet Range.

a square-shooter, fed well, and treated his men like humans. The hands were not a lot of sissies and tea-hounds, by any means. They were real trailers, could eat smoke, and all that. Just a lot of square, decent chaps. Men who wouldn't steal the milk calves from a widow, and a boss who wouldn't let them. Men that knew which end of a gun smoked, and how to make it smoke, if need be. Among them were four fellows who had come from what

The wolf sneezed and the herd rose and flew. The very devil would have run from that noise.

was then the Indian Territory. They were two pairs of partners, a quartette of good friends, and as it turned out, an organization of shrewdness and cold nerve that was hard to beat on the cattle trail, where there were plenty of both. One pair of the partners was Lee Gentry and Acey Duff. Gentry was a college-bred man, and Duff just a plain countryman that knew his way about. Likewise, Vince Collins, of the other pair, was an educated man, and Don Bogle just an honest yeoman. It was rare in the cow country for two men who had escaped from a university to be partners. They usually chummed up with some uneducated man who had a modicum of brains. So, these two pairs were running true to form. As stated, they came from the Indian Country to Charley Toliver's trail outfit, but—Where they had come from to the Indian Country was something else. All that anybody knew about them was that no man could get a fight with one of them. He had to fight all four of them. So, they were pretty generally let alone.

When Charley Toliver got his spread together and started out to find those fifteen thousand steers, he learned something. Someone else had been buying a few steers. He didn't find as much as a milk bunch of cattle for sale, until he got clear over in the Rio Grande country, in the forks of that border stream and the Pecos. Old Tobe Lasker was a rough and ready old cowman in that section, who could find cattle where there were not any, so Charley went to Tobe and told him he had to have fifteen thousand steers.

"That's right smart steers," said said Tobe, wrinkling his nose, which was all he had to grin with. The rest of his face being hid by whiskers. "I can find them many, but they're wilder'n hell. Four to ten year old. Some of 'em is nine foot high. They have looked for boogers until their eyes stick out like door-knobs. They're wild as Old Wolf Beddy himself."

"Who's Wolf Beddy?" asked Charley. "Is he the man that's got the steers?"

"No. Wolf ain't got nothin' but some traps. He's the chap that keeps the wolves off'n Steve Enloe's calves, so's they grow into steers, and Enloe is the man that has got them many steers, all in one brand."

"Don't this Steve Enloe ever sell any steers?" asked Toliver.

"Shore. He sells a lot every year, but he always has a big hang-over left in the thickets. If you want wild ones, I can get them SE steers for you. I seen Steve today, and he told me he hadn't sold nothin'."

"Well," said Toliver, "it's like this. I've got the steers sold at a fixed price, delivered in Montana, and I know what I can afford to pay for them. If you want to buy them from Enloe for me, you can do it. I'll tell you what I can pay for good, clean, average steers. You'll have to get your commission out of Enloe." Toliver stated the price he would pay, and Tobe Lasker agreed to buy the steers from Enloe, and get his pay from the seller.

That was all there was to it. The trade was made, and the cattle were to be ready for the trail in two weeks. Lee Gentry was standing by when the deal was made. After Old Tobe Lasker had wrinkled his nose again, and gone on to the Enloe Ranch, Toliver said:

"Lee, what do you make of that kind of cow business?"

"Well," said Lee, "the price is low enough for you to make some money, but I don't understand what a ranch is doing with ten-year-old steers, with cattle in demand like they have been for the last few years. Enloe must be hard to trade with. I doubt whether Lasker gets the steers or not."

"He thinks he can," said Toliver. "He says they are wolf wild. I didn't tell him, but by the time they get to Montana they'll be gentle enough."

"Maybe this Tobe Lasker thinks we

are a bunch of tenderfoots, and can't drive wild ones," grinned Lee.

"Maybe he does," said Toliver, "but if we ever get 'em strung out on the trail, we'll make a noise like we meant to drive 'em."

Toliver's outfit was camped a little way from the straggling old dobe town of *Cabeza de Caballo,* in plain English, Horsehead. It was a real nice town. One store, two saloons, and plenty of gun room. Two days after Lasker agreed to try to buy the cattle, he came back to Horsehead, and with him was Steve Enloe and a gang of his *vaqueros.* Charley Toliver was a fair-minded fellow. He knew his boys wouldn't have any more fun for many, many moons, after they took the trail with that string of horns and hoofs, so he was just letting them run wild, drink as much as they pleased, play poker, dance in the dancehall, and flirt with the Mexican girls of the old town to their hearts' content.

Toliver and a dozen of his men were in the Wandering Boy Saloon, taking a few drinks, when in came Tobe Lasker and Steve Enloe, trailed by about twenty of the hardest looking waddies that ever swung a rope, or fired a gun. Lasker introduced Enloe to Toliver, and they took a drink, while Toliver looked Enloe over. He was a medium-sized man, rather good looking, with the softest voice, and the most innocent face and eyes that Charley Toliver had ever seen in his life. He was wondering how a man with a face like that could ever handle that gang of tough *vaqueros,* when Enloe said:

"Mr. Toliver, Tobe comes to see me about them fifteen thousand steers you want. I've got the steers, and I can gather 'em and have 'em ready for the trail in two weeks, and the price is all right, but—"

"Well," said Toliver, "that's all there is to the trade, isn't it? If I get the steers at my price, and they are up to standard, I'll be satisfied."

"I know," said Enloe. "I can trade with Tobe, all right, and deliver the steers, but— I'm a man that aims to shoot square. I been caught in some trades with trailers, and I don't want to again, if I can help it. I'm supposin' that you are on the dead level, but I don't know you, and business is business. I—"

"What the devil are you driving at?" asked Charley. "Do you want me to put the money up somewhere?"

"No, it ain't that. Several times I have sold steers to trailers. They's let 'em run as soon as they got off'n my range, and drift back home. Then they'd comb my range for 'em, and take every damn thing in sight. So, if I sell these steers to you, I got to have an understanding that you either road-brand 'em, or else keep 'em off'n my range when you get 'em. I won't let nobody on earth gather cattle on my range that ain't got no brand on 'em but mine. You can see what I mean. I'm a man that don't want no trouble. I don't mean to insinuate that you would take steers that weren't yo'n, but the trouble is you couldn't tell yo'n from mine, if they all has just the SE brand on 'em."

"I get you," said Toliver. "Road-branding fifteen thousand steers would take about all summer, out here in the wide open out-of-doors, with no lumber to make a branding chute. Where is your range line?"

"The Rio Pecos is my line," said Enloe.

"All right, Mr. Enloe," said Toliver, "you'll find that I want to be absolutely fair with you. Throw those steers across the Pecos, and deliver 'em to me on the mesquite flats five miles from the river. When I throw my waddies around that herd, they are mine. If they get away from me and drift back to your range, you can have 'em. Is that all?"

"Shore," said Enloe. "I ain't lookin' for trouble, and I don't mean to be contrary. I just want an understanding."

They took another drink, then En-

loe turned his back to the bar, rolled a smoke, and stood looking Toliver's men over with innocent, baby eyes. His own men had crowded up to the bar, and were drinking boisterously, while Toliver's men gave back to the middle of the floor, to give them room. Lee Gentry and Acey Duff, and the other pair of partners were standing together, looking the wild scene over, and measuring Enloe and his men the best they could. A shaggy giant of a fellow stood next to Enloe. He had a couple of guns on him, spoke Spanish as well as he did English, which was not too well, and seemed to be a sort of leader with Enloe's wild mob of waddies. His name was Giff Coombs. If Steve Enloe spoke a word to Giff, nobody heard him. He did say to Toliver:

"Mr. Toliver, let's you and I and Tobe go across to the Border Saloon. It's quieter over there. My boys haven't been in town for a while, and they make a lot of fuss when they get to drinking. I never did see why cowhands had to drink, and get rough, but they all do it."

The three cowmen left the Wandering Boy, just as Giff yelled:

"Hey, you trailers. Come up and take something. You ain't too proud to drink with a lot of pear-thicket punchers, air ye?"

Toliver's trailers drifted to the bar, to show their good will, and scattered along among the *vaqueros*, but that quartette from the Indian country stuck in a bunch at the bar, as they usually did in any kind of a crowd. A few minutes later, as the three cowmen sat at a table in the Border Saloon, drinking some beer, a gun roared over at the Wandering Boy. Enloe sprang up, overturning his glass, and said:

"My, my. I was afraid my boys would get rough."

Charley Toliver looked up at him, with an odd little wrinkle between his eyes, and a smile on his handsome lips. He was wondering how long Steve Enloe would last on the cattle trail. Old Steve Lasker wrinkled his nose in a grin. Neither of them spoke, and they could not have been heard if they had. It sounded as if all the guns in the world were firing at once. A moment later, Enloe's *vaqueros* began to pour out of the Wandering Boy.

What had happened was quite simple. Giff had tried to talk to Vince Collins, who was about as shrewd, and about as near speechless as trailers ever got. Vince had answered with a few monosyllables, and Giff seemed to think he was not friendly. He said so, in pretty raw language. Vince said nothing.

"Ary man that drinks my whiskey ain't too good to talk to me," roared Giff. "Fill her up again, and see if yo' tongue won't come loose."

"No, thank you," said Vince. He could see that this big bully, for no apparent reason on earth, wanted to start a quarrel. He had seen ranch hands and trailers mix like that before.

Giff went for his gun, at that, and if he wanted to start a quarrel, he had it started. He fired one shot, into the floor at Vince's feet. It seemed to be the rallying signal for Enloe's hands. At any rate, in half a second they all had their guns out. Giff had started a party, but he didn't finish it. Vince Collins shot him apart, before the fun even started good. After that, Vince and Don, and Lee and Acey, backs together, smoked that room until Enloe's *vaqueros* couldn't breathe the air.

When the firing stopped, and Enloe's men were all out of the Wandering Boy, the three cowmen walked across the street. Enloe was following behind Toliver and Lasker, and wringing his hands like a school girl who had lost her pencil. They entered the Wandering Boy, and found a mess. One of Toliver's trailers and three of Enloe's *vaqueros* lay dead on the floor. Enloe was overcome with grief.

"This is terrible, Mr. Toliver," he said, still wringing his hands. "I never could understand why men would lose their tempers, and resort to violence. It is so much easier to do right."

That quartette of swift gunners who had made the Wandering Boy too hot for Enloe's men were standing in a knot. Lee Gentry turned to Vince Collins, and said:

"What do you think of that fool, Vince? He talks like a woman."

"Yes," said Vince, "and to quote the Immortal Bard, 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks.' "

"Much too much," said Lee. "He is either a damn fool or a crook, and one is about as bad as another."

CHAPTER II

A HAIRY WOLF

The dead were carried to the undertaker's shop, and Enloe and his men mounted and left town. The trailers went about the saloons, and left Charley Toliver and Old Tobe Lasker standing in the street.

"Mr. Lasker," said Toliver, "what's the matter with Enloe?"

"Nothin' the matter with him that I know of," said Tobe, wrinkling his nose.

"How on earth does a man like that ever handle a gang of wild buckaroos like he's got?" asked Toliver.

"Oh, like he did just now. Just lets things take their course. He knows he can't do nothin' with them devils, and he don't try. Steve has got some queer ways."

"He must have," said Toliver, musingly. "If he don't watch that gang of killers they 'll get him in a jam some time, and if he don't control 'em, and keep 'em away from my trailers, he won't have any hands. They took my boys by surprise that time, but they won't any more. They— What the devil is that, coming yonder?"

"What?" said Tobe Lasker. "I don't see anything."

"I don't know what it is. Looks sorter like a human. Anyway, it walks on its hind legs, and dogs follow it."

"Oh, that," said Tobe. "Why, that's old Wolf Beddy. The old devil lives in the pear thickets and traps wolves. He associates with dogs, and looks like a varmint. Wonder them dogs of his'n don't make a mistake and ketch him some time, but they don't. He can talk to them about as good as he can to a human, and can understand them about as good. First time I've saw the old rascal for a year. Guess he comes in to get a supply of whiskey."

Wolf Beddy was a little old man. He was less than five foot, and badly bent. He wore an outlandish costume of rags, and more whiskers than were ever carried by any other man so small. He passed within ten feet of the two cowmen, and didn't even grunt. He just scowled at them through his whiskers, his beady little black eyes glinting, and went on into the saloon.

"Well," said Lasker, "I got to be getting on to my ranch. You can be ready to receive them steers two weeks from today. They ain't ary man in Texas whose word is better than Steve's."

Lasker mounted and rode out of town. Charley Toliver and his men went back to their camp. They were not talking much, but Toliver knew they were thinking, and he knew that if they had another run-in with Enloe's hands, there would be a worse tale to tell. After they got to camp, Toliver saw that queer quartette standing in a little knot, talking in low tones, and went to them. Lee Gentry was always spokesman for the group, so Toliver said to him:

"Lee, what started that mess?"

"That big puncher that they called Giff," said Lee.

"I know, but what did he start it about?"

"We have just been talking about that," said Lee. "Best we can make

out, they thought you had too many hands."

"Well," said Toliver, who decided that he would never know what started the row, but did know that he was not going to try to find out from that close-mouthed quartette, "I hope there won't be any more trouble over it. Of course, I don't expect my boys to take back water before any outfit, but try to keep from mixing with them until Enloe gets the cattle gathered. I want to get going with them. It is one hell of a long trek from here to Montana."

That seemed to have closed the incident. The trailers lay around camp most of the time after that, going to town occasionally. Toliver noticed that those four swift killers never separated. If two of them went to town, they all went. He made the mental note that if anybody jumped them, there would be plenty of work for the undertaker for a while.

Two weeks from the day of the fight, the fifteen thousand steers streamed across the Pecos about noon.

"All right, Mr. Toliver," said Steve Enloe, in his low, soft voice. "We'll get 'em out five mile to the flats, and deliver 'em to you just before night. You get on one side of the herd and I'll get on the other, and count 'em. If we ain't quite together, we'll just split the difference. I want to be fair."

"That's all right," said Toliver, "but I won't receive the cattle just at night. We'll bed 'em, and tomorrow morning we'll count them as they leave the bedding ground."

"But, Mr. Toliver," protested Enloe, "this is the day that I agreed to deliver them, and you agreed to receive them."

"I would have received them this morning, at the bedding ground, five miles east of the Pecos, if they had been there," said Toliver. "They were not there, and now I won't receive them until tomorrow morning."

"I—I don't know what I can do about it," said Enloe. "I always keep my word, and—"

"I keep mine, too," snapped Toliver, "I'm satisfied with the steers and the price. If you and your hands will hold them five miles east of the Pecos until tomorrow morning, we'll begin counting at daylight, and when they are counted I'll give you your money. If you don't want to do that— Well, you have just got fifteen thousand steers east of the Pecos, that's all."

Tobe Lasker took Steve aside and talked to him. Finally, Steve agreed to hold the cattle until morning. Enloe and his men went on to the bedding ground, and bedded them. Charley Toliver went to his own men, who sat their horses in a group as the herd went by.

"Boys," said Toliver, "get back to your own camp, close to the river, and don't anybody go about that herd until morning. Then we'll all go out there at daylight, and take over the herd. It is beginning to look to me that there is something damned rotten in the State of Denmark, about that herd of steers."

"I don't know how rotten it is," said Lee Gentry, "but I'll bet a dollar to a nickel that them old rangy, ten-year-old steers in the lot can outrun any horse we got. Then I'll double the bet that they had been bedded out here once a year for six years. Ever since they were four-year-olds."

Charley Toliver shot Lee a keen glance, and went on to camp. He wondered if Lee was thinking the same thing about the soft-voiced, fair-minded Steve Enloe that he was thinking.

Next morning as they were saddling up, Lee Gentry said to Toliver:

"Mr. Toliver, if you don't mind, Acey and me, and Vince and Don would like to be in the same watch, all the way up the trail."

"All right," said Toliver. "I'll remember that when I go set the night watch. I guess you four Indians are better satisfied together, and the other

boys come from all different parts of the country."

They all rode on to the herd, but Toliver mused as he went along: "I wonder what the devil is wrong with Enloe. I wonder, too, what those four Indians have seen or heard that I haven't seen and heard. Well, I'll put them together, like they want to be. There is one thing sure, if anybody jumps the outfit while they are on herd, they'll take care of themselves, and if the other fellow don't watch out, they'll take care of him, too."

At daylight Enloe's men began to rouse the cattle and move them northeast in a thin stream. Enloe and Tobe Lasker stood on one side of the stream of cattle, with Toliver on the other, counting, while Toliver's men took the cattle after they passed the counters. Everything went smoothly. When the last steer had passed the counters, Toliver's men fell in behind the drag, and that herd was off for Montana.

"How many, Mr. Toliver?" asked Enloe.

"Fifteen thousand and seven head," replied Toliver, "and I'll take 'em at that count."

"No," said Enloe. "I aim to be fair. I made it even fifteen thousand."

"All right," said Toliver, "we'll split it."

"No, I'll just throw in them seven, if you didn't make a mistake. Fifteen thousand is what you bargained for, and fifteen thousand it is."

Toliver paid over the money. The chuck wagon went on after the herd and the big *remuda*.

"Well, Mr. Toliver," said Enloe, "you have paid what you said you would, but I'd rather not sell to you next year. I—I guess I'm particular, and one day in closing a deal means something to me."

"Well," laughed Toliver, feeling that he had got the best of Enloe some way, but not knowing how, "if I put this string of steers in Montana, I won't have to drive another trail herd. The profit on them will be all I'll ever need."

Tobe Lasker's nose had been wrinkled for five minutes, while the other two men were talking, and now he said:

"If you put them fifteen thousand wild devils in Montana, you can drive fifteen thousand crickets out of a haystack. Here's hopin' you do, and good luck. So long."

Toliver rode on after the herd, wondering if Tobe Lasker really thought he couldn't drive those steers, with the best gang of trailers in the world.

It was just before night when he was setting the watches, and taking care to put Lee and Acey, Vince and Don in the same watch, that Toliver saw his four Indians in a little knot again, and went to them.

"Well, Lee," he said, "what do you think of this string of beef?"

"About as good as ever went out of Texas," said Lee, "but there's more ages of cattle in that herd than any herd I ever saw. Some of the big ones are at least twelve years old, and the wildest cattle I ever saw."

"Yes? Well, I guess that long drive we gave 'em today will make 'em willing to lie down and behave tonight."

"Maybe so," said Lee, "but if they ever run before they get trail-broke and leg-weary, it'll take the best horses we got to turn 'em."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Toliver. "I'll tell the boys to rope out their best mounts for night work, for a few nights, until we get 'em gentled a little. You four fellows mount your best horses, and go on at midnight."

It was a little while after midnight, and the four Indians were on herd. There was not a drop of Indian blood in any of them, but Toliver called them his four Indians, because they came from the Indian Country, and had some Indian ways. Suddenly, those cattle rose as one, and started to run. Whatever had scared them had

been at the north side of the bedding ground. The country was open, but no one took time to look for the booger. The steers headed right back the trail that they had come. Everybody was on the job, and they rode their best, but they could not turn those cattle. In the lead were a lot of old timers that could run as fast as the best horses, and they simply refused to bend. It was almost daylight when the four Indians finally bent them into a mill. Sunrise showed them that they were on the very bedding ground where Enloe had delivered them to Toliver.

Charley Toliver was a fine fellow, and all that, but when he was roused, there was plenty of fire in him. He didn't have much to say that morning, but it was beginning to soak into his head that there was something wrong with the cattle trade that he had made.

"Don't give 'em a chance to graze, boys," he snapped. "String 'em out right back the trail. I'll make 'em damn glad to rest and sleep, before I get through with 'em."

CHAPTER III

THEY FLY AGAIN

No chance to graze, and only a little water, saw a weary herd of cattle drop to the ground that night, within a mile of where they had been bedded the night before. The men were weary, too. At midnight the watch was doubled. The four Indians were on the north side, when the cattle again rose and flew, but they didn't follow at once. They had scattered out. Suddenly, Lee Gentry fired a shot. He dismounted, picked up something, and threw it up in the forks of a mesquite tree. Then he mounted and tore on after the herd with the others.

That time they stopped the herd ten miles short of the original starting point. At daylight they started them again, limping along.

"Ten miles in two days," growled Charley Toliver. "Why, damn it, I can't put these steers in Montana in five years, at that rate."

He was talking to the four Indians, at the chuck wagon, about noon. They were as stolid-faced as real Indians. As they were mounting to ride on after the herd, Lee said to Toliver:

"Mr. Toliver, I got something to show you about a mile on up the trail."

"What is it?" asked Toliver.

"I don't know. Maybe you'll know. I think it is what scared the lights out of them steers."

They all rode on with the herd. Just where the cattle had bedded the night before, Lee Gentry and his three companions led Toliver to a little mesquite tree. Lee pointed to an object in the forks of the tree.

"There's what I wanted to show you," he said.

"Why, it's nothing but a wolf," said Toliver, "Still, it looks a little different from any other wolf I ever saw. Where did you get it?"

"I shot it, last night, about the time the cattle ran," said Lee. "It must have been right in the edge of the herd when they ran, and—"

"Why, Lee. I've been on the trail a long time, and I never knew wolves to stampede a herd, when there were men riding around it. That's a funny looking wolf."

"It shore is, Mr. Toliver, and—That's a Sneezing Wolf."

"A what?"

"I know you'll say I'm crazy, but—I've heard a story that there's a sort of wolf in here on the lower Pecos that can't howl, and when it tries to it makes a sort of sneezing noise that scares a steer to death."

"Nonsense," said Toliver. "Where did you ever hear such a fool story as that?"

"It was told to me by an old trail hand. He said he had never seen one, but had heard 'em sneeze in the night, and that it sounded more like a booger than anything that he ever heard."

"Some of these old trailers are the damnedest liars on earth," snapped Toliver, "but that's about the worst

one that I have ever heard. Come on. I guess those steers just have to be worried down before they'll behave. They certainly won't run tonight."

Nightfall found the herd just five miles beyond where they had bedded at the end of that first long day's drive.

"Thirty miles in three days, cattle half-dead and horses worn out," growled Toliver. "We've got to do better than that, or we'll never put these cattle on the Montana range before frost."

