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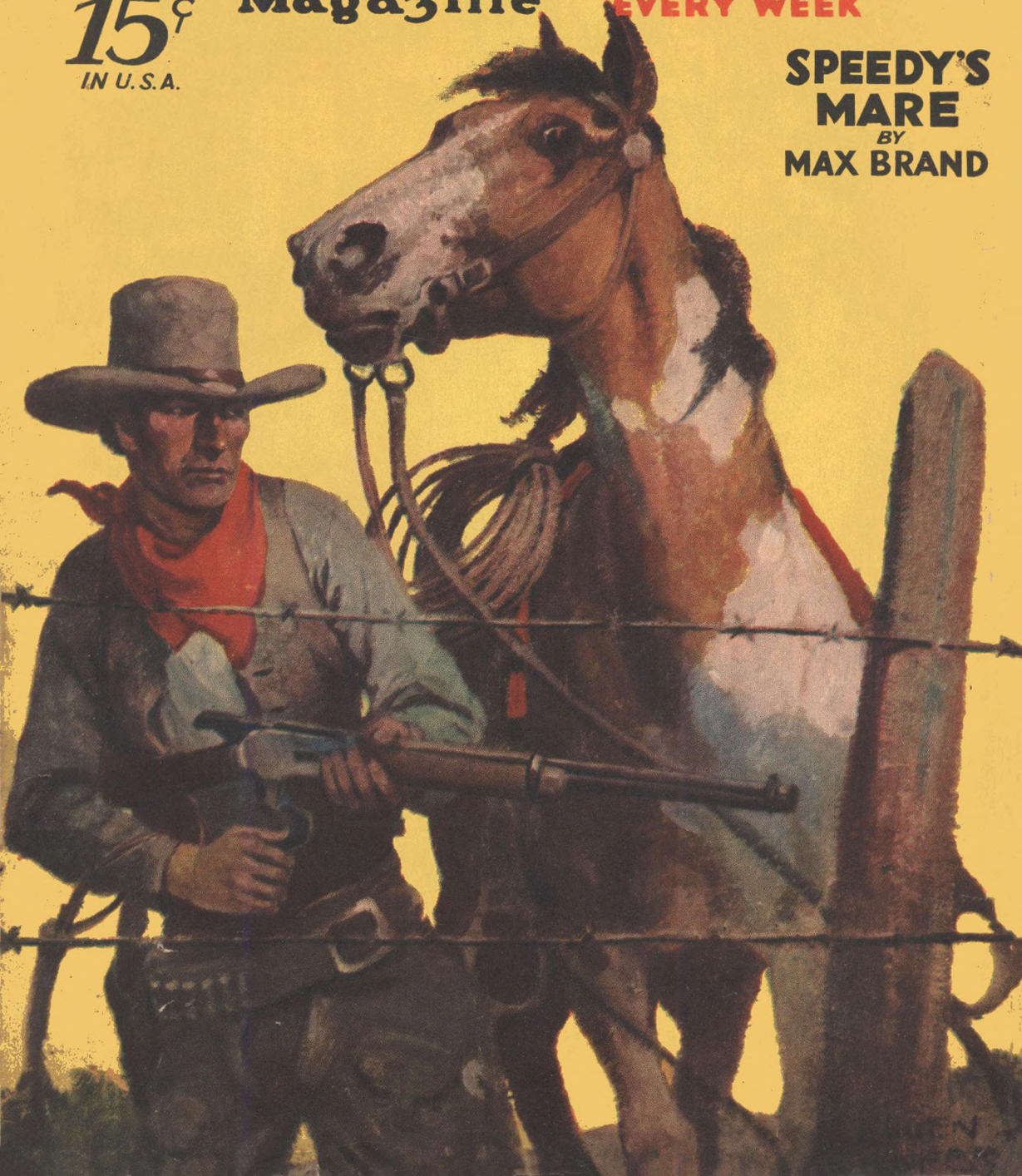
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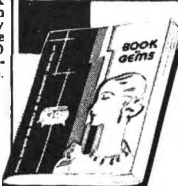


