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Every Week

FEB. 4, 1928

Western Story

Magazine

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STREET and SMITH PUBLICATION

TESSIE OF STAR 9
BY
GEORGE GILBERT

Also Stories by
ROBERT ORMOND CASE

MAX BRAND

ROLAND KREBS
AND OTHERS

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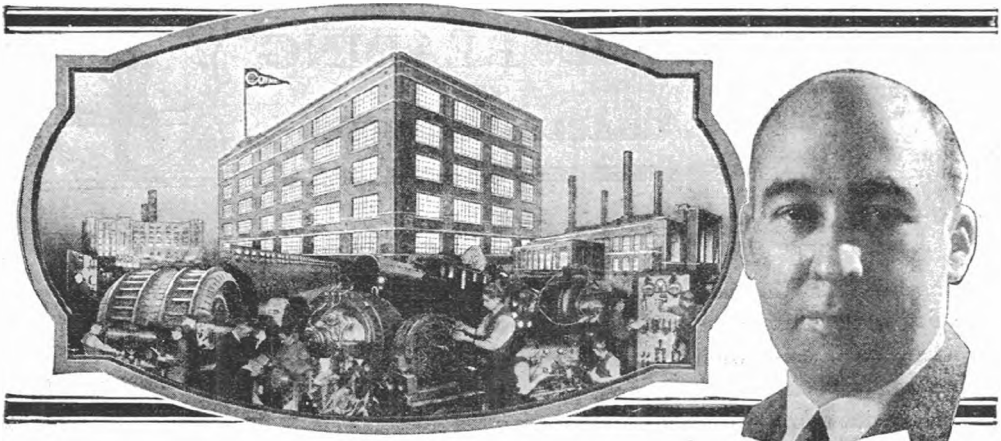

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

THERE is silence in the room. The man who is reading in the comfortable chair by the fireplace does not lift his head from the book. Through the half-opened window there comes now and then the distant wailing of a train, the sound of some belated automobile on the highroad, neighbors down the street calling good night.

So still and peaceful is this room, so quiet this reader, that one would never dream that in this very place there are wild alarms and excursions, that here indeed is the soul and center of high adventure.

To be sure, the desperate clash of armed men, the headlong pursuit of lovely maidens, ships foundering under heavy seas, horses thundering across the desolations of prairie land—all these exciting events are taking place in the active imagination of the inactive figure in the armchair. But to him, for the moment, they are reality itself. And that is the charm and the abiding lure of good fiction, that it can take a man or woman away from the routine of everyday surroundings and transport him or her to magic realms.

No one, no matter how sophisticated, how apparently unmoved by sentiment or emotion, can withstand this lure. The delights of a well-told story are democratic. They are shared by all sorts and varieties of people, in all walks of life.

Bankers and bricklayers, miners and manufacturers, Mrs. Vanderpoel of Park Avenue and Mrs. Higgins of Peoria, revel alike in the swift-moving stories told them by the masters of American fiction.

In New York, in a large building just beyond the edge of romantic Greenwich Village, is the clearing house for fiction that is typically American. One of the oldest and best-established publishing concerns in the country, Chelsea House, at 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, is recognized from coast to coast as Good Reading Headquarters. Herewith are some of its very latest offers:

STRANGE TIMBER, an Adventure Story, by Joseph Montague. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Sam Strong came riding down the tide and
yelled his message plain,
'Go to it, boys! No jackstraw pile can best
the men of Maine!
'Go to it, boys! No jackstraw pile can best
the men of Maine!'"

On this crashing refrain of the deep-chested lumberjacks opens a story whose range swings from the Northland forests and the wind-swept dunes of the little sea village of Truro, down to the heat and clamor of a South American revolution.

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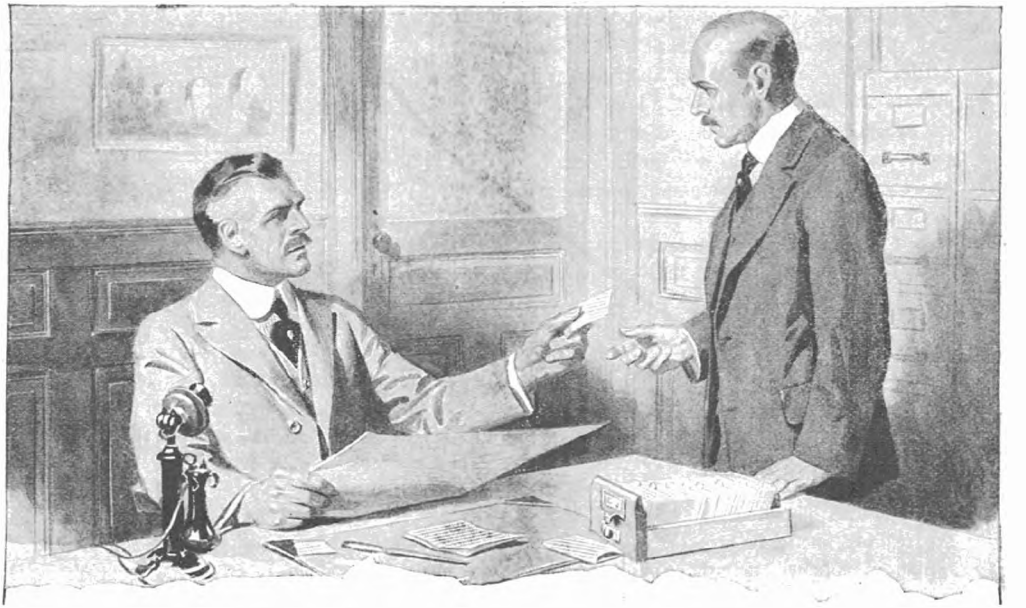

"Put Wagner on the Job!"

"I've been planning to promote him at the first opportunity. And now it's here. Watson hasn't been showing the interest in this business that I hoped he would and he's got to step down. Wagner, on the other hand, has been studying in spare time, with the International Correspondence Schools. They've been sending me his reports and I want to tell you he's doing fine. I've been watching him and he's ready. Put him in Watson's place and give him full charge of the department. And tell the cashier to see me about his salary."

Great news for Wagner. Too bad about Watson. But what can you expect?

When an executive hires a man or when he promotes a man, he can't afford to take chances. It's to his advantage to stand back of the man he feels sure will make good.

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For 35 years, the International Correspondence Schools have been helping men to win promotion and more money—to have happy, prosperous homes—to know the joy of getting ahead in business and in life.

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And, indeed, nothing did best the men of Maine, ashore or on the high seas. Their battles, and the struggle of their leader to success and the winning of the love of a girl of exceptional beauty and vitality, are elements in a story that is one of the best that has come from Mr. Montague's talented pen. Your dealer has "Strange Timber." Ask him for it on your way home to-night if you want to spend one of the most adventurous evenings of your life.

THE THUNDERBOLT'S JEST, a Detective Story, by Johnston McCulley. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

"Alias the Thunderbolt" made a hit with the reading public as sure and direct as the lightning from which its hero took his name. There arose instant demands for further chronicles of the adventures of John Flatchley and his faithful coworker, the ugly but dependable Mr. Saggs. And here, in "The Thunderbolt's Jest," is the thrilling answer to these demands. Once more we follow Flatchley and Saggs through a series of amazing adventures; once more we watch the cultured clubman change into the swift avenger who strikes terror to the hearts of cunning rogues—and then change back again. We can forgive the Thunderbolt his peculiar methods because he steals, not for the love of it, nor is he a criminal at heart. Why this man of means should steal, why he should resort to the ways of the denizens of the underworld, is revealed for those who have not met the Thunderbolt before in this gripping romance. Of course, if you already know the Thunderbolt, you will want to know him even better, and now Mr. McCulley gives you the long-awaited opportunity.

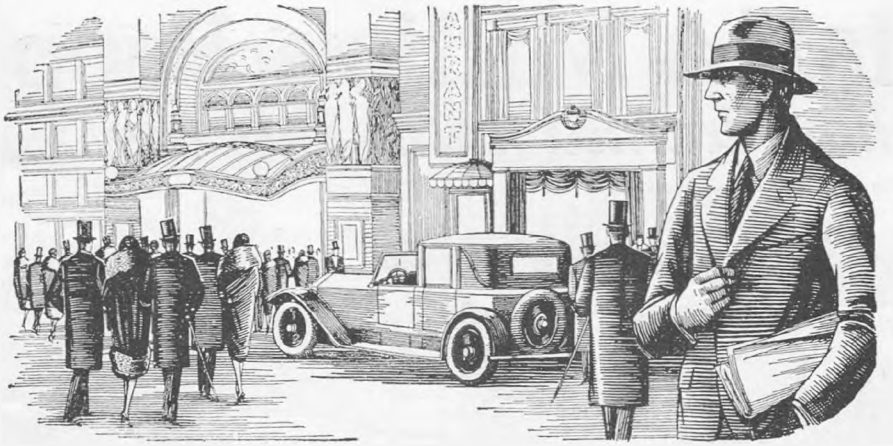
THE FLYING COYOTES, a Western Story, by Raymond S. Spears. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Strange are the motives which animate the heart of an outlaw! Unexpectedly the good which is in the worst of us comes to the surface, and the bad man becomes an ally to the forces of law and order. Such was the case with "Short Joe" Fitzgammon, a member of the hard-riding, straight-shooting, "Flying Coyotes," a band of outlaws who long had terrorized peaceful citizens. One can well imagine the amazement of the sheriff when Short Joe stepped off his motor cycle and told him that he wanted to join the sheriff in hunting down members of the band of which his father had been a leader. There follows adventure aplenty, and there is a love story, too—one of the sort that is all too rare these days.

"The Flying Coyotes" is a book for men and women who love the West and its people.

ISLAND RANCH, a Western Story, by Thomas K. Holmes. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

When an oil prospector is in the neighborhood, you can bet your best Stetson things will begin to pop. Nothing much had been going on around Island Ranch until Aleck Carter, a man with a nose for oil, showed up. Things popped then, all right. There was a fortune and a girl at stake, and the winning of them both for a brave-hearted man. Believe us or not, once at the Island Ranch, you are in the midst of such adventure as will take you far away from routine cares and worries.



Always outside of things—that's where I was just twelve short months ago. I just didn't have the cash, that was all. No theatres, no parties, no good restaurants. No real enjoyment of life. I was just getting by, just existing. What a difference to-day! I drive my own car, have a good bank account, enjoy all the amusements I please.

I Couldn't Get The Good Things of Life

Then I Quit My Job and "Found" Myself!

HOW does a man go about making more money? If I asked myself that question once, I asked it a hundred times!

I know the answer now—you bet. I know the way good money is made, and I'm making it. Gone forever are the days of cheap shoes, cheap clothes, walking home to save carfare, pinching pennies to make my salary last from one pay-day to the next one. I own one of the finest Radio stores you ever saw, and I get almost all the Radio service and repair work in town. The other Radio dealers send their hard jobs to me, so you can see how I stand in my line.

But—it's just a year ago that I was a poorly-paid clerk. I was struggling along on a starvation salary, until by accident my eyes were opened and I saw just what was the matter with me. Here's the story of just how it happened.

ONE of the big moments of my life had come. I had just popped the fatal question, and Louise said "Yes!"

Louise wanted to go in and tell her father about it right away, so we did. He sort of grunted when we told him the news, and asked Louise to leave us alone. And my heart began to sink as I looked at his face.

"So you and Louise have decided to get married," he said to me when we were alone. "Well, Bill, just listen to me. I've watched you often here at the house with Louise and I think you are a pretty good, upstanding young fellow. I knew your father and mother, and you've always had a good reputation here, too. But just let me ask you just one question—how much do you make?"

"Twenty-eight a week," I told him.

He didn't say a word—just wrote it down on a piece of paper.

"Have you any prospects of a better job or a good raise sometime soon?" he asked.

"No, sir, I can't honestly say that I have," I admitted. "I'm looking for something better all the time, though."

"Looking, eh? How do you go about it?" Well, that question stopped me.

How did I? I was willing to take a better job if I saw the chance all right, but I certainly had laid no plans to make such a job for myself. When he saw my confusion he grunted. "I thought so," he said, then he held up some figures he'd been scribbling at.

"I've just been figuring out your family budget, Bill, for a salary of twenty-eight a week. I've figured it several ways, so you can take your pick of the one you like best. Here's Budget No. 1. I figure you can afford a very small unfurnished apartment, make your payments on enough plain, inexpensive furniture to fix such an apartment up, pay your electricity, gas and water bills, buy just about one modest outfit of clothes for both of you once a year, and save three dollars a week for sickness, insurance and emergencies. But you can't eat. And you'll have to go without amusements until you can get a good substantial raise in salary."

I began to turn red as fire.

"That budget isn't so good after all," he said, glancing at me, "maybe Budget No. 2 will sound better—"

"That's enough, Mr. Sullivan," I said. "Have a heart. I can see things pretty clearly now, things I was kidding myself about before. Let me go home and think this over." And home I went, my mind in a whirl.

AT HOME I turned the problem over and over in my mind. I'd popped the question at Louise on impulse, without thinking it out. Everything Mr. Sullivan had said was gospel truth. I couldn't see anything to do, any way to turn. But I had to have more money.

I began to thumb the pages of a magazine which lay on the table beside me. Suddenly an advertisement seemed almost to leap out at my eyes, an advertisement telling of big opportunities for trained men to succeed in the great new Radio field. With the advertisement was a coupon offering a big free book full of information. I sent the coupon in, and in a few days received a handsome 64-page book, printed in two colors, telling all about the opportunities in the Radio field and how a man can prepare quickly and easily at home to take advantage of these opportunities. I read the book carefully, and when I finished it I made my decision.

What's happened in the twelve months since that day seems almost like a dream to me now. For ten of those twelve months I've had a Radio business of my own! At first, of course, I started it as a little proposition on the side, under the guidance of the National Radio Institute, the institution that gave me my Radio training. It wasn't long before I was getting so much to do in the Radio line that I quit my measly little clerical job and devoted my full time to my Radio business.

Since that time I've gone right on up, always under the watchful guidance of my friends at the National Radio Institute. They would have given me just as much help, too, if I had wanted to follow some other line of Radio besides building my own retail business, such as broadcasting, manufacturing, experimenting, sea operating, or any one of the score of lines they prepare you for. And to think that until that day I sent for their eye-opening book, I'd been wailing "I never had a chance!"

Now, I'm making real money. Louise and I have been married six months, and there wasn't any kidding about budgets by Mr. Sullivan when we stepped off, either. I'll bet that today I make more money than the old boy himself.

Here's a real tip. You may not be as bad off as I was. But, think it over—are you satisfied? Are you making enough money, at work that you like? Would you sign a contract to stay where you are now for the next ten years, making the same money? If not, you'd better be doing something about it instead of drifting.

This new Radio game is a live-wire field of golden rewards. The work, in any of the 20 different lines of Radio, is fascinating, absorbing, well paid. The National Radio Institute—oldest and largest Radio home-study school in the world—will train you inexpensively in your own home to know Radio from A to Z and to increase your earnings in the Radio field.

Take another tip—No matter what your plans are, no matter how much or how little you know about Radio—clip the coupon below and look their free book over. It is Radio Institute, Dept. 2-A, Washington, D. C. filled with interesting facts, figures, and photos, and the information it will give you is worth a few minutes of anybody's time. You will place yourself under no obligation—the book is free and is gladly sent to anyone who wants to know about Radio. Just address J. E. Smith, President, National

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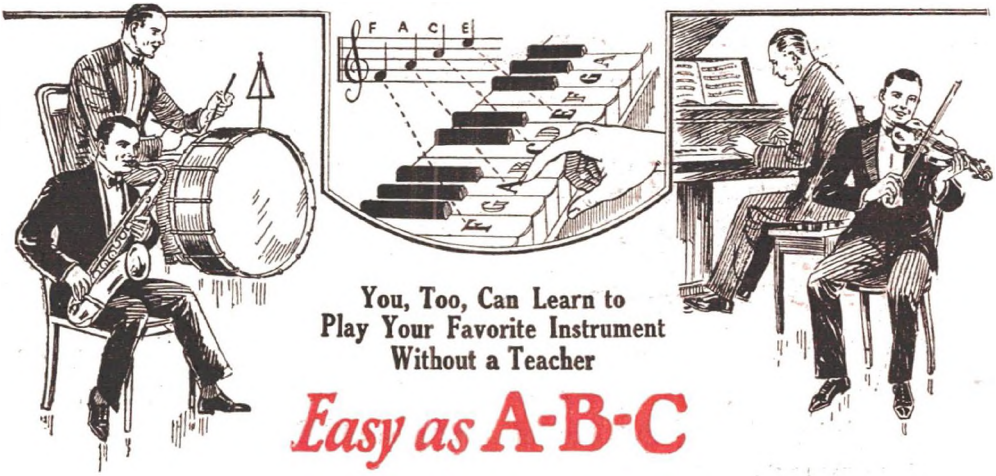

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Many of this half million didn't know one note from another—others had never touched an instrument—yet in half the usual time they learned to play their favorite instrument. Best of all, they found learning music *amazingly easy*. No monotonous hours of exercises—no tedious scales—no expensive teachers. This simplified method made learning music as easy as A-B-C!

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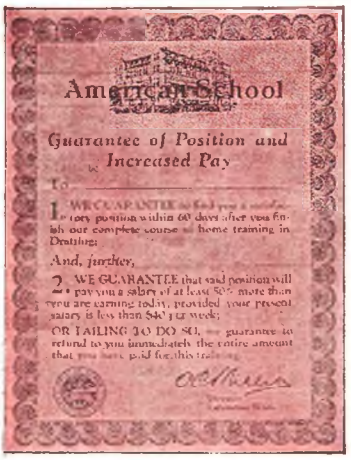

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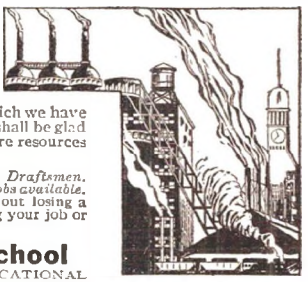

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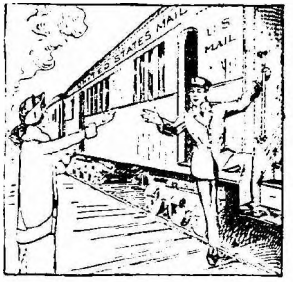

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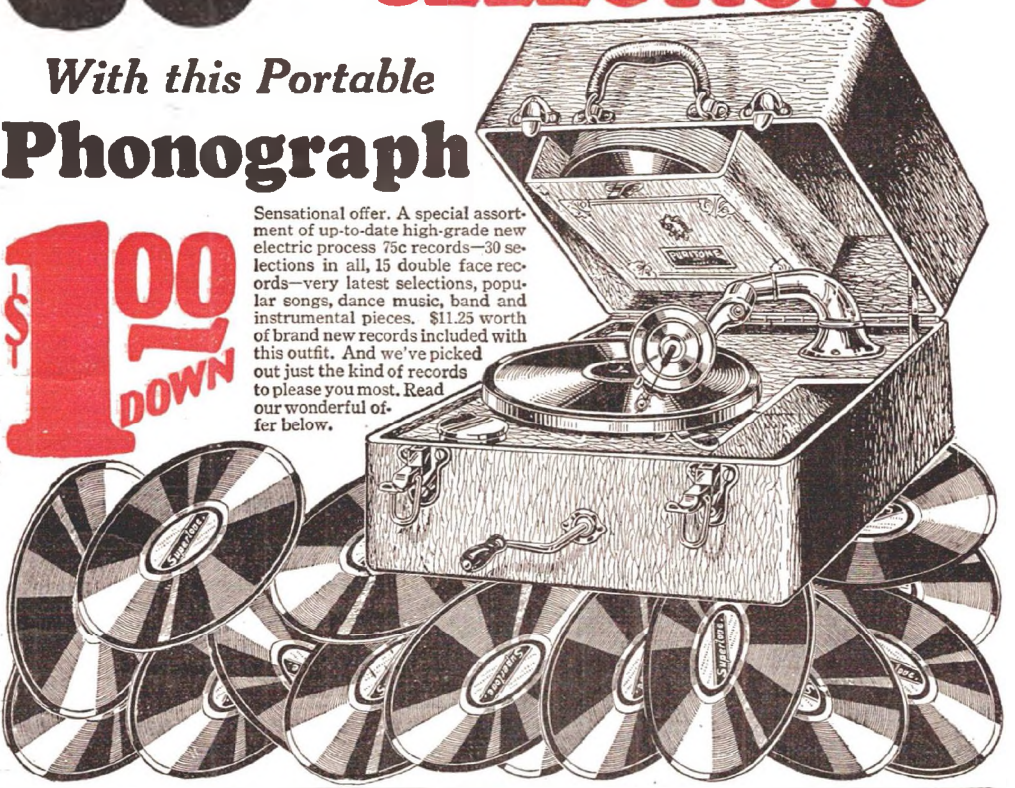

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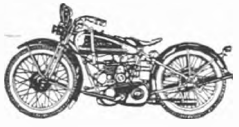

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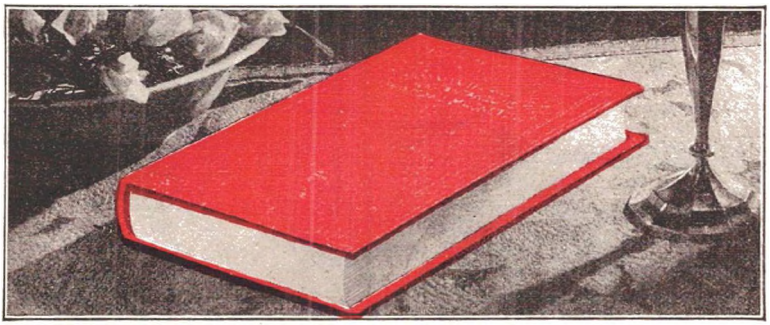

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Western Story
Magazine
EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXV FEBRUARY 4, 1928 No. 5

Tessie of Star 9

By George Gilbert

Author of "The Mystery of Indian Mound," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TESSIE SHOOTS A MAN.

SHE was on a close-coupled grulla, and her eyes shone like stars. White Mule watched her coming—that is, the few who were active so early in the day watched her.

She gentled her horse from a sidling canter to a quiet pause before the White Mule Emporium, and, as she was about to swing down, a tall, rather heavy man stepped from the doorway and offered her assistance. Her lips curled in scarcely concealed scorn, and she swung herself down with perfect grace, tossed the bridle reins over a hook on the rail and started for the store. The man spoke:

"Tessie, that wasn't right fair."

"As fair as you're deservin'," she said, and then went into the store.

Several men near by laughed at this rebuff. One, a lean-faced, thin-browed man, dressed in patched, slovenly gray, sneered at the laughers:

"She's done the same t' all of yo', one time or another. Why laugh at Quince, then?"

His half-closed eyes swept his au-

ditors with chilling gaze, and they all became silent. He and the big man started down the street.

The others began a whispered buzz:

"Tessie of Star 9 isn't goin' to marry."

"If she was, Quince Burdone is handsome enough."

"And his land and her own adjoin."

"She's got a long brain for business and a marble heart."

Down the street some one yelled—whooped. The men looked down the road in tolerant appraisal. In the middle of the street, before a saloon where illicit stuff was dispensed, a man stood. He elevated his hand, and shots reverberated. Burdone and his companion had disappeared into another place down the street.

"That fellow's sure on the prod," one of the loungers remarked.

"He's been in town about long enough t' be broke."

"No one knows him; the town marshal has been plumb absent since he rode in and began t' buffalo all the tinhorns and hard geezers."

The man in the street was seen to be reloading his gun. He whooped again. Just then Tessie Cuyler came out, several packages in her hands. She started to tie them on behind the saddle.

The man with the gun began to walk up the middle of the street, yelling, wolf style.

Tessie's lips curled in scorn that she did not try to conceal.

"Another fool in pants," she snapped; "drunk, disorderly and honin' t' fight. Why cain't men act like they knew something?"

She glanced at the assembled loungers. They were all watching the man come toward the group.

Tessie studied the packages, as requiring a better arrangement than she had given them. She started to reach down her blanket roll, with the idea of bundling the things into it and then making all fast behind the cantle. Now the whooping man was close by.

"Git a-goin'," he yelled, and he threw his gun forward. His hat was on the back of his head, his light hair strayed over his broad, high forehead. His light-blue eyes were glazed with the folly that comes from strong waters. A half-foolish smile was on his smooth, boyish face. A line of yellow down across his upper lip promised a sweeping mustache in more mature years.

His gun roared. A big chip flew off the corner of the awning or gallery post close to the cheek of a lounger. They all turned and ran. The shooter laughed wildly. Then he saw Tessie clearly for the first time as she moved from behind the grulla to face him:

"Howdy, kid! Git a-goin'!" and his gun's muzzle made a circle toward the sky. Tessie gazed at him unwinkingly.

"Git a-goin'!" he roared.

Still she faced him unflinchingly.

"Yo've got a gun, kid. Use it or git a-goin'!" and now the muzzle of his gun came down slowly. His body swayed, but his arm was steady as a rock as he lined up the gun.

"Yo're a coward and a fool," the young woman spoke with clear emphasis.

"Sure, all kinds of a fool. First t' come t' a dawg hole like this town, then t' stay here till I'm broke, and then t' go squanderin' around town this a way, but it's my way, and that's whatever."

"And you deserve a licking."

"I've been searching all week for a man here that c'd give it t' me, kid. Whoop——"

He jammed his gun back into its holster with easy grace and speed and started toward Tessie. She turned to go around her horse, but stumbled and fell—toward him. He caught her. She slapped his face and squirmed away. His face flamed with fury. His hand slid toward his holster.

Like a flash, Tessie snapped her lit-

tle fancy .32 forward. At the crack the man clutched his shoulder. His gun clattered down. He reeled. Then he fell.

Tessie, her face white beneath its tan, sprang to his side:

"Take him inside. I had t' do this. He's probably a good cowboy, but he's full of that wild Mexican stuff the crooked politicians let be sold here. He's a pretty boy, too. He took me for a young fellow. I shot too quick."

"Carry him down to Mrs. Peters' house," some one suggested.

"Yes, she nurses every one that needs it."

"I'll pay the expenses. Don't file any charges against him, poor young fellow!" said Tessie.

The first-aid squad started up the street, carrying the injured man. The big, handsome fellow who had first accosted Tessie came hastening up. He inquired the nature of the trouble and at once turned toward the group carrying the wounded cowboy:

"String this fellow up! He had no excuse, going after a girl that a way!"

Tessie stepped in between him and the group carrying the wounded boy at once, her face alight with excitement and anger:

"Yes, now that he's down, hit him. I've heard how this foolish lad made yo' take water, Quince. He's had every one in this fool town scared for a week, and that just because he was drinking too much Mexican high-power. Yo' let him alone. I can take care of any one that bothers me, and I've taken care of him. I run my own outfit and handle my own business, including fights. Just keep away from this young fellow. He's in my care now."

Scowling darkly, Burdone allowed the man to be carried away, but he spoke to his familiar in the faded-gray suit:

"I thought I'd make myself solid, offering t' handle that young fool rough, but yo' never can tell about a girl what notion'll bite her."

"No, they're mighty queer, but if yo' keep right after them, they'll cave in; give them time. She's got what yo' want—more land and water."

"She's also got a spitfire's temper."

"High-haided ones always make the best cuttin' hosses, if yo' handle them right, Quince," said the toady, with a rasping chuckle.

"Yes, Gryce, and that's what keeps me after her—that and her mighty good looks. She can rope, ride, and shoot like a man, but get those trail pants off her and set her down at night in her own home, with pretty she-finery on her, and she's enough t' turn any man's brains. Tessie Cuyler is a woman when she's out of the saddle, but in it she's hard as nails."

"Well, she has t' be, Quince, running that outfit all alone, with only her Mexican housekeeper t' balance her up against those cowboys of hers. They say there's only one offense that gets a man fired from Star 9, and that's gettin' soft on Tessie."

"She's a queer one; sometimes I think she puts on a fierce outside behavior just t' make sure she won't soften down and fall in love."

"Huh, no one can tell about a woman, and if they can, they had never ought t'."

CHAPTER II.

HUMILIATION.

ON a sofa in the spare room of the Peters home, the wounded man breathed heavily. Fat and comfortable Mrs. Peters gazed down on him in pity:

"The ide-a, Tessie Cuyler shootin' a handsome cowboy like he is!"

"He grabbed me and wrastled me rough and was comin' again, after I'd broke away from him once," Tessie defended herself. "Anyway, I only shot him in the shoulder. I might've killed him."

"Yes, and been sorry ever after. Now, this boy ain't got any ha'm in him, Tessie. He's just got lit up and got heavy in the sky-piece. We heard how he saved that Mexican girl from being run over by that runaway team when he first came into town, grabbin' her right out from under the hoofs of those galloping hosses. He's got a lot of good in him, give him a chance."

"Yes, but he's been using himself pretty rough, Ma," said Tessie, giving Mrs. Peters' official title a pleading insistence that caught the older woman's attention, for she dropped to the floor on her knees and put her arm around the girl's waist at once.

The sofa was long. Ma Peters had "shoed" all the men out of the house. She and Tessie were now ready to perform a rough job of surgery on the injured shoulder of the wounded man. A superficial examination had convinced Mrs. Peters that the young fellow was not seriously hurt. The wound was a clean one, right through the thick muscles of the shoulder.

"It was the effects of all that Mexican lime juice he drunk up that made him topple off that a way," she explained, as she took up a cloth that had been soaking in a warm antiseptic solution. "He was about ready t' keel over from drink, when that bullet did the trick. Peel back his shirt, and we'll see what it really amounts t'. Brazos bottoms, but he's got a fine set of muscles!" she exclaimed, as the shirt was drawn back, and she ran her admiring eyes over the corded beauty of the young fellow's shoulder and upper arm and chest.

Tessie's eyes had lost their hard look. Now she was the compassionate woman—the mother nature in her was touched. She looked at the hole her bullet had made and felt behind the shoulder. She gave a sudden exclamation of satisfaction:

"That bullet's right inside his shirt, in the back. It came through clean and won't have to be probed for."

"Brazos bottoms, if that ain't lucky! Now we won't have t' have that old sawbones up from Cottonwood Creek messing up this boy with probes and dosing him with bitter stuff. Shucks, I've nu'sed a lot of men in my time and never did so well as when no doctor was around! After they get a few yarbs and sleep and good grub, these cow persons have a way of getting over most anything."

They proceeded to bind up the wounded man's shoulder. They had just completed a most workmanlike job when the young fellow sighed and opened his eyes. He began to babble and shout. He tried to get up, but Mrs. Peters pushed him down again. He glared at her, then suddenly relaxed. She motioned to Tessie, who now came in with a big bowl of some soothing herb drink. She held it to his lips, passing her strong arm under his left shoulder. He winced with pain as she lifted him. His lips touched the edge of the bowl, and he felt the grateful liquid on his parched mouth. He drank with deep, strong force, and he relaxed with a sigh.

"That'll make him sleep. I'll give him more, every time he asks for a drink," Ma Peters said complacently. "Sleep and quiet are his best friends now."

"Take good care of him," Tessie said, as she started for the door a few moments later. "I'll be in, in a few days to see how he's gettin' along, or I'll send for news of him."

She went outside, jamming her hat on carelessly as she emerged from the house. Several loungers were outside, wishful for news.

"He's not hurt bad," she assured them. "Mrs. Peters will take care of him. Any one know his name?"

"He called himself 'Lone Star Fred,'" one of the gossips replied.

"He got what was comin' t' him," another said.

"None of the men in this man's town dared talk turkey t' him when he was up and howling on his own hook," Tessie reminded them crisply, and smiled sweetly as she noted their crestfallen looks over this remark. Then she passed down the street, and soon was on her way back to her own ranch, which was in the adjacent range country some thirty miles southwest of the town of White Mule. The gossips lingered still about the Peters place, but soon disappeared when Ma Peters came out and ordered them away, on the ground that their loud talking was disturbing the patient.

Down in the town Burdone and Gryce walked from group to group, getting what news they could.

"When he gets out we'll give him a hint t' move on," Gryce said, and Burdone nodded.

In the Peters house Ma Peters went about her everyday tasks. She did a great deal of the fancy washing for the men of the town. Her hot irons smoothed out the wrinkles in the pleated-front shirts of the gamblers, the frills on the short frocks of the dance-hall girls, and the plainer shirts of the cowboy and townsfolk who wanted at times an extra finish on things used for going to parties and dances. People injured or sick were, by common consent, turned over to Ma Peters for repairs. Those that could pay, paid her well; those that could not, she did not ask for money.

The wounded man slept all day. The soothing herb drink, the exhaustion following unwonted excess, gave him sleep that was profound. The wound itself was nothing.

Ma Peters sat by him during the long evening, listened to his babbling talk when a slight fever sent delirium to pound at his brain. She renewed the dressings and gave him more of the soothing herb potion. He slept through the night.

Early next morning Ma Peters began to move carefully about the house, getting ready for the new day. The town outside was very still as yet.

Lone Star Fred stirred, pulled himself up on the sofa, gritting his teeth. He glanced all about the room. He had been put to bed in his ordinary clothing. He slid his long limbs free of the blanket Ma Peters had thrown over him. She heard him and came toward him, arms akimbo, eyes hard:

"So, yo're awake at last, eh?"

"Yes'm. How did I come in a house?"

"What! Brazos bottoms! Don't yo' know what happened?"

"No. I've been makin' a fool of myself——"

"A fool! No, a hundred kinds of a fool. Shootin' up this man's town, fightin' all over the place, jerrymandering around like a burro gone mad."

"Was it as bad as all that?" he asked, feeling his injured shoulder tenderly and wincingly with his long, lean left hand.

"Worse and more of it. Yo' had a horse, and a nice ridin' outfit when yo' came t' White Mule. Yo' had money. I've had inquiries made. Yo've fooled away money, outfit, horse, everything but yo'r gun and belt and what yo' wear this very minute. Brazos bottoms! What a fool!"

She gave vent to her deeper disgust in a sudden "Whewww!"

"Anything else?" and now his face was lighted with a half grin.

"Yes, more than all that! Yo' chased every one off the street, then spraddled all around before the Emporium and dared every one t' fight. Then yo' grabbed a girl, a nice girl, and acted like a locoed fool, and she wouldn't stand it. She shot yo'."

At once the grin left his face, and it went gray:

"I was mean t' a woman, a nice woman?"

"Sure was. And she shot yo' for it," Ma repeated.

He hung his head down. A tremor shook him:

"I deserved it. Why didn't she kill me! Me, a Texan, mean t' a girl! Who is she? I'll apologize. I'll let her do anything to me——"

"She's Tessie Cuyler, of Star 9. If she hadn't been in half-pint pants, like a boy, yo' mightn't've done it, Fred."

"Who told yo' my name?"

"Oh, yo' told the world all about yo'rse'f when yo' was at it."

"My name's Fred Wayne."

"That's all right."

"I'm humiliated, for fair! Set afoot! Marked as a man that's done dirt t' a girl! Broke! Shot by a woman and deserved it, too! I'm about as low as a man can get and stay alive. I don't even know yo'r name, ma'am."

"Ma Peters, they all call me."

"Yes, I remember now. I don't remember anything about the shooting, though. I haven't a penny left. I'll pay yo' for yo'r trouble——"

"No pay from those that are broke, boy."

"Thanks, just the same, I'll be even with yo' and somehow make up to that girl that shot me. Think of it, a Texan, a native son, in my condition! I'd ought t've died before I came he'e and got into this mess," and he bowed his head still farther. A tremor shook his broad shoulder. Ma Peters tiptoed out and left him to his shame.

"I'm tellin' yo' the straight of it, ma'am," Fred called after her, "I never got into such a rookus befo'e. I never got drunk befo'e. They doped my drinks to get my money, I'm sure, and it turned me into a fool. I'm through with that kind of stuff——"

"For how long?" and she wheeled in the kitchen and came to the door to look squarely at him.

"Forever, ma'am, and I swear it by the Lone Star of Texas!"

"Yo'll keep that oath, son."

CHAPTER III.

DREGS OF HUMILIATION.

FRED had breakfast, and ate in a way that gladdened Ma Peters' big heart.

"Brazos bottoms!" she exclaimed. "A man that can eat like that ain't got no badness in him. He wouldn't have room for any, after eatin' as much as all that."

"Whe'e's my gun?"

"On that peg, behind the door. Nice gun, too."

He took down the gun, belted it on, then examined the weapon. It was empty of good shells. He threw the used shells out on the table and looked at them:

"About like me, no good! All blowed out! I've got just enough shells t' fill her up again," he said, feeding them into the cylinder rapidly.

"Yo' feed a gun like yo'd done some of it."

"Uh-huh," he replied absently. "Well, I'll drift. I wish I could do something t' make it right with yo' for carin' for me this a way."

"Yo' can," smilingly answered Ma Peters.

"Name it, ma'am."

"Don't ever get into such a fool scrape again."

"I won't—shake on it with me, please."

She gave him her chubby, veined hand. He bent over it with sincere respect.

"I own a piece of yo', cowboy," she laughed.

"Yo' own all of me. Call on me, if yo' need me," Fred said.

He went out quietly. On the street he looked the lower town over. Then he started straight down toward where he had spent his time and money so

foolishly. He walked till he was at the farthest end of the place. Over a saloon there was a sign:

LLUVIA DEL ORO.

Fred looked at it quizzically. At that early hour the keeper of the place was before it, his hands under his white apron.

"That sign tells the truth, hombre," Fred said.

"About what?" asked the man, eying Fred appraisingly.

"It's a shower of gold, but it's for yo'."

"The morning after, eh? I've heard a lot of cow persons talk that a way, afterward. Broke?"

"Sure, flat."

"No, yo're not. I bought yo'r pony and outfit, but yo've got a gun yet."

"Yes."

"I'll buy it."

Fred unbuckled his belt and handed it to the man.

"Hand-worked belt, holster hand-tooled. Mexican made it for me. Gun's reliable, shoots square and hard, if she is just a plain walnut-grip frontier six."

"Give yo' ten dollars."

"All right."

The money was passed over.

"Have a drink?"

"No, not none."

"On the house, I mean?"

"No, not none," said Fred firmly.

"Yo' will, after a while. These morning-after resolutions are fine, but they wash out."

He waddled indoors, leaving Fred on a seat before the door. Inside he grinned at Burdone and Gryce, who were at a table. He showed them the gun, and they laughed, as Burdone said:

"I thought when I saw him coming down the street he'd let go of his gun. Glad yo' got it away from him, Klicker."

Klicker put the gun on a peg behind the bar and turned to sit down with them. They got up, however, and started toward the door. Outside they both eyed Lone Star Fred keenly. He glanced up at them rather hazily. Gryce spoke sharply:

"How long are yo' stayin' in this man's town?"

"Who is the man?" Fred flung back angrily.

"Well, I am."

"I don't know. I was intendin' t' ramble right soon, but now——"

"Keep right onto that notion of ramblin' out."

Fred got up slowly, his eyes narrowed to slits.

Gryce's gun leaped forward to thud home against Fred's body. Gryce's teeth were bared in a wolf snarl:

"I said—get a-goin'."

"When I had a gun, yo' kept out of sight. Give me a gun, and yo' won't talk this a way, hombre."

"No? Well, I'm talkin' this a way right now."

"I'm hearin', but I don't savvy, that's all. Men that threaten unarmed men have got something loose in them."

"We're givin' yo' two days t' get out of town, that's the limit," Burdone put in his threat.

"Two days?"

"Till, say, noonday after to-morrow. In that time yo' can make it out of he'e. After that—well, people in White Mule don't fancy a man that a girl has t' shoot t' protect herse'f."

"That's whatever," Gryce concluded, putting away his gun.

The two started up the street, speaking to several men they met and jerking their thumbs back to indicate Fred. Klicker spoke sharply to him:

"Don't hang around this joint, either, Mr. Walking Man."

Fred started up again as if stung by a side-winder. This epithet stung like a flick of a red-hot lash on a raw sore.

"I guess it's cases for me," he cried

bitterly. "I'm afoot, without a gun, and have disgraced myself the worst way of all. I've had t' let that cheap tinhorn hold it over me, as if I was a common bum. Well, I won't leave town. I'm a man yet, if I am a failure. This is the bitterest dose I ever drunk, but it is the last of its kind. I'll never drink," Fred ended firmly, starting up the street again.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOW-DOWN.

TESSIE CUYLER rode into town quietly. She drew rein at the cottage of Ma Peters, swung down, and went inside. She found Ma Peters' hands well floured as she wrangled a "mess of sugar cookies," as she expressed it.

"Brazos bottoms!" she ejaculated. "Yo' ain't done and gone and rode from he'e t' Star 9 and back again, just for fun?"

"I only rode to Duckworth's place," Tessie replied. "They were having a li'le fiesta the'e, and I kept along with Mrs. Duckworth t' he'p her out. So I didn't go home at all."

"Not that thirty miles one day and back again two days later cain't be done by a right-sma't girl, or fifty miles two days hand-running, for that matter. But what's the use of wanderin' and squanderin' around all the time. Sit down and talk a mite, please."

"No, I'm in a hurry. I forgot something, and I want to get it and get started going home again. How is that cowboy I shot?"

"Oh, so that's it! Came clear back t' find out how that handsome, blond-haired, blue-eyed cow wrestler is?"

"No, but as long as I'm in town, I'm asking about him."

"Oh, yes, just like that!"

"I couldn't do any more, after shooting him," said Tessie, blushingly.

"Oh, no! I asked how Pa Peters' ears were the day after I boxed them for kissing me when he thought I didn't want it. I was afraid I'd made him deaf, but he always heard the supper and dinner and breakfast call ever after we was hitched, and until the day of his death. Fi'st yo' hurt them, and then yo' make up. Then they love yo'——"

"I'm going." Tessie spoke angrily now.

"All right, yo'll be back."

Tessie wheeled on the threshold and laughed.

"Now, that's better. Well, that cowboy yo' shot got well quick. He left me, sayin' he wouldn't eat free grub. He tried t' pay me, but I knew he had only the price of his gun that he sold as soon's he got out. He's afoot, broke."

"Anything else?"

"Been ordered out of town by noon to-day."

"How did you learn all of that, Ma?"

"Men in for their washin' gossiped it. He had ten dollars that he got for his gun. He gave that t' a sick Mexican teamster that had two kids and his wife sick, too."

"Where has he been stayin'?"

"No one knows. I offered him free bed and board till he got a-humpin' again, but he wouldn't take any more charity."

"Who is going to run him out of town?"

"Burdone and Gryce."

"They tried it when he had his gun, and failed."

"Yes, he took their guns away and slapped their faces. That's what's bitin' them now. They want t' make a cheap play t' get even, now that he's disarmed."

Tessie went out, her lips set. She mounted and rode daintily down the street, toward the Emporium.

A knot of men began to form before the Shower of Gold. She glanced at the group disdainfully. She drew up before the Emporium and watched the

crowd down below. Men kept joining it every minute, and it grew in proportions. Tessie clucked to her horse, and he started toward the crowd, catching at once the subtle current of his mistress' wishes.

From her seat on the horse, Tessie could look into the center of the half ring of humanity afoot. Each end of the human horseshoe was pressed against the front wall of the building. Three men were in the open space—Gryce, Burdone, and Lone Star Fred.

"Time's up for yo'," Gryce was saying.

"I heard yo' the first time," Lone Star replied steadily.

"We done told yo' t' be faded out by this time t'day," Burdone put in combatively.

"I am right here, *hombres bravos,*" with an accent of scorn on the title of respect.

"But not for long," Burdone gibed.

"No, not for long," Gryce echoed.

"I'm unarmed, one shoulder is shot up, but I'm right close by."

"Don't try no sympathy plea. This town's too small for yo'," Burdone almost shouted.

"If yo' meant it all, loud talkin' wasn't needed," Lone Star Fred shot back.

"Come, let's beat him up and start him out on a rail," Gryce appealed to the crowd.

"I'll be right on hand and do my best. I won't be bullied out of any man's town without a fight. I'll be licked, but that won't count; a man licked in a fight is still a man, he isn't a mangy coyote running because he has no heart for takin' care of himself."

Lone Star braced himself for the onset. They drew in closer and closer. Just as Gryce was reaching for Lone Star, Tessie called over the heads of the men of the crowd:

"Let that man go!"

She had ridden up so quietly and kept so still, they had been so intent upon their work of intimidation, that they had not noticed the young woman. Her handsome face was now stern, her eyes alight with anger. Burdone waved his hand.

"Let us handle this without a shovel, Tessie."

"I'll handle it, as I started out t' do," she replied firmly. "Come here, cowboy," she called, beckoning to Lone Star. The crowd parted to let him pass. He stood before her, hat off, humble and ashamed:

"Cowboy, are yo' fit t' take along?"

"I don't know what yo're aimin' at, ma'am."

"I want a hand."

"A hand! After what I did——"

"Never mind all that. I'll try yo' out at Star 9."

"I'm plumb afoot."

"So I've heard."

"Tessie," Burdone called sharply, "don't take on this man; no one knows anything about him. I should think yo'd had enough of him——"

"Who is running Star 9?" cried its mistress, ringingly.

"Why, I meant no offense!"

"Anything this boy done when he wasn't himself was done t' me. I've hired him as a Star 9 hand!" Tessie said with emphasis.

She spoke to Lone Star Fred, short, crisp sentences:

"Go t' a livery and get a hoss, charge it t' Star 9. Borrow a saddle and bridle, too. Be ready t' ride with me, from in front of the Emporium, in half an hour. Klicker, I heard yo' had his gun. I'll buy it back."

"Yes'm," said the man, going for the weapon.

Burdone and Gryce went after Klicker. The crowd began to scatter. Lone Star Fred looked up at Tessie:

"Miss, if I can ever pay yo' back, ask me, *anything!*"

She smiled:

"I may ask something sooner than yo're thinkin' is possible."

Then she whirled her horse about and rode up the street.

Lone Star took off his hat and gazed at her as she rode away.

Klicker came out with Lone Star's gun, belt and holster. He handed them silently to Lone Star, who took them, saying:

"I'll pay for these myse'f in a few weeks."

"All right."

Fred fingered the gun, looked to the cylinder to make sure that the shells were good, then snapped the belt snug. He stepped into the Shower of Gold. Gryce and Burdone seated at a table, started up. Fred spoke—low, clear, firm words that stung like a whip flicking onto the raw:

"Now, make me get out of town."

They did not make a move to back up their former boasts.

"Gryce, yo're as much of a town marshal as they have in White Mule; why don't yo' put a bum like me out of town?"

Dry-lipped, Gryce sat down.

Lone Star backed out of the place, smiling and somewhat satisfied. He started for the livery. There, on the plea that he was now a riding man again and had a regular job, he got a poor horse, and his own saddle and bridle, the last two on his own credit. His outlook now was good, and he rode toward the store to meet his new employer, who was waiting there, her trading done.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT TESSIE WANTED.

RIDING beside his new employer, Lone Star Fred, ashamed of his recent condition, spoke little and then only when directly addressed. They passed several people on the trail in the first few miles; then they took a side trace. Fred's shoulder ached, and he was not letting it be known, but he had fasted now for over a day.

"Was that a good cow-pony yo' left behind?" Tessie asked, after they had traveled the side trace for about five miles.

"Say, Miss Cuyler! He was a pony that could turn on a blanket, and he sure knew cows. Good trail hoss, and good on the circle, good all around."

"I suppose yo' were sorry, then?"

"Me and old Nicker never had no quarrels after I once got him broke. I rode for the Bar Shoe then. Got a fool idea I'd ramble and see what I could see. I've seen enough."

The girl smiled whimsically. A little trail crossed the trace. Tessie turned into, and soon they came to the Duckworth place, a small ranch where Tessie had spent the night and day following her misadventure with Fred in town. Mrs. Duckworth and the children came swarming out. Duckworth was away, looking for strays.

"Hired him, eh?" Mrs. Duckworth whispered, eying Fred appraisingly as he sat quietly in the saddle while Tessie was inside getting her former purchases. "First yo' fire on him, then hire him. What for, Tessie?"

"I need a hand, that's all," she answered firmly, almost coldly.

"I didn't know hands was scarce as all that."

Tessie did not reply, but bundled her things together and came out. Fred was afoot at once, although the effort in swinging down made him wince. He took the things from her stiffly. Mrs. Duckworth gave Tessie a small bag, into which they were put. It was tied behind Fred's saddle.

"Ride for Bar 9. I'll give yo' plain directions," Tessie ordered. "I'm going t' ride a li'le circle of my own and will be in about dark."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Tell Keeler Harms, my *primero,* yo're hired by me.'

Fred nodded and rode away, after she had given him the directions. He turned in the saddle after he had got on top of the first roll of land, but Tessie and the Duckworths had gone indoors. Tessie's pony, before the house, raised his head and sent a parting nicker to Fred's *potero.*

The old borrowed horse proved to have more in him than seemed possible at first glance. He shacked along at an average speed that was respectable. It was well after the shadows had lengthened that Fred found the lower gate of the home pasture of the Star 9. He looked at the rolling, evenly grassed scene with approval. It told of water up the vale, water well handled. The ranch house and attendant buildings, on a bench, were small, but as he neared them he saw that they were comfortable. The adobe structures had a wide-spreading overhang of roof, and heavy thatches that kept the rains from them, and so they were solid.

A grizzled old fellow was under the west gallery, reading. He hardly glanced up as Fred drew rein and addressed him:

"I'm Star 9s new hand."

"All right, pen yo'r cuitan."

"Lone Star Fred they call me."

"Never heard of yo'. I'm Keeler Harms."

"*Primero,* Miss Cuyler told me?"

The reader merely grunted. Fred proceeded stiffly to get rid of the things his horse had carried behind the saddle, and then of horse and riding gear. Harms seemed to pay little attention to him. But as Fred finished and came back to the gallery, Harms spoke:

"Yo' act tender in one arm. Accident?"

"Yeah, sure. I stopped lead."

Harms glanced at him keenly.

"Recent?"

Fred's face turned white, then red.

"All right, no harm in asking, is there?" said the foreman tartly.

Fred did not reply. He sat down, took up an old news sheet and began to read.

"What were yo' hired for?"

"She didn't say."

Harms went back unsociably to his reading. Fred did the same, at times glancing aslant at near-by things. He noted that the bunk-house windows were clean and curtained, and smiled to himself at that proof of feminine influence.

Dusk came, and two men came riding in and reported to Harms before unsaddling. They glanced with concealed curiosity at Fred, who nodded to each of them. The rattle of pans somewhere told of preparations for supper. Just as the evening star winked over the distant ranges, Tessie came slowly and quietly, along the bench trail from the south, quite opposite from where Fred expected she would appear.

"Anything new?" she asked Harms.

"No, Tessie," he replied, taking the things she handed him.

"I cut quite a circle to-day. I didn't see anything."

"Yo'd better not get too far into the clear, Tessie."

"I can take care of myself."

He did not reply. Fred took the horse from her and cared for it and for her riding equipment. He returned to find Harms out under the gallery again.

"Where do I hit the grub?" Fred asked.

"We all eat t'gether, Miss Tessie with us, when it's convenient."

Fred washed up and then heard the triangle tinkle. He followed Harms into a room set apart from the big ranch-house kitchen. A long table was set there, and at the head was Tessie Cuyler, now in a pink-and-green-checkered gingham house dress, and slippers, her hair coiled tastefully and set off with wide Spanish combs of tortoise shell, set with brilliants.

During the meal Fred estimated the

personality of each of the others present; little talk went on as the hungry men ate the good food.

"This is our new hand, Fred Wayne," Tessie told the other Star 9 men. "He is nursing a sore shoulder now and will do light chores for a few days."

Fred noticed that the other men looked at him keenly as Tessie told of his being injured. Grins of comprehension passed between them, and Fred realized that Harms had told of Fred's admission that he had "stopped lead." Fred also realized that so far Tessie had told no one at Star 9 about how he came to be hurt. That the news could not be kept secret Fred well knew. The first Star 9 man that went to town or met up with a rider who had been there would get the news. As he strolled out to the bunk house with the men he resolved upon his course of action.

In the bunk house his sleeping place was pointed out—a single bunk close to the door. He stowed away his boots under it and produced a pair of moccasins that he had stuffed in one of his pockets. He sat on his bunk. One of the men spoke to him:

"How bad is that shoulder? Keep yo' out of a game?"

"No," Fred grinned, "but it's not how bad it is, but how I got it."

"Oh! Want to say how come?"

The speaker was a thick-set, tight-lipped man of middle age, evidently a range veteran, whose bow legs told of many a horse clamped tight and mastered.

"Yes, and before yo' get chummy with me, too."

They stared at him, as he went on:

"I was shot by a girl for doin' a mean act. I got into White Mule with a good outfit. I tangled with their game, got doped, lost all I had, got mescaled up, made a fool of myself, ran blazers all over town. My last act I knew nothing about, being all in a mescal fog. But they say, and I believe it, that I tried t' grab a girl on the street and acted rough, and she shot me. Served me right, and I'm plenty ashamed of myse'f for it."

"Who was that girl?" the spokesman for the crowd asked.

"Our boss—Miss Tessie of Star 9."

There was a moment of silence, ominously deep.

"She hired yo' after that?"

"As yo' can see." Fred's hands were outspread in a gesture of appeal.

"I guess we'll have t' wait," was all that was said. They sat down around an up-ended box and began to play cards.

Fred understood.

He was not yet a part of the outfit.

"I sure deserve it, men," he said, simply, and then he stretched out on his bunk and was silent. The card game went on.

After a time Fred made a few simple preparations and turned in. He slept at once. The card game came to a pause after a few more hands.

The players glanced toward Fred, and the middle-aged man with the tight lips spoke:

"Well, she hired him. Must be a reason. Miss Tessie don't make many fox passes."

"Now yo' said a mouthful, Bruce," a slender, smooth-faced but oldish man gave praise.

"Yes, Silver, the'e must be a reason," Bruce Hepborne replied, "as sure's yo'r name is Silverthorne."

Fred, lax-limbed in sleep, did not hear them as they turned away from his bunk with questions in their honest eyes that he could not have answered had he been awake to note their existence.

In the morning the men were assigned to various tasks by Harms, who did not speak to Fred. Lone Star remained about the place until Tessie came out of the house and took note of him. She told him to come down to the

larger corral on the flat. He walked at her side, silent and moody.

In the corral were a dozen good horses.

"Ever broke any?" she asked.

"Plenty."

"That's yo'r job, then, cowboy, when yo' get able. How is that shoulder?"

"Better than I hoped last night."

"When it's well, start on those hosses. Star 9 wants cowhorses and not buckers; break them, but not their spirits. Savvy?"

"Yes, ma'am."

He leaned against the corral fence. The horses, bunched at the point farthest from the humans, walled their eyes, snorted, stamped, and broomed their tails. One seized a jagged bit of fencing and bit it savagely and lashed out with a vicious kick at thin air.

"He sure feels crickety," Lone Star laughed. "Pretendin' like he was cribbin' and then kicking that a way."