"Looks to me like we are having pretty good luck to still have the cattle," said Lee Gentry. "They mighty nigh got away from us that first night, and tried their damnedest again last night."

"What do you mean got away from us?" said Toliver.

"Why, your trade was that if you let the cattle get back on Steve Enloe's range, they were his cattle. He told you that you couldn't gather SE steers on his range, unless they had a road-brand, and you wouldn't road-brand 'em."

"See here, Lee," snapped Toliver, rearing up on the bed-roll where he sat. "What do you know that I don't know about this mess?"

"Nothing," said Lee. "You heard everything I heard. I'm not blind, and neither are you. There are a lot of little things. If you want me to add some of them up—"

"Do your adding, and let me see what you get. I've been doing a little adding myself, today."

"All right," said Lee. "Steve Enloe is too good to be true. That's one thing. He knew you wouldn't rope and throw fifteen thousand big, wild steers, and road-brand 'em. That's another thing. He wouldn't let you come on his range to gather the steers, if you let 'em get away. He wanted you take over the steers at night, so they would run, and go back onto his range. My guess is that a lot of these steers have been sold several times, and have got away and gone back to his herd, because the trailers said what you said; that if you ever wrapped your waddies around those fifteen thousand steers, they were yours."

"Then you think that Steve Enloe has stampeded these steers twice, to try to get 'em back onto his range?"

"Well, that would be a pretty easy way to get a lot of good steers, wouldn't it? He could sell 'em again next spring."

"Yes, that would be an easy way to get the steers, but you don't believe that Enloe done anything of the kind. You showed me that dead wolf, and told me you believed that was what stampeded the steers last night. Are you boys holding out on me? Have you seen anybody about the herd at night?"

"No one except our own men," said Lee.

"Well, whatever caused you to tell me that wild tale about Sneezing Wolves? You know that just a trailer's lie."

"Maybe it is," said Lee, "but— Mr. Toliver, I have been among the Indians for several years, and they tell a lot of things that sound quite as bad as that, and many of them I know are true. There's a whole lot of things about the people and the varmints and the like in these out of the way places that most people don't know."

"Perhaps," said Toliver, "but there is one thing about some people in this out of the way place that I do know. That is, that if Steve Enloe is a thief, and trying to work me, he is trying to work the wrong man. They can't take these cattle by that trick, for we are thirty miles from his range-line, and they are so worn out they can't run that far again."

"Might make it in two runs," said Lee.

"Do you think these half-dead cattle will run again tonight?" asked Toliver.

"Well, I've been on the trail a good

while, and I never have seen any cattle that couldn't run, if a big enough booger jumped 'em."

"Lee, there's only one thing that has the sense to scare these steers from the north side of the herd every night, and that's a man. If I find out that one of my own men is standing in with Enloe, and trying to steal this herd from me after I have paid for it, he gets hung, and I am going to begin right now to look for him. I'm making no charges against any one. I'm just going to watch for him, and when I catch him—"

"I don't think there is a man in the outfit that would do that, Mr. Toliver. He couldn't get away with it if he tried. If you want to watch tonight, go with us four boys. We'll get on the north side of the herd, scatter out, and just watch."

"Huh," grunted Toliver. "Watch for Sneezing Wolves, I reck'n."

"Watch for anything that tries to scare the steers," said Lee. "The north side is the place to watch. If it is some one trying to run 'em back to Enloe's range, he wouldn't scare the herd on the south side, and run them north."

"All right," said Toliver. "I'll go with you boys, and I want it understood that if we catch anybody trying to stampede this herd, he gets hung first, and given a chance to explain afterwards."

They all ate supper and slept a while, for no man living can go forever without sleep. They were up and on the job a little while before midnight. Riding around to the north side of the herd, they scattered out, as close to the cattle as it was safe to ride. The tired cattle were sleeping quietly. Toliver, Lee, and Acey had met, and stopped, and were talking in low tones, as they rolled smokes. Suddenly, Toliver stiffened in his saddle, as he heard an unearthly noise. It was a combination of snarl, bark and cough. It amounted to a sort of hollow, gulping sneeze. The cattle ran. The very devil would have run from that noise, and yet it was not very loud. As the cattle started, something darted by the three horsemen. Toliver jerked his gun, fired and missed.

That was all he had time for then. The cattle were milled on the bedding where they had bedded the first night after they started. They had gone back five miles, and now had made only twenty-five miles in three days, and were jammed up until they could barely travel. After they were quieted down, Toliver hunted up his four Indians, and said:

"Now, boys, we've got to get to the bottom of this mess. If all the hands find out about those Sneezing Wolves, a lot of 'em will be scared stiff. If they ever hear one, and don't see it, they'll swear it's the devil. I saw that one. It was no bigger than a kioty. About like the one you killed last night. What I don't see is why they jump the north side of the herd."

"That's pretty easy to figure," said Lee. "The herd coming up the trail scares them, and they run on ahead. Then when night comes they steal back. In a big herd like that there is always some cattle getting hurt, and bleeding. The wolf smells the blood, and starts to hunt for it. Then he runs into the cattle, tries to snarl, sneezes and scares hell out of 'em."

"You say that old trailer said them Sneezing Wolves were bad down in this lower Pecos country?" asked Toliver.

"Yes, and he said this is the only place that ever saw them, or heard of them."

"Well, tomorrow night I'm going to try to keep 'em out of my herd. I guess that let's Enloe out of it. I was suspicious of him, just like you said. He is too damn good to be true, but maybe he is just one of those fellows that have queer ideas about trail outfits, and some of them are pretty raw."

The cattle quieted. A double watch guarded them until morning, and then they were permitted to graze slowly

on north. A little while after noon they came to good water, let the steers fill up, then drifted them out onto high country and good grass before night. No chance for anything except a wolf or a bug of some kind to slip up there. All hands were out with the herd. Again, just after midnight, no wolf sneezed, but a shot was fired at the west side of the herd. The cattle paid no attention to it. A dozen more shots crashed. The men left the cattle alone, and stormed around to the scene of the shooting. Two riderless horses stood a little way from the herd. The four Indians and Toliver, who had been watching on the north side of the herd, were among the first to reach them. They caught the horses, and found the two trailers who had ridden them, lying a little way apart. Both of them were quite dead. There was no sound of a running horse. No one was in sight. As the other men came up, the horses were caught. The dead were put on their horses and two of the trailers set out for camp with them. The other trailers scoured the prairie for half a mile, but saw nothing.

"Get back to the herd, boys," said Toliver. "There is something mighty queer about this, and the queerest thing of all is that those wild steers paid no attention to all that shooting."

Toliver and the four Indians were riding around to the north of the herd again, when they pulled up in a little squad.

"Boys," said Toliver, "there is something fishy about this."

"Looks that way," said Lee Gentry, "but there is just one thing that could have happened out there. No one was there but the two men who were killed. They must have had a falling out about something, shot it out and killed one another. If there had been anybody else out there, we would have seen them, or heard their horses running, for it is flat, open prairie for a mile."

"That must have been the way of it," said Toliver, "but it looks queer. Those two fellows came to the outfit together, and I never heard anything of a quarrel between them. They—Look out!"

Those crazy cattle were up and gone, and Toliver and his men had heard nothing, seen nothing. Weary as they were, and undisturbed by a dozen shots, the cattle were off to the south like a flash. They didn't run very far. It was little more than a mile to the water, and there the men stopped the cattle, and held them until daylight. Toliver and his four Indians got breakfast early next morning, and were sitting their horses near the herd, which was scattered along the water, and grazing out toward the prairie north of the stream.

"Boys," said Toliver, "I'm beginning to get about enough of this. I've been on this trail for a long time, and have had a lot of queer experiences with cattle, but never anything like this. Those steers sleeping right through a gun-fight, and then rearing up and going crazy when everything was still, and not a cloud in the sky, is spooky. I heard that damned thing snort, or sneeze, or whatever you may call the noise, night before last. I didn't hear anything last night, and I didn't see anything, but I'm sure it was one of those same things that scared the cattle. I'm going to push these cattle more to the east, today, and try to get as far away from the Pecos as possible. If these Sneezing Wolves are only along the lower Pecos, we'll do our best to drive out of their territory. A little more of this, and cattle, horses, and men will all be run to death."

The herd started. As Toliver and his four Indians followed on they saw the four men who had been detailed to bury the two trailers, just finishing the shallow grave. Toliver rode over to where they were, and stood talking to them for a few minutes. When he left the Indians, Vince Collins rode up by the side of Lee Gentry and said:

"Lee, a little more of this stuff, and Old Man Charley is going to fly apart. It's getting on his nerves. I didn't tell him, but I don't believe those two fellows killed one another."

"I know they didn't," said Lee. "I just said that to help keep Toliver on the earth. That first shot that was fired was a rifle shot. All those boys had were six-shooters. I looked on their saddles, and there were no carbines. There were several more rifle shots fired in the mess."

"Yes," said Vince, "I heard that, but I can't imagine what the devil became of the man or men that fired those rifle shots. It doesn't seem possible that they could have got out of the way that quick."

"Didn't get out of the way," put in Acey Duff. "I ain't been to school, like you fellers, but I'm part wolf myself. I've saw Indians hide where the grass weren't six inches high, and rid all around 'em without seein' 'em. That gent was right out there on the ground. It was night time, and dark. They's room on half a mile of prairie for about a million men to lie on the ground. So, when you start to ride onto one man out there, in the night time, there's about a chance in a million that you'll strike him."

"That's shore right," said Don Bogle. "I can't figger like Acey do, but I damn shore know that a Indian can hide behind a bush that wouldn't shelter a cotton-tail rabbit from the sun."

"That don't mean anything," said Lee. "There are no Indians in this country now. The Texas Rangers ran them out years ago."

"Shore," said Acey, "but they could be one Indian here, that sneaks away from some reservation, and tries to go back to the tricks that his grampaw used to play on the settlers."

"No," said Lee, "that won't click. Here's what we are up against. This is the cleanest, squarest trail outfit I ever saw, and Charley Toliver is a prince, but if this goes on he'll go to pieces like a wet paper. He'll fight anything he can see, but he can't see this. I can't see it myself. I killed one of those wolves, and it don't look like any wolf I ever saw. Maybe today's drive will take us out of the range of the Sneezing Wolves, but it won't take us out of the range of smoking lead. We've got to stop whoever that is doing the killing. Toliver and the rest of his men are fine fellows, game as men get, but they just don't know Indian tricks, and this is one, whether it is an Indian doing it or not. Tonight, we'll see what we can do."

Toliver caught up with them, and they all rode on after the herd. They were swinging east toward the high plateau of open prairie that was the first of the great steps leading up to the staked plains. Night found them ten miles from any timber. As the cattle bedded, Lee said to Vince Collins:

"Now I'd like to see some gentleman slip up on this herd, and get away with any rough stuff. If anything starts, we'll just let the others take care of the herd, and we'll see what we can find. We know a few Indian tricks ourselves."

CHAPTER IV

THE SNEEZIN' VARMINT

The cattle slept quietly that night, and seemed to be getting trail broke. They were well away from the Pecos now, and another good day's drive would put them in the regular trail, where all the big herds crossed the high plains country. They had to follow that route, in order to have water. Toliver said he just had to have some sleep that night, so the four Indians and half a dozen other trailers were on herd just after midnight. The Indians had taken the north side as usual. They met in a bunch half an hour after they went on watch. Lee Gentry looked at Acey Duff and said:

"What are you doing with that rope in your hand, Acey?"

"I'm packin' it this way tonight," said Acey, as he flirted the loop, to keep it straight. "If I see one of them Sneezin' Wolfs, I aim to ketch it for a pet."

"Why, Acey, you can't rope a wolf," said Lee.

"The hell I can't," chuckled Acey. "I've roped many a razorback hawg, and they are the hardest thing on earth to rope and hold. I aim to— Look out—" Acey jumped his horse, and his rope whirred. He jerked it taut, there was a struggle at the loop end of it, and that terrible coughing, snarling sneeze. "I got him, fellers," yelled Acey. "Get another rope on him before he gets away. We'll— Aw hell. There he goes."

They were after the wolf in a bunch, as it tore across the prairie, going due north from the herd.

"Don't shoot him, boys," called Lee Gentry. "Let's take him whole, and see what he looks like."

They did not take that wolf whole. They were all riding good horses, and they crowded the wolf for a mile. Then their horses began to lag a little. Off to the right, and ahead of them, they heard the peculiar screeching call of a prairie owl. Lee Gentry yelled to his companions to pull up, and threw his own horse on its haunches.

"What is it?" asked Collins.

"Dog town," said Lee. "Those prairie owls hole up with prairie dogs. If we ride in there, it will be just too bad for us. Anyway, that wolf is gone. Maybe we scared him bad enough to keep him away from the herd for a while."

They went back to the herd, which was still sleeping quietly when they reached it, and they stopped in a little group, to let their horses breathe, while they rolled a smoke.

"I guess I made a mistake," said Lee, "when I told you boys not to shoot. If we had all opened on that wolf, some of us would have hit him. Funny thing. Wolves usually go in packs, but that one was alone the night Toliver saw him, and heard him sneeze. I saw two the night I killed that one, but there was only one tonight."

"Yeah," laughed Acey Duff, "and he'll dodge and run every time he smells a herd of cattle the rest of his life. I thought I had him good, but a wolf is shore harder to hold than a razorback hawg. I've ketched many a one of them."

The cattle slept on. When the last watch came on the four Indians went to camp, and went to sleep. There was no disturbance. After a full night of sleep, Charley Toliver rolled out of his blankets feeling fine. A little while later he was talking to his four Indians. Lee Gentry told him of the wolf chase, and he laughed. He was feeling natural again:

"I guess we'll be out of the territory of Sneezing Wolves in another day. By the way, you boys say there's a dog-town out there. You take the point this morning. Let Vince and Don take one side, and you and Acey take the other, Lee. You know where that dog-town is. Swing the herd a little west and miss it. I don't want any horses crippled, or men hurt. There are none too many of us, now, since those two— Things are going to be all right now. I feel a lot better. For a while I thought there might be something to Enloe trying to stampede the steers back to his range. I don't think so, now. If there was anything to it, we are too far from his range now for anybody to try that."

The big herd started on north. Later in the day they would swing west, and strike the cattle trail. A mile from the bedding ground, Collins and Duff gave back a little, and Lee and Acey pushed the rangy old leaders over to miss the dog-town. Then Lee rode off to the right to look at that dog-town. He took several

turns across the prairie, but no sign of a dog-town did he see. Cursing himself for not keeping on after the wolf the night before, he rode thoughtfully back to his place with the herd. He was wondering about that owl being away out there, and no dog-town. He had heard it, and knew what it was, for he had heard them a thousand times on the prairies at night, and had made the mental note that that was another of nature's warnings to men. If a man were prairie wise, he knew enough to go round a place where those owls screeched their call, for it was always a dog-town. No, not always. There was no dog-town here.

The herd swung into the trail. Toliver was riding far ahead at the time. As the herd bedded that evening he rode up to his Four Indians, and said:

"Well, boys, I think our troubles are over. In spite of our bad start, we are the first herd on the trail. We'll have good grass, the waterholes will all be full, and everything lovely. I guess we are clean out of the Sneezing Wolf country by this time."

"Yes," said Lee Gentry, "it is good, open country now for a long way, but there is one place that I'm afraid of."

"Where is that?" asked Toliver.

"Crossing the Colorado River. There is a stretch of deep draws and gulches on both sides of the river. We can't drive that stretch of roughs in a day, and get out onto high, open ground by night. The steers will be dry when we get in there, and they'll take half a day to fill up with water. We've got to let 'em rest and fill up good, for there is a long dry stretch the other side of the Colorado."

"Oh, we'll make that drive all right," said Toliver. "I have crossed a herd there every year since there has been a cattle trail, and I never had any trouble. There'll be plenty of water at Eagle Lake this time, and the steers won't be dry enough to stampede to water, if we handle them right at the river. That Sneezing Wolf business has got you jumpy. It had me going for a while, but I've doped it out. Them wolves had distemper, same as dogs have, was the reason they made that noise when they tried to snarl, or howl. There's no doubt in my mind now that those two boys simply fell out about something, and shot one another that night. You four Indians had better get a good night's sleep tonight. The cattle are trail-broke, now, and won't run. I slept last night. I'll go on herd with the other boys at midnight. A good, full night's sleep will put you right. I have felt like a different man today."

So, at night the four Indians rolled into their blankets. They did not get a good, full night's sleep, and had just as well gone on herd at midnight. That herd ran back the trail ten miles, before all hands could stop it. No one had seen anything.

"Them steers has just got the damn runnin' habit," said Don Bogle, next morning. "I've seen 'em get that way. Some old long-horn devil just dreams a booger is after him. He gets up and starts to go some place, and the others go with him."

"I've seen 'em run that way, too," said Lee Gentry, "but they didn't always run south. I'll bet a hundred dollars to a nickel that a Sneezing Wolf scared 'em."

"Why do a Sneezing Wolf always jump the north side of the herd?" asked Acey Duff.

"Search me," said Lee, "but I mean to find out."

The cattle were not jammed up quite so badly in that run, and they made a good day's drive, getting back into the cattle trail, and ten miles farther on than where they had bedded the night before. The four Indians stayed on herd, and watched closely. There was not a thing happened. The cattle slept like tired babies. Don Bogle said:

"Well, them old steers was just too

tired to dream anything worth a damn, so they didn't run last night."

"Maybe that was it," growled Acey, whose lips were beginning to crack with the wind of the plains, and loss of sleep had not helped his disposition any. "I know one thing. I don't mind mixing smoke with rustlers, that'll get in the open and shoot it out, but this thing is something else. It looks plumb damn spooky to me, and I got about all of it that I can eat. Every time I go on herd at night I think about them two boys being kilt. You fellers ain't never told Old Man Charley that they was rifles in that mess. He thinks them boys kilt one another, but we know damn well they didn't. I think we ought to tell him."

"Wait a while," counseled Lee. "It is bad enough for part of the hands to have the jitters. If Old Man Charley gets 'em, the outfit is likely to go all to pieces, and lose the whole herd."

Nothing more was said about the matter. A good drive was made that day. Toliver doubled the watch at midnight that night, and went on herd with the Indians. He had been doing a lot of thinking. There must be some man in his outfit who was wrong. Still, he had seen and heard that Sneezing Wolf scare the cattle once. He had seen the one that Lee had killed. He was sitting his horse within fifty feet of the four Indians that night, just after midnight, when two things happened, almost in the same tick of the clock. First, the cattle simply rose and flew, and a split second later two shots were fired over on the west side of the herd. Toliver didn't pay any attention to the shots. Sometimes when a bunch of cattle started to break away from the main herd in a run, the boys would fire in front of them, to turn them back.

That was a real run. It all happened so quick that no one could tell whether it was the shots, or something else that started the run. But, when morning came, and the herd was back on the trail, Toliver discovered that he was two men short. He swore, under his breath, and taking the four Indians rode on up the trail ahead of the herd. Out to the west of the bedding ground, where the cattle had been when they started the run the night before, two horses with saddles on them were dragging their bridles and grazing. A hundred yards from them, and only a little way apart, lay two men on the ground, both dead. They, too, were partners.

Charley Toliver blew up, then. There was no longer a chance that the men had fallen out and killed one another. Lee Gentry told him that those two shots were rifle shots, and he recalled that they had the short, sharp, vicious bark of a rifle.

"Boys," he said, "that means that somebody is working on my men. I can't think of an enemy I have on the trail. I've been fair with everybody, and—"

"Except Steve Enloe," said Lee. "You wouldn't let him steal fifteen thousand steers from you."

"Lee, I don't believe it is Enloe," said Toliver. "While we were close to his range, I thought it might be him, but we are too far away now. He would know that he never could run the cattle back there from here. Anyway, if it was some of his killers, we would be bound to get a glimpse of 'em out here in this open, plains country. I have watched, and I know you have, and none of us has seen anybody. I'm— Well, I'm just beat. I can't do anything but drive the herd on, but I don't want my men killed in the dark, without having a chance. It looks like—"

"It looks like I told you, down there at Horsehead," said Lee, when Enloe's killers jumped us in that saloon. "It looks like you just had more hands, and better ones, than Steve Enloe wanted you to have. These two killings look as if somebody still felt that way about it. If they can get your outfit trimmed to the size they want, then they'll jump you out in the open

—probably about the crossing of the Colorado."

"Well, what do you say to do?" asked Toliver. "I'm out. I don't know what to do. If I don't put this herd through, I'm ruined. If I keep on the way I'm going, I'll lose a lot of the best men in the world, and still not put the herd through."

"All right," said Lee. "Since you asked me, I'd put all hands north of the herd tonight. If the cattle run, let 'em go to the devil. They can't run back to Enloe's range, now. They'll stop when they play out. When the mess starts, we'll simply spread and ride north until we find something. It is bound to be north of the herd, whatever it is, for the cattle always run from that side, as if something or somebody was determined to not let you drive these steers."

"We'll do that," said Toliver. "I've come to where I've got to know what is doing this. Sneezing Wolves can scare cattle and make them run, but they can't fire rifles and kill men."

The herd was stopped at some fair water, two hours before night. While the cattle drank and grazed, all the men but a few slept. Toliver was going to make an effort to solve that mystery, and he wanted his men in as good shape as possible.

Never was there a finer night than that. The men were all at the herd by midnight, and all on the north side of it. The cattle were bedded on some high ground, a mile north of the water hole. The four Indians had talked to Toliver, and then had ridden north, an hour before midnight. Toliver had not asked themwhere theywere going, but he knew they were either going to help catch the man or men who was doing the mischief, or else to join them. He had about got to where he didn't trust anything or anybody. It looked queer that those four Indians wanted to ride away just then, but let them go. What he wanted was a showdown. Something that he could come to grips with. He called the boys around him and said:

"Now, boys, I'm out for blood. With all of us out here, no man on earth can slip up and pot one of us without the rest seeing him. I want that man. Don't ask any questions. Simply blow him apart. Scatter along the north side of the herd, but keep in bunches, and keep your eyes and ears open."

So started the midnight watch, and Charley Toliver's drive for the mystery of the Sneezing Wolves that stampeded cattle, and actually shot men.