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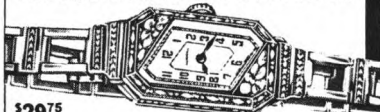
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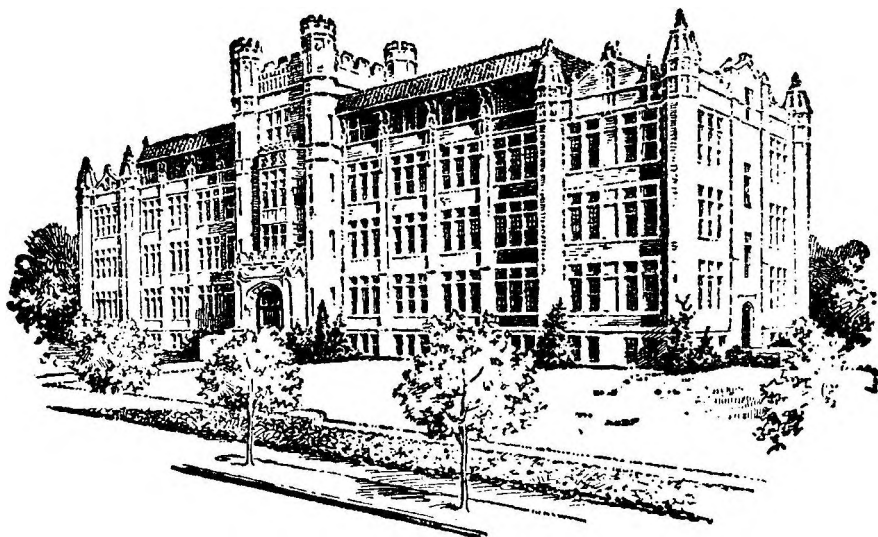
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Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1932, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1932, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Foreign subscription, \$8.50.

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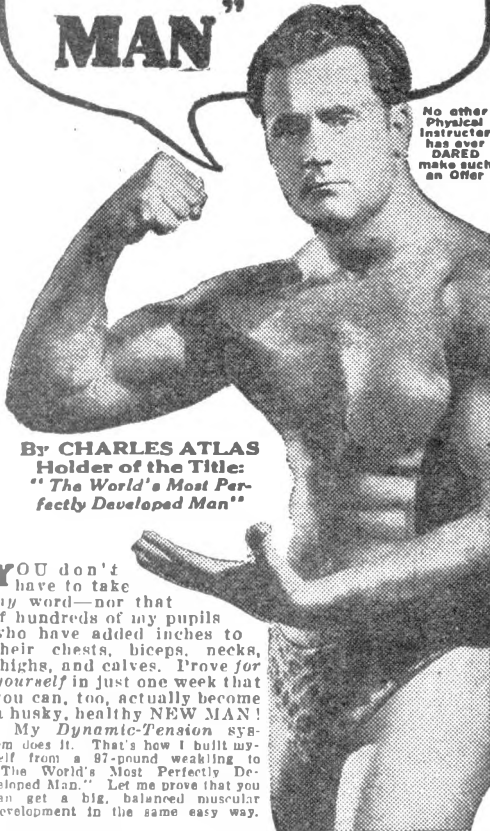
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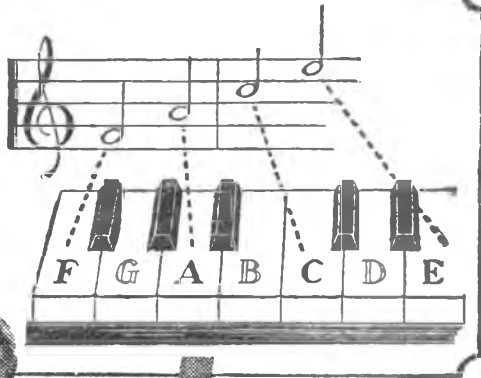
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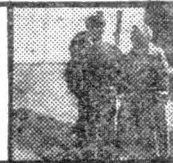
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In about ten years the Radio Industry has grown from a \$2,000,000 to hundreds of millions of dollars. Over 300,000 jobs have been created by this growth, and thousands more will be created by its continued development. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you in the N. R. I. course—have stepped into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

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An invention made possible by Radio. Offers many fine jobs to well-trained Radio men, paying \$75 to \$200 a week.