Tessie was silent. She had turned and was facing the bench on which the ranch buildings stood. Harms appeared there and then went back.

"Lone Star," Tessie whispered tensely, "I'm going t' tell yo' what I've hired yo' t' do. I want yo' t' side Keeler Harms."

"Yeah?" said Fred, wonderingly.

"Lone Star, I saw in town that yo' knew how t' handle a gun. I heard what yo' did t' Gryce and Burdone before yo' were—well, too far gone t' know what yo' were doing. Lone Star, have yo' ever had a fight?"

"I am not tellin' about what my past has been."

"I hadn't ought t' have asked, Lone Star. But I'm going t' tell yo' something. Star 9 has always been a ranch that rustlers let alone. My father ran a hard-boiled bunch, and I grew up with them. These old-timers that I have with me are my father's old friends. Keeler Harms was his best friend. But they're good because Keeler was good."

"*Was* good?"

"Yes, *was* good. I've heard my daddy tell that a man of courage sometimes lost it, with age, or from sickness, or from a shock of some kind. Now, I wouldn't humiliate Harms for the world. He's my best friend. My parents are daid. They were Texans. Harms was from Texas, too. He was with us when we were in Arizona, and when we moved back into this region, he came, with those other old-timers. They always stuck with daddy. They taught me all I know. They fairly worship me, and I love them. But Harms was always their leader and gave them courage, and now—"

Her voice broke, and Lone Star noted that her shapely shoulders shook under the prim gingham gown. She put back her shoulders with a sudden firming of purpose and went on.

"The men don't know. Harms is fighting t' keep us all from realizing it. A few years back, it wouldn't have made so much difference. This region, owing to the clean-up daddy and Harms gave it, was free from bad elements. But they've been creeping back, li'le by li'le. We've not been bothered, and the larger outfits haven't been. But the town butchers are paying well for beef and gradually the rustlers are gaining strength."

"Why not round them up?"

"We haven't full proof yet. To get back to Harms. A few weeks ago I was riding with him along the line between us and the B X T, that is Burdone's range. Something caught my fancy, and I left him to ride by myself, agreeing to meet him at a certain butte that is a landmark on that part of the the range. I felt free and easy and rode slowly. The nook of land that I wanted overlooked for sleepers was soon combed out by me, and I started on over a ridge at the top end of it. That would fetch me close to that butte, I figured.

"On that side the butte is fringed with brushy thickets. I was riding quiet, when I heard voices. I dismounted and stole forward afoot, for one was Burdone's. The voice of the other man was low, but as I got closer, I made out that it was the voice of Harms. He always talked low when angered, and drawled the more he got mad at the other fellow. Just as I got t' where I could see through the thicket growth, I saw Burdone reach for his gun. He beat Harms and stuck his gun into him and told him that he lied. Then he holstered his gun and rode away.

"It was an awful thing to realize that Keeler Harms, the old-timer, had taken it without a fight. After Burdone had gone, he sat there staring. I came out to him and let him know I'd seen and heard it all. He broke down and said:

" 'Tessie, I haven't had t' draw on a man for years. I thought I was all the'e, but he beat me at it, and I had t' take what he gave me. I'll never hold my haid up again."

"I tried t' argue it out with him, but he was all gone, inside. He wanted t' resign, but I wouldn't consent. He's grieving. Now, I want t' hold up that old man before the world. I want yo' t' ride with him, get friendly with him, and if he gets into a jam, protect him. Never leave his side. Those rustlers think they can crowd onto Star 9 now. Burdone has dropped hints that let other people know he's outheld Harms. Burdone's boasted of it——"

"Is Burdone in with the rustlers?"

"No proof of that, Lone Star. But he's thick with those that have a standin down in White Mule, with Gryce and his friends. White Mule hasn't a regular village organization; they just let things drift, and Gryce is marshal by common consent. On the outside he's fair enough, but I've convinced myself that he's in with those crooks, on the quiet."

"Burdone has a ranch of his own?"

"Yes, and a good one, and he wants another."

"Another?"

"Yes, Star 9, and me with it, but he won't never——"

She stopped abruptly, blushing from anger and from having revealed a side of her experience that no woman likes to have inquired into too closely.

"He proposed marriage once. I refused. Since then he has tried to get my attention several times. I always have put him aside."

Again she was silent, then she went on: "The other men don't know that Harms has lost his nerve. Only I know it, and he and Burdone and whoever Burdone may have told. I'm afraid Harms will be put to the test again, Lone Star. I thought I saw a man underneath the deviltry yo' was doin' in White Mule. I've taken yo' out of it and given yo' another chance. Lone Star, if he needs it, go through with my father's friend and mine, Keeler Harms, and do it in a way that will save his nerve and self-respect, for with that goes the morale and backbone of all my men. If we can keep those bad men afraid of Star 9, they'll keep away; if not, we may be in the midst of a big fight. I've scouted myself and know some things that my men, aside from Harms, don't know. Can I trust yo'?"

"Ma'am, yo' can. I was down, and goin' out. I was a walkin' man, disgraced. I had done the worst thing a man can do. Yo've given me another chance. Yo've bought me, body and soul. Let me ride by Keeler Harms' side, and whatever happens t' him will come first through my daid body, ma'am."

"Lone Star"—and now Tessie's voice vibrated with deeper feeling—"we'll find a way, perhaps, to do this without hurting the old man's feelings. A chance will come, some way. They'll crowd in again. Will yo' get hurt?"

Her hand for a moment was on his elbow, her voice was low and sweet.

"I think not, if I get a few more days t' limber up my arm."

"We've got lots of shells for .45s in my room. Help yo'rse'f. Leave it to me to let Harms know what my plans are."

"All right. I'll merely meet what plays yo' make, ma'am."

"Begin on those broncs when yo' feel that a way. I'll go back now."

He leaned against the corral and watched her graceful progress up the trail to the ranch house. She disappeared over the edge, leaving the scene, some way, blank. He turned to look at the horses. The cribber grabbed the projecting knob on the bar and kicked and then squealed:

"Tryin' t' keep up yo'r nerve, eh, like a lot of folks? Well, we're all right up t' snuff so long's no one calls our bluff, and when they do, some of us fall pretty flat. I wonder how fast Burdone really is, and if he's got real sand? He didn't assay high down in White Mule after I got my gun back."

He turned to look toward the house. On the edge of the bench Harms stood, silhouetted against the sky line.

"Old-timer, I'll go through with yo', all right," Lone Star whispered, "especially seein' as she wants me t' do so."

CHAPTER VI.

THE HE-WOLF.

THE man rode into White Mule with the dusk. His grulla horse was quiet of step; his saddle creaked not. His bridle reins had no merry, clinking sound; thick was the brim of the big hat that shaded his face. No cricket was on the bit for the horse to amuse himself with. In short, the man was silent, furtive. He did not go to the front of the Shower of Gold, but to its rear. The horse remained standing, with the bridle reins tossed onto a special hook that the gaunt man seemed to know just where to find. He knocked at a back door with a peculiar rhythm of tattoo and was at once admitted into a rear room, where was a table and a few chairs and a lamp shaded so that its rays did not shine except on the table itself.

The gaunt, furtive man slumped down into a chair. Two other men were there. Klicker, the proprietor, remained, but went at once upon hearing a low-toned snarl from the newcomer, who at once fixed the other two with his eyes:

"Well, Burdone, how are things here?"

Burdone laughed, but did not speak.

"Gryce, how is it?"

They were all silent. The new man's eyes were baleful now—level in their steady gaze, yellow green in their depths, like those of a wolf. He sat well back from the table, yet his elbows were on it. The big hat shaded his face so that only those terrible eyes could be made out.

"We've run into a snag," Gryce declared.

"A snag?"

"We think it's one."

"Why not find out?" said the newcomer, biting off his words sharply as a wolf might bite off meat with single snaps of powerful jaws.

"We thought we had found out," Burdone took up the tale. "I acted on yo'r idea. I called Harms and found him slow and nerve-shaken. I told him t' keep out of the way. He took it. He's cowed. But Star 9 has another man——"

"Another! When did he come?"

"He's a stranger; Lone Star Fred Wayne, they call him," Gryce informed the newcomer.

"Lone Star Fred," the man spoke musingly.

"Tall, rather thin, light-haired, light complexion, slender, strong hands.

Like lightning when he was full of the dope we had fed him t' get his money away. I don't know what he'd be sober, Oslowe."

"Might not be any good at all. I've known men that were fast and brave drunk, and cowards sober, and *vice versa,*" said Oslowe.

"He held it over me, took away my gun and buffaloed Gryce, entire," Burdone blurted out the full tale of their humiliation. "He got fresh at Tessie Cuyler, and she shot him, then hired him, out of pity, we think."

"He's one of those good-lookers that women enthuse over a whole lot," Burdone went on. "She may've fallen for him."

Oslowe spoke again, his eyes veiled by half-closed lids.

"I've been looking for a chance t' horn in down around White Mule and make a killing," he said; "I'm not going to be stopped by anything now. We've got this new man at Star 9 to feel out. Those old-timers under Harms will fight if they're well led. None of them are pickety on the prod by themselves. Even if this new man is any good, we can find a man as good to fade him."

"Yo're the he-wolf of the rustlers, we know that," Gryce said slowly; "what yo' say goes."

"It wouldn't do for yo' two to get into a run-in with this new man now. I've got a dozen men that I can send in to take his measure. I'll send 'Chalk-eye' Roder. Watch for him. He'll bring my token. He'll have my orders. I'll tell him to tangle up with either Harms or Lone Star Fred, or both. Only if he gets into jail here he——"

"He'll escape," Gryce promised.

"Just give him a horse and a start, and he'll make the grade."

"Aside from Star 9, the other outfits will be easy picking," Burdone said. "We can get several of them fighting, and under cover of that range war we can run off stock, and each side will blame the other, and fight the harder."

"That shows brain work, Burdone," said Oslowe, approvingly.

"A good market in White Mule for some of these rustled beeves," Gryce said; "no questions asked, either. I inspect at their li'le town slaughter-houses," he added with a laugh.

Oslowe joined in this laughter, his mirth having the sardonic ring of a wolf yapping over a marrow bone, chance-found at an old camp.

"Watch for Roder," Oslowe warned them again, getting up. He signed for them to remain as they were and vanished into the night without a sound. They listened for hoofbeats, but they heard none. They did not go to peer out the door. They sat in silence. Gryce broke it first:

"Something creepy about Oslowe!"

"Yes, a man that can run his crowd of cow thieves, horse thieves, and bad men and keep them under, as he does, is a sure-enough he-wolf."

"Ever hear of this Chalk-eye Roder?"

"He's next t' Oslowe—bad, cool."

"Well, it will take that kind of a man to meet this Lone Star."

"Yes, if he's as nervy sober as he was drunk."

"Still, it's not our fight now."

"No, he's stacked up against that he-wolf and his crowd."

They laughed—low, silent laughter that shook their shoulders, but did not move their lips.

CHAPTER VII.

CHALK-EYE RODER.

THREE days later Lone Star Fred went down to the breaking pen, with a Mexican to haze for him, and started light work on the horses there. The little corral next to the big pen had its dust cloud; the sound of grunting, an-

gry horses was to be heard. But, contrary to usual custom, no onlookers came to oversee the job from the top rail of the corral. No matter if a rider did have a few moments of leisure during the day, he kept away from the breaking pen, and Lone Star Fred knew why. The men did not care to associate with him yet. So they did not come near the breaking pen to shout sarcasms at him as he topped the horses off for their first rough sessions of breaking. Fred handled only a few horses at first, not fully trusting his injured shoulder muscles. But as he found they stood the strain, he kept more steadily at his work, in the effort to wear out of his mind and heart the thoughts of his humiliation and disgrace. With this feeling went a desperate yearning to do something to wipe them out.

Harms came to watch him and had little to say. Lone Star thought he could note in the old-timer's silent attitude a yearning for company and a chance to talk. He wondered often if Tessie had told Harms why she had hired him, the newcomer.

One morning, the stint done, and the two horses picked for exercise that day topped off successfully, Fred sat on a blanket, his gun out. He had brought down a bit of rag and was wiping the gun. The Mexican had gone on an errand for Tessie. Harms strolled up and looked down on the horse breaker, and his lips quivered several times before he finally spoke:

"Let's try a shot apiece at something," he suggested.

"Sure!" said Fred, glad for this seeming proof of good-will.

Fred filled the gun and holstered it. He stood up. He saw Tessie, on the rim of the bench, looking down at them. He wondered if she had prompted this trial of skill.

"See that can?" Harms asked, and he whipped his gun over with dazzling speed. But although he had the edge by knowing what was to be the target, and seemingly the start on the draw, the other's big gun boomed first.

The bullet from Fred's gun struck just under the can, and it began to roll. Harms' bullet struck where the can had been. Fred's gun streamed lead, each bullet shuttling just under the rolling can, and it jumped and rolled like a living thing till the ringing count of five ended.

"Yo' took that can right away from me," Harms exclaimed admiringly, as he fed a new shell into his gun.

"Oh, that was nothing!"

"And I knew what that target was t' be, and had my gun half out before yo' knew what it was t' be!"

Fred began to reload.

"I can show yo' something real," Fred laughed. He saw that Tessie was up there yet. The horses, bunched on the far side of the corral, snorted and wheeled forward and back, over a short course, in their alarm at the shattering jar of the gun detonations.

"What's that?"

"Let's walk toward that tin can. I'll turn my back t' it. Yo' face it. Without a signal, yo' draw and shoot. I'll try t' shoot it first."

"Yo' won't see me start; I'll be ready t' shoot befo'e yo' know about it——"

"Let's see!" said Fred crisply.

They walked together toward the can. Harms stopped. Lone Star turned his back and waited, seemingly lax and slack of pose.

A scrape of steel on leather!

Lone Star wheeled.

Harms' gun was going forward.

Lone Star's gun spun out forward, and blazed, all in one flowing series of motions. The can rolled. Again Harms' bullet struck where the can had been. Fred's big slugs kept it rolling, each striking just under the round of the can, the shock sending the can forward jumpingly with each shot. The

fifth slug struck the can and smashed two holes in it, from side to side. Fred shook the smoke out of the end of his gun and started back to where the rag was on the blanket. He began to reload, after wiping the long barrel out roughly, saying: "We'll try another round, after I wipe her a bit, old-timer."

Harms laughed at this proof of skill in gunnery and warmed up to Lone Star Fred. They held a prolonged shooting match on the flat that morning. Harms, for the first time in years, made a real effort to use his gun as he had in days of yore. The other men of the outfit were away.

Harms did not make any direct reference to having been warned by Tessie that Lone Star would ride with him when danger seemed to be near. Lone Star took this to mean that the old-timer knew of the plan, but his pride kept him from discussing what might have seemed like an effort to belittle his courage or his skill with the gun.

The only reference to the new status was when they had finished shooting, and Harms, cleaning his gun with Lone Star, remarked:

"I reckon yo' can roll 'em with anybody. I cain't, no more."

"Oh, I guess yo'd make any one worry some, old-timer," said Fred.

For a single instant a flash of old-time fire came into Harms' features, but it soon passed. He finished cleaning his gun and then holstered it slowly. He soon walked thoughtfully to the ranch house. Lone Star went back to his horse-breaking.

Three days later Tessie spoke to Fred right after breakfast:

"Lone Star, Harms goes t' town later."

"I'll go with him?"

She nodded and said: "I've sent word that yo'r hoss Nicker is t' be given yo' on demand. Ride back that old hired cuitan and turn him in."

Lone Star made ready for the trail. Harms accepted his company, seemingly without any thought of the real purpose of Lone Star in accompanying him to White Mule. The old horse, now well filled with good grass and rested, made pretty good time alongside Harms' seasoned trail horse.

They came to White Mule's upper end at noon. They saw Ma Peters leaning over her paling fence. She at once began to rail at Keeler Harms:

"Brazos bottoms! A wonder yo'd never come t' see a body. Here I've been a widow for these many years, and no old bachelor like yo' ever came t' shine in on my loneliness."

"Hush up, Ma," Harms made believe to whine. I'm too young for such foolishness."

"Brazos bottoms! Young! Then Adam is a babe. How's this young coot been a-behavin'?" she asked, indicating Lone Star.

"He manages t' keep out of his own way."

"Why, isn't that fine!" She glanced all around, then said in a whisper: "On the daid level, boys, I had word t'day that Oslowe, the big he-wolf of all the rustlers, was in town two-three nights ago."

At once Harms' face went white.

Lone Star did not change a muscle.

"And Chalk-eye Roder, that's said t' be in the rustlers' gang, high up in it, too, is in town now. He's inquired particular after Lone Star."

"What for looker is this Chalk-eye hombre?" Fred asked.

"Thick in the body, left eye chalked, talks loud, but don't let that fool yo'. It's not bluff. What've yo' done t' get him after yo?"

"Not a thing that I know about, Ma. Aren't there any deputies t' tame such folks down, and not leave it t' citizens?"

"We've got a poor lot of peace officers."

Lone Star thanked her for the infor-

mation. Harms looked at him inquiringly.

"We'll go down and look this coyote up," Fred remarked, clucking to the old hired horse. They rode down the street side by side, Fred keeping a keen watch to right and left.

"If he's around town, he'll be hangin' down at the Shower of Gold," Fred told Harms. "Now, I'm going in and see if he's around. It'll be less risky than riding around town and maybe gettin' a bullet in the back from a gun some one shoots from between two buildings or behind an up-ended barrel."

They swung down before the Shower quietly.

"I'm inside fi'st," Fred said; "we'll inspect this lone wolf and see what he's like at home in his den," and he stepped across the threshold of the resort, lithe and sure of purpose as a panther on a game trail.

From the instant of his entry, Fred blotted from his mind all thoughts of Harms. His problem was to observe in a flash all within range of his vision.

He heard some one speak his name, saw Gryce and Burdone, at a table close to the bar, stare at him. Several hard-faced men at the bar wheeled.

Fred walked straight toward them, at once spotting the one-eyed man with the thick body. This man at once began to laugh, like one with a good joke in prospect.

"They tell me that a man that'll be mean t' a woman isn't much good," he bawled, leaning forward.

Fred never slackened his deliberate forward pace.

"And that he's got a chicken heart," Roder shouted again.

The room was very still now, except for Fred's even footfalls as he came closer toward the gunman. He looked him over for a sign of a gun in the open, but saw none. It would be an arm-holster play, then, Fred decided. Roder had his left elbow on the bar rail. So it would be a right draw from under the left armpit that Roder would attempt.

"I'd sure admire t' teach such a mean young devil manners," Roder bawled again. The hard-faced men drew away from him into a corner.

Fred called out:

"A cigar, a mild one, please," as if he did not know what was in Roder's mind. Fred knew the type. Roder was a man who worked himself up into a fury of words before starting a fight. He had to have the stimulus of anger, insult, and high-voiced reply in order to work him up to a killing mood.

"I'm talkin' t' yo'," Roder thundered, putting out his hand to touch Fred on the shoulder. They were face to face now, Fred's right elbow was on the bar. So his left arm was free. But his gun was hung for right-hand play, and Roder, by jamming him against the bar with a lurch of his body, might well pin Fred fast and so have him at a disadvantage long enough to decide the issue. Fred was more than ever confirmed in his idea as to Roder's plan of fight, because Roder's left hand touched his shoulder.

To complete the play, Roder would grip Fred's shoulder and swing him around, using him for a pivot on which to turn in crowding him against the bar, at the same time swinging his gun out and over, while Fred was deprived of power of balance and arm play by Roder's attack.

"Oh, are yo', old-timer?" said Fred, as if he failed to understand just what the joke was about.

"Sure, I mean yo', and that's whatever," and now the hand on Fred's shoulder gripped fast, and Roder's eyes held Fred's.

"Say—lemme go!" Fred said.

"No—I'll show yo' a thing or two, yo'——"

Roder started to draw his gun, but Fred's left hand jerked under the flap

of Roder's coat first and got the weapon. Roder barely touched the barrel of it as it slid through his closing fingers, and then the gun thudded up under his ribs with sickening force. His hands jerked aloft, his face went yellowish gray, his single eye rolled back in terror, the other lid fluttered up and down, revealing the white socket that gave him his nickname of Chalk-eye.

"Now, while I back out, walk, right close to me, as a shield," Fred ordered, his own gun flicking out and appearing over Roder's shoulder, sweeping the hard-faced crowd.

"And don't let any one get exuberant," Harms said from the door, "or I'll take a hand. Gryce, Burdone—listening?"

They growled something angrily, but remained seated, hands on the table.

"Keep step; if yo' miss a step or start anything, I'll squeeze this trigger a li'le harder," Lone Star warned Roder.

So, step by step, using the gunman as a shield, Fred walked him out of the Shower of Gold in a tense silence. Harms covered the exit with a sweeping motion of his guns, and then they were outside.

Fred broke Roder's gun and took the shells:

"I'll keep them," said he; "we'll meet again some time, and I may want to use them against yo'—and till then they're mine."

"Tell Oslowe that Star 9's on the job," Harms spoke firmly. The old-timer's eyes were shining with delight at having been in a tight place and out, with entire credit to himself.

Roder slunk back into the Shower of Gold.

Fred and Harms went to the livery where Fred got Nicker; then, after getting the mail and trading, they turned homeward.

Outside of town, Harms reached over and shook Fred's hand as he said:

"Yo've arrived, son!"

That was all.

But it made Fred's heart beat light in his bosom.

Back in the Shower of Gold, Roder, his gun reloaded, leaned against the wall and faced the crowd of gabbering roughs:

"I've no alibis. He was too fast for me, that's all. If any one here thinks *he is,* all right."

He waited, his single eye ominously fixed. They looked away and began to shift about on shuffling feet. Roder laughed harshly and beckoned to Burdone and Gryce to follow him into the back room.

"That young cowboy's sure got nerve," he said, with grudging admiration, "and I'll admit it."

"Now, what'll we do?" Gryce asked; "we never can let a blazer like that be run, and him get away with it."

"I'll tell Oslowe; sometimes he likes to 'tend t' a hard case himself," said Roder grimly; "and he never fails."

CHAPTER VIII.

OSLOWE TRIES IT.

ARRIVING home, Lone Star first thanked Tessie Cuyler for making it possible for him to get Nicker back.

"I'll work it out," he said; "keep back some of my wages every month till I've paid yo' back."

He went about disposing of saddles, bridles, and other things. He was glad to see that Nicker was in good shape. He fed the horse a bit of tobacco, and gave him a good rubdown and a feed of grain. He spent quite a time at this, and when he appeared at the house for further orders, he found Tessie waiting for him, before the casa, smilingly enthusiastic:

"Lone Star, yo' did a lot of good t' Harms. Giving that outlaw that lesson will put some fear into those rustlers. Roder is said t' be right next t' their leader, Oslowe."

"Miss Cuyler, I didn't fear that man. It was nothing, beating him out that a way. I've found that a man that hollers and threatens is easy for a man that keeps his mouth shut and his ears and eyes open and his haid cool and his footsies warm. Mr. Harms sure backed me up in fine style."

"I never yet felt scared when Star 9 was facing rustlers," the girl spoke in a rush of confidence. "Daddy used t' handle them without gloves or a spade. They were afraid of this outfit. Some one's got t' face them down, or they'll overrun this region again."

Admiration for this brave-hearted, clean-lived girl, who could see so clearly that men must do the hard, harsh work of cleansing the region's social and business life of the taint caused by the mean elements, filled Lone Star's heart suddenly, and he must have shown some of it in his eyes; but Tessie hid her agitation by turning away with a little trilling burst of laughter and going indoors. Lone Star stood for a moment, as one who had seen a vision of loveliness. Then he turned toward the corrals again to take up his day's work.

That night, in the bunk house, Fred at once noticed a change on the part of the men. Bruce Hepborne started it:

"Say, kid, come on and play ante for beans?"

"Yes, come along," Jake Silverthorne urged.

"Oh, I dunno; I've most forgot what a card looks like," Fred objected, playfully.

"Yo' can soon learn. Come!"

Hepborne came to Fred's bunk and dragged him out. Soon he was deep in the intricacies of a game, standing and giving edged phrases of teasing, railing humor.

"Yo' belong!" Silverthorne summed it up, although no reference was made directly to the incident in the Shower of Gold. "Harms, he told us. That's all, and that's enough."

Nothing else was said on the subject, but Fred now knew that he had redeemed himself in their eyes. He accepted it as a matter of course and did not boast or enlarge upon the affair in any way, and thereby gained much more credit than ever he could have gained by a display of ranting and bravado.

From now on Fred gained with the Star 9 hands. He rode with Harms on trips of inspection. The horse-breaking went on between times. A feeling of determination and assurance had spread through the outfit.

Guns were kept clean, lass ropes in the best of condition, and the horses were looked after better. The little beginnings of slackness that had crept into the outfit were rooted out, the men themselves doing it, under the firmer leadership of Harms, who now rode with straight back and set jaw.

It was apparent that the old-timer had recovered himself, regained his self-esteem. He never referred to any change in himself, or to the Shower of Gold incident, but Fred had the impression that the old-timer cherished that bit of play as something that had done him great good. Silverthorne, in town for the mail, reported that no man had tried to crowd him, as had happened before several times, but that the rough element of the town had given him plenty of room, and the better element was especially cordial to him.

By now Fred was familiar with the lay of the land all about Star 9 and began to ride himself in regular turn with the other men.

"Our most westerly range is Red Sandy," Harms told him one night; "about ten mile west. Big water hole over that way, end of an arroyo. Queer place, big red gash, all red sand in the bottom of it, and a rock tank that has water a season like this. Look the sign out and see what bunches are waterin' over that way, and how the grass is."

Fred started, glad to have a day by himself in the open once more. Nicker hoss liked it, too, and expressed his joy by pitching all over the landscape; but when he had blown off surplus steam, he settled down to a discreet trail lope.

Under his thigh, Fred had a rifle. His short gun, newly cleaned as usual, rode snug in his long holster. From the time he left the vicinity of the house, Fred did not see any of the Star 9 outfit. He did not pay much attention to the near-by sign; that was under constant observation as a matter of regular routine.

Fred kept off the sky line; if he crossed a ridge he did so rapidly, without remaining a second longer than necessary on the top.

He found the Red Sandy tank and noted the cattle ranging near it and the number of tracks leading to it from the other range. He made a wide circle all about the red-sanded arroyo; noted that there were lobo tracks, the "pugs" of a big cougar, and the usual collection of coyote, fox, and other small-game tracks. Having assured himself that there was no serious drifting there, Fred rode back toward Star 9.

Now his mind was lax and pretty much at ease. Nicker hoss had no foolish ideas. It was a time to laze in the saddle, hands crossed on the horn, and dream. He saw again Tessie of Star 9, as she had been that morning, with a light springing in her eyes that answered the throb of his own heart. He had a wild hope that he would not own to himself. He had a feeling that the world was good and getting better all the time. Nicker hoss was taking his own way home. Well, let him.

Out of the dream with a jerk came Lone Star Fred. The golden haze through which he was riding seemed to melt. Nicker was standing still, ears dead ahead, and a warning little snort told that he was nervous over something.

There was a cloud over the sun; a small wind came whirlingly into action on a small flat ahead, then died down into a smother of dust. High above, where the funnel had been, small dried things floated—leaves, shreds of grass, nature's débris.

It was silent—very, very silent.

Fred at once began to build a smoke, as if that were what he had stopped for. Nicker, his duty done, relaxed, let one hip slump down, and sighed. He accepted this rest spell as a favor from his rider.

Fred lighted the smoke and sat, quiet and still, viewing the scene all around.

It was flat and hot, and there was no cover.

Building the smoke had given a color of naturalness to Lone Star's pause. Ahead was a slight ridge. Fred had crossed it, coming out. Something moved down its face. A stone, Fred decided; not large, but carrying sand and dirt with it. That stone might have started of itself. And yet——

It was a very long shot.

Fred spoke to Nicker, and turned him as if to ride down the little flat, paralleling the tiny ridge, and thus round its end.

"Any one behind that ridge would've drawn back, easy and quiet, when I stopped. His rifle might've hit that stone, old-timer. He won't hear it slide; it's small, and that fine, dry sand and dirt will not make any noise sliding. We'll ride as if we're going to go around that ridge, where it merges down into this flat again, and see what happens. If there's a man behind there, hostile, he'll think he can get a close shot at the end of the ridge, and not risk a long one now."

Now Nicker started, fast and clippety. Once under full speed, Fred wheeled him as if he were on a blanket, and Nicker went at the little ridge in giant, plunging leaps. Fred whipped the rifle out and over as he threw him-

self from the saddle behind the ridge's top. Nicker halted, just under the ridge. Fred fell on his stomach, just as he shoved the rifle barrel ahead of him over the ridge's keen edge, his face following.

The man on the other side, gaunt, stooped in the effort to scud along behind the ridge and get to the end before Fred did, was just closing in to mount his horse, a grulla of fine lines. He held his rifle balanced across the palm of his left hand.

The gaunt man's leg swung up, in the act of mounting.

At the instant when he was most at disadvantage, Lone Star's long gun cracked. The bullet, at that short range, came against the stock of the gun the gaunt man was swinging up and over—the stock being flatwise toward Fred. The heavy ball smashed the stock against the man's side; the horse began to buck as a second ball caught him stingingly on his rump. The gaunt man, caught unawares, pitched, head foremost, to the ground, losing the rifle as he did so. The horse bucked and grunted away from him in wide, springy leaps. The man lay there, huddled and still, arms above his head, just as he had fallen. Fred had seen his head strike first, knew he was not shamming. Fred walked into sight over the ridge and on to the long, gaunt man, whose big hat lay to one side. Fred stood over him, studying his lined face. The narrow-spaced eyes were closed now. Fred got his gun and long knife, then went to one side and watched. The horse ceased his bucking then. Presently the man stirred and came awake with a jerk.

He sat up, his hand flicking to his hip.

"Yo' needn't put 'em up," Fred jeered. "No, because I've got yo'r gun and knife, and yo're not in the fightin' class just now."

Twin orbs of yellow green flamed at him from under heavy brows. The snarl on the gaunt man's face was terrible to see. Fred laughed at him.

"Hiding behind a ridge, with a gun laid over it, waitin' for a man t' ride into daid-easy, close-up range may be yo'r idea of fun, but it ain't in line with mine. I saw right whe'e yo'r gun laid across that li'le ridge. Yo' thought I'd turned t' ride along it and around it whe'e it flattens down onto the level land, and so yo' wanted t' ride fast behind it and meet me face t' face whe'e it would be easy shootin' for yo'. Yo'd be all organized, gun in hand, and I'd ride around the small end of that ridge, and poke my chest right against that rifle's barrel? All right, I didn't. I wasn't born yesterday, hombre bravo."

The man did not reply. He let his eyes fall.

"I'd ought t' kill yo', cold turkey, but that ain't my way. What've yo' got against me that yo' were layin' for me this a way?"

"Nothing. Yo're in bad, cowboy. I'm a deputy from Salinas, looking for a horse thief, and I sized you up, and when I saw yo' were not the man wanted, started t' steal away unobserved."

"If yo' was a real deputy, yo'd came out and asked me for information."

"No, I've had honest men that I've met when after criminals blab and get the news around that I was close by, and then my plans were spiked."

"I'm not thinking yo're a deputy."

"Let me turn back my coat, and I'll show yo'."

"Got a short gun under yo' arm?"

"No, if I had, I'd used it before this," said the man, surlily.

"All right, but remember that my rifle may go off any moment."

The gaunt man's hand glided under his coat. He flipped back the part covering his left breast, and a star did shine there.

Fred stood back, puzzled.

"Well, it don't matter. I'm Lone Star Fred of the Star 9, in case yo' have t' make a report of my having bested yo' this a way. I sure had reason on my side."

"Yes, if you put it that a way, yo' did," said the fellow, more amiably now. "Am I let up?"

"Yes. In a minute."

Fred got the gaunt man's rifle and filled the barrel with sandy loam, pouring it in coolly, while the other scowled. He broke the rifle open and loaded the mechanism and slides with loam. He opened the stranger's gun and took out the shells, and stuffed the barrel of that with sand, too. Then he laid the two guns down and walked toward the ridge. backward, his eyes on the other.

"That sand sure will make that long gun shoot fine," he said and laughed; "and that short gun, too, if yo' try t' use either without cleanin' them complete. They'll be all leaded in the barrel. Nothing short of a cleaning and oiling inside will make them fit for use again. I hope yo' catch yo'r hoss thief. Patience and time will make those guns fit again, and no harm done t' honest men, either."

A stream of epithets came curling over the ridge as Fred swung to Nicker hoss and rode away in peace.

At home he looked for Tessie and Harms and told them of the incident. As he described the man, Harms' eyes dilated with keenest interest.

"Yellow-green eyes, like a wolf's?" he cried. Gaunt, big, big hat? Hard face, and eyes close t'gether? It's the big he-wolf of the rustlers himself!"

Tessie's face paled.

"Oslowe?" she asked.

"Certain!"

"If only I'd known," Fred exclaimed, his hand whipping to his gun. "I had him, right over the sights of that rifle. I couldn't've missed him."

"Yo' couldn't've known," Harms rejoined; "few men've seen his face. He was not taken when we cleaned out this region some years back, when Tessie's father was with us. He just disappeared, vowing vengeance on Star 9 some time. But he's been gone so long that every one thought he was daid and gone."

"Suppose I'd shot him, me not knowin'," Fred said, "I might've killed some innocent man. I had him at a disadvantage, and I thought a lesson would be enough for some skulker t' send him off the range locoed with fright. If I'd known him, I'd fotched him in, alive."

"He'll never stop now till he's closed his account with yo', or had his own closed," Harms said earnestly.

"All a man can do is his best," Fred said soberly.

He looked at Tessie.

She was looking at him earnestly, a wistful light deep in her dark eyes. Her lips said:

"Oh, Fred, don't let him get yo'! He's terrible, mainly on the prod and always secret and quiet and stealthy. He never forgives. His own kind fear him. He can ride into any outlaw camp and find willing slaves t' obey him. Fred, don't let him get yo'!"

"It's him or me now," Fred said, soberly; "and that's whatever!"

Harms nodded and gave Fred his gnarled hand.

"I'll side yo', Fred, anyhow, and any place and time."

"Thanks, old-timer," replied Fred, returning the pressure.

CHAPTER IX.

QUIET DAYS.

BUT although the Star 9 outfit waited for some manifestation of power, large or small, on the part of Oslowe and his band, none came. The range was scouted closely. Nothing was found to indicate that illegal acts were being committed. In fact, the outlaws seemed to have disappeared.

In town, too, the change was noticed. Gryce assumed an apologetic manner toward every one connected with Star 9, and as for Burdone, he was more than polite, especially to Tessie. He did not try to speak to her, except to bow rather distantly, when they met on the trail.

Lone Star Fred kept at the gentling of the horses. He had the lot pretty well polished off by now. Keeler Harms, his nerve wholly restored, rode with his men, and the men of Star 9 were now confident and in full control of themselves. The old discipline and morale had returned.

As for Tessie, she held her head high now and laughed—with a lilting note in her laughter that set men's pulses bounding. She went to several neighborhood parties and dances. With her always rode Lone Star, Harms, Hepborne, Silverthorne, and others of the Star 9 outfit. It was noted that the Star 9 crowd was looked up to in making the plans for the year's round-up activity in the time ahead, just as the old-time outfit had been looked up to in other years when Tessie's father was its head.

Occasionally, maids and matrons at the social affairs of the region teased Tessie of Star 9 about her new and handsome hand, but she passed this off with laughter and raillery that left them helpless to retort against her merry disclaimers.

The Star 9 party met Gryce and Burdone at one of these affairs, and the two warmed up to Lone Star and tried to make him believe that they had lost all animosity for him. Lone Star looked them over with level gaze, and his drawling, easy voice lost not a shade of its languorous hesitancy.

"Sure," he told them, "why fight all the time? I don't fight only when some one fights me. That's soon enough."

In public they spoke well of Lone Star, to people they felt would carry the news back to him.

"They'll be lovin' yo' next," Harms joked with Fred, as they sat one noon under the gallery of Star 9. Indoors Tessie's sewing machine whirred as she stitched away at another party dress of filmy white and rose pink.

"They're not foolin' me any," Fred replied.

"I think when yo' ran Oslowe off that time, he got cold feet."

"Those kind never get cold feet. There is an old saying that revenge is a dish best eaten cold."

"Yo're thinkin' they're waiting for a good chance?"

"I feel sure of it, Mr. Harms."

"I guess Star 9 can take care of herself."

"Oslowe's wolves are sure bad."

Harms did not say anything more on the subject. The sewing machine stopped whirring. Harms and Fred stretched out on the bench for a siesta.

The day was beautiful, warm, not too warm, with a gentle breeze from the west. Where the breeze came from, the pure, white cumulus clouds of range land rode high and changed shape gently as they passed across the blue vault's outer rim. All was still.

Lone Star came awake, like a cat, all at once. He rose and walked about uneasily. A queer feeling of unrest was upon him. He looked down at the horses below, walking to the rim of the bench. He looked at those in the small corral close to the house, and at the few cattle visible. He saw nothing to justify his uneasiness. The feeling gradually wore away. Harms awakened; indoors the cook began to make a noise with pots and pans. Tessie called. Harms went in. He came out presently and told Fred that he was elected to ride to the south to meet Jake Silverthorne and with him ride a circle toward the east line, where there was a water hole that might be drying up at that time.

"Yo' know pretty much all the ropes now," Harms told him, "and Jake can

wise yo' up on that region. Lot of pocket holes and cut-up range out in that direction, and a place for foxy old cows t' hide out with their calves. Hepborne will be with Jake, but he'll come on in, when yo' meet up with them. They ought t' be right at those two black buttes about two hours before sundown. Take grub, so yo' and Jake can be comfortable out t'night."

In the bustle of getting ready, Lone Star forgot his premonition of evil. He waved his hand gayly to Tessie when she appeared just as he was riding away. Nicker hoss was full of life and claimed Fred's attention for a time as he rode down the little trail to the flat land. Once out on it, his mind became taken up with watching near-by cows and their calves, for he was yet far from being able to recognize all Star 9 stock at a distance by color or other oddities—something that comes only with months of experience on the same range. Near by there was little drift of other stuff onto the home range.

Once Fred turned. The rim of the bench now showed as a dark line. Along it a small horse came at a good clip, sending up a feathery cloud of dust. By its base being so far ahead of its top and by the acute angle at which the dust streamed back, Fred judged that the rider was getting a lot out of his horse.

For a moment he thought again of his uneasy feeling of half an hour before, then he thought of Harms, his nerve restored, at the casa, and of the defensive strength of the place itself, and he rode forward, banishing his uneasiness for the time.

He had been at the two buttes, but never into the difficult country around the water hole which he and Jake were to visit. He had put off going there until the last, scouting out most of the Star 9 range alone. But he wanted to have an experienced local man with him on that trip, and so he was glad of the chance Harms had given him to go with Silverthorne.

Fred reached the butte at the time Harms had set. He found Hepborne and Silverthorne deep in the intricacies of a game of cards. In a few moments Hepborne was riding toward home, and Jake and Fred were angling off to the northeast.

"Don't get lost," Hepborne railed at them.

"Don't be foolish," Silverthorne answered.

Fred was silent. The feeling of uneasiness had returned, and when Jake tried to joke with him, he found Fred a bit crusty. But the feeling passed, and they pushed on rapidly to find a good camping place for the night that Jake knew about.

CHAPTER X.

A PLEA FROM DUCKWORTH'S.

HARMS saw the rider coming along the rim of the bench, and spoke to Tessie as he came hurtling into the ranch yard. Tessie came out hurriedly as the young lad on the dun horse leaned over, offering a note. She read the note, her face clouding with worry.

"Mrs. Duckworth wants me; I've got t' go," she said.

Harms looked the lad over keenly.

"Ain't I seen yo' hanging around town?" he asked.

"Sure," said the boy, grinning; "I'm Joe Atherton."

"How'd yo' get this note? Duckworth in town with it?"

"No, some neighbor brought it in. They thought yo'd be in after mail, and as yo' didn't, and I had t' ride over t' Juraville, I brought it out."

Tessie gave him a dollar, and he rode away. She began her preparations to ride for Duckworth's.

"That Atherton kid has been in pretty tough company in town lately," Harms told her; "chumming with all those

cholla kids and learnin' a lot of foolishness. His daddy wasn't none too good, either."

"Mrs. Duckworth writes that one of the children is sick, and she is not feeling well herself," said Tessie.

She threw the note on the table in the living room. Harms had her horse ready soon. She rode away with her head high and a light of laughter in her eyes. Harms offered to go with her, but she refused:

"Mrs. Duckworth doesn't want yo' around, Keeler. If yo' see a big bird flying over toward Duckworth's, don't shoot at it. He may be carrying something."

Harms laughed and did not press the point. She, light of heart and happy to be in the saddle again, saw the old-timer as he shifted his belt and stepped back behind the corner of the house to his bench.

Tessie rode rapidly. She hoped to get to Duckworth's well before sundown. The way was plain; she might meet people she knew on the route, she thought. She thought of Lone Star Fred as she rode, and of how his coming had brought her outfit from slackness and despondency to renewed pride and courage.

As the horse warmed to his work, she made better and better time. The trail was not hard on either horse or rider; the horse knew the way well.

Thinking of Lone Star, the warm-hearted girl clasped her hands over the horn and let her body sway easily. She was in one of those moods when the motion of the horse, the flow of the trail behind, the passing of time happily, produces a sort of self-hypnosis. She almost dreamed. Suddenly she looked all about. She was passing the end of a little dry wash. There was not a soul in sight ahead or behind on the trail. She looked up the wash. The arroyo bent above the *bajada*. It was just a little pocket, she well knew. She passed it. She was passing a clump of mesquite just beyond it when a lasso that was buried in the light soil there, just in the trail, was jerked as the horse's feet were in its circle. Tessie saw that the tautened rope ran back under the mesquite, knew that her horse was snared, felt him going into a thrashing fall, leaped clear, and heard the thrum of hoofs as she struck afoot. She saw, as she ran, that a man had emerged from the mesquite and was walking up the taut rope toward her horse, and saw the band of wild, hard-faced riders emerge from the dry wash skirting the *bajada* where there was a passage between it and the cut bank on the side nearest her. She tugged at her gun, but it had jammed and stuck. She stumbled and was partly stunned. When she awakened, a one-eyed man was leering down at her. He stood over her and held her gun in his hand:

"I guess it's as well t' keep this; they say yo've used it on a man before this time."

"Star 9 will hamstring yo' all for this," she said bravely.

"We ain't botherin' with Star 9 just now. We'll 'tend t' them later," he drawled slowly, and chuckled. "I call yo' a pretty nice sage hen. We've got yo'r hoss all tamed down now. Mount and ride."

"Where?" she demanded.

"That'll appear later."

"I won't go willingly," firmly said Tessie.

"All right; we can bind yo' onto yo'r hoss like a bag of meal, then. Yo're goin', and that's said and done."

The girl reflected.

They had her under their control. She dreaded the contact that would result from a struggle with any of them. Their hard faces reflected no feelings of pity for her as a woman fallen among human wolves. With the regular cowboys, out for a bit of a lark, she would have felt no uneasiness what-

ever. But these men, she sensed, were different. They were all strange to her. She remembered what had been said about the one-eyed man Lone Star had bested in the Shower of Gold.

"Yo're Roder, Chalk-eye, they call yo'?"

He laughed recklessly:

"What difference? Get on that hoss, or be tied on. I'd sure enjoy roping yo' on myse'f. It would be fun t' cinch a pretty gal like yo' up. Get up, or be tied up."

Tessie got on the horse.

"That's better; a li'le obedience t' men's orders never hurt any woman. Get a-going, boys; yo' know all about the place."

So, ringed by the wild-looking crew, the girl rode away.

"I was on my way t' visit a sick woman, a neighbor," she said.

Roder laughed recklessly:

"She won't suffer any because yo' didn't come," he replied.

"Was that a fake message I got?"

Roder laughed again, and his men laughed with him.

Then they became grimly silent as they urged their horses forward. They kept Tessie's horse ringed with their own. She noted, with keen appreciation, that their horses were good, although some of them seemed pretty well gaunted. Their saddles, bridles, and all their equipment lacked glitter and ornament. Their guns, especially, she noted, were all frontier sixes, without any fancy trimmings. At a distance the troop would ride without sending off any flashing rays from ornaments on either horses or riders. They managed their horses quietly, with few words and those low-spoken.

They at once left the trail and struck across the open range.

Night came on. They saw no one. The riders seemed to know just where to go through the darkness. Tessie knew that if she lifted her horse for a lope, in the effort to escape, a blaze of gunfire would greet the effort, and the horse would be shot down, and she compelled to ride with one of the men. She shuddered to think of that possibility.

"As long as I've got my own horse under me, I've always got a chance to get away," was her thought; "some time in these dark hours the chance will come. I'll watch for it."

The horsemen kept her closed in skillfully. They did not address her directly often, although now and then some crude jest would be flung at her, or one of them would lean over in the saddle and leer.

There was a moon, and that helped in getting over the rough going. Tessie had given up the effort to keep her bearings. She knew they were far north of Star 9 and in country she had never been in before. They were working toward the higher country.

Suddenly they turned sharply, and the moon was blotted out by the shoulder of a cut bank that seemed to be higher and higher as they rode up the slot. They went through it, and presently came out, after a scrambling climb, onto a mesa. They had the moon now. They started across this tableland. The going was good; the horses ceased to breathe hard, the men were quiet. Fatigue crept over the girl. In spite of herself she nodded in the saddle.

"Swing down!" She heard the order. They had stopped and were now before a collection of cabins. The moon was streaming down. Men came out and asked questions. Dogs barked.

Tessie was pulled from her horse and shoved into the largest cabin. Sitting at a rough table was a big, gaunt man, with deep-lined face, and eyes that were gray green. He smiled at her coldly:

"It worked out all right, boss," Roder said.

"I thought it would. Are the men ready for the other part of it?"

"Sure."

"We'll watch, then. Star 9 will be some upset. It's time t' strike. Go away, Roder," said the leader, waving him aside.

Roder went out, with a leering laugh, his eyes on Tessie. Oslowe regarded the girl closely. She returned his glances bravely.

"Star 9 will hamstring yo' and yo'r gang," she flashed ta him.

"Yo've got spunk, eh? Yo'r dad drove me out. I wasn't bad then, just picking up a few unbranded cows now and then, like a lot of other men were doing——"

"Cows belonging t' others," she flashed again.

He laughed:

"Yo' sure are pretty, that a way, when yo'r dander's up."

The girl was silent under the gaze of those eyes, which seemed to blaze with a cold, hateful light.

"Later, we'll see more about yo'," he nagged at her; "later, when other work is done. It's my turn now."

He clapped his big, bony hands thrice, and from the back of the room a slender Mexican appeared. He wore two guns and a big knife's haft showed in his broad silken sash. Oslowe spoke harshly to the man:

"Carlo, keep her for me, in the back room."

"*Si,* señor."

He signed to Tessie to go with him to the door by which he had entered. Tessie decided to go without a struggle. The Mexican watched her, his white teeth exposed in a half laugh. As she passed him, Oslowe gave his orders:

"Keep her with yo', and let no one come near her but me. If my orders are disobeyed, I'll see that yo're killed."

The Mexican did not reply, but walked after Tessie.

The rear room was hung with tanned skins—bear, cougar, wolf, and fox. There was a bunk in one corner.

Tessie sat on the edge of the bunk. Carlos sat on an up-ended keg, regarding her closely. The room was silent. Somewhere outside men talked, and she heard horses being led past. She could tell they were being led, not ridden, by the way they walked and the phrases used by the men with them. Then there was the scrape of a rough chair in the outer room, and the door banged slightly.

At once Carlo's manner changed. He approached the girl with light step and spoke softly:

"Señora, Ah'm going your freend to be."

"What do yo' mean?" she asked, her eyes suddenly alight with a hope she scarcely dared admit.

"Dhese *puerco* Oslowe—Ah'm done weeth heem. He's broken dhee heart of *hermana mia.*" He promised to be good weeth her, *pobrecito mia.* She is now gone—dead, you say—dhese three month. Ah'm looking for way to revenge our insult on heem.'

Tessie looked at the man, studying his face for some sign of deceit. His agitation was apparent. He burst out with a tale of how his sister had been enticed away with the band, and how Oslowe had taken her before a priest down in Mexico and had afterward kept her on the mesa top where they then were, jealous of her and yet seldom seeing her, until she had died of loneliness and his cruelty. Carlo said he had bided his time, waiting for a chance to revenge himself upon the leader of the gang, and he now felt that the time had come.

"I weel go to Star 9 weeth a note," he promised. "Star 9 weel wipe out these ladrones."

"Yes. I would hardly know the way to thank you," Tessie whispered.

Carlos stepped into the outer room and came back with a bit of paper and a pencil. She scribbled hurriedly:

"Am held a prisoner by Oslowe's

gang. The bearer knows where. I think you can trust him."

Carlo took it, folded it small and tucked it into his sash. He went out, saying he would get her some supper. She heard him bolt the door outside, then go out in front—*and then she heard, after a few seconds, a shot.*

Men laughed after that and talked loudly.

Tessie waited and waited, a feeling of depression growing on her.

Until now she had kept up hope and courage. At the worst, there would be captivity and a ransom. Lone Star and Harms would run out the sign, if no rain came. Harms was good on sign-reading. Carlo would get the message through. She felt convinced of the sincerity of the man. She knew the Mexican character well enough to realize that while Carlo might not have clear ideas as to other people's property, he would resent such an affront to the honor of his family as Oslowe had been guilty of, presuming that Carlo's story was true. In any event, she had risked nothing by writing the note, she reflected.

The door opened.

Oslowe came in, his cold, level gaze on her.

Those green-gray eyes were terrible to look upon now. His hat was pushed back from his high, bony forehead. His big hands, lean and talonlike, clutched and worked:

"I did not trust that cholla altogether. The'e's a chink in that outer wall. I had him spied upon. I shot him when he came out and got that note. It will do t' send t' Star 9, and with it that outfit can all be drawn away on a wild-goose chase, while we loot Star 9 range."

"Yo' devil!" the girl cried and started up bravely to face him.

"Prettier than ever! A woman never looks quite so well as when she's angry. I won't say good night, but that I'll see yo' later, after I've given some orders."

He shut the door again, and his laughter came back to her as he shot the outer bolt.

Tessie threw herself on the bunk, and now her courage, indeed, ran low.

CHAPTER XI.

FRED SEES TESSIE SMILE.

LEANING over the little fire that Lone and Jake Silverthorne had made to cheer their camp near the water hole, Lone Star Fred studied the ruddy coals, as a man will after a long day in the saddle. He saw many visions there, and then there flashed into sight, where a few little glowing embers crossed and nestled together, a vision of a face that smiled.

"Jake," he said quickly, "what're yo' seein' in the embers?"

"I used t' sit and look at them, but since my wife died ten years ago, I don't do it any more," Jake said soberly.

"Lean over in line with my haid. See, isn't that Miss Tessie?"

"Which it sure is!" said Jake admiringly. "And, say, Lone Star, she's smilin', too."

The glowing embers grayed, like a flash the vision was lost.

Fred half started up:

"I've got an uneasy feeling about her, Jake. This sudden fadin' away of Oslowe and his gang isn't convincin' t' me, old-timer."

"Nor t' me. That he-wolf has a bad rep for always coming back."

They rolled in their blankets back from the water hole in a little sheltered place under a cut bank, so that cattle coming to drink early would not be kept away from the water, after coming for miles to get it. Fred tried to get to sleep. Generally he slept as soon as he reclined, if no danger threatened, but this night he was uneasy. He twisted and sat up several times. Jake was

snoring. Fred stretched out again, and sleep came like a thunderclap, as it will to tired men overwrought.

Fred woke with a jerk. He had slept till dawn, but the bad impressions of the night clung to brain and nerve. He hurried Jake through breakfast and getting ready for the return trip, nor did he let Jake dawdle in side passes after things that took his veteran attention.

Near home he blurted out: "Jake, I feel mighty uneasy some way."

"I don't, only over what'll I get t' eat when we get in."

They arrived about noon. Harms greeted them warmly. Not a cloud marred the sky of the outfit's content, according to his cheery talk.

"Miss Tessie get back?" Lone Star asked.

Harms shook his head: "Wasn't lookin' for her. If she was up all or part of the night with a sick kid, she'll sleep this mornin' and not get home till mebbe late in the afternoon. She might stay at Duckworth's two-three days. She has, formerly."

Fred let that satisfy him. He and Silverthorne had a cold snack from the cook's bounty. Regular mealtime was past. Jake said he'd wait till supper to fill his aching void.

"It always aches, but it's never void," Harms joked the veteran. "Yo' take too much trouble fillin' it up for that."

They were beside the house, Fred and Jake making ready for a session with the almost-gentled ponies in the corral on the flat.

"Whoever that is, he's burnin' the wind," said Harms and pointed to a rider coming from the direction of White Mule.

"Maybe it's word from Miss Tessie that she wants something," Fred said, for she was on his mind constantly, and everything seemed to call for some reference to her. Like a flash there leaped before his mental vision the dream face he had seen smiling at him out of the campfire's embers.

The rider came, indeed, at speed. He was on a lathered dun. He was slender and supple, and he swayed easily with the horse's leaps, as one accustomed to the long trails.

"He can ride some," Jake praised.

The horse came to a puffing, blowing stop. The lean rider snapped a scrap of paper from his pocket and handed it to Harms. He swayed in the saddle as a man will who is very, very tired.

"What's this!" Harms exclaimed, his right hand going to his gun's butt as he held the paper in his left.

"What is it?" Fred demanded. Jake was silent, regarding the messenger keenly the while.

Harms read the message:

"Am held a prisoner by Oslowe's gang. The bearer knows where; I think you can trust him."

"It's her hand of write, too," Harms said emphatically.

Fred peered at the messenger. His face was seamed and covered with a reddish beard. His gaze was open and direct.

"Where is she?"

"Where'd yo' get this note?"

"If she's hurt, some one'll suffer!"

These three remarks exploded almost at once. The messenger spoke quickly:

"She's near Red Springs. Held in a camp they've got."

"How come yo've arrived as if comin' from the other way?"

"I had t' ride with some of the gang that were circlin' over toward White Mule. I slipped away. I made an excuse t' fetch a circle and have come he'e with that note at the risk of my life, pards. I've got t' ride an' overtake them again, so they won't suspect and send word back t' Oslowe that would spoil any plan at rescue."

He paused and glanced all about as one eager to get away.

"How did yo' come t' get this note?" Fred demanded.

"She was in a tent apart. They brought her in last night. I'm a danged-tough citizen, hombres; stealin' a few cows or hosses seems all right t' me, but I've never picked on a woman yet. I didn't dare tell Oslowe that, but I whispered it to that pretty li'le gal, and when I brought her in her supper, she slipped me this note. I'll stay with them and protect her, when yo'-all charge in t' get her, and I'll see that she don't get hurt none, either," said the man with well-acted fervor.