CHAPTER V

A RIGHT BAD WOLF

It was half an hour after midnight. Toliver was restless and jumpy. He had been riding from one group of men to another, along the north side of his big herd, and had stopped midway between two groups, and also about midway the herd, to roll a smoke and listen a moment. Suddenly, he jumped like a woman who had seen a mouse, and almost screamed like one. He had heard that terrible coughing sneeze. The next moment, the thing darted by him going back north, as the cattle rose and roared away. It was understood that no attention was to be paid to the cattle. Toliver jerked his gun and fired at the wolf. Then he yelled to the other trailers, and they all gave chase. Fifty shots were fired at that wolf, but there was not a chance of hitting it. On they sped, the wolf keeping well in the lead, with no chance, except to simply outrun the horses, for the men were spread out so it could not possibly double back in the darkness. The horses had gone a mile at breakneck speed, and were beginning to slow up, when far ahead of them there was the sound of shots, and stabs of flame in the darkness.

"That's the Indians," yelled Toliver. "They have jumped him with fresh horses. Come on. No telling what they'll run into."

The four Indians were a good half mile in the lead, and their fresh horses were outdistancing Toliver and his men. From time to time, Toliver could see a flash, far ahead, as one or other of the Indians fired at the fleeing wolf. Suddenly, the Indians seemed to have stopped, and all were firing. Then the firing stopped. The next thing Toliver knew, they were fairly on the Indians, who were riding due east, right across the course.

"Come on," yelled Lee Gentry. "They crossed that damned gulch, heading on north. We couldn't cross it. Got to head it."

"They, who?" asked Toliver, as he spurred in by the side of Lee Gentry, and galloped on with the rest.

"How the hell do I know?" returned Lee. "I know this place. There is a mile more of open country, then a little creek with some timber on. Come on, we've got to beat 'em to that creek."

Around the head of the deep gulch, the Indians set a course northwest across the prairie, and spurred ahead of the rest, who followed as near in a bunch as the speed of their horses would let them. They reached the first bank of the creek just as two objects went over it, in a hail of lead. There was no timber just there. The two things went into a narrow deep wash, and the trailers heard that terrible snarling sneeze again. But somebody's bullet caught the wolf, just as it went over the bank, into the wash, and it rolled down to the bottom dead. The trailers could see nothing in that gash in the ground.

"Swing around it," yelled Lee Gentry. "There's something else in there. Don't let it get away."

The men encircled the place. It was just a little ditch, not more than thirty feet long.

"Now, pour lead into that place," called Toliver.

"No!" yelled a voice from the ditch. "I'll give up."

"What—the—hell," said Toliver, in amazement.

"Climb up out of there," called Lee Gentry. A dwarfish figure climbed out of the wash. "Put a rope on him, Acey."

The next moment, the thing had a rope on it, and was being slowly dragged toward a clump of trees a hundred yards away.

"I don't want to touch that thing," said Toliver, "but I want to look at it. Get some wood, boys, and make a fire, so we can have a light."

The fire blazed up, and the men looked at what they had caught. Only one man in the outfit knew what it was. That was Charley Toliver, and he gasped:

"Well, I'll be damned. Old Wolf Beddy!"

"Yes, it's me," snarled the old beast. It may or may not have been an omen, but Wolf Beddy was standing under the projecting limb of the biggest tree in the grove.

"What are you doing out here on the cattle trail, a hundred miles from Horsehead?" asked Toliver.

"That's my business," snarled Wolf.

"Oh, it is? Well, I'm going to make it mine. If you have anything to say, you'd better say it." Toliver glanced up at that overhanging limb.

"Why—you— You gents wouldn't —wouldn't hang—"

"Oh, no. Certainly not," jeered Toliver. "We wouldn't think of hanging an innocent little man like you, but what's the story? What about those Sneezing Wolves?"

"They—they're both dead," said Wolf Beddy.

"Both?" said Toliver.

"Yes, both," replied Wolf. "They never was but two of 'em. They was eight year old. I had a Russian wolf bitch. She brought a litter of half-wolf pups. I picks out two of the best ones and kills the rest. When them two pups grows up, they are the smartest dogs I ever seen. I could teach 'em to do anything, but they

never could bark. All the sound they ever made was a sort of sneeze."

"Huh," grunted Toliver. "Mean that there never was but two Sneezing Wolves on the Pecos?"

"That's all I ever heard of," said Wolf, "and they was only half wolf. I trapped for Steve Enloe for twenty year. One day I showed them two pups to Steve Enloe. He asked me could I train 'em to stampede a herd of cattle, and then come back to me. I tells him I can, and I does. After that, every spring when Steve sells his cattle, he sends me with the two pups, to stampede 'em back onto Steve's range."

"And you sent them in to stampede the cattle, then called them back with the cry of a prairie owl," said Lee Gentry.

"Shore," said Wolf.

"Well, they worked all right this time," said Lee, "up to a certain point, but when you found out you couldn't take the cattle away from us, why didn't you take your Sneezing Wolves, and go on back home?"

"I—I wish I had of done that," said Wolf, slowly, "but— Somebody kills one of my dogs, and it made me mad. I thought more of them two dogs than I did of ary human on earth, so—"

"So you crawled up and potted two of our men," said Lee.

"Yes, I done that," snarled Wolf.

"And two nights later, you got two more."

"Yup," said Wolf. "That was fair. You fellers got two of my dogs, and ary one of 'em was worth more than ary two men you got."

"That's a matter of opinion," said Lee Gentry, dryly. "Take the witness, Mr. Toliver."

"He's too damned filthy to touch," said Charley Toliver, "and I hate to waste good rope on him, but—"

"Hold on," snarled Wolf. "You—you said you wouldn't hang me for—"

"I didn't know you had murdered four of my men, when I said that," replied Toliver, grimly. "Do your stuff, Acey."

Acey's rope flipped. The noose went over Wolf's neck. The other end went over that projecting limb, and the trailers pulled on it until that bundle of depravity was clear of the ground, then snubbed it to a sapling. In these modern times, Wolf would probably have been turned loose on the grounds—of insanity, but those trailers didn't know the difference between a sane murderer and a crazy one. To them, a killer was a killer, and Wolf Beddy was a bad one.

The big herd had run a few miles and stopped. They were getting trail-broke, and tired of running. Toliver and his men got them in hand, and drove them to Montana. True to his word, Toliver made enough on that drive to retire, and did it.

The next spring, the four Indians were with a trail outfit that gathered a big herd near Horsehead. One day, Steve Enloe, the baby-faced, fair-minded gentleman, was found hanging in a cottonwood tree. No one ever knew who put him there. The story of the Sneezing Wolves was told a thousand times, along that old cattle trail, but all who heard it branded it as an old trailer's lie, except the men who were with Charley Toliver on that spooky drive, and they didn't talk.

GUNS FOR A STRANGER

"I want to buy a pair of guns," the old man said. "Forty-fives."

Through The Years The Special-Built Colts Lived Their Legend In Hung-Up Holsters. Then Came One Who Took Them Down For Killing Purposes—And His Name Was Legend Too.

Impending tragedy hung like gunsmoke in the Catamount Saloon, last landmark of the frontier in the mining town of Topaz. It was common knowledge that the McSorley gang had stolen Shorty Davis' mining claim, and Shorty had done too much talking for his own good. Shorty must have known there wasn't a gunman alive who could buck Jargo McSorley and his two brothers, Dave and Frank, and get away with it. He surely knew that he was not himself an accomplished gun slinger. But all that morning he had been raving about what he was going to do, and nobody could stop him.

He was drunk but not a bit unsteady. He was just cold, crazy drunk.

"The lousy swine aim to clean every mine in Topaz the same way they robbed me," he shouted savagely. "Oh, yes, the rest of you have got it comin'. They'll git you sooner or later. What about it? Are you yellowbellies goin'

By CARL N. TAYLOR

to take it layin' down? I'm not! Sure, the law will uphold them—I know that. But I'm goin' to take it to a court where there ain't no appeal. I'm gunnin' fer th' dirty thieves!"

The men who were lined up at the bar looked at him uneasily, yet with a certain admiration. It wasn't much safer to hear that kind of talk then to be spouting it. For if you appeared to listen with any sympathy, the news was sure to reach the McSorleys. It was dangerous to be suspected by the McSorleys.

Jargo McSorley was the sheriff of Topaz County. Dave and Frank were his chief deputies. It was said of them, covertly, that they never took prisoners, and the saying was almost true. They took no prisoners alive who was likely to be a source of trouble to them; and since the only men in Topaz County who were ever in danger of arrest were men outside the McSorley faction, the safest policy was to abide strictly by the law as laid down by the three McSorleys.

Not so long ago, this precious trio had amounted to less than nothing. They had made their start by rustling a few cows here, a few there, until they acquired followers and could run the risk of stealing in a big way. Afterward, by blackmail chiefly, they had built up a political machine among other cattlemen who were in no position to throw stones. Then had come the Topaz gold discoveries and the McSorleys had stepped into their own. With the law behind them (they themselves were the walking embodiment of the law) they ruled and looted the county in a fashion that was a disgrace to the State. No man's property was secure if it happened to be valuable. Nor was life in any degree safer. Men who had boosted the three brothers into power to further their own private interests had been ruthlessly crushed along with the innocent. The corruption extended to the governor himself, while in Topaz County, Jargo McSorley dictated court decisions to the district judge, a man who wanted to be honest but did not dare because he had a family and a past.

Thus the three killers had become so solidly intrenched that nothing could touch them, save gunplay by better artists than they. Unhappily for Topaz County, the familiar old time gunman was a figure of the past. Law and order, in the guise of coercion and blackmail, held sway, and the people groaned.

Shorty Davis continued his tirade. There was madness in his eyes and a suspicion of froth about the corners of his mouth. His facial muscles twitched.

"No, sir!" I worked all my life to git a start," he was shouting, "an' th' McSorleys nor nobody else can't take it away from me without a fight. I'm goin' out an hunt 'em down like coyotes!"

A hardrock man in mud-spattered overalls touched his arm.

"Don't be a fool, Shorty. Better go home an 'cool off."

Shorty jerked away and headed for the door. Two or three other men, known to be McSorley henchmen, slipped out the rear way inconspicuously. The group who remained in the saloon looked at each other in silence. Old Fairplay Flannigan, owner of the Catamount, moved ponderously back and forth behind the bar with pursed lips, industriously polishing glasses.

All the customary noises of the town were suddenly hushed, as though the whole community, sensing what was to come, braced itself against the shock. In the saloon the ticking of the clock above the back bar sounded unnaturally loud. The customers were not drinking. They were standing with their backs to the bar, bootheels hooked over the brass foot rail. That is, all stood so except one man who sat at a card table apparently engrossed in a game of solitaire. He was a stranger, and he looked old and tired.

He had drifted into town that morning, and no one had paid much attention to him. He looked like a miner down on his luck, for his hands were crooked and hard and his face had the look of a man who had toiled long and fruitlessly. Perhaps sixty years old, he looked all of seventy, with his thin white hair, deeply lined face, and drooping shoulders. Until you saw his eyes, that is—then you got an impression that he might be younger than he looked. His eyes were smoky blue and there was something in them, a spark of fire unquenchable, that bespoke a dauntless spirit.

He alone of all the men in the saloon seemed unaware that the atmosphere was surcharged with tragedy.

The silence held for perhaps five minutes; it might have been less. It was broken by the bellow of a shotgun, followed by a single revolver shot. Bedlam broke outside. Heavy feet clumped on the board sidewalk. Someone yelled: "Dave McSorley got Shorty Davis with his scattergun!" Another voice added: "Shorty was game. He pulled his gun and shot after he was down."

As one man, the group before the bar lunged across the room and disappeared through the swinging doors. Fairplay Flannigan stopped polishing glasses and put his big red hands on the bar, leaning forward slightly; but he made no move to follow the crowd. Fairplay was widely known as a man who minded his own business.

"Shorty must have knowed they'd git him," he said, addressing the stranger at the card table. "He wasn't no gunman; he didn't have a chance."

"Your town seems like it's buffaloed," said the stranger. "It was different in the old days. Tin horns and shooters in th' back didn't prosper here, thirty year ago."

Fairplay gave the man an intent look.

"Old-timer, huh? I seem to recollect yuh, but I can't seem to place yuh."

"No, I reckon not," agreed the other. "A man changes after twenty or thirty year."

The stranger did not mention his name, and Fairplay didn't ask for his card.

Fairplay poured a glass of whiskey for the other and a glass of water for himself and, as old-timers will, they fell to reminiscing. Names that once had meant something wherever cattle were run, were mentioned; such names as Brazos Pete Foley, Tom Dunn, Texas Charlie, Wolf DuBois, the Cimmarron Kid, and Pecos Dare. Names of hard drinking, rough riding, quick triggered, square shooters, as loyal a crowd as ever drew breath. Some had been outlaws, others peace officers; a few had alternated these occupations.

"I come in after th' country started to quiet down," Fairplay said. "But I knowed some of 'em personal and th' rest by reputation. I reckon you probably knowed 'em all, huh?"

By the man's answer Fairplay hoped to recall his name. Thirty years, or even twenty, *was* a long time, Fairplay admitted to himself, yet not so long that a man ought to forget an *hombre* entirely. But it seemed he had forgotten, and of course he couldn't ask a stranger his name right out.

"I reckon I knowed most of 'em," vouchsafed the stranger.

That didn't help much.

"Most of 'em is dead," Fairplay said.

"All of 'em," corrected the stranger, "except Pecos Dare."

The man seemed to know, but you couldn't always tell about old-timers. Some of them talked through their hats. Fairplay looked at the other through narrowed eyelids, but still the thing he was trying to remember eluded him.

"It sure takes a man back to better days to talk about them old names," he said, probing again. "Like you say, stranger, times has changed. We

need some o' them fellers back agin. I reckon most any of 'em could have took on a passel o' killers like th' three McSorleys and emerged triumphant. Tom Dunn could of. Texas Charlie could of. So could Brazos Pete, an' willin' too. I never knowed Pecos Dare, but he had th' fightin'ist reputation of the lot. I wisht he was back in Topaz long enough to limber up his guns an' cut a swath where 'twould do th' most good."

It seemed strange to Fairplay that he should be speaking his mind openly to an utter stranger when it was worth a man's life to say such things. But these thoughts had been rankling deep within him for a long time. It did him good to get them off his chest. Besides, you could talk to old-timers in a different way than you talked to the average run. You could tell them things in confidence; to them you could speak your mind—a blessed privilege these days.

"Tom Dunn cashed in his checks down in Sinaloa, at a place called Ixtlocan," the stranger said softly. "They strung Texas Charlie up, mistakin' him fer a tinhorn he was out to kill, up in Jackson Hole. Brazos Pete ended up in El Paso with his back agin a dobe wall an' both guns goin'. They got Pecos Dare in Californy, an' framed a train robbery an' murder on him, an' sent him up fer life. And I reckon if he was here he'd be jist like you an' me—old an' tired an' willin' to stay out o' trouble. An' he'd be pretty awkward with his guns after all these years poundin' rocks."

"I keep fergittin' that I'm gittin' old," Fairplay said. "But it's a fact. Twenty year ago, I wouldn't have stood for some things I take right meek these days, though I wasn't ever what you'd call handy with a gun."

"Me, I keep fergittin' what I'm here fer," the stranger said wearily, pushing back a thin lock of white hair with a gnarled, work hardened hand. "I'm lookin' fer a man. Last I hear of him he was workin' a minin' property hyarabouts."

"If he was workin' a minin' property in Topaz, I reckon I know him," said Fairplay. "What was his name?"

"His name is Tommie Deal."

"Tommie Deal?"

"Yeh, he'll be—le's see, twenty-eight come June."

Fairplay opened his mouth as though to speak, thought better of it, and said nothing. He went on polishing glasses, at the same time studying the face across the mahogany bar. Curious, he thought, how things happen. What could the stranger want with Tommie Deal? If he had come a week sooner— Fairplay shook his head. Yep, it was sure funny how things happened.

The other's smoky eyes narrowed and he looked hard at Fairplay. His stooped shoulders lifted slightly, his lips came together in a thin hard line. Fairplay's silence had given away his thoughts.

"What's happend to Tommie Deal?"

"He had a mine that was payin' him a lot o' money, an' Jargo McSorley tried to buy it off'n him," Fairplay said slowly. "Tom, he wouldn't sell, an' they had a quarrel, an'—"

"Git it over with!" snapped the stranger. "McSorley killed him?"

"I ain't sayin' that," Fairplay replied. "It don't pay to have opinions in Topaz. All I know is, Tom started packin' a gun. He didn't do much talkin', but there was somethin' about him made th' McSorleys go a little slow. One day his mine caved in, and Tom got caught. It looked like an accident, an' it ain't fer me to say it wasn't. I'm in business here, competin' with Jargo McSorley's Gold Dust Palace acrost th' street."

"So they've murdered Tommie Deal," the old man muttered in a voice that rattled strangely in his throat, and that was all he said.

In those few seconds, however, he seemed to have aged. His thin shoulders sagged, the lines of his face appeared to deepen, his mouth twitched,

his eyes grew dull. He picked up the drink Fairplay had set before him, but his hand shook so that most of the liquor was spilled.

"Tommie some relation o' yourn?" Fairplay asked.

"Never seen him," snapped the other. "Knowed his mother—that's all."

Fairplay said no more.

Some miners came in and ordered drinks. They were discussing the killing of Shorty Davis, and among them were buying considerable liquor. Fairplay had no time to talk with the white-haired stranger, and presently the man resumed his place at the card table. His solitaire forgotten now, he sat with his elbows on the table and his chin cupped in his hands, listening to the talk of the men at the bar.

They were excited, shaky, a little sickened by what they had seen. There is something about a shotgun killing that takes all the fight out of most men. Even the Germans in the World War, inured to shell fire and the terrors of machine gun slaughter, shouted their protests to the world when the Yanks went over the top with shotguns. That was why Dave McSorley always used a sawed-off double barrel and buckshot. With such a weapon he couldn't miss, and the effect discouraged other men from harboring ambitions to shoot it out with him.

It was plain that McSorley had correctly taken the measure of the men he had to deal with. As he watched them, the stranger sized them up the same way. They were not westerners, though some affected western garb. Fairplay Flannigan was the only man in the lot who bore the stamp of the old West. The rest were of another breed. Tenderfeet, men from the East and from European countries. Not that a man's birthplace was the index of his character, but these didn't fit in with the country. They hadn't become acclimatized yet, perhaps never would. There wasn't a pair of bow legs among them. The man who had come to find Tommie Deal looked at his own crooked shanks and smiled mirthlessly and shook his head.

"Nope, I'm wrong," he muttered half aloud. "It's not them that's out o' place here. I guess it's me."

Times had changed in this community. They had no use for a man who openly wore two good guns and used them with devastating effect when occasion demanded. The old-time gunmen, the vanguard of the westward march of civilization not so many years ago, now lived only in tradition. Tinhorns lived on in the form of hoodlums like the three McSorleys.

The stranger rose from the table and left the saloon. Outside he stood for a moment gazing across the street at the Gold Dust Palace Saloon and Dance Hall. McSorley's Place. Several automobiles, mostly battered wrecks thickly covered with alkali dust, stood where the hitch rack had been in the old days. There was one long, shiny machine, however, that seemed distinctly out of place here. Presently a beefy, red-faced man dressed in well cut clothing strode out of the saloon, entered this car, and drove away in a cloud of white dust toward the courthouse at the other end of the street.

The stranger's mouth twisted and he spat out, "Jargo McSorley," as though the name were gall to him.

The street was lined with gaudy stores, their fronts plastered with signs that shrieked of bargains, fire sales, bedrock prices, bankruptcy sales, carload lots, clearance sales, sacrifice sales, and all the catchwords known to the vultures of the mercantile world.

Back against the canyon wall, where the livery stables and horse corrals had been thirty years ago, a stamp mill now rattled and thumped, and sent out clouds of dust.

The stark outlines of a ferris wheel and a group of carnival tents showed against the sky beyond the town, on

the knoll that old-timers had named Boot Hill.

On that knoll the Cimmarron Kid and Wolf DuBois were buried. Clean fighters, both had been, though they had passed out facing each other. There had been many such incidents in the old West. The Cimmarron Kid had taken to the crooked outlaw trails. His friend, Wolf DuBois, had become a frontier marshal. A simple story. One that all old timers could understand.

Out beyond Boot Hill a little way were the graves of several men who had been buried apart from these others. They had been the McSorleys of their day. Hoodlums and degenerate killers, they had died with rope burns on their necks.

A new day had dawned in Topaz. The old order had given place to the new and was almost forgotten.

The old man thrust his hands deep into his pockets and walked up Main Street. He came to a hardware store and went inside.

"I want to buy a pair of guns," he said. "Forty-fives."

The proprietor looked at him curiously and then led the way to a showcase.

"Something like these?" he suggested, and laid out two automatics.

"Do I look like a machine gunner?" rasped the stranger. "I want a pair of single action Colts, second hand if you've got 'em, with old worn holsters."

"I may have what you want," the storekeeper replied patiently. "We don't carry the old models in stock, but a rancher with a sick wife brought in a pair that he wanted to pawn about a year ago. I took a chance on them because I was sorry for the man. He never redeemed them. If you want them, you can have the pair for twenty-five dollars."

He opened a drawer and brought out two heavy guns in ornate Mexican holsters, silver mounted. The guns themselves were perfectly plain, except that they had ivory grips; but they were not stock models. An amateur could have seen that they were specially made, so perfect was their balance.

With an exclamation of amazement the customer seized them, spun their cylinders, weighed them in his hand.

"Where did you get these guns?" he demanded huskily.

"A rancher named Frank Boyle brought them in, as I told you. Why?"

"Frank Boyle, eh? So Frank is still alive? Did he say who them guns used to belong to?"

"Why, no, I don't think he did," the merchant replied, wishing he had set a higher price on them. "What do you know about them?"

"They belonged to Pecos Dare," said the white haired man shortly, counting out some bills. "I don't suppose you ever heard of him. I'll be needin' some ca'tridges, too."

It was plain that the shopkeeper had not heard of Pecos Dare. Like most of the present day inhabitants of Topaz, he was a newcomer.