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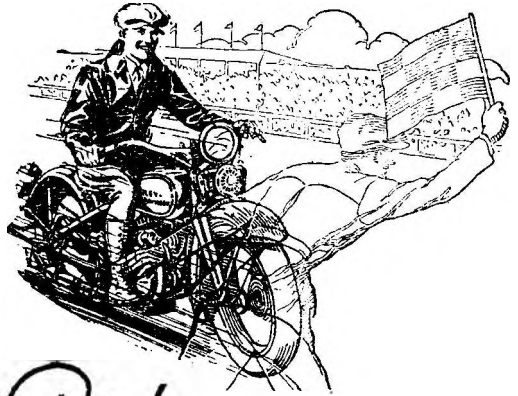
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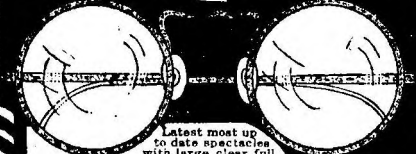
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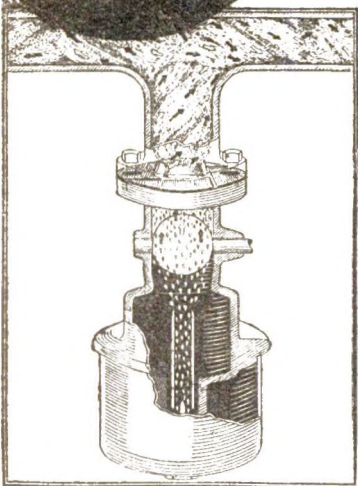
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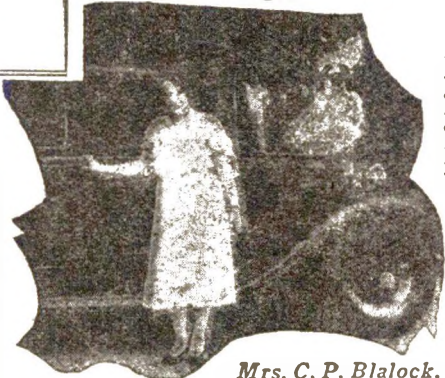
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MAVERICK RINKER'S RUSE

By C. WILES HALLOCK

THE town of Ute Junction was throwin'
a function

To dedicate "Alamo" Parr's new hotel;
The folks congregated, I, the mayor
orated,

And other plumb tedious proceedin's be-
fell.

The shuriff, "Hank" Strothers, Jedge
Barker and others

Sat on the verandy, all wearin' a frown,
And sweat till they panted while Alamo
ranted

Regardin' his joy in improvin' the town.

Big "Maverick" Rinker, the town's hardest
drinker,

A troublesome hombre, half outlaw, half
bum,
Stood near the verandy, right whisperin'
handy

To Shuriff Hank Strothers, disgusted
and glum.

"I'm nursin' a notion to start a commo-
tion,"

Old Maverick muttered, behind his big
paw.

WS-1C

"The town misbehavior could do you a
favor."

"Okay!" whispered Hank. "Go and frac-
ture a law!"

So Maverick shifted and suddenly drifted
Away from the doin's, unnoticed by all.
Then sounds of a ruction, like doom and
destruction,

Come boomin' from over by Ellery's
hall!

'Twas uproar of shootin' and howlin' and
hootin'

Like dog fights and cyclones and war
all in one!

Says Hank: "Folks, I'm grievin', I gotta
be leavin';

My duties don't never permit me no
fun!"

(The dog-gone, deceivin' durned son of
a gun!)

So Shuriff Hank Strothers deserted us
others.

Jailed Maverick then played him
pinochle and won!

While folks of Ute Junction endured the
durned function

With Alamo spoutin' till settin' of sun.



SPEEDY'S MARE

By MAX BRAND

Author of "Seven-day Lawman," etc.