"How did they get her?" Harms asked.

"I don't know any particulars. I'm goin' now, pards. Don't let me get caught in this. Even if I get away Oslowe has a hold on my brother that he can use t' send him to a Mexican prison. I'm afraid I may've done too much now."

They grasped his hand and asked his name. He refused to talk more, becoming more and more uneasy:

"I'll have t' rub my hoss down and rest him before I join up with them in town, so they will never suspect what happened here," he exclaimed.

"They're camped right in the arroyo, above the springs," he told them, as he turned his horse; "it's been dry enough t' make that arroyo safe t' camp in now. No signs of rain for weeks and none now at all. I'm driftin'. I'll be right with her if yo' strike t'night. At the first shot, I'll get t' her side and stay. I rode past Star 9 two years ago, before I joined up with Oslowe, and she gave me a good feed and tobacco. I ain't never forgot it, boys," said the man, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "I'm sayin' that just seein' that pretty gal in that camp of wolves is too much for a man, even if he has been tough."

"What's yo'r handle?" Fred asked.

"Never mind that; it wouldn't do yo' any good," he replied, touching his horse. "Get a-goin'; yo'r outfit can whip them."

They stared at his receding back. Then they broke into a fever of activity. Harms issued orders for the cook to get grub ready. They made up bags of supplies at once.

"We'll hit the trail and pick up every man as we ride. The near-by lads will be haiding this way now, and those at the line camps we can get on our way."

"Had we ought t' get help?" Jake suggested.

"Star 9 isn't askin' any help," Harms replied grimly.

"That's it, old-timer," Lone Star agreed.

They hit their saddles with a determination that took the kinks out of their mounts at once. Nicker hoss, tired pretty well by his journey of the day before and the return, yet had stamina left. They planned to get extra horses and haze them along.

"We can pen them in that old corral near Indian Rocks," Harms told them; "we'll have some of the boys by then. We can change hosses and ride during the night. We'd ought t' make it long before dawn and be ready t' close in then."

So they made their plans feverishly, taking plenty of extra ammunition. Each man carried a rifle in his saddle sheath, and an extra one across his thighs; at least three of the other men would have their long guns with them.

CHAPTER XII.

WAGES OF SIN.

TESSIE was not further molested during that night, nor did she see any one. The noise of the camp died down; the red glare of the fires did not again shine through chinks in the outer wall. With the dawn came a silent, hard-faced man with food. He watched her eat, then he withdrew.

After a time, Oslowe came in to remind her that she must not try to escape. Even if she got away, she would be retaken, and some of his rougher men might not care if they hurt her in the capturing, he warned her.

"Yo've played right into our hands by writin' that note yo' gave Carlo Mendoza," he said, laughing at her hopes of rescue. "We might've forged a note for our own purposes, but it never would've fitted in like that one has."

He went out, bolting the heavy door. In the open he went from group to group, giving orders and listening to reports. He inquired after "Cashel," but there was no news of this much needed man.

"Too early yet, anyhow; he started in the night and wouldn't've got t' Star 9 much before this," he said. "I expect Burdone and Gryce. Pass word t' the lookouts t' let them up the narrow trail, on top of the mesa."

He went back into his cabin and began to eat what the camp cook brought to him. He ate fully, wolfishly, devouring great bites of juicy, rare beef with great gusto. His gray-green eyes roved about restlessly.

There was a hail without, and the sound of horses at a walk. He went out, chewing a great T bone.

"H'lo, Burdone! H'lo, Gryce! First time I've let yo' into my camp. Well, it may not be the last. If all goes well, I'll stay here. It was our gang's old hang-out before Zack Cuyler fought us off this range. Light down, men," he called, throwing the T bone to a cur to finish.

Burdone and Gryce alighted, glancing all about curiously. Oslowe signed for his followers to leave them. He sat down with the two newcomers before his cabin.

"I don't want t' go inside and talk loud; we might wake her up," he said exultingly.

Burdone glanced quickly at Oslowe:

"Then yo'r plan t' lure her out where yo' could snare her worked all right?"

"My plans usually work," snapped Oslowe, showing his sharp teeth in a vulpine grin that was gone at once.

"That will draw them away from Star 9, hunting for her," Gryce suggested, "and make it easy for yo' t' comb their range. They won't leave a man on the job till she's found."

"No. I don't think they will."

"And remember my part of it," Burdone said eagerly. "I'm t' play the part of rescuer, so I'll get back into her good graces."

Gryce and Oslowe exchanged a glance. Burdone caught it, partly.

"That was our plan, wasn't it?" he demanded; "I was t' get that chance t' rescue her; and a cut off the profits of the raid on Star 9?"

"Yes," Oslowe replied quickly, "sure."

"Of course, I'd not gone into it, otherwise," Gryce seconded.

Burdone's face cleared. The thick-bodied but handsome man showed some signs of nervousness.

"I'll walk around to see yo'r outfit," he said.

"Go as far' yo' like," Oslowe invited.

Burdone strolled away.

"He'll raise thunder," Gryce whispered; "he only got into this t' get a chance t' win Tessie of Star 9."

"I'm about sick of him," Oslowe said; "he's too squeamish. I want yo' in full power in White Mule, now that I'm back on the range. Burdone will always ask questions and nose into everything. I want yo' in full power, understand? Then yo' and I can do business, without a third fatting up on the cut."

Gryce's thin, red tongue ran over his lips. His manner showed how well pleased he was with such an arrangement:

"But how'll we get rid of him? He's got a big drag with all the sporty cattlemen of his own sort, and they don't

suspect him bein' in with us, and so he keeps right strong with them all."

"How'll yo' handle him?" Gryce persisted, when Oslowe did not give an immediate reply to this pointed query.

Oslowe did not answer. He smiled and glanced away.

Burdone roamed about, observing, and under observation. At a sign from Oslowe a man went everywhere that Burdone went, listening to his chat with the many men of the camp. From time to time this man reported quietly to Oslowe, who kept with Gryce at the main cabin. That man was Chalk-eye Roder, the he-wolf's grim second.

Burdone came to them, visibly ill at ease. He at once addressed Oslowe, as the he-wolf of the rustlers sat on the big bench before the cabin:

"Oslowe, this don't stack up?"

"How so?" asked Oslowe, without moving his gaunt, powerful body a hair's breadth. His hands were very still.

"I've heard some of those men hint that yo're goin' t' take Tessie of Star 9. They make jokes about yo' two and look at me and laugh."

"I'm not t' blame for what roisterin' men, hard-boiled geezers like my men, do or say, as long's they serve me well."

His voice was harsh now.

Burdone glanced away.

"Say, Burdone, it's all right," Gryce wheedled.

"I wish I was sure," Burdone said, sitting down moodily, chin on his cupped hands.

"Yo're gettin' mighty squeamish all of a sudden," Oslowe snarled.

"I said I didn't want any harm t' come t' Tessie. I can replace the cattle yo' take, later. I've got enough for us both. I want Star 9 and her. Especially her. At first it was just Star 9. Now it's her," Burdone said hollowly.

"Lovesick, at last, after breaking a dozen women's hearts!" Gryce showed the venom of his nature.

"Well, put it that a way, then, if you like."

Burdone got up and strolled away. Oslowe and Gryce exchanged again that significant glance of secret understanding.

Burdone lounged about among the men, eating with a group of them at noon, and then passing his time apart from every one. He started several times toward Oslowe's cabin, but each time failed to carry through whatever he had in mind, going away again.

In midafternoon a man came over the rim of the mesa, spurring fast.

"Cashel!" some one called.

Oslowe at once came out of his cabin, with Gryce. Cashel came on and swung down, talking jerkily:

"I made it, boss. I started them for Red Springs, as yo' said. "They'll strip Star 9 range, thinkin' t' find her——"

Oslowe signed for him to be silent and led him indoors. Burdone walked away, head down.

Oslowe came out soon, with Gryce and Cashel. The latter went to put his horse in the corral.

Burdone came toward the two, his eyes hard.

"Oslowe, I'm out of this."

"All right."

"I'm going home."

"Go along."

"Gryce, come along."

"No, I stick."

Burdone eyed them both and started away.

Gryce made as if to stop him; Oslowe signed for him to desist. Burdone got his horse and saddled. As he got about a hundred yards away, Oslowe signed to a man, who at once picked up a rifle and followed. It was Chalk-eye.

"He thinks he's gettin' away t' give some sort of a double-cross alarm against us; Roder will take care of him when he rides out from the mesa's base into the open," Oslowe told Gryce, leading him indoors.

In the cabin they sat at the table in silence.

A rifle cracked.

"That's Roder; he never misses at a fair range," Oslowe laughed.

"Let's play a few hands of cards till we hear more," Gryce suggested, and they played with dogged indifference to any fate but their own.

A rap at the outer door!

"Come in!" Oslowe ordered.

A hard-faced man came in:

"Roder's gone down t' get his hoss and gun and money and other things, and t' make sure—with his knife."

"All right," said Oslowe indifferently.

They played on and on. Gryce pleaded fatigue and went to sleep with one of the men. Oslowe raked in his winnings greedily and went to the rear room. Tessie started up from her bunk. He called in to her:

"I don't want yo'—yet. We start at dawn for Star 9 range. It's bare of fightin' men. We'll sweep it clean, and yo' go south with yo'r herd, with me—down into Mexico!"

Then he closed the door, and the bolt shot home.

Tessie shudderingly sank on the bunk again.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT RED SPRINGS.

A LINE of ghost riders came toward Red Springs.

"We'll steal as close as we can, and charge in," Lone Star Fred whispered to Harms.

Behind them the Star 9 men rode, grim, tight-lipped, ready.

"I can make out the *bajada* at the end of the big red arroyo," Silverthorne warned them. Jake was noted for having fine night eyes.

"So can I, now. Maybe we'd ought t' scout in," Lone Star said.

"Yo' cain't hold these men back—what's that" Jake asked.

He was calling attention to something between the *bajada* and the cut bank's end.

"Man, slumped down over his saddle horn," Hepborne warned.

"Sentry, likely, fallen asleep, sitting in the saddle," Lone Star said. "If we get him, the way's open——"

He spurred forward. The man did not move. They watched the attempt to capture the sentinel.

As Fred closed in, the man swayed erect.

The watchers looked for gun play.

Instead, the man fell over. Fred, leaping down, caught him and signed for them to come. They galloped in. Fred spoke:

"It's Burdone—speak, Burdone; what is it?"

He held the wounded man in a sitting position, his knees at Burdone's back. The latter gasped:

"Tessie, at Horse Thief Mesa! That note was hers, but they gave a false idea of where she was, t' draw yo' off Star 9 range so it can be raided to-day. Men, Oslowe's taken a fancy t' Tessie. I was in it, but I couldn't stand that part. I'm bad, but I love her. Men, don't let them take her—they start off the mesa at dawn. I tried t' get away. They shot me in the back as I was leaving the mesa base and sent a man down, Chalk-eye Roder, t' finish me with the knife and rob my body. I got him, with my knife, as he leaned over. I struck upward—I'm done, don't wait, yo' cain't do me any good. Save her by——" and then he was still.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE WAY TO MEXICO.

TESSIE started up. She had been in a doze.

Oslowe was calling to her from the door:

"We start now, for Mexico. We'll pick up those Star 9 heavies on the way. Come, my dove."

She eyed him bravely. Now that the crisis had arrived, her brain cleared of fogs of terror and fatigue. She was again the clear-eyed, fearless daughter of the open range.

"Star 9 will hamstring yo' for this," she flung back.

He laughed:

"I like t' have yo' look at me like that. It shows spunk, and I like spunk."

She went with him to the outer room. Food was handed her. She showed her fearlessness by eating it rapidly. Oslowe led her outdoors. The band was gathered in full force. Laughter and jokes ran the rounds. Tessie was given her own horse, and Oslowe mounted near her. They started, Tessie and Oslowe in the lead.

They went down the mesa trail, steep and with a turn halfway down, where slides and slips of fallen débris had made a broad, ample turning place, forming a sort of letter S. Here they were temporarily spread out a bit. Oslowe thought of something and asked suddenly:

"Who saw Roder? I want t' talk t' him about what he took off of Burdone."

No one had seen Roder, it seemed.

"Well, it doesn't matter, let's get along," the rustler he-wolf ordered.

Tessie was just ahead. He felt no uneasiness about her, though, as a bullet would stop her horse if she tried to get away.

To her came a whisper from somewhere:

"Edge back through them—slow up, let them pass."

She drew her horse down, let them loiter past. Oslowe saw this and started toward her, the others being now past.

"We're on the way t' Mexico, come along, my queen!" Oslowe said invitingly.

A crashing volley—rifles and sixes!

The light was just good for shooting.

"Sheriff, order up the posse," Tessie heard Lone Star Fred call. Harms, afoot, came bounding from among some boulders at the turn of the trail. The old man, his hat off, had his guns rolling, and the death-hail went from him like thunder of cannon in battle. Behind him were Jake and Hepborne and the other Star 9 boys, six of them using their rifles, sending streams of bullets into the bewildered outlaws.

Lone Star Fred came riding up the trail, shouting:

"Now, men!"

He passed through their disordered ranks as if leading a charge. They tumbled off the trail, in the effort to take a short cut, their horses rolling and sliding. The Star 9 men charged across the elbow in the trail, shooting as they came. The outlaws, terrorized by this rain of fire, broke and fled.

Tessie, at the first shot, started her horse up the trail. After her came Oslowe, unhurt.

On the mesa top, the girl started her horse forward. A shot tumbled him over. The girl lay, stunned for the moment. Oslowe rode for her. Another horse came up the trail and onto the mesa.

"Oslowe!" the rider called.

Oslowe swung down, to use his horse as a shield, offside.

As he was in midswing, a bullet caught his horse, which leaped madly. Oslowe fell. Lone Star leaped down, and as Oslowe rose, clawing at his gun, he bent over the girl.

"The end of the trail," Lone Star spoke quietly. His hands moved, lightning swift.

Oslowe's gun roared.

Fred fell sidewise, going down with his gun roaring.

Oslowe tottered—fell.

Lone Star sprang erect. He reached Tessie. She opened her eyes and asked anxiously:

"Fred, are yo' hurt?"

"He never touched me—sweetheart."

CHAPTER XV.

AT STAR 9.

THE outlaws scattered. Gryce was found among the dead. No one remained to tell Burdone's real story, so, in virtue of his last great service to right and justice, the Star 9 folk pledged themselves not to reveal just how he died, and he was given a range funeral, and his name left unsullied before the world.

The fight at the mesa settled the status of the region, for no he-wolf arose to gather the scattered outlaws again, and the range thereabouts had peace ever after.

Tessie and Lone Star Fred were married the next year. Harms, rejoicing in his restored courage and in the love of the happy pair, remained Star 9's *primero* for many, many years, and the old-timers, Jake Silverthorne and Bruce Hepborne, with him.

Sometimes in the evenings, Keeler Harms would take the children of Lone Star and Tessie out under the shady gallery, warm still from the sun's last rays and, while the moon swung up over the range land, tell them of the time when their mother shot their dad and then cured him, and of how Star 9 had broken up the wolves of the range and put them to rout once for all in that last wild fight at the foot of Horse Thief Mesa.

A WOMAN WHO CATCHES HER OWN FURS

WHEN winter storms have snowed in the Vancouver coast and gales scream in the offing, one sturdy woman, Mrs. W. Maben of Pachena Bay, follows her own trap lines. The principal line is about eight miles long, extending from Marion Lake to the mouth of the Pachena River. It traverses rugged country covered with big trees and almost impenetrable underbrush, but Mrs. Maben knows how to find the easiest footing as she makes her way through the wilderness.

Trapping has been her winter hobby for the past three years. Last year her catch numbered eighty-six pelts, largely those of raccoons, mink, otter, and marten. The business pays, she says, and it costs practically nothing. Another of her dictums is that, "It certainly beats housework for a woman who is strong and active and likes outdoor life."

A VERSATILE WESTERNER

THE real Jack of all trades has been found in the West—near Walla Walla, Washington, in fact. His name is Will W. Henry, and he is county farm agent in one of the largest and most productive farming regions of the Pacific Northwest. Mr. Henry's activities do not stop here, however, for included in his repertoire are forty-eight other jobs. At any time, he will assist the people of his neighborhood at tasks ranging from stump blasting to dressmaking. He is competent to act as medical adviser to both animals and humans. And, in addition to his many other labors, he found time last year to write sixty-six articles on farm subjects.

Southward, Ho!

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Flapjack and Sirup," etc.

FIGHTING mad was "Flapjack" Meehan.

He had been given plenty of excitement during the period when "Vag" Blucher had arrived in Cold Deck with a fake rodeo and had attempted to "take" the hard-working miners. On Flapjack's shoulders had fallen the burden of beating Blucher at his own game. With the aid of local talent and hard riding and shooting Flapjack had managed to turn the tide, with the result that Cold Deck had not only seen a good show but had won a rodeo as a side bet. With winter ahead the rodeo was a problem. Blucher had planned to sell the steers as beef and kill the horses when profits were no longer possible.

There were too many lovers of horseflesh in the camp to permit the killing of the animals. Then, too, it seemed a crime to kill the steers after the patient if somewhat scrappy creatures had given so much entertainment in return for their hard board and lodging. On the other hand, Cold Deck in winter was no place for a rodeo. The committee in charge had solved the problem by presenting Flapjack with the rodeo and then hunting the tall timber until after the storm had blown over. And Flapjack was storming.

"That's gratitude!" he bellowed. "Keep these sour doughs from being trimmed; get twenty thousand dollars for the sick miners' fund, and they turn around and present me with a rodeo—and a hard winter ahead! It's a good thing—— I'm going out and find 'em!"

But though Flapjack hunted high and low he was unable to find Cold Deck's committee. One and all were in hiding. They knew that Flapjack would offer no personal violence but they were afraid he might slip something over so that the rodeo animals would prove a boomerang. The cool fall air eventually chilled Flapjack's rage and he grinned. After all, why shouldn't he solve the problem? He had the time and the money. "I'll see if I can't get some fun out of this," he mused, "might just as well spend most of the winter touring around the country putting on shows for people. I'll make it different from most by bringing along a few

northern animals! Of course, I'll have to be in Cold Deck on Christmas and Thanksgiving; but the rest of the time —huh! I'll be a good manager. When I get tired of it, I'll sell out to a good man. Any way you look at it I'll win, because I'll be giving the stock a fair break instead of killing 'em off as Vag Blucher figured on doing."

He chuckled as he thought of Vag Blucher and the other members of the show that had attempted to take Cold Deck. Vag was working in Flapjack's mine for a stake out of the camp. So were his subordinates. Their glory had vanished. They were common muckers covered with the silt of the mine. "Chuck" Foster, who boasted he could ride anything with hair on it, was now riding a pick and shovel. Duke MacDougal, who billed himself as the world's greatest roper and announced he could rope anything that moved and had horns, was now roping ore cars. Ray DeLay, who proclaimed he could bulldog anything with horns, was sitting pretty. He had made good his boast. He alone had given his best at all times. Flapjack had presented him with a thousand-dollar poke of gold as a reward. And it was to DeLay that Flapjack eventually turned.

"I don't like the idea of killing off the stock," he said, by way of sounding out the other.

"Me neither!"

"Got any ideas?"

"Yeah!"

"Shoot!"

DeLay scratched his head, then grinned. "You strike me as a bird that likes to have a little fun now and again. Now, down South there's a reformed cattle rustler named Garby. He used to be pardners with Vag Blucher, but they got all worn out watching each other so there was a bust up."

"Reformed cattle rustler, eh?" Flapjack observed, "that's the way Dad Simms described Blucher."

"Well, there's something about a reformed cattle rustler that a range man naturally spots. You sort of feel it in the air, like a thunder shower." DeLay spoke half seriously.

"I know how you feel, go ahead," Flapjack urged.

"Well, this Garby's been working Blucher's game of hitting small towns and shaking down local committees. I've seen 'em leave five hundred fans holdin' the sack because their riders wouldn't ride unless there was a real gate in sight."

"They returned the gate money?" Flapjack suggested.

"Return nothing! When Garby gets his paws on a dollar, it's his. When he lets go, it's because he sees something worth a dollar that looks better to him than the dollar. He's playing small towns, as I was explaining, and I was thinking that if a good show hit that country it'd make a difference. Men like Blucher and Garby make humane societies wild, and that makes it tough for the regular places like Pendleton, Ellensburg, and the other round-ups. It's something for you to think about."

"Here's something for you to think about Ray. How'd you like to go along as a sort of assistant manager and show me the ropes? We'll have our fun for a while, then sell the show. If we can't sell it, we'll give it away."

"I've seen shows you couldn't give away," DeLay answered. "You've treated me white and I'll treat you the same way. I've told you how you can have some fun, now I'll tell you some of the grief. You'll be jumped on by humane societies and you'll find cheap politicians that'll want to graft off you. You'll have grief—great gobs of grief. Back of it all, you'll have the opposition of Garby's crowd. And, let's see, there was something else. Oh, yes—watch out for Vag Blucher! This affair at Cold Deck got in the papers and every man Blucher knows is laugh-

ing at him. He'll have to get you, Flapjack, to save his own face."

"I suppose he has got a face he thinks worth saving," Flapjack admitted, "but when I saw him this morning—coming off shift—he looked mostly like silt to me. Only his eyes showed. Huh! Come to think of it, he did give me a dirty look. Oh, well—do you take the manager job?"

"Sure thing!"

"Then your pay starts now!"

The message that reached Cold Deck was in code, but Vag Blucher, to whom it was addressed, found little difficulty in deciphering it. Blucher had received too many dispatches in code from Pete Garby not to remember the key. He read swiftly—not what it said, but what it meant:

Report Flapjack Meehan bringing your old show South. Report he will bring moose, caribou, polar bear, sour doughs, and Eskimos. This will raise the devil with me. A thousand dollars in it if you stop this show before it reaches Seattle. No questions asked. GARBY.

"A thousand dollars," whispered Blucher, "Well I'm through with the muck."

Blucher had been mucking long enough to learn a few things about Flapjack Meehan and "Tubby" Willows. He learned that each was a very soft man once the victory was won. They might demand unconditional surrender, but once the enemy had given in, the terms were more than generous. Blucher planned to cash in on what he had learned. Accordingly, he washed up that night and presented himself at the New Deal Café. "Good evening, Pancake!" he began. He never could remember Flapjack's nickname.

"Flapjack!" corrected Dad Simms, "Flapjack Meehan. It ain't Pancake, Slapjack, Hotcake, or Flannelcake, but Flapjack. Now, see if you can't remember it."

"Never mind, Dad," Flapjack interrupted. "What's on your mind, Blucher."

"I hear you're taking the rodeo South. I know how to handle things, and I'll go along as a hired hand if you'll let me. I'll do anything to get back to my own country."

"Hum-m-m-m!" said Flapjack. He had a hunch that he should not grant this request, but his good-nature got the better of him. "Well, Blucher, you may go, but watch your step. If I see or hear of any crooked moves I'll act first and ask questions afterwards."

"Pancake——"

"Now, hold on. If you make one more slip about my name, Blucher, back you go to the mine! It's Flapjack Meehan. And incidentally, it's Meehan to you."

"O. K., Meehan!"

"And remember I'm keeping an eye on you as well as on the boys I hire. I'm leaving all your friends behind, but I'm taking Ray DeLay along. You'll get your orders from him!"

Three days later, with the cheers of Cold Deck ringing in their ears, the Cold Deck Rodeo headed for points South and warmth.

"How you going to get to Seattle?" Blucher inquired when the interior country was behind them and the scent of salt water was in the air.

"Well," Flapjack drawled, "there's only two ways of getting into Alaska—one's by water and the other by air, and flying hasn't reached the point where they're transporting rodeos yet."

"Of course, I know you're going by water," Blucher retorted, "but what ship are you going on, one of the regular steamers?"

"Cost too much," Flapjack explained. "I've a bet with my pardner, Tubby Willows, that I can make this thing pay its way, and I aim to win that bet!"

"What's the bet?"

"Each of us put up a ten-cent cigar!"

Flapjack answered. "No, we're not crazy. You'll never understand the sportsmanship of the North. The bet's the thing. But to answer your question. A tramp steam schooner, the *William F. Hough,* is picking up twenty thousand cases of salmon and a thousand tons of ore. There's room aboard for the rodeo. If you don't like the idea of so small a ship, you can go down on a regular passenger vessel, I'll pay your way."

"No, I'm not a quitter, Pancake."

"Flapjack!" corrected Meehan.

"I'm not a quitter, I'll stick to the ship."

And Blucher stuck. Shortly before the *William F. Hough* sailed, Flapjack received a cable from one "Sleepy" Sexton. Sleepy had been recommended by DeLay as an advance man. His cable was to the point. Flapjack had to read it but once to realize all it contained. It read:

FLAPJACK MEEHAN,
Cold Deck Rodeo,
Care of *William F. Hough.*

Have booked rodeo to play all towns one week ahead of Garby shows. Garby tearing hair. Threatens trouble. What shall I tell him? SEXTON.

Flapjack grinned and cabled back:

Tell Garby to get a hair cut and he can't get such a good hold and won't tear so much hair out.

But Garby was doing more than tearing his hair. As the schooner was shoving off, a cable was tossed aboard. It was addressed to Vag Blucher, Flapjack noticed as he picked it up.

"Here you are, Blucher!"

"Thanks, Slapjack!"

"Flapjack!" Had Flapjack been able to guess the contents of that message he would have thrown it overboard and Blucher after it. Decoded, it read:

Sexton has billed Cold Deck Rodeo ahead of me. Moose, caribou, Eskimos and dog teams will kill game. Stop at all costs. Two thousand in it for you if they fail to show at Everett week from Saturday.

PETE.

"And he could have had the job done for a thousand." Blucher muttered, "or as a matter of squaring accounts I'd have done it for nothing. Oh well, Pete owes me something!" He fell into deep thought. "That plan will work, but somebody might get drowned."

The man considered this angle of the situation coldly, weighing his own chance of safety rather than the others' chances. He had always lived for himself and himself alone, so it was not difficult to weigh human lives against dollars so long as the lives did not belong to him. He consulted a chart for some time and traced his finger along the course a vessel would follow until it came to a point marked "Sandy Reef." "Sandy Reef is the place," he mused, "I'd get the horses and cattle sure. That trick stuff Meehan's brought along would either drown or if it did get ashore it would escape. If people used their heads they'd be saved. Sandy Reef's the place. Garby won't have to worry about the Cold Deck Rodeo opening in Everett."

Unconsciously, Blucher thrust his fingers into his pocket and touched a heavy metal object. He wandered about the deck and finally climbed to the top of the wheelhouse. On this part of the schooner stood a compass housed in a binnacle which was covered with a canvas. Unobserved, Blucher removed the canvas and examined the instrument. When he stood on one side the needle gently moved several points toward him. When he shifted to the other side, the needle swung in that direction. Gravely he nodded his head as he replaced the canvas.

"If there's a fog," he observed to a seagull, "I can put this ship on the beach anywhere I feel like while we're in the passage."

He referred to the famous inland sea or "inside passage" which is nearly a thousand miles in length when measured from the southerly end of Puget Sound near Olympia, Washington, to Skagway, Alaska. A thousand miles during which the ocean breaks through less than a half-dozen times; a thousand miles of calm, blue water hemmed in by mountain ranges thousands of feet high. But the channel twisted and turned amazingly and was often so narrow that a strong man could throw a stone from the vessel's deck to the beach. A million fangs lay beneath the surface to slash at the hull of the unwary vessel; restless tides surged amid the reefs, exacting the utmost skill from those who piloted craft through the passage. It was a challenge to a man and his craft and man and his craft had accepted it because of its beauty, calm waters, and convenience. Fog and rain often obscured landmarks, adding to the difficulty of navigation. This was true particularly in the fall of the year. And all these things Vag Blucher well knew.

The first day out he timidly ventured into the wheelhouse. The quartermaster said nothing but continued keeping his ship on the course the compass pointed out. The skipper and third officer were the only other occupants. "Come in," the former said. "It's warmer and you're welcome—if you don't talk to the quartermaster. We're not so strict about the 'Keep Out' rule on these small craft—we don't carry passengers often."

"Thanks!" answered Blucher. He had found that one of the best investments in the world from the dividend-paying standpoint is a box of good cigars. He passed the smokes around and tucked one into the quartermaster's pocket. "Thanks," the man said, keeping his eyes on his work. It was the only word he spoke.

Under the soothing effect of the cigar, the skipper related some of his experiences, and Blucher's hair-trigger laugh, always ready whether the joke justified laughter or not, once more served him well. The skipper slapped him on the back as he left the wheelhouse and told him to drop in any time.

Often Blucher appeared in the wheelhouse, taking great care to keep out of the way. He never approached the compass except slowly. Once he had forgotten that he carried the magnetized metal in his pocket and the compass had swung toward him. The quartermaster had looked sharply at the instrument, then at a point dead ahead. For a moment he was puzzled, but later a check on a buoy proved the instrument quite in order. After that, Blucher left his iron in a safe place, but he practiced entering the wheelhouse slowly. That would be an important part of the game.

At the first stop Flapjack received another cable. The Everett people had demanded a two-thousand-dollar guarantee that the Cold Deck Rodeo would appear on the scheduled date and that it was the show that was advertized. The town had had experience with fly-by-night rodeos before, it seemed.

Flapjack cabled the necessary instructions to his Seattle agent, who prepared and sent the bond to Sleepy Sexton, temporarily at Everett. He had gone down into Oregon and booked the rodeo. "Following the bums and the birds south," he termed it.

Fog was in the air when the schooner left the little Alaskan port. It deepened as the vessel worked her way south. Flapjack grew nervous. "We've got plenty of time," he informed Ray DeLay, "but I don't want to be delayed too long, and that's no pun on your name either."

He spent most of his time with the stock, assuring himself that everything was done to keep the animals in shape. Moose and caribou were wild and probably always would be, but Flapjack

handled the shipment without difficulty. When he loafed, it was among the horses. In his younger days he had ridden the range and had never lost his love for horseflesh, though there had been little of it in his life in the North. There he had come to know and love dogs, but nothing can exactly take the place of a horse. Flapjack used the currycomb and brush by the hour and even the outlaw nags regarded him with favor.

"You sure like 'em, don't yuh?" Ray observed.

"I'd forgotten just how dog-gone slick a horse can be until this rodeo hit Cold Deck. Brother, I'm sure going to enjoy this winter."

"Listen!"

The wail of the schooner's fog whistle came suddenly, lingered, and died.

"Foggy again!" Flapjack informed him.

"Yeah, I know it, but I don't like it," DeLay answered. "I was on deck when we ran through that last fog. You can't see. Any minute I expected to see a mountain rise up in front of the bow."

"No chance of that," Flapjack explained, "they blow the whistle, the sound strikes the mountains, and the echo comes back. The pilot counts the elapsed time, cuts it in half, figures the number of feet a second that sound travels and he knows just how close he is to the mountain. No, Ray, it's not the mountains we have to worry about, it's the reefs and pinnacle rocks."

"There it goes again!" DeLay was a cattle-country man. He did not like the sea because he did not understand it. The wildness of that whistle stirred his imagination. He saw pictures of what could happen. "Water rushing in, Flapjack," he mused, "and the stock in a panic. These fine horses fighting for their lives and drowning like rats in a trap. Flapjack it would be—hell!"

"Yes," Flapjack agreed, "it would. But remember, ships don't strike often, and in recent years there has been no loss of life. Get on deck, you'll feel better. You're used to lots of elbow room, old son, and you won't find it below decks on a steam schooner! Guess I'll go along myself!"

Vag Blucher alone found satisfaction in the fog. His only worry was, would it last until they reached Sandy Reef? Just why it was called Sandy no one knew unless because there was a sandy beach beyond the reef. The schooner lifted and fell gently, a new motion that caused Blucher to turn to an officer standing near. "Open water?" he queried.

"Some. The sea cuts in between a couple of islands. We're due to change course in ten minutes, Sandy Reef's just ahead!"

Blucher was thoughtful. "Maybe it's because I'm a landlubber that I don't know," he said, "but why does the man at the wheel keep moving it back and forth once he gets on a straight course?"

"Wind, tide, and currents, mostly," the other answered.

"Thanks!" Blucher answered, "I was curious!"

He walked back to his room and unlocked a bag, from which he removed the magnet and placed it in his coat pocket. Next he lighted a cigar and casually entered the wheelhouse. For a moment the schooner seemed to hold her course steadily enough. Blucher watched the compass and stepped closer. The compass swung slightly toward him. Blucher studied the quartermaster's face. He merely turned the wheel and brought the compass back to where it belonged. The vessel was now off her course, steering no longer for the narrow neck of water off Sandy Reef, but directly toward it. Blucher glanced toward a life preserver, then toward a small boat. That would be his course when she struck—first the life belt, then the boat.

"Whoooo—oof!"

Though he had seen the skipper reach for the whistle cord, nevertheless, the blast startled Blucher.

"Whoooo—oof!" came the echo. Not one, but many, as the sound followed the range, became soft and sweet like music, and died. How wild it all was—the never-ending mist rolling over the bow, drenching everything, vanishing astern! So thick at times it smothered a man, it seemed. But sound could penetrate it, just as the element in the magnet could slip unseen from his pocket and affect the compass.

"Whoooo—oof!"

The skipper counted the seconds and changed the course. "Thought I was closer," he muttered. He would have been had the craft been on her true course. "Steady!" he said heavily.

"Steady!" the quartermaster repeated.

Ray DeLay peered into the mist and shuddered. Flapjack looked sharply at the skipper. Great was the responsibility at such times, the tall sour dough was thinking. He had made many such trips and the science of navigation had never failed to impress him.

The man stationed in the bow suddenly bellowed a warning.

"Starboard!" roared the skipper.

"Starboard!" repeated the quartermaster. He was cool. Some day he would be a master, and a good one.

The engine-room telegraph clanged. The schooner vibrated, then shuddered. Deep in the heart of her something crashed mightily. The deck lifted beneath men's feet. Flapjack grabbed a line for support. DeLay was knocked off his feet. As he scrambled up once more, he saw Vag Blucher on the bridge donning a life belt. He was standing by a boat—waiting.

The carpenter and first mate tumbled below, but reappeared in a few moments. The mate spoke crisply, but without excitement. Flapjack caught the phrase: "——hulled, sir, well aft. Making water rapidly!"

Stewards and engineers were coming on deck. From the forecastle poured the off-watch members. And then above it all came a note that only a range man recognizes, and never forgets once he has heard it—the scream of a horse in terror. The silence was now broken by many voices, each sounding its own cry of terror—horses, cattle, moose, caribou, dogs.

"The horses! The horses!" There was agony in DeLay's face as he looked at Flapjack.

"Wait for orders," the tall sour dough answered, "there's one man in command now. The rest of us will hop to obey. Gad, that screaming is getting me! They look to us to help 'em. The cussed fog, it's done its work! Why don't it lift? Come! They're sending the passengers into the boats. Years ago, the *Sophia* it was, the people remained aboard, and that night she slipped off the reef—not a life saved."

DeLay hesitated, then dived below. No one but Flapjack observed the act. The tall sour dough climbed a ladder and entered the wheelhouse. The skipper was standing in the door, bawling orders. "Out of the way, Blucher," he cried, "in here a moment until that lifeboat is swung out!"

Blucher was deathly white. The sea fascinated him. The water licked at the craft like some hungry monster. She was settling rapidly astern as the water ran in. Yes, that was it, the sea was a monster that swallowed things whole. "What's that terrible sound?" he cried.

Two men hurrying through the wheelhouse shoved him aside. He was pushed against the compass a moment and Flapjack saw the instrument swing violently. There was no reason for it.

"That screaming?" Blucher shouted. "Flapjack, what's that——"

"Horses, drowning," Flapjack an-

swered. "Come here! No, you'd better get over there again. No, that won't do. Now come here out of the way." Another man entered, then passed through. Flapjack took the occasion to shove Blucher aside and feel of his pocket.

"Captain!"

The skipper turned.

"Have I permission to go below, open that port, and turn the horses loose!" Flapjack inquired.

"No, Meehan. Stand by! I want all these people in boats. She may hang to the reef and she may go under!"

Then, in a lower voice, Flapjack whispered, "Feel in Blucher's coat pocket before he disposes of what's there."

Something in Flapjack's tone impressed the seaman. He was a man of action. His hand shot into Blucher's pocket and drew forth the magnet. "You——" was all he could say. He launched himself at Blucher, but the latter leaped backward and by good fortune got through the door. The captain was right at his heels.

Twenty feet from the vessel's side a black fang protruded above the water. There was a break, then an irregular line of rocks that vanished in the fog. Blucher turned once, then leaped over the rail, seeking to escape. Bubbles came up for several seconds, then Blucher's hand, clutching at the air. It vanished as though jerked under by some tremendous force.

"Retribution!" the skipper muttered. "For some reason he wrecked my ship, but the suction of water pouring into the hole dragged him under. Meehan! Meehan!"

But Flapjack was gone.

Below decks he was standing knee-deep in the icy water, struggling with the doors of a port. Slowly they swung back. The water rushed in, then out, but always it climbed higher. How slow, yet how certain were the movements of the sea! Risking all, men hurled themselves upon the terror-stricken animals, throwing blankets over the horses' heads and rushing them into the sea. The pitch of the vessel helped them. Once an animal started there was no stopping. A continuous line of them came from the port and vanished in the mists, shoreward. They might live, or they might die from exposure, but each got its chance. The caribou and moose were accustomed to swimming, they offered little opposition; but Flapjack and Ray spent some lively minutes dodging hoofs and horns.

An empty boat swung close to the port gave Flapjack an idea. He drew the boat half into the ship, then began tossing the dogs in, knowing that most of them would remain aboard. Another sickening moment when the vessel slid deeper. "Come, Ray, we've got everything living out!"

They piled into the boat with the dogs and were drawn into the mists.

"Well done, Mr. Meehan!" the skipper shouted, "I was afraid you couldn't get on deck again!" He had shoved the empty boat within reach. Knowing men as he did, he knew the neither Flapjack nor Ray DeLay would obey an order to leave.

Flapjack looked up. The skipper was sticking to his ship, hopeful to the last that she would remain afloat, yet almost certain that she would go down!

Flapjack's Eskimos and interior Indians had followed the animals in small boats. Grabbing the oars, Flapjack rowed through the reef to the sandy beach. The tide was high, he noticed, which might or might not aid in salvaging the schooner—if she stuck to the reef.

The beach, hemmed in on all sides by sheer walls, was alive with animals. The moose and caribou stood apart; the horses were scattered about, gradually banding together, the dogs were sniffing at the various objects of inter-

est, frequently shaking themselves violently, drenching any one near. The cowhands gathered driftwood and built a huge fire. The tide reached its high point and gradually receded. Hours passed, and from the fog came the groaning of timbers. Frequently the report of breaking planks sounded like the crack of a gun. The vessel was settling, but not into the sea. She was attempting to find ease on the reef.

The ship's radio had broadcast the news. Now it was asking for a salvage craft. Flapjack looked at Ray DeLay.

"You heard about them finding a magnet in Blucher's pocket?" he asked.

"I heard about your finding it! Didn't I tell you they'd get you, Flapjack? I don't suppose he really knew what he was doing—what a wreck was like." DeLay shook his head thoughtfully. "We'll not open up in Everett, Flapjack, and it'll cost you two thousand dollars. Garby wins the first round!"

"Not yet!" Flapjack answered. "The papers will be full of this. I'm going aboard the schooner and have 'em radio we'll open the show on time."

"And then——?"

"We'll open the show on time!" Flapjack answered.

The tide was out. The schooner, with the exception of her stern, was high and dry. A gaping hole, through which the cargo of ore was spilling, showed where the reef had gnawed her hull. And the rock that did the work was visible two hundred feet astern. The schooner had struck and gone on. A few inches more water and she would have cleared that danger, but, no doubt, met a worse fate by crashing bow on onto larger rocks. A rope ladder dangled down and Flapjack climbed aboard.

"Meehan," the skipper announced, "I'll save her. I'm going to land the cargo in that hold, patch the hole, pump her out, and when the tide's high pull her off."

"How long will that take?"

"Oh, not very long—ten days!"

"That won't put me in Everett on time," Flapjack answered. "May I send a message for a boat to pick up my rodeo? There're plenty of small freighters on this run and——"

"Go ahead, Mr. Meehan."

Pete Garby read the headlines with interest. He was not expecting anything so dramatic as a shipwreck and the loss of his old-time partner and later rival. He blinked and chuckled.

"What a story I could tell the papers, eh? But I won't. Meehan and the Eskimo Rodeo are out of it." His voice was filled with contempt. "I'll have something to say to that gang at Everett. If it wasn't for the money I'd lose I'd pass 'em up cold. It'd serve 'em right!"

Time passed swiftly enough for Garby, who was rather busy with his own affairs. Suddenly he remembered that the day had at last dawned when the Cold Deck Rodeo was due to parade and show at Everett. Accordingly he took it upon himself to visit the City of Smokestacks and chuckle a bit over certain officials. "Hear they got a two-thousand-dollar bond out of Meehan, too! Serve him right; now he'll stay in Alaska where he belongs instead of trying to run a show business."

He was driving into town when he caught sight of a familiar figure. He jammed on the brakes and prepared to crow a bit. Garby enjoyed hitting a man most any time, but particularly when he was down. "Hey, Sleepy!" he called.

Sleepy Sexton stopped dead in his tracks. "Hello, Garby!" he said. The greatest moment of his life had been when he had had the supreme pleasure of telling Garby to take his job and go to the devil. That had been two years

ago, but the memory of the moment would live forever.

"How do you like being advance man for a drowned rodeo—you tramp?" jeered Garby.

"Fine!" answered Sleepy pleasantly. He was a rather good-looking man, but gave the impression of being dead from the neck up. When one discovered that Sleepy was far from dead it was usually too late—the deal had been put across. "That wreck was a great piece of publicity. We got columns of news about the rodeo that we couldn't have bought at any price."

"A lot of good that does you when you ain't got a show," Garby tauntingly jeered.

"Maybe we haven't a show, but we've got something, and every seat in the grand stand will be sold. Flapjack Meehan's boat got in at three this morning. Here's the parade! Look it over. That's an Eskimo band—only one in the world!"

"Sounds like it," Garby sourly observed. But the sarcasm left him a few moments later. He was too good a showman not to recognize the elements that pull the public. Indians, Eskimos in costume, skin boats, dogs, dog sleds, moose and caribou in portable cages. The whole outfit transported in new trucks. There was money behind it, and Garby knew it.

He thought of the miserable entertainment he offered the public and resentment leaped within his breast. "He don't know the game he muttered, "and I'll beat him in the end."

That afternoon when the stands roared their approval at Ray DeLay's bulldogging a bull moose, Garby estimated the "gate" with an experienced eye. "I've got to beat him and beat him quick," he murmured, "and I'm the man to do it!"

But he had yet to learn what the North already knew—that Flapjack Meehan never started anything unless he was sure he was right, and then it was hard to beat him. With the thousands of others, Garby pushed his way to the street, talking to himself and plotting—always plotting.

Meanwhile Flapjack Meehan was grinning at Ray DeLay. "We've got the world by the tail, Ray, and a downhill pull," he observed.

"Not yet, Flapjack you haven't polished off Garby yet. And he's so doggoned rough he won't polish easy."

But Flapjack only grinned and looked southward where he hoped the polishing would take place. This was his vacation and he planned to enjoy it.

LOTS OF GAME BUT FEW HUNTERS

RECENTLY very few people have availed themselves of the splendid chances that abound to hunt in Alaska, so the report comes. The result of this lack of hunters is that there has never been a time in the history of the white man in Alaska when game has been so plentiful. And indications are that next season there will be a great oversupply of big brown bears, as well as a notable increase in moose, caribou, and mountain sheep.

Meantime, the trophy seekers remain scarce. And the reason for this is not hard to find, since the cost of a trip lasting from three to six weeks in the bear country is such that only men of means can afford to undertake it, unless the hunter is subsidized by museums or universities seeking specimens of wild life.

Riders of the Grande Ronde

By Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Why Jeb Hung the Jury," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

RUTH HAMILTON, Easterner, decides that the West is dead. Her uncle, Abner Sibley, tells her it is merely sleeping. The vivid Le Veq and a lazy farmhand are two figures who have impressed Ruth. Hannah, the Sibleys' hired girl, listens interestedly when Ruth speaks of Le Veq.

Abner tells his niece of various desperate deeds in the region and hints at liquor smuggling by airplane. Ruth, ready to change her viewpoint, goes to a moonlight meeting with Le Veq.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF THE PILLAR.

SHE kept under cover of the gloom beneath the trees. The luxuriant grass of the all but abandoned orchard deadened the sound of her footfalls. As she drew nearer, the voice became stronger, more compelling. From a distance, the sound had seemed almost eerily a part of the mysterious whispering night about her. Now it gained more human qualities, no less romantic. It breathed of a reckless, dominant personality.

She should see the singer now. He had taken a position behind the northern pillar calculated to shield him from observation from the long lane and the distant outline of the Sibley ranch house, and yet permitting him to maintain a watchful eye on lane and house. From her angle of approach he was in full view.

He was, by starlight, more than ever a figure to cause a feminine heart to beat faster. The remote valley beyond was a background against which he loomed in compelling outline. The gloom could not detract from a suggestion of strength in his tall, yet slender proportions. His pearl-gray sombrero was pushed back, revealing his finely chiseled hawklike features, in which his eyes were pools of shadow. Points of reflected light were caught and held about him, on a gleaming buckle, on silvery spurs, in the sheen of his gorgeous shirt. The song he was singing, the girl thought, was typical of the man. It was no uncouth cowboy refrain, but crooning, and somewhat barbaric. She

could not imagine any of the blushing farm hands at her party doing justice to a selection from "The Bohemian Girl."

She moved softly into the shadow of the pillar, watching him covertly and smilingly. She couldn't quite resist a roguishly cynical thought. Here was a splendid example of the gorgeous male of the species on parade. His voice lost nothing from nearness. It was well-modulated and confident, following the lilting requirements of the solo with artistic exactness.

When the song was done, he stood, strumming the banjo absently. As he craned his neck to peer up the lane, she moved from the shadow of the pillar into full view and clapped her hands softly. The starlight was caught in her red-gold hair and her eyes.

"Well done, caballero," she applauded. "It was a noble effort."

It was tribute to the youth's iron self-control that he did not start at her abrupt appearance and the sound of her voice. He swept his sombrero from his head and leaned forward.

"Ah, Miss Hamilton!" His white teeth gleamed as he smiled. "You were waiting, hidden by the pillar all the while? It was more than I dared to hope."

"No," said the girl. "I wasn't." She withdrew her hand. He released it unwillingly. "I was sitting on the porch," she continued, taking a perverse delight in making her words careless and matter of fact. "It was lucky my uncle wasn't there. One of us had to come down to investigate the disturbance."

"Disturbance?" said the youth, crestfallen. "Was I as bad as that?"

"My uncle would have called it worse," smiled the girl. Then, relenting, "No, you did very well, Mr. LeVeq. It was quite thrilling."

"The thrill is mine." He leaned gracefully against the pillar, towering above her. "The slave has dared to lift his eyes to the queen, and the queen has drawn near."

Banjo and sombrero were still tucked under his left arm. He raised a slender but powerful right hand as though to place it casually upon her shoulder. She drew back, stood erect. His arm dropped to his side. His dark, luminous eyes were fixed on her face.

"You are in error, Mr. LeVeq," she said haughtily. "Look!" She gestured between the pillars. "There is a line between us that you may not cross."

"Is it the line your uncle has drawn? Or yours?"

"Mine," said the girl. "You must remain forever outside."

"It is a wall I will scale some day," he vowed carelessly. "Forever is a big word, too big for us mortals to use."

"It is a wall of your own building. Listen, Mr. LeVeq. You perhaps gained a wrong idea of me. This is our first and last rendezvous."

"Why?"

"Ask yourself." Her voice was grave. Yet there was in it a hint of regret. "You made yourself what you are."

"And what am I?"

"You are young and vigorous," said the girl. "You have a pleasing personality. You have in you qualities of leadership which might have done big things. Had you turned your energy and talents into the right channels, you could easily have been far along the road to success."

"Instead?" he prompted.

"Instead," she continued inexorably, "you are known as a lawless and dangerous man. Your reputation is bad. There is a shadow over your name. To substantial men who have had you under observation for years, you are the leader of a criminal element here in the Grande Ronde."

The youth made no reply to these accusations. He continued to regard her with a fixed and disconcerting intentness, like a skilled gambler striving

to gauge the strength of his opponent's hand.

"I did not come down here to-night," she continued, vaguely disappointed that he did not defend himself, "to listen to your gallantry. I am no child. Under other circumstances, perhaps, you might have been—er—interesting. You are a spectacular type. You are perfectly aware of your own accomplishments. But you are unsound at heart. It is presumption on your part to even imagine that we have anything in common. You may not be interested in my point of view." Her voice was more kindly. "I thought it only fair to tell you."

He drew himself up. "I do appreciate it." He bowed. "Thank you. And good-by."

He was turning away. The girl caught her breath. "Have you nothing to say?"

"Nothing," said LeVeq, with the air of one who has bowed often before injustice. "You have condemned me in advance."

"I did not mean," she said hastily, "that I would not be glad to hear any explanation you might have to offer. I had even hoped—that you might be able to justify some of the activities laid at your door."

"Why humiliate myself? You are ready to believe the worst. I will be frank." His voice was vibrant with feeling. "You are a beautiful and accomplished girl, Miss Hamilton. More beautiful than a sinner's hope of heaven. You will think me bold. I admit it. I have an impetuous nature. Let others be bound by convention. Not I. When I saw you to-day, I knew that of all the world, destiny had brought you to me. But to-night, you have caused me to doubt. The girl of my dreams would never have judged me without a hearing. Having judged me, she would not have asked to indulge her feminine curiosity."

Under other circumstances, the passionate energy of his voice and manner might have seemed incongruous, his words melodramatic. But there was a fire in the man that transformed him. He believed utterly in himself.

"But it isn't mere curiosity." The girl was now on the defensive. "If you can explain——"

"I offer no explanations," said LeVeq between his teeth. The girl knew that he was speaking his creed. "I make no apologies. I cater to no one. Let others follow their hidebound paths. I stand alone. I will explain nothing. Not even to you. Let the world think what it pleases."

Striding savagely away, he whirled suddenly and turned. It was as though his Latin temperament had swept him to another emotional extreme.

"I will tell you," he said gently, almost pathetically. The world—it does not matter. But your opinion is precious. Listen, and I will tell you something no human ears have heard. It has been locked up in me. Deal kindly with me when I bare my heart to you."

He stood, twisting his hat in his hands. It was a boyish pose, a new rôle that was singularly appealing.

"I am a black sheep," he said in a low voice. "I have always been known as such. As a boy, I thought nothing of it. I laughed. I think I even enjoyed being pointed to as the bad boy of the neighborhood. I thought I would outgrow it. I told myself that presently, when I had taken my place among men, the world would forget the follies of youth. But they did not forget. So I went away to other parts. I stayed away for a long time, learning much of the world. But when I came back, my good neighbors whispered among themselves. I could see fingers pointing. I could feel eyes upon me. 'Ah,' they were saying among themselves. 'Our black sheep is back again. We must watch him. Perhaps we can put him behind bars.'

"This is a rough country, Miss Hamilton. You have lived a sheltered life. Position, wealth, and family have stood guard over you. You do not know the bitterness of one who stands alone with the hands of determined men turned against him. But enough of that. I do not ask for sympathy.

"I and my men are known as the LeVeq gang. I am the leader. Each man that rides with me is a black sheep. The world has forced us together. Our bond is the bond of lonely men.

"You have been in the valley but a short time. Yet already you have heard of those things that happen under cover of night. They have rushed to you with rumors; daring things have happened, reckless and lawless things. Who is doing it? The LeVeq gang, of course. They are the black sheep. The spokesmen of the rumors have been many. But who has been my spokesman? Who has dared to raise a voice in my behalf? It is not human nature, Miss Hamilton. It is the spirit of the mob, the voice of the pack, to demand a victim.

"Rumors, solemn heads wagging together, sly whisperings behind hands. These things are the evidence they have against me.

"What crime have I committed? What court has sat in judgment on me? There is no record. Yet the men who would not sign a note without studying its contents, and whose word is as good as a government bond, will openly state their belief as to the color of the black sheep.

"Listen, Miss Hamilton." All the iron force of the man was thrown into the significant words. "I have a thought to offer for your ears alone. Do not breathe it aloud. It is a secret you must guard. Much depends on it. My own hopes, and those of my men.

"You have heard of the riders that terrorize the valley by night. You have heard of another group, the vigilantes. You have been told that I am the leader of the outlaws. Another name has been mentioned, perhaps"—though his head was bowed, she had an impression that his black eyes were fixed upon her face—"as the leader of the forces representing law and order?"

The girl shook her head. "Not exactly," she breathed. "I think I know who you mean."

"I will name no names," said LeVeq. "I will tell you this. There is a certain youth in this valley. You are bound to meet him soon. You may already have met him. Living in the same valley, he and I are as different as the poles, and like the poles, our lines of force conflict. We have been enemies since childhood. He has land and wealth and resources. I have nothing. He stands high in the councils of men who control the destinies of this valley. I am the black sheep. He is secure in his position. His wealth and friends are his stronghold and no rumor can touch him. But the pack is baying at my heels.

"It is only a though I am suggesting, I do not state it as a fact. Such an idea, in the valley of the Grande Ronde," his voice was bitter, "would be sacrilege. But you are not affected by local prejudice. You know something of the world, of the forces locked up in the hearts of men. You know how even the unimaginative and phlegmatic oftentimes rebel against conventional chains. Yes, and where they are sufficiently bold they brush them aside——

"Well, then"—he measured each word—"this is the picture. It is of a youth—this good citizen—who is sated with wealth and power. He has land and resources and men—and friends. By day, he is the stalwart pillar of society to whom men point with pride. But he is a buccaneer at heart. He has in him a Viking strain that demands marauding expeditions, destruction, blood. By day, then, he is bound—behind walls of convention and custom and habit. But at

night—ah, mademoiselle, that may be another story—of inner savagery unloosed, of wolfish instincts unchained. And what better pose than that of leader of the vigilantes?"

It was a bold and daring thought. The girl was staggered. Was it possible that back of the mysterious night activities of the valley were forces even more sinister than her Uncle Sibley and other old-timers had suspected? LeVeq hurried on, pressing his advantage.

"There is another side to the picture, Miss Hamilton. It is of a group of lonely men that have been convicted of no crime, yet rumor, gossip, or prejudice, have changed them from free men into exiles. Picture them, if you can. I do not ask for sympathy. I beg you merely to see their problem with unprejudiced eyes. They yearn, these black sheep, for human companionship, for the good will of neighbors, for all those things that men hold lightly when they have them, but which become precious when they are lost. How can these men, these exiles, reëstablish themselves? I ask you, Miss Hamilton. You have imagination and understanding. By what single, bold, and desperate play, can these exiles tear down the walls of prejudice and stand once more before the world and their neighbors as free men?"