The old man adjusted the holsters on his thighs, loaded the guns, slipped them into the holsters, and asked the way to Tommie Deal's mine.

"You go up the canyon about four miles until you cross a creek," said the shopkeeper. "Then you'll see a cabin about a quarter of a mile above the road, to the left, and a tunnel a little bit behind it. That's the place. A trail goes up from the creek."

"Much obliged."

The merchant cleared his throat.

"Did you know Tommie Deal?"

"Did and didn't." The stranger started toward the door without further explanation.

"You knew he was dead?"

"Heard it this mornin'."

"It's none of my business, but you're probably a stranger, and—well—" the merchant seemed embarrassed. "It seems the sheriff owned a share in the mine. He's got the property posted, pending court action—"

"Mind doin' me a favor?" The stranger's voice was chill.

"Er, not at all—anything in reason—"

"If you see th' McSorleys, tell 'em there's a stranger pokin' around that mine. Tell 'em he's tryin' to find out how they murdered Tommie Deal, an' they can come on up with their guns any time they feel like it!"

Leaving the storekeeper goggle-eyed, he strode outside, his shoulders no longer drooping, his hands swinging easily not far from the ivory butts of the guns.

The day was hot and the road was dusty. He started from Topaz at a brisk walk, but before he had gone far his steps grew slower. He was very tired by the time he reached the creek.

Dropping to his knees, he drank thirstily, and then rested with his back against a cottonwood tree. His lips were colorless, his face like parchment. Clearly, he was a sick man; the exertion had taxed his strength severely, and the trail the rest of the way to the mine was rough and very steep.

"Guess I'm nearer tuckered out than I thought," he said to himself. "But I got to finish it."

From his vest pocket he took a small vial, shook two tablets into his hand, and swallowed them. Presently a hint of color came back into his weathered cheeks. He got up and started, very slowly, to climb the hill. It took him a long time, for he had to stop frequently to rest.

He was halfway to the top when a man came out of the shack in front of the mine, stood for a moment looking down, and then re-entered the shack and came back with a rifle.

He sat down upon a rock with the rifle across his knees and lit a cigarette. He watched the climber's slow progress with a smile on his swarthy lips, and blew smoke rings into the still, hot air. He was a Mexican, and he had a Mexican's indolent love of useless artistry. He smiled at his skill and blew small rings through the larger ones as he watched the toiling figure on the trail below. When the climber was within fifty feet of him, he cocked his rifle.

"You see those sign, no?" he called out sneeringly. "She say no trespass. You geet the hell out, *pronto!*"

The old man had stopped again, and was looking out across the desert, his back to the Mexican. If he heard the command, he ignored it. He seemed sublimely unconscious of the Mexican's existence.

The Mexican was irritated and insulted. He flung away his cigarette stub with an impatient gesture. He frowned darkly.

"Hell! I make you hear me, old fool!"

He threw the rifle to his shoulder and fired. The old man's battered hat leaped from his head and sailed into the lifeless air.

"Queek—run!" the Mexican commanded. "Next time I keel!"

This threat brought action. The stranger swung around and as he did so his left hand moved swiftly in a short arc. The gun on his left thigh seemed to leap into that gnarled old hand. It bellowed thunderously, once, and the Mexican's heels flew upward ridiculously, his rifle clattered on the rocks, and he tumbled backward with a howl of pain. The bullet had shattered his shoulder.

"I was afeard I'd lost th' knack," the old man muttered to himself as he blew the smoke from the barrel of his gun. "But I reckon it's a gift that can't be took away."

Having replaced the empty shell, he slowly made his way to where the Mexican lay groaning, and having rested again, prodded the fallen man with the toe of his boot.

"Git up," he barked hoarsely. "Walk in front of me an' keep your good hand up, or I'll shoot your backbone out!"

There was that in his voice, and a

look in his eye, now flint hard, that brought quick obedience.

At the door of the cabin he paused again to catch his faltering breath before ordering his captive to go inside. He then took down a coiled riata from a spike in the wall and expertly tied the man to a chair. After that he rested again, his flinty eyes boring into the prisoner's black ones. The prisoner cowered.

"You look like a mangy coyote to me," he growled. "I've got a lot o' things to do and not much time to do 'em. I'm not goin' to waste much time with you. You got jist one chance to live—*savvy?*"

The Mexican glared.

"You got to talk. You helped th' McSorleys murder Tommie Deal, didn't yuh? No use glarin' at me—you wouldn't be guardin' this mine if you hadn't had a hand in it. You're goin' to tell me how it was done. I'm goin' to write it down, an' you're goin' to sign it."

The prisoner squirmed in his chair, and beads of sweat appeared on his dark face. He was in a tight place and he knew it. If he refused to talk the old man would surely kill him. While if he told what he knew he would only live until the McSorleys ran him down. To have his brains blown out at once might be preferable. He licked his lips and stared straight ahead.

"To hell weeth you!" he gritted desperately.

The old man cocked one of his revolvers.

"Then say your prayers. You got about one minute left."

The Mexican gazed into the cold eyes behind the gun, gazed into them unwillingly for they held him in spite of his efforts to avoid them, and he saw nothing but implacable determination. His resolution wavered, snapped.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he groaned. "I did nothing, *señor,* but weaken the timbers. Jargo McSorley placed the dynamite—it was he who made the blast. Before the Saints, *señor,* it is true what I say, and they will keel me, poor Jose!"

"Somebody else may. It won't be th' McSorleys," his captor said bleakly. "That gang has done the last killin' they'll ever do!"

The Mexican seemed grateful for the assurance, for words tumbled from his lips in a torrent. He called upon the saints to witness the truth of his statements, and eloquently larded his story with Spanish expletives. In the midst of it the old man got up and left the cabin. He came back a few minutes later, looking grim.

"I been in th' mine," he said, "an' I found some timbers you sawed through. I guess that much o' your story is true. All you got to do is sign what I write—an' don't remind me of your part in th' rotten mess! I might fergit myself an' put a bullet through you yet."

Upon the back of an envelope he wrote a few lines slowly in a cramped, old fashioned hand. The writing done, he untied the Mexican and thrust the pencil into his hand. With trembling fingers the prisoner scrawled an almost illegible signature, and then, disregarding his protests, the old man tied him up again.

"In the name of God, have mercy!" pleaded the Mexican. "Do not leave me here!"

"You didn't have any mercy on Tommie Deal, you coyote. Jest th' same, I'll send somebody to cut you loose—if I don't fergit."

The Mexican was still pleading lustily after the old man was beyond hearing distance from the cabin. It was more than an hour before he discovered that he had been tied in such a way that he could easily free himself.

Jargo McSorley was alone in his office in the Topaz County Courthouse when the stranger plodded back into town, and there these two played out their brief drama. Enter-

ing the office quietly, the stranger softly closed the door behind him. Then he stood leaning against the door a moment, breathing hard.

McSorley removed his feet from the desk and swung his swivel chair around.

"What the hell do you want?" he demanded roughly.

"A talk with you—th' last talk you'll ever have on this earth, McSorley!"

McSorley started and turned pale. He tried to laugh, and the sound died in his throat. He tried to bluster, and succeeded only in repeating his question weakly.

"What the hell do you *want?*"

"I guess you must be hard o' hearin'," the stranger replied.

Nothing like this had ever happened to Jargo McSorley before. He had a savage impulse to go for his guns and cut the old man down; but there are some things that even the boss of a thoroughly cowed community does not dare to do. McSorley knew he never could shoot this old man and make it look like self defense. It was better to humor him along.

McSorley opened his mouth to begin an ingratiating speech, but before he could utter the first word the old man said something in his cold, level voice that left him thunderstruck.

"I been up to Tommie Deal's gold mine," said the stranger. "I winged your Man Friday an' made him tell me how you murdered that boy. I know he wasn't lyin', for I seen the sawed timbers. In about a minute I'm a-goin' to settle with you—"

McSorley bounded from his chair, livid faced, his mouth working with fury. In his eyes blazed the green fires of fear. Shoulders hunched, he came around his desk with murder written on his features; he made two steps and then stopped. He was looking into the barrels of two unwavering single action forty-fives; and he knew he was close to death.

"Damn you, what's your game?" McSorley's voice was hoarse.

"No game—jist a chore. I'm goin' to kill you."

Jargo McSorley licked dry lips and almost went for his gun. He weighed his chances and lost his nerve.

"Who the hell are you?" The question came as a dry whisper, yet it sounded loud in that still room.

"Ever hear o' Pecos Dare?"

"Hell! You ain't—you're crazy!"

"I ain't got time to argy about it. I got to kill three yaller coyotes—an' you're th' first. I'm goin' to give you a fightin' chance, an' that's more than you gave Tommie Deal."

The two guns went back into their holsters.

"Pull your guns!"

It looked like a foolish thing to do, to throw away the advantage of the drop. It was something Jargo McSorley never would have done himself, and he seized the advantage for what it was worth. It was worth precisely nothing, for it is nearly always futile to gamble against the other man's tricks. Pecos Dare shot McSorley between the eyes before the sheriff's gun was halfway out of its holster. McSorley fell across his desk and lay there, staring down at the floor. Without a backward look, the other man went out and closed the door behind him.

Frank McSorley, the walking image of Jargo, was on his way to the courthouse when the killing occurred. At the sound of the shot in his brother's office, he drew both his guns and dashed forward. He met the stranger coming down the steps.

"If you're a McSorley," said Pecos Dare, "I've killed your brother!"

They were no more than ten feet apart, and both fired two shots, Pecos Dare a fraction of a second sooner than McSorley. Frank fell with a bullet through his heart and another through his stomach. He rolled down

the courthouse steps, and was dead when he stopped rolling.

Walking around the body, Pecos Dare started down the middle of the street. His guns were in their holsters and he walked slowly, looking to right and left. Dave McSorley ran out of the Gold Dust Palace saloon with his sawed-off shotgun in his hand. They faced each other fifty feet apart, and the reports of Pecos Dare's two guns came so close together that there was argument about it later. Some said they were fired simultaneously, although they were not.

Dave McSorley leaped straight into the air. His legs and arms jerked up and outward ridiculously, like the caperings of a marionette controlled by unseen wires, and he fell in a heap across his deadly gun.

The old man made his way across the street to the Catamount Saloon, pushed through the gaping crowd, entered the swinging doors, and slumped into a chair. His face was chalk white, and his clothing seemed to have become too big for him all at once.

Fairplay Flannigan lumbered across the room and put a ponderous hand on his shoulder.

"I reckon we owe you a big debt," he said. "You've cleaned this town today, and she sure needed cleanin' bad. I know who yuh are, now, fer nobody else could do what yuh done. You're Pecos Dare!"

"That's what they used to call me," was the slow reply. "But Pecos Dare wasn't my real name. My real name was Tom Deal."

"Tommie, he was your boy, huh?"

"Born after I— went away. My wife wanted me to settle down an' git a safe job after she learnt th' little feller was comin' along. I went to th' Coast. But they got me, them that couldn't face my guns. Framed me fer murder an' train robbery, an' I went up fer life. I never seen my wife again, nor th' kid. I got my pardon six months ago when another feller confessed to framin' me, an' I wanted Tommie to know his daddy was a peace officer, not an outlaw. That's why I came back."

As though exhausted by all these words, the gray old man slumped forward across the table.

"Hell, I believe he's shot," Fairplay exclaimed. "Here, some o' you, help me lay him on th' table!"

They placed him on the big card table where he had played solitaire that morning. He was evidently dying, but they found no wounds. Presently, however, he opened his eyes and spoke to Fairplay.

"Heart trouble," he whispered. "It's bothered me for years." A moment later he whispered again: "I'd like to be planted on Boot Hill, though, along with them I used to know."

In his pocket they found a wallet containing a few small bills, a faded picture of a young woman and a baby, and a newspaper clipping.

The lead sentences of the story were pregnant with tragic irony.

> A full pardon, granted as the result of a death-bed confession of a prominent citizen revealing a frame-up that sent an innocent man to prison for life, today opened the doors of the State Penitentiary for Prisoner Number 989,654.
>
> White haired, broken in health though not in spirit after serving twenty-eight years for another's crime, he expressed great surprise, not that he had been pardoned, but that the world still remembered him.
>
> "I never quit believing I'd get a pardon some day," he told reporters, "because you can't hide a crime forever. But what beats me is that people still remember me."
>
> Prisoner Number 989,654 was none other than Pecos Dare, famous frontier marshal.

It was Fairplay Flannigan who insisted that they should bury him wearing his guns.

"Because," he explained, "there's none left that could use 'em proper. Besides, it looks like law and order has finally come to Topaz."

Honor of an Outlaw

A New Chapter In That Famous Duel Between Buckskin Frank Leslie And John Ringo—Or Was There A Duel?

By ED EARL REPP

"*Si. Señor,* I saw it! And why not? Was I not herding my *padre's* goats in the Middle Pass of the Dragoons that day? How could I help but see the Señor Leslie kill the Señor Ringo? Were not my eyes young and good?"

For two days we had hunted Phoenix from one end to the other to find the wrinkled, age-bent old *mozo* who made that startling statement. The heat was terrific as it usually is in Arizona at that season. A man said it was so hot that even the lizards in the sand lots carried long sticks in their mouths to shove into the ground and climb up on when their feet began to burn. We had hoped to cash in on the standing offer of the Chamber of Commerce to feed you free each day the sun fails to shine. But what we lost in the way of free chuck was more than paid for in the finding of Señor Jose Gardena, our quarry.

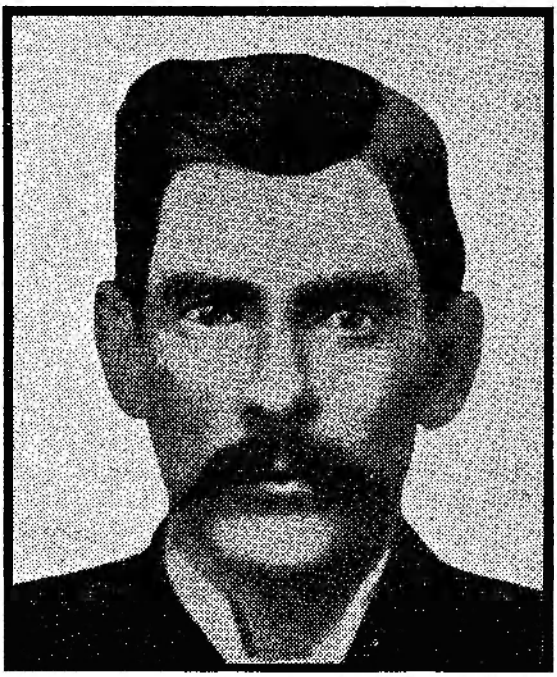


Photo from N. H. Rose Collection

The famous Doc Holliday, supposedly the West's premier gunman—yet he refused to shoot it out with John Ringo.

When old-timers gather at Tombstone to conjure dying memories and talk of the days that have gone, it is inevitable that such famous characters as John Ringo, Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Billy Breakenridge, Luke Short, Curly Bill, the Clantons and others of the Blood Brotherhood, gunmen all, be brought up for discussion. Many old-timers living today in that section of Arizona knew them well, and though many a false tale concerning them has been manufactured by amateur yarn-spinners, the truth is always just around the corner.

It so happened that the notorious John Ringo was on the pan when we ambled up to a group of desert rats sitting in the shade offered by a decaying roof near the equally notorious O.K. Corral where the Earps and the Clantons staged their famous battle of the century. When the subject of Mr. Ringo is brought up, this humble historian becomes all ears, for little enough is known of him.

"I knowed John Ringo pussonally," said a grizzled desert rat who was eighty if a day. "I was right heah in Tombstone when he hit town

an' he hit it a-shootin'! Tarnation, gents! That hombre killed two cowpokes the day he come!"

It took the old-timer a good forty-five minutes to tell his listeners of John Ringo's arrival in Tombstone. The date was hazy. But sifted down to skeleton facts, Ringo had just left Western Texas one jump ahead of a posse. He had drifted from California into Texas where he had entered whole-spiritedly in the cattle and feud wars which constituted the popular outdoor sport there in the late '70's and early '80's. So popular did he and his six-shooters become in that locality that when he left he headed a long procession staged in his particular honor; said procession consisting of a sheriff and several deputies bent on giving him a farewell party. They surely did hate to see John leave, but as it was, he chanced to be riding the fastest horse.

He landed in Tombstone at just about the time Cochise County was shaved off the eastern extremity of Pima County and turned over to the lawless element to do with as they double-damned pleased. He immediately aligned himself with the wild bunch at Tombstone and was soon recognized as the man behind the guns of that nefarious outfit consisting of the Clantons, the McLowerys, Curly Bill, Kettle-Bellied Johnson and others of their ilk who seldom went a day without letting daylight through some innocent or otherwise luckless hombre.

At any rate, the day he arrived in Tombstone, John Ringo killed two men in the Emporium, the remnants of which still stands in Tombstone. On that occasion, the old-timer recalled, John happened to be in that bar when three thirsty punchers came up to wash the alkali from their dusty throats. They paid little attention to the tall, silent figure of the gunman until one of them accidentally brushed his elbow as he was about to gulp a drink. Said drink, of which John was very fond, simply spilled over his vest-front. Like a tiger at bay he swung around, nailed the unfortunate puncher by the neck and deliberately booted him from the bar.

Quick to resent such rough treatment, the cowboy whirled with his six-shooter half out. It got no further, for John simply planted a bullet squarely between his eyes. Friends are friends in any language and the puncher's companions immediately took up the fight. Ringo ducked just in time to escape a bullet hurled at him. With characteristic calmness and fortitude he threw up his own gun and promptly sent the second waddy to Boot Hill. The third, seeing he was stacked against a cold, deadly gunman, dropped his hogleg to the floor and ran from the place.

He was not long in learning that the killer of his two friends was John Ringo. Burning up with anger at his own dishonor and the unnecessary killing of his two friends, he made up his mind to get revenge. Learning that Ringo was to head that evening for Charleston, an outlaw town nine miles south of Tombstone, he stalked out to wait for him. But John remained all night in the Emporium and it was not until morning that the puncher saw him coming up the Charleston road.

Riding at a steady lope, sitting straight in his saddle despite his inebriated condition, Ringo's first suspicion of an ambush came when his horse suddenly pricked up its ears and whinnied. While yet a quarter of a mile from the waiting angel of vengeance his sharp eyes detected a horse tethered off in the blue sage. Sensing the ambush he dismounted, sent his riderless horse forward to draw the attention of the ambusher, then quickly circled his man. Coming up behind him just as the cowboy was beginning to get nervous, he boldly challenged him to fight it out.

But John Ringo was the personification of confidence, drunk or sober. He even allowed the puncher the first

shot which tore a hole through his sleeve. Then as calmly as a man shooting at a target, he planted a slug in the waddy's head. The corpse was found that afternoon by the old-timer who was telling the story. And all during the scrap, he said, Ringo was as drunk as a prohibition agent on a bright Sunday afternoon.

The names of the three punchers had long since skipped out of the old man's memory. Possibly he had never known them. But he did know of one Señor Jose Gardena who had once told him that he had been a witness to the long-existing mystery fight between Ringo and Buckskin Frank Leslie which took place one hot afternoon in the Middle Pass of the Dragoon Mountains not far from that hell-town, Tombstone.

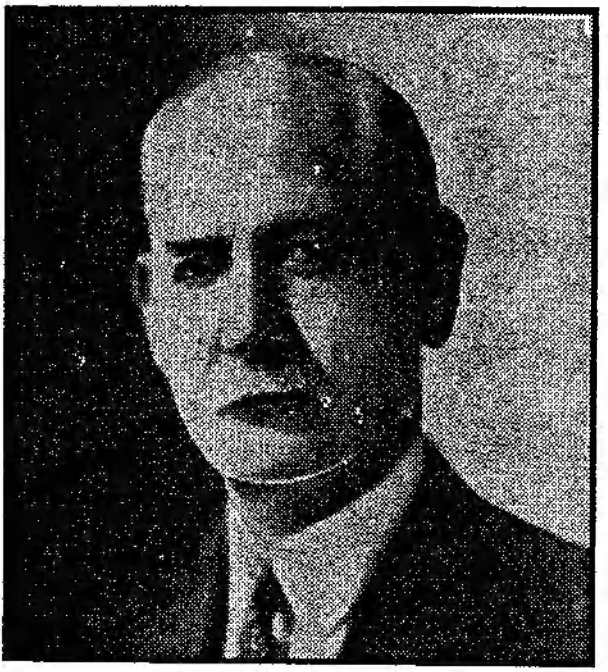


Photo from N. H. Rose Collection

Wyatt Earp as a deputy of Cochise County wanted none of Ringo's lead and let the bully boast without trying a gun-taming. Photo made in 1926.

That sounded interesting! Where could this Señor Gardena be found? A witness to the Ringo-Leslie fight? Incredible! According to history no witnesses had ever appeared in Tombstone, except Leslie himself, who verbosely told of his duel with his arch-enemy, John Ringo, and whose story few, if any, had believed. Even Deputy Sheriff Billy Breakenridge, who like a great many other men admired Ringo and respected him, had said there were no witnesses. It was through him that into the court records of Tombstone had been written that John Ringo had died by his own hand in the Middle Pass of the Dragoons! It could be seen to that day! Possibly this Jose Gardena had talked through his sombrero!

"Where yuh headin' frum heah, pawdner?" the old-timer demanded gruffly, planting a stream of tobacco juice squarely on a small rock lizard that caught his watery eyes.

"Los Angeles."

"Then yuh'll be goin' through Phoenix," he grunted. "If he's still livin' an' eatin' chili, yuh'll find Gardena there. Talk t' him ef yuh want the truth o' the shootin' o' Ringo. I've knowed Jose frum 'way back in the eighties an' there never was a more honest greaser than him. Go talk t' Jose!"

"But why didn't he testify in Leslie's defense and prove how Ringo met his death? It would have corrected history and stopped folks from thinking Leslie was a liar in claiming he shot it out with Ringo."

The old-timer glared back scornfully.

"Say," he said, "would yuh go out an step into a nest o' rattlers jes' t' prove one o' them could bite?"

"No. Of course not!"