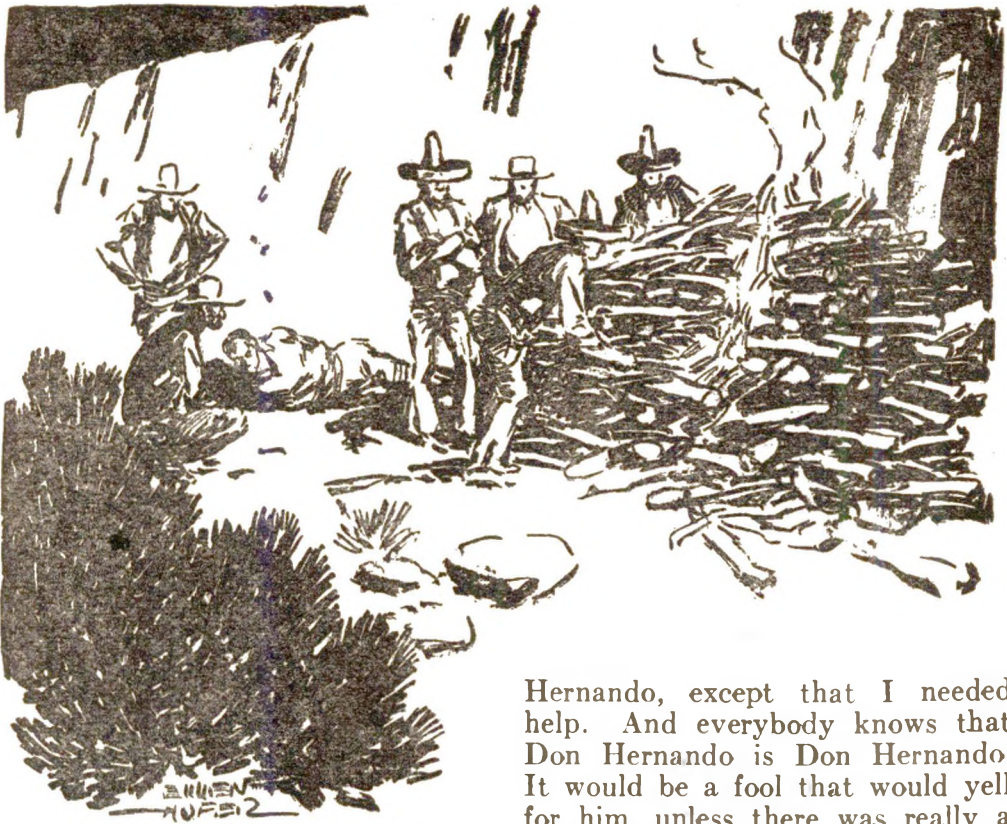
CHAPTER I.

GLOOMY GUS.

HIGH on a hill above Sunday Slough, in the dusk of the day, three horsemen sat side by side, two very large, and one a slenderer figure. The sun had set; twilight had descended on the long gorge of the mining ravine, and the last "shots" of that day had exploded, sending a roar and a hol-

low boom whizzing upward through the air. From the highest of the surrounding mountains, the rose of the day's end had finally vanished, leaving only a pale radiance, and now the smallest of the three silhouetted horsemen spoke:

"Señor Levine, as you know, I've come a long distance, because it is the pleasure of a gentleman to defy miles when one of his brothers calls for him. But it is already late, and I must inform you that, instead of



going to bed, I intend to change horses and return, before the morning, to my own house."

He spoke his English with the formality and the accent of a foreigner.

The largest silhouette of the three, a gross shape that overflowed the saddle, answered: "Now, look a-here, Don Hernando. I ain't the kind that hoists up a white flag before I gotta need to."

"That's the one thing that he ain't," said the third member of the party. "You take Levine, before he hollers, he's got his back agin' the wall."

AW, shut up, Mike, will you?" demanded the big man, without the slightest passion. "What I wanta say, if you'll let me, is that I ain't called for you, Don

Hernando, except that I needed help. And everybody knows that Don Hernando is Don Hernando. It would be a fool that would yell for him, unless there was really a wolf among the sheep, eh?"

"Thank you," said the Mexican.

He raised his hand and twisted his short mustaches, forgetting that the dimness of the light robbed this gesture of half its grace and finish.

Then he said: "We all love to see reason according to our lights. What reason do you think you can show me, Señor Levine? This a wolf; those, sheep; which may they be?"

"This sheep," said Levine, "we're the sheep. Me and my friends down there in Sunday Slough. There was a time, not far back, when we owned the town. What we said went. But then along comes the wolf, which his name is Speedy, what I mean to say. You don't need to doubt that. Because he's the wolf, all right."

"I have even heard his name," said the Mexican, politely.

"You have even heard his name,

have you?" said "One-eyed Mike" Doloroso. "Yeah, and you'll hear more'n his name, if ever you got anything to do with him. You'll hear yourself cussing the unlucky day that you ever bumped into him. That's what you'll hear!"

"One never knows," said Don Hernando. "He is not a very large man, I am told."

"Oh, he ain't so big," said Sid Levine, "but he's big enough. There was me and Cliff Derrick. Maybe you heard of him?"