"You mean"—said the girl, wide-eyed—"surely you don't mean that you, that these black sheep, are the real vigilantes? In other words, you mean that you and your men, who are believed to be the outlaws, are in reality the defenders of the valley? By riding forth at night and capturing these desperadoes," her voice was somewhat awed, "you will earn the gratitude of the valley? They can no longer call you black sheep. Is that it?"

Standing erect, with head thrown back, LeVeq eyed her smilingly. "I do not say so. I would not have suggested it, except that you, too, were on the side of the enemy. Not now, I hope." His voice became grave. "I do not ask you to believe me, yet. We may fail. Our dreams may not be realized. These night riders are bold and reckless men. If we fail, we will be buried as black sheep, and soon be forgotten. Suppose some night"—he gestured out toward the valley—"to-night, perhaps, there is a clash between these forces, and we are wiped out. The enemy would make it appear that we were caught in the act. No one would be any wiser. But for us it is the chance of a lifetime. We have much to gain, and only our lives to lose. We are taking the chance."

He moved closer to her, and leaned against the pillar. His manner was grave and considerate. Her face, white through the gloom, was upturned as she eyed him steadfastly. Momentarily forgetful of the world about them, it was as though they stood, side by side, on an emotional pinnacle. LeVeq was lifted up and exalted by the fire of his own narrative. The girl's imagination was caught by the possibilities he had unfolded.

Compared to this, her thrill at discovering that beneath the sleepy exterior of the valley seethed a gripping mystery and intrigue was a pale and feeble thing. That had been general. This was specific. In all the valley, with the exception of the youth that stood before her and his men, she alone was in possession of the true significance of the conflicting forces. LeVeq had singled her out for his confidence. She was striving to readjust her point of view. If true—and LeVeq's fervor had impressed her tremendously—it was a situation replete with dramatic possibilities.

With startling abruptness, into that high moment broke an alien sound. It came faintly from far down the slope, but it crashed into their reveries like a pistol shot. Both turned in that direction. With a swift motion, LeVeq re-

placed his hat and pulled it low over his eyes. He stood erect, jaw outthrust, banjo gripped under his arm. With his right hand, he motioned the girl into the shadow of the pillar.

A rider was coming up from the valley. Through the gloom he was in full view. He was riding a black horse with a white stocking. He was trailed by another horse, saddled but riderless. The dust of the valley had muffled the rider's approach, but his presence had been revealed instantly when he had achieved the rocky slope. Even in the half light, he seemed vaguely familiar. Then the girl recognized him. He was the languid yokel she had encountered that afternoon.

LeVeq muttered an expletive. His profile was startingly hawklike as he turned his head slightly to whisper over his shoulder. "Go!" he commanded. "He is one of the enemy. Please don't wait, Miss Hamilton. He can't avoid seeing me now. We will meet again. Some other night."

The girl disappeared behind a pillar, leaving LeVeq alone. She had no desire to be seen, harmless though the clandestine meeting was. In the light of what LeVeq had told her, it was imperative that they should not be seen together. But she did not go. Disregarding LeVeq's command, she moved back a few feet to the protection of the orchard. Here, shrouded by the shadow, she halted.

LeVeq stood beside the pillar, motionless as stone. The horseman had evidently been humming under his breath as he rode through the starlit gloom. Now, achieving the slope, he raised his voice and sang.

The girl felt that a crisis of some kind was impending. The air seemed to vibrate with conflicting forces. Yet even in the tension of the moment, she could not help but notice the song the yokel was singing, and his voice. It was a tenor of colossal volume. He sang with enthusiasm, obviously for his own amusement. He did not carry a banjo. His accompaniment was only the creaking of leather and the sound of steel-shod hoofs on rocky soil. He did not sing of marble halls. His song concerned itself with the exploits and demise of an active person known as Two-gun Pete, in some region where men were men and a river was called the Rio Grande.

Clearly now and with almost profane distinctness came the refrain of the melody:

"His horse is old and his guns are cold,
His bones lie deep in the shifting sand,
But his story is told where men are bold,
'Way down by the Rio Grande.
Yea, cowboys!
'Way down by the Rio Grande."

Listening, the girl clenched and unclenched her hands, and squirmed in the grip of some acute reaction. The presence of this yokel was a jarring note in an otherwise perfect picture.

Yet, in a way, he seemed a natural part of the starlit night. For him, doubtless, the southwest wind was merely a cooling tide that was pleasant, its voice, only a murmur in the leaves. The stars merely served to light his way. But he had ridden up from the valley and, in some intangible way, he was a part of it. Not as an ambassador of its mystery and romance, but as a representative of a region where men toiled and fought and died for such mundane things as home, sweethearts and the betterment of the community.

The horseman had obviously become aware now of the statuesque figure of LeVeq beside the pillar. He sat a little straighter in the saddle as he drew near, pushed back his sombrero, and whistled aloud. Though his features were vague in the gloom, the girl knew that his mouth was widening in a slow grin. Her own cheeks flamed. The boor, the yokel! What could he know of the

glamour and romance of the starlit world into which he had ridden so casually and ruthlessly?

LeVeq stood erect, head thrown back, gathering about him his mantle of dignity. With some vague protective instinct against she knew not what, the girl longed to rush from her shadowed retreat and take her place beside him. Being on foot, he was at a disadvantage. To profane eyes, his costume, glittering though it was, might have seemed a little incongruous. He was tall, but his flaring chaps caused his lower limbs to loom huge and ill-proportioned. His banjo clutched in his left arm could not be hidden from view.

The horseman pulled up between the pillars. Mentally, the girl urged him to hurry. But he looped a leg over the pommel of the saddle in an attitude of repose, pushed back his sombrero farther, and scratched his head as he grinningly eyed LeVeq from head to foot. No word of greeting passed between them. He was of the enemy, LeVeq had said. The latter's back was toward her. She knew that his black, menacing eyes were fixed upon the intruder. Spectators in Unionville that afternoon had withdrawn hurriedly before that stare. But the yokel seemed unaware of its venom.

"Well, well, Gigolo," he chuckled, and the girl hated him for the obviously impromptu appellation. "Doing a little troubadouring, eh? Too bad I interrupted your merry roundelay. Yeh," he shifted himself more comfortably in the saddle, "it's a tough break."

LeVeq did not deign to reply. He drew himself more haughtily erect. If looks could kill, the newcomer must have wilted in the saddle. Instead, he produced the makings from his breast pocket and rolled a cigarette.

"I saw a horse down in the chaparral by the big boulder," he observed. "Supposed to be hidden, wasn't he? You should watch little details like that. Men have been hung for less." Tobacco and paper had become a brown wisp of cigarette, which he placed between his lips. "I didn't know what you were up to so I put on a little speed. But I did you an injustice. Still dreaming about rosy-cheeked Hannah, eh?" He shook his head as though in lazy tolerance of such human frailty. "Well, well, caballero."

The drawling inflection was maddening. The girl's cheeks flamed again. Hannah indeed! She knew that the yokel was deliberately challenging the other. She was aghast at his temerity. There was something significant beneath the outward casualness of the encounter. What this was, she could not fathom. She knew that she should not continue her eavesdropping, that the pair were unconscious of her presence. She told herself that she would depart forthwith, would retreat to the shadows of the orchard, near the house. Having decided this, she remained where she was and listened breathlessly.

The horseman lighted his cigarette and flipped the match away. In that brief flare of light, the girl caught a vivid and significant impression. He, too, seemed to have been changed by the mysterious alchemy of the night. He was a yokel no longer, but a closely knit, hard-muscled, and well-proportioned figure seated lazily on a magnificent horse. He was no longer clad in the habiliments of a farm hand. His riding breeches were cut with a flare that would have done credit to an academy master. The lighted match had gleamed on the polished sheen of his high-heeled boots.

LeVeq drew forth his silver cigarette case. As he lighted a cigarette, his hands shook a little and his face was white with passion. The girl marveled at his self-control, at his ability to even tolerate the presence of the yokel, not to mention the deliberate aggravation of his manner. But something restrained

him—something outside her knowledge, she told herself.

"Question is, LeVeq," the horseman continued—his cigarette glowed as he exhaled a cloud of smoke—"suppose hardboiled Sibley had heard your passionate efforts instead of the rosy-cheeked Hannah. It would have been embarrassing, huh? And then I come along and bust up your fine effect. It's a cruel world."

Still LeVeq said nothing. The horseman leaned forward suddenly. His voice was clear and distinct. His genial manner had gone.

"Listen, hombre. You're thick-skinned, maybe worse. Sibley doesn't know you're here. That's as far as your luck goes. This isn't your lucky night.

"There's other reasons why you're off your range. Make dust, LeVeq. I'm here." He put the statement bluntly. "It's time for you to go."

It was the challenge direct. LeVeq cast down his cigarette and stamped on it viciously, his mantle of dignity temporarily cast aside. He took a step forward.

"You! You—!" he choked. His rage mastered him. His smoothness of speech failed him. His breath hissed between his clenched teeth.

"Yeah?" inquired the horseman with irritating self-possession. "You were about to say something, now, weren't you, LeVeq? Say on. But be careful. No cussing. It's too nice a night. No ungentlemanly remarks, if you please. No, not any."

"Listen," LeVeq found words at last, recovered some of his poise. He spoke rapidly, and his voice was raised by his rage to a higher pitch. "You are an obnoxious fellow. You continually force yourself in where you're not wanted. I'm going to find it necessary to eliminate you soon."

"Yeah?" The movement was swift as the uncoiling of a rattlesnake. The horseman's attitude had been one of repose. From that attitude he catapulted from the saddle, took a long step forward, and faced LeVeq. "You'll eliminate me soon, eh?" He spoke softly. "Why not now, LeVeq?"

LeVeq started back, his right hand flashing to his hip. The banjo dropped from beneath his arm and clattered to the ground. For a long moment they faced each other, motionless, the yokel with feet firmly planted, arms hanging loosely, fists doubled. LeVeq was crouching a little, his right hand on his hip. The fingers of his left extended and curved in a curiously tense attitude. In that moment, a discord from the fallen banjo throbbed into the silence.

In the shadow, the girl shrank back, her hand stealing to her throat. Terror seized her. It was not a personal fear, but the unreasoning panic of one who stands too close to the meeting of unknown and irresistible forces. Never before in her sheltered life had she seen two men face each other in just that way. It was appalling. It couldn't be. Men did not settle their differences thus. Yet momentarily they stood before her, stripped of their birthrights of centuries and æons—as in more primeval gloom hairy shapes had faced each other, teeth bared, and great arms knotted with leaping muscles, hanging below crooked knees.

Only for an instant the picture held. Then LeVeq's hand came from his hip, empty. He recovered his banjo, adjusted it methodically under his arm.

"Bah!" he sneered, turning away with a shrug. "Why should I waste time with you? It should suit your purposes, not mine. I have plans on foot that I cannot afford to jeopardize." A few paces distant, he whirled to point a quivering finger at his adversary, who was standing at ease now, grinning, his thumbs hooked in his belt. He spoke with concentrated fury. "Remember this. I know your game. You'd like

to force my hand to-night, wouldn't you? It was a crude attempt, my friend. Very crude. But I have avoided the trap. I go now because it suits me to go. But we will meet again under circumstances that I have arranged. You know what I mean."

"You're a prize grand-stander, LeVeq," chuckled the youth. "Don't kid me. You mean you haven't got your guns. You left them on your horse down in the chaparral thicket. That was another error in judgment. You mean you haven't got your gang with you. You haven't got a gallery, so you don't have to save your face. We'll meet some other time, will we? To-night, perhaps?"

"Perhaps to-night," said LeVeq between his teeth. "But that is for you to find out, my friend. Let me suggest this thought: Watch your step! You are playing a dangerous game."

"Not so dangerous as I thought," retorted the youth. "You're taking some of the kick out of this business, LeVeq. You've got such a habit of avoiding a show-down."

With a gesture that indicated that he could not continue this profitless conversation, LeVeq strode away. The youth, chuckling, mounted his horse again, and twisted in the saddle to watch him go.

From the shadow, the girl, too, watched LeVeq go. The jingle of his spurs died away. His figure dimmed and was lost in the gloom. In her mind's eye, in almost the same manner, his glittering personality had also been dimmed a little. Her thoughts were in a turmoil as she drew back into the shelter of the orchard.

LeVeq had been at a disadvantage in the encounter, she told herself. He had been caught off guard. Rage shook her as though the gibes of the genial youth had been directed at her. LeVeq had done right in avoiding a conflict. In the light of what he had told her, it was good strategy. As one of Delaney's men, the yokel had seized the opportunity to challenge the leader of the forces of law and order. It was good strategy to avoid a conflict, she told herself. There was too much at stake, and there was nothing to be gained by taking a risk.

Of one thing, she was sure, and that was her active resentment toward the yokel. She could see him now, riding up the lane toward the house, followed by the led horse. She drew back still farther into the shadow. Whatever errand had brought him to the Sibley ranch would doubtless soon be consummated. She resolved to wait until he had gone before returning to the house. She did not want to meet him, she told herself. But she did not tell herself the reason why.

She strolled, therefore, in the orchard, while the wind whispered in the poplars and she became conscious once more of the stars and the night. She built again her picture of LeVeq, his cleanly cut, aristocratic features, his well-modulated voice, his courtly manner.

And while she did this, she did not know that deep within her she had succeeded in crushing a half-formed question, a vague, intangible humiliation. She did not search for the source of this unspoken thought. She did not realize that it was the voice of the unyielding Sibleys striving for utterance—that unbending race who would back down from no man living, even for purposes of strategy, and who were known in the valley of the Grande Ronde as the last to be pulled from beneath the pile in a free for all.

She crushed the vague impression, stilled the tiny voice. As she moved aimlessly through the gloom, she centered her thoughts on what LeVeq had told her.

A clatter of hoofs announced presently that the yokel was departing.

Again, from far away, she heard his voice raised in uncouth melody.

"You missed something," growled Pa Sibley as she stood framed in the doorway, blinking in the unaccustomed light. "Out star gazin' that a way. Sam Delaney was just here. He couldn't stay but a minute or two."

"He said he saw you to-day." Ma Sibley smiled up from her fancy work. "He said he was doing a little irrigating when you drove by. He must have been that farm hand you told us about. Nice looking boy, isn't he?"

"Farm hand," grunted Sibley, his pale blue eyes twinkling. "You mentioned his horse, standing by the ditch while he was fixing the car. That there horse and saddle was worth a danged sight more than the car. That black," he stated impressively, forgetting that the girl knew nothing of the aristocracy of horseflesh in the high country, "is out of the Coldwell stables. Warm blooded. Sired by Mountain King. His dam was Lullaby."

"You must have made a hit with Sam," said Ma Sibley. "He brought up a horse for you to use while you were here. He said you mentioned that you liked horses. Wasn't that thoughtful of him? That one he brought up for Ruth is a thoroughbred, too, eh, pa? It looked like an awfully nice horse."

"Nice!" Sibley snorted at this sacrilege. "That filly is a full sister to Sam's black. Her registered name is Stranger's Lassie. She's gentle as a kitten and fast as a comet. Sam's never had her on the track, but I'll gamble she could run neck and neck with his black."

"I think," said the girl slowly, "that I'll go to bed, if you don't mind. It's rather late."

"Poor child," said Ma Sibley. "You do look pale. You're tired. Sam said he'd be up to-morrow forenoon and take you for a ride up on Lookout back of here. My, you can get a fine view of the valley from Lookout! You can see clear to Cherryville and the plains on the other side of the sand hills."

Ruth's bedroom opened directly off the living room in the southern wing of the rambling house. Abner Sibley sidled up and intercepted her casually at the doorway. "Good night, Ruth," he said gruffly. His right hand was extended, hidden by his bulk from Ma Sibley. In his palm was her golden compact. "Sam found this gadget down by the pillar. Said Hannah had dropped it there. I didn't tell him it was yours."

She did not immediately go to sleep. The windows flanking her room to the east gave her a view of the valley. The shades were up, the sash thrown open so that the cool night air poured into the room. The rustling of the poplars had risen before the wind from the southwest. From the high places back of the ranch, from ridges to north and south, came a faint but clear and bell-like chorus of coyotes.

She had slept in this room on three previous nights. It had been merely comfortable quarters in an ancient and somewhat old-fashioned farmhouse. From her window, she had looked out upon a sleepy landscape. To-night, the whispering wind was the same. The coyotes had called before. Yet now she lay, wide-eyed and breathless, tingling with new emotions, and looked upon a new world. Her yokel was the great Sam Delaney, of high repute in the Grande Ronde. LeVeq, the magnificent, had played and sung of marble halls.

Later, having drifted into the drowsy lethargy that precedes slumber, she was jerked into wakefulness by a detail that fitted into her sleeping train of thought. She had dreamed that a tiny speck of light was flickering against her half-closed eyes. She sat up in bed, rubbed her eyes, and stared out the window.

It was no dream, after all. Far across the valley, high in the heavens on

the crest of Antelope, a light was flashing intermittently, almost like an eye winking. It stopped, began again at a great rate, a dot-and-dash system, evidently a code. It meant, the girl knew —and the knowledge of it tingled like fire in her veins—that the mysterious riders of the valley were abroad.

Because she was young and wholly feminine, she subsided, quaking, and pulled the covers close in an instinctive and childlike gesture of self-protection. Because she was feminine, and a Sibley, she thrilled to the knowledge that fate had brought her into contact with the two leaders of the forces at war in the valley. It required no inner voice to tell her that she had found favor in their eyes. She was no longer a spectator. She had taken a rôle on the living stage, perhaps a prominent one, as women had done through the centuries whenever men strove for gain or glory. Yes, since the time of Helen of Troy.

It was a terrible business, she told herself. She shivered as she lay. But in the darkness, she smiled.

CHAPTER VI.

SLEEPY SAM DELANEY.

THE sun was high when she awoke the next morning. The room was warm, and the world beyond the porch was already blazing in midsummer heat. She had slept late, she told herself without remorse. It was wonderful how one could sleep in this high altitude. Another hot day was at hand. But she was not bored by the prospect. The heat would not be oppressive after all. It had only seemed so because of the languor that lay on the land.

How, she wondered, had she ever thought the region uninteresting? She faced the day eagerly and gloated in the knowledge that glorious days were yet to come.

During that drowsy interval that had preceded awakening she had been vaguely aware that the Sibley establishment had been astir since the early hours of the morning. Hannah had been singing at her work. In some distant part of the house, the telephone had jangled many times. Mounted men had come and gone. There had been a murmur of deep voices, and once, she was sure, she had heard her uncle Abner swear.

She breakfasted in the cheerful alcove off the kitchen. Ma Sibley prepared and served the meal herself, beaming affectionately, her motherly features reflecting some of the vitality of the radiant girl. Hannah was busied elsewhere in the house. Sibley was somewhere on the premises.

As she bustled about the kitchen, Ma Sibley told the girl in the mildly horrified and gossipy manner of women who have lived their lives on the frontier of new depredations committed by the outlaws during the night.

This was already history in the valley. Ere Ruth had arisen that morning, the news had traveled by telephone and by word of mouth to the uttermost corners of the Grande Ronde. Hours before, it had been discussed from every angle in a hundred homes. The incident had already taken its place among other outbreaks of the recent past, and conjecture was being freely hazarded on the place and nature of the next.

Ruth was amazed at the speed with which the valley had acquired the news. She listened with avid interest.

At North Powder, a village on the extreme northern edge of the valley, supported by the hill farmers in the back country and traffic to and from the mines, the principal mercantile establishment had been ransacked, the safe dynamited. Cash, securities, and gold dust on deposit in behalf of prospectors in the Powder Hills had been taken in an unknown amount. There had been a running fight between the vigilantes

and outlaws. One of the latter had been wounded slightly. But all, as usual, had made their escape.

"It's a terrible business," said Ma Sibley. "Try one of these muffins, my dear. Pa thinks they're great. He eats them by the dozen—— Yes, it's terrible. Those robbers got an awful lot, they say. You know, Joe Hancock's store is a kind of bank. He sleeps in a room next to his office and is a dead shot. But these outlaws surprised him and tied him up. They left him right there while they blasted the safe. It's a wonder it didn't kill him. It blasted the wall in right where he lay. He was unconscious when they found him. But I guess he wasn't hurt very bad, just kind of dazed and terrible mad.

"It's awful." Ma Sibley beamed upon the girl. "Have some more coffee, my dear. They might have had black murder on their souls. You mark my words, they'll answer for it at the Day of Judgment."

In the midst of their discussion, Abner Sibley loomed in the doorway. He seated himself heavily on a kitchen chair, puffing on his pipe. His heavy features were expressionless, but his eyes rested on the girl with grudging admiration and a kind of solemn pride.

He had not yet grown accustomed to the wonders wrought by environment in a single generation. Ruth's mother had been beautiful. But her daughter was exquisite. His niece, he told himself, was a Sibley. He could not express his thoughts. He sat, and there was a kind of awe in his pale blue eyes as his glance dwelt on the glory of Ruth's hair in which the light from the low window was caught, and the contour of her cheeks, rosy with the health of vigorous forbears.

He could add little to what Ma Sibley had said concerning the night's outrage; save the spectacular manner in which the outlaws had escaped.

"The vigilantes had 'em surrounded," he chuckled. "You got to hand it to 'em at that. Them desperadoes are slippery as eels. The vigilantes figured something was going to pop to-night. It did. They heard it. It was Hancock's safe. They throwed a cordon clean around the place, mounted men with rifles. It was darker than the hinges of Halifax.

"But you know what them desperadoes done? They rode clean through the line and them vigilantes didn't know it till they busted from cover and made a run for it. They rode right down lateral B, by gravy! They had their horses down in the ditch all the while. The water's been turned off for two days on account of there being a break above. The boys had forgotten about it. It's most generally full of water. The bottom's soft and the horses didn't make no noise. They must have come within fifty feet of one of the vigilantes. First thing they knew, these highbinders come up out of the ditch, scattered, and made a break for the hills."

"There was some shooting, wasn't there?" inquired Ruth.

"Nothing to speak of," said Sibley. "A couple of dozen rounds, maybe. All guesswork in that kind of light and on running horses. There's some talk about one of the outlaws getting winged. But it couldn't have amounted to much. They didn't get any of them."

"And none of the vigilantes were hurt?"

Her uncle shrugged. "They ain't saying. I ain't heard of anybody being missing. Probably not, or some of these wise lads would be claiming that at least a dozen citizens had been slaughtered."

It was after the noon meal and the trio were seated in the welcome coolness of the porch, when Sibley, who had been squinting down the road toward the valley, turned to his niece.

"You don't want to forget," he ad-

monished, his pale blue eyes twinkling, "that Sam Delaney aims to come up and go riding with you to-day. He said so, and what that lad aims to do, he generally does."

"He's presumptuous, isn't he?" said Ruth, somewhat coldly. "I don't recall saying that I would ride with him. I should look upon it as an honor, I suppose."

"What made me think of it," said Sibley, "is that here he comes now. If that critter ain't his black, I'll eat it, hide and all."

To Ruth's inexperienced eyes, the approaching horse was merely a tiny black object, trailed by a cloud of dust, of insectlike proportions compared to the poplars that towered along the way.

"At the rate he's traveling," said Sibley judiciously, "I'd judge he'd be here in about six minutes."

"I think I'll go inside," Ruth rose. "I'm not at all sure that I even care to ride with him."

Abner Sibley watched her disappear into the house. Then he turned to his wife somewhat blankly.

"Tough on Sam, ain't it? What ails the girl? Why the devil shouldn't she ride with him?"

"You big lummox," said his wife, "of course she will. Go saddle that horse Sam gave her, and fetch it around."

Sibley stared at her, jaw dropping. "You mean she aims to ride with him?" His wife nodded. "Well, I'm a blasted goat."

"She's got some riding clothes," Ma Sibley explained calmly, "that are much too nice to lay idle. She showed them to me when she first came, and said she hoped she would get a chance to use them. Now you run along, Abner, and fetch that horse."

Baffled, he rose obediently and strode away, shaking his head.

The sound of the rider's approach came presently. The horse was plunging forward at an extended and seemingly effortless lope. The youth sat the saddle with the unconscious ease of a born rider.

Ma Sibley regarded him approvingly as he drew near. Times had changed. The young men of her day had also ridden good horses. Their saddles, too, were their pride and delight, of hand-tooled leather, ornately carved, representing, oftentimes, the wages of months on the range. But they had not worn tailored riding breeches of finest whipcord, nor looked as if they had come, smooth-shaven and immaculate, from the hands of a valet. And yet, she made the concession without regret, the new order of things was no less colorful than the old.

The horseman pulled up and swung to the ground, led his mount to the shade and left him, reins trailing. He mounted the steps, hat in hand.

"Fine!" he answered in response to Ma Sibley's greeting. "It's a swell day." Obeying her gesture, he seated himself, and fanned his face with his sombrero. His actions, like his speech, were somewhat deliberate. He looked about him with an unhurried but comprehensive glance. "How's Abner? Where's Miss Hamilton? Is she around?"

"I like that," chided Ma Sibley. "You sit right down beside me and ask for my niece. But, of course, you can't be bothered talking to me. Yes, she'll be out in a minute, Sam. Abner's out saddling her horse. My, she's a beauty! Ruth was out to the stables looking at her this morning. But she hasn't ridden her yet. I persuaded her to wait till you came. I kind of had an idea you'd be along this forenoon."

Sam looked at her and grinned slowly. "No," he said, "I slept pretty late this morning. I'm working hard these days, you know."

"And nights?" Ma Sibley's eyes rested upon him smilingly.

But the youth only grinned. The good lady's keen eyes had noticed that Sam, mounting the steps, had walked with a slight limp. Seated now, with his right leg stretched out and resting on the heel of a polished boot, there was visible beneath the whipcord the faint contour of a bandage around the limb between knee and hip.

She was about to question him concerning his disability when the door opened behind them and her niece stepped out on the porch.

Sam leaped somewhat awkwardly to his feet. Ma Sibley turned in her chair to face her niece, smilingly.

Ruth was stunning, no less, in a riding habit of hunter's green. It was a shade that harmonized exquisitely with her high coloring. She was trim, dainty, devastating. Yet she appeared entirely unconscious of the effect she invariably produced.

"Ruth," said Ma Sibley. "This is Sam Delaney."

"Of course." The girl's imperious eyes laughed as she extended a gloved hand. "We've met before, Mr. Delaney. I'm glad to see you've overcome your paralysis."

"Just now," said Sam, grinning, "when I first saw you, I felt another stroke coming. But I fought it off. You'll be glad to hear, too, that I didn't get fired yesterday afternoon. In fact, the boss was pleased. He patted me on the back and said, 'Delaney, my boy. Sleep as much as you like. Maybe you'll dream some more.' And I said to him," continued Sam complacently, "'Delaney, those are words of wisdom.'"

"It's obvious," Ruth laughed, "that you and your boss are on excellent terms, mutual admiration, eh?"

"Why not?" said Sam lazily. "No one else appreciates us."

They moved together toward the head of the steps. Ma Sibley was forgotten, but she did not resent it. They were youth drawn together. Watching them, the good lady was surprised at Sam's ease of manner. He was not overawed, apparently. If he were, he concealed it. His blue eyes expressed only a placid interest. But Sibley had once told her, in high praise, that Sam was a poker-playing fool and proud as Lucifer.

Sibley now appeared around the corner of the house. His face revealed the pride of a lover of horseflesh whose hand holds treasure. Behind him trailed Stranger's Lassie, a glossy, undulating poem of motion, even at a meek walk. She was a magnificent filly of an utter black, unmarred by other color. She was not as muscular to the eye as Sam's horse, nor as heavy boned. She was as tall but more rangy, almost serpentine in her flawless proportions, beautiful to the eye.

Side by side the two horses stood. Abner Sibley eyed them gloatingly. Each gained by comparison with the other, and paradoxically, neither lost. They were brother and sister, five and four years old. An example of the Coldwell genius in bringing together the heart and stamina of Mountain King and the pride and speed of Lullaby.

Ma Sibley liked horses, but she was more interested in people. Her eyes rested on Sam and the girl. They too, she told herself, were thoroughbreds.

"Sorry about that saddle," Sam apologized, as they descended the steps. "I didn't ask you what type you preferred. English, I suppose."

"Not at all," said the girl, kindly. "I like Western saddles. That one's a beauty, isn't it? It'll do very nicely."

Abner Sibley snorted as he made his way to the porch.

"When that girl goes to heaven," he growled to his wife, "she'll probably look over them pearly gates with those big eyes of hers and the said streets of gold, and she'll turn to Saint Peter and say, 'Neat establishment you've got

here.' You know what she said about that saddle, just now?" He strove to mimic his niece's voice. "'It will do very nicely.'"

Ma Sibley smiled at this. Both knew the saddle, as did every citizen of the Grande Ronde. It was at the pinnacle of riding equipment made for man's use and vanity. Leather and craftsmanship could go no further. It was a show saddle. Sam had never used it. He had won it two years before in the world's championship bucking contest at Pendleton.

To purchase such a saddle, a cowhand at forty dollars a month would have had to work more than a year, spending nothing meanwhile for tobacco, bonbons, or other trifles.

"I don't understand young folks," complained Sibley, as Sam and Ruth rode away, laughing in high good spirits. "If I was Sam's age, and riding with a girl like Ruth, I'd be tongue-tied, shackled, and hollering for help. But Sam ain't pop-eyed. Look at him, careless and kind of good-natured. Sure, he's riding with Sibley's niece. Yes, indeed. What of it? Nothing to throw a fit about. Nice day, ain't it?

"And that ain't the half of it." His tone was venomous. But his eyes rested eagerly on the youthful pair in the distance. They were in view again. They had circled the orchard and farm buildings and were now ascending the sage-clad slope that led northward and upward toward the pine timber. "That girl could highbrow the Duke of Ballyhoo and make him like it. Sam Delaney owns six thousand acres. It's worth eighty dollars an acre. His income, when the breaks come his way, is bigger than a bank president's. There ain't more than forty gals in this valley but would give their right arms to ride with Sam.

"Yeah, and how does Ruth treat him?" His endeavor to imitate the tones of his niece all but reduced his wife to tears. "'I'm not sure that I care to ride with him.' Them big eyes of hers might just as well be saying, 'Cut yourself a piece of cake, Mr. Delaney.'

"Yeah," he eyed his wife malignantly, as that good lady wiped her eyes, still quaking with mirth. "And what about the young cake eater? He's a lad that's supposed to be taking a hand in this business in the valley. Where'd he get all this said polish? He's that hard-boiled he would snap his fingers in the face of a wild cat. When he was looking at Ruth, kind of languid and grinning, it wouldn't have surprised me none if he'd busted right out and said, 'Won't you have a cup of tea, Miss Hamilton?' Why, the maverick's a lounge lizard! He's a sofa snake, no less."

"My, you're getting to be such a talker, Abner," said Ma Sibley, complacently. "Having young folks around kind of wakes you up. But don't you worry about them. Just leave them be. They'll get along fine."

Sibley, yielding to his former habits, said nothing. He relaxed in his rawhide chair and refilled his pipe.

A more serious thought had occurred to him. Ruth's reaction to her encounter with LeVeq at Unionville was even more puzzling than her treatment of Sam. The girl had obviously been much impressed with the former. It was bad business. But on the other hand, he assured himself, they could not meet in the future except by chance. Meanwhile, Sam would have his innings unhindered.

He crouched in his chair, lowering his head to peer beneath the edge of the porch roof. The pair was still in view, tiny now in the distance, silhouetted on a long hogback as they climbed toward the sky. Presently they merged into the pine timber that crowned the slopes of the Powder Hills at the base of Lookout.

CHAPTER VII.

CROSS CURRENTS.

DESPITE her lightness of manner, Ruth was studying Sam keenly during the long climb to the crest of Lookout. She had an impression, too, that she also was under observation. But this did not make her in the least self-conscious. She was accustomed to the admiring appraisal of men. She regarded it as natural and inevitable and thought nothing of it. Tribute, to her, was conspicuous only by its absence.

There was nothing in Sam's manner to indicate that she was under observation. She was, in fact, vaguely piqued by his indifference. He was careless, genial, impersonal. From her contact with the world and men since her early teens, she had learned to be prepared instantly to rebuff any advances, to still with an imperious glance the first suggestion of a too ardent interest. But this protective armor, she speedily realized, as far as Sam was concerned was in the nature of excess baggage.

It was a realization that was vaguely disconcerting. His impersonal and lazy courtesy did not indicate a realization that for the moment he was being favored above all other men, that he was alone with a ravishingly beautiful woman in an almost primeval solitude. His attitude was almost brazenly matter of fact. It said, in so far as it revealed anything, that he was young, healthy, astride a good horse, and mounting through sunlit spaces to the top of the world. His companion was also young, easy to look at, and a good sort until proved otherwise. Meanwhile, it was a nice day and a pleasant ride in prospect. And that was that.

Nevertheless, in his genial blue eyes, resting upon her with irritating self-possession, she felt that she was being studied. He admired her, that was obvious. But she felt that he would also have paused to admire a beautiful flower, a beautiful horse, or a beautiful deed. Never before in her experience had a youth near her own age failed to accept her instantly at her face value. But Sam did not. He conceded her beauty and nothing more.

This realization of Sam's attitude gleaned in the long climb toward the timber, was for Ruth a strange and somewhat intriguing sensation. It placed him alone in her mental category of the male of the species. He immediately became intensely interesting.

The face of a rocky precipice was visible through the trees at their right as they climbed. Ruth had caught glimpses through the trees of a far-flung vista unfolding below them. Yet, because of the timber, it did not seem that they had mounted very high. She was staggered when, achieving a steep ridge where a rocky formation appeared for the first time underfoot, Sam pulled up and waved an arm to the right.

A momentary vertigo seized her. It was as though they stood on the edge of a world.

Perhaps an acre of dark weather-beaten basalt stretched before them to the east. It was the crest of Lookout, that great monolith that projected so casually from the summit of the Powder Hills. On either side of this expanse of rock, the crest of the pines dipped down sharply and was lost to view. Beyond its edge, from where they stood, the eye rested on a hill covered with tiny, almost feathery, green stubble. It seemed close at hand, this hill, almost as though the shoulder of rock leaned against it. Yet it seemed weird and unreal.

It was, she discovered a moment later, a section of the Blue Mountains. The green stubble was pine timber. It was twelve miles away and the valley of the Grande Ronde lay between, two thousand feet below.

They dismounted and left their horses in the timber. As they moved forward

side by side toward the edge of the abyss, Ruth was thankful for the eternal rock beneath her feet. It gave her a feeling of security, as an unreal world, vast in distance and depth, unfolded before her. Slowly, as she moved forward on a horizontal plane, the edge of Lookout, like a lowering barrier, crept toward their feet. And beyond was space upon which the untrained eye focused unbelievingly.

As they stepped down from a low ledge all too close to the edge of reality, Sam motioned to Ruth.

"Sit down," he commanded. She obeyed thankfully. Sam seated himself a little stiffly at her side, his right leg extended. "Nice view, what?"

Ruth did not immediately reply. She looked about her. Far below lay the valley; like the bottom of a great bowl. The Blue Mountains were beyond. Vastness was the keynote of the world. Through passages in the stupendous outline of the Blue Mountains to the northeast, she could glimpse the great Wallowa country, like rocky foam-crested billows on a storm-tossed sea, stretching to the far horizon.

North were glimpses of another ocean, more tranquil, stretching into a blue distance that merged into the sky. Dim black and gold was that farther sea, the great wheat region known as "The Inland Empire." Southwest and south were the sand hills, and beyond was the purple and tawny vista of the level sagebrush country. The remainder of the circle of the majestic bowl was the green of the Powder Hills, converging from north and south on the point where they sat.

"Why," said Ruth at length. "The valley isn't so big after all."

"That's what the immigrants said," chuckled Sam. "They sent scouts up here to Lookout to look over the lay of the land. They had crossed the Dakotas, and the Bad Lands, and the Rockies. Their oxen had dragged them through the sagebrush and the sand hills. They thought maybe from here they could see the river, the Columbia, that had cut a gash through the mountains to the Willamette Valley. They thought perhaps this valley was a part of the Columbia River Basin. But they couldn't see the river from here. It lies between here and that wheat country yonder, but it's down in a canyon. It must have been discouraging. 'Men,' the scouts reported when they got back to camp, 'this valley is only a hole in the ground. We got more mountains and deserts to cross before we get to the river.' "

Scouts from the pioneer wagon trains, the girl thought, had stood on this spot, contemplating with weary eyes this very scene. How awe-inspiring to those dauntless hearts it must have been! To them the æsthetic value of the panorama was secondary. It had been a wilderness, peopled with hostile Indians, seemingly limitless, and beyond the mountains, unless they found the river, were winter, starvation, and death.

"But they pushed on," she said. "They weren't discouraged, were they?"

"My grandfather," said Sam, "was captain of that immigrant train. The grass in the valley was belly-deep. They waited three days so the starving oxen could rest and recuperate. Then they held a council. One of the scouts who had come here to Lookout led a faction that wanted to winter here in the valley. By my grandfather wouldn't listen to it. The women and children were worn out. They wouldn't last through the winter here in the high country. Their supplies were low. He finally won out. Three days later, from the top of the pass, they could see the river."

Ruth was adjusting herself slowly to her environment. In the first breath-taking instant when the world had dropped away beneath her feet, she had felt tiny and insignificant, insectlike in the face of the stupendous dimensions

about her. But men had dominated it. Her own grandfather was a pioneer. The valley, far below her, had once been a wilderness. Men had changed it, made it productive. Sam's forbears had been of this dominant breed.

He designated points of interest. A cluster of trees with a huddle of dun-colored buildings was Unionville. To the northwest, where there were no trees, and concrete and brick buildings fronted on paved streets laid out with geometric precision, was Grande Ronde. Cherryville and North Powder were at opposite ends of the valley. Southwest, beyond the Powder Hills, was the mining country of the Sumpter Valley.

Ruth was only half conscious of his words. She was seated on the top of Lookout. The hour spent on that lofty eminence also represented a high point in her psychological reaction toward the Grande Ronde. She had been in the valley almost a week, had driven the car over it, met its people, and knew its history. She had thought her interest in it to be of a synthetic variety—her rebellion against its languid exterior and its later glamour of intrigue and romance. She had been a stranger who had visited briefly in a region of which her mother had often spoken.

Yet now, studying the changing moods of the valley as it drowsed under the afternoon sun, she knew that she was not, and never had been, a stranger. The dominant strain of the Sibleys was also dominant in her. This was the land of her people. The names of places Sam mentioned so carelessly were familiar to her from her mother's stories. There they were before her. She could see them all. The Blue Mountains were there, and southwest were the sandhills. She had never seen these places before. She had known them always.

Sam had seated himself beneath the ledge, leaning his back against it. He had ceased talking, as though, having done his duty as a guide, he was now prepared to enjoy the view. He had rolled and lighted a cigarette. He puffed lazily, hands locked behind his head, utterly at ease.

"Your grandfather came back to the valley, didn't he?" Ruth's voice was casual, but her eyes resting on the recumbent youth were critically intent.

"Yeah," said Sam. "He never forgot those three days when the wagon train rested. He came up here to Lookout on the second day to look it over himself. He probably sat right where I'm sitting now. After he delivered those families in the immigrant train down in the settlements, and was footloose again, he came back the next spring. He homesteaded a section over there at the foot of Antelope. A fellow proved up on another section beside him and he bought that. It was all he needed. His cattle had all the world to graze in. That was the start of the Delaney Ranch. My father added eight more sections to it."

He gestured toward the valley. On the farthest slope of the great bowl, Antelope loomed at the foot of the Blue Mountains. Ruth could see the line of poplars that Ma Sibley had said marked the northern boundary of the Delaney land, a thin hedge paralleling the ribbon-like road.

"How far does your land extend into the valley?" she inquired. "This side of Antelope."

Sam grinned. "All the way," he said quietly. "It lies in a rectangle, five sections across the valley and two south."

The girl sat up. "Do you mean that, following that line of poplars from the base of Antelope, your land comes clear across the valley to the foot of these hills?"

Sam nodded.

"Well," said the girl, "from the poplars south, how far does it go?"

"That black square behind the poplars," said Sam, "is a section of summer

fallow. I'm going to raise wheat on it. If I'm lucky, I ought to take off twenty-five thousand bushels. There's two squares south, you'll notice. One's dark green; the other light. The first is a half section of alfalfa. The second is wheat. The south side of that wheat is my south line. It's two miles from the poplars."

For the first time, viewing it from above in its relation to its environment, the girl realized how large an area was six thousand acres or more of tillable land.

"All that land is yours? Why, it looks like you own about a fifth of the valley."

"Oh, no," said Sam. "There's ninety thousand acres in the Grande Ronde. I only own seven per cent of it."

Ruth leaned forward. "Your grandfather," she said, "homesteaded a section and acquired another. Your father added eight sections. What have you done?"

He turned his head slowly to look up at her. His blue eyes expressed nothing at first save a keen appraisal. Then a dimple appeared in his cheek as he grinned slowly.

"You're right," he said. "So that's what you're leading up to? Yeah, my grandfather homesteaded and whipsawed the first lumber in the valley to build his house. He planted the poplars and dug a well. He graded the first road into Unionville. My father added eight sections and dug the first irrigation ditch in the Grande Ronde. They thought he was crazy. It cost four thousand dollars when money meant something. But he made it back in a single crop. Now the whole valley is irrigated. He started it."

"And you," said the girl, "get the benefit of all that these pioneers have done."

"They had the grief," Sam agreed. "I'm getting the gravy."

"But you're the third generation," persisted the girl. "Have you done nothing at all to continue the work your forefathers began? Have you followed in their footsteps or have you turned aside?"

For the first time since she had met him, a heavy flush showed beneath his tan. He was looking away from her again, and his gaze rested on the distant valley.

"I've thought of that myself," he admitted, "more than once. No, I haven't done much. I'll never sell the ranch. I've kept it up, improved it, paid off the mortgage." It was as though he addressed an inner consciousness. "The Delaneys have always been the mainstay of the valley. I've tried to keep up that tradition. I've done a little, not much. I've brought in better strains of horses, beef, and dairy stock, and sold them at cost. I built a community house over on Catherine Creek. Those hill farmers wanted it but couldn't afford it. No family in the Grande Ronde ever goes hungry. But that's only money, of course."

He looked at her somewhat shamefacedly. "I'm not volunteering this. You asked me."

"It was not mere curiosity." Ruth flushed a little in her turn. "Please don't think me impertinent. But don't consider me a stranger. My people, too, were pioneers. I do not mean to criticize you. You have done well. You are well spoken of in the valley." Unconsciously she was using LeVeq's own words. "Anything whispered against your name would be sacrilege. But, are you really upholding the Delaney tradition?"

Sam turned now to face her squarely. He winced, and shifted his right leg to a more comfortable position. But his blue eyes, fixed upon her face, did not waver.

"In what manner," he inquired softly, "do you think I am falling down? In your opinion, of course," he added, ap-

parently as a courteous afterthought, "which I value very highly."

"Your people were men of action." She reflected her words with care. "That is the tradition of your family, is it not? Your father, I think Uncle Abner told me, fought in the Piute and Bannock wars. Your grandfather led his immigrant train through a thousand miles of hostile Indian territory. His entire life was surrounded by action and danger. What of that tradition?"

There was nothing of the listless now in Sam's pose. He seemed restful enough, his lower limbs prone upon the rocks, his back against the ledge. But his blue eyes fixed upon her intently gave the lie to his appearance of physical ease. It was as though deep within him a sleeping giant had roused to meet her words.

"I saw plenty," he said slowly, "in the war."

"Overseas?"

"Yes," he still eyed her fixedly. "But that isn't what you meant, of course."

"No," said Ruth. "I didn't mean that. You undoubtedly upheld your family tradition overseas. I'm certain you did. But what about after your return to the valley? What of the lawless outbreaks of the past month? To be more explicit," her level glance met his squarely, "what of last night?"

Their gaze locked and held. Sam's survey was deliberate, impersonal. Secretly, she was a little frightened at that impersonal quality. It was a challenge to her resources. She knew that he was not looking at her as at a beautiful woman or as Sibley's niece. She knew that he was appraising her merely as a potential force which had to be reckoned with.

Then the dimple appeared again in his cheek. She grew hot with anger. Sam's grin was his most eloquent expression. It could reveal amusement, scorn, carelessness. It could mock or defy, belittle or flatter. He grinned now with a lazy tolerance that was maddening.

"I am to assume from that question, I suppose," he said, "that you know all about the situation here in the valley. You have said that you are not an outsider and not inspired by a mere curiosity. I'll concede that. What I wonder about is the—er—quality of your interest. You think this lawless business quite romantic, eh?"

"Dramatic," Ruth corrected, "in so far as all our problems have an element of drama. Don't laugh at me if you please, Mr. Delaney." Her voice was haughty. "I assure you that my interest, as you put it, is above question."

"Then why," said Sam, very casually, "did you meet LeVeq at the entrance of Sibley's lane last night?"

Ruth flushed, then paled. Sam's grin was still on his face, but his eyes were cold. With a lazy gesture, as in all moments of stress, he rolled a cigarette.

"I don't apologize for that question." He flipped the match away and blew a cloud of smoke upward. "Let me remind you that it was you who started this inquisition. You don't have to answer it, of course. You must have had your own justification. Some motive impelled you to encourage the advance of that—er—LeVeq. If your reason for doing so is satisfactory to you, it is more than sufficient for me."

"You saw me last night?"

"Yeah. As soon as I saw LeVeq, I knew that gilded lily had blossomed there for some purpose. Then I saw you beyond the pillar."

Ruth had recovered her poise. Only a faint wrathful spot showed in her cheek. "That is why you spoke to him so harshly? Was it because you knew I was listening?"

"No." He waved his cigarette in a deprecatory gesture. "I don't wish to belittle you. You are used to dominating the stage, no doubt. But you are, in these matters, incidental. I had other

reasons for calling him. I'll say this for him. He didn't know you were still a spectator. If he had, it might have been different. He would have been forced to do what is technically known as 'save his face.'

"I repeat," he continued, as Ruth would have spoken, "that except that you opened the discussion, I wouldn't have mentioned LeVeq. If you choose to spend a rosy-tinted moment in his languishing presence, that's your privilege. You can trust me to keep your secret. Neat, wasn't it, to give your powder puff to Sibley and tell him Hannah dropped it?" His grin was mocking now. "Don't mention it. Glad to assist."

"Listen, Mr Delaney." Ruth congratulated herself on her level tones, which revealed nothing of her inner wrath. There was also chagrin together with a hint of growing and unwilling respect for the youth's keen perceptions and mental agility. "Let me tell you something of my point of view toward you and Mr. LeVeq."

"You don't have to justify yourself," murmured Sam. "It's all right."

"You're trying to make me lose my temper," she accused, biting her lip. "I am not justifying myself. You know I'm not. Let me make this plain. I have the interest of this valley at heart. I am an outsider only in one particular. I have an unprejudiced point of view. Aren't you at all interested in my ideas on the situation?"

"Depends on who helps you form your ideas. But continue, lady, continue."

She chose to disregard this thrust, though it had struck home with amazing accuracy.

"From my neutral point of view," she said, "there are several angles to the situation that are rather odd. In the first place, if these desperadoes live right here in the valley, why has it been so hard to round them up?"

"You tell me." Sam shrugged his shoulders. "Looks like these vigilantes are falling down on the job, ch?"

"It is generally believed," Ruth continued bluntly, "that LeVeq and his gang are the outlaws. But each of them are known here in the valley. Their horses are recognizable. Everybody knows that their headquarters are on Mormon Creek. Why," she said, leaning forward and emphasizing each point with a gloved forefinger, "haven't the vigilantes succeeded in getting sufficient evidence to justify having the whole gang arrested and tried. If the vigilantes are certain it is the LeVeq gang, why don't they place a guard at the mouth of the canyon and trap the desperadoes as they return to Mormon Creek?"

Some of Sam's mocking lightness of manner had departed.

"Those are reasonable questions. You are assuming, of course, that I am in a position to answer them."

"Rumor," she said, "places you among the vigilantes, if not actually their leader."

Sam hesitated. When he spoke there was an edge in his voice. "And if I were, Miss Hamilton, do you suppose I would tell you anything?"

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Sam, "that last night you were talking with LeVeq."

"To-day," retorted Ruth, "I am talking to you. Is it wrong of me to get both sides of the question?"

"Get them both from LeVeq," said Sam between his teeth. His blue eyes blazed suddenly upon her. His jaw was set. It was the first time he had spoken to her in wrath His words crowded upon one another. "I'll tell you nothing. Does he think I'll argue with him through you? I'll do all my talking to him. Let him tell you what he pleases, to the accompaniment of a banjo. Meanwhile, you're welcome to your opinions."

Ruth was shocked, yet inwardly elated. His rage gave the lie to his careless but stinging suggestion that she, even in the shadow of the pillar, had been incidental. She grew more cool and collected in the face of his belligerence. He was turned toward her, jaw outthrust, the flush of wrath ebbing in his tanned features.

"A word of advice," he said bluntly. "Watch your step. You're Sibley's niece. Nobody but me knows you talked to LeVeq last night. Better not do it again. He's bad medicine. No use giving him any big ideas. His days are numbered."

"By the vigilantes?" inquired Ruth.

"By the vigilantes. You'll see LeVeq again, of course." There was a touch of scorn and more than a touch of bitterness in his voice. "I don't understand women. There was a man once that did. He's behind bars now, in a padded cell—— When you see LeVeq, and retail to him all that you have been able to pry out of me, he'll figure his banjo playing hasn't been worth while; because I've told you nothing."

It was the girl's turn now to yield to her wrath.

"You — you're insufferable!" she choked. "Are you insinuating that I am acting as a spy in this business?"

"I don't insinuate," he said shortly. "A spade is a spade. You met LeVeq in Unionville. One of my men saw that romantic episode. He wasn't sure whether you dropped your mail accidentally or on purpose. We'll give you the benefit of the doubt. But your meeting with him last night was voluntary. I'm not asking you why you did it. It's nothing to me, except that it is barely possible that you might affect events of greater importance than your sweet-in-death intrigue. The point is, you can't pose as an unbiased observer. You are sympathetic with LeVeq. Otherwise, why have you attempted to ride me so rough to-day?"

His speech, delivered bluntly and without apology, brought home to Ruth a realization that she had been maneuvered into a difficult position. His attitude was logical. She had encouraged LeVeq, even by listening to his passionate utterances the night before. To-day she had badgered Sam. She saw herself suddenly as a mischievous interloper with a thirst for dramatics, forcing herself into the path of contending forces whose significance she did not fully understand.

She was humiliated, and deep within her she recorded this humiliation against the youth at her feet. But her innate generosity and fairness compelled her to make amends without hesitation.

She brushed her wrath aside. Her features softened. Her eyes lighted and her red lips parted over dazzling teeth as she smiled. Sam, being only human, met this phenomenon with an unwilling grin.

"I am not a spy, Mr. Delaney," she said softly. "No, you don't need to apologize. I haven't told you what Mr. LeVeq has confided in me, nor, should I encounter him again, would I think of telling him anything you happen to say. I haven't been nice to you to-day. It was wrong of me to question you the way I have. You'll think me unappreciative of your thoughtfulness." She gestured toward the horses dozing in the shadow of the pines. "That's a beautiful horse you brought for me to use. It was nice of you to bring me up here to Lookout. I haven't forgotten, either, your practical help yesterday when Uncle Abner's car got balky."

"Shucks," said Sam, carelessly, "I wouldn't have even thought of those things. Don't mention it."

"But I appreciate it," Ruth insisted. "I'll tell you, too, why I rode you so rough to-day, as you put it. You may not understand, but it's perfectly clear to me. As soon as I got here last week,

my uncle and aunt warned me against LeVeq. They immediately began to sing your praises. I've always been in the habit of forming my own opinions. I discovered that LeVeq had no property to speak of. He had never been convicted of any crime. Then I met him. Hate him as you will, you must admit he has a pleasing personality. He has a bad reputation. But a bad reputation in a valley like this is often mere rumor. Mind you, I am not so foolish as to deny that he is probably as black as he is painted. But he may not be. I like to think that even an under dog may yet win out."

She paused, waiting for Sam's reaction. But there was no reaction. He said nothing and appeared to be listening with courteous interest.

"To-day," she continued, "you sat here on the rocks as you are sitting now, like a lazy king looking over his empire. Your ranch down there is tremendous. You're positively wealthy. Yet, it was all through no effort of yours. You have everything that LeVeq hasn't, including friends. Every man's hand is against him. Do you see what I mean? I assure you that I am not trying to extract information from you that might be of value to LeVeq. My name is Ruth," she said smilingly, "not Delilah."

She waited for his acceptance of her frank and sincere confession. It had been an effort, and she yearned for appreciation. She expected it. Seldom in her experience had circumstances forced her to explain her actions, to defend her point of view. She did certain things; they were sufficient unto themselves. She spoke; it was final. The queen, according to ancient legend, can do no wrong. This was a form of unconscious egotism on her part that added to, rather than subtracted from the charm of her imperious personality.

Now, having made a concession to her pride, she was certain that Sam would meet her halfway.

But Sam conceded nothing. It may have been that his iron pride forbade; that in him, as in her, were certain imperious qualities that were unyielding. It may have been that another bitter picture was before his eyes—LeVeq and Ruth in the shadow of the pillar. He said nothing. The moments passed, while he regarded her fixedly. Then he turned his face away and rose, yawning.

The laughter faded in her eyes. He was according her the supreme rebuff of carelessness.

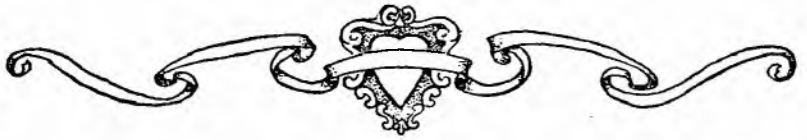
"Say no more, Miss Hamilton," he said, lightly, with a return to his old facetiousness of manner. "Let's forget it. We came up here to enjoy the ride and the view. We seem to have got sidetracked into politics. Look"—he pointed into the depths at their feet—"it's getting late. There's the shadow of Lookout on the valley floor."

She did not immediately reply. He seemed unconscious of her fixed appraisal. He was disregarding her, then, considered her of no force. She had been on the verge of a further admission—that her interest in LeVeq had been dramatic rather than real. Now her chin raised proudly. She was not so sure.

"You're right," she agreed, rising. "Perhaps we'd better go. I've enjoyed this afternoon immensely, Mr. Delaney."

They secured their horses, mounted, and rode in silence down through the deepening shadows of the pine timber.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



Peg Leg's Criminal

By F. R. Buckley

Author of "Suspended," etc.

I AM tired of this here moralizing.