"Then why should Jose Gardena come into Tombstone in them days an' tell folks he saw Leslie kill Ringo?" the other growled. "Believe me,

hombre, Tombstone warn't no healthy place fer greasers in them days. I've seen 'em shot jes' fer fun! Besides, Ringo had a lot o' friends who'd go through hell fer him t' save his reputation. They'd have swore themselves into Pe'gatory t' prove Leslie didn't have the guts to shoot it out with him. Yuh know why Buckskin an' Ringo was enemies?"

"Not exactly."

"Then I'll tell yuh," the old fellow volunteered. "Buckskin Frank was the kind o' a cuss who'd enter a man's back door an' fool with his wife when he's gone out the front. Frank pulled that stunt on Ringo an' stole his woman, all o' which'd make any gent ravin' mad, Yuh can guess the rest."

Considerably less is known of Buckskin Frank Leslie than of John Ringo. As far as can be gathered, Ringo's real name was Ringold and he was the scion of a well-to-do California family. Like a great many youngsters of his day, he was a man, doing a man's tasks and fighting a man's battle with life even before the yellow fuzz on his square chin stiffened into whiskers. He was a cousin of Cole, Jim and Bob Younger who were co-partners with Jesse James in the thwarted robbery of the Northfield, Minnesota, Bank raid in 1876.

As for Buckskin Frank, well, little can be said of him without becoming imaginative. He was, however, an imposing figure in his fringed buckskin jacket and pants, with beaded moccasins, belts and knife scabbard. He was as handsome as Ringo was gaunt and raw-boned. Some say that prior to his advent into Tombstone's society he had been a trader among the Kiowas, later a scout under General Crook. Whether that is true or not, he was a colorful character in and about Tombstone. He looked like a ghost of the past, of Daniel Boone's day, with his long, black hair, alert blue eyes and long-barrelled rifle. He was known as a braggart and few men of integrity accepted his word. He was like the lad who had cried "Wolf!" once too often and this characteristic had much to do, no doubt, toward denying him the credit for having met John Ringo face to face and killing him in a gun duel in the Dragoons. With his line of chatter ringing in their romantic ears, many women fell hard for him. Among them was John Ringo's common-law wife. The result was the springing up of a deadly feud between them which was eventually to bring a clash.

Unlike Leslie, John Ringo was a well-educated man. But he simply followed the way of least resistance and drifted into outlaw ranks. In due time he became the undisputed leader of the wild bunch that made things so hot and unhealthy in and around Tombstone. He was a heavy drinker. His bouts with John Barleycorn were always followed by acute attacks of bitter despondency which, his friends declared, eventually caused him to shoot himself squarely between the eyes, a deed easily disproven in the light of modern crime detection.

It is a well-known fact that Ringo was a cool, calculating master of the six-shooter, a man who had no more qualms about entering a shooting scrape than a Mexican has for diving into his favorite brand of chili and frijoles. His keen ability for unlimbering a split-second ahead of the other fellow more than once saved him from sudden death by lead poisoning.

On one occasion, Wyatt Earp, in his official capacity as Deputy U. S. Marshal at Tombstone, committed some act which particularly exasperated Mr. Ringo, who immediately hunted him down for an interview. Facing the officer and his ever-present companion, Doc Holliday, in public, he challenged them both to step out in the street and settle their differences for once and for all.

Strangely, neither Wyatt nor Holliday accepted, For perhaps the first time in their lives they backed water.

Why, nobody knows. The intestinal fortitude of Earp and Holliday had never previously been questioned and just why they side-stepped Ringo is a matter for conjecture. Possibly there may have been some justification for Ringo's anger and, realizing it, they had permitted his deadly invitation to pass without bloodshed. Questioned about this one black mark on his career as a fearless gunman, Earp in later years avoided the subject. The answer doubtless went to the grave with him when he died January 13th, 1929, in Los Angeles.

It was generally conceded at that time that Curly Bill Graham, whose real name was William Broscius, the Jesse James of the Southwest, was Ringo's chief lieutenant in the running of the affairs of Tombstone's Blood Brotherhood. Curly Bill, incidentally, was supposed to have been decapitated by a charge from Wyatt Earp's shotgun, but facts recently disclosed show, to some extent, that Curly Bill did his dying at his home in Montana. In proof of this, a reliable citizen of Lordsburgh, N. M., declares that he saw and read a letter written by Bill's brother stating that Curly had died of the measles. In addition, William Sparks, perhaps the best-posted man in the Southwest on frontier history, stated that Bill positively did die in Montana.

After his arrival in Tombstone, Ringo, as has already been stated, rode to Charleston which, in addition to Galeyville, the Hughes Ranch and the Double Dobies Ranch, was a stronghold of the wild bunch. Arriving there the outlaws undertook to shake him down. A poker game was arranged and Ringo was invited to sit in. The others promptly proceeded to strip him of his cash in a crooked game. His funds soon vanished and he offered his watch to Kettle-Bellied Johnson as collateral for a hundred-dollar loan. Johnson flatly refused and advised Ringo to go out and rustle a bunch of steers and cash in on them in order to continue in the game.

Without a word of comment, Ringo promptly brought his horse around to the front of the saloon and anchored him there. No attention was paid to him when he re-entered the place. Suddenly his guns appeared like magic. With a crisp order he commanded everybody there to elevate. Hands shot up and Ringo calmly collected everything of value he could find. Calling his victims a bunch of damned robbers, he rode away, laughing. The outlaws gave no pursuit.

But a few days later, Johnson rode over to Tombstone and talked. Ringo's holdup reached the ears of the Law and Order League. They forced Kettle-Belly to sign a warrant for Ringo's arrest. Deputy Sheriff Billy Breakenridge pocketed the warrant and rode out after Ringo. Locating his quarry, Billy, using diplomacy instead of gunplay, arrested him. Ringo confessed that his horse was too tired for a trip to Tombstone just then and Billy was anxious to return to town. Ringo advised him to go on ahead and he would overtake him at Sulphur Springs. Fully believing that Ringo would fail him, Billy headed back toward town. But true to his promise, Ringo actually overtook him and they rode into Tombstone together. From that day on, Breakenridge held a great regard for John Ringo.

It being late at night when they arrived in town, Ringo found it impossible to arrange for bail. He remained in jail all night and in the morning got hold of an attorney from whom he learned that the Law and Order League was bent on raiding Charleston and arresting Curly Bill. Sometime later that morning, Ringo walked out of jail and rode hard for the outlaw stronghold where Curly was holed up. When the League appeared at the bridge which crossed the San Pedro River into Charleston, they found Ringo waiting for them. Like Horatio he stood on the Charles-

ton end, guns out, death in his snapping dark eyes.

There were just six words uttered and John uttered them. They were: "Come on, you jaspers! I'm waitin'!"

That invitation was enough for the League. They backed up and never stopped backing until they were once more in Tombstone! But from that date on, John Ringo was a marked man. Many members of the League would have been pleased to hear of his death, but none had the fortitude to take the responsibility for his demise. Thus it was that Ringo went about his own good way, which passed many saloons. He drank more than ever and his guns roared daily. His periods of drunkenness became more frequent and of longer duration.

Photo from N. H. Rose Collection

Johnny Behan, first sheriff of Cochise County, where Ringo and Leslie ruled the roost until a bullet ended the reign.

Then one day somebody ran off with his common-law wife. He learned that Buckskin Frank Leslie was the vile culprit. Telling the world that he was going to kill Leslie on sight, he ranged about Tombstone like a mad wolf. But the bird had flown. He started hunting him in the Dragoons where, one hot day, Billy Breakenridge encountered him in the Middle Pass. Ringo, as usual, was well supplied with his favorite brand of jig-juice.

After exchanging commonplace remarks with the officer, Ringo dug up a bottle and invited Billy to drink. Not wishing to offend him, Breakenridge accepted. He returned the hardly-touched pint to the outlaw. John drained it to the last drop without a breath. They parted immediately thereafter, with Ringo heading through the Pass toward San Simon Valley.

The next that was heard of him was when Buckskin Frank Leslie thundered into Tombstone with the news that he had met Ringo in the Middle Pass and had killed him. Known as a braggart and a liar, Leslie's tale was immediately branded false.

Dubious that the invincible John Ringo had fallen before Leslie's gun, a party of officers headed by Breakenridge rode out to view the remains. They found Ringo in exactly the spot Leslie had described. His body was seated and wedged between two closely-grown trees. As Leslie had described, there was a bullet hole squarely between his eyes. His six-shooter, with one empty shell, was found on the ground at his feet.

"Suicide!" said Breakenridge promptly.

Disregarding Leslie's claims, a coroner's jury rendered the verdict that Ringo had died by a wound self-inflicted. Buckskin, with great vehemence, arose to the occasion and demanded that they change the verdict if for no other reason than it branded him a liar. Ringo's friends laughed in his face, but Leslie insisted that the instant Ringo encountered him he had taken a shot at him.

"Soon as he saw me," he declared, "he unlimbered. His bullet missed me by a yard. Knowin' he was figgerin' t' kill me if I didn't kill him, I ducked off'n my hoss, pullin' my gun as I dismounted. From behind the nag I fired at John. He was sittin' his hoss waitin' fer me t' show myself which I didn't do. I fired one shot at John Ringo an' hit him dead center. What follered was the dangedest thing I ever seed a man do. John didn't fall off'n his hoss. He jes' stepped down, walked t' them two trees an' sat down! I waited behind my nag t' see what he'd do next. He didn't do nothin'! He jes' sat still and his gun slipped out o' his hand, droppin' t' the ground. That jasper was dead when he left his hoss, but didn't know it! It's plumb certain he died with my bullet in his head, wedged a'tween them two trees. That's gospel, gents!"

But Breakenridge and the jury were adamant. Buckskin Frank had cried "Wolf!" once too often, and though he was rated among the best of Tombstone's gunmen, they refused to give him credit for Ringo's demise. John had too much of a reputation as a gunman to have been killed by a man of lesser fry, they reasoned. Besides, wasn't he a man of honor? Hadn't he kept his word with Billy Breakenridge at Sulphur Springs?

He had been a marksman with few equals and it did not seem possible that he would shoot at Leslie and miss. Thus they based their claims that he took his own life. The records can be seen at Tombstone today. But there were no powder burns on Ringo's forehead to, in the light of modern crime detection, justify the suicide verdict. Quizzed on this subject in later years, Breakenridge and others who had attended the inquest, admitted they saw no powder burns on his face. Ringo certainly could not have killed himself without leaving powder burns to prove it, considering that cartridges in those days were loaded with black powder!

In the light of this fact, Leslie should have been given his just credits, and if the veracity of Jose Gardena's later statements can be accepted without question, then the suicide verdict was rendered simply to save the reputation of a popular character.

Gardena, his face grooved with numberless wrinkles, his hair white as snow, his back bent, was found sitting in the shade beneath the porch roof of a humble *jacal* a mile or so down the railroad track from Phoenix. The weight of seventy years bore heavily on his stooped shoulders. He lived alone with his fat old wife, supported by charity. It was a hard task locating him, for the name of Jose Gardena is as common among the Mexicans as Joe Smith is among the *gringos*.

"Si, Señor," he declared huskily, staring out over the dazzling tracks, and his voice carried conviction. "I saw it. I saw the Señor Leslie kill the Señor Ringo many years ago over in the Dragoons. I did not know then who they were, but what I saw I shall never forget."

As he spoke he injected many Spanish words into his statements and with the smattering *Espanol* we boast, it was difficult to follow him. Often he paused to shift his cud from one side of his toothless mouth to the other. Mongrel dogs yapped viciously in neighboring yards. Naked brats, as black as sin, played *vaquero* along the shimmering rails, frequently poking fun at the sweating, exasperated *gringos* who prodded the old *mozo's* slumbering memories into life.

"No, Señor," he continued after a long pause. "I shall never forget what I saw. I was a young *caballero* then, *veinte* (twenty) perhaps. I lived with my *padre* in Sulphur Springs Valley. We had many goats which I herded in the Dragoons where they grew fat on acorns. Have you ever eaten goat meat, *amigos?*"

Gringo heads bobbed negatively.

"Then you have missed the best in

flesh, *amigos,*" he continued. "As I was saying, I herded my *padre's* smelly goats in the Dragoons. Often I would not see our *jacal* for days. I was in the Middle Pass the day Señor Ringo and Señor Leslie met each other on the trail. My herd was feeding peacefully in a little swale while I was sitting on a large boulder nearby, in *bueno* view of the trail. I was lying on my back when I heard the clatter of hoofs. Looking down I saw the Señor Ringo riding toward the San Simon Valley beyond. I saw him pause and tip a bottle to his lips.

"Suddenly from around a bend in the trail rode another man. He wore fringed buckskins. He was the Señor Buckskin Leslie. Both horsemen halted when they saw each other. I heard the Señor Ringo give a vile curse and saw him draw his gun. My goats stampeded out of the swale when they heard his shot. He missed. I could see very clearly, and Señor Leslie fired back very quickly. Señor Ringo slid down slowly from his horse. I saw him walk like a drunken man to the trees and sit down. The other man hid behind his horse until he walked very cautiously to the Señor Ringo and looked at him closely. After that he got back on his horse and rode away."

He paused to stare down the tracks at the coming of a distant train.

"What did I do, Señor?" he replied to a question. "I slipped away, *amigos,* and did not stop until I drove my herd into my *padre's* corrals. I was afraid to be caught in the Dragoons lest they accuse me of shooting the *gringo.* Soon after, my *padre* started to Tombstone for supplies. We never saw him again. We learned that some *malo hombres* had robbed and murdered him. We, my *madre* and two sisters, went to the *jacal* of my *padre's* people in Mexico. Later I returned and worked in Tucson for the railroad. Until I could no longer work, I was a track-walker. Now I am very old, *amigos,* and soon I will go to meet my *padre. Sabe usted, Señor!*"

"*Seguro!*" we said, more or less doubtful of the *mozo's* tale. We had to admit that it rang true with Buckskin Frank Leslie's report of a half century past. He certainly seemed sincere in telling it and it was strongly convincing. The train rumbled past, shaking the *jacal* like dice in a box. "But, Jose," we continued, "it's going to be hard to make people believe your story—that you actually saw the killing of Ringo. History says there were no witnesses. *Sabe, Señor?* Maybe you sign an affidavit, eh? You *sabe?*"

His watery old eyes flashed with quick resentment.

"The word of Jose Gardena is *bueno!*" he grunted. "No *sabe gringo* aff'davit. I cannot read or write, Señor! How could I sign it?"

"You could make your mark."

"My word is my mark, *amigos!*" he said emphatically. "I make mark on paper once in Tucson and *gringo* collect my wages! No marks no more! I have told you what you asked for. That is all I can do, *amigos. Buenas tardes, amigos!*"

Without another word he limped in a huff into the house, thus ending the interview. Whether he told the truth or not is a matter of conjecture. If he did, Buckskin Frank Leslie should be given his just reward, though belated by half a century, for vanquishing his arch-enemy, the supposedly invincible John Ringo!

LEAD LAW

She realized that she was alone, caught in the cross fire of a range war.

Range War! It Sparked And Flamed, Then Swept All Before It Like Wind-Lashed Hell—Until One Picked Six-Guns, Strange Tools To Start A Backfire.

By
JAMES PERLEY HUGHES

When Mildred McArthur saw her brother pitch from his horse, a bullet through his head, she realized that she was alone, caught in the cross fire of a range war. She had none to whom she could appeal. None to take up her battle. Since the war began, herds had been scattered, some driven off to far distant points. Chaos held the country west of the Pecos.

"I must get help—somewhere," she told herself, after her brother's body had been laid to rest beside her father's and mother's. "Old Judge Pease might do something. If we could only get the man who's really behind all this."

She saddled her pony and raced into the little town of Langtry where the strangest court of all time held its session. Burnham Pease, keeper of a typical frontier saloon, was the self-appointed justice, who ruled a turbulent country in the name of the law. But the court took no part in range wars. Plaintiffs were required to show an injustice before this frontier Solon would expound his naïve interpretations of the justice.

"But I've got to do something, Judge," Mildred all but sobbed.

"I know—I know," he mollified. "Last month, after you was here I writ a letter to a friend of mine up in the Panhandle and he writ back that he'd send somebody, but—I ain't seen hide nor hair of him yet. He'll be moseying along some of these days and then—"

"By that time somebody'll have the last steer I've got and all my water holes," Mildred broke in bitterly.

"Shore's a pity," hawed the judge, "Wall—jes' as soon as my man comes, I'll send him right out to yuh."

Mildred McArthur turned away, her heart leaden. She walked down the dusty street, her mind held upon the dismal future. She heard the jingle of silver spurs behind and glanced around. A tall, bronze faced young man met her glance and quickly snatched off his wide sombrero.

"Are yuh Miss McArthur that was telling yore troubles to the jedge?" he asked with a disarming smile.

She hesitated. So complex was the web in which she and her brother had been caught that suspicion gripped constantly. But the young man's smile was frank and engaging.

"Yes," she said.

"Mebbe I might he'p yuh out a bit," he volunteered. "Yuh see I ain't doing nothing particular right now and—"

"I'm afraid there's nothing you can do," she broke in. "One man wouldn't last long against the Flying-M and Lazy-Z, not to mention Matt Davis and his crew. My—my brother tried to fight them alone and—and he's dead."

Pity came in the cowboy's blue eyes. They were fine eyes, Mildred noted, and his head of curly straw-colored hair intrigued her in spite of her troubles.

"Mebbe your brother didn't savvy fighting these coyotes," he countered, "But I shore understand 'em a heap. 'Scuse me, but—my name's Steve Morrison. I come from east of here a piece."

She smiled at the bashful self-presentation. Then she held out her hand.

"I'm awfully glad to meet you," Mildred said, "and gladder still at your offer of help. It's a frightfully mixed up thing. The Flying-M and Lazy-Z are fighting each other, but—there's a man named Matt Davis, who seems to be in it, wherever there is any dirty work going on. Sometimes he's in the Lazy-Z ranks and sometimes—"

She stopped as a hulking figure slouched up and stopped to stare, first at her and then at Steve Morrison. Behind him was another man, even less engaging. Steve Morrison flashed a quick, gauging glance at the newcomers. Both were heavily armed and carried themselves with the swagger of professional bad men. The pig-like eyes of the taller of the two were held upon Mildred McArthur's pretty face.

"What was yuh saying 'bout me to this whipsnapper?" he demanded.

Steve Morrison dropped the big hat he had held in his hand while talking to Mildred McArthur. His finger tips rested on his guns. So this was Matt Davis, the man she had said was involved in most of the dirty work of the range war. He was typical of his kind, yet in his porcine eyes was a cunning seldom found in the bad man.

"I asked what—what was yuh saying 'bout me to—"

The girl cast a frightened look at Steve Morrison.

"Look here, Davis," the young man turned to Matt, "Yuh do yore talking to me. Yuh all wanted to know what she was saying to me. The answer is—none of yore business."

Matt Davis's face darkened. The man beside him whispered a few low words and dropped his hands to his six-guns. Morrison's glance flicked from one to the other.

A throaty rumble of laughter came from Davis's hairy throat and he squinted as he looked at the girl's flushed cheeks.

"Caught yuh a man, huh?" he

gibed: "Picked up a stranger from God knows where. I suppose you're taking him home now and—"

A roar from Steve Morrison's left hand gun. Matt Davis looked up, then down, his small eyes wide with amazement. The bullet had cut his loosely buckled belt as though it were a knife and his guns had tumbled to the ground.

"Crease this fresh young squirt, Lefty," Davis barked to his companion.

"Can't boss, he's got me covered."

Matt looked around. Steve Morrison's right hand weapon was all but touching Lefty Conway. Both were at the mercy of the tall, curly headed stranger, who now was gesturing Conway to drop his weapons on the ground.

"Yuh hombres should take lessons in manners," the young man was saying. "Ought to learn how to speak to a lady. Fust yuh take off yore hats and then—"

"I'm taking off no hats to nobody," Davis growled. "Yuh and nobody like yuh—Hey, thar—don't shoot—"

A flash of guns, but Steve Morrison had only holstered one of his weapons. Then he reached out to snatch off their sombreros. Next a stinging slap smacked against their stubbly cheeks.

"Bad boys git that when they're not polite to ladies," Steve said.

Growled threats to kill him before the day was over.

"Now vamoose, both of you," Morrison pointed down the street, "and remember yore manners."

He kicked the disarmed men's guns off the board walk into the muddy gutter. A crowd had gathered around the man and girl, but Steve elbowed his way through, making a path for her to where her pony was hitched. He held the stirrup for her to mount. Next he swung onto his own horse and they galloped down the road leading to her home.

"You shouldn't have done what you did," Mildred told him. "Matt Davis is a killer and is as tricky as he is mean."

"That's jes' meat and drink to me, ma'am," was the laughing reply.

As they cantered across the range, Steve Morrison asked innumerable questions. He wanted to know the various brands, her own and how they were made. Were rings used for range branding, or did the cowboys carry irons?

"I'm just naturally curious," he told her, when she smiled at his many interrogations.

It was late that night when Morrison reached Langtry again. Mildred McArthur had insisted that he stay to supper and Hong Kee, her cook, had prepared a meal worthy of a visting prince. But as he rode back along the dim range trail, Steve's head hung low with thought. From the girl's description, the range war had unusual features, features that he could not understand. Pete Alberts of the Flying-M and Rob Bentley of the Lazy-Z were fighting, involving the smaller ranchers to their destruction, but through the maze of milling strife rode the sinister figure of Matt Davis and his crew of killers.

"Ain't half as simple as it looks," the young man muttered, alighting in front of Judge Pease's home. "I reckon I ought to habla with His Honor befo' I go much further."

A talk that lasted far into the night with the strange character, who was known as the law west of the Pecos. When Steve Morrison finally went to bed, his dreams were divided between the appealing eyes of Mildred McArthur and Matt Davis's lowering glare. He would see more of both, he knew. When and how, he was not certain.

Morning found him staring at a note in girlish script. It was signed with Mildred's name, asking him to meet her at Baldface Butte. Steve scanned the note a second time. The writing was graceful and done with

studied care. For a long moment he scratched his thatch of curly blond hair. Then he saddled his pony and rode at a high gallop until he reached the girl's home. As he had expected, wide eyed surprise marked his exhibition of the letter.