"He was a very great man," said Don Hernando. "Yes, yes, some of my friends knew him very well, and one of them was honored by having the Señor Derrick steal all that he owned in this world."

"Cliff would do that, all right," said One-eyed Mike. "I tell you what I mean, Derrick, he'd steal your gold fillings out of your teeth, while you was saying good morning and glad you'd met him. Derrick, he was a man, what I mean."

"Yes," said Don Hernando, "I have heard that he was such a man. And he was your friend, Señor Levine?"

"Yeah," said Levine. "I had Sunday Slough all spread out, and along comes Derrick, and him and me get ready to take the scalp of Sunday Slough so slick and careful that the town won't hardly miss its hair. Then along comes this no-good, guitar-playin' hound of a tramp, name of Speedy, that looks like a worthless kid, and that turns the edge of a knife, and bites himself a lunch out of tool-proof steel—what I mean!"

"That I hardly understand," said Don Hernando.

Mike Doloroso explained: "What the chief means is this Speedy looks soft, but he's hard-boiled. He's more'n an eight-minute egg, is what

he is. You take and slam him the works, and they just bounce off his bean, is what the chief means. He lunches on boiler plate and dynamite sticks is toothpicks for him, is what the chief means."

AW, shut up, Mike. Lemme talk for myself," said the chief, "will you? Don Hernando, he understands English like a gentleman, all right."

"I think I understand what you mean about Don Speedy," said the great Don Hernando. "It is to get a surprise, to meet him."

"Yeah, you said it then, Hernando," said Levine. "A surprise is all that he is. I was saying that me and Derrick, we had things planned, and we had this here county all lined up, and tied, and ready for branding. And then we find out that Speedy is in the way, and first Derrick stumbles over him and pretty near breaks his neck, and then along comes my best bet, which it was my old friend, Buck Masters, that I had got made the sheriff of the county."

"Why, Buck Masters was worth ten times his weight in gold to me. He was set with diamonds, was all he was to me, and along comes that sneak of a wolf of a Speedy, and he picks off Buck Masters, too, and all that Buck gets is fifteen years minus hope, for pushing the queer, which was a rotten break for any gent, I say. And there's Derrick in for life, and a matter of fact, I mean to say that there ain't any fun around here, like there used to be in the old days, when we had Sunday Slough all spread out and waiting to be scalped. What I mean."

"I seem to understand you," said Don Hernando. "I also, in a small way, have a little town at my service. It is not much. We in Mexico have not learned the big ways of

you Americanos. It is very small that we work, in a modest way. Still, it is a comfortable town. Everybody pays me a little bit, not much, partly because I love my people, and partly because they have not much to pay. But we understand one another. If my friends make five pesos, one of them they pay to me, and all is well.

"They are poor, simple people. Some of their pesos they pay to me in oil, others in wine, others in chickens, or in goat's flesh. Fine flour and cornmeal they send to me. Their donkeys toil every day up and down the steep road that goes from my castle to their city. So we understand one another. I am not one who rides down suddenly and robs a man's house. No, not I—unless the scoundrel has refused my rightful tribute to me. But I leave all of my people in peace. Like a great family we live all together, Señor Levine, and that, I dare say, is how you lived here in Sunday Slough before this accursed Speedy, whom I already despise, came to spoil your happiness!"

"Yeah," said Levine, with a sigh. "You can say that we lived like a happy family, all right. I won't say no to that. The boys didn't know where they stood, except that it was better a lot to stand on the sunny side of me. I can talk out to a fellow like you, Don Hernando. I guess?"

"Frankness is as frankness does," said Hernando, wasting a smile on the darkness.

ONLY the gleam of his teeth showed through. "Now, then," said Levine, "in the old days, I run the biggest gambling house in the town, and I got everything my own way. There's only one side to be on in Sunday Slough,

and that's my side, what I mean. All the boys in the know are on the right side of the water, believe me. But along comes this runt of a singing fool, this here Speedy, and slams everything, and busts up the picture, and why, I ask you?"

"That I cannot tell," said the great Don Hernando.

"Because," said Levine, his voice warm with indignation, "because, if you'll believe it, I wouldn't let the low-down son of a sea hound get away with nothing. And there was a half-witted sap of a crooked prospector that was a friend of his by name of Pier Morgan, that claimed to own a mine, and my friend, the sheriff, he turned that mine over to a friend of mine and got Pier Morgan jailed for vagrancy, which is being a tramp, to say it in good English. And Pier Morgan starts shooting his way out of jail, and only shoots himself onto the junk pile, and along comes this here Speedy that nobody had ever heard of, and he takes and picks Pier Morgan off the tin cans.