It is now nearly seven years that I have been writing, for the *Gold Creek Bugle*, memoirs designed to show the population of Three Pines County what it should do to be saved, or rather what it should refrain from doing if it does not wish to be slammed in the calabozo; and, as aforesaid, I am fed up. I must have written fifty or sixty copy books full of horrible examples encountered by me in the course of my duties as sheriff, and spent ten or twelve dollars on Pain Specific for my writer's cramp, and I don't believe I have reformed as many criminals with the whole series as I could have with half an ounce of birdshot properly applied. On the other hand, the attitude of noncriminals toward me has been growing steadily more and more unsatisfactory; those over twenty-five years old treating me as a bore, and those under that age obviously regarding me as an Institution despite the total lack of Latin mottoes across my façade.

So, taking one thing with another, I have decided to lay off the community's morals for this week, and devote myself to writing a plain story like you see in the magazines. At seventy-four, and with no surviving relatives, one gets weary of being looked up to and avoided like the Black Death. I crave to be thought cute.

Well, the incident which I am about to narrate began just one week after Jake Henson had ceased to be my deputy in favor of becoming the husband of little Mary James of the Triangle J; and since Jake had insisted both on having me for his best man, and on being married in a rainstorm, naturally I was all tied up in bowknots with rheumatism. At the time of which I speak, moreover, this disease or affliction was not being improved any by the discov-

ery that apparently Jake's method of filing those Wanted notices on which I depend for my living had been to sling them into a dark cupboard as soon as received; and, in case of a call for any special one, to shuffle the remainder around like a poker deck.

So at the moment of Sue Green's entry, I was sitting on the counter of my International Emporium and Sheriff's Office half buried in descriptions of desperate criminals, and three quarters choked by the dust that had been lying on some of them since 1904. Since I am being cute, I may as well admit that in spite of my rheumatism I was having quite a nice time in some respects—meeting old friends long since hanged or put in jail; but at the same time it will be obvious to the meanest intelligence that when I was looking for one particular photograph and description, the dear departed were more or less in the way.

Hence the irritable tone with which I greeted Sue.

"Well?" I said.

Now, as a matter of fact, she had come in on strictly personal business, which, if put forward and attended to, might have saved me a great deal of trouble. But, having gathered from my one word the idea that I was suffering from hydrophobia or something, she put up a bluff at buying groceries for the Star B Star outfit, which she owned. Aside altogether from its cash value, which was fifty-eight dollars and fourteen cents, it was a good, sound bluff.

"By the way," she said, carelessly, while I was carrying out the stuff to her buckboard, "did Jim Porter happen to leave you his address?"

I do not like mind reading. There are some folks to whom it's all to the merry, but among their number will not be found W. Garfield, Esquire, the present deponent. I am not alluding to the mind reading practiced by those scientists who travel with a small tent and a blindfolded lady, and say "What's this?" if they mean a quarter, and "What *is* this?" for four bits. No, what I object to, and what makes me drop cans of No. 1 sweet corn on my toes, is this business of somebody else talking about the very thing that was on your own mind, like Sue Green was now doing. It may be all very well for folks with nothing on their minds anyhow; but when you're a sheriff, with enough assorted knowledge under your hat to wreck half the happy homes within a ten-mile radius, such stunts give you a feeling of insecurity.

"No," says I calmly, but swallowing my chew of tobacco. "I wish he had."

"Well, good afternoon," says Susie. For a moment it had looked as though she were going to say something much more extensive; it was after a survey of my features, still slightly convulsed from the sweet corn, that she changed her mind.

"Why," I asked, "is anything missing from the ranch?"

"Missing? How do you mean?"

"Any stock short? Any gaps in the silver service?"

"Why, no. Certainly not."

"Anybody been claiming to have paid Jim any illegal commissions on purchases, or anything like that?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

Glancing behind me, I'd just noted that about two hundred and fifty of the Wanted notices I'd sorted had slipped off the counter into a disordered heap on the floor; so it is possible that my reply was somewhat crisp.

"I just thought you wouldn't be asking for the man's address unless you wanted to get in touch with him about something," says I. "That's all. Pardon me if I seem unreasonable."

"You seem to be in a very bad temper," says Susan. "Good afternoon!"

And off she went.

Probably this would be as good a place as any other to talk about Jim

Porter as aforesaid. He had been more or less what might be called a wild lad at some time in his career; the evidences of it had come out when, for instance, he shot three gentlemen to death in Prairie Dog the very day of his arrival. The deceased, it seemed, had mistaken Jim for a tenderfoot, and had tried to make him dance the Santa Fé fling. After this incident, and a serious talking-to from me, Mr. Porter settled down and took a job at the Star B Star, where he rapidly fought his way up to the position of foreman. With "Gotch-ear" Farley, "Slasher" McVey, and "Parky the Bite" in the way, and all senior to Jim in point of service, it must have been some fight; yet, after winning it and holding the job a month, Mr. Porter had suddenly, mysteriously, and completely disappeared. He hadn't given notice, said good-by, or even paid the fifteen cents he owed me for cigarette papers. One evening he had been there, apparently cheerful and contented, and, in fact, engaged in taking Miss Green over to Prairie Dog so she could see the gambling layouts that were keeping her help from buying ranches of their own; and then the next morning he was gone, horse, saddle and war bag, leaving neither explanations nor address.

This had happened a month before the time of which I write; so that you can see what a queer coincidence it was that Sue Green should come in asking for his whereabouts just at the very moment when, sitting among the Wanted notices, I was figuring to go out and look for Mr. Porter.

He also—to use an expression that later caused me grief—was wanted.

And I am glad to inform the assembled population—which I know could not bear to think of me looking for a needle in a haystack—that Mr. Porter had been good enough to leave a trail that could have been followed by the veriest novice. He had not only started his journey by going to Longhorn City, which is the first stop of every criminal compelled to leave our midst, but he appeared to have told every voter there that his destination was the village of Great Scott, some fifty miles to the northward. And what was more, I found—after inquiry at a half dozen places that seemed more probable to a suspicious mind like mine—that it was to Great Scott he had actually gone.

I received this information from a lean and stringy-looking individual at the entrance to Great Scott's main street. According to him, Mr. James Porter, late foreman of the Star B Star outfit, was at present cook for the Brandy Bottle K, five miles west of town.

"Sir," says I politely, though choked with dust so that my lungs creaked, "I think we must be talking at cross purposes. The man I want——"

I perceived the jasper's eyes suddenly focus themselves on my left breast; a vagrant gust of air had just blown my coat aside, exhibiting my shining star of office.

"Oh," says the jasper, in a thoughtful manner which I didn't note at the time, "the man you want, eh?"

"The man I want," I said irritably but still thinking no evil, "would scarcely be a cook, even for an outfit so distinguished as your local Brandy Bottle, of which I regret never to have heard."

"No?" says the jasper. "You seem to know a lot about him."

"To say I know a lot is to put it mildly," says myself. "Didn't I help to bury his first victims—neat jobs as ever I saw? Wasn't it me that held Gotch-ear down while the doctor tried to set his nose? Who but W. Garfield sold Parky the Bite those brooms which even now he is using as crutches?"

"M'm," says the guy, seeming to scratch himself reflectively. "Jim seems

to have a violent record down where you come from."

"To call it violent——"

"And that's why you're looking for him?" asks the stringy man.

"Yea, verily. You see——"

But at this point I noticed that instead of scratching himself, the right to do which is guaranteed by the Constitution, this here welcoming committee of one had been reaching for a shoulder holster, from which he now produced one of the largest and pointingest revolvers that even I have ever seen. It was fully loaded, too.

"You go on back home where you come from, grandpa," says the man, adding to his gun's undesirability by cocking it. "You ain't wanted here. Mr. Porter ain't at home."

"But——" says I.

"Nemmine 'but.' Get on out of it. Giddap!"

"Are you aware," says I, slipping my foot out of the stirrup and more or less gathering my peg leg under me, "that you are addressing a duly appointed officer of the law, and that——"

"Nemmine 'and that,'" says the perfect stranger, "you just——"

Well, since he took that stubborn, obstinate attitude, there was only one thing to be done, and I did it. Tony, my horse, is neither young nor of the physical conformation that wins blue ribbons; but during the twelve years he has been my official nag, he has learned one valuable trick. When vigorously spurred on a spavin, he arches his back like a Persian cat, thus shooting me high into the air and permitting me to come down unexpectedly on the neck of any person within four yards.

So I laid the stringy gentleman carefully in the shade of a live oak and continued my way into town.

The day being Saturday, and the time about four thirty of the afternoon, it was a good guess that most of the local population would be gathered together in the general store; which surmise, on my arrival at the emporium in question, turned out to be correct. As at Three Pines, the floor was entirely covered with semirecumbent cow-punchers eating fruit out of cans and drinking sarsaparilla out of bottles. And if their behavior on my entry was slightly different from what I'd expect from my own customers back home, it has got to be considered that these poor lads had had no course of Bill Garfield in their educations.

"Enter the Old Man of the Mountain," says one of them, for instance. "What cheer, whiskers?"

"How did you leave Kit Carson?" asked another.

"And to think," says a third voice, "that while my pillow back home is as flat as a pancake, all that naturally curly hair is going around loose. Lend me a pair of wire cutters, somebody."

There were other remarks which I will not describe here, because this is going to be a cute story, all running over with good-nature. I will just state that when everybody had had his bray, I advanced a little farther into the store, and once again inquired politely about James Porter.

"Well," says somebody after a pause, "he ain't here just at the moment. What do you want of him?"

"Will he be in later?"

At this, a short, thickset guy arose. "You didn't say what you wanted with him," says this individual. "Who are you, anyway?"

What I mean—this was getting monotonous.

"I'm W. Garfield, sheriff of Three Pines County in this State," says I, "and there are a few words I should like to say to Mr. James Porter, if you'll be so kind as to be so good as to allow me."

Two more gorillas got up from the floor.

"Ah, yes," says one of them. "And

these few words, for instance. Would they be of a legal nature?"

"Yeah, they would," says I; and was about to elaborate the subject when I found myself grasped firmly and inconsiderately from behind, my arms being painfully pinioned to my sides.

"Boys," says the bird that held me, "this old duck's come to arrest Jim Porter that taught us to make waffles without an iron. He's just laid out——"

Well, I suppose I should have stood there and argued, but old habits are strong, and these folks seemed to have an idea of taking my guns away from me. So that before speaking, I banged my head backward into my captor's nose, poked him in the solar plexus with my peg leg, and drew my guns myself.

But there seemed to be no public demand for oratory at the moment. No sooner had I disembarrassed myself of the human anaconda hereinbefore mentioned than the whole remaining gang seemed taken with a desire to climb aboard me, those in the rear fighting desperately for the choice places. This competitive spirit was, of course, very human; and, like most human weaknesses, very useful to one knowing how to take advantage of it. I myself turned it to account by transferring the grip one guy had fastened on my throat to the neck of a gentleman that was painstakingly trying to uproot my nose; and while, in the confusion, these earnest souls worked happily on each other, I slipped to the floor and crawled out from under the contestants' feet. Such was their absorption in the fray that I was able to stun four of the toughest-looking bimboes from behind, and to sling the store's cash register into the remaining knot of fighters, before any one knew I had excused myself.

"Now, if you gents will allow me to——" says I, as the survivors turned around.

But they wouldn't; and from this point onward my memory is not as clear as I should like it to be. I know that it seemed like the population of Great Scott was either inexhaustible or indestructible, because however many I laid away, there were always more; but that's about the only impression I did gather in nearly half an hour. For most of the time, I just stood there with a whiffletree I'd happened to find on the counter, batting at any object that looked like a human head. To give an idea of how deadening is this mass-production idea, I may say that after all my human adversaries had subsided to the floor, I found myself wiping away at a box of fine spring cabbages.

Well, the shades of night were falling fast, and seemingly I had five miles to go to this Brandy Bottle K outfit, if I wished to capture this Mr. James Porter. Still, it went against the grain to leave that stricken field without seeing if I could do anything for the wounded, and getting myself a new pair of trousers. It was just as I was negotiating this loan from a gentleman quite beyond thoughts of dress, that my eye chanced to fall on the features of James Porter himself. He was lying by the cash register, which in death showed a cash sale of four hundred and seventy-six dollars and thirty-nine cents, and he appeared to have had an accident of some kind. In fact, I saw to my surprise and regret that his forehead bore the imprint of that whiffletree's ironwork, which was of a tasteful and distinctive pattern; and I realized that I myself must be responsible for the young man's comatose condition. He must have come rushing in, with youth's impetuousness, to see what the scrap was about.

Well, I was sorry; but I saw at a glance that the only medicines would be time and cold water. Both of these would be available on the way home, whereas it occurred to me that any prolonged stay in Great Scott would only lead to more unpleasantness; so, having

snitched a pair of overalls from stock, and left my personal I O U pinned to the storekeeper's vest, I loaded the young man across Tony's crupper, and started back to Three Pines.

It was a long ride, and toward midnight a pretty cold one; and I was much annoyed to find that Jimmy, aroused by the evening chill, was inclined to be delirious. He narrated a very interesting list of misdemeanors committed in Arizona and other States; and he lamented at considerable length his tough luck in being laid by the heels just when he'd beaten both his guns into frying pans. He also went into some detail as to what—since he couldn't be left alone to reform—he was going to do to Old Bill Garfield as soon as he felt a little better. This was why, arriving at my store and turning in for a sorely needed sleep, I took the precaution of handcuffing the young man to the cot on which I laid him.

This was at 3 a. m. on Sunday morning.

Will you believe that at five fifteen by the clock I was awakened by the sound of somebody breaking the Sabbath with a hacksaw? It was Sue Green, and what she was really trying to bust were the shackles which decorated Mr. James Porter. It seemed only charitable—since I was awake—to tell her that this couldn't be done with the tools she had.

"You see," says I, explaining the matter very clearly, considering how my head ached, "it's chilled steel, so that even if I weren't here, or even if you were using the edge of that hacksaw instead of the back as at present——"

So she reached for a gun, and I took that away from her; and then she got hold of an ice pick, and I confiscated that; and finally she tried to strangle me, which I was obliged to prevent, if only out of a feeling of duty to those who elected me. At last, her excitement dying down under my ejaculations of "So, boss!" and similar, she sat down on J. Porter's cot and had hysterics. Not knowing what to do about which, I sat still and ached until Porter awoke and took Susan's hand in his.

"Never mind," says he, vaguely.

But apparently she did mind, in a most surprising manner. Indeed, she now knelt down by Mr. Porter and put her arms around his neck—which seemed to revive him more than all the buckets of water I'd poured on his head the night before—and she wept, and she wailed until really I felt both puzzled and uncomfortable.

"Why did you run away?" she moaned. "It was only that that put this old devil on your track. So long as you stayed here quietly, he had no idea——"

"I couldn't stay here, Sue," says Porter weakly, "I'd have asked you to marry me, or something."

"Well, why didn't you do that?" cries the girl.

"No money."

Well, after this they dissolved into such a mixture of reproaches, excuses, and general this and that, as seriously to embarrass me. My mind wasn't working with its usual clarity and speed—in fact, I now see it hadn't been all through—and for the moment this struck me as the end of an epoch of lunacy. It was quite evident that from the moment I'd started out after James Porter, Esquire, I had been considered little better than a dirty dog; but how come or wherefore was at the moment beyond me. All I'd been trying to do was my duty, as performed by me on previous occasions amid the greatest public applause.

"But never mind!" says Susan, rising and regarding me with eyes that flashed fire. "You'll use my money now, whether you want to or not. We'll see if the courts of this State are going to deny a man that never did anything anyway, his chance to stop doing it and become a useful citizen."

This also was far from clear to me; but an Indian with whisky or a woman with a love affair, you can't expect sense of either of them. So I fumbled in my vest pocket and said nothing.

"Now, to begin with," says Sue, "what's the specific charge against this man?"

"Charge?" says I, getting the word, but, if you know what I mean, no idea from it. "Charge? Well, there's fifteen cents for cigarette——"

"I don't mean that," says the girl. "I mean, what is this that you want him for?"

Well, now it did become clear to me—at least, partly so, as clear as anything can become to a poor old man, the front of whose brain has been shoved around to the back. It wasn't until later that I could summon enough mental vigor to think how unfortunate are those of us who go about this wicked world thinking no evil, and accordingly getting set on, covered with bruises, and robbed of their broadcloth pants. It is a great testimonial to the courtliness of my upbringing that, even in the awful moment when I saw where all the error had come in, I was still capable of a generous gesture.

"Well," says I, unlocking Mr. Porter's handcuffs and groaning as my various dislocations grated one against the next, "what I wanted him for was to be my deputy sheriff, to help me sort out all these Wanted notices, and so on."

"What?" screams Susie Green.

"Yes. But never mind," says I, smiling paternally as I became unconscious. "Never mind, little girl. You can have him."

Jesse James Redivivus

Matt Kimes—Bandit King of the Southwest

By Edward H. Smith

Author of "Anceney, Montana's Biggest Rancher," etc.

THE mantle of high celebrity is draped upon many narrow shoulders before it finds a pair fit to wear it well. How many successors have been hailed to the classic modern bandit, the late Jesse James of Clay County, Missouri!

Now comes Oklahoma with a fresh claimant, who has at least some ponderable evidence, some evil eminence, and a great deal of family likeness in his favor. His name is Matt Kimes, and he hails from the heart of the bandit country, every acre of it historic with gallant misdeeds. His similarities to the great Missouri outlaw are too numerous and striking to be quite derided. His youth, his procedure, his brigand etiquette, his elusiveness, his dash, his solicitude for his victims, and the esteem in which he seems to be held by his neighbors, all form striking parallels to the case of the youthful outlaw who fell to the treacherous gunfire of Bob Ford at St. Joe, when our fathers were reading the crime news.

Kimes is just past twenty-one. He was born on a farm near Beggs, Oklahoma, which is in the northeastern quarter of the State and only a hard ride from the foothills of the Osages, where bad men have hid and been hunted since the paleface first squatted among his red brothers in that broad section of the land. The Youngers and Jameses, the Daltons, Henry Starr, Cummings, Logan, and hundreds of lesser men all flourished and had their retreats in this region or visited it in the course of being hunted out of near-by communities. It is the last American happy hunting ground of the Indian and the bad man.

There seems to have been no bandit blood in the Kimes family, for his parents were poor and respectable farmers, hard working, submerged in their necessities, and utterly inconspicuous. Their two sons, George—now twenty-three and serving a twenty-five-year sentence at the Oklahoma State Prison at McAlester—and the redoubtable Matt, two years younger, were reared

as other farm boys are in that region They went to school as long as the law required, but their minds were not adapted for learning the commonplaces. It was much easier to learn how to wear baggy trousers, vaseline the hair, and play the cake-eater and drug-store cowboy. Accordingly, in their middle teens, George and Matthew Kimes were small-town smart boys, with their blond hair plastered down on their bulletlike heads, and their store clothes worn in the best approach to cinema fashion obtainable in an Oklahoma village. The local girls thought them quite irresistible and the two boys personally came early to the conclusion that there was nothing in working and getting the hands calloused.

When and where these two spick-and-span young men came first into contact with crime is not to be discovered. Unquestionably, the tendency was in them, the warpedness, the fault in the fiber. Since they would not work on their parents' farm and they had no equipment for anything else, the drift toward theft must have been powerful. They were soon consorting with elder miscreants and idlers, committing small depredations, and getting themselves an evil name. When George Kimes was not quite twenty and Matt had just turned eighteen, the two lads were arrested for a minor robbery, tried at Holdenville, convicted, and sent to McAlester for two years each. This was on April 20, 1925.

In prison, the Kimes boys naturally met many men a great deal better informed and more practiced than themselves. They heard stories of real crimes. They were told how experienced criminals went about their business, how masters worked in the illicit crafts. They heard the breath-taking yarns, the vast boasts, the enormous lies that pass in the intercourse of prisoned men for truth and gospel. Out of this rodomontade they conceived grand ideas of the exploits they would perform. Here were the spiritual and psychological roots of their subsequent careers.

Owing to the fact that both the time spent in jail awaiting trial and the usual good-conduct time allowance are deducted from the terms of prisoners in Oklahoma as in various other States, the Kimes boys spent ten days less than a year in McAlester They were released on April 10, 1926, and their career is thus of the briefest sort. It is, however, crowded enough to make up for the shortness of the run.

As so often happens in prisons, George and Matt Kimes were told behind the walls of a man they ought to know, a friend of one of their prison intimates, a person "to get in touch with when you're out of this." The indicated worthy in their case was a fellow known to the police of all the Southwest and wanted in half a dozen States for half a hundred crimes. His name is Ray Terrill, and he is at least ten years older than either of the Kimeses, a bank bandit, gun fighter, gang leader, and, if the charges against him are true, a killer. It is generally accepted that Terrill either led or coached the Kimeses in their first striking crime.

On the morning of August 10, 1926, exactly four months after their release from prison, the Kimes boys and one other man—who may have been Terrill—strolled into the Farmer's National Bank at Beggs—the home town of the young desperadoes, it will be recalled. They were neatly dressed and they seemed in no haste or excitement. They sauntered up to the cashier, showed him some businesslike weapons, and bade him and half a dozen employees and bank clients step into the vault. The unfortunate prisoners were locked in, the cash was dropped into a bag, and the three visitors walked out again. When the imprisoned six finally made themselves heard and were released, the raiders had vanished. No one had seen

them come or go, and it is only a strong surmise that they used an automobile. Several of those held up in this job have said that two of the men were the Kimeses, which seems to be credible, since they were known to most people in Beggs and their identity can hardly have been mistaken.

Posses were formed, alarms sent out, and officers posted on the roads to intercept the retreating bandits. It was supposed, of course, that the rascals would run eastward and northward into the Osage Hills, and it was in this direction that the hunt was carried. It had been going on steadily for five days without results and the tired hunters had just dragged themselves disconsolately home when word came that five men, all dressed in overalls, had stepped into the American State Bank at Covington, a town lying about one hundred miles northwest of Beggs, robbed that bank and another, and made off with heavy booty.

In these robberies the Kimeses first adopted a maneuver that quickly attracted to them a good deal of popular sympathy and emotional admiration. When the bandits poked their weapons under the nose of Cashier Edward Fitzgerald at the American State Bank, they remarked in a casual and not at all menacing manner, that they were there to take charge of the bank. The banker did not question their authority at all, but stepped into the vault with great alacrity, not to mention nearly twenty employees and bank customers who happened to be on hand when the five holdup men meandered in. Mr. Fitzgerald was then commanded to put the bank's entire surplus into a bag. He complied, and the rollicking youths remarked:

"We don't want no money belonging to widders and orphans, or any that you ain't got insured."

Expressing their regrets to the cashier, the bandits locked their prisoners into the vault and strolled across the street to the premises of the Covington National Bank. Here the men likewise presented their formidable credentials to the cashier, Mr. Wallace Melvin, and bade him step to the rear. He waited not upon the order of his going but made for the vault, where he was imprisoned after he had handed over about five thousand dollars and been told, like his colleague, that the funds of the poor and the lowly were not wanted. These lads were out to rob bankers and insurance corporations, not depositors—a highly popular attitude outside banking circles. Mr. Melvin said not a word that might have seemed in the least censorious. And, being locked in the vault, he could not even observe the retreat of his ceremonious captors. When he was released he could merely say that it must have been the Kimeses—not a bad guess.

The officers, summoned to lend their aid and advice, opined that, since the Kimeses hadn't fled to the Osages after the Beggs job, they must surely be on their way thither now. Perhaps they played the law of averages; at any rate they were right, for a big touring car had been seen roaring across Pawnee County toward Osage and the foothills. The officers in towns and villages along the bandits' line of retreat were called out by telephone and posted themselves at strategic points, most of them too late to be of any use. The desperadoes got safely into the Osages, and there they shook off pursuers as a hare loses a poodle

Now, however, the pursuers had another hunch. Probably the bandits wouldn't stay in the Osages but would go farther, cross the border into Arkansas, and make for the deeper tangles of the Ozarks. When the alarm reached the border county of Sequoyah, four men set out from Sallisaw, the county seat, to stop the bad men. They were Deputy Sheriffs Perry Chuculate and

Bert Cotton, Chief of Police J. C. Woll, and Will Ross, a citizen who had been sworn in. Why the force sent out was so small is another puzzle. Perhaps there was no time to gather forces or possibly volunteers were conspicuous by their paucity. So these four brave men waited at the crossroads. Presently the big car came into sight and the four men blocked its way. They were greeted by a volley from the car, which they returned in kind. The shooting was general if wild, the officers coming off second best. Sheriff Chuculate was mortally wounded, and Sheriff Cotton disabled. The bandits took Woll and Ross prisoners, loaded them into their car, and sped on.

The Arkansas line was crossed and the bandits got into the lower Ozarks before they freed their prisoners. Woll and Ross had been kindly treated. On parting each was given a twenty-dollar bill, a drink, a box of ginger snaps, and the parting remark:

"You ought to be able to get home on that."

According to Woll and Ross, Matt Kimes was the leader of the bandits, and he was more than solicitous as to the condition of Chuculate In parting, he asked Woll to see that the wounded officer got the best hospital treatment, and added that if the amount of the bill and other expenses were published in the newspapers, where the bandit might see them, he would send the money to pay up. He did not know then that Chuculate had died or that the police of two States were gathering to hunt him down. The truth was that Chuculate, a thoroughbred Cherokee brave, had been one of the best-liked officers in the region, and his killing inflamed the people.

The general search which now began was more than the Kimeses were prepared to cope with, and they were soon in chains. Officers, after having pursued them till nightfall, surrounded the cottage of Ben Pixley, a cousin of the bandits, at Rudy, Arkansas, and lay in ambush all night. Between three and four o'clock in the morning, two dim figures were seen crawling and slipping along through the grasses, trying to reach the cabin. The officers opened fire and wounded both George and Matt Kimes, who were taken prisoners on the spot. They were carried off to a surgeon and prepared for the dressing of their wounds and the extraction of the bullets. George Kimes was given an anæsthetic, but when the ether was brought to Matt he waved it away and said:

"I want to see the doc work and watch what he does to me."

Through all the probing, cleansing, and sewing, he bore himself with the greatest fortitude, repeatedly joking through his pain. Both men recovered and were brought to trial at Sallisaw for the murder of the Indian sheriff. George, the first to be tried, was sentenced to serve twenty-five years. Matt, convicted a few days later, was given a thirty-five-year sentence, but appealed. He was granted a new trial, at which the prosecution was as jubilant as he. On the next trial he was once more found guilty and this time sentenced to ninety-nine years behind the bars. The elder Kimes had already been sent to McAlester when this happened. Matt was returned to the local jail at Sallisaw, to be held there a few days until the sheriff might carry him to the State prison.

Early on the morning of November 21st, last, before the first streaks of false dawn were in the sky, a fast motor car with six men drove into Sapulpa and halted not far from the jail All the men piled out. Four remained near the car or at the head of the street and kept back one or two belated and curious citizens. The other two took the night watchman captive and walked him, with a gun pressed against

his ribs, to the door of the jail. There, following instructions from the menacing strangers, the watchman told the turnkey that he had a prisoner to lock up. The keeper opened the door and looked into the barrels of leveled revolvers. He and the night hack—to borrow a word from the bank burglars —were locked into the jail, while Kimes was released from his cell and taken away. The six men who came and freed him are said to have been led by Ray Terrill, and all Oklahoma now believes that the members of this gang took on oath binding themselves to make raids upon jails where any member of the gang might be confined, and set him free.

Indeed, the bold, but, after all, simple maneuver which freed Kimes from Sallisaw at once established a great reputation for him, for Terrill, and for their men. The most incredible tales got to be told about them, they were credited with every unsolved killing in the State, and no bank was burglarized or held up within a thousand miles of their haunts without the report going forth that the criminals had been Ray Terrill and Matt Kimes, chiefly the latter.

Thus the stocky, thickset, blond desperado, not more than five feet five inches tall, and just under twenty-one years old, moved the imagination of the people as once the boy Jesse James had haunted the fancy of rebellious youth. The James boys, in their day, had also been credited with scores of crimes obviously committed by others, so here is another analogy.

Quite as Jesse is said to have visited his mother in the clothes of a woman neighbor and fled from her cottage in a wig and shawl, so Matt was now believed to have paraded the streets of Oklahoma towns trigged out variously as a squaw, an old woman, and a flapper. The bandit now denies that he wore these varied disguises but no one believes him, for he has much to conceal and to answer for.

Be the truth what it will, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas officers ran themselves breathless for weeks and made a thousand fruitless, brave dashes before Kimes was heard of again. On January 10, however, six unmasked men held up the officers of the Sapulpa State Bank, in the considerable town of that name, took thirty-one thousand dollars in cash, locked up the bank employees, and once more motored away to safe distances. The report went out that Kimes had been the leader. Ordinarily this would not mean much, but the short and blond bandit was now so widely known through newspaper pictures and reward posters that unimaginative bankers probably could not have mistaken another for him.

There may be added corroboration in the fact that Ray Terrill and three other men, said to have been his confederates, were arrested at Joplin, Missouri, five days after the Sapulpa robbery, having been trailed more or less directly from the scene of the crime. If Terrill was there, it is held, so was Kimes.

Instead of taking Terrill to the Sapulpa jail or any other county lockup in the State, it was decided to remove him from Joplin to the State prison at McAlester, so that Kimes and his men might not come in the night and release Terrill, as Terrill had Kimes. The elder bandit, realizing that he would be beyond aid inside the strong walls of the prison, took matters into his own hands. He was being driven to the prison in a motor car with two guards, one sitting beside him and another at the wheel. The car had reached the railroad yards of McAlester, and in a few minutes the man would be safely inside the prison walls. But he never got there. Loosening his shackles by some miracle of strength and agility, Terrill threw the lap robe over the head of the guard beside him and leaped out

of the running car before the driver could stop and get out his weapons. The bandit disappeared into the night and the railroad yards and is still to be caught.

Not content with their own freedom, Matt Kimes and Terrill now used the old prison underground to get into touch with George Kimes in McAlester. Presently, George Kimes and a lifer named Mayfield held up their keepers with dummy pistols, forced them to open the gates, and bade them to walk with them toward a light pole as if to make repairs. All would have gone well had a wall guard not recognized Kimes and opened fire. The elder brother of the new Jesse James fell wounded, while Mayfield got into the brush only to be run down within three hours by the hounds.

Terrill and Matt Kimes had been concealed at a short distance, ready to take the escaped men to safety. They had now to put distance between themselves and the prison in their own behalf, for posses were called out in a twinkling and the hounds that had run Mayfield to earth were sent after Matt. At one time they were close upon him and the officers knew it, but he managed to throw them off the scent. It was believed he had done this by wading and swimming a small stream, and on this theory the hunt was transferred across the river when the dogs failed. Just here Kimes tricked his pursuers and won his freedom by knowing a little more than they. He put a little oil of mustard on his shoes—and old yegg trick—and the dogs quit cold when that irritant bit into their sensistive nostrils.

Matt Kimes' celebrity now rose by the day, as ever fresh marvels were told of him. He was said to wear a fourteen-pound bullet-proof vest, and so thoroughly was the tale credited that officers were gravely instructed to shoot at his head or legs. It was rumored that he had ordered a flying machine; that he had abducted a rich man's daughter to be his bride and the queen of the bandits, that he gave half his stealings to the poor, and the like—all the legends dear to the heart of men since brigandage began.

Kimes, however, seems to have had his mind upon more solid objects. The First National Bank at Cushing was robbed while officers hunted Kimes in another part of the State. The loot was eleven thousand dollars and the crime bore some of the marks of the gentlemanly desperado's work. Whether he actually committed it is not to be said now.

But, at half past ten on the morning of May 18, in his second raid on his home town of Beggs, Kimes seems to have come into the open with supreme dash and audacity. At the hour stated, nine men in two big automobiles drove quietly into Beggs and got out without attracting attention. Three moved off to the Farmers' National Bank, the one robbed a year earlier; three went to the First National Bank, a little farther down the street, and the last three loitered before the American National Bank, around the corner. As the hands of the town clock reached the hour of eleven, two of the trios entered the Farmers' and the First National Banks, while the other three, before the American Bank, still delayed. It was discovered afterward that the hands on one face of the clock, at which the last three bandits were looking, were three minutes behind the others. This circumstance prevented a triple robbery.

In the two first mentioned banks, however, there was nothing to halt the bold raiders. They again locked the officers, employees and customers into the vaults, raked the available cash into their bags, apologized for the intrusion, repeated that they did not want to cause any loss to the depositors, and withdrew.

But they had been discovered Mrs. Charles Campbell, wife of a local citi-

zen, passing along the main street with her baby in her arms, saw what was going on in one of the banks, and hurried off to notify the chief of police, W. K. McAnnally, whom she found in a near-by building. The chief drew his revolver and ran into the street without waiting for reënforcements. The bandits were just getting into their cars as the brave officer came forth; he advanced firing, but the first volley from the guns of the criminals stretched him dead at the curb, while a wild ball brought down Mrs. Campbell, who was, however, not badly wounded and was picked up still clutching her child to her breast.

The bandits, with eighteen thousand dollars in their bags, turned their cars and rushed away before any kind of pursuit could be organized. Once more the officers of the Farmers' Bank and one or two people in the street declared that the leader had been none other than the thrice-redoubtable Kimes.

Such crimes could not go much farther. The governor of the State now offered a thousand-dollar reward for Kimes, and the Oklahoma Bankers' Association added three thousand more. Officers throughout Oklahoma were now either watching or actively hunting for Kimes, spurred by the reward money and the glory of capturing this celebrated young robber and killer. Scores of times he was reported caught or cornered and every time he got away. More lead than a strong man can comfortably carry must have been fired in his general direction by pursuing professionals and amateurs, but he managed to survive all this free firing and volleying, so that he was known as one bearing a charmed life.

The young man's daring became magnificent. In one of the Oklahoma towns, Kimes sauntered past three officers who stood on a street corner talking about him and reading a circular announcing the four-thousand-dollars' reward. One sheriff looked up, recognized Kimes, and reached for his revolver. But the bandit had looked first. He dodged in and out among a line of cars till he reached one that pleased him. Into the seat he sprang, and before the astounded officers could get the range he had sped away into the country. They followed in a second but slower car, firing at his gas tank, but he outran them, wrecked his car across the road at a junction, ran through a field, held up a man in a fast car who was himself a deputy sheriff and forced that discomfited official to drive him to safety.

Kimes' mother lay dying in the little farm home that had sheltered the youth of this hustling young man, and Oklahomans wondered if he would try to reach her. Officers watched the place from concealment day after day and night after night. At last they gave it up. Kimes wasn't such a fool as that. But in the night he came, spent an hour with his mother, bade her not to believe all that was said against him, and vanished into the dark. Before he could make a second trip she died, and the newspapers said her heart had been broken by the misdeeds of her sons. Well, maybe so. But this writer has known the mothers of several notorious bad men, including the stanch old dame of Jesse James. His experience is that the mothers of bandits are proud of them.

From time to time notices appeared in the newspapers, some of them indubitably written by Kimes, in which false charges against him were denied and vaunts made. He seems to have reveled in the discomfiture of the officers, for he taunted them without mercy, promised to attend his mother's funeral, and to visit her grave. He seems to have carried out the latter boast promptly enough, but if he was present at the obsequies he must have been well disguised

He managed also, in spite of the fact that she was constantly under more or less close surveillance, to visit his wife, whom he had married after his release from jail. One of these trysts was followed by the most impudent foray of the bandit's life. After leaving his wife on the night of June 14th, he found himself, at about nine o'clock, in the little town of Drumright, far from his base. His maneuver was, of course, to appropriate a motor car and drive where his fancy led, just as the older bandits used to steal or swap horses for their clattering dashes through the country.

It happened that Mr. and Mrs. Orville E. Noble of Drumright had stopped at the house of a neighbor living on the main street of that town, leaving their car at the curb, with their two-year-old son, Orville, junior, sleeping in his blanket on the back seat. Along came Kimes and saw the Nobles' car. He jumped in and whirled away. Four miles out in the country he slowed to light a cigarette, looked behind and beheld young Orville sleeping quietly on the back seat. Now, a practical man of felonious affairs cannot afford to have a baby on his hands. Its feeding would be a problem and its care might seriously interfere with mobility. Neither can a gallant gentleman of the road desert an innocent child on the lone prairie. Faced with this dilemma, Kimes turned the car about, drove back to Drumright, where the parents were already making a frantic search, and deposited the baby in a churchyard a few hundred yards from the place where he had preempted the car. That done, he went his way again, but not without having been noticed The result was that a telephone alarm was sent before him.

At the little town of Jennings, lying in the path of the retreating marauder, Marshal George McAninch got the word. Though he is a man of sixty-two and no longer in robust health, the courageous officer seized his gun and drove out to meet the oncoming car. He stalled his machine in the path of the speeding vehicle and forced Kimes to stop, but the bandit beat him to the draw, took him prisoner, loaded him into the stolen motor and sped on into the dark. Long after midnight they halted and Kimes sought shelter in a field. He bade his captive to be at ease and go to sleep, assuring him that no harm would befall him. But Marshal McAninch was too excited for slumber, so the young desperado sat up till dawn and told him yarns. At last he apologetically tied the marshal to a tree with his own belt, laid his empty revolver down out of reach, and drove away with a brave flourish. A few hours later the officer managed to wriggle himself free and reach a farmhouse, whence he sent the alarm.

Once more the posses went up and down the Osages and the Ozarks, and once again came repeated false rumors of brilliant captures. But Kimes was elsewhere.

If he managed to keep out of the way so handsomely, this was a genius all his own, for some of his pals were not so fortunate or skilled. Two of those who had been caught at Joplin with Terrill, played upon by the local prosecutor and frightened at the prospect of being tried for the murder of Police Chief McAnnally of Beggs, turned States' evidence and revealed the secrets of the gang to the officers. These men, Roy Brandon and "Blackie" Wilson, told that the Kimes gang were to rendezvous at a point on the rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona on the eighteenth of June and set out from there for southern California, where several bank raids were to be made before crossing into Mexico. This news was telegraphed to Flagstaff, Arizona, whence Mr. J. O. Parsons, sheriff of Coconino County, received it with joy and set out alone to get this bad boy and the four thousand dollars.

Kimes had been delayed in getting out of Oklahoma and did not reach the rendezvous in time for the supposed conference, but he did arrive a few days later and Sheriff Parsons found him lolling at Bright Angel Camp, Grand Canyon Park, with Ray Doolin and his young wife, who had driven Kimes from Oklahoma in their car. The sheriff, playing the part of a local simpleton, cultivated Kimes and got him into his car.

But Kimes' lulled suspicions were roused at the last moment. He fought his way out of the car, ran for it, and escaped to the rim of the canyon. The sheriff now summoned help and a few hours later Kimes was brought to bay on a ledge from which he could not escape. He was taken back to Oklahoma in irons and is now in jail awaiting trial, guarded night and day by whole squads of deputies.

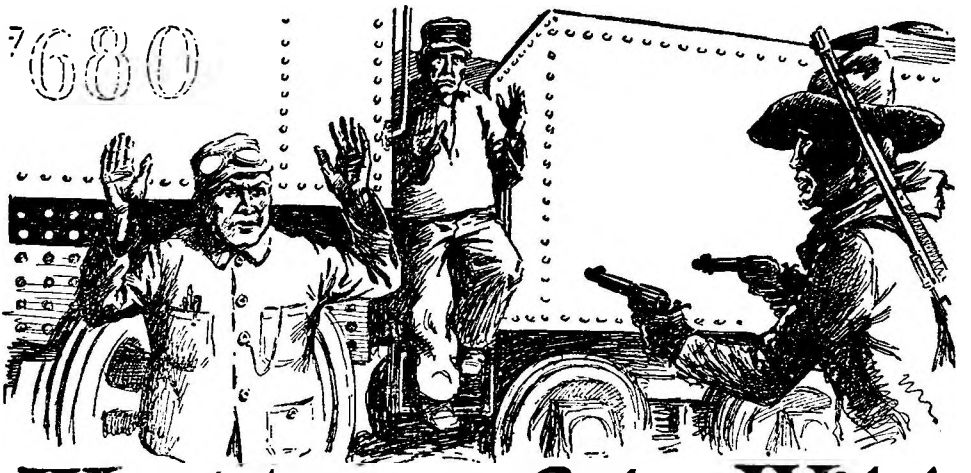
In his cell he is still the same smiling, urbane, good-humored and somewhat ungrammatical young bandit. He talks freely, denies almost everything, and says he will not get the hot seat, which is his name for the electric chair. Stories of his exploits bring smiles of pride to his weathered face, but he has his regrets, too.

"I shoulda never left the farm," he says, "but there's reasons for that, too. There's reason for everything."

The bankers of Oklahoma are not unnaturally anxious to have this troublesome young man sent to the chair, believing, of course, that the execution of Kimes will deter others from emulation. There is no time now to convince these optimists that some millions of executions seem never to have deterred any one from crime, but there is yet a prospect that they will not have their way in the matter. The Kimes case promises a political crisis in Oklahoma, just as the shooting of Jesse James ruined Governor Crittenden in Missouri. In other words, Kimes has become so popular with the average citizen that the State administration which kills him may find itself beaten at the polls. I choose a revealing passage from a newspaper of the considerable city of Henryetta:

> Many people are openly in sympathy with the outlaw. Many others may feel a bit that way but are not willing to say so. One Henryetta man is quoted as saying: "Well, Kimes is just a young fellow, and so far as is known he has killed only one man. They ought to overlook that, since he robs banks only." Now there are many people who feel bitter toward banks and bankers and can point out why they feel that way. But it is unthinkable that such feeling should go to the extent of sympathizing with a bandit and murderer simply because the said bandit wreaks vengeance on banks. This is a slant on the situation that is unwarranted from any viewpoint. . . . If the Oklahoma public is willing to turn him—Kimes—loose, that will be up to the law and the jury.

Vide, the heart of man is always and everywhere the same. The gallant rascal is nearer to it than any straight-backed respectable, any leader of righteousness, can ever be, whether that rascal be called Fra Diavolo, or Dick Turpin, or Claud Duval, or Jesse James, or Matt Kimes. For these ruffian heroes represent the chaos in the human soul.



Weakling of the Wild

By Max Brand

Author of "Pleasant Jim," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

DANIEL CROSSETT learns that he is an adopted son and really belongs to the notorious Dunlin family, outlaws. He rescues his brother, "Lefty," from prison.

The elder Crossett, aided by Jenny Loren, a waitress, sends Doc Tolliver with a conciliatory message to Daniel.

The fugitives stop at the shack of one Hannigan, who says that a posse is after them. Daniel kills Tolliver. Lefty advises Hannigan to take the body to town and tell the truth, while he and Daniel escape, but Hannigan decides to bury it. The sheriff arrives, but can prove nothing. Hannigan flees, terrified by the imagined sight of Tolliver's ghost.

Lefty and Daniel join Tyson. The latter suggests a train robbery. Lefty agrees on condition that he get the larger share of spoil. Tyson, protesting, agrees.

CHAPTER XXII.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

IN Lammer Falls, Jeremy Crossett grew pale and gaunt of face. His sleep was broken by endless pacings of his room; his days hung terribly upon his hands; and with his whole tormented soul he waited to hear the next news of the wanderer. Then something more than a vague anxiety came to him.

He had come down late for breakfast, and Jenny Loren served him by the window when a tall man walked in and banged his sombrero on his chaps to knock the dust from them.

Jenny Loren hailed him cheerfully: "Good morning, Sheriff Loftus!"

And Jeremy Crossett looked more carefully, and pushed away the mists of his own brooding in order to see a hard-faced man of great height, with shoulders narrowed and stooped by endless riding; a weary, aging, troubled man he seemed, like some farmer who pours his soul, his labor, into a task which never can free him from debt. Yet there was nothing to invite pity in Sheriff Loftus. Whatever one might think of his pendulous arms, and his hanging shoulders, and his withered neck, and his bowed back, his chin was still that of a fighter, and his eyes were as cold and as blue as ever.

He sat down at a near-by table and asked for a cup of coffee. While he waited for it, he leaned his elbow on the edge of the table, his chin in his hand, and closed his eyes. It was not the relaxation of thought; Jeremy Crossett judged that this was a slumber as profound as it was brief.

When Jenny placed the steaming cup before him: "Two lumps!" said the sheriff.

And Jenny dropped them in, and stirred them until they were dissolved.

The sheriff slouched back in his chair until his head and his shoulders dropped against the wall.

"Come here, Jenny," he said wearily.

She stood beside him, smiling down.

"You better go to bed," said Jenny.

"Gimme your hand," said the sheriff.

She surrendered it to him obediently, and the sheriff covered it with his great, gnarled paws. He was silent, his eyes closed again, and he seemed to be sleeping. Every line of his face sagged.

"How long have you been riding today?" asked Jenny.

"About fifty mile," said the sheriff.

And Jeremy Crossett, all his own cares forgotten, felt his blood turn cold; fifty miles of riding through such country as this—by breakfast time! And this was no youth, but a man past middle age.

"Jenny——" said the sheriff, like one too feeble to speak more than a word at a time.

"Your coffee'll be getting cold."

"Jenny—what's been happening around here?"

"It's been quiet here in Lammer Falls, sheriff."

"Jenny——"

"Yes."

"I mean about Willie."

"Oh!" said Jenny.

The sheriff partly opened his eyes.

"You don't like him, Jenny?" said he in a mournful voice.

"I do, though," she answered.

"But not enough?"

Jenny hesitated.

"If I was younger——" said the sheriff, and let his voice drawl away as he closed his eyes again.

"If I was younger," said the sheriff, his eyes still closed, "I would go and marry you, Jenny, myself."

"Perhaps you would," said Jenny, and she smoothed the great tangle of hair which shadowed the forehead of the sheriff.

Jeremy Crossett began to grow a little ill at ease. It became hard to realize that this was the public room of a public hotel.

"I was a terrible set man," said the sheriff. "When I seen the girl that I wanted, I went for her. She didn't want me. Her folks didn't want me. Even their dogs barked at me. But——"

He paused again, wearily.

"Ah, well," said Bud Loftus, "she couldn't keep from me. I drove her man out of the country. I made her folks shut up. And one night I took her away. I drove her away. 'Where are you takin' me?' says she. 'I dunno. Home, I guess,' says I. 'Home lies the other way,' says she. 'Not my home and yours,' says I. She began to scream. I whipped up the horses. She said she would jump. I just whipped up the horses. She didn't jump. She began to cry. I just whipped up the horses. She began to beg. I just whipped those horses along. And finally she sat still, and she didn't say nothing, and the horses come out of a gallop to a trot, and out of a trot to a dog-trot, and out of a dog-trot they fell to a walk, and from a walk they stopped dead still. Because they was beat, you see. And there was a moon hanging on the edge of Mount Lewes, and every pine tree, it stood up straight beside its shadow and never moved, and——"

His voice failed again. He allowed

the hand of Jenny Loren to fall away from him.

"Willie——" he said.

"Yes," said Jenny.

"Willie was her son," said Bud Loftus. "But——"

And then, opening his eyes, he peered earnestly at her.

"I would hate to let you get away, Jenny, into any other family, to live with some other man, and get your back or your heart broke, or both. And callouses on your hands. And your soul just dyin'. Because," said the sheriff, "you could be perfumin' the life of a good man, and makin' a whole town sweet, Jenny. Well, well, Willie ain't the man! Now, you run along," he went on, suddenly growing more brisk as he sat up in his chair. "You run along about your work. I got something to think of!"

He seized his coffee cup and drained it.

"Gimme some coffee, Jenny. Gimme a full cup, this time. The world has gone to hell, Jenny. There was a time, if you asked for coffee, they handed you a bucket of it; now they put a drop in a thimble. The coffee cups, the women, and the men—they been shrinking and shrinking! Is that Mr. Crossett?"

His head was erect, now, and there was not the slightest shadow of weariness in his eyes as he looked across at Jeremy Crossett.

"My name is Crossett," said the latter.

"I gotta talk to you," said the sheriff. "I want to know, is it your son that's gallivantin' around and raising hell by the side of Lefty Dunlin?"

Mr. Crossett gripped the edge of his table, and it quivered until the water shuddered in the glass.

"Why, Sheriff Loftus!" cried Jenny Loren. "That's an idea, I guess not! Him? Why, he's gone hunting up in the mountains, that's all. Him a jailbreaker? Him? But you never seen him!"

"I asked Mr. Crossett," said the sheriff. "You run along, Jenny, because I guess that he don't need you to help him talk."

"I was surprised," said Crossett.

"Nacherally you would be," said the sheriff. "And you still look kind of sick, I might say."

This observation did not help the unsettled nerves of Crossett, but under the grilling he steadied himself a little. After all, back on "the Street" there just such encounters, games of bluff, sudden challenges, and he with the best poker face won millions, and the weaker man went to the wall. The quiver of an eyelid might mean a dozen bankruptcies within an hour.

"I've heard you addressed as 'Sheriff?'" said Crossett gravely.

"That's my unlucky job," said Loftus.

"So that you have a right to ask such questions, as a matter of course."

"And to have them answered," said the sheriff sharply.

"Naturally. It was a shock to me to hear such a remark—you understand that I have heard a great deal in the past few days about the exploits of the ruffian Dunlin and his equally ruffianly companion—to be asked if my son—it was a great shock to me, sir!"

"It was," said the sheriff keenly. "I see that it was. You turned green!"

"When a father hears his son accused of murder and robbery——"

"Murder? Who have they killed, now?"

"I thought there had been killings."

"Maybe, maybe! Maybe you've heard straighter from them than I have. Who did they kill?"

"Naturally," remarked Jeremy Crossett, "I only have to remember that my son is my son; it puts me at ease again. But the sudden suggestion——"

He waved his hand. But the sheriff did not answer the sympathetic smile.

"Where's your son now?"

"Hunting in the mountains."

"There's a pile of mountains. Where in the mountains?"

"He intended to start north," said the millionaire, "and gradually circle around through the mountains, following game as he could find it——"

"Start north, travel in a circle, follow game as he found it!" growled the sheriff. "I asked you for an answer, not for a puzzle!"

"I tell you what I know," said Crossett with dignity.

At this, Sheriff Loftus stood up and leaned upon both hands, that rested on the table top. From this position, he stared fixedly at Mr. Crossett.

"Well——" said the sheriff, and then, abruptly, he turned upon his heel and left the room.

At the door, Jenny Loren met him and looked at him with great eyes.

"Dear Uncle Bud!" she said. "Is it really Mr. Crossett's boy that's doing all the terrible things?"

"Don't you think so?" asked the sheriff.

"How should I know what to think?" said Jenny.

"He's a fine-lookin' boy, ain't he?"

"Oh, no, just ordinary."

"Fine, up-standin' kid, ain't he?" asked the sheriff.

"Him? I never noticed him particular."

"Humph," said Bud Loftus, and strode swiftly away from her, his spurs jingling upon his old and wrinkled boots.

CHAPTER XXIII.

INTO THE WILDERNESS.

JENNY LOREN appeared on the verge of following the tall man, but she changed her mind presently and, after balancing back and forth, as an undecided person will do, she returned hastily to the dining room and dropped into a chair opposite Mr. Crossett.

Mr. Crossett was not pale, he was even smiling a little. His fighting blood had been roused and, like a thoroughbred, he responded to the challenge of the danger.

"Who is Willie?" he asked.

"Willie? A poor sap!" said the unsympathetic girl. "What do you think he meant?"

"Willie is his son; he hopes that you'll marry Willie, it seems. Will you, my dear?"

"I'm not for marriage," said Jenny Loren bluntly, "unless it helps me on with my business."

"What is your business, pray?"

"The movies, of course."

"I almost forgot. Jenny, that is a very keen man."

"Him? Keen?" said Jenny.

She closed her eyes and with them shut spoke in a drawling imitation of the sheriff: "They used to have men—some—around here—long time ago. They've died—finished—dried up—all except one. That's Bud Loftus—I guess——"

She opened her eyes and smiled at Jeremy Crossett.

The latter was nodding.

"You talked to him at the door," he pointed out.

"I tried to turn him off the trail; I only put him further on it. I thought I could talk him away—but I couldn't!"

"Well," murmured Crossett, "we haven't a word from Tolliver. I'm afraid he's not so keen a man as you thought, Jenny."

"Tolliver," said the girl, "will follow a trail as good as any man in the world, and shoot as straight and die as game."

"Then what do you think has happened to him?"

"I don't know. I don't know! They couldn't just brush him out of their way, if he came up with them——"

"You mean that if there was a fight, it would be such a terrible one that

other people would have to hear about it?"

"I think so," said the girl. "I'd bank on that."

"I think that Tolliver is a beaten man," answered Crossett slowly. "The more I reflect, the surer I am. He couldn't stand up to them. To the two of them, I mean. I saw Dunlin ride down the street. That was enough to make me feel that he's one man in a thousand. Then there is my boy. You haven't had a chance to know him, Jenny, but let me assure you that *he's* one in ten thousand!"

Jenny's color changed ever so little; her brown face was tinged with pink.

"Is he?" said Jenny vaguely.

"He is, my dear. And now I see what utter folly it was for me to send a fighting man on their trail. I must try some one else. I don't know whom, I don't know what expedient, Jenny. Can you suggest any one?"

Jenny sighed.

"I've been trying to think. Oh, how I've been trying, night and day."

"What a warm heart you have, my child!"

"There's something for me to get out of it," said Jenny in the most practical of voices. "I want that trip to Los Angeles and back."

"Ah?" said Crossett, but he could not be totally deceived, and his eyes retained their kindness as he watched her.

Then he continued sadly: "They've done damage enough, even now. What they may have in prospect before them, heaven knows! Sheriff Loftus has more than a suspicion about my boy. The whole countryside is up in arms. They cannot last long, no matter how clever Lefty Dunlin may be. And every moment that I remain here alone, Loftus will grow more and more suspicious because my son has stayed away so long!"

Jenny started up from the table, struck with a great thought.

"Wait! Wait!" said she. "I'm thinking something out—I—I'll come and talk to you later."

Jenny disappeared, and climbing swiftly to her own little attic chamber, there she sat down in the midst of her life, so to speak, and stared at the future. From her bureau, two pictures looked out at her—a faded woman in a little hat tied beneath the chin with ribbons, and a faded gentleman with a long beard and an air of Nestorian solemnity. They were father and mother to Jenny Loren, and though they had died, she kept their pictures continually with her, so clinging to her past, so gathering about her some vestige of an environment which was her own. A threadbare carpet bag in the corner served to contain the total of her worldly goods, except for the dancing dress which hung from the nail near the window, giving one streak of cheerful color to that little room.

So Jenny sat among her thoughts until a little wrinkle appeared in the middle of her forehead; she banished it by taking from the dark cavern of the carpet-bag an old wallet inherited from her father, and from the depths of the wallet she removed the one treasure which it contained. It was neither a bank note nor a check, but merely a snapshot of a slender, dark, and handsome youth. She held it in both trembling hands and searched the photograph hungrily, as though she wished to receive some manner of answer from those serious eyes.