"I only wish I could write that good—I scrawl," she said.

"I didn't know that, but—folks that are anxious and in a hurry don't write even like that," the young man answered. "Wall—I jes' wanted to be sure. I guess I'd better be moseying along."

Her hand touched his arm as she sought to stay him.

"Don't go," she begged, "It's some trick. Matt Davis—I told you that he'd—"

"I'll never know who did it, if I stay here," he pointed out. "How am I going to learn anything—"

"Then I'll go with you," she blurted. "I'm all saddled up and—"

She stopped in stunned surprise. The firm brown fingers of the young man closed over her arm and led her toward her front door. A call that brought Hong Kee scurrying out. Then Steve Morrison turned her over to the Chinese with this astonishing remark:

"You keep missee home side, savvy. No let get 'way. Mebbe get killed. You keep here aw time. You savvy?"

"Me savvy," Hong Kee managed to squeak.

Mildred McArthur stared, round eyed, at this cool young man, as he walked swiftly toward his horse. If her brother had dared such a thing, but—her eyes softened. This was not her brother. She watched him until his galloping figure was only a speck, bobbing across the range in the direction of Baldface Butte. Then she sank into a chair and gratefully accepted the cup of tea Hong Kee had prepared.

Steve Morrison did not hold a straight line as he crossed the flats toward Baldface. He circled, following a winding wash that screened him from the sight of those who might be spurring across the plain. He found several small bands of cattle at the water holes and stopped to examine them. Calves with an Eight-Bar-Eight brand were following cows, which bore the Circle-Cross, Mildred McArthur's brand. To whom did the Eight-Bar-Eight belong? Pete Alberts had the Flying-M. Rob Bentley's was the Lazy-Z.

"That Matt Davis hombre must be building up a herd for hisself," Steve muttered.

He roped a yearling and tied it fast. Then he examined the brands with care. They had been made with a ring, instead of the traditional iron of the round-up. Steve studied the mark still closer. Next he let the yearling loose and galloped up the wash. He was nearing Baldface Butte and his care increased.

"Not going to dry-gulch me," he told himself. "Not this early."

He hobbled his horse in a clump of chaparral within a few hundred yards of the butte, deciding to make the rest of the journey on foot. But as he crawled out of the wash he glimpsed the high-crowned hats of two riders. He settled back taking out his knife to cut a long branch of willow. He put his sombrero on the top of it, then crawled along the ground, holding the hat aloft. He had not gone more than a hundred yards, when he heard the crack of a rifle. He dropped the hat to find a neat hole in its crown, just at the band line.

Next he heard horsemen were charging toward him, spurring their mounts. He wormed to one side and waited. His guns were ready, his thumbs resting on each hammer. A pounding of hoofs and the two flashed by, scarcely fifteen feet away.

"Stick 'em, gents, or I empty yore saddles," Morrison leaped to his feet. "Stick 'em up or—"

The horses came to a sudden stop and two men turned, their hands up-

raised. Steve almost dropped his guns through sheer surprise. Instead of Matt Davis and Lefty Conway, the two were strangers. A glance at their horses showed the Flying-M brand. He had held up Pete Alberts, one of the leaders in the range war, and—

"I shore made a mistake, gents," he addressed them in mollifying tones, "I was looking for a miscreant who—"

The crack of a six-gun sounded from off to the left. Steve whirled to see Matt Davis and Lefty Conway charging toward him, their guns ablaze. He turned to meet them, but as he flicked his weapons from Alberts, the Flying-M owner began to shoot. Steve Morrison had expected to find a trap set and waiting, but—he had walked into a double snare. Now he must fight his way out. The man who had accompanied Pete Alberts charged at him with guns aflame.

Steve's weapons barked and the man swayed drunkenly, then slid from his saddle. Matt Davis spurred forward, but a shot grazed his cheek and he reined up sharply. Steve stooped low and scuttled through the brush. He did not want to shoot it out—not then. Too much was unexplained, but as he made for the wash in which his horse was hobbled, his adversaries scoured the sage with their bullets.

"That's the hombre that's been working our brands, Matt," he heard Pete Alberts call.

They charged with new savagery, but Morrison's gun fire held them back. Next he heard Alberts order Lefty Conway to ride to the Flying-M and return with a posse. They would comb the range before they let him escape.

"If I'm going—I've got to go now," Steve muttered, sliding down into the wash.

Above, he could hear the riders bawling to one another, searching for his horse. Matt Davis swore deeply, threatening to kill unless surrender was immediate, but Steve only grinned as he unhobbled his horse and rode down the draw.

Leaving his opponents to comb the seas of sage, Steve Morrison rode toward Langtry as fast as his eager mount's pounding feet could cover the distance. He was tempted to stop at the Circle-Cross to see Mildred McArthur, but hurried on without slacking rein. His first visit was to a blacksmith shop and then he turned to the ramshackle building in which Judge Pease dispensed both justice and strong liquor. He called the older man into a private back room, generally used for poker parties.

"What we want is to stop this range war fust, jedge," the young man said. "If yuh all could call a peace meeting, we might gather 'round this here table and settle things."

"Who all should I call?" Pease wanted to know.

"Alberts of the Flying-M, Matt Davis, Rob Bentley of the Lazy-Z and —I'll get Miss Mildred to let me play her kyards. It ain't going to be a meetin' whar a lady should sit in."

"Reckon not," muttered the judge. "It ain't going to be a meeting that'll be healthy for anybody to sit in, onless—"

"We'll check our six-guns with the court," Steve Morrison concluded.

Instead of objecting to the peace parley, the range combatants welcomed the suggestion. Date for the meeting was fixed five days hence. Meantime, Steve Morrison spent his days upon the range and his evenings at the Circle-Cross ranch house. Mildred McArthur was only too glad to name him her representative at the conference. Their friendship was growing rapidly. Several times, the young cowboy found himself speaking words of even warmer tone, but he choked them back.

Mildred was interested in Steve's talks upon the tricks of cattle thieves. She listened as he explained how herds could be decimated, but her mind was more upon the clear blue eyes and

curly blond hair than the stark facts he was reciting.

During his hours in town, Steve watched carefully, but an armistice seemed to hold the warring factions in check. He spent no little time loafing along the hitch rack where the cattlemen tied their mounts. Then came the day of the conference. Judge Pease had designated the poker room in the back end of his establishment as the meeting place. They were to gather around the table—unarmed. Steve Morrison did not reach Langtry until the hour set for their assembly. He had been on the range since dawn and his blue eyes were snapping when he returned. He met Mildred McArthur, as he hurried to Judge Pease's establishment, but a whispered warning from her trembling lips only brought a grin to his face.

Then he entered the strange combination of saloon and court room to nod to the men with whom he would meet.

"Where's Matt?" he asked, when he saw Davis was missing.

"Ain't feeling well," Judge Pease replied. "Lefty Conway's going to sit in for him. Now gimme yore hardware, gents, just so everybody'll feel safe and at ease. Gent can't speak his mind when he's expecting a slug between the eyes at any minute. Leave yore six-guns at the bar."

They surrendered their side arms and entered the poker room. Lefty Conway was the first to go in and took the seat usually occupied by the dealer when stud games were in progress. Steve Morrison watched this move with understanding eyes. Pete Alberts sat at his right, Rob Bentley of the Flying-M at his left. Hardly had the door closed, than Steve saw the faces of his companions harden. They wanted peace on the range, peace by the elimination of Steve Morrison and they had gathered with that idea in view. He glanced across at the swart, bearded face of Lefty Conway. Then he knew why he was there instead of Matt Davis.

"Well, gentlemen," Steve began, when the others were silent, eyeing him with cold malice, "one of the fust things we've got to do is to straighten out those beef herds. A lot of brands have been worked, a lot of mavericks burned with a mark that ain't registered here. I've look over a lot of them and find—"

"Find what?" Pete Alberts snapped, his thin lips creasing after the words had leaped out.

"Find that Miss McArthur's steers and yearlings have been the favorite animals for the rustlers to work on. The Y-5 up the country has lost some too."

"So have I," Rob Bentley added.

"We all have," Pete Alberts finished, "and—I reckon, stranger, there ain't anybody that knows as much about it as you."

"Reckon not," Steve agreed placidly.

A scowl crossed Lefty Conway's face. Then the young cowboy saw the man's hand stealing toward the drawer in the poker table. Now he knew why Lefty had taken that position. Their six-guns had been checked outside, but—Matt Davis or Lefty had planted a weapon in that drawer.

Steve watched the man's left hand move steadily toward the gun's hiding place. His own were on the table. He felt the growing tautness in the room. He sensed the passing of a signal, but dared not turn his eyes from Lefty Conway.

"So yuh know all about working them brands?" the man growled, as his eyes held Steve's.

"Mebbe not all, but a heap."

"Then yuh admit that yuh're the hombre, who—"

"I ain't admitting anything. What all have yuh got to admit?"

"Nothing that yuh'll ever hear in this—"

Lefty's hand shot forward and the muzzle of a six-gun appeared above

the edge of the table. Pete Alberts and Rob Bentley dodged backward, their chairs clattering.

A shot roared out, sounding like a blast in the crowded little room. A streak of crimson appeared upon the table's green top. Outside, men yelled and rushed to the door. It was flung open and they stared in. At their head was Matt Davis. The expression of triumph upon his face vanished suddenly and his eyes widened. Sprawled across the table was Lefty Conway, a bullet hole squarely between his eyes.

"Feeling better now, Matt?" Steve Morrison inquired, "Too bad it wasn't yuh, 'stead of this poor maverick. You jes' sent him here 'cause—"

"Lynch him—he murdered Lefty—hang the damn rustler," Davis whirled to bellow to the crowd that filled the room. "Lynch him. He—"

"None of that now—" yelled the authoritative voice of Old Judge Pease. "The law ain't going to have no necktie parties that ain't legal. If a hombre has been done in, then we'll hear the evidence and ef he's guilty—then everything will be all right and legal."

"That suits me," Steve Morrison said.

But as he glanced into the faces of the men around him, he knew an impartial trial would be impossible. He was a stranger while Matt Davis, Pete Alberts and Rob Bentley controlled an appreciable following.

Still, there was an element that followed Judge Pease and backed him in his insistence that the law be observed. They added their voices to the judge's, demanding a trial by jury. The witnesses of the killing were present. They should tell their story and let Steve Morrison's peers decide his fate.

A sneer from Matt Davis as he gauged the crowd's temper. Then he beckoned several intimates for a whispered conference. He reappeared a moment later to flash a signal to a man who had been selected for jury duty. Then the trial began.

Judge Pease was a martinet for legal procedure. At his instructions a curtain was drawn across the front of the bar, hiding that part of the room. A jury was sworn in, a jury headed by the man to whom Davis had signalled. Morrison watched Matt closely.

"He and I'll have to decide this with lead law yet," Steve thought.

With Pease acting as both attorney and judge, the case was soon under way. Pete Alberts was the first witness. He wasted small time in preliminaries.

"This maverick tells Lefty that he knows who was working the brands," Alberts testified. "Lefty slangs back at him and then—the coyote flips open his hand and plugs old Lefty right between the eyes. Cold a blooded murder as I ever did see."

A buzz among the jurors as they glanced at one another.

"Did Conway have anything in his hand when I shot?" Steve inquired on cross-examination.

"Nothing."

"Got a shooting iron in it now," a voice called from the back of the room, "and nobody's touched him."

"He had it then," said Steve. "I knew what he was figuring on doing. A friend told me. So I had a derringer handy all the while—just waiting for him."

"He didn't draw—nor nothing," Alberts growled back. "Ask Rob Bentley. He ain't no friend of mine, but he'll tell the truth."

The owner of the Lazy-Z was next sworn and corroborated Alberts' testimony in every detail, nor could Morrison or Judge Pease shake his story. Matt Davis again flashed a signal to his friend on the jury and the man nodded in understanding. A few more questions and the judge turned to Steve.

"What's yore side of it, son?" he asked.

"They're trying to get me—one way or the other," Morrison answered hotly, "Both of those men lied. The facts speak for themselves. Matt Davis put Lefty Conway in there to kill me because he hadn't the nerve. He drew his shooting iron out of the dealer's drawer and—well I beat him to it. That's all."

A silence as Steve sat down. Judge Pease rapped for order on his rickety old table that did duty for a bench. Then he faced the jury.

"I reckon the defendant was right in saying—'that's all,'" he began. "Yuh all got two stories to decide on. Take yore choice, but it shore looks to me as though somebody was lying like hell. I ain't naming no names, but—while the jury is deliberating, the court, prisoner, witnesses and spectators will adjourn to the bar and licker up. The jury will retire to the woodshed while the court sends 'em out a couple of quarts to be charged against the costs."

Judge Pease slid from his chair and donned the white apron of his alternate calling. All hands took their liquor straight. There was no time for mixed drinks. Then came the announcement that a verdict had been reached. Once more court was called to order and the bar screened.

Steve Morrison saw a swift exchange of glances between Matt Davis and the man to whom he had signalled. The juror nodded his head significantly. Steve stiffened in his chair. A broad smile held Matt's face.

"Looks as though they were going to get away with it," Morrison muttered.

In another moment the foreman was handing the verdict to the judge.

"Guilty of murder in the first degree," he said, as he placed the paper in Pease's hand.

A murmur ran through the crowd. Matt Davis crowded forward.

"Now maybe we'll have that necktie party," he began. "Now maybe we'll—"

A vigorous pounding by the gavel in Judge Pease's hand. A flush had crossed the old man's face. He needed no legal lore to understand the verdict and the methods behind it. He glanced at the jury and pounded once more. Then a twinkle came into his eyes.

"Gentlemen," he began in strictly judicial tones, "the Constitution of the United States and the statutes of the grand old State of Texas both provide that where a jury errs, the court can set its finding aside. You boys might mean right, but you're all wrong. I know this Steve Morrison, although I never saw him ontil the other day. I knew his daddy and the Morrisons shoot straight—all the time. They don't lie, but more 'n that, he ain't guilty for an entirely different reason. Thar weren't no murder committed. Thar's a daid man thar, with a shooting iron still in his hand, but—"

"I suppose he committed suicide," Matt Davis snarled, "I suppose—"

"Yuh plumb took the words out of my mouth, Matthew," Judge Pease returned. "Anybody that tries to beat either young Steve or Old Steve Morrison on the draw jes' naturally commits suicide. That's my judgment, gentlemen. Case is adjourned. All hands will stampede to the bar for licker."

Half a cheer greeted the old man's words, but a growl went through the gang that surrounded Matt Davis. Their eyes were fixed on Steve Morrison as he arose and stepped to the table where his six-guns had been placed. He belted them on slowly and then elbowed his way to where Davis stood.

"Well, Matt," the big cowboy hawed, "you missed fire again. What's the next move?"

"You'll see," Davis answered; "you ain't through with the law yet. That old fool who says he's a judge can't get away with anything like that.

You're going to taste the law and when you do—"

"Right with you, Matt," Steve broke in, "only this time we'll make it lead law, savvy? You and me'll go out there in the street and the one that can get back here on his own feet wins the judgment."

The shadowed eyes of the bad man glowed.

"Think yuh can beat me to the draw, huh?"

"No—we'll have the judge give the signal, all fair and reg'lar, and then, six-guns'll be our lawyers and do the arguing."

A yell greeted this suggestion. The crowd was keyed for action and had been disappointed in Judge Pease's decision, but now—lead law would have its day in court. But it was Matt Davis who appealed to the judge this time. Dueling was against the law, he declared. Judge Pease stopped serving the thirsty jurors and witnesses to consider the argument. A moment of silence while they awaited his word.

"Trial by battle is one of the oldest Anglo-Saxon relics," the self-appointed jurist declared. "The Good Book has heaps of precedents. Nope, Matt, I reckon you's elected to stand trial. I'll see thar ain't no tricks nor funny business, but—that's my decision. The court'll adjourn to Main Street jes' as soon as the gentlemen pouch their drinks."

The little town of Langtry tingled as the word spread that Matt Davis and Steve Morrison were going to shoot it out. Crowds sought points of safety where they could witness the duel. As Steve stepped out onto the rickety sidewalk, he saw Mildred McArthur. The girl rushed toward him, tears showing in her eyes.

"Don't worry none at all, Milly," he broke in. "It's going to be all right. Did yuh bring them yearlings in I spoke to yuh about?"

"Yes, they're down in the corral. But, Steve—he'll kill you and then I won't have anyone—"

"You'll have me, Milly—right from now on. Jes' soon as I get through arguing with this hombre."

Judge Pease had again doffed his white apron and donned the long tailed black coat of judicial office. It was his ceremonial costume. He called Steve and Matt Davis before him and demanded their guns for inspection. Each man was allowed six shots. No more. Their belts containing extra cartridges would be left with him. They must take positions at each end of the long hitch rack before his place of business. At the dropping of a handkerchief, they would advance, shooting at will.

"But remember, gents, only six shots. Don't squander yore lead. It might be onhealthy."

Mildred McArthur watched Steve take his position. She held a handkerchief to lips to dam back the cry that threatened to surge out. For a moment she considered leaping between the combatants and stopping the duel. Then she realized the futility of such an act. Her eyes flicked to where Judge Pease was standing, looking first at Steve and then Matt Davis.

"All right, gents," he boomed, as his handkerchief fluttered to the ground. "May the best man win!"

Matt Davis leaped forward. His six-gun blazed as his booted feet kicked up the dust in the unpaved street. Another shot before he had gone six feet. A scream from Mildred, a cry she could not stifle, but in the high excitement of the moment, none heard. Steve Morrison was moving forward, slowly, methodically. He had not fired. His steps were long, but deliberate. Matt Davis slowed his impetuous rush after the third shot.

"What the matter, Matt?" Morrison taunted. "Ain't yuh eager?"

An oath and the man fired again. He had only two shots left and Steve Morrison had not used a cartridge.

"Nervous, huh? Kind o' gun shy?"

Steve drawled, still stalking forward. "Maybe this ain't yore range. Wait ontil I get a mite closer and mebbe you'll hit me."

"Damn yore hide, I'll hit yuh now," Davis swore.

He aimed deliberately and fired again. A slight stagger as the bullet crashed into Steve's left arm, but he regained his balance and continued.

"Ef yuh know any prayers, Matt," Steve was saying, "yuh'd better start 'em 'cause—"

A yell and Matt fired. The shot went entirely wild and Davis stood, hesitating in the middle of the street, an empty six-gun in his hand. Then he flung it into the dust.

A frantic signal to men in the crowd standing close to Davis and a loaded six-gun was tossed out. Matt grasped it and turned to meet the cowboy.

"Crooked to the last, huh?" Morrison shouted, "A sidewinder first, last and all the time. Well—"

A saffron tongue leaped from his weapon and Matt Davis dropped the shooting iron he had half raised. A grimace crossed his face. A blotch of red appeared on his forehead and he sank limply into the dusty street. A cry from the crowd, a woman's cry, filled with unpent joy. Mildred McArthur turned toward Steve, her arms outstretched. But a gesture caused her to stop and then nod with understanding.

Morrison turned to where a little knot of the leading men of the county had gathered around Judge Pease. They started to voice their congratulations, but he held up his hand.

"Gents," he began, "I wouldn't have used lead law, even on that varmint, if he and his pals hadn't tried to dry gulch me at every turn of the trail. We'd have let the judge settle everything, but they jes' naturally wouldn't play fair. Matt Davis tried to make himself tophand in this man's country by playing Pete Alberts and Rob Bentley against each other, but he got played instead.

"There's been a lot of rustling, brand working in addition to this make-belief war in which only the small ranchers got hurt. Alberts and Bentley pretended to fight each other but—they were killing off the little fellows."

"Yuh've got to prove that," Rob Bentley barked.

His hands were on his guns, but he saw Steve's weapon flick toward him and he dropped his arms to his sides.

"Now this brand working," Steve went on, "was done with rings instead of reg'lar irons. They used two and a half inch rings for changing a Circle-Cross to an Eight-Bar-Eight. I got Jim Dolan, the blacksmith, to make me some, jes' a quarter inch smaller. I put them in these rustling hombres saddle bags and—Down in the hoss corral are some critturs that have jes' been marked. See and believe and then look up the records of the Eight-Bar-Eight and you'll find that Pete Alberts and Rob Bentley are registered owners of—"

A yell as the two men leaped toward Steve Morrison. Their six-guns flamed, but hands nearby jerked their arms down before they could aim. In another moment they were bound and being led toward the little adobe jail to await trail by jury instead of lead law.

"Wall," said Judge Pease, as the excitement ebbed, "I reckon I'd better get on my apron. Everybody'll be pow'ful thirsty after all this ruckus and—"

"Jes' keep that long tailed coat on a minute more, won't yuh?" Steve Morrison whispered into the old man's ear. "Milly McArthur don't like the idea of being married by a jedge wearing a white apron."

HELL FOR RANSOM

By WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

Author of "Banjo Boy," "Powder Monkey," etc.

SUPERINTENDENT MAYHEW, in his creaky swivel, rattled his evening paper. His smoky eyes focused attention, with vast effort, on the news of the day. The widespread activities of kidnappers screamed at him from an assortment of black type displays. He was conscious of Train Master Joseph Lynch, bland and rotund, posing at the front window with one scuffed toe resting on the sill. He wished he could be oblivious to the object of the train master's surveillance —a tall, round-eyed gentleman on the depot platform below.

Mayhew read about a desperate search for a girl who had been snatched in southern Indiana. He thought about Engineman Wylie Wyndham Lewis—the gentleman on the platform—and his stomach muscles twitched. The front page told him somebody'd paid a hundred thousand to get somebody else back. His conscience told him he'd better send Lynch to bring Lewis up before it was too late.

Observing that Mr. Lynch had not relaxed his vigil, the super said, "Still down there, Joe?" He nodded beyond the window.

Mr. Lynch said, "You couldn't move him with a wreckin' crane."

Mr. Mayhew immediately assumed the look of a man who would do or die, and went to the window to stand beside his aide. Engineman Lewis, flawlessly attired in well pressed serge, could be seen reclining against an empty baggage truck, taking, at the moment, a very close interest in his finger nails. A spotless gray hat, a gleaming collar and a deep orange necktie with breast pocket kerchief to match attested, with a loud note of gaiety, to Mr. Lewis's sartorial elegance.