"Then he takes him off into the hills, and goes and gets him well, what I mean. And while he's getting well, Speedy, he comes down and gets himself a job as a seven-day man, I mean, as a deputy sheriff. You know how it goes. The deputy sheriffs, they didn't last more'n about seven days apiece, in those times, that's what kind of a wide-awake town we had around here, Don Hernando. But Speedy, he starts in throwing monkey wrenches into the machine. And he goes after my scalp, unbeknownst to me, and he picks off Cliff Derrick, and then my pal, Buck Masters, that was sheriff.

"And now comes along the election for sheriff—and whacha think? If they don't go and put up Speedy

for sheriff! Why, he ain't got no name, even, and he calls himself John James Jones, and they laugh their fool heads off, but they get all ready to vote for J. J. J. just the same. Now, I ask you!"

"That would be hard on you, señor, to have him for the sheriff of the county?"

"It was heart failure and rheumatism to me to have him only for the deputy sheriff," sighed Levine, "so what would it be to have him for sheriff? There was a time, when my house down there, the Grand Palace, it took in nine tenths of the coin that was pushed over the felt or over the bar in Sunday Slough. And now what kind of a trade have I got? Nothing but the crooks that hate Speedy so bad that they won't patronize the joints that he lets run. So they come to me, and drink my booze, and run up bills and don't pay them, and the roulette wheel, it don't clear five hundred a week!"

He hung his head for an instant with a groan, and then he went on: "Now, I'm gonna tell you what, Don Hernando. I know how to clean out this here Speedy. There's a friend of mine called Dick Cleveland, Crazy Dick, that was smeared around by Speedy once, and he's spotted the place where this Pier Morgan is finishing up, getting well and sharpening his knife for my throat at the same time! Now, Don Hernando, if I can snatch this here fellow, Pier Morgan, away, and put him in a safe place, this here Speedy will line out after him, and that'll take him out of my path, and while he's gone, I clean up on Sunday Slough. Is that clear; I mean, is it clear if you're the place where Pier Morgan is taken to?"

"I see your reason, señor, but not mine," said Don Hernando, rather simply.

"I got five thousand reasons for you," said Levine.

"Reasons, or dollars?" asked Don Hernando.

"Both," said Levine.

CHAPTER II.

THE MEXICAN HAND.

IN Sunday Slough, later on, that day, Speedy, public choice for sheriff, sat in his office, which had formerly been office and home of the late sheriff, "Buck" Masters, now in the penitentiary where Speedy had put him.

He sat at his window, much at ease. In dockets upon his desk were various documents which had to do with his workmen wanted by neighboring States, by neighboring counties. But Speedy allowed such business to roll off his back. He was interested in only one thing, and that was cleaning up the town of Sunday Slough.

The job would have been more than half finished, at that moment, except that Sid Levine was still decidedly at large. The great Levine was the major force with which, as Speedy knew, he had to contend. Though he had cut away, as it were, the right and the left hand of the gambler, there still remained the man himself, with his brain, so resourceful in evil and upon the subject of the great Levine the thoughts of Speedy were continually turning.

He heard a light, stealthy step crossing the porch in front of the little wooden building that housed him and his office. Then came a light knock at the door.

"Come in, Joe," he called.

The door opened. Joe Dale, short, thick-shouldered, strong as a bull and quick as a cat, came into the room. He waved his hand in the dusk.

"Why not a light, Speedy?" said he.

"I like it this way. I think better by this light," said Speedy.

He began to strum, very lightly, the strings of the guitar that lay across his knees.

"If you don't stop playing that blooming thing," said Joe Dale, "I'm gonna go on out."

"All right. I'll stop," said Speedy, gently. And stretching himself, he settled more deeply in his chair, and watched the other man.

"What's up, Joe?" said he.

"I meet up with Stew Webber," said Joe Dale, "and the fool don't know that you've gone and got a pardon for me out of the governor. When he recognizes me, he pulls a gun. I kicked the gun out of his hand. I slammed that bird on the beak so hard that he nearly busted the sidewalk when he sat down on it. Then I told him what was what. He was gonna collect some blood money out of that, Speedy!"