It was a picture of Daniel Crossett, and had the elder Crossett seen it he would have known that prying fingers had been through his luggage and chosen this prize from all the rest. No qualms of conscience troubled Jenny Loren for this theft, and yet often she wished that she had not taken the little print because it had given her many hours of such happy sadness as she never had known before; and the

knowledge that it waited for her in her room sometimes stopped her in the middle of her work, and set her dreaming breathlessly, like a witch of the olden days, who has made an image and thereby captured a soul to torture or make rejoice.

But it seemed to Jenny, now, that her duty lay clearly before her. She could understand why it might be most difficult for any man to come within hailing distance of two such as Lefty Dunlin and Daniel Crossett, but a woman could come to them unsuspected, if only she could pick up the trail. She had her own saddle and her own horse —Sheriff Loftus had given her both— and a better little mustang never rocked over the level miles or twisted through chaparral, or dipped up and down among the hills and canyons of the back country. She knew the lay of the land, also, because whenever a dance was given in a neighboring town, Jenny Loren had to go; pretty girls could not be spared!

There were difficulties. She hardly could explain to people that she was leaving in order to ride in pursuit of a young man across the mountains. So she went first to Jeremy Crossett and explained to him, briefly, that she had hope that she could persuade an old and tried friend of hers—a relation, in fact —to undertake to deliver the message. To the hotel manager she gave a different story—there had been a sudden message from a sick friend—in a week she would be back. So Jenny gathered her courage for the task.

She knew exactly what to do, the sort of a pack to arrange, the supplies to take along; and out of her own money she paid for everything. Jeremy Crossett had not even thought to offer funds.

For that matter, she needed to think for him, as well as for herself, and it was her suggestion that he leave the hotel and take a horse and pack mule into the hills across the left shoulder of Lammer Mountain. In that manner, he could remove himself from the embarrassing questions of the sheriff, and it might keep the attention of Loftus from being turned so curiously upon the identity of Lefty Dunlin's young companion.

Jeremy Crossett accepted that good advice. He was in a profound quandary, now, unable to fix on anything, ready to do as any other bade him; therefore, he went in the most docile fashion toward the hills, riding an old horse, leading a pack mule behind him, with the haunting conviction that once the pack was removed from the back of the mule, he never would be able to assemble it in one homogeneous whole again.

However, such a worry as this was a small thing compared with the sea of trouble in which he was lost; and when he reached the first rise of ground beyond the town of Lammer Falls, he turned and looked back upon it with a gloomy conviction that nothing in the world could save his boy from early and terrible death except the intervention of wise Jenny Loren.

She seemed to Crossett, now, the very personification of wisdom, and he felt himself oddly humbled, as if he had become a child again, and as though Jenny Loren were a commanding presence—like a school-teacher, say.

He smiled a little at this fancy, and then he turned his back on Lammer Falls, and went slowly toiling up the slope beyond. He was disgusted with himself. He felt that he had played and still was playing a weak and foolish game, but he did not know where he could put his hand to the wheel. All was vagueness and confusion before his eyes.

Jenny Loren was as compact of assurance and confidence as Crossett was now full of indecision and weakness; she gathered the lightest of packs, she threw on the saddle with her own strong

young hands, and drew up the cinches until the mustang groaned. Then she swung into the saddle like any man, her divided skirts looking for all the world like the chaps of a cow-puncher.

So she drew on her gloves, she tapped the butt of her light Winchester with an assured hand, she gathered the reins, and sitting straight and easily in the saddle she sent the mustang cantering down the main street of Lammer Falls. As she rode, her confidence grew in her, as strength grows in the workman who put his hand to the task. She was singing as she saw the last house of Lammer Falls drop behind her, and the trail winding snakelike before her, into the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GHOST TRAILING.

BETWEEN the towns of Jackson and Silver lay a little switch station, well within view of each city, and that was the spot on which Lefty picked for the holdup of the express. When big Tyson argued savagely that it meant running their heads into the lion's mouth—or rather, into the mouths of two lions—Lefty insisted that if they perform the job at the switch station they would have a fairly well-secured line of retreat. They could head up between the two rivers, through a region screened with many trees, and if the bulk of the pursuit rolled after them on the same line of march, they could turn either right or left and ford one of the rivers, or else they could abandon their horses and drift down one of the currents in the night; in short, they would have a hundred ways of playing dodge with their followers. Whereas, if they robbed the train at any other place, they would be isolated in the midst of widely sweeping plains, and the telegraph would send hordes of pursuers to spy them out before they could reach shelter of any kind.

"You can't dodge a man twice when he sees you in the open," summed up Lefty. "But if those two towns see the train stop, they'll think nothing of it. They can see the train, but they won't be able to see what's happening to it, and by the time they get the warning, we'll be well along our way!"

Tyson still argued, but, as always, he was forced to accept the decisions of the master criminal.

When that important point was settled, Tyson set out at once. He was to ride ahead of the others for two reasons. One was that he could go freely if he were not in their company, besides, it is harder for three to journey unobserved than it is for two. In the second place, he could execute several necessary commissions by starting on ahead; and, finally, he would be on the spot of the holdup with a fresh and eager horse, and a fresh horse was what Tyson would need when once they started to ride for their lives.

A thousand other points were discussed, also. Not a detail was left untouched by the accurate minds of Lefty and Tyson. The latter, for instance, insisted beforehand that all the loot should be left in the possession of Lefty Dunlin until they were well away from all danger of capture.

"Suppose that they snag me," said the logical Tyson, "because I'm big and beefy and will give my horse more work than a splinter like you. Well, then I'd have jail and my money gone, if I had my share with me. But suppose that you have it, it'll be a hot-riding gang of deputies that ever lay their hands on Lefty Dunlin! Then you can use anything up to twenty thousand for lawyers for me. And, after that, if I have to serve out a term, well, it'll be work that I'll be being paid for."

And Tyson grinned. It was plain that for such a stake as this he would venture not prison only, but death as well. His family already was packed and ready to move south for Mexico,

where an old companion of Tyson was located. Their future address he did not fail to give to Lefty, so that in case he were killed in the holdup or in the fight, the money he had earned could be forwarded to his wife.

This was a mere sample of the foresight which the pair exhibited in every detail of their planning.

So, then, Tyson went on ahead, and the other two waited for the evening, so that they might ride down through the lower foothills under the cover of the dark; then, proceeding out into the plains toward the two towns, they could camp the rest of the night—resuming their journey the following afternoon—in easy striking distance of the right place and the right time.

They had paid careful attention to their horses, and through Tyson they had secured two temporary mounts. These would be ridden through the hills, the regular saddle animals being led. Their strength was to be reserved for the homeward dash to the upper mountains.

The evening came, and Daniel was drawing up the cinches on his mustang substitute, when Lefty whistled a soft warning, and stepped to the edge of the little thicket which sheltered them.

Then he turned back and said softly: "It's Hannigan coming, and coming as if the devil was after him. What can he want? Why's he here? And how the devil has he trailed us?"

Brush began to crackle in the distance, and then Daniel saw the wild form of Hannigan bursting toward them with all the speed that he could command; and as he reached the little clearing inside the outer fringe of the thicket, he saw Lefty Dunlin and threw up his hands with a wild cry of joy. He saw Daniel, and leaped at him with a yell of a madman. He clutched him with one hand, and with the other, he seemed calling to some one from behind.

"I've swore and swore that it wasn't me," said Hannigan. "I've swore faithful, and he wouldn't believe. But now I've brought him to the gent that done the work."

Lefty caught Hannigan by the shoulder and swung him sharply around.

"Look me in the eye," he commanded.

"I ain't dippy," said Hannigan. "I'm close to it, but I got the wits in me still, I think!"

Lefty pulled out a flask of brandy and poured a large dram down Hannigan's throat; it left him coughing with the sting of the raw liquor.

"Now tell me how you happened to come for me here? Who tipped you to this place?"

"You done it yourself. Four years ago you remember that once you made me lay up for you here and wait while you was coming in from Anvil with——"

"I remember! I remember!" said Lefty sourly. "It slipped out of my head. That's all. Now what's the meaning of the rest of this jabbering. Will you tell me?"

"A ghost, man," said Hannigan. "I been chased through the mountains by a ghost that says that I murdered him, but I didn't. It was the kid, and I've told him so."

Lefty glanced sharply aside at Daniel, and the latter nodded his own conviction that Hannigan's excitement must be madness.

"You mean Tolliver?" asked Lefty gently.

"Don't try to baby me!" groaned Hannigan, instantly feeling the change of expression. "I tell you, that I let down five ton of rock on the spot where I stretched out Tolliver's body——"

"You damned idiot!" exclaimed Lefty Dunlin. "I told you what to do with him!"

"You told me what," said Hannigan. "But I figured that I knew more than you. And suppose that while I was

drivin' down the road, he'd stood up and took me from behind——"

Hannigan, with bulging eyes, clutched at his throat, as though he felt the fingers of the ghost closing upon him there.

"Steady up!" said Lefty. And he added to Daniel: "There's something in this. Go on, Hannigan. Tell me what?"

"There's everything in it straight and sound," said Hannigan. "I swear that there is. I ain't a fool of a ghost believer. I never had no belief in spirits. I figgered that when we died we went to ground like cattle or sheep. And I've lived thinkin' that. But I'm wrong, and you're wrong, Lefty, and every fool is wrong, because I tell you that they's spirits inside of us that look like us, and wear clothes like us, and carry our marks and our skins and our scars—and when we die, we'll wander around in the wind, Lefty, the same as Tolliver is doin' now, bringing hell after him toward me. What have I done to him? I ask you, Lefty, did I ever so much as damn Tolliver in all my days?"

This semi-hysterical speech rushed from the lips of Hannigan in a frightened babble, and Dunlin said: "Pull yourself together. Give the brandy a chance to work a bit on you, and then tell me just what happened—about Tolliver, I mean."

"That swine of a deputy come out from Anvil with his posse," said Hannigan, summoning his strength again. "And he held me up where he found me—cleaning from the floor of the barn the blood of Tolliver where he fell——"

A strong shuddering seized upon Hannigan. He closed his eyes and gripped Lefty's shoulder to steady himself.

"Where he fell," said Hannigan again, in a hollow voice, "with a bullet drove straight through his brain!"

"Yes," said Lefty, growing a little pale. "But go on, Hannigan."

It seemed clear to Daniel that Lefty had lost a great deal of his nerve. He was shaken, though he kept himself sternly in hand. And his eyes rolled rather wildly at the shadows which encircled them, deepening every moment as the last light of the day faded.

Even Daniel himself, clear-headed skeptic though he was, felt his nerves weaken a little—not that he believed, but that he was unstrung to see such a man of steel as Lefty affected by a wild tale of spirits.

"I saw Tolliver lie dead," repeated Lefty Dunlin. "Now what did you see?"

"I saw him—after the deputy had gone, mind you—when he would have me alone to pull me down to hell with him—after I'd buried him under five ton of rock! Man, you can't bury a ghost, not even if you was to lay a mountain on top of it! It would come through solid rock the same way that a bubble comes up through water——"

He was unable to continue for a moment, and then he said in the wildest of voices: "I sat in my cabin and heard a whisper, no more, of somebody comin' toward the door from the outside. 'Danger!' says I. My blood begun to turn cold. I got into a corner, with my rifle ready. I waited. I could feel my hair lift. A chill was in the air. I was afraid—of nothin' at all! And then into the doorway stepped the face and the body of Tolliver, with his dead hands stretched out to get me!"

"My God!" whispered Lefty.

"I dropped the rifle. I knew it was no use. I rushed for the door and ran right through that body of Tolliver—and it was nothing but air!

"I ran on. I been running ever since, it seems to me. I been wandering here and there, not even safe in the day. And with him—with Tolliver—stalkin' through every night, waitin' for me!

My God! why should he take me for the murderer of him? It was the kid! And I've brought him to the kid. God help him!"

CHAPTER XXV.

ONE CHANCE IN THREE.

UP to this time, it had seemed to Daniel that Lefty Dunlin was one of those four-square figures, invincible to every wind of danger and discomfort that blows, but now it appeared to him that he saw a breach in the armor of the outlaw.

In low, rapid voices, Hannigan and Lefty conferred together—low, save when hysteria brought high the tones of Hannigan. Then, in haste, the leader mounted and motioned to Daniel to do the same, while he gave a place to Hannigan on one of the extra horses.

The imp of the perverse began to stir in Daniel.

He said to his leader: "Lefty!"

"Aye, Danny," said Lefty.

Daniel lowered his voice to a hushed whisper:

"Lefty, I think something moved back there in the brush!"

Lefty gasped and turned with a jerk in the saddle, one hand holding a swiftly drawn revolver.

"Where? Where?"

"Back there—near the birch—something white——"

There was an indistinguishable whisper from Lefty.

"Let's go back," whispered Daniel. "You take the right hand and I'll ride through on the left—somebody is trying to spy on us, Lefty!"

"Go—go—go ahead," said Lefty, shuddering in body and in voice. "Don't turn back. You don't know what you're talking about, Danny——"

But Daniel was already gone. He slipped from the clutching hand of Lefty, and drove his horse straight through the brush, which crashed loudly around him, until Daniel came to a sudden halt when he was out of the sight of the other two. He waited for a long moment; then he heard a distant exclamation, and a rush of horses away from him. Panic, certainly, had seized upon the other two riders.

He took out a white handkerchief and draped it over his face, then he prepared to follow them.

It was a ghostly moment in the wood, for the sun was long down, and the moon was now giving a faint light when something passing among the trees called the attention of Daniel to his rear.

He saw a horseman passing with strange silence through the wood. There was the faintest breeze stirring through the leaves, and no sound came from the horse and rider greater than that whisper among the leaves.

He came closer—a rider dressed like any ordinary cow-puncher, a small, thin-shouldered man; and now, passing out of shadow into the dim moonshine, Daniel saw the face of the silent rider, and it was that of Tolliver!

Within half a dozen yards passed Tolliver, and when he was opposite young Daniel, he turned his head and looked fairly into the white-shrouded face of the youth.

He made no sign of alarm or surprise, but looking straight ahead again, Tolliver passed on into the wood upon his soundless horse.

Daniel remained behind, turned cold with sudden dread. This lasted for a moment only. Then, gathering his resolution, he rode straight after the vanished horseman, gun in hand.

Twigs and branches crashed and snapped around Daniel as he galloped, but though he searched among the shadows here and there, he saw nothing whatever. Tolliver, or the phantom of Tolliver, had been snatched away from beneath his eyes!

He issued from the wood and, turning down the slope across which Lefty

and Hannigan had fled, it seemed to Daniel that a voice cried faintly behind him. No doubt it was only the whistling of the wind in his ears, but he turned in the saddle and, looking back, he saw the shadowy rider issue from beneath the trees and come toward him at a silent gallop, with one hand raised, beckoning to him to return.

At that, all of the hot-blooded courage in Daniel vanished. He leaned over the neck of his good mustang and flogged it into a full gallop that whisked him down the slope, and through the next fringe of trees, and then again into the open, until the figures of two horsemen twinkled before him.

Glad was Daniel to ride again with Lefty and Hannigan. They received him silently. For his part, he neither could mock at them nor speak of what he had seen or thought he had seen. Indeed, now that he looked back upon the adventure, it seemed to him that the whole had been the stuff that dreams are made of. And yet he knew that he had not been dreaming; the shadowy rider actually had passed him, actually had disappeared from before him, actually had reappeared and followed him from the wood. Very cold and thin became the blood of Daniel.

They journeyed on that night out of the upper hills, into the lower, smoother country, and finally into the rich and pleasant region between the two rivers, which extended toward the lake. And when Daniel saw the lights of the houses flashing before him, he took a renewed comfort. Yet still he could not help turning, now and again, and glancing back along the way, and never once did they enter a woodland without the dropping of a mist of terror over the soul of Daniel.

When they camped, the thicket that concealed them was within easy sight of the lights of both Silver and Jackson, and when Daniel lay in his blanket that night he could hear the whisper and rush of a river near by. It had no soothing effect upon him; it passed into his dreams as the voice of a ghost, who rode on a soundless horse and whose words were lost in the whistling of the wind.

He wakened with the dawn.

They were two, again. Hannigan had disappeared, leaving the horse he had ridden behind him, and Lefty explained briefly: "He's put the curse on us, kid. Then he's gone on, the dog! Well, it'll take more than ghosts and ghostliness to stop me to-day. Big Tyson will be here before noon!"

They had a breakfast of stale pone, hard as flint, and then they waited through the cold hours of the early morning until the sun rose to its full strength and burned away the last of the dew and then filled the winds with heat.

In the meantime, they kept close watch from the edges of the thicket, wary lest some one should approach them. A cow strayed into the shade toward noon, to escape from the heat of the midday; but she made a quiet companion, and nothing else living came near them until, close on the appointed hour, the burly form of Tyson came in sight, riding a mighty horse fit for the burden of his sinews and bone.

He came into the covert and stared down at the pair from his saddle for a moment.

"You look like a pair of kids playing hooky," observed Tyson.

Then he dismounted, took the bridle and saddle from his horse and watched the big animal roll.

"I paid two hundred for that," said Tyson.

"He's big enough to tire himself out," answered the unsympathetic Lefty, "but not big enough to carry you. Did you get the powder?"

"I got it. When do we start?"

"In two hours."

"I'll sleep it out," said Tyson, and

stretching himself on the grass he was instantly snoring.

"Look at the ants crawling over him," said Lefty presently. "And the leaves falling on his face. And him, perhaps, about two or three hours away from hell, but still he can sleep through it!"

"What nerve!" murmured Daniel.

"What a pig!" answered Lefty. "He's got a layer of fat on his brain and no decent ideas can get through it."

For his own part, Lefty employed himself in the care of his weapons, and Daniel did the same. Also, there was the matter of masks, and this Lefty handled by cutting out great sections from the linings of their coats, and making the eye holes.

"Not too big, or somebody will get a slant at your whole face."

"And what about our voices?" asked Daniel.

"People talk about recognizing voices," said Lefty, "but it never would go down in court, I guess. You recognize a voice after you've recognized a face, most likely. Never worry about that, but take care of your face and let your voice take care of itself!"

With that, Daniel contented himself.

So the time came for the start, and the three rode out of the covert and started across country toward the switch station. From the top of every small swale they could see the light glancing on the distant rails, and Lefty consulted his watch from time to time.

"We ought to get there not more than five minutes before the train's due. That's enough to paralyze anybody in the station house and open the switch," said Lefty.

"And if the train's late?" suggested Tyson.

"Then we'll wait as long as we dare, and ride for it!"

"How long can we wait?"

"It depends on how long it would take people to get from the station house to the nearest ranch where there's a telephone."

"The people that are in the station house, we'll keep there," suggested Tyson.

"Will you keep those, too?" said Lefty, and he pointed with his field glasses, which he had been using, toward a point on the distant track.

Daniel and Tyson examined it in turn. Through the glasses it was easy to make out a section gang of a dozen hands at work on the track.

"A fine time," said Tyson bitterly, "to run into a snag like that. You might've thought of it, Lefty, before this! The dozen of 'em will come down to mob us before we can do anything!"

"Those fellows are greasers, hobos, and negroes," answered Lefty. "They won't bother us; but we can't help them from running to give the alarm. Say it takes them ten minutes to get across to that house"—he indicated a group of trees in the distance—"and then it will depend on how many punchers are at the house. That's the Custis place. He might have half a dozen riders right there, ready to hop into the saddle. If that's the case, we won't have a chance to do much. But this is the middle of the afternoon, and it ain't likely that they'll be so close to hand. Somebody will ride to get the men in; somebody else will be busy telephoning the alarm to Silver and Jackson. And we've got one chance in three that we'll have time enough to do the job before the rescuers come!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

IT'S ME HE WANTS.

THEY drew nearer to the switch station.

It stood in the open country, with only a streak of trees here and there in the distance, none so close as the Custis house. These were farmlands, and rich ones. Wheat stood tall and dusty yellow, ready for the harvesting machines,

and there were great pale patches of summer fallow, dimly marked with the green of the grass which had sprouted since the spring plowing. Farther away, on either hand was a mist of smoke and vapor through which Jackson showed on one side, and Silver was completely obliterated on the other side.

The station house itself was a little brown building of sanded wood with a neat truck garden in the rear, a pasture inclosed beside it, and a few failing orchard trees growing close by. Sun-withered climbing vines attempted to cover the sides of the little house with green but failed wretchedly. It appeared a home, but a home very much down at the heels.

As they rode closer, they saw two small children playing before the house near the track; and a woman came from the rear door and began to hang out a basket of washing on the clothesline.

Nothing could have been more domestic, more humdrum, it appeared to Daniel; and up the track, half lost behind the shimmering heat-waves, he could see the section gang at work.

If they were greasers, and negroes, all might be well, but if there were whites among them, armed for the work, they might lead the rest to make serious trouble.

However, all was peaceful, dreamily lost in the heat of the sun, and never could there have been a scene with less possibilities of romantic danger and adventure, had it not been for the two parallel strips of steel which widened between them, and ran away in streaks of light, joining at a point in the distance just before they swung around a curve among trees and were lost to sight. Those flowing currents of silver brightness might lead into the humdrum quiet such a storm of wealth, power, and danger as would have filled the hands and the heart of any sixteenth-century pirate to overflowing.

They were close up before the house when the front door banged open, and the woman who had been hanging out the laundry in the rear of the building rushed out before them and ran with a scream of fear and anger to her children.

She gathered them about her, like chickens under the wing of a sheltering hen.

"You—you devils!" she panted.

She stared from one masked face to the other. "What do you want? Why've you come here? What d'you think that a woman like me would have in the house worth stealing?"

"You get inside and shut your mouth," Tyson ordered her.

In response, she cupped her hands at her lips and sent a long, shrill cry echoing down the tracks toward the section gang.

"They'll hear her!" exclaimed Tyson. "The she-devil!"

And he pitched himself from his horse and drove at her. Daniel, anxious for her in the face of that charging monster, drove his horse between. Its shoulder, as it reared in excitement, struck Tyson's breast and sent him reeling and gasping backward.

He had his hand on a gun-butt, but he failed to draw the weapon. Speechless with rage and lack of breath, he glowered like an unshaven goblin at Daniel.

And Daniel, sitting easily poised in the saddle, steadied his excited horse with one hand, and kept the other ready for the draw.

He felt no fear, and he felt no uncertainty, but he knew that if Tyson's hand twitched that gun out another inch, Tyson would die. And Tyson seemed to realize it also, although he cast the blame on another cause.

"The two of you are workin' against me," growled Tyson. "But when we get this job off our hands, I'll have a talk with you, kid. You tie to that, will you?"

The mother, dragging her children with her, came close to Daniel, a protector in time of need.

"What are you people gunna do?" she asked. "What do you want from me? Or what has Jim done or got? We're poor as mice!"

Daniel lifted his broad-brimmed hat.

"Madam," said he, "we're not here to do the slightest hurt to you. It's best for you to go inside and stay there——"

"The train!" she cried, as the idea burst on her. "The train," she repeated with widening eyes, "you're gunna stop it!"

"You got your marching orders," said Tyson savagely. "Get into the house and stay there, will you?"

She shrank away from them. But at the door she turned and looked once more at them, her face frozen with fear and with wonder.

Later, when Daniel peered in at a side window to make sure that no telephone was being rung in the house, he saw the poor young mother seated in the dining room, her frightened children on the floor at her feet, and across her knees a heavy double-barreled shotgun. There she sat like some figure out of an old tragedy, and Daniel was something between awe and smiling as he watched her.

But, after all, he felt that his two companions made terrible figures in their black masks, like midday goblins!

The section gang was still at work, a glance through the field glasses revealed, except that one man was walking down the tracks toward them.

"Turn your backs on him," commanded Lefty. "Don't let him see that we're masked until he comes close up, and then we can cover him. *He's* the husband of the woman, I figger, and he's the section foreman on this job."

So they turned their backs and waited. They heard the steps come up the cinders beside the track—then pause. Lefty whirled, a gun in his hand, and the others followed his example; but the foreman, if it were he, had already leaped down the grade and now was running through a wheat field, only his head and shoulders appearing above the tall grain.

"I'll nail him!" exclaimed Tyson, and tipped his rifle to his shoulder.

Lefty promptly struck it up.

"Let him go," said he. "That money in the train ain't worth as much to us as that tramp is to those two poor kids."

"Seven hundred thousand dollars, maybe, for the sake of a pair of brats!" cried Tyson. "I never heard nothin' more crazy!"

"Of course, you haven't," agreed Lefty smoothly. "But I hate murder, friend!"

"You've done enough of it to get sick of it," agreed Tyson sullenly. "But this job—my job——"

He turned with an oath and strode away down the platform.

"He would've had the woman and the husband dead, by this time," said Lefty, "and what's worse, the two kids squalling inside of the house. Damn such a man! Kid, what do you think?"

"About the train? I don't think. I leave the thinking to you. Will it be too late for us?"

Lefty stared at him.

"You're cool," said he. "Tell you the truth, kid, I never put much faith in the wild yarn you told me before now—but it seems to me that this here is the real Dunlin blood—or better! It ain't the money that takes you; it's the game, Danny. Am I right? But damn the train. That's not what I was saying!"

Daniel, listening to the compliment, made no reply. His heart had been warming gradually to this singular man, but he knew that not words but actions had any meaning for the outlaw.

"I meant Hannigan's story," said

Leftv. "You heard it, the same as me. What do you think? Booze?"

A false pride tempted Daniel to put the whole tale to scorn, but the truth came out almost in spite of himself.

"I don't believe in ghosts, Lefty," said he.

"Nor I—usually," said Lefty. "But the face of Hannigan—he's seen something out of hell!"

"I didn't believe Hannigan. I rode back into the trees last night to throw a scare into you two. And then I saw a rider come by on a horse that made no sound at all. You understand, Lefty? Right through that brittle thicket and stamping on the leaves and the dead twigs—and not a sound more than the wind whispering. He turned his head toward me. It was Tolliver!"

Lefty dropped his hands into the pockets of his coat and said nothing, but he had lost color.

"I spurred after him," went on Daniel, honestly, feeling the chill of that adventure come back upon him, "and he disappeared among the trees. That took the last of my nerve. I spurred my horse without any pity, and got out of that wood."

"I noticed the flanks of the mustang," said Lefty.

"And as I got out of the wood I thought I heard a voice, and I looked back, and I saw Tolliver riding with a white face after me and beckoning to me——"

Daniel paused; perspiration was running on his forehead, and not because of the heat of the sun.

Lefty began to roll a cigarette with uncertain fingers.

"It's true, then," said he. "I got a touch of the death damp out of Hannigan, I thought. I got it again from you. Now, kid, did you say that Tolliver passed by you?"

"Yes."

"And looked at you?"

"Yes."

"And still he went on?"

"Yes."

"Although you were the man that shot him! But he don't want you. He passed you by. It's me that he wants, and it's me that he'll have! I've lived my life out, kid. Maybe you'll go on where I left off. I've dodged the posses and the sheriffs, but now the devil is takin' a hand against me. I'm going down. I feel it in my bones. This will be my last job!"

Daniel fumbled in his mind for reassuring words, but he could find none. His mind refused to function. His brain was a blank.

So they sat on the bench before the station house and watched the heat-waves shimmer down the track and waited for they hardly knew what; the coming of the train certainly was not all!

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HOLDUP.

TRAIN time passed.

Tyson, meanwhile, had smashed the lock and thrown the switch onto the siding, the automatic signal, of course, giving warning to any approaching engineer. But it began to seem to Daniel that there would be no chance to wait out the train.

He had been through trying moments, and more trouble lay before him, but never did he endure such a strain of nerves and spirit as was represented by that pause on the bench before the station house. Under the shadow of the eaves the flies buzzed shrill or faint, and the sun-drenched landscape slept around them, but he knew that this promise of peace was an illusion. By this time, the section boss had reached the Custis house, and the alarm was being shouted over the wires to Silver and to Jackson. From those centers, again, the warning would flash out to every crossroads village that dotted the hill country and the plains so that the riders might pour

out and hem in the fugitives in a great circle.

But, as Daniel's nerves began to give way, he looked more and more often at Lefty. Dunlin was like a rock. His color had not altered; his eyes roved freely here and there, taking calm note of all around them. In those minutes, he said only one thing:

"When we start, kid, keep off the plowed ground. It may mean the straight line for you, but plowed ground is always the long way round for a horse. Go through crops rather than the plowed lands!"

That was all; otherwise, silence hung heavily over them, and the monotonous humming of the flies threw Daniel into a delirious confusion. Sometimes he was about to spring up and confess that he was beaten and bolt for his life, spurring hard. Again, he was like a passenger, calmly waiting that he might take the train to an unknown destination.

Then Lefty stood up and yawned and stretched himself carefully.

"It's coming," said he.

Daniel leaped to his feet as though he had been struck by a whiplash.

"The train?"

Lefty pointed to the tracks, and now Daniel heard a faint and far-off humming, thinner than the buzzing of a single fly across his ear, but strangely piercing, and he knew it was the singing of the rails as the train drew near.

"Is it ours?" he asked.

"Maybe they've flashed the warning in and sent out a guard train loaded with men and guns," said Lefty, "but I think there's hardly been time enough for that. All is quiet over toward the Custis house," he added, quietly surveying the distant clump of trees through his glass. "I called at that house once, kid. It's a grand place. I sat in the kitchen and made them feed me!"

"And you got away?"

"They shot my horse under me, but I switched to another in a field and got off bareback. There she comes!"

The train was suddenly before them. It had pitched around the lower bend in an instant and already seemed to Daniel to be a towering front, black and formidable, with white steam and smoke slanting straight back out of the stack.

He had wanted haste, before, but now he would have been glad of a slower train approaching.

It grew upon his vision with incredible speed; a thin streak of steam jutted up, and a whistle screamed like an angry sea-bird in a storm.

"Tyson!" rang the voice of Lefty. "If that fool of an engineer runs on and don't believe the signal, throw in the switch. Come on, kid. Help me wave it to a halt."

They stood in the center of the track and waved their hands frantically, and still the train thundered on them, reeling with speed; and from a window of the cab, Daniel could see fireman or engineer leaning out and scanning them. At the last moment, sand began to fly beneath the train, wheels screamed and then thundered, and the big train, though at a dizzy speed, hit the switch.

Tyson had not closed it. The engine crashed, keeled violently over—and after one heartbreaking moment settled back again, rocking onto the track and staggering slowly forward until it stopped.

That swift check and the keeling of the whole line of cars apparently had thrown the passengers into pandemonium, for a roar of voices poured up from the windows with the screaming of one strong-lunged woman high above all of the rest.

It seemed to Daniel that the roar and the confusion closed above his head, like water. He could not think; he could hardly move. And yet it was his important task—explained in detail by Lefty—to hold up the fireman and en-

gineer and make them climb down from the cab. Afterward, he was to force them to flood the fire box, so that the train would be helpless for some time after the robbers left her.

"And watch those fellows," Lefty had said. "Some of the men on this run carry guns and know how to use them. There's a fat reward from the railroad to employees who are willing to fight for the trains they command!"

He remembered that now, as he ran stumbling like a drunken man toward the cab. His rifle he kept slung on his back. In either hand he carried a heavy Colt, but he knew with perfect surety that he would not be able to shoot straight. To encounter one enemy was a different matter; it was almost a cheerful thing; but to stand against this iron monster broke his spirit completely.

Just before him a gun spurted smoke and fire and his big hat jerked off his head. He replied with three rapid shots. Other shots were sounding up and down the train. He felt that the entire mass of the people aboard her were about to pour out, armed to the teeth, and destroy these impertinent scoundrels who had dared stop her.

As he ran up, a revolver was thrown down from the cab. It exploded as it struck the ground and blew a shallow channel through the surface cinders. Then two frightened men climbed down the narrow steps and leaped to the ground. They had their hands above their heads, and the sight of their fear suddenly steadied Daniel. That blind fusillade of his, no doubt, had broken their spirit as they heard the bullets crash in the metal work of the cab.

He slapped their pockets to make sure that they carried no more weapons. Then he turned to the engineer, a gray-headed, kind-faced man.

"Flood the fire box!" he directed.

The engineer folded his arms.

"Talk to the youngster," said he. "I'll do nothing for you, you damn land-pirate! And if I didn't have five kids at home to work for, I'd have this out with you. D'you hear?"

"Back up!" said Daniel, with more roughness in his voice than he felt in his heart, for he admired this old fellow, and his steady, brave, blue eyes. "Back up there against the car side and keep your hands over your head."

The man showed no signs of moving until Daniel rudely jammed the muzzle of his Colt into his fat stomach. Then, protesting in a growl, he backed to the required position.

The fireman was more easily handled. He was a youngster, thin-faced, nervous. Beyond a doubt he had been the man who fired the first shot. Had it been an inch lower and killed Daniel, perhaps this fellow would have fought on like a hero, gained fame, foiled the attempted robbery, saved the train, and gained for himself an undying reputation which would have forced him into a long life of heroism. But he had barely failed with his first shot, and the crash of the bullets about his ears unnerved him. Now he was shaking and weak with fear. He could hardly do what Daniel commanded—but the fire box was opened at last, and a flood of steam leaped out and covered the engine and tender with a fog; this died away in the wind, and the fire box was silent and dead. The soul had been stolen from the machine.

So Daniel, with his part of the task successfully accomplished, marched his prisoners well back from the side of the train and marshaled them at the bottom of the grade.

All this time there had been a steady fusillade.

Lefty from the front of the train, on the right, and Tyson from the rear of it, on the left, had been firing with their repeating rifles at the roofs and the upper windows of the cars, so that there was a constant stream of explosions, and a constant crash of broken glass

and the clang of the bullets against the steel roofs.

Not a head showed from a single window—not a gun glinted in the sun anywhere—if there were armed heroes in that list of passengers, they were not showing their hands at once!

Now the door of the car slid back close to the spot where Lefty was standing. Daniel, below the grade, could see all that happened. As the door was rushed back, a shotgun boomed with a short and heavy note, and Lefty took a snapshot in return. Daniel saw the bullet strike, and tear a great splinter from the wooden lintel of the doorway just above the fighting messenger's head.

Daniel saw, and he admired! For he knew enough about Lefty Dunlin's skill to understand that the outlaw could have driven that bullet, with as great ease, straight through the heart of the messenger.

As it was, the heroism vanished from the heart of that warrior as the splinter from above was whipped into his face. He dropped his formidable shotgun with a barrel unfired; but at the same moment, from the shadows within the car, a revolver began to chatter.

Lefty dodged as though a fist was striking at him; but it was Daniel who silenced that fire. He tried a snapshot, just in the direction of the dim form within the car, and above the level of the floor—a snapshot, a chance shot, such as flies home once in twenty times, and this was one of the lucky moments. There was a loud yell from the interior of the car, and then a sound of tremendous cursing that barked and shrilled like the defiance of a bull terrier.

Lefty, in this noisy crisis, did not fail to acknowledge the help he had received by a wave of his armed hand.

Then he called to the first messenger and that hero leaped down at once—dared not lower his hands even to brace himself against a fall—and so tumbled head over heels down the grade and lay in a heap, groaning.

The train was theirs!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FUGITIVES.

ONE wounded, cursing man remained in the express car, and Daniel disposed of him. As he swung through the doorway, the man on the floor twisted around and tried to fire, but the movement cost him too much time, and Daniel jammed a heel upon his arm and pinned hand and gun to the floor.

With that, the fighting messenger collapsed in a faint. He lay in a pool of blood. The bullet which dropped him had pierced the left leg through the calf and driven up above the right knee, tearing all through the hardest and thickest muscles of the thigh. Daniel dragged him to the door of the car. He would have had Lefty help him in disposing of the hurt man, but Lefty, oblivious to all else, was examining a big safe which stood in a corner of the car, fastened to the floor by heavy steel bands. So Daniel called the young fireman and the engineer and with their help carried the wounded messenger to the bottom of the grade. There he ordered the two to care for the stricken man, while he returned to his job.

Down the line of the cars, in the meanwhile, the excitement of the passengers was growing steadily. Angry voices began to sound. And Daniel clearly heard a shrill-voiced woman upbraiding the men in her car because they would not attempt a rescue.

"Here's a dozen of you, and every man with a gun, and not a one of you game enough to step out and take a chance—enough of you to eat 'em in a meal, most likely."

Yet no adventurous heroes appeared from that car, in spite of that speech, and Daniel could not help remembering what Lefty often said—that men never

risk their lives freely for the property of others unless they are either heroes or fools. Certainly there were no rash fools in this list of passengers, and the old engineer and the wounded messenger seemed the only men really capable of fighting.

It amazed Daniel, as he walked briskly around the line of the cars, his two revolvers in his hands. He had not the slightest doubt that twenty armed men and good shots were watching him as he walked, and yet no one fired.

On the farther side of the train, he encountered big Tyson, who was swelling with confidence and fighting rage.

"They don't dare to stick their heads out, kid!" said Tyson. "By heaven, I got 'em tamed! I got 'em all tamed and in hand. They know me, by this time, and when I yell, they jump!"

He laughed loudly, and then struck Daniel on the shoulder.

"You've done fine, kid. Nobody could've done better. I give you my compliments. I'm your friend, kid. You tie to that!"

He was in a perfect hysteria of expectation. His eyes rolled wildly, and his fat, thick lips trembled and twitched violently as he spoke, like those of a glutton eying a feast. For Tyson, a feast of wealth was coming, and perhaps a feast of death before it! There was manifest murder in this fellow—murder for the love of killing. Contempt filled Daniel as he walked on.

He did not share the feeling of Tyson that these men in the passenger coaches were completely in hand. As he went by, more than one pair of stern eyes looked calmly and quietly out at him. These fellows were not willing to rush out, unled, and with no knowledge of the numbers of their enemies in hiding. But press them too far, and they would respond with a hail of bullets which, in fact would blow Lefty's gang to bits at the first volley.

It was nothing but the sheerest bluff that was holding this train—bluff reënforced, in this first instance, by a liberal salting of bullets showered at the windows and the roofs of the cars at the beginning. After that, those inside waited. They would not fight unless they had their backs to the wall, and hitherto, that had not happened. The railroad, the express company were losing money. But they themselves and their pocketbooks were not touched.

So Daniel estimated the situation as, on the run, he swung up between the two of the cars and darted around to the express car again.

Below, on the level, he saw that the wounded messenger was being cared for not only by the engineer and the fireman, but also by his own less heroic companion. He was sitting up with his back against a pile of tiles, and cursing with steady and terrible virulence.

In the express car, Daniel found his leader on his knees beside the big safe.

"It's a two-jacketed devil," said Lefty with regret, "and we'll have to try two explosions on her. Help me here a minute, kid!"

He had laid three sticks of dynamite on the top of the big safe, and now Daniel helped him to heave up the little way safe which stood near by and place it on top of the explosive, so that the force of the detonation would be turned downward.

Then, with a three-inch fuse lighted, Lefty and Daniel sprang from the car and lay flat on the ground at a little distance.

The effect of the explosion was tremendous. The roof of the long car lifted and fell again with a ridiculous simulation of a raised hat. The near side of the car burst out like the wall of a cardboard hat box kicked by a heavy foot. The very bottom of the car, massive as it was, was blown through, and clouds of heavy smoke and dust boiled up around it.

For some reason, the car was driven

forward a little by the blast, striking the tender and buckling that up into a foolish position, like a bucking horse. The coupling which held the express car to the nearest passenger coach at the same moment burst, and the whole line of cars jerked back a few feet with a groan.

For a brief instant, Daniel and Lefty remained lying on their faces, perforce, to let their brains clear from the shock they had received.

Then they stood up and ran to see the ruin.

They entered in an atmosphere still thick and dense and foul with the fumes of the smoke, and Lefty shouted with joy as he saw the whole corner of the safe blown off and a jagged, thick sheet of steel torn away down one side. The inner core of the safe had been little damaged, but with the destruction of the outer and probably thicker shell, they should have little difficulty in disposing of the inner one, also.

"The powder——" began Lefty.

Then he broke off and struck himself violently across the forehead.

"Kid," he exclaimed, "I've chucked everything! That's what made the explosion so big. By heaven, I left the rest of the sticks of powder lying there on the floor of the car when I jumped!"

So, for one brief, agonized moment, he stared at Daniel. Then his teeth clicked like a trap.

"There's only one thing to do—and that's to get out. Kid, start moving! Go for your horse!"

He followed his own advice and, leaping from the car, he hurried around the front of the engine and summoned Tyson with an imperious whistle.

The latter came at a lumbering run.

"You've got it?" he asked.

"I blew all the powder in the one shot and only fractured the outside skin of a damned double safe. Tyson, we got all our work for nothing. Let's get out of here!"

"By the——" began Tyson, and then changed to: "You're double-crossing me, and I know it!"

"Go look!" advised Lefty Dunlin. "I'll wait here for you, a minute. Only—take a glance around the fields, Tyson, will you?"

He pointed, and straight across the wheat fields, heading in from the Custis place, they saw a group of riders, half muffled in the dust which they raised from the standing crops through which they were galloping wildly.

There might be half a dozen—there might be ten of them. At any rate, there were enough to insure a desperate fight, and Lefty could not risk staying for a moment.

Tyson, however, gave only one glance at the approaching enemy; then he lurched around the engine and raced back toward the express car. Already it seemed the passengers were taking heart, for half a dozen of them, perhaps having sighted the approaching rescuers, were pouring down the steps of the coaches.

Daniel had accompanied Tyson, at a sign from his leader, and he saw the men from the coaches hesitate. He was sure that he detected the glimpse of at least two guns, and he fired a hundred yards above their heads.

That had the required effect. They tumbled back up the steps to cover, and Tyson and Daniel sprang into the express car.

The big man stood a moment and threw a wandering glance over the wreckage. Then he tore from the wall, where it was fixed in case of emergency, a massive ax. Furiously he struck at the half-shattered corner of the safe—the ax splintered under that tremendous blow, and the safe had received no damage whatever.

"We're done!' 'said Tyson savagely. "And a thick-headed fool has chucked a million for me! Damn his black heart for him! I'll talk with Dunlin——"

Still he hesitated, but Daniel plucked him by the sleeve and pointed.

Through the waving wheat they plainly saw eight riders coming at wild speed, and that sight cleared the enraged brain of Tyson. Still cursing, he sprang down from the car, and with the lighter-footed Daniel outracing him, they turned the line of the train again and found Lefty Dunlin waiting for them, mounted, their two horses held by the reins.

So they flung into the saddle and twitched their mounts around behind the section house, racing at full speed, not only because of the approaching riders, but because there was danger that men from the train would open on the rear of these manifest fugitives.

That was what happened. As they straightened away down the lane by which they had approached the station, revolvers began to rattle behind them, but the range was great. One good rifleman might have accounted for all three of the fleeing robbers; but in another moment they were out of range of those short guns—out of their range but by no means safe. Far, far away, dim and blue above the heat of the plain, they saw the mountains which must be their goal now, and between them lay many miles, and every mile was like a yawning canyon mouth before them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THREE HUNGRY WOLVES.

FOR five hard miles they rushed their horses across country to the verge of the Jackson River, where Lefty at last turned toward the mountains.

Tyson, whose horse had stood the long drive astonishingly well, in spite of the weight of his rider, urged that they should turn, instead, toward the towns; that direction would be least suspected, and the pursuit seemed so safely distanced that they had time to double on their trail.

The answer of the leader was short and to the point: "I used to do those things. Then they started working me by opposites. Now I'm back again, doing the simple things."

So he held on his way toward the mountains.

He had chosen the river side because, along it, there was a general scattering of woods, and through this region he made his companions spread out and ride at fifty or a hundred yards distance from one another, partly so that a passer-by might not see three men riding together, and partly because the drift of the fallen leaves would cover three separated trails, but hardly three which went side by side.

For a silent hour they worked their horses at a steady trot, until the dripping flanks and the lathered neck of Tyson's mount showed that he was far spent. Then Lefty called a halt and took a package from his pocket.

He opened it, and they saw that it consisted of a sheaf of bills. He counted the money and then said with a grim smile: "We hoped for seven hundred thousand. We got one per cent of that. But we won't split this in four sections. Here's your full third, Tyson."

He passed the bundle of money to Tyson, and a similar section to Daniel. The big man received his portion in silence and then counted it, casting a suspicious scowl at that which the leader was calmly stuffing into his wallet.

"If I'd thought," said Tyson, "that you were going to bungle the job the way that you have, I'd never have chanced everything on this deal, Dunlin. You've made a fool of me!"

"And of myself," answered Lefty cheerfully. "You're no harder hit than I am, or the kid."

"Which of the pair of you has a wife and kids to look to him?" snarled Tyson.

"Listen to me," said Lefty gently.

"When you start to be a crook, forget that you're a family man until you land in court. There it gets you a shorter sentence. Out here, it don't mean a thing."

Tyson made no answer except a muttered oath; then he flung himself from the saddle and began to loosen the girths to breathe his horse more quickly. Lefty and Daniel did the same.

They were in the core of the woods, but from that position they could look out through several narrow vistas which opened beyond the margin of the trees, and embraced wide stretches of the countryside, hill and house, and grove and field. And all was peaceful under the floods of brilliant sun; no one could have suspected that danger was riding through that region, but Daniel could guess that trouble lay ahead of them. So far, all had been too foolishly simple and easy. Surely the law could not be bearded with such impunity? For though he and Lefty had had their adventures before, even the smallest breaches of the law had brought danger swiftly on their trail; this greater venture would surely bring a greater threat.

But he said nothing and he asked no questions. Standing there beneath the trees, with the mottling shadows falling over them, and the horses steaming from their hard work, he looked back to that nervous self which had paced the chamber in the Lammer Falls hotel, gun in hand, ready for suicide. A foolish self, as it seemed to this newly confident Daniel, filled with life and the joy of existence. He smiled at what he had been and faced the future not with a smile, but with a broad grin. The burden of the time-weary Crossetts had fallen from him and he was glad that destiny had made him a Dunlin!

So thought Daniel at the very time when, as a proper hero, his mind should have been filled with misgivings, and with the reflection that robbery attempted is as bad as robbery accomplished, in the eye of the law and of the conscience. Indeed, there appeared to be but little conscience in Daniel, at this period in his odd career. He became a free bird, so to speak, and like a bird, he preyed upon his lesser neighbors.

They left that wood when the horses were breathed a little and rode out into a pleasant vale beyond, with a creek twisting through the center of it; and as they let their horses put down their heads to drink, a scattering half dozen of riders broke from the copse on the farther side and charged them like cavalry, with a shout.

Cunning Lefty did not turn straight back for the woods. Instead, he drove along the bank of the stream, with his two followers instinctively behind him, little as they could comprehend the maneuver. But it drew the attackers slantingly toward them and, following that line, they presently found themselves opposite an unfordable section of the creek, a steep-walled little ravine. They had opened a scattering fire, but from this Lefty now returned to the woods, and as he rode he could look back and see the posse in confusion beyond the water.

Finally, they swung to the side to gain the fordable bit of the stream; before they had gained it they had lost a mile and the race.

"Very hot," said Lefty, when he drew his horse back to a trot, and Daniel knew that he was not speaking of the weather. "The hornets are out in the sun, too; somebody's bothered their nest!"

He asked for no advice; he merely cast a glance at Tyson's staggering horse, and then he made for the Jackson River at the edge of the wood. When he reached it, he rode to the verge, scanned the farther bank, and then rode straight in. He threw himself from the saddle, and with his rifle held above the current, he was drawn

down stream and slowly toward the farther bank by his horse. The other two maneuvered in exactly the same fashion and luckily the three gained the opposite shore. For a cross-current hit them in midstream, and forced them rapidly on. Even with that assistance, this effort so exhausted Tyson's horse that all three men had to drag it from the water. They forced it into covert, but there it stood with braced legs and with hanging head. Manifestly it could not go on.

They stripped off the saddle. Lefty and Daniel rubbed down the poor beast to give it a better chance for life; then they threw the saddle into a thicket and turned the animal adrift. Their condition that instant became tenfold precarious. If the three hung together, they never could escape from the pursuit of horsemen when once sighted, and their only hope for safety lay either in scattering or else in trying to steal another horse, and that at once.

Tyson squarely faced his two companions; his face was white and his hands clenched.

"I suppose that I get hell, now," he suggested grimly. "I've got to go on foot, Lefty?"

"We have two horses," said Lefty coldly, "and we'll share them, turn and turn about."

There was not a word of thanks from Tyson, only a muttered: "Thank God you got that much decency in you!"

Evening was coming, and they were glad of it. They had thrown pursuit off the trail, for the time being, by the crossing of the river, but at any moment their enemies might pick up the way.

They dared not venture out of that shelter until the darkness gathered; and it was still the half light of the day when they heard an outburst of shouts and cheers near the river bank behind them. They glanced at one another, well knowing what they meant.

Some flying posse had crossed the stream and found the abandoned and spent horse there; now, keen with hope and confidence, they would push ahead to catch the three robbers, who could not be very far distant. Tyson was for bursting out of the wood at once and striving to make a copse a mile before them, but Lefty insisted that they remain where they were. A dense growth surrounded them, and they could not possibly be seen from a distance. So they stood at the heads of the horses to prevent a whinny which would betray them, and presently they heard the searchers crashing through the underbrush here and there about them.

It lasted for only a moment. Then some one began to shout indistinct words from the outer edge of the wood, and after that a body of fully a dozen riders poured out of the shelter and galloped at full speed across the slope toward the very wood to which Tyson would have had his companions flee.

Lefty chuckled as he saw them go.

"They're beat three times," said he. "Once by the horses, and twice by wits. Now it's time for luck to help us out. Tyson, do you think it's dark enough for us to go out?"

They agreed that it was, and that the need was imperative, for in a short time the searchers would raise the neighborhood and bring men in a host to swarm over all the ground. Tyson suggested a return across the stream and then an attempt to beat back up-country, but Lefty would not hear of it.

He urged them forward, and they marched slowly ahead, creeping snail-like across the open.

"Take this horse," said Daniel suddenly to Tyson. "We can make better time than this!"

He dropped to the ground and struck out at a swinging stride which he had learned from cross-country running in his college days. Never had his wind been better or his condition harder, and

they covered five miles of country, the horses trotting steadily behind him.

During that stretch, he watched the lights gleaming in the houses which stood here and there on the rich countryside, and it seemed to Daniel that they should try to approach one of those dwellings and get a horse; yet Lefty made no such suggestion. Only when Daniel fell to a panting walk, going up a hill with evident effort, Dunlin pressed up beside him.

"Can you hold out for another half mile?" said he. "We're near a bunch of the finest horses that ever stepped on iron. There's the Joe Pitcher place down there on the left—you can only see one light blinking through the trees around it. Can you run on that far, kid?"

Daniel nodded. All the way sloped gently and easily before him, and he sprinted ahead with a fresh power. So they went rapidly on. Utter night was overhead, sprinkled brightly with stars, and the rolling landscape around them was dotted with tufts of darkness and gleams of light where the houses of the farmers stood, surrounded by lofty trees.

So they came down on Joe Pitcher like three hungry wolves—starved for horseflesh!

Their own horses they left in the woods, the saddles on their backs, but the packs removed, and the packs they carried on toward the huge black outline of the barn.

"Inside," cautioned Lefty in a whisper, "you'll find some box stalls toward the front of the building. That's where Pitcher keeps his blood horses. They'll carry even Tyson and never quit. Come on, Tyson. Get in there with me. Kid, that house is full of people"—a door opened, and a noise of distant voices poured out as he spoke—"you go up there as quiet as a snake and hear what the gossip is. They'll be talking about us, I guess."

Daniel made no protest, though it seemed to him that their work should have been to get the fresh mounts and ride as fast and as far toward the mountains as possible. What questions were necessary?

However, he felt his own inexperience in these matters, and prepared for the dangerous work ahead of him by making sure of his two revolvers, and then moving straight for the rear of the dwelling, as the other two turned into the barn. He had not gone a dozen steps when the silhouette of a great dog showed before him, and the beast rushed at him with a furious snarling.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

A HIKING DOG

A NATIVE of Sydney, Nova Scotia, Paul Doucette, who is a landscape gardener by profession, recently reached New York on a walking trip from his home to Los Angeles. He was accompanied by a fox terrier named Friday.

The object of the journey is to enter the walking race from Los Angeles to New York which is scheduled for March, 1928, and for which twenty-five thousand dollars in prizes have been offered. The route of the present walk, taken for the purpose of getting into condition for the race, lay through Montreal and Toronto, across the border, and then east through the center of New York State. Since his walk, which began early in June, Mr. Doucette estimates that he has walked 3,200 miles, and the industrious Friday has the same distance to his credit.

From Ice and Flame

By Seth Ranger

Author of "The Round-Out," etc.

THE log hotel at Big Six sheltered the three things dearest to Bud Dagget's heart—his girl-wife Dorothy; his infant son, Little Bud, and his dog, Prowler. The girl and the dog did not trust each other. When Bud and Dorothy married, Prowler had taken the girl more or less for granted. Such dislike as she aroused in the dog's heart failed to flare. But with the arrival of Little Bud, Prowler's long-slumbering jealousy had been aroused to white heat. Unconsciously, Bud had neglected the dog for the baby, and the dog had failed to understand.

Bud had not realized the state of affairs at all, and Dorothy had been slow to notice the dog's attitude. The break had come one day when Bud was away. Prowler had snapped at the infant!

The threat had been followed by a moment's terrible silence—a moment during which the dog undoubtedly regretted and was deeply ashamed of his act. Then the girl had become a tigress. She had caught up a stick of wood and brought it down on the dog's head with crushing force. Carried away by the maternal protective instinct Dorothy had dragged the unconscious dog, heavy as he was, to a freight car at the station near by, thrust him in, and closed the door. Weeks passed before he made his way back to the man he loved. Then for days he lingered in the vicinity, guarding the place in his own way, patiently waiting for the man to leave the log hotel for one of his occasional hikes in the woods.

But Bud Dagget was busy. Prowler's opportunity came one day, after the summer season was over and the hotel closed, when Dorothy was alone with the baby. An escaped convict, seeking to revenge himself on Bud, had forced his way into the building, and Prowler had rushed to defend his master's loved ones. After that he was permitted to remain, but the mother always guarded her baby. Bud Dagget understood his wife's feelings. On the other hand, he understood dogs as it is given few to understand them. He did not expect Prowler ever to forget himself again. In fact, he was sure the dog had grown

fond of the baby, realizing it was something that must be protected.

Dorothy was as certain that a constant battle with jealousy raged in Prowler's being; that once more the terrible feeling might overcome him. Thus winter found them, mistress and dog suspicious of each other; the dog trying to win his way back to favor. If he could have but spoken and told what was in his heart all would have been well. But he could not speak; all he could do was to show it on his face, and only Bud understood what was there.

Bud Dagget's familiar step on the stairs aroused the dog this winter morning. Prowler leaped to his feet. For his master to appear at such an early hour meant an expedition; a renewal of the old companionship when man and dog had skulked the hills and mountains as hunted creatures, and laid the foundation of their mutual respect and love.

Prowler rushed forward, eagerly whining, a bundle of pent-up energy, always almost, yet never quite, under foot.