The super scowled. "Think he'll go through with it, Joe?" he demanded.

Joe thought so. "You know what he's capable of. I'd put him back to work. You ain't got a thing on him, an' you know it."

Mr. Mayhew knew it all too well. Which was the cause of his perturbation. He pointed at the recumbent figure.

"That hyena, Joe!" Apoplexy threatened as Mr. Mayhew purpled. "That hyena! It was him put us in that mess with the safety inspector. It couldn't've been anybody else but him. Nobody else's got a mind so weak and low as to get playful when we got a safety expert on our hands."

"Look, Al," Train Master Lynch said with infinite patience. "If you could prove it was Dirty Lewis who loosened certain nuts an' bolts in Elmer Penny's caboose so when the safety expert started expertin' the caboose started to come to pieces, it'd be different. If you could prove

Some Train Crews Wondered What Was the Use of Engineman Wylie Wyndham Lewis Along the Right of Way

Lewis replaced the chemical in Elmer's fire extinguisher with valve oil——"

"Prove it!" The super waved his arms. "Gimme time, and I'll prove it."

"Give you time, yeh. But you got a first class engineer outta service, without pay while you're tryin' to make a suspicion stick, an' Lewis knows you can't get away with it. That's why——"

"Listen, Joe." The smoky eyes narrowed. "You think he'll actually tie into the operating vice president with his grievance?"

MR. LYNCH did. "He ain't been on that baggage truck most of the day just to sun himself. Vice President Bagley's due here on No. 3 at seven tonight. Lewis told us this mornin' he'd give us until seven to make up our minds an' put him back to work, or he'd climb on Bagley's car with his tale of woe. He knows Bagley's meetin' his huntin' companion to go to his lodge up North for a month's shootin' an' rest, but that ain't stoppin' Dirty Lewis. If you want me to go down an' get Dirty, an' tell him we're sorry an' we're reinstatin'——"

"Naw!" The super's snort was terrific. "He's not gonna bluff me. Let him see Bagley. Bagley'll kick him off his car."

The train master's countenance assumed an "it's-your-own-funeral" expression. He hunched his round shoulders. "An' what if we do find out it was Lewis that got funny in Elmer's caboose? All you can do is hand him a little discipline——"

"I can tie a can to him," Mr. Mayhew growled. He was fully conscious that he spoke of one of the best locomotive runners he had ever known—a man as capable and as fearless as they came. But he was fed up. Dirty Lewis's jokes had nettled and embarrassed him before. This business with the safety inspector was the end.

The train master's moon face broke into a slow grin. "My hunch, Al, is you'll get rid of Lewis only by sudden death or old age retirement." His eyes fell across the black lines on the evening paper. "Of course," he pointed to the type, "if you could find a coupla kidnap boys——"

Mr. Mayhew said, "Yeah? I wouldn't wanna do 'em a dirty trick."

LATE that afternoon, three young men sat at a table in a boarded-up house. They glanced at one another with hard, shifty eyes. They were all in their early twenties. There was nervous eagerness about them.

Gordie, who had just come in, crushed out his cigarette. He was slim and tough, and his voice was a sideshow barker's.

Max, the dark, tense runt on Gordie's right, said, "O. K.?"

"O. K." Gordie leaned forward. "Easy. Like that." He snapped slim fingers. "Nothin' to do but follow my layout like I got it doped. Like a railroad time table. Everything fittin'."

"There ain't no mob on his car with him?" Louie asked. He was the largest of the trio, big-boned and shallow-featured.

"Only the nigger porter," Gordie said. His voice came from the left-side droop of his thin lips. "No stenos, clerks or nothin'. Just Bagley an' the smoke. I'll say it's sweet. Made to order." He lit a cigarette and exhaled through his thin nostrils. It ought to be sweet. It was his own idea. It was his first big job, and he wasn't the kind to play a piker's game. This Bagley was a big shot, the operating ace of the railroad, and worth a couple millions by marriage. The railroad wouldn't hesitate to pay. Fifty thousand dollars? Fifty grand? Gordie was letting them off cheap.

"It's gettin' darker," Max said. "Maybe if we'd go over the dope——"

Gordie put two diagrams on the table, roughly drawn on envelopes. One represented the floor plan of a railroad business car. The other was obviously a detailed drawing of a street, an alley and some railroad tracks. He pointed with a pencil.

"Now you, Louie," Gordie said. "When we drive up an' park the car here in the alley, you an' me come around here——"

His voice dropped to a tense whisper.

ENGINEMAN Wylie Wyndham Lewis possessed the demeanor of a vastly innocent and greatly injured man. His round, mild eyes were wistful and his not unhandsome countenance was deceptively without guile. Even the appellative, Dirty, applied in derisive familiarity by his fellows, seemed utterly incongruous against the spotlessness of his raiment. That behind this innocuous exterior burned a mania for embarrassing others by means of jokes which were funny to none but Mr. Lewis, seemed entirely too absurd even to imagine.

Dirty cast one last glance at Superintendent Mayhew's lighted window. Knowing the grizzled division boss as he did, Dirty was well aware that Mayhew would die before he would send for his engineer and tell him all was well. Dirty had no qualms about walking innocently into the presence of Vice President Bagley. He entertained no belief that Mr. Bagley would even so much as listen to him. But he knew that, beyond the oblong patch of light, on the upper wall of the depot, Superintendent Mayhew was being very uncomfortable over the prospect.

A glow in the east grew brighter. A whistle call broke over the yards in a prolonged wail. No. 3, presently, materialized behind the silver blade of headlight into a long black and yellow chain of glowing windows. Dust swirled up from the wheel line.

Dirty immediately turned his steps eastward along the main track. He saw the distant aureole of the yard engine coming onto the hind end of the train to take off the vice president's traveling office. A scattering of passengers from the rear Pullmans came jogging along carrying their bags, picking their way over the cinders. The yard engine snorted and backed away with the car attached. Lanterns swung high in signals. A switch light turned.

The spur where private business cars were spotted, paralleled the main track to Dirty's right as he walked. And just across the spur was a little used alley flanked by several old barns. A shabby street led away from it.

Dirty was on the front steps of the car almost before the yard engine, having set it where it belonged, started to back away. He climbed into the vestibule, opened the screen door and stood in the dining compartment. There was a half cleared table and a song from the kitchen indicated, along with a rattle of dishes, the activities of the vice president's porter.

The ordinary cinder-bitten employee would have stood there trembling, mouth dry and throat tight, fearful of the next move. Mr. Lewis was, in no sense, ordinary. He didn't even bother to summon the porter to announce his presence. He took off his hat, advanced to the corridor and passed to the rear end. He was all ready with his speech of grievance, and the cloak of innocence had so deepened on his features as to deceive the hardest heart.

There was nothing in the rear but a lamp burning dimly on a table. Dirty turned his attention to the office section which opened off the middle of the corridor. He looked in at the open door. A brief case, packed and strapped shut, was on the desk. He advanced a step inside and stared about. A furrow came down the center of his brow. He leaned against a filing cabinet to decide whether he should make himself at home in here, or go out to the rear compartment to wait. Bagley certainly must be on board. Probably in the sleeping or bath division.

Dirty was still leaning against the cabinet when he heard the porter's song go into a half scream, then die altogether. There was a thud. Dirty half turned to the door.

ALL innocence went out of his stare, and most all the feeling out of his bones. He was looking at a gentleman in a dark hat which somewhat shadowed wide, shallow features. The gentleman

held a gun. Dirty extended his neck a foot and gulped painfully.

"No trick moves," the man with the gun said. "Just turn around an' face the wall. One peep outta yuh, an'——"

"Hey!" It wasn't exactly a peep when Dirty found his voice. Nor did he turn around. He said, "Hey! What the hell's ——"

Then he said, "Wun-nf!" The gun had suddenly taken him deep in the stomach.

"I said keep your mouth shut!" Another jab.

Dirty decided whatever kind of joke it was, he shouldn't try to talk. He thought of the scream and wondered if it were a joke after all.

Another man appeared in the door, a slim, hard man whose lips twisted down at the corner where his voice came out.

"Got his bag?" this second man asked in a raspy bass, pitched low.

"Don't see none," the big fellow said.

"What's this?" the other picked up the brief case. "This's O. K. Where he's goin' he won't need a nightie. Get him to the car."

Dirty didn't want to go to any car. He protested. "If you guys'll listen——"

They didn't want to listen. They prodded him sharply. He decided he'd better go.

One of them slapped his hat on cockeyed. Dirty reached up to set it straight and got a bang on the arm. They shoved him through the rear door. They pushed him down into the darkness. He thought he might make a break for it here. They probably thought so, too. One got him by the arm and held onto him.

"If you think this's funny," Dirty growled, "I sure as hell——"

"You don't hear us laughin', do you?" from the darkness behind him. "You keep that trap shut or it'll be awful sad for you. Lilies an' things."

A gun poked him vulgarly and he did a little skip step.

"I'll betcha, by hell," Dirty retorted, "I'll make you birds——"

They made him shut up by virtue of an ungentle slap across the mouth. And then the dark hulk of an automobile loomed in the shadows. Dirty held back a little as the rear door swung open. He was shoved in on his face without ceremony. He heard a voice from the wheel say, "O. K.?" and then one of his captors said "O. K."

THE motor started, the car moved. Big hands fumbled over his head and eyes.

"We ain't gonna hurt you, Mr. Bagley," the raspy voice said. "We just——"

"Bagley! Bagley!" Dirty's throat tightened. "I—hey! You ain't got Bagley. I'm not Bag——"

"We know," the rasp laughed. "Oh, sure. You're just his office boy. Yeh. Listen, Bagley. We been watchin' your moves a whole month. We had a man in Minneapolis doin' nothin' but keepin' tabs on you, see? When you left for Montana we knew all about it. Now you be gentle an' quiet, an' nothin's gonna happen."

They were tying up his eyes, slipping a cloth over his mouth, binding his wrists behind him. He was cramped on the floor in back, with the raspy voice leaning just above him.

"Nothin'll happen, see?" the voice droned on. "The railroad's gonna get a chance to show just how much it appreciates you. Fifty thousand worth. If the railroad don't think you're worth that much——"

Dirty, at this point, began to realize that the situation was somewhat serious. He was also aware that the kidnappers would find out their mistake tomorrow or the next day when they went to make deman-

for Mr. Bagley's return. They might be so disgusted with themselves for their blunder that they'd shoot him just to relieve their feelings. He could understand how the youthful racketeers might make the mistake unless one of them at least knew Bagley by close contact. Bagley and Engineman Lewis were built alike and resembled enough facially to be taken for brothers. Dirty had been told this more than once. Well, he could only pray for the best. No use trying to talk 'em out of it. In fact, with that cloth over his mouth, there wasn't any use to try to talk at all. He'd see what he could do about things tomorrow.

DIRTY didn't have to wait that long. The car stopped after what seemed an hour or an hour and a half of alternate smooth and rough going. He was shoved through thick growth that scratched his face and hands. And then he felt a floor under his feet, heard a door close and was thrust down on some iron springs. Cords went about his ankles, and finally the gag came off.

A candle burned on a small table. Dirty found himself on a naked bed. He could see the three young, tough mugs looking him over.

"Didn't like to be rough with you, Bagley," the raspy one said. "You can talk now. All you damn please. Nobody to hear you but us."

"You say it's fifty thousand you're gonna ask for me?" Dirty queries. A plan was beginning to work in a brain that was noted for some of the most awe-inspiring and demoniacal plans ever devised in the field of practical joking.

Had either of these three gentlemen any knowledge of what that vast innocence now growing on their victim's face by the second meant——

"Fifty thousand," said Gordie. "An' we better get it, or——"

"You'll get it," Dirty said. But——" the plan was beginning to whirl itself into shape, and there was only the barest chance it would work "—I was thinkin'. Maybe if I helped you along a little I'd get away from here that much quicker." If these boys took the bait it ought to be a good one on Mayhew. He turned his innocent eyes upon them.

"Now you're talkin' sensible," the man called Max growled.

The three exchanged glances.

"How you gonna make the demand, an' who you makin' it to?" Dirty asked.

"Well," Gordie said, "I kinda had it doped out I'd write a letter——"

"You want the money, don't you?" Dirty demanded.

"Sure, but——"

"Don't write letters. You read the papers. Letters get kidnappers in trouble. I can tell you a way to go about this——" He left his words in the air. "It's your show, though. I'm—I'm just supposed to be the victim."

The three held a huddled conference at the far end of the room. Then they came out of it and approached the bed. Gordie spoke:

"If you got a plan to speed this up, we'll listen. That ain't sayin' we're gonna foller it. You talk, an' we'll do the decidin'. If you'll open up——"

Dirty eased himself against the wall and began to speak.

SUPERINTENDENT MAYHEW came out of a sound sleep with a sudden start that sent his heart pounding. He couldn't say whether he heard a movement. Something, he told himself, was cockeyed. He started to reach for his bed lamp, felt human flesh and jerked his hand away. A sharp gasp escaped him.

The light went on and he blinked first at the barrel of a gun and then at the strange tableau at his bedside. The man with the gun was masked. Next to him stood Train Master Joseph Lynch with a gag in his mouth and his hands tied up. On the other side of Mr. Lynch two white eyes rolled about in a very black face and the dark porter from the vice president's

car seemed close to the color of ashes. Like the train master, the porter, too, was gagged.

The gunman spoke quietly, his voice low. He said:

"All you do, Mayhew, is lay there an' listen."

There was no speech left in the super's throat. This must be a nightmare. It couldn't be a robbery. Otherwise Joe Lynch——

"Wh—what's it all about, Joe?" the super demanded weakly. He tried to raise himself on one elbow.

The gunman poked the barrel into his stomach.

"I'll tell you," the gunman said. "It's about Bagley. If your railroad cares about seein' him again, it'll cost you fifty thousand. I'll give you forty-eight hours to get it in. Small bills an' not marked. An' when you get the money you'll hear from us on what to do with it."

"But—but—Bagley's on his vacation," Mayhew sputtered. "You're crazy, man. He—he's gone north to his lodge. He ——"

"Bagley's where he don't need any vacation," the gunman broke in. "An' don't think I'm crazy, see? If you do, look at these." He tossed letters on the sheet, taken from Bagley's brief case. "An' when I get through with you, ask the porter who boarded his car an' slugged him an' took Bagley off. I rounded 'em up for you so the porter could tell you his story, an' so's you'd have Mayhew as a witness. We took Bagley six hours ago. You got forty-eight hours, or you get Bagley's head back in a box. Roll over on your tummy."

"But—but we haven't got any note demandin'——"

"No. We don't write notes. They get a man in trouble. Roll over."

Mr. Mayhew rolled over. He was securely tied up, and Lynch and the negro were tied with him. The masked visitor turned out the light and silently vanished.

THE trio was released a little after daylight by the train crew caller who said somebody called him on the telephone and told him the super wanted him at once and to go right to the super's room.

It was five minutes before Mayhew could get both feet on the earth and restore some semblance of calm to his large person. Then he questioned the porter backwards and forwards. The porter, before the super finished with him, had described a masked army swarming in and over the car, and even went so far as to allow his imagination to picture Vice President Bagley as screaming and pleading with his abductors.

Through all of the mad babbling, Mayhew tried to picture Engineman Wylie Wyndham Lewis, and wondered what had happened to the engineer. He sent Joe Lynch to find Dirty and bring that gentleman to the office. Then he reached for the telephone and put in a long distance call to Minneapolis, asking to speak with President Wishard personally. Yes, he told the operator, get the high officer out of bed.

It was a cool morning in the Montana mountains, but Mayhew perspired as he heard the Minneapolis operator tell him to go ahead. He blurted out the information about the kidnapping and paused.

"You're sure about this?" the crisp voice from more than a thousand miles away demanded. "You're positive?"

"I tell you the kidnapper brought my train master right into my room in the middle of the night. If you'll tell me what you think I ought to do——"

"I'll come out there. Charter a plane. Keep your shirt on till I show up."

"How about the police?" Mayhew queried. "This gun artist told me it'd be all off if I mentioned it to the cops——"

"Say nothing to anyone till I show up. Keep that porter where he can't talk. Caution your train master."

Mr. Mayhew wiped the sweat away. He did some mental calculating. The train arrived at seven sharp. Bagley's hunting

companion would have been there to meet him. What had happened to that chap? Where was the station wagon he would have used to take Bagley north to Cordova where the two would have hired a boat for a hundred-mile push farther northward over lakes and rivers to the vice president's isolated lodge?

He called Cordova, sixty miles away, and asked for the boat landing. He inquired over the sleepy voice that answered, if Bagley's man had been seen.

The reply was that Bagley's man had gone down yesterday. He had not come back because he hadn't chartered the boat.

At that point Train Master Lynch came in with a hopeless countenance.

"Lewis," he moaned. "Musta got poor Lewis, too. Not a trace of him. Ain't been to his room. Bed ain't been slept in. It's lookin' bad, Al. I wouldn't be surprised if we don't hear of somebody findin' a coupla bodies in the weeds somewheres, an' it'll be Lewis an' the lodge caretaker. Lord, Al, when I said sudden death was the only way you'd be likely to get rid of Dirty——"

"Don't—don't let's think about it, Joe." The super trumpeted into his kerchief.

PRESIDENT WISHARD arrived in Harbison at ten o'clock that night, a little more than twenty-four hours after the sensational abduction. He immediately went into conference in his hotel suite with the Messrs. Mayhew and Lynch and heard the repetition of their story. They produced the Negro whose tale, with the hours, had grown exceedingly lurid.

"My hunch," the super said after numerous questions had been asked and answered, "is we ought to get the police busy on this before it gets too cold."

"Bum hunch," the president snapped. He was a short, gray man with clipped speech. He was flawlessly tailored and well manicured. "No, gentlemen. Looks like carefully worked out plan to me. Somebody's had his eye on Bag's moves. Knew Bag's habits. Pretty desperate lot, perhaps. Look here."

President Wishard produced the evening paper. He pointed to the black line. It said, "Kidnap Victim's Body Found After Ransom Hoax."

"These desperadoes," the president snapped. "They're getting worse. They don't fool with you. No. We'll get the money. In the morning. Wait and see what they tell us to do with it. Then we'll follow instructions. We'll call in our chief of railroad police and confide to him. Nobody else. We'll take our chance on capturing 'em after the money's paid and we get Bag back."

"But how about our engineer an' this other guy?" Mr. Lynch wanted to know. "We oughta start a search for 'em in case they're hurt or dead."

"Start it," Wishard shot. "Don't say anything about kidnappers."

ENGINEMAN LEWIS lingered over his milk. The large gentleman with the flat features stood behind him with his gun between Dirty's shoulder blades. He sat at the small table in the dark room, his hands free. They always untied his hands when they fed him which was twice a day. About nine in the morning and seven or seven-thirty at night. They fed him sandwiches and milk which they brought in quart bottles. A line of dirty bottles stood against the farther wall.

Dirty smacked his lips and ran his hand over the stubble on his chin. Gordie and Max sat on the coverless bed.

"The other idea I gave you, it worked out all right, didn't it?" Dirty demanded, turning to Gordie. "It worked a hell of

a lot better'n a letter, an' you got quick service, didn't you?"

Gordie admitted he did.

"Sure," Dirty said. "Walkin' in on people like that beats a letter all to hell. Now, about collectin' the money and gettin' me outta here——"

"What about collectin' it?" Gordie demanded. His eyes were hard in the flickering candle light.

"If you wanna know a safe, sure way," Dirty suggested, "I thought maybe——"

"I ain't promisin' it's better'n my way," Gordie snapped. "Spill it."

Dirty submitted in silence while Louie tied his wrists at his back again.

"You say the president's in town?" Dirty queried.

"Got in last night," Gordie admitted.

"You could call on him tonight," Dirty mused. "Like you called on Mayhew. An' take that little black satchel you got with you. Just sorta drop in on Mr. Wishard after he's gone to bed at the hotel, an' tell him he can put the fifty grand in the bag tomorrow. He won't have it on him tonight, that's sure."

"How about the cops?" Gordie demanded.

"Maybe it's a trap," Max said nervously.

"Listen," Dirty said. "If Wishard's told the cops it'd be in the papers by now. No cops. Now, about the dough. Tell him to put it in that bag, an' hand it to the baggageman on No. 8 tomorrow night at Harbison. That's at 7:45."

Dirty let their hard eyes gaze on a countenance as innocent of guile as that of a child.

"So what?" Gordie prompted.

"Wishard's to instruct the baggageman to get off at Mile Post 939. Have him tell the engineer to stop there. That's open country. You could see a bull a mile if they put any out to watch what happens."

"Mile Post 939," Gordie said.

"The baggageman gets out of his car with his bag there an' sets it on the gravel. He gets back on an' signals the engineer."

"An' I walk up," Gordie said, "an' pick up the bag an' fall over into the arms of a dozen dicks."

"No," Dirty said with an injured air, "you couldn't do that, because you're on No. 8. You're on the baggage rods, underneath. You got a stiff hooked wire. When the baggageman sets the bag down an' climbs back on, you reach out with your wire an' hook the handle. When the train starts, you pull it in to you. Six miles east the train'll stop at a grade crossing with another pike. You unload there. You got the money. You come back here an' let me go. That's simple. That's all you gotta do."

"Sounds lousy to me," Max said. "Too simple."

They went out to the next room after putting Dirty on the bed. They kept his feet bound securely.

Dirty lay in the dark and suppressed a quiet chuckle. He thought about the row of milk bottles and the large boned gentleman who acted as his keeper. If Gordie only followed his suggestions, now —he heard the outer door of the next room slam. Then the rumble of a motor starting. He went to sleep.

THE hours of the next day seemed endless to Engineman Lewis, alias Vice President Bagley in Charge of Operations. Louie fed him at nine in the morning. Sandwiches. Always sandwiches and milk. Louie left a paper for him to look at. He could only read the first page. He couldn't turn the pages over. The first page said nothing about the kidnapping. It was the third day.

About the middle of the afternoon Dirty heard loud voices following the slamming of a door in the adjoining room. He held his breath and listened. A word now and then came to him, caused him to stiffen, to narrow his innocent eyes.