Bud tossed several logs into the great fireplace, then pulled on a pair of heavy wool socks and afterward his boots; then he stretched and yawned. The logs were crackling merrily, several living sparks arcked clear and glowed on the floor. Bud laughed quietly as Prowler, with deft movements of his paws, knocked the glowing coals either back into the fireplace or else extinguished them entirely. This was a trick he had taught the dog; a worth-while trick in a country where timber is king, and flame a constantly plotting revolutionist.

Master and dog breakfasted together, then, with a lunch in his light pack, Bud closed the door and stepped to the porch that ran the full length of the building. Icicles fringed the eaves, the snow was crusted but of not sufficient strength to bear a man's weight. Bud donned his snowshoes while Prowler indicated his delight by cutting a few capers. Then man and dog set forth together, leaving woman and child behind sleeping, as has happened countless times down through the ages.

This was to be a great day for Bud. Just the previous afternoon word had come of the formation of a new company in which he was to be given a block of stock. The old log structure that had served as a summer resort was to be abandoned. A new building was to take its place. There would be ski jumps, toboggans, and winter sports. It was planned to operate the inn summer and winter, with Bud as general manager, and Prowler, of course, as chief of guards.

Bud Dagget took to the ridges from the start, working along slowly, mapping different routes for winter hikes, making notations of conditions generally. One in particular interested him, with a snow-capped dome to lend background to the flat at its base. Then he noticed the absence of timber in places, as if some great adz had cleared everything from snowline to base in one mighty sweep of its blade.

"Slides," he muttered, "lots of 'em; still, perhaps they don't go clear down to the flat. I'll check up on the snowfall later and make allowances for unusual conditions."

He had crisscrossed all morning and was getting tired, so now he sought the easiest going and began the descent. Presently he found himself on an old slide. Winter snow had covered the lasting scars and made progress easy.

Tragedy seemed far removed from this peaceful scene; the snow-laden trees stood motionless, not a breath of air stirred; it was more like some wonderful painting than an existing scene. A bit of snow caved off several hundred yards above where Bud and

Prowler had worked onto the slide. The irregular block lingered a minute as if debating, then commenced its descent. It grew from a block to a mass, then gathering momentum, carried all before it, until the very vibration of the avalanche set the whole slide in motion.

Instinct warned Prowler a moment before the uproar startled the man, yet before he fled from danger, Prowler turned to Bud, then they both ran for the side, the dog running on top of the crust, the man frantically wallowing in his wake on snowshoes. While the main slide was yet above him, the snow started downward. Bud Dagget leaped desperately in an attempt to cross a crack. He landed on elbows and chest, held for a moment, then slipped in to his shoulders. When he again struggled upward, the edge caved off as ice breaks from the weight of a skater who has gone through.

Not a cry escaped the man, he just struggled in grim silence to do his best. For a moment Prowler watched, then, with a low whine of fear, he leaped in pursuit. Hardly had he touched the slide, when the mass from above caught him. For a moment Bud was forgotten, then as the dog was carried along on the crest of the mass, he remembered his master.

Presently the thundering echoes lessened, some distant peak faintly hurled back the final crash, then silence. Prowler placed his forepaws on the mass of ice and dragged his body clear, then he shook himself violently. He was trembling, but it was not from fear, for he knew not the meaning of fear, except for those he loved. He looked about for a moment, then ran again. The scent of his beloved master became stronger, then less, then it increased again as he had been carried along with the slide.

Prowler stopped at last, then commenced to dig. He was certain now as he followed a crack, perhaps three inches in width. His paws fairly flew, the snow shot between his hind legs in a stream. Nor did he pause until he had uncovered Bud Dagget's face. Low whines came from the Airedale as he licked Bud's cheeks in an effort to bring forth some movement, some sign of life. Once he stopped and barked frantically, then, some dread premonition gripping him, he voiced his misery to the world. It was the same desolate cry he had given when he was lost as a pup in the great forest, the same cry of Prowler, the miserable outcast. He had done his best, he needed help, for this tragedy that had come into his life was beyond him. He could not fight it—though he would give his life if need be, as when he faced the cougars—it was invisible; present, yet unseen.

Long he hesitated, long he licked the silent face, then he trotted slowly toward home. On the ridge he paused and looked down as if to assure himself that no danger lurked, that nothing had been left undone, then he broke into a tireless lope.

When Bud and Prowler were away from the log inn it was Prowler who invariably returned first, as if heralding good news. He might remain at Bud's heels or side for hours, but he always raced ahead at the last few yards.

Dorothy was standing in the doorway when Prowler broke through the timber. The first stabs of worry vanished at sight of the dog. Bud did not usually remain away so late when he started early. She put her hand down to pet the dog as he neared her, but to her astonishment Prowler turned around and started back. Twenty feet away he paused, and his eyes sent her a mute appeal. The stabs of worry returned with a rush. She cupped her hands and shouted, "Oh, Bud! Oh, Bud!"

The timber sent her voice back, "Oh,

Bud! Oh, Bud!" Nothing is so silent as a wood. The tall firs seemed to be hiding something she should know. Prowler returned, scorned her hand, and started back. As before, he stopped. She advanced a few steps, and the dog was off like a shot. "Oh, Prowler! What has happened, boy? Tell me!" The words of an old trapper returned to her, "Most anything can happen—and often does—in the big timber!"

She was dressing for the trail when Little Bud awakened. His demands were imperative, and since the affair with the cougar Dorothy Dagget had remained closer to him than ever. That tragic incident had forcefully brought home to her the helplessness of babies.

She was afraid of everything where Little Bud was concerned. The sickening realization came that she must leave him alone; that Big Bud needed her more than Little Bud. Fears leaped one upon the other into her mind until they towered like a black pyramid. Fear of cold, fear even of Prowler, fear of cats, of hunger, if she were delayed long. Little Bud might cough and have a bad choking spell; he might—— The fears were endless; her mind, worried over Big Bud, responding quickly to the unknown terrors.

As the minutes ticked by, she prepared frantically against everything. She might be gone for hours, so she gave Little Bud his bottle; then, when he fell asleep, she refilled it and placed it beside him. Then she tucked him in his crib, but remembering his tendency to kick everything off she pushed the crib into the lobby. Finally she heaped logs into the fireplace, placing them close together, so they would burn slowly. Then she kissed Little Bud softly, hungrily. Prowler was waiting at the door, and she stopped as a new thought came into her mind. "Old boy," she said, "you'll have to stay. I'm afraid to leave you with Little Bud, but I am more afraid to leave him alone. Oh, Prowler, boy, you won't harm him, will you? You'll watch him and protect him as you did that day the cougar came?" This gave her another thought. She examined all the windows to see that they were secure, then she thrust Prowler into the lobby, much against his will, and closed the door.

In her frantic state of mind, she even then debated. Perhaps, after all, Big Bud was all right, and if she did go away and something happened to Little Bud, Prowler in a fit of jealousy—or a—— She peered into the room and watched. Prowler was walking slowly toward the crib. This was an unusual place for it, it seemed. With an easy movement, he lifted his paws to the edge and peered in. Breathlessly she watched him inspect the infant, then turn away. Close to the fire he turned around several times, then lay down. "Oh, Prowler, I'm sorry," she whispered, "you're true blue. I've felt it, but—Little Bud." She hurried in and kissed the sleeping baby once more, then almost ran from the building.

In one of the storerooms she found a sled Bud used in hauling Little Bud about on nice days. It was rather small for a man to ride on, but she took it, knowing that Bud must be helpless or he would have been home before this.

She did not take the trail Bud had made that morning knowing that it doubtless meandered from place to place. Instead, she followed the direct route made by Prowler on his return. It was a heartbreaking course to follow. It led, as a crow might fly, almost straight. She panted from her efforts as she dragged the sled up steep draws, over tangled masses of down timber, and around rocky points where a slip meant death far below.

At times she ran, driven to the breaking point by the uncertainty. Devil's clubs tore her clothing and flesh when buried limbs tripped her snowshoes. It grew darker and she turned on a flash

light to keep Prowler's guiding footprints in view. A half hour later the tracks ended abruptly. Here the snow was heaped in disorder, with small trees, boulders and timber protruding from the mass. She climbed to the top and looked about, then she called. Her voice carried clear and far on the frosty air, but there was no answer, though she listened for a full minute. Then she commenced to search, sending the finger of white light into dark recesses, hopeful, yet fearful of what it might disclose.

Again she found Prowler's footprints and then, some distance beyond, a square of paper, weighted down with lumps of ice. A cry of relief escaped her, for a living man only could do this. It was the map Bud was making, and scrawled on it in big, unsteady letters she read:

Caught slide. Prowler dead. Broken leg. Crawling railroad. BUD.

"Poor boy," she whispered, "he thinks Prowler is dead."

Bud Dagget never made a move without thinking it over. He was crawling toward the railroad track, though that was across a ravine and up a steep mountain, but once there he stood a better chance of being found. It was the sensible move. She had no difficulty in following the strange track he left. Apparently, he was using the snowshoes on his hands, assisting his progress with his good leg, dragging the broken one. He was using to the utmost what strength he had.

Here he had gone over a mass of down timber, there he had crawled around a bad place; several times he had apparently fallen. Close to the ravine another track merged with Bud's and the sight set her heart pounding with a new fear. A cat had stalked from the brush and was following the injured man. She could see where its belly had brushed the snow as it slunk along. At another place it had paused and lashed its tail in impatience.

Dorothy remembered for the first time that she was unarmed. So must Bud be, for he could not very well drag a rifle along. That had doubtless been lost in the slide. Abruptly a scream broke the silence—the wild terrifying cry of a cougar infuriated. Dorothy Dagget's scream came unbidden; it matched the cat's in unchecked fury, as if it had come down through time from some parent of the cave era when mankind and animals were almost level in mentality. Both cries seemed to linger before dying away. Lesser forest folk crouched in silence. Just for a moment all was still, then, "Dorothy! Down here, girl!" came a voice.

"Coming, Bud!" She wanted to drop in her tracks and sob, but she fought back the weakness. "Coming, Bud!" she repeated.

Prowler slumbered before the fireplace. Twice he had moved back when the heat became intense. The pile of logs Dorothy had heaped on in an effort to warm the room for a considerable period of time was burning fiercely. From time to time Prowler opened a watchful eye, just one. The other was kept closed as if he could not spare it from sleep. Occasional sparks leaped into the room, tongues of flames shot outward and up, licked at the stones, and leaped back as the draft sucked them into the chimney. Prowler knocked the sparks, one by one, back into the ashes, then resumed his nap.

Presently Little Bud awakened. For a while he cried resentfully over this unusual neglect, then, discovering the bottle, he managed to work the business end into his mouth. He sucked away in silence, and when the last drop was gone, he continued to suck. After a while he gulped up a quantity of air, then heaved his bottle out of the crib.

It bumped and rolled on the floor, but being built with such treatment in view, did not break.

Prowler backed away from the fireplace again as a pitch pocket in one of the logs opened. The hot pitch ignited and blazed until the whole chimney roared with the flames. With a final snap the bottom log burned through, then the weight of those above forced the burned ends outward. For a moment the blazing mass held, then collapsed, sending a shower of sparks and embers into the room.

Instantly Prowler was on the alert. Never before had he seen so many sparks at one time. Fully half of them died and blackened, but enough remained to keep him occupied for several moments. One large snag, hurled from the mass, blazed up near the table. He barked in impotent fury and continued his efforts to knock the snag back into the fireplace, for his master had taught him that fire was dangerous to man and dog alike. Each time he actually touched the blaze his paw was singed. For once he was defeated; the man had not explained how burning snags were to be handled.

It worried him mildly at first; then, as the blaze increased and worked along the floor to the table, caught the covering, and ignited a number of newspapers, Prowler became frantic. The air above became so heavy with the ever-increasing strata of smoke that the hewn beams were no longer visible. Little Bud squirmed uneasily in the crib, and squinted before he voiced a protest. At his first deep intake of breath he choked on the pungent air and coughed, then squalled loudly. Prowler was running about now, seeking some means of escape, then, as the baby's crying increased, he returned to the crib and peered in. Little Bud regarded this furry friend through tear-filled eyes and his crying was reduced to sobs. Prowler knew that whenever this small person cried somebody immediately did something. Perhaps Prowler did not associate the smoke with the crying; perhaps he did. Some contend that dogs cannot reason; if not, then they do some remarkable things instinctively.

Prowler left the baby and sniffed at the different windows, then pawed at the doors. The flames increased swiftly now with a fair start, tongues leaped in every direction, licking the seasoned wood hungrily. But for the size of the lobby and the high ceiling, smoke would have overcome Prowler and Little Bud before this.

In sudden desperation, Prowler turned his attention to the largest window. He knew what glass was; it blocked progress, yet outside he could see snow and security from the red death now threatening him. He gathered his strength and bounded at full speed toward the window. The pane bulged outward and Prowler dropped to the floor. Again the dog raced the distance of the room and his body bunched, hurtling through the air, again he struck square in the center of the pane. The glass seemed to explode as it broke.

Prowler was safe, though half stunned, but the air revived him. For a moment he panted, looking at the smoke and flame with fearsome eyes. His kind had often met the red terror both in the wild and domestic state, and always they had fled, for to linger meant death. Within him a struggle waged between danger to himself and faithfulness to that which was his master's.

The struggle was brief, almost instantaneous, and loyalty to the death won. He leaped back through the opening and bounded along the floor. It was stifling, but the air currents, hot as they were, had partially cleared the room along the floor. Prowler's paws came up and he leaped to get into the crib, his hind legs and feet, braced

hard. For a moment he held, then the crib overturned.

At this seeming abuse, Little Bud's startled eyes opened wider than ever. He rolled to the floor, a compact bundle of indignation. Prowler's fangs nipped at his clothing and caught; a tongue of flame licked down silently. Prowler cried out sharply as he felt his hair singe down to the skin, then he snarled into the onrushing flames and caught up his burden once more.

The roar was deafening; embers were falling thickly; a column of fire was mounting into the heavens, sending flickering shadows among the silent firs; snow was melting and sliding from the steep roof; the sky became pink, then sullen red, until the whole mountain valley seemed aglow.

Dorothy found Bud across the stream, working his way painfully up the slope. "Oh, Bud!" she cried in relief.

Bud seemed to collapse for just a moment; his hands were numb, almost like clubs from the wrists down, though he had wrapped them well; his leg was swollen, his teeth set courageously. She took him into her arms and held him tightly.

"There! There!" he said at length, "I'm safe, but Prowler——"

"Prowler is home with Little Bud. He came in!"

"Oh, I didn't think he'd leave me; thought I saw tracks but wasn't sure. Guess he found it was too much for him and went for help; faithful old Prowler!"

"When that cat screamed——" she began.

"Your scream frightened me more, it came so unexpectedly," Bud answered. "The cat was afraid to tackle me, though he wanted to. Get the sled up the slope if you can. I can crawl that far—I guess."

She dragged the sled up to the right of way and placed it well away from the rails, then she returned. Foot by foot, Bud was dragging himself up the slope. She could help some, but not much; often he rested for several moments, and as he neared the top the rest periods became longer. She carried him literally on her shoulders the last fifty feet, and then collapsed. Presently she smiled. "Well, we've made it!" she said happily.

Bud crawled to the sled and she commenced to pull, aided by the down grade. Yet even this was difficult when drifts were encountered. Time sped, and presently she stopped.

"Bud!" she said in a queer voice, "it seems lighter."

Bud aroused himself from the stupor of exhaustion. "Yes, Dorothy, what ——" He stopped. Their eyes met and each read something terrible in the other's. "Yes, it's fire!" he said thickly. His hands clenched and tears trickled from his eyes as he realized his helplessness.

Dorothy's face was drawn as if something within her were being stifled slowly. She started for the slope, but Bud caught her coat. "Not there!" he said sharply, "it's death!"

But why consider death at such a moment? She dropped over the edge, and Bud crawled on his hands and knees and watched her, a flying figure of black on the white incline. Sometimes she vanished in a flurry of flying snow, again she reappeared. The timber below was scattered at this point, construction work having killed much of its growth. He saw her disappear among the stark trunks, then he waited. The glow seemed brighter, he even thought he could see flames above the treetops. "Prowler's there!" he muttered, and somehow found comfort. "Prowler's there! He'd go through fire, water, he'd die for me or mine, I know!" A great eddy of sparks lifted itself high above the treetops and Bud knew that the roof had fallen in.

A grinding of brakes behind him broke the silence; a speeder came to a stop alongside. "Hello, Dagget, what's the trouble?"

"Broken leg! Fire below!" Bud tried to explain everything.

"Yes, saw the glow and thought I'd drop down!"

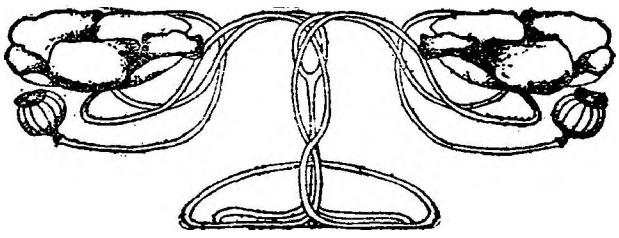
The newcomer was dressed in heavy clothing, but Bud recognized the voice of the night telegraph operator at the tunnel station. He loaded Bud onto the speeder and they slipped down the switchback at breakneck speed.

Bud had shoveled a path from the station to the inn. As the speeder came to a stop, Bud Dagget forgot his injury. He hopped along the path on his good leg and denied the pain in the other; though blinding flashes of light leaped before his eyes at times. "Prowler! Prowler!" he cried frantically. "Prowler!"

Only the glowing flames answered. Bud heard something off to the left and Dorothy burst into view. She had followed the icy stream down to gain time. She was drenched and her hands were bleeding. "My baby! My baby?" The last was a question. "Prowler! Prowler!"

Bud Dagget looked like one dead. The tunnel operator swallowed hard. "There's blood in the snow!" he muttered, as Bud Dagget took his wife in his arms. Then he leaped a drift and looked down. "Well, son of a gun!" he whispered. "Well, if it don't make me bawl! Come here!"

And the parents came and found strength in the contact of each other as relief threatened to rob them of their strength. Prowler looked up happily and thumped the snow with his singed tail. Little Bud blinked at them with smoke-inflamed eyes, and snuggled closer to Prowler. He was just a little bit cold. Then he recognized his mother and held out his arms. The telegraph operator went out to flag down No. 6 as Dorothy took Little Bud into her arms and Big Bud took—Prowler.



THE SOUTHWEST YIELDS UP ITS JAZZ

IT now develops that jazz is not as modern as some of us have believed, for there has recently been uncovered evidence in the Southwest to support a theory that maidens of a prehistoric day may have danced their version of the Charleston to the strains of a jazz orchestra. At any rate, Lyman Brown, an archæologist of Portland, Maine, tells of having recently unearthed musical instruments used by early exponents of the art of jazz.

Excavations made in the Mexico Valley, near Phœnix, Arizona, have revealed musical devices resembling the implements of modern jazz music.

Mr. Brown made the following statement: "We found horns made from animal tusks capable of producing weird moans like those of a saxaphone. Other instruments resembled the clarinet. We also uncovered an assortment of drums which would have been worthy of a modern trap drummer."

He said that the instruments would be turned over to the American Museum of Natural History.

A Cowboy in Print

By Roland Krebs

Author of "His Iron Hand," etc.

HAVE you got a package for me, Al?"

Every day for a week I heard that when I'd ride back to the R Bar R from town with the mail. The asker of the question was "Shorty" Nolan, the comicalest little cow-puncher in Montana and probably the most ardent Romeo in the West.

"Why are you so hopped up?" I inquired the last time he asked me. "Have you ordered a new face or something from another Eastern mail-order house?"

"It's a—uh—you'll see," he stalled, starting to walk away.

"Here it is, Shorty—whatever it is," I announced, digging a square box out of the mail sack.

Shorty Nolan pounced on the package like a starved dog finding a leg of lamb with mint sauce, and tore off the wrapping paper.

I'd like to fell off my horse—which us ex-Easterners are apt to do any time anyway without no great shock, even—when I saw it was a camera.

"Ah," I kidded him, "you're expecting a new tooth and you want to record it for posterity."

Shorty blushed till you couldn't have told him apart from an auctioneer's flag. "Oh, I always sort of wanted a camera, sort of," he said awkwardly.

He couldn't fool me, though. I didn't need a set of blue prints to show me that Shorty was trying to steal a march on "Slim" Evers, the best-looking guy of the R Bar R outfit. Him and Slim are both all kicked in about Alberta Pritchard, the school-teacher over in Snake Hollow, and Shorty suspects, not without grounds, that if either of these goofy courtiers are making an impression on Alberta, why, Slim probably is the one—and I don't think Slim is going over so big at that.

It was as plain to me as a goat's hips in the moonlight why Shorty had sent East for a camera. I don't think the good Lord has got around yet making any woman who's not vain enough to enjoy having her pictures made. There may be a few holdouts in Hollywood, but all and all I think

most girls are right pleased when some dude steps up and asks them to please face the camera and show toofies.

And another thing: neither Shorty nor Slim, as far as I know, had any pictures of Alberta to nail up on the wall or carry over their left lung.

Well, later that day Shorty came to me, with a big bulge in the pockets of his overalls, and said: "Al, would you mind posing for me, letting me make some pictyours of you?" being careful not to get ungrammatical and call them "pitchers."

"I don't mind, Shorty," I laughed, "but you're not going to try to make me believe that you sent East for this camera just so you could make pictures of me, are you?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said, "I think——"

"Well, I know," I informed him. "You want to make pictures of Alberta, but you want to wait till you make good ones. So, you want to practice on me. Go ahead."

For a half an hour Shorty shot snaps of me—at least, he thought they were—holding his camera in one hand and an open instruction book in the other till he had filled in all ten exposures. Then he got aboard of his pony and rode lickety-split to town, where he persuaded Karl Schultz, eldest son of the general storekeeper and the county's one film finisher, to get right to work on the roll.

When he rode slowly back to the R Bar R, Shorty was wearing the sour, downcast face of a guy who's just eaten a platter of razor blades.

"How did they turn out, Shorty?" I asked him.

"Rotten," the half-pint growled. "Either that camera ain't any good or else that Schultz feller don't know anything about developing. They were all pitch black. Looked like I had tried to photograph the inside of a tunnel. The Schultz boy tried to tell me I had the wrong 'stop' and the wrong 'bulb' adjustment. What's he talking about?"

Shorty and I got out the book that came with the camera and we studied over it for an hour. Finally we found the trouble. He had monkeyed with the box and set it for the time exposures, then tried to make snapshots, so that all his film was exposed to the light all the time it was in the camera.

Next day Shorty put in another roll and practiced some more on me. He made one swell portrait of my knees, another picture managed to get in just the top of my hat, a third showed the tip of my elbow, and the rest was watering trough. His second roll was some better, but not much.

In a week, though, Shorty turned out to be about as good an amateur photographer as you could expect, and I told him I thought he was about ripe to try his stuff on Alberta.

So, one afternoon, after making a date with her, he sprinkled water on his hair and combed it slick, shaved twice over instead of once, scrubbed his paws, and otherwise tidied up a bit.

Then, smiling all over like a kid with a new cur dog, he galloped off, his camera bulging from his hip pocket.

About fifteen minutes after Shorty had gone, Mrs. Durbin, the foreman's wife, came to the bunk-house door and asked Slim Evers, Shorty's hated rival, if he would be so kind as to ride over to "Ma" Dooly's, with whom Alberta boards over at Snake Hollow, with some breast of chicken, chicken broth, and other knickknacks for Ma, who was on the sick list.

Slim said he'd be delighted, and me, not having anything better to do, decided to ride along with Slim.

"Say, Slim," put in "Bucky" Durbin, the foreman, "I wish you'd take that new pony I got in a trade from old Tod Jeffries and ride him over to the Hollow. That critter needs a little dis-

cipline. He thinks his object in life is to eat hearty and take it easy. Look out that he doesn't throw you. He gets nasty sometimes."

"Sure," Slim told the boss. "I'll put him in his place."

Slim's got a way with horses.

I was all ready to cast off at once, but Slim stopped me with: "Just give me a minute, Al, to slick up a trifle. We might—uh——"

"We might bump into the schoolteacher and you want to look civilized," I finished for him.

I want to say that Slim did a man-size job of slicking up.

From a big, square box he got out a new five-gallon hat that I hadn't suspected he'd bought. From another box he got out a new pair of boots, and from a third box he took—steady, now; hold onto the arms of your chair!—a noisy purple shirt that I guess must have been color-schemed by a guy who designs movie theater lobbies.

"Has DeMille sent for you—or what?" I asked him.

"It is a little gay, ain't it?" he grinned, togging himself out with very special care.

"Gay?" I said. "Boy, you're the kind of a riot that the National Guards get called out for."

Slim Evers cocked his new hat at a swank angle and got onto Rubber Ball, the new, bouncing pony from Tod Jeffries.

Our get-away was delayed about fifteen minutes while it was decided whether Rubber Ball or Slim was boss. Rubber heaved and bucked and pitched and stomped till he was foamy, but he couldn't unhorse Slim. Finally, the pony quieted down, Slim patted him a few times and talked sweet and yet sharp to him, and all of a sudden the beast got real docile and just as much as said to the long cow-puncher, "You're the boss."

With that we trotted along, the pony behaving like the kind of a Shetland that takes little children for rides.

"Better watch him, Slim," I cautioned.

"Oh, he's all right now, Al," Slim said, stroking the nag on the neck.

When we were a quarter of a mile from Ma Dooly's place, I spied two ponies standing beside the road, and a few feet farther on were Alberta and Shorty. The little fellow was taking her picture, of course—and I want to say she was some picture to take, too; her smile flashing fit to outshine the sun and her black hair playing tag with the gentle wind.

"Well, well; there come Mr. Crews and Mr. Evers," Alberta said as we trotted up.

Shorty turned around and gave us the kind of gladsome looks people usually reserve for tax collectors and bailiffs come to dispossess them.

"Why, Mr. Evers!" the schoolteacher busted out to Slim after getting a better look at him—and that look had a little admiration stirred into it, too. "What a fetching costume you have on! Doesn't he look as though he had stepped out of the pages of a Western novel, Mr. Nolan?"

"Uh-huh," grumbled Shorty, as enthusiastic as a guy who's just heard a jury come in and say he was guilty of burglary and larceny.

"So you like my new togs?" Slim asked her, grinning with the satisfaction of seeing her interest transferred from Shorty and his picture box to his own self.

"I think they're very becoming," Alberta went on thoughtlessly. "What a good-looking pony you have, too! Is he hard to ride?"

"He ain't—isn't very well broke—broken," Slim told her. "Rubber Ball's a mite headstrong and bucksome yet, but then I don't have no—any trouble staying in the saddle."

There was just a little bragging in

the way that last crack was got off, and Shorty noticed it, too, as I could tell from the way his nose wrinkled and he sniffed.

"Oh, Mr. Nolan!" Alberta exclaimed suddenly, clapping her hands together and facing Shorty. "Don't you think it would be nice to make some pictures of Mr. Evers in his romantic costume and with this perfectly beautiful horse?"

"Sure, you bet!" agreed Shorty with a smile that he must have fished out of some vinegar vat. What he meant to say, "Aw, you must have gone daffy!"

"Let's make the first one of Mr. Evers seated on the horse," the school-teacher said. "Snap it from the side, Mr. Nolan."

Slim straightened up in his saddle and sat on Rubber Ball like General Braddock at Antietam.

"I got him," Shorty said after snapping the shutter. He started to drop the camera into his carrying case with a that's-all air.

"Now shall we try one from the front?" Alberta asked him.

"Sure thing," Shorty said, getting his camera out again.

"I think a snap of Mr. Evers standing at Rubber Ball's head, rubbing his nose, would make a dandy, don't you, Mr. Nolan?"

Then Shorty made an exposure of Slim with an arm around the nag's neck—and how Shorty enjoyed it!

"You must promise me, Mr. Nolan," Alberta told Shorty, "to send me a print of every picture you make of Mr. Evers."

"I will sure," the poor little runt told her.

The whole thing was making me sick. Somehow, I can't yet understand how Alberta Pritchard, as nice a little lady as I've ever met, could have been so thoughtless. I guess she was just so struck with this good-looking Slim's rag-out that it never occurred to her how she was hurting poor little Shorty.

I say it was making me sick. I'm a tender-hearted guy. I didn't want to hang around there.

"Hey, Slim," I interrupted, "it's getting almost past Ma Dooly's chow time. I'll just run on down there with the grub Mrs. Durbin is sending over while you folks wind up your picture-making, what?"

Slim thought it was a good idea and handed over the groceries. It was agreed that I would overtake him, he inviting himself to ride along with Shorty and Alberta for a half a mile in the direction back toward the R Bar R, on account of the teacher was going to have supper with the Purdues. Ma's daughter was taking care of the old lady.

I sat around for a half hour or more listening to Ma Dooly complain about "my operation" and then struck off back. When I got to the place where Alberta, Shorty, and Slim had been "on location," so to speak, there was no sign of them. Nor did I overtake either of the two fellows all the way back to the R Bar R.

Both of them came into the bunk house late at different times during the night and both were out early, so I didn't see them until near to evening of that following day.

When I did see them again, I saw plenty. It was one of those there things that I believe you call "strange meetings of Fate."

Shorty and Alberta—Shorty all in smiles and the school-teacher laughing gayly—were riding down the road together alongside of the R Bar R shacks. Slim happened to be approaching them from the other direction.

After they'd met and said how-do-you-do, I saw the school-teacher take an envelope out of her pocket and show Slim what apparently were the pictures they had taken. Alberta

laughed merrily all the while. Even from a distance I could see Slim's face get red. He handed the pictures back finally and maybe I only imagined it, but it seemed to me his hand shook. He suddenly raised his hat awkwardly and rode hell-bent-for-election down the road and away in several clouds of dust.

With Shorty Nolan still grinning all over and the school-teacher still laughing, those two trotted off in the direction that takes Alberta home.

Slim never did show up that evening, but along about ten Shorty came into the bunk house, happily whistling that his bonny lay over the ocean.

"Now tell me the whole story," I invited him, seeing anyway how anxious he was to do it.

"Haw, haw!" Shorty began. "Al, 'member the school-teacher asking yesterday if Slim found that pony hard to ride?"

I did.

"And 'member him saying the pony was headstrong, but how he had no trouble—him being such a swell horseman and all—staying in the saddle?"

"Yes."

"One more thing you may remember —about Alberta making me promise her I'd give her a print of every picture of Slim that I made?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes; go on!" I urged.

"Well," Shorty went on, "about a mile this side of the Purdue place, where Alberta et supper last night, Rubber Ball started to act up on Slim —Slim, the swell horseman that never had no trouble staying in the saddle.

"With no warning and for no reason at all that pony suddenly shot forward like as if he came smack out of a cannon. It took Slim so by surprise. Gee, I wish the school-teacher had have been there to see it!—that for some time he had plenty to do to keep from falling off, much less he should try to rein in the pony.

"You know 'Rusty' Rohlfing's place? Well, you remember, then, that he's got a pigpen right up against the fence along to one side of the road, where his big sow, Bessie, and her seven little piglings live. Know how oozy everything is in that pen?"

"A mud sea," I suggested.

"Exactly," said Shorty and laughed loud again. "Well, sir, Rubber Ball ran like blazes straight for that fence, and, when he got to it, he stopped like he had four-leg brakes. He stopped on a dime—and Slim, who never had no trouble staying in the saddle—went plumb over the pony's head and into the ooze across the fence, where Bessie and her family flew in eight directions."

"And where were you?" I asked Shorty.

"Right there on the job!" he cackled. "The sun was plenty bright and at my back. I had my bulb timed for a fiftieth of a second—for a action picture. Just as Slim shot over the horse's head and the fence I snapped him."

"You must have got a swell picture."

"A swell picture?" Shorty busted out. "Al, I got several swell pictures. There's one—here, look at it! Look at Slim a-sitting there in that black, muddy, oozy ooze? Does that look like a purple shirt? Does that look like a new hat? Does he look like he stepped out of a novel? Look at that face! Look at that mud! See this one, here, Al. That was the funniest thing! When Slim stood up, Bessie was awful mad. She figured he aimed to hurt her baby pigs and she charged—charged on Slim from the rear and right through his legs. Look at him a-settin' there on her back like he was horseback riding."

"Alberta made you promise to give her a print of each picture you made of Slim, didn't she?" I laughed.

"Yes, sir; she did!" Shorty howled

joyously. "And us Nolans always keeps our word, Al. I gave her a print of each—true to the promise she exacted from me. Do you know what she told Slim this evening?"

"What?" I inquired.

"The school-teacher told Slim he ought to go into the films. She said she thought he could make some awful funny pictyours."

Shorty whistled him a little tune and kept time by slapping himself on his stomach.

"Al," he finally told me, "I think the camera is the greatest invention that was ever invented."

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Red-winged Starling

THE red-winged starlings, also known as marsh blackbirds, do not suffer as do some other birds when winter sets in. They usually migrate to the South, but if they stay North, they find plenty of food in the fields, gleaned from fragments of corn, wheat, and other grains, so that what is considered a "dull season" in bird lore, is a continuous holiday for the starling.

Not much is said in favor of the starling for he drives out more popular birds from their haunts and makes a great deal of noise in doing so. Then, too, he is apt, like the crow, to devastate fields of young, growing corn, if not interfered with. However, the starlings do destroy vast quantities of the grubs and larvæ which are the insidious enemies of the wheat and other grain fields.

The male starling is very handsome, being coal black, with a smart touch of orange and yellow on the shoulder of each wing. The female represents the drab little housekeeper, for she is of a dark-brown color, seamed with a yellowish gray. Her breast is of a grayish brown shade, streaked with a darker brown. Doubtless her coloring serves as a very good protection, and she needs this protection, for her nest is built in low places, near a swamp or meadow, sometimes in a thicket of alder bushes, and not infrequently on the ground.

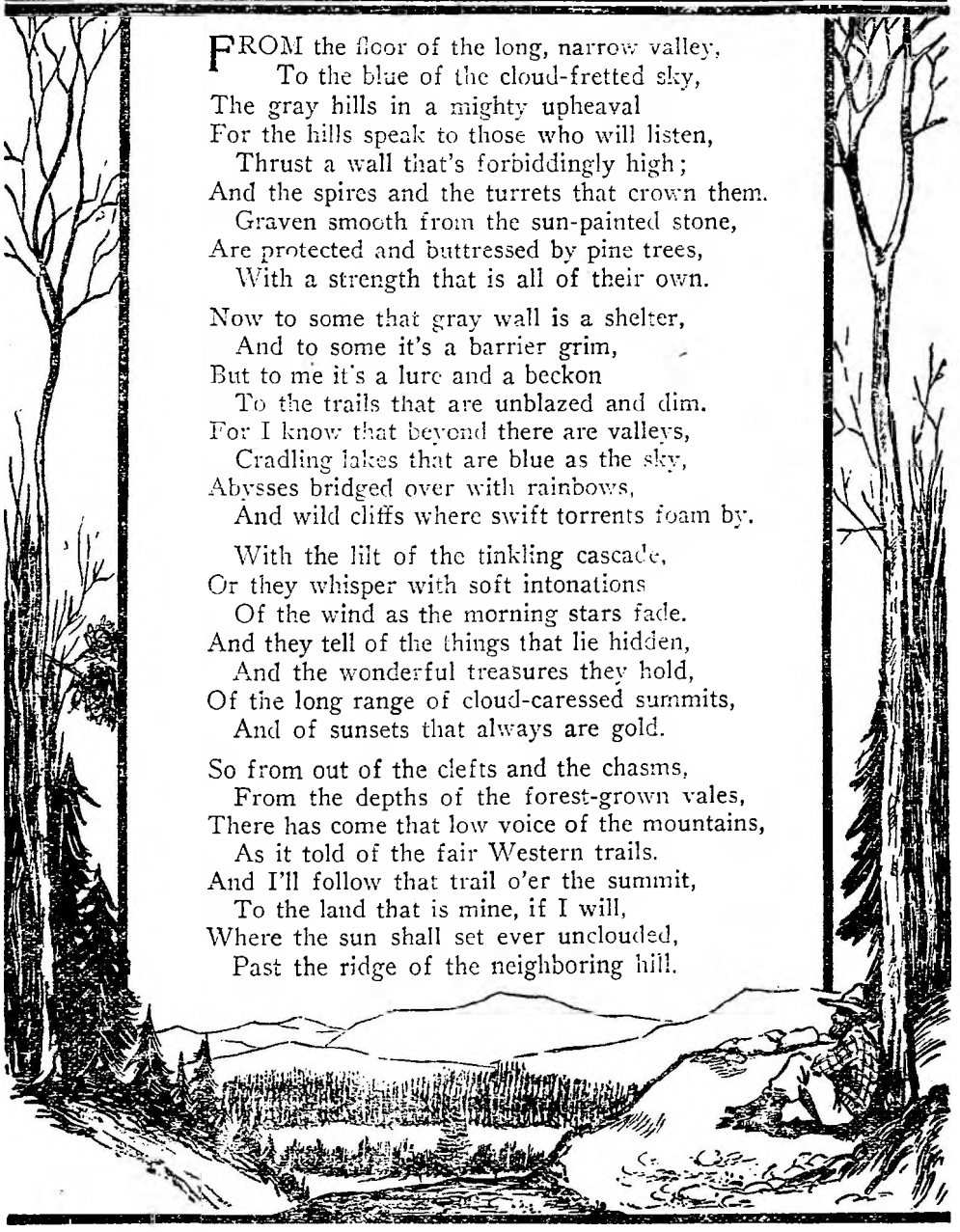
The male bird, for all his splendid coloring, is not too proud to help his mate and guard her from harm during the brooding season. In a nest composed of twigs and grasses, the mother bird lays five eggs of a pale-blue color, marked with tinges of purple, and long, straggling lines and dashes of black. While his mate is sitting and after the young are hatched, the male bird exercises great care and precaution, exhibiting violent symptoms of alarm and apprehension on the approach of any human being. In case the young are taken from the nest, the starling assumes a very dejected mien for several days after, flying disconsolately about the place, and generally rebuilding a new home in that neighborhood.

It is estimated that the good the starlings do is greater than the damage, when it comes to feasting on the farmers' crops. They are very persistent fellows and when driven from one spot merely settle down in another place near by to continue their nefarious habits.

Often several nests will be found rather close to each other, and it has been noticed that the young keep to themselves, never more than one or two adult birds being seen with them. For the first few months, the young starlings resemble the female bird, but as winter approaches the males become more and more pronounced in coloring until they are full fledged, when they prove to be fully as handsome as their father.

Beyond the Divide

By Hugh V. Haddock



FROM the floor of the long, narrow valley,
To the blue of the cloud-fretted sky,
The gray hills in a mighty upheaval
For the hills speak to those who will listen,
Thrust a wall that's forbiddingly high;
And the spires and the turrets that crown them.
Graven smooth from the sun-painted stone,
Are protected and buttressed by pine trees,
With a strength that is all of their own.

Now to some that gray wall is a shelter,
And to some it's a barrier grim,
But to me it's a lure and a beckon
To the trails that are unblazed and dim.
For I know that beyond there are valleys,
Cradling lakes that are blue as the sky,
Abysses bridged over with rainbows,
And wild cliffs where swift torrents foam by.

With the lilt of the tinkling cascade,
Or they whisper with soft intonations
Of the wind as the morning stars fade.
And they tell of the things that lie hidden,
And the wonderful treasures they hold,
Of the long range of cloud-caressed summits,
And of sunsets that always are gold.

So from out of the clefts and the chasms,
From the depths of the forest-grown vales,
There has come that low voice of the mountains,
As it told of the fair Western trails.
And I'll follow that trail o'er the summit,
To the land that is mine, if I will,
Where the sun shall set ever unclouded,
Past the ridge of the neighboring hill.

Pages from the Old West

By Larry Reddington

IN its heyday, in the sixties, Whisky Gulch, located in the John Day Canyon, in the remote Oregon country, was a roaring metropolis of six thousand souls. Portland, present metropolis of the Northwest, in that day could boast of less than two thousand, and was little more than a stump-dotted clearing in the mighty virgin forest that bordered the Willamette River.

To-day, Portland has a population in excess of three hundred and fifty thousand and mighty ships from purple ports across the world discharge freight hard by a business section builded of towering concrete and steel.

Whisky Gulch is Canyon City, a small cluster of ancient buildings on the banks of the chuckling creek from whose stream-bed, long ago, placer miners extracted fifteen million in dust, nuggets, and pumpkin-seed gold.

Thus, time readjusts values and changes the facts of the past. The wilderness is no more. Whisky Gulch is gone. Only a few ancient buildings among the newer structures of Canyon City and a hoary cemetery whose number of graves, marked and unmarked, is out of all proportion to the size of the present community, remain as witnesses of a lurid page in the history of the frontier.

Could those ancient buildings tell what they had seen, or those hardy men who sleep so peacefully in the ancient cemetery above the now quiet canyon, reveal their story, it would be a colorful epic. But the crumbling walls are dumb and the grave shrouds its secrets. Only in the memory of a handful of old-timers scattered throughout the Northwest, dozing on sunny thresholds of their grandchildren's homes, and placidly hoping to "hold out till fall," do those romantic days live again, days when thousands of men toiled on the rocky slopes of Whisky Gulch, when the roar of the giant eating into the face of the bank drowned out the myriad ringing of picks and grating of shovels, when raw gold was the medium of exchange in store, saloon, and dance hall, and the .44 Colt was king.

Yet, oddly enough, these fragmentary memories, while they leave many gaps in the picture, cover a wide field. The old-timer has forgotten his hardships,

the unbelievable things that he himself has done, his days of toil, the lurid nights at Whisky Gulch, gun play, claim jumping, hanging. He recalls these things only as incidents. They do not loom large in his life. But those incidents into whose fabric are woven human qualities of prejudice, humor, or pathos, he relates chucklingly and vividly, as one speaks, not of a half century ago, but of yesterday.

There was, for example, the grave of Ludwig Kleinschmidt, and the manner in which his good wife, Bertha, paid her respects to his memory.

Whisky Gulch, when Ludwig Kleinschmidt established the High Grade Restaurant and prepared to cater to the wants of hungry miners, was some hundred and fifty miles from the nearest settlement, and that a boat-landing on the Columbia River two hundred miles from the ocean. Such an isolated metropolis was a world unto itself. Men speedily learned to know each other, to delve beneath the surface and appraise accurately whatever enduring qualities of character the individual could number among his assets. They were neither fastidious nor snobbish in their appraisal. Nor was it necessary for public opinion to be unduly harsh toward the weak and unfit. For these, in that day and environment, and under the operation of the iron law of the survival of the fittest, were speedily eliminated.

Ludwig Kleinschmidt was a burly Teuton, hard of feature and blunt of speech. He asked no favors and contracted no debts. When others talked, he listened, saying nothing. When his opinion was asked, he gave it, and his words were endowed with weight. He was a good cook.

His one ambition he revealed to no man. Only his good wife, Bertha, knew that deep in his taciturn heart he dreamed, after saving a competence, of returning to the Fatherland. There, in his native village of Schlossbauern—which being interpreted, means the "castle builders"—he would spend his declining days in the shadow of an awning overloking the sun-drenched streets, sipping beer from a giant stein and watching flaxen-haired, healthy children playing in the shadow of the castle wall.

When he died at Whisky Gulch, his funeral was one of the most impressive in the history of that roaring metropolis, where men were too much concerned with the business of life to pause overlong in the presence of death. Two thousand men stood with bowed heads on the crest of the hill above the canyon as the rough pine casket containing the mortal remains of Ludwig Kleinschmidt passed from view into the grave. Only the good wife, Bertha, knew that in the far-off Fatherland, across the world, an empty stein would be placed on a smoke-blackened shelf where castle builders forgathered.

Following the funeral, the business of the camp went on. A few short days and it was all but forgotten. Bertha Kleinschmidt took charge of the High Grade and the establishment catered as efficiently as before to the needs of hungry miners. She was a rosy-cheeked, flaxen-haired woman, amply proportioned, and with round, blue eyes that, like placid pools, gave no hint of depth of emotion below.

She was a good cook. Better even than Ludwig. A few of the more observing remembered that for his own table Ludwig had turned to delicacies prepared to his personal taste by his good wife, Bertha. Thus, the business of the High Grade did not suffer from the passing of its proprietor.

It had been thought at first that Bertha would not tarry long in Whisky Gulch following the funeral. It was known that Ludwig had saved a neat amount. He was thrifty and left no

debts. But when close friends approached her and discreetly suggested that she could live in comfort in some more favored region, she had fixed her mild blue eyes upon them with a kind of faint surprise. "No," she would say in her quaint accent. "I vill stay. Ludwig is near by."

Lonely men approached her at various times with diffident and bashful proffers of matrimony. For the flaxen-haired Bertha, her cheeks rosy with health, was exceedingly good to look upon, and she was an excellent cook withal. But she would refuse them gently, shaking her head. "No," she would say. "You are a good man. You are my friend already. But I have been Ludwig's frau." To herself alone, she would add, *"Fuer Zeit und Ewigskeit."* Which, being interpreted, means "Always."

The good Bertha employed help at the High Grade. This enabled her to make daily trips to the grave of Ludwig. No spot in the cemetery was better cared for. She worked the ground in a skillful manner and sent away for seeds so that flowers that Ludwig had liked might grow and blossom above his grave.

This business of sending away for seeds was no simple project in that day and region. They must come across the continent, for the trading post of the frontier carried nothing but essentials. Thus, an order for seeds of flowers that grew in riotous profusion in far-off Schlossbauern must go by stage northward to The Dalles on the Columbia River, by river boat to Portland. There it must wait for a deep-sea sailor to carry it around the Horn. Some time might be saved by the southern express route across the continent, but months must elapse ere returns could be expected.

Bertha Kleinschmidt sent away the letter ordering the seeds in the late spring. Through summer and fall, she kept the plot spaded, and waited. Winter came, and only dark crosses were visible against the snow on Cemetery Hill. But when the snow was gone and the last frost was steaming from the ground, Bertha was first to get her plot in order. On a day in late spring, the seeds arrived.

It was a great day for Bertha Kleinschmidt. Close friends marked her placid and contented manner when she descended that day from the cemetery. Ludwig would rest easier now, no doubt. Deep within her, she felt a great comfort. Ludwig had never seemed nearer. She had but to close her eyes and there he was, the big burly bulk of him, sitting at his table, looking across at her with that faintly quizzical expression in his stern eyes that was his sole outward mark of affection. "Well done, Bertha," she could almost hear him say. "It is like Schlossbauern, those flowers."

It happened that no one gave much heed to Bertha during those days when the small plants emerged from the carefully worked ground above Ludwig's grave. Thus, during that period, if she had descended into a bitter valley of disappointment, she had done it alone, for no one marked it. But there were among the citizens of Whisky Gulch certain persons who had been themselves gardeners of repute back in gentler regions of their boyhood. These, pausing at Ludwig's grave to observe Bertha's handiwork, shook their heads and whispered among themselves. No one laughed, remembering those long months that she had waited so patiently for the seeds to cross the continent.

But presently a committee of the good citizens was formed. It was a cruel task they had before them. They approached Bertha on a sunny afternoon as she started for the cemetery, and told her the truth. Through one of those unfortunate mistakes of the insignificant type that sometimes wreck

hearts and kingdoms, a clerk had made the wrong shipment. It was not flowers that were growing on the grave of Ludwig Kleinschmidt, but cabbages.

They told her gravely, the committee, and each in his own heart had steeled himself against the disappointment that must inevitably be revealed in Bertha's blue eyes. But she smiled upon them placidly. It might have been that she believed the mistake to be an omen under whose dictates she would abide. It might have been the ancient courage of the castle builders.

"Of course," she said, in her quaint accent. "They are cabbages. I knew it already. We will let them grow and I will keep it spaded all the while. Ludwig would like it. He told me once, 'Bertha,' he said, 'there is nobody could make kraut like you. We must get some cabbages.' So, since cabbages were sent instead of flowers, we will let them grow, my friends. Ah, that Ludwig, he liked his kraut!"

The Magic o' the Mojave

By James Edward Hungerford

THE desert holds a charm fer me,
A sort o' magic spell;
Out here my heart jest longs to be
An' here I love to dwell.
There's somethin' 'bout this lonely land
That grips me, so it seems;
I love to roam the silver sand,
An' dream my golden dreams!

I love to git my prospect pack,
Some grub, an' campin'-truck,
An' with it on my burro's back
Strike out to try my luck.
I hit the trail at early dawn—
The ol' Mojave calls,
An' I jest travel on an' on
Until the twilight falls.

At evenin' when the sun sinks red
To shine on other lands,
I spread my little blanket bed
Upon the silver sands;
An' then I lay me down to rest,
Plumb weary from my hike,
An' dream about the Golden West,
An' *gold*—a lucky strike.

I suffer hardships, here an' there,
As I go down the trail;
O' trails I guess I've had my share—
But life is never stale.
The ol' Mojave calls to me,
Its silver sands to roam,
An' here I guess I'll always be—
To me it's home, sweet home.

Miner's Potlatch

By J. A. Thompson

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE desires this department to be of real assistance to all who are interested in the practical side of mining. Questions pertaining to field conditions, mining equipment, mining territories, mining laws, prospecting and general geology will be answered.

Address all communications to J. A. Thompson, mining expert, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

IN searching for copper ores the modern trend among wise prospectors is to pay particular attention to all indications of extensive low-grade deposits rather than to pass them up on the chance of finding smaller deposits containing comparatively few tons of richer mineral. Relatively few high-grade copper-bearing deposits are being worked in the United States at present. Most of the great producers, constituting by far the major portion of the country's copper tonnage, are working in large ore bodies carrying small copper values to the ton. Yet fabulous fortunes in profits and dividends have been realized in copper.

The United Verde Copper Company at Jerome, Arizona, has paid well over seventy millions in dividends, and the near-by United Verde Extension has similarly paid out approximately thirty million dollars.

Copper is well worth searching for.

An additional incentive is offered the copper prospector in the fact that gold and silver often occur in appreciable values as mineral associates of many copper deposits.

In prospecting for copper veins both float ore, that is, pieces of rock which have been dislodged from their original position in the rock formation of the neighborhood, and stained rocks are important indications warning the prospector of the possible occurrence of copper in the regions in which they are found.

Concerning the green stains which are almost always connected with copper deposits in the mind of the prospector, two things should be remembered. First, be sure that the stain is a true mineral coloration and not a vegetable stain produced by mosses or microscopic fungi. In the second place, do not lose sight of the fact that a very minute quantity of copper may discolor an extensive area, so although the stain may indicate the presence of copper, it is a purely qualitative indication, and no inferences should be drawn concerning the quantity of copper that may lie in the region of the discoloration.

Surface deposits, or outcrops of iron oxides—gossan—are frequently indications of copper-bearing ore at depth, the copper having been leached out of the ore at the surface as the gossan was formed.

Copper ores in commercial quantities have been found in the United States in more than thirty States and Alaska. Among them are Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The ores occur in many different rock formations: in the igneous rocks, such as the granites; in shale and other sedimentary rocks; along the contact zones in conjunction with limestone.

Some of the largest copper-ore bodies such as are found in Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, are considered by geologists to have been formed in the following manner. A mass of molten rock, usually of the granite family, works its way to the surface through the stress of the gigantic internal forces of the earth. As the upper portion hardens, it cracks. Liquids from the interior of the earth—steam and metal-bearing solutions—bubbling through the molten rock reach the surface and fill the cracks formed by the cooling of the rock mass. Thus a lean copper-ore deposit is first formed.

Later, surface and rain water soak in, dissolving the copper that has been deposited at the top, and carrying it in solution down to depth again. When this down-flowing solution strikes a place where conditions are such that the water can no longer retain the copper in solution, it is redeposited in the cracks and crevices of the mother rock. This copper added to the copper already deposited from the upgoing steams makes a much-richer ore in the neighborhood of this second deposition—or so-called secondary enrichment. Thus, though there may be little more than indications of the presence of copper upon the surface, depth may uncover a valuable zone of enrichment somewhere along the vein. In searching for the existence of an enriched ore under the leached surface, the prospector should examine any quartz stringers carefully. If the quartz shows cavities which look as if they might have been once filled with pyrites or sulphides, the probabilities of uncovering a subsurface deposit are materially increased.

Certain surface features in the desert and semidesert regions of the West indicate the presence of copper ores caused by enrichment, according to F. L. Ransome of the United States Geological Survey. Taking the fundamental association of a granitic or porphyritic rock, one of the most obvious hints as to the possible presence of copper ore is a general rustiness of the rock outcrops, due to the iron oxides left behind in the decomposition of the pyrites. As a rule, a too-intense redness is not a favorable sign. The color of the typical surface showing above one of these ore bodies is generally brown or yellow on a rock that has itself been bleached almost white. At Miami, Arizona, the surface ore is a light-yellow color, bleached and dead-looking, according to Von Bernewitz.

In general, copper-bearing gravels and deposits which contain Chryscolla, a dull-blue, or bluish-green copper silicate containing thirty-six per cent metallic copper, are purely surface deposits and do not carry into depth. They have been frequently known to lead to costly exploratory effort in futile attempts to find the source of the ore far beneath the surface.

Copper itself is a heavy metal, slightly more than three times as heavy as quartz. It is malleable, like gold. Copper is one of the best conductors of electricity and occupies an important position among the industrial metals. One of the simplest tests for copper is the flame test. With a pair of forceps or some similar instrument hold a small splinter of the mineral in the blue flame of an alcohol lamp. Copper colors the flame a vivid bright, emerald green easily distinguishable from the pale green imparted to a flame by barium and other metals that give a green tinge upon ignition. The test will work more easily if the splinter of mineral is first moistened with nitric acid. A common variation of the flame test is to dip the wick of a lighted candle in some of the pulverized copper ore both before and after moistening the ore with nitric acid. Some miners familiar with copper deposits use this test in making rough assays of copper ore, as the degree of the flame coloration is dependent upon the volatile compounds of copper present in the sample.

Though more than a hundred copper-bearing minerals have been listed and classified, there are only a few of the more important that a prospector should be able to recognize. These principal copper ores will be discussed individually in the Potlatch in a future issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, lack of space prohibiting their inclusion here.

Once again we hear from the fair sex. There has been a lot of mail from the lady Potlatchers lately. It is always a pleasure to hear from them. This one is from a "Down Easter" who hails from Winchester, Massachusetts, and signs herself "Dorothy Fessenden." Says Dorothy:

DEAR MR. THOMPSON: Ever since I was an infant in swaddling clothes and learned about the Pilgrims landing on Plymouth Rock, I have been interested in mineralogy. So throwing maidenly modesty to the four winds —or wherever one throws maidenly modesty these days—I am writing to ask you a question. What is meant when a rock is spoken of as being "kindly?" I saw the expression in a story I was reading and it puzzled me.

In spite of my New England address I am an ardent WESTERN STORY fan. I enjoy it from cover to cover. Thank heaven, it's a weekly, and I don't have to wait more than seven days for the next issue!

A rock is said to be "kindly" when it is likely looking, that is, when it appears as if it might carry ore.

To F. L. D., Bellingham, Washington: The Vacas Mines you inquire about are situated in the Parrilla mining district, Durango, Mexico. They are somewhat to the west of the Vicente Guerrero station on the Canitas-Durango Railroad.

To J. J., Wellfleet, Massachusetts: Olivine is a rather common rock-making mineral which derives its name from its olive green to dark green color. The clear green variety has some value as a semiprecious gem. It is found principally among the dark-colored igneous rocks such as basalt.

The Round-Up

IT'S of guns, stampeding herds, and shoeing horses on the range that Max Coleman, Lubbock, Texas, will make some talk about. Swing into the saddle, Max, and say your say:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: There seems to be some discussion in Round-Up regarding whether or not the automatic six-gun was used and approved by the army in the late war. Some of the writers state positively that, after trial, they were discarded, owing to their unreliability when used in dirt, mud, and bad weather. Other writers are equally positive that they were not unreliable, and that they gave entire satisfaction, being approved by the army. Cannot some of the readers of the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, who were over there during 1917 and 1918, give us the true facts on this subject?

"Many interesting questions are brought up in the Round-Up. The explanation of some of them seemingly borders on the supernatural, such as that given by a recent writer as to why a bunch of cattle will sometimes all spring to their feet simultaneously, and without any apparent cause, and stampede. This is simply another one of those unaccountable occurrences that great scientists and educated minds cannot explain, the true reason probably being that animals sometimes sense or see things, invisible or unknown to a human being, which cause them all to act as one.

"The worst herd stampede I ever saw, was of twelve hundred four-year-old steers, that we trailed from New Mexico to Amarillo, Texas, for shipment. These cattle became so bad that we were finally forced to drive at night and rest through the day. The last night a stampede occurred, there were four of us on guard. It was perfectly still, not a cloud to be seen, and as far as could be determined by us, every animal in the herd was lying down. Then, suddenly, they were on their feet and running. A person who has never seen such a thing can hardly conceive of it. Any one not used to such occurrences would think there would be stragglers in the get-away, that is, that a few animals would jump up, the others following suit. Such was not the case. These cattle were instantly fully awake, and, with the speed of

race horses left. They scattered over fifteen miles of rough country, and we spent a week gathering as many of them as we could, a few never being recovered.

"Some of the men gathered at Round-Up state that one should never, under any circumstances, put a shoe on a horse. The writer of that statement is correct, provided that the horse wanders at will, and does not carry any weight. If you put a burden on him, however, and force him to go a certain way and at a certain time, then, in some portions of the West, you will be forced to either shoe him or ruin your horse. The reason for this is that in the bad lands, notably in New Mexico, Montana, and Oregon, the molten rock, which has melted, run together, and hardened, has the sharpness of hard glass, and with your weight, or the weight of a pack, upon it, the rim of the hoof needs the protection of steel and plenty of it, when you cross these sections.

On the other hand, I have known of wild horses going of their own free will, across these bad lands, without hurt. The reason that they could do so, was that they could pick their own route, step where they please, and when they pleased. I would advise the writer of the 'No shoe' article to stay out of the bad lands south of Gallup, New Mexico.

"The discussions, in Round-Up, on the proper way to shoe a horse, were good. However, in New Mexico, before we could start work, we would round up the horses, and shoe them all. We would forefoot the wild ones and throw them, then hog tie them in such a manner that you could get to each hoof. Two of the boys held them on their backs, while another nailed on the shoes."

Nothin' like a little poem to kind o' mellow things up. Miss Verneta Paterson, Armsted, Montana, has made up a nice little piece, which, if you'll all listen quiet, she'll recite:

A millionaire—you know the kind—
Came to our ranch one day,
He'd come from some big city
That's up the State a way.
He strolled into the bunk house,
Expressing his surprise,
And informed us that he didn't know
We were uncivilized!
Well, he made life miserable
For every one of us,
And how he treated all the boys
Was enough to make one cuss.
And the way he handled language!
We sure had some debates
On whether he was talking "chink"
Or just United States.
But in spite of all these troubles
He was high in our esteem
For he loved—as everybody should—
WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Here is more about sarpents. Pop Ranney, Endicott, New York, will now hiss his:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I enter your circle to-night with the peace sign, but the buzz of the rattler still sounds in my ears from the Alleghanies and Shawangunks.

"In a recent Round-Up, Nick comes forth with a sure-enough snake story. Having killed a five-foot blowing 'adder' on the mountains of southeastern West Virginia, and not finding him listed by Dan Beard, in an article in which he claimed that there were but four poisonous snakes in the United States, I wrote to Albany for information and was referred to Raymond L. Ditmars, curator of reptiles in New York Zoological Park.

"In reply, he referred me to his book, 'Reptiles of the World,' which has put me on a much more friendly relation to snakes and has dispelled much of my ignorance and superstition in regard to them. As 'Grizzly Gallagher' would say, I 'sartainly do' recommend any

one interested in snakes to read this book, written by a man who has made reptiles his life study and work. To quote from page 264 of this book, I find: 'Such are the three species of Heterodon—the Hog-nosed Snakes, Blowing Adders and Flat-headed Adders, their striking titles coming from eccentric looks and actions. North America is the habitat.' Also, we find, in this book, that the three species of Heterodon feed exclusively upon toads and frogs, principally the former. Quoting again, 'To aid them in holding the struggling prey is a pair of fanglike teeth in the rear of the upper jaw; these teeth are entirely solid and not connected with glands for the secretion of poison.'

"Of the four venomous snakes in the United States, so far the best authorities seem to agree, they are the rattlesnake, nineteen species; the copperhead or highland moccasin, the water moccasin or cotton-mouth snake, and the harlequin or coral snake, two species. If there exist to-day in Montana or elsewhere any such snakes as Nick describes, I believe it would be worth his while to consult Ditmars. Hoping I have not horned in too long, will just say, Adios."

THE WEST

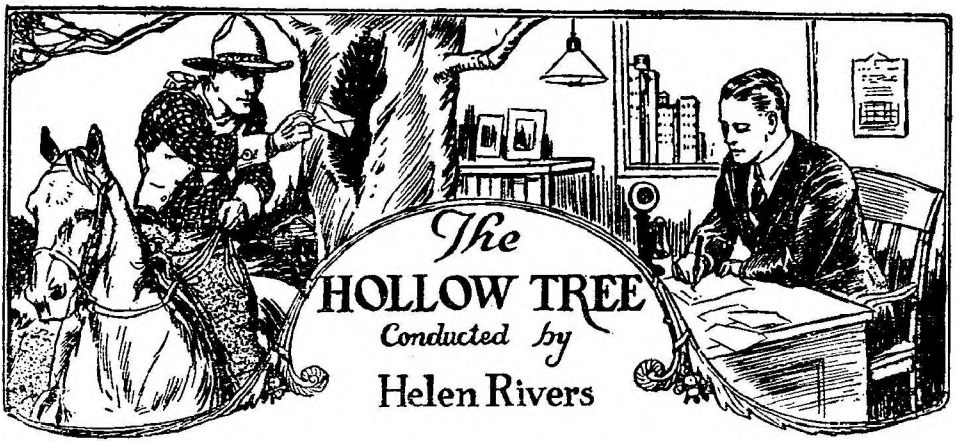
And What Do YOU Know About It?

Here is a chance to test, and, at the same time, increase your knowledge of the West. Take these questions now, one at a time, and write your answers down during the coming week. In the next issue, right here, at the end of the Round-Up, you'll find all of the questions in this week's issue correctly answered. Compare your answers with the right ones and mark yourself accordingly. If you have read your WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE with care during the past years, you should have little trouble in getting mighty good marks on these questions, for nearly all of them are based on information given in articles and stories that have been printed in WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Then get your best-thinking Stetson on, your pencil out, and go to it.
More questions next week.

1. How is steer bulldogging usually accomplished?..... 2. When the audience calls, "Bite 'im lip!" what is the cowboy supposed to do?..... 3. Hoolihaning is another form of..... 4. How is it done?..... 5. Aside from being dangerous for the man, why is it cruel for the animal?..... 6. What is meant by "steer roping?"..... 7. How is this different from "steer busting?"..... 8. What is "hog tying?"..... 9. Why must it be done quickly?..... 10. The capital of British Columbia is.....

Answers to last week's questions: 1. It is a Cree Indian name meaning "swift current" or "rapid river." 2. Canada. 3. Hanging or shooting a man summarily. 4. It is a male of the ox species, usually with widespreading horns. 5. For beef. 6. A young cow which has not had a calf. 7. An unbranded heifer. 8. From the name of a Texas cattleman who neglected to brand his cattle. 9. Wrestling with a steer barehanded. 10. The Salt Lake State.



Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

A NEW gold strike! Imagine the rush that followed such an announcement in the days of '49. Picture the hard-fisted miners and their sacks of coarse gold. And then recall that we have a gold rush going on right now in Nevada—the gold strike at Weepah. Here is a Gangster who can tell you, firsthand, about Weepah.

DEAR MISS RIVERS AND GANG: Here I am five miles from Nevada's newest gold strike —Weepah—one of the most picturesque of our Western towns. If you came here you'd find the same sort of a gold rush that happened way back in '49, and you'd also discover that this gold-strike town is no different from the little towns that used to spring up overnight in the old days. There's the same hard-fisted miners and the same gambling of gold dust.

Any of you hombres as want firsthand information about Nevada's newest gold strike just come ahead and drop me your address, along with a real friendly li'l' chat. I'll oblige pronto. HANK MEADOWS.

Box 1212, Tonopah, Nevada.

Real old-timer.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've punched cattle and hunted gold in most of the Western States and have been in nearly every State in the Union. I guess I'm an old-timer compared with most of the hombres now a days. If any one wants to get a line on any of our Western States, I'm here to offer my humble assistance. Come right ahead, boys!

HERBERT KLEIN.

Hayden, Colorado.

New Mexico cowboy.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a cowboy on the Bell Ranch, located in the northeastern part of New Mexico. This here outfit is supposed to be one of the largest in the States. Any one who wants a waddy for a pal just come right ahead and let's get acquainted. This is the slack season on the Bell Ranch. I'll run the Bell brand on any letters as come my way and answer 'em pronto.

CLARENCE GRIGGS.

Montoya, New Mexico.

Another of our waddies.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Montana waddy and know the bad lands and ranges thereabouts like a book. At the present I'm lost in a big city and pining for some word from my Montana buddies. Any hombre wanting to know something about Mexico can come right ahead, too, as I've included that there place in my various travels. LONE JACK.

Care of The Tree.

This Gangster knows ranch life in southwestern Kansas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Although I was raised on a big ranch in southwestern Kansas, I've been here in California about fifteen years. I've traveled all over this big State, espe-

cially through the fruit belt, and personally I think that the work in the fruit belt is not what it is broadcast to be to outsiders. Good packers certainly make excellent money, but you have to be sturdy, and you have to know how.

I am one of the unfortunate folks who have no family, being an only child and an orphan. My youngsters miss the opportunity of visiting country relatives during the summer as lots of children do. I would like to get in touch with some one on a ranch, within a reasonable distance from Oakland, who would be interested in taking a ten-year-old boy for his vacation next summer. I would like to get him on a real ranch for a few months. I would also like to make some pen friends between the ages of thirty and forty, and from any location.

MARY G. NUNES.
732 Eighth Street, Oakland, California.

Wants pal.

DEAR GANG: I want to find a real worthwhile pard to go West with me—one who is sincere, ambitious, capable, and who is interested in the scientific and intellectual phases of life as well as the rougher, more practical life one leads in the open. I'm thoroughly familiar with much of the West, and I truly love that great country.

Now, pards, if this strikes you, whoever you are, and wherever you are, write *muy pronto*. It may be the one who thinks himself the most unlikely that's really the one I want to find. ALFRED D. SMITH.
932 Lincoln Way East, South Bend, Indiana.

This hombre has been as far north as Canada, as far south as Panama, and knows his West, too, folks. He's prepared to tell you all there is to tell about Charleston, South Carolina, one of the historic "cities by the sea." Also, Gangsters, this hombre can tell about the navy, and the merchant marine; and if there's anything about life on the sea that you'd like to know, here is the very one to come to. He is John Beaudrot, and his address is 83 America Street, Charleston, South Carolina.

"I'm twenty, and an orphan," says Richard LaDeuce, 152 South Chalfonte Avenue, Atlantic City, New Jersey. This Gangster is lonely and he's tired of the hustle and bustle of city life. He'd like to get out West where he could see the open spaces for a change. But as his prospects fail to lead in that direction, Gangsters, he'd like to have you-all who live out that way—on the trail that points westward—get in touch with him.

Peter J. Bauer, of Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan, Canada, is a seventeen-year-old Gangster who can speak and write French and German as well as English. He lives in a French town.

"Is there any one of the gang who can give me lots of information about the State of Montana? I'm going there soon," says Claud Davis. If you can give this hombre a hand, address him care of C. S. Johnson, at Ralph, South Dakota.

"I am glad to say that my Hollow Tree friendship badge has brought me many pals," says Miss R. H., of San Anselmo, California.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

"I'm an 'Aussie,' just twenty-three, and have been all over the Australian Alps, so I can tell you-all something about outdoor life in this part of the world," says Reg Cargill, Montrose, 8 Morrice Street, Caulfield, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. This Gangster has a good deal to say about camping, hunting, and fishing.

"I live on one of the Thousand Islands," says Marian Marshall, Victoria Avenue, Gananoque, Ontario, Canada. Get in touch with her, sisters, if you want a good pen pal, and want to know something of her section of the country.

This boy lives in the Redwood belt.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a California boy, sixteen, and am, of course, a lover of our redwood trees. I live at Fort Bragg, and any one who wants to find out anything either about the town or about the surrounding country, just drop a line to Box 702.

RUDOLPH MATSON.

Box 702, Fort Bragg, California.

On a hundred-acre farm.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My home is on a farm of one hundred acres, and of course I'm all for horseback riding. I have two black horses and one bay, and I ride them all bareback. In fact, we haven't a saddle around the place. All you lovers of horses please get busy and write. MARY REVAY.

R. D. 1, Freeport, Pennsylvania.

"I was born and raised in Texas, and I'm so homesick for the West," says Lone Star, care of The Tree. This sister Gangster is stranded in the far North, and would like to hear from some of the folks who are situated in the West. If there is any one who could offer a position such as ranch cook to this middle-aged widow, she would appreciate hearing from you.

Southerner.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a Southerner, having been born in Georgia and traveled around throughout the largest portion of the South. Have been to Cuba, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Panama. Now that doesn't mean that I'm unfamiliar with our West, for I have been out to the coast and back. I've never lived there, however, and would appreciate having a few friends who "know the soil." I'm nineteen. Come on, you young Western hombres, and write a feller!

C. W. STOKELY.

2022 East Sixty-ninth Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

"If there are any Gangsters who like snaps of the marine type, I wish they'd exchange with me for some having Western atmosphere," says Richard C. Dahlem, 360 Webster Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey.

"We are farmers and could tell very much about this section of the woods if any one cared to write," says Mr. and Mrs. John Voras, Winton, Merced County, California. They would like to hear from foreign countries as well as from the States.

Planning Western trip in the spring.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am planning a trip which will take me West in the spring, as the doctors advise me to try a warmer climate. A number of folks have suggested Phoenix, Arizona, for they say that the climate there is ideal. I wish that some of the Arizona sisters would drop me a line of encouragement. Is there a chance, do you think, for a young woman of thirty-one out in that part of the country? I'm not afraid of work.

MARGUERITE DULTON.

587 Highland Avenue, Columbus, Ohio.

Looking for a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm going to start homesteading and ranching just as soon as I can find a partner. The undertaking won't be anything to brag about—just on a small scale. The kind of a ranch that two hombres can take care of. I'd prefer that my pard be about twenty-two. The younger the better.

P. J. ROY.

3718 Winchester Avenue, Ashland, Kentucky.

Winnipeg.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a Canadian. Was three years and a half in France. And while there I visited England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and Germany. If any one cares to write me, I'll tell them of my experiences overseas, and also about Canada. I would appreciate letters from ex-service men.

MAC MCAULEY.

495 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Where is the nearest real cow town?

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like to live in one of the Western States—Wyoming, Texas, or New Mexico preferred. I would like to locate in an honest-to-goodness typical cow town, away from the railroad, and where one can see a cowboy or cowgirl who can really ride a horse without thinking they are the only person who ever did such a thing!

I'd like to get some work to do in such a town, such as clerk in a country store, or, as I am considered a pretty good cook, I'd like a place as cook on a ranch. Won't some of the cowgirls drop me a line? L. K.

Box 57, Leoti, Kansas.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

OUT in the State of Washington fruit-growing is a mighty important industry. Most of you hombres are familiar, I reckon, with those big, red, juicy apples known as the Wenatchee. The fine quality of this Western fruit is tempting Dave T., of Savannah, Georgia, to hit the trail for the Evergreen State and set himself up on a fruit ranch. Nor can we much blame him. That sounds to us like "sitting sorter pretty," and we are glad to pass along what we know on the subject.

"What can you tell me of the town of Wenatchee, Washington, Mr. North?" queries this Georgia Cracker. "I'd like also to get some information about the Wenatchee Valley where the apples of the same name are grown. How big is this valley? Are the orchards irrigated? How large are most of the fruit farms? What varieties of apples are grown there? Is this old country or new? When was it settled? As you can savvy, I'm a bear for facts, for I'm seriously thinking of betaking myself out that way and investing my funds in an apple orchard."

Well, Dave, we'll say that Wenatchee is as fine a city as one will find in the course of a year's travels. It is picturesquely situated in the midst of thousands of fruitful orchards on the west bank of the Columbia River, near its junction with the Wenatchee. Literally rising up all around it in a gentle sort of way, tier on tier, are the orchards which during the season are laden with gorgeous Wenatchee apples. To the west of the city the mighty peaks of the Cascades raise their snow-crowned heads.

Beauty, however, is not the sole claim to fame of this Washington town, for it is the headquarters of the whole Wenatchee Valley, being the chief marketing and shipping point of the section as well as the banking and commercial center. It is an up-to-date city, with a population of over six thousand. Here one finds in the business section substantial buildings, large

apple-shipping warehouses, a cold-storage plant, and other industries. The residence districts of this Western town are charming, the bungalow type of home prevailing. Wenatchee also serves those other fruit-growing and agricultural valleys to the north, the Entiat, the Chelan, the Methow, and the Okanogan. The city is a comparative youngster as cities go. It has been developed entirely since the coming of the Great Northern Railway in 1892, the principal development taking place since 1900.

And now for the Wenatchee Valley! It lies about the junction of the Columbia with the Wenatchee River and extends along both sides of these rivers from near Rock Island, where the Great Northern's main line crosses the Columbia, to near Leavenworth, west of Wenatchee, a total length of about forty miles. It is from one to three miles in width and contains more than twenty-two thousand acres under irrigation.

The water is taken from the Wenatchee River near Leavenworth and carried by gravity in a substantial canal system throughout the valley. Most orchards are irrigated by an underground piping system with hydrant turnouts and when not actually in use there is little evidence of irrigation works, with the exception of the main canals and laterals.

The first time Dave lamps the valley we'll wager that it will look like a solid orchard to him. As a matter of fact, it is made up of small ranches ranging in size from a few acres to twenty acres, with a number of larger commercial orchards containing from forty to over one hundred acres. While several orchards are twenty to thirty-five years old, the greater number are only from ten to twenty years of age. Only a few varieties of apples are grown extensively, among which are the Winesaps, Jonathans, Spitzenburgs, Rome Beauty, Winter Banana, and the Delicious. These are shipped to all the corners of the United States and across the ocean to Europe. They are said to be the best-known apples in the world.

If Dave had visited the valley forty years ago he would have found it only an arid waste of volcanic ash, covered with sagebrush. It was in 1873 that one Doctor Jewett came riding into the Wenatchee, bringing the first nursery stock of apple trees on a pack horse. These were planted and rude ditches dug to water them. When the volcanic ash soil, rich in decomposed lava, free iron, potash, and phosphates, proved to be ideal for fruit-growing the big apple boom was on. Dave may be interested in hearing that Doctor Jewett's pioneer trees are still bearing fruit.

Thirty years ago Wenatchee apples were unknown in Eastern markets, but to-day the State of Washington leads the nation in the growing of apples for market. In 1921 more than one third of the mercantile apples grown in the United States came from the Wenatchee Valley. We surely envy Dave his first sight of the valley in the spring when the fruit trees are in bloom, for viewed from the surrounding hills this is a never-to-be forgotten scene. Blossom Festival is celebrated each year in Wenatchee during the month of May.

It's not an annual celebration, but a spot where fun may be counted on every day in the whole year that J. K. P., of St. Paul, Minnesota, is interested in. "Do you know a dude ranch in the State of Texas, Mr. North, that is ready to receive guests any time in the year? I have the addresses of a bunch of Western ranches that offer summer hospitality to the tenderfoot, but what I'm looking for is a place where I can go whenever I feel the urge for the free and invigorating life of the cow-puncher coming on me. I'd

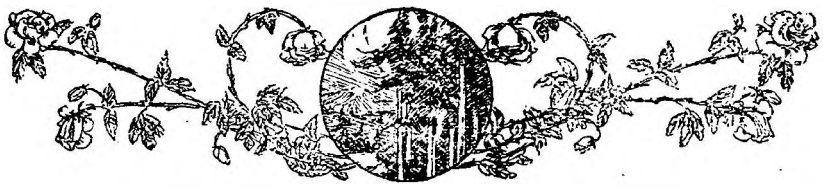
prefer Texas, as before moving to St. Paul I hailed from down that way."

It happens, strangely enough, that the first all-year dude ranch in Texas has just been started on the Gallagher Ranch of ten thousand acres, twenty-five miles northwest of San Antonio in the picturesque hill country. Any time J. K. P. feels the need of a wholesome outdoor vacation on a real old-time Texas ranch he can just make tracks for the Lone Star State. Here he will find in addition to all the present joys of the great open spaces some relics reminiscent of the thrilling past. On this ranch there is still standing an old stone house with portholes and a bell used to sound the alarm when the redskins attacked the place one hundred years ago.

And now here's a letter that I hope some of you miners out in Wyoming will sit right down and answer. It's from H. J. S., of Minnesota, who writes as follows:

"I would like to have some information from WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE readers concerning the iron mining around Sunrise, Wyoming. How large a camp is this? Is the work all surface? What are the chances of one getting work all the year round? I am a drill runner, also a fireman, and am interested also to know what the wages are for a brakeman. What are the regular working hours? And what are the chances for homesteading out there? There are many other questions I'm anxious to ask about that country, but will wait until some kind hombre answers these."

Now will some kind hombre come forward and help this brother out with some information?



REDISCOVERY OF LOST FOSSIL DEPOSIT

FOR over half a century a fruitless hunt has gone on in the mountains of Utah for a lost fossil deposit. Recently, however, the search has come to an end with the receipt by the Smithsonian Institution of a collection of fossil trilobites from Frank Beckwith, of Delta, Utah.

The deposit is the result of pioneer geological surveys which opened up the West over fifty years ago and discovered in the House Range of Utah a collection of excellently preserved fossil trilobites. After the discovery had been made, Doctor Charles Walcott, late secretary of the Smithsonian, revisited the region many times in order to find more material; but he never succeeded in locating the exact spot.

The trilobites supported Doctor Walcott's theory that life existed on the earth at a much earlier geological period than had previously been supposed. The trilobites were a shelled, invertebrate animal whose closest living relative is the brine shrimp, now found in great abundance in the Great Salt Lake and the Dead Sea. The trilobites, however, though they were the dominant life of the sea many millions of years ago, completely disappeared about the time that the coal deposits of the eastern United States were laid down.

Although Doctor Walcott made immense collections elsewhere in the West, he never found this most-longed-for deposit. Now, however, Mr. Beckwith, an amateur collector, has located it.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

DAVIS, MR. and MRS. GLOVER.—Sad news for you. You can trust me. Write Myrtle Shull's daughter, A. E. S., in care of this magazine.

QUEEN, MARY.—Last heard from in Knox City, Missouri. About twenty-five years old, dark hair and eyes. Information appreciated by her friend, Mrs. Clara Silknitter, Box 165, Centerville, Iowa.

KEPHART, or WALLACE, NELLIE.—Last heard from in Kirksville, Missouri, three years ago. She is about twenty-one years old, has dark hair and eyes. Information appreciated by her friend, Mrs. Clara Silknitter, Box 165, Centerville, Iowa.

McMATTIE, MRS.—Last heard from in Opelika, Alabama. Please write to your daughter Jessie Mae McMattie, Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

SARGENT, ROGER JOHN.—Last heard from in New York City. Please write to your cousin, Ricky, care of this magazine.

DAVEY, ANNIE.—Formerly of 1 Bleecker Street and 229 East Tenth Street, New York City. Your son who was placed in an orphans' home is anxious to hear from you. Please write John Davey, care of Henry Coffe, South Plattsburg, New York.

TUCKER, JOHN J.—Five feet eleven inches tall, dark complexion. Last heard from in Mojave, California, in spring of 1926, en route for Oklahoma. Please write to Harry, same address.

FOWLER, VINITA.—Last heard of in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Please write to Kenneth Brown, 2521 Lenway Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

SINGLETON, BESSIE E.—Please send for a letter from Bill that we are holding at this office.

COLE, GEORGE W.—Please write to Mrs. G. W. Cole, 258 Woodworth Avenue, Yonkers, New York.

BUNN, MYRTLE HELEN.—Answered your ad, but letter returned. Anxious to hear from you. Please send correct address to Mother, care of this magazine.

RUST, JACK HARREL or HENRY LEE.—Last heard from in Wilcox, Arizona. Let us hear from you. Will not tell your father unless you wish. Please write Mrs. Joe E. Rust, Balmorhea, Texas.

HOLLY, CHARLEY.—Of Portland, Oregon. Please write Zolena Rice, formerly of Des Moines, Iowa, now of 5383 Northland Avenue, Apartment F, St. Louis, Missouri.

WASHBURN, OVAL.—Formerly of Kansas, who lived with us in Dawson, New Mexico, please write Mrs. Nancy Swanser, 999 Messenger Service, 2417-B, Galveston, Texas.

SWANSER, FRANK.—Has large scars on neck and arms. Native of Montana. Left wife and three children three years ago. Information appreciated by Frances, 999 Messenger Service, 2417-B, Galveston, Texas.

WILSON, JESS.—Native of Spokane, Washington. Knew Frank Swanser in California in 1923. Nancy would like to hear from you. Please write to Frances, 999 Messenger Service, 2417-B, Galveston, Texas.

WARNER, CHARLEY.—Born in England. Have never heard from Frank. Kiddies are in the orphanage. Please write to Nancy, 999 Messenger Service, 2417-B, Galveston, Texas.

WILSON, LOUISE.—Last heard from living with her father, Leroy Wilson, near Marion, Indiana, in 1922. Has two brothers, Milton and Lindley. Please write to an old school friend from Norvon, Mrs. Lorna Huckelbery, R. F. D. 1, Salem, Indiana.

SHAFFER, CLAIRE or SPECKS.—Have news. Remember me in the Theater Blossom. Write Blossom LaValle, General Delivery, Youngstown, Ohio.

BOWEN, FRED.—Englishman. Served in imperial army in World War. Last heard of at Glen Cross, Orangeville, Ontario, Canada, in spring of 1925. Information appreciated by Hilda Bowen, 354 Seneca Street, Niagara Falls, New York.

DUFFY, JOHN, MICHAEL, HENRY, RODDY, and KATE.—Would like to locate my uncles and aunt, who emigrated to America from Voine, Ballaghaderren, County of Rosscommon, Ireland, about forty or fifty years ago. Believed to be in Pennsylvania or Ohio. My father is their eldest brother and a twin to their eldest sister, Gary, Mrs. Dan Fitz-Patrick. Please write their niece, Kathleen, care of this magazine.

ISLEY, or KUNTZ, MARGARET.—Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, in June, 1927. Information appreciated by an old friend, R. C. Ellis, 2936 Sheffield Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

SMITH, S. P.—Is about sixty-five years old. Last heard from in General Hospital at Elko, Nevada. Sad news about his son. Information appreciated by his daughter, Kate Dunmire, Wallace, Idaho.

MYERS, FRANK.—Served with the Eighth Field Artillery at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, February 2, 1927. Was to come home in June. Information appreciated by his broken-hearted mother, Mrs. R. Kronstadt, 223 East One Hundred and Third Street, New York City.

WILLIAMS, BURTON ALBERT.—Born in Akron, Ohio, in 1857. Welch descent, a paper hanger, painter, and carpenter by trade. Owned a moving-picture show in Scranton, Mississippi, in 1910, and managed a wagon factory in Houston, Mississippi, before this. Had an uncle, Mr. Powers, in Lynchburg, Virginia, and a sister in Norfolk, Virginia. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Irene Thompson, care of Tallassee "Tribune," Tallassee, Alabama.

McKENZIE, LILLY and WALTER.—Grandmother took them thirty years ago, when mother married Ludwig Strandberg and took me with them to Sweden. Would like to hear from you. Please write to your brother, Charlie F. Strandberg, 440 Long Beach, Los Angeles, California.

EIKSTEDT, AUGUST.—Have good news. Please write to Joseph D. Fuller, Route 7, Rockford, Illinois.

HUGHES, MARUIN S., EDNA SYLVIA, HARVEY, and DOROTHY.—This family left Big Spring, Texas, in February, 1925, supposed to have gone West. Information appreciated by father, mother, and grandparents. Please write Mrs. Dallie Hughes, General Delivery, Big Spring, Texas.

WHITE, BOB.—Was with us in Utah. Had a wife named Leda. Frank left me with three kiddies five years ago. Have you seen him? Please write to Nancy, 999 Messenger Service, 2417-B, Galveston, Texas.

STRICKLER, HOWARD EARL.—Have been expecting you all summer. Please write to mother. Ella, 18 Clantoy Street, Springfield, Massachusetts.

MILLER, JOHN.—Last heard from in Washington. Florence, who was raised with you, would like to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. Florence Metzger, care of this magazine.

NANCY.—Forgiven. Dad, J. Quinn, R. F. D. 50, Toms River, New Jersey.

CONWAY, FRANK.—First wife was Johanna Brojack, daughter of Joe Brojack, of Friendship, Wisconsin. Had one son, Norman, who needs him. Please write to R. Golden, Route 8, Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin.

WORTMAN, ALVIN.—Received your letter from Panama. I need you. Your mother is here. No trouble if you come back. Your wife, Ethel, 521 I Street, San Bernardino, California.

STUDLER, ADELE.—Last heard from in Wetomka, Oklahoma. Please write to V. McBride, 1224 Florida Street, Long Beach, California.

ELIZABETH.—Was the notice in October 15th "Western Story Magazine" from you? If so, please answer with mailing directions. Am leaving for Central America, but will watch magazine for reply. Address me in baby girl's pet name for me. F.

MARION, A. E. C.—We are all well and love you. Write but do not come back now. Mother C., 1200 E 9 L B.

BIKIE.—Your wife needs you. Please come back to San Berdoo. Mother.

SHEPHERD, JACOB FLOYD.—Telegraph operator, about forty-five years old. Worked at Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, for Michigan Central Railroad. Last heard from leaving for Minneapolis, two years ago. Information appreciated by his daughter, Lillian Shepherd, Box 75, Lingle, Wyoming.

ATTENTION.—Will the party who advertised for Ben J. write to Pat, care of this magazine.

MULLANEY, DAVID W.—Of Honolulu, Hawaii. Last heard from on the U. S. S. "Wyoming," in July, 1922, where he boxed as flyweight. Was on one of the Barter-line steamers or American Pioneer line around New York. Information appreciated by his sister, Y. B. Mullaney, Box 2689, Honolulu, Hawaii.

WOODS, FRED, 6,049,888.—Have all your papers. Trust me. Am home. Write Augie, care of this magazine.

WARREN and **EDNA.**—Good news. Have searched all over States for you. Please write to C. G. Engel, 450 West Main Street, Eldorado, Arkansas.

McCAULEY, T. P.—Write or call your mother or youngest sister, Mrs. E. W. Argo, 424 West Magnolia Avenue, Inglewood, California.

HARRISON, B. M. or **BUCK.**—Last heard from three years ago in Arronville, California. Your mother, now a widow, is not well and wants you to come home or write. Mrs. Rebecca Hastings, 1614 East First Street, Muncie, Indiana.

BUNLAP, JAMES.—Was mess sergeant for U. S. M. C. in San Francisco in 1922. Please write to Fred Meyer, alias Bolo, Thirty-third Infantry, Headquarters Company, Fort Clayton, Canal Zone, Panama.

CORNELL, O. C.—Was blacksmith and corporal for the U. S. M. C. that was in San Francisco in 1921 and 1922. Information appreciated by Fred Meyer, alias Bolo, Thirty-third Infantry, Headquarters Company, Fort Clayton, Canal Zone, Panama

OLSON, OLAF, BJORN, or **VICTOR.**—Olaf lived at 2417 Twenty-fifth Street, South Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1889. Victor kept a merchant-tailor shop in St. Paul during the years of 1885 and 1895. Information appreciated by their niece, Mrs. Cecilia Louise Sanders Cope, Route 3, Mosho, Missouri.

LACKEY, R. M.—We miss you. Please come back or write to Mr and Mrs. H. L. Lackey, Hiddenite, North Carolina.

RUSSELL.—I love you more than ever. Am true. Have your letters. Babe.

WRIGHT, FRED.—Have been ill. Must see you. Please write me at Arcata, California. Minnie.

YERIAN, HARRY, EARL, and **WILLIAM.**—Uncle's estate must be settled. Information concerning them appreciated by their sister, Mrs. L. W. Fisher, Allingdale, West Virginia.

McEROY, PETER.—Last heard from in Toledo, Ohio, Christmas, 1925. Father very ill and wishes to see you. Edward P. McEroy, 730 Liberty Street, Corry, Pennsylvania.

DONAHOU, or **PATRICK, JOHN H.**—Dark, curly hair, blue eyes, twenty-seven years old. Last heard from in Denver about a year ago. Was a bridge carpenter on the Missouri Pacific, working between Coffyville, Kansas, and Fort Smith, Arkansas, up to July, 1926. Any information concerning him appreciated by Jim, care of this magazine.

CLARK, BEN.—Twenty-two years old. Was put in a home thirteen years ago. Mother married again and lives in Piqua, Ohio. Please write to Mrs. Frances Clark Gustin, R. R. 3, Box 285, Dayton, Ohio.

OLD BUFFALO HUNTERS.—Those who hunted on the plains south of Dodge City, from 1872 to 1878, and those who were in the "Yellow House Indian fight," March 17, 1877, please write Nick Ross, R. F. D. 1, Oswego, Oregon.

RICHARDS, B. J.—Thirty-one years old, light-brown hair and eyes. A logger. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. E. S. Richards, care of this magazine.

ROYCRAFT, CHARLES.—Last heard from in St. Paul, Minnesota, in May, 1927. Please write or come home. Mrs. Charles Roycraft, General Delivery, Mt. Simon Court, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

CHURCHILL, ALEN, and **HAROLD CARNNIE.**—The former last heard from in Washington about eight years ago, and the latter was last heard from in Wyoming after he left the navy. Information appreciated by Mrs. L. A. Wheelock, Box 82, Bridge, Oregon.

WHITTON, S. M.—Sixty years old. Last heard from in 1910. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Lola Brown Hays, Cleveland, Texas.

BRYANT, LYDA, nee **WEST.**—Daughter of Henry Landsiedel West. Was raised in Missouri. Last heard from in Denver, Colorado. Sad news about your father. Please write at once to Mrs. Norman Wright, Ohiowa, Nebraska.

JEANNE.—We all love you. Mary and Dee, and your dad and Addie are married. All are well. Write often to your Sister Mae, 5630 Cote Brilliante Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

WILLIAMS, GEORGE CLAY.—Last heard of at Doctor Starbuck's Ranch, three and one half miles west of Salem, Oregon, in 1921. Dark, curly hair and blue eyes, five feet nine and one half inches tall. Your sisters, Lilis and Emma, and mother, Emma K. Sanders, are anxious to hear from you. Please write to mother, General Delivery, Medford, Oregon.

PINK.—Have important news. Write at once to Pink.

DUBOIS, MRS. MAE, HARRY L. MOSS, and **IVAH FOX** or **MILLER.**—Please write to Mrs. Iva Welch, 107 Pine Street, New Castle, Pennsylvania.

MARSHALL, DONALD.—Last heard from in Garden City, Long Island. Blond, six feet tall. Has worked in Utica and Lake Placid, New York. Information appreciated by his old friend Harry E. Wright, 1676 Dudley Avenue, Utica, New York.

GARRISON, GEORGE.—Forty-three years old. Last heard of in Gadsden, Alabama, in 1912. Information appreciated by L., care of this magazine.

N. B.—Have not heard from you since I gave you the brown dress. Please write to mother, care of this magazine.

HAVILL, DELOLA.—Last heard from in Oakland, California. Have important news. Please write to Mrs. Barnig Travis, Greenville, Mississippi.

HAZEL O.—Am heartbroken. Have bought bonds for you. If I do not hear from you in sixty days after this is published I don't know what I'll do. Love from your broken-hearted mother, R. L. H.

NEIBOR, CHARLES.—Met you July 12, 1926, in Port Angles. I was with my grandmother. Please write to Charlie Johnson, 1149 Mason Street, Victoria, British Columbia.

CASEY, JIMMY.—Left Paterson, New Jersey, in 1898 for Klondike. Last heard from that year going on a rescue party at a snowslide at Chilicoot Pass. Information appreciated by an old pal, Joe Wright, 6606 Barton Avenue, Hollywood, California.

BERNIE.—All settled. G. B. still needs you. Write or wire. V. is very ill. Mother.

JACK.—You told me to watch July numbers of "Western Story Magazine" for your address. Have looked in July, August, September, and October. What has happened? E. E. R.

FELLEMAN, IRVING J.—Formerly of Maywood, Illinois. Information appreciated by daughter, care of this magazine.

GIRARD, JACKSON L.—About forty years old, five feet four inches tall, hazel eyes, and auburn hair. Last heard from in Portland, Oregon. Information appreciated by his daughter, Ethelwyn Victoria Girard, 813 H Street, Grants Pass, Oregon.

MULL, J. ROY.—Last heard from two years ago in Phoenix, Arizona. Forty years old. Black hair and eyes. Artificial teeth. Was a barber. Had nose and throat trouble. Information appreciation by his brother, B. Mull, 209 East Raymond Avenue, Hawthorne, California.

STOCKDALE, ROSS SYLVESTER.—Last heard from at Valley Junction, Iowa, in February, 1924. Thirty-one years old, brown hair and eyes. We still love and want you. All except Harold are married. Please write your sister, Irene, care of this magazine.

BURNHAM, WINNEFRED.—Enlisted in navy in 1914. Last heard from in Phoenix, Arizona. Mother and Eva anxious. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. W. Sibbick, 414 West Q Street, Wilmington, California.

MAY, MRS. JUNE, nee **COLLINS.**—Formerly of 1025 Monroe Avenue, Huntington, West Virginia. Mother and sister worried. Please write. Remember you always have a home with me. Mousie Jackett, Chespeake, Ohio.

LITTLE, ED and **EARL.**—Twins, about forty years old. Last heard from at Lint, Oregon, a suburb of Portland, in 1912. Please write to your father, E. E. Little, 303 Carroll Avenue, Glen Dora, California.

CARTER, JACK.—Wherever you are, and whatever you are doing, come to me at your mother's or write. Am in trouble. If you care for baby or me let me hear from you. You can help us all around. A.

PERKINS, EDNA.—Twenty-five years old, has a scar over temple. Left me four years ago with baby Arthur. Come back to baby and me. William A. Perkins, 526 Third Avenue, New York City.

SCHNELL, WILLIAM FREDERICK.—Formerly of Paterson, New Jersey. Last heard from in East St. Louis, Illinois. His family at this time lived in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. Forty-seven years old, six feet three inches tall. Information appreciated by Walter Schnell, 728 Sixty-seventh Street, Brooklyn, New York.

VORTEX, STANLEY.—Let us hear from you. A. L. Bird, Mandarin, Florida.

BLACKMAN, F. M.—Formerly of Dodge City, Kansas. Last heard from in Blackwell, Oklahoma. Married and a cook by trade. Information appreciated by Blondy, care of this magazine.

SULLIVAN, GLEN.—Worked in New Orleans in 1921. Last heard from at Travelers' Hotel, San Antonio, Texas, in 1922. Communicate at once with R. E. O'Niell, Jr., care S. S. "Altair," Terminal Island, California.

GOTTLIFFE, or NORMAN, BABS, SIDNEY, and BILLIE.—Formerly of Cardiff, South Wales. Last heard of in the Bronx, New York City, in 1925. Please write to your friend, Eddie Somers, at Chagoness P. O., Saskatchewan, Canada, or to 36 King Edward Avenue, Worthing, Sussex, England.

CROSSLEY, OTHELIA.—Last heard from in San Antonio, Texas. Please write to H. F. M., care of this magazine.

SLIM.—Remember Davenport, Iowa. Write to your old pal, Jack Hamilton, care Wyatt Hotel, Casper, Wyoming.

CLIFTON.—Still love you. Please write Babe, 133 Herkimer Street, Brooklyn, New York.

GROSS, PAUL.—A jockey from San Diego, California. Information appreciated by Inquirer, care of this magazine.

BALL, ALBERT VICTOR.—Last heard from in Conell, Washington, ten years ago. About fifty years old. Information appreciated by his son, Lucian E. Ball, care of this magazine.

HEALY, P. J.—Important news. Please write to your son, F. P. H., in care of the shop.

R.—Saw your notice in magazine. Binny would like some life-savers. If that recalls anything, write to me. E. L. K.

JEAN.—Please write to me just once more for old time's sake. Herbert K. McClure.

KUPSKY, WILLIAM A.—Please let me know where you are. Write to Armon J. Kupsky, Box 114, Heislerville, New Jersey.

SON.—Please come home at once. Can help you. I live near stop thirty-seven on the Y. & O. street-car line. Charles A. Hay, care of W. J. Fife, R. D. 6, Lisbon, Ohio.

GORDON.—We were thinking of you at Christmas and hoped that you would be with us. Mother.

KUCERA, CHARLES.—Served in headquarters company, Camp Travis, at San Antonio, Texas, in 1918 or 1919. Last heard from at St. Paul, Nebraska. Information appreciated by F. S., care of this magazine.

EGGERT, PERL ANTHONY.—Last heard from five years ago in Seattle, Washington. Supposed to have gone East. Ruddy complexion, light-brown hair, gray eyes. Anxious to hear from you. Mrs. Martha C. Eggert, care Alonzo J. Eggert, Oakdale, North Dakota.

THOMAS, ROBERT C.—Suspense is terrible. You do not have to come home, but please write to your mother, Mrs. Stella Thomas, Church Street, Newton, Hamilton County, Ohio.

ENDICOTT, MARCUS or KAC.—Last seen in Parsons, Kansas, December, 1920. Important news. Information appreciated by P. F., care of this magazine.

CONALEE.—We are anxious to hear from you. Please send address to O. F.

COALTON, JIM.—Answered the letter you wrote in West Virginia in 1925. Left for East shortly after that. Am living in our home town. See nothing of the rest. Won't you trust and have faith. Please write mother, in care of this magazine.

CREASY, LEN and FRED.—All are well. Please write to sister, Mabel Creasy Smith, 60 Kendall Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts.

ROBERT, T. L.—We are all well. Please make us happy by writing to Mother Lilly, care of this magazine.

FRED S. B.—All is forgiven. I love you. This has brought Gladys and me together. We need you. Please come home or write. Same address as before. Your lonesome wife, L. G. B.

LA PLANT, ARCHIE.—Please write Sister Aggie. Would like to find Sister Nettie. Have not heard from her in twenty years. Mrs. J. Feyler, 48 Line Street, Rockland, Maine.

CONNORS, LILLIAN, or KATHERINE LUMPP.—Last heard from at 6637 and 6549 Evans Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Met you while Indian riding for the Army Military Circus at White City and Grant Park, Chicago, summer of 1919. Please write Joseph V. Millette, 81 Lauder Avenue, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

STARR, H. A.—Please write to your old friend, R. P. Hayden, U. S. Naval Station, New Orleans, Louisiana.

ACKERSON, MRS. MAUDE.—Has a daughter, Iris, about eleven years old. Last heard from in San Diego, California, where she was visiting a cousin. Left in August for her home in West Virginia or Virginia. Please write to William Perry Maxcy, Ward 14, Bed 29, Wadsworth Hospital, Sawtell, California.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any of the boys who served in Motor Truck Company 454, Motor Supply Train 415, A. E. F., France. Archie D. Bates, 627 Main Street, Chico, California.

YATES, BOBBIE MAE.—Formerly of Memphis, Tennessee. Last heard of in St. Louis, Missouri. Information appreciated by M. S. Pierce, U. S. S. "Niagara," care Postmaster, New York City.

RHYNERSON, HARRY.—Mother and dad worried. Please come home or write to your brother, Frank Rhynerson, Boicourt, Kansas.

JOLLY, LUCILLE.—Have lost your address. Please write to May Rhynerson, Boicourt, Kansas.

POTECT, CHARLES.—Visited Alta fifteen years ago last May. Last heard from in Idaho. Information appreciated by Edna Lewis, care of this magazine.

SAYERS, FLOYD.—Thirty-one years old. Left home in Peace River, Alberta, Canada, in fall of 1920. Last heard from in spring of 1924, at Marble Creek, Idaho. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Minnie Sayers, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, MARION A.—Wife's name Lizzie, and children named Arthur, Mattie Lee, Howard, Lulu, May, and some smaller ones. Mother, brothers, and sisters supposed to live in Alabama. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mattie Lee Davis, 409 Van Buren Street, Amarilla, Texas.

ISAAC, MRS. PORTER.—Lived in Alabama City, Alabama, in 1924. Has brothers named Henry, Tom, Marion, and Charlie Davis, and a sister, Mrs. Henry Dandridge. Information appreciated by her niece, Mrs. E. J. Davis, 409 Van Buren Street, Amarilla, Texas.

HARRY.—I still care. Am worrying and lonesome. You can trust me as ever. Write your Chicago pal, Red.

WINGLER, NINA.—About fifty years old. Married Mr. Tracy at Sandoval, Illinois. Last heard from thirty years ago at Tucson, Arizona. Information appreciated by her brother, Orville Hines, 438 South Chestnut Street, Centralia, Illinois.

SNYDER, ADA MITCHELL.—Left Paterson, New Jersey, six years ago. Last heard from in Newark, New Jersey. Please write Mrs. F. J. Rogers, 488 Broadway, Paterson, New Jersey.

HANNA, MRS. ELSIE, and son, ARCHY.—Last seen at Arant, Oklahoma, in April, 1927. Was employed at this time in a rooming house. Information appreciated by her cousin, Albert Cunningham, Austin, Minnesota.

POWELL, CLINT.—Last heard from at Goodwin's Ranch, near Abilene, Texas. Please write to your mother, Mrs. E. D. Powell, San Angelo, Texas.

ASTON, MRS. JESSIE HELEN.—Left Lowell, Arizona, on March 22, 1927, with two children—Albert, three years old, and Barbara, five years old. Information appreciated by D. T. Aston, Box 3641, Lowell, Arizona.

DOUGHERTY, TOM.—Eighteen years old. Has scar on forehead. received in glass factory in 1925 at Torrance, California. Last heard from on his way to Oregon. Please write to your old pal, Comstock. Same address.

GREEN, SUSAN or JOE, and ANNIE BELLE JONES.—Left Whitwell, Tennessee, about thirty years ago for Texas. Information appreciated by Mrs. Green's granddaughter, Mrs. Nellie Burnette Gray, North Chattanooga, Tennessee.

WEISS, EITEL.—Last seen about thirteen years ago. Was in the navy in 1919. Mother has left us. Your sisters would like to hear from you. Information appreciated by Ethel Weiss, Route 1, Washington, Michigan.

PERRYMAN, W. RALPH.—Thirty-seven years old. Tattooed on arms. Cook by profession. Was in the navy twelve years. Last seen in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1923. Please write your mother, Mrs. W. M. Perryman, 1421 McCadden Place, Hollywood, California.

JARVIS, GEORGE I.—Have information. Please write P. Martin Jarvis, care of this magazine.

CLAIRMONT, CLARENCE.—Last heard from serving in the A. E. F. in France, as a dispatch rider, in 1918. Home was in Escanara, Michigan. Information appreciated by John C. Frizzell, Box 378, Brownsville, Texas.

GREY, ESTHER.—Last heard form at 117 South Street, Utica New York in 1917. Information appreciated by John C. Frizzell, Box 378, Brownsville, Texas.

CAHILL, LILLIE and SYBLE.—Last heard from in Royalton, Franklin County, Illinois, in 1918. Information appreciated by John C. Frizzell, Box 378, Brownsville, Texas.

Sore throat while you wait

Working in stuffy quarters, sleeping in over-heated homes, mingling with crowds and using appliances that others constantly use, people run an almost constant risk of a cold or sore throat—or worse.

At the first sign of either, use Listerine, the safe antiseptic, full strength. Gargle with it repeatedly. Rinse your mouth with it. Employ it occasionally as a nasal douche.

These simple measures may be the means of sparing you a trying—and possibly—a costly and painful siege of illness. In thousands of homes Listerine has checked colds and sore throats before they had a chance to become serious.

Being antiseptic, Listerine immediately attacks the countless disease-producing bacteria that lodge in the nose, mouth, and throat waiting until body resistance is low to strike.

Remember that while you are thus helping Nature ward off disease, you are also putting yourself on the polite side socially, for Listerine, as you know, ends halitosis (**unpleasant breath**). **Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.**

Do something about it

LISTERINE

-the safe antiseptic

Relief from Curse of CONSTIPATION

A PROMINENT physician, of Battle Creek, Mich., says: "Constipation is a disease of civilization. Wild men and wild animals do not suffer from this malady, which is responsible for more misery than any other single cause."

But immediate relief from the scourge of constipation has been found. The Research Laboratories of the United Drug Company in Boston have developed a tablet which attracts water from the system into the dry, lazy evacuating bowel called the colon. This fluid softens and loosens the sluggish food waste and causes a gentle, complete evacuation.

Rexall Orderlies (the name of these wonderful tablets) form no habit and never require an increase of the dose.

Stop suffering from constipation. Chew a pleasant-tasting Rexall Orderly tonight before retiring and feel fine tomorrow. Rexall Orderlies are sold only at Liggett and Rexall Drug Stores. Get a package of 24 tablets for 25 cents.

Save with Safety at your

Rexall

DRUG STORE

Liggett's are also Rexall stores

There is one near you

You will recognize it by this sign

Foot Pains

stop in 10 minutes
or you pay nothing

Burning, aching feet — foot calluses, pains in toes, instep, ball or heel — dull ache in ankle, calf or knee—shooting pains, flattening and spreading of the feet, sagging arches —all now quickly ended.

SLIP on a new and amazing band. Within 10 minutes every trace of pain has vanished. Displaced bones are corrected—weakened muscles are supported whose weakened condition causes 94% of all foot troubles, medical authorities say. Wear stylish shoes again, walk and dance without a twinge.

No stiff props to further weaken the foot. This amazingly light band strengthens muscles naturally. Soon do without it—feet are well.

Test it 10 days. If not amazed and delighted your money returned. Go to druggist, shoe store or chiropodist. If they can't supply you use coupon below and pay postman. **Send for free book on foot and leg troubles.**

JUNG'S The "Original" **ARCH BRACES**

FREE if it fails

Jung Arch Brace Co.,
342 Jung Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send 1 pair ☐ Wonder Style, $1. ☐ Miracle Style (extra wide for people weighing over 145 lbs.), $1.50.
☐ Money encl. ☐ Send C. O. D. plus postage.

Shoe Size.....Shoe Width.....

Name .....

Address.....

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

Canada: M. L. C. Bldg., Montreal. Add 25c to above prices

WHITE TEETH
have nothing to do

Ignoring the whitest, cleanest teeth, Pyorrhea wages a very successful war against health. It attacks the gums. And unaware of this fact, 4 persons out of 5 after forty and thousands younger surrender to Pyorrhea.

But take this precaution. Just be careful in your selection of a dentifrice. Use Forhan's for the Gums, regularly morning and night.

This dentifrice cleans teeth white and protects them against acids which cause decay. And in addition, if used in time, it helps firm gums and keeps them sound and healthy. Pyorrhea seldom attacks healthy gums.

Make Forhan's your daily morning and night health habit. It is economical health insurance. Get a tube from your druggist, today.. 35c and 60c.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's *for the gums*

YOUR TEETH ARE ONLY AS HEALTHY AS YOUR GUMS

New Liquid Kills Germs That Cause Dandruff And Falling Hair

STOP worrying about hair troubles—dandruff, falling hair, approaching baldness! Here is a new kind of liquid, hermetically sealed in vials, that is ending dandruff and falling hair, and growing new hair for thousands everywhere.

This new treatment, perfected by the Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Fifth Avenue, New York, is based on countless experiments which prove that in an enormous number of cases hair troubles are caused by tiny parasitical germs.

These germs work down into the roots of the hair and render them dormant—inactive. As a result, with the roots unable to supply their vital nourishment, the hair soon becomes dry, brittle, lifeless—and begins to fall out.

Ordinary treatments fail because they merely treat the surface skin and have little or no effect on the harmful bacteria embedded below the surface. But this new treatment, called Merke Derma Vials, penetrates *beneath* the surface—kills the infecting germs—carries off the unhealthy scaly substances which cause dandruff and falling hair—at the same time promoting a healthy circulation which supplies the dormant hair roots with the life-giving nourishment they so sorely need.

Extensive laboratory tests by one of the world's foremost research laboratories concluded with a report from which we quote: "The results indicate that the tonic *killed* the test organism (bacteria) *in less than three minutes.* The results also indicate that the tonic is capable of penetrating and preventing the growth of the test organism (bacteria)."

FREE—One regular 25-cent vial

Thousands of people from coast to coast are discovering Merke Derma Vials—the secret of new, lustrous, healthy hair. Now we welcome this convincing test. Simply take advantage of our generous free offer explained in the panel above, use Merke Derma Vial liquid yourself and see how remarkably helpful it is in ending dandruff and falling hair. Sign and mail coupon TODAY. Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. D-422, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

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Dept. D-422, 512 Fifth Avenue,
New York City

I'm willing to be convinced—without obligation on my part. Please send me one of the regular 25c Merke Derma Vials absolutely FREE and tell me how to use it.

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The cigarette that leads by billions

Just to state a great truth in another way—Camel is so exactly what so many smokers want that no other brand is even a close second.

If all cigarettes were as good as Camel you wouldn't hear anything about special treatments to make cigarettes good for the throat. Nothing takes the place of choice tobaccos.