"All over the front page . . . headlines . . . says the cops trying to find out what

it's all about . . . President Wishard won't tell the cops anything . . . nothin' to be scared of now."

Dirty didn't quite agree. He took it that somebody had talked and the local police were trying to get into the case for the glory of it. Maxie and Gordie certainly sounded excited about it. He waited for them to call on him.

The day faded and the door remained locked. Darkness fell and there was no sound in the house.

Dirty slipped his feet over the side of the bed. He dropped to his knees on the floor and backed up against the bed rail until his fingers could feel over the rust-eaten edge ragged as the teeth of a saw. He had discovered this ages ago, it seemed. Now he adjusted his wrists against the rail and started an easy sawing motion.

Slowly, steadily, he continued. His ears were trained for any sound outside. This job had to be completed before Louie came with supper. Maybe Louie wouldn't come. He kept on doggedly.

Dirty could only guess at the time. He could see, in the darkness, the slim form of Gordie swinging onto the baggage car rods. He could see the stop at the mile post. His wrists kept going back and forth. The milk bottles against the wall were barely visible in the deep gloom.

Gordie would have Max pick him up in the car. What if they didn't come back here for him, to release him? Dirty didn't like the thought. He peered through the gloom. The last trace of the bottles was gone from vision. His wrists chafed where the metal touched them.

It was still outside and sounds seemed magnified. A freight engine whistled in the distance. He wondered how far from Harbison he was. He heard a noise that sounded like someone fumbling at the latch of the outer door. His wrists, suddenly, fell apart.

Half numbed fingers attacked the cords at his ankles wtih breathless haste. The door in the next room slammed and Louie's heavy tread sounded on the bare boards. Dirty picked the knot and felt the cords loosen.

"Hope you're not gettin' weak, Bagley," Louie's voice from beyond the door.

"Hope not," Dirty said in the darkness. "Not too weak." He groped along the wall silently, his fingers closing about the neck of a bottle.

"The boys'll be back soon an' then we'll shake an' part," Louie at the door now, key grating in the lock.

Dirty flattened himself against the wall. He was glad Louie packed a big gun. He spat in his right hand and gripped the bottle harder.

SUPERINTENDENT MAYHEW held the lighter over for President Wishard's sixth cigar since No. 8's departure with the black bag filled with money. The president turned on Maloney, the superintendent of the railroad police. The president said:

"Well, if we don't get Bagley back, it'll be your fault. Certainly played it dumb. After I told you not to let it get to the papers."

"It wasn't my fault," Maloney defended weakly. "It was the local police. When I told 'em this noon I wanted to use 'em in confidence, they hadda go blab. An' then when you denied there was anything wrong —well, it wasn't my fault."

"The kidnappers," Mayhew said, looking up at the clock which pointed eleven, "they got their dough around eight-fifteen. If they had any intention of getting Bagley back to us tonight he ought to be here by now."

"I got every road watched," Maloney boasted. "We'll let 'em bring him in, but we won't let 'em get away."

"Umph!" the president snorted. "Suppose you think they'll bring him in with a brass band."

It was the door banging inward that caused them to turn. It was what they saw that brought them to their feet. The president bellowed:

"Bag! Bag, old boy! My God, we just thought they wouldn't turn you loose. You all right, Bag?"

Vice President Bagley looked extremely well. He seemed quite breathless.

"What the hell's going on here, Wishey?" Mr. Bagley demanded. "What's this about kidnap——"

"No jokes, Bag," Wishard said. "What'd they do to you?"

"Nobody did anything to me," Bagley exploded. "I've been at Jim Costain's house, three miles back of Cordova, waiting for him to finish my boat he's building for me. About supper time Jim's boy came in with this."

Bagley spread the evening paper before them. Their jaws sagged.

"But the kidnappers," Mr. Mayhew bellowed. "They even brought me letters they took from you." He laid them on the table.

"My God, what a joke!" Bagley took up an envelope. "I hope you didn't think seriously about paying any money——"

"Seriously!" President Wishard stood. "Bag, old boy, if this is a joke, the jokesters have fifty grand, as they call it, right now."

BAGLEY stared from one to the other. He blurted, "Dumb! God, but somebody's been dumb." His eyes centered on Maloney who shrugged uncomfortably. "This letter here. If somebody'd read it. It's from Anders, telling me I'd have to stay with him about a week until he finished my boat. If somebody'd read it and checked up before—— Dumb!"

"Joke!" Wishard shook his gray head. "All right, men. It's on us. Now it's up to us to get that money back."

"I got the roads blocked," Maloney insisted stubbornly. "I got the sheriff helpin'. I'll have that money by mornin' or——"

The plain clothes man, stationed in the outer office, yelling "You can't go in there," caused attention again to center on the door.

There was a brief commotion, sounds of a scuffle, and then a voice yelling:

"The hell I can't. I'm goin', ain't I?"

The Messrs. Mayhew and Lynch looked at each other gasping. They alone recognized that voice. They said together, in a sort of awed whisper, "Lewis!"

And then Engineman Wylie Wyndham Lewis came barging through the door with the plain clothes man hanging on to him and tugging at him.

Engineman Lewis's coat was in ribbons, and a bruised eye, coupled with several other marks, indicated recent combat. His face was a stubble of brown from several days without benefit of razor. His eyes were red and his hair matted. He carried a black bag resolutely, advanced into the staring group, gave the plain clothes man one mighty shove, and deposited the bag on the table.

"Lewis!" Mayhew exploded the name. There followed a rapid, "Who's this?" . . . "What's this man doing here?" . . . "Who in the name of . . ."

"Lewis," Mayhew was shouting. "What —where the hell—what you doing with that bag?"

"Ransom," Dirty said wearily. "I just been through a lotta hell for it. I brought it in."

"I say, Mayhew!" Bagley shouted. "If this is a joke——"

"Joke?" Dirty stared at the vice president. "If you call it a joke when a well-meanin' locomotive engineer gets on your car to hold a confab with you about a matter of important business, an' gets taken off his feet by a couple gunmen——"

"Wait!" The president held up both hands. "You say you're an engineer. You got snatched off Bagley's car. You better start from the beginning. Just why did you go to the car in the first place?"

SUPERINTENDENT MAYHEW spread his hands. "Gentlemen," he cried weakly. "Mr. Lewis is one of our crack runners. He went to call on Mr. Bagley on—on a matter of safety." He

signalled Dirty with his eyes which said, "You let me handle this."

Dirty stared back at him, unblinking.

"He must've got on one side while the vice president dropped off the other," Mayhew explained. He hoped Dirty wouldn't talk about that caboose business.

"I left my car," Bagley explained, "almost before the train stopped. My man was at the grade crossing in the station wagon waiting. You must've got on——"

"When the yard engine set her in the spur," Dirty said.

"What a joke on the kidnappers," Bagley howled. "But—say! Lewis! How the hell did you happen to get away with this?" He indicated the bag.

"That wasn't so funny," Dirty said, his face without guile.

"And the kidnappers——"

"Downstairs in their car," Dirty explained. "I brought 'em in, too."

"In a car?" The president turned to Maloney.

"All the way from this side of Big Wolf," Dirty said. "They're tied up. Maybe you'd better send a couple bulls down."

"Couple?" Wishard turned to the chief dick. "You'd better get an army and lock those gents up." He faced Dirty. "Lewis, here's fifty thousand dollars we owe directly to the courage, the cleverness and the boldness of a locomotive engineer—a man trained to think and about the only one who did think in this whole mess."

Dirty looked at the money.

"Financial reward would be an insult to a man like you, Lewis!"

Dirty wasn't very susceptible to insults. He wasn't sensitive.

"On behalf of the railroad—my hand!"

Dirty felt the pressure of the president's grip.

Vice President Bagley followed. He took Dirty's unwashed paw.

"I'm proud, Lewis," Bagley said. "Proud to realize we have such men as you on this railroad. I hope Mayhew can fully appreciate you."

Mr. Mayhew coughed. He said, "Oh, yes, Mr. Bagley."

Train Master Lynch stuffed his knuckle in his mouth and turned away to contemplate a map on the wall with eyes which were moist.

"Rest up," Bagley continued to Dirty. "Then go back to work. And remember—in me you've a friend."

Some minutes later, when the Messrs. Mayhew and Lynch were left to their own wise counsels, the rotund train master grinned slowly as he turned his gaze to his smoky-eyed superior.

"Well," Mr. Lynch said with vast deliberation, "it looks like kidnappin' wasn't so hot, an' certainly Lewis had a chance to come in on sudden death while those boys had him in tow. Nope, Al. My hunch is we'll have Lewis with us until old age retirements gets him."

Mr. Mayhew emitted the long, whispering sigh of those who have no hope.

THE SILENCER PROBLEM

IT is doubtful if any firearms gadget is more thoroughly misunderstood than the "silencer." In every magazine you find references to a "revolver equipped with a silencer," or a "silenced automatic." Newspapers use the terms frequently. Even police, when they fail to find anyone who heard a shot, blame it on to the use of "silencers."

This silencer problem is one great fraud.

A recent letter came in from Clyde Baker, noted author of "Modern Gunsmithing," credited with being the only textbook on that subject now available to guncranks and to the trade. Mr. Baker has made many interesting statements regarding silencers, which we are quoting herewith along with our comments.

Says Mr. Baker:

"I have fitted and attached Maxim silencers to various rifles from .22 to .45 calibre, tested, delivered, and collected for them; but I have yet to see a silencer that did much of anything in the way of silencing. I remember when I first opened my shop on the fifth floor of a loft building here, a silencer was fitted to a .22 calibre 'cat' rifle and tested out by firing about half of the length of the shop. *There was no noticeable difference in the sound of the explosion with the silencer on or with it off*, and before the five shots had been fired, the janitor came barging in to see what was the matter, stating that other tenants of the building were nervous about the shooting!

"The plain facts about silencers on rifles are: A silencer will, if the gun is fired in the 'wide open spaces' such as over the water, or in a field, reduce the report *somewhat*—but not very much. If fired against a nearby hillside, or in thick timber, there is little, if any, reduction in noise. The obstructions act as a sounding board and throw the sound right back at you. But even in the open any gun equipped with a silencer gives a good honest *'Bang,' 'Kr-rang,'* or *'Crack!'*—according to the calibre and load, and NOT the 'click of the firing pin,' or the 'dull plop' such as fiction writers love to describe. You might tell some of these lads that if they like to hear 'dull plops' they can do so only by throwing rocks in a mudhole—and NOT by firing guns—any kind of guns —equipped with silencers.

"The only thing that a silencer does, in actual fact, is to retard the distance the sound will travel, and on small calibre rifles it does that to some extent, probably making it unnoticeable at about half the distance it would normally draw attention. But to persons nearby there is no noticeable difference.

"Regarding this matter of silencers on handguns. Honestly a single shot pistol with locked breech is the ONLY handgun on which a silencer could have even slight effect—you *know* that if you stop to think. Automatic pistols operate by force of recoil; a silencer functions by retarding and slowing up the gases which cause the recoil. You change the recoil or back pressure in any automatic and the gun won't work, and that's all there is to it. And moreover, how in the nation would you attach a silencer to any Colt or similar style automatic with a slide outside the barrel? It could be done only on a Luger or Mauser—but here again the gun won't function properly.

"As to revolvers. What good would a silencer be (even if it worked) on a

gun which has an opening between the cylinder and the barrel? Fire a revolver in the dark and watch the hot gas escaping between cylinder and barrel. If you could muffle the muzzle blast completely, you'd still get the noise, and plenty of it, between barrel and cylinder.

"Finally, think of a cylinder, say 1½ by 7 inches screwed on to the business end of a gat. Ye Gawds! Try putting it into a coat pocket—or any other pocket—as we frequently hear about. Try putting it into a holster—or anything else. Then, if you've performed that miracle, try yanking it out and getting it into action in a hurry."

WE certainly appreciate these comments from Mr. Baker. But he isn't exactly correct in a couple of points. On others he didn't go into the matter deeply enough.

Essentially speaking, silencers are ineffective, but this is not entirely true. To understand this one must understand the theory of bullet noise.

There are two distinct noises originating when a firearm is fired—one the sound of the explosion of the cartridge, and the other the sound of the speeding bullet. The first, on some guns, *can be silenced*—the second can never be silenced or quieted with existing forms of bullets.

When a rifle is discharged, the hammer or firing pin explodes the priming material in the "cap" which in turn *ignites*—not EXPLODES the charge of powder. This burns rapidly—roughly about a ten-thousandth of a second being required, sometimes much more—and the result is the rapid generation of a huge volume of gas which builds up a great pressure—as much as 60,000 pounds per square inch in some of the military cartridges. That tremendously compressed gas must go somewhere—otherwise it would blow up the gun. But since it meets resistance in the sides of the barrel and the breech, it exerts pressure equally in all directions—a law of physics—and the bullet lets go. This is pushed from the mouth of the cartridge case into the rifling, and thence down the barrel and out. Thus is the pressure relieved.

Those hot, burning gases follow right along behind the bullet, and it is safe to assume that they are, at least, travelling as fast as the bullet itself when the latter emerges from the muzzle. When this volume of gas strikes the atmosphere, the report of the gun becomes audible, due to the tremendous blow. Also, this sudden blast of the gases, freeing themselves from the restraint of the barrel, causes the bulk of what we know as "recoil."

A silencer is nothing but a version of an automobile muffler and contains baffle plates with a hole through their middle. The gas expands sideways into these pockets formed by the baffles, reverses on itself, hops into the next pocket, and repeats—and so on until it reaches the muzzle of the silencer. By that time it has slowed down to a point where there is no "blast" and therefore very little noise. Meanwhile the bullet has speeded ahead, through the centre hole in the discs or baffle plates.

Like the muffler of an auto, a silencer creates back-pressure, and thus reveals the cause of the ineffectiveness of the attachment on handguns.

The Maxim people, originators of the silencer, had experimentally fitted silencers to every handgun made up to 1926 or so, when they abandoned the manufacture. The net result of their tests showed that silencers were effective on rifles and single shot pistols, because of solid breech construction, but they were impractical and practically useless on all revolvers and automatic pistols because of reasons mentioned by Mr. Baker. BUT—they *would* work on autos after a fashion. On such guns as the Luger, Mauser, and Colt and Reising—the latter two .22s—they performed, but had a bad habit of wrecking the action every once and a while because of the tremendous back pressure slamming the mechanism open too violently.

Bullet noise? This is quite important. Any bullet travelling at a velocity greater than the velocity of sound—about 1075 feet per second in still air, will make a sharp "crack." This is the theory of whip-snapping. The harder you snap the whip, the louder the crack, because the velocity of the whip tip greatly exceeds the velocity of sound. If you have ever been in the "target pits" of a rifle range and heard the bullets crack overhead, you will need no further verification of this statement. And this sound cannot be silenced.

I've heard silenced rifles work fairly

successfully—in particular a .22 Remington pump gun, and on one rifle range I saw, but did not fire, a Springfield Army Rifle. In action the heavy Springfield emitted a loud "grunt"—you could hear it, but it didn't annoy one. And the shooter claimed that it had a very greatly reduced recoil.

AS to handguns. I've seen plenty of various guns so fitted—weapons seized by police—and have witnessed the test firing of a few of them in police laboratories. It was very difficult to tell the difference in sound between a "silenced" gun, and the same arm and cartridge with the silencer removed. In a couple of other cases it was easy to tell, not because the sound was eliminated, or even reduced, but because the tone was entirely changed.

Hiram Percy Maxim invented the silencer, and his firm built them up until about 1926. In recent years the only builder of silencers has been O. H. Brown. Mr. Brown does not recommend these instruments for revolvers or automatic pistols.

Thus explodes the myth about silencers on handguns. Just one grand misunderstood fraud—mostly a figment of the imagination.

Received another letter this month from a chap who says that years ago he experimented with home-made silencers. "About the most effective one was the very simple process of putting the rifle muzzle against a feather pillow," this reader writes. "But this is often rather nasty since the pillow is inclined to leak feathers after the shot is fired. And very often the pillow catches fire.

"Another experiment I conducted," our friend continues, "was with a silencer laboriously constructed with a piece of pipe as the body. I tried it one shot—and I still have some of the pieces of that rifle around the house."

Moral: Don't experiment with home-made silencers!

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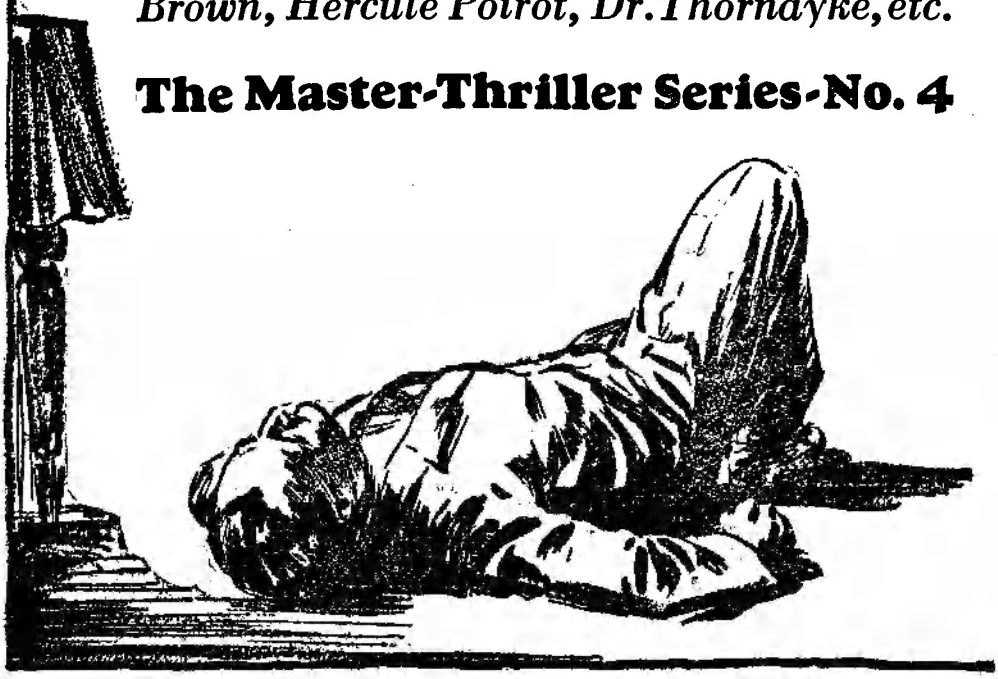

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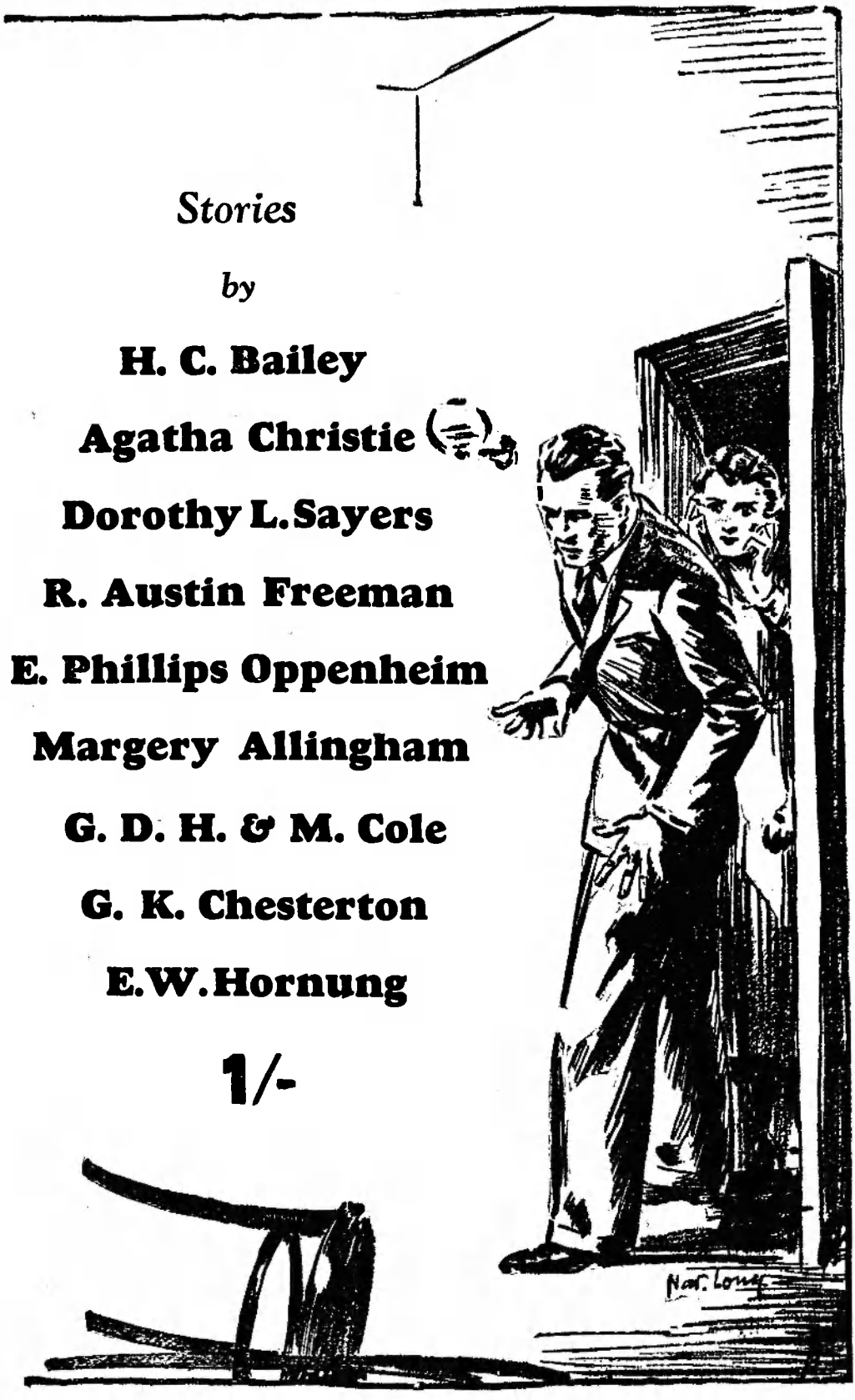

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