"He's a fool," said Speedy. "He's a fool, though I don't know him. How are things in town, Joe?"

"Everything's so good that it'd make you laugh," said Joe Dale. "I'll tell you what. There was a bird come into the Best Chance Saloon, and he starts telling the boys that he won't vote any ex-tramp for sheriff of this here county. And the boys listen to him a while, and then they take him out and tie him backward on his hoss, and give him a ride out of town. That's what they think of you, Speedy!"

I HOPE the poor fellow doesn't get a broken neck," said Speedy.

"No, he didn't get no broken neck," said the deputy. "All he got was a fall and a dislocated shoulder. One of the camps took him in off the road. He wasn't hurt bad."

"Dog-gone it," said Speedy, "I'll have to go and see him, to-morrow."

"Say, what are you?" asked Joe Dale. "A visiting sister of mercy or what?"

"Oh, lay off that, Joe," said Speedy. "What's the other news?"

"There was a riot started down in the Thompson Saloon. I got there as the furniture begun to break. A big buck hauled off and was about to slam me, but somebody yelled: 'That's Speedy's man!' Well, the big bozo he just backed up into a corner and hollered for help, pretty near. He started explaining how everything was wrong that he'd been thinking. I lined him up and made him pay for the breakages, which he done it plumb peaceable.

"Afterward, he bought drinks for the crowd. And Thompson, he says that any bird that don't vote for you, and announces it loud and high, he don't get no liquor in his saloon. And election day, he's gonna run wide open, with free drinks for everybody. I told him that was a fine idea, but the Best Chance Saloon already had the same idea. He said that he'd go in one better than the Best Chance, because he'd loosen up and give a free barbecue, along with the drinks. It's gonna be a great day when you're elected, Speedy!"

"Humph!" said Speedy.

"Like you didn't care, is what you mean to act like, eh?" said Joe Dale.

He sat down on the window sill, his big shoulders silhouetted against the street light.

"I care, all right," said Speedy. "But what I'm after is Levine, not the job of sheriff of the county. I don't want that job, Joe, unless I have to have it before I can get Levine."

"I know you want Levine," said Joe Dale, "but you're human,

Speedy. You want the sheriff job, too."

"I don't," said Speedy. "I'm human, all right, but not that human. Hunting men isn't the kind of excitement that I want. Only, I have to get Levine, because he's got so many others."

"I've gotta believe you, if you say so," answered Joe Dale. "But, if I was you and circulated around the town and heard the boys singing songs about Speedy and J. J. J., it'd give me a thrill, all right."

"What's the rest of the news?" asked Speedy.

"There ain't any other news except you," said the Joe Dale. "It's all that anybody is talking about. All the big mine owners are gonna close up shop, that day, because they want to make sure that their men get a chance to vote for you on election day."

"That's kind of them," said Speedy.

And he yawned.

"Anything about Levine?" he asked.

LEVINE is cooked. His place don't draw no business, no more," said Joe Dale. "The tables are mostly empty, day and night. Levine is cooked in this town. It's a funny thing that the fool keeps hanging on."

"He'll hang on till he gets me, or I get him," said Speedy. "He's no hero, but his blood's up."

"He's beat," declared Joe Dale. "He's only a joke, now. He's got no hangers-on."

"He'll have them five minutes after I'm dead," answered Speedy. "Oh, I know how it is with the boys. They like the top dog. You say Levine is beat, but I tell you that I'm more afraid of him right now than when he was on top of the

bunch, here. Bad times sharpen good brains, and Levine has a brain in his head, don't doubt that!"

"He has a lot of fat in his head, is what he's got," said the other. "You're all wrong, Speedy. Levine is finished in Sunday Slough. Gents have had a taste of law and order, and they like it better than Levine's rough-house. Only, Speedy, we oughta do more about the outside jobs. We get letters every day about thugs and crooks that've come over into our county. We're expected to clean up some of those boys! We'd oughta do it!"

Speedy yawned once more, very sleepily.

Then he said: "They behave, over here. They don't even lift cattle. They pay their way. I know a dozen of 'em around town, right now. But as long as they stay quiet, this can be their port of missing men. I don't mind having them about. I don't care how many other States and counties want them; all I want is peace in Sunday Slough. It was a rough nest when we came here, Joe, and now it's settling down, I think."

Joe Dale grunted, but before he could answer, a rapid drumming of hoofs was heard, the rider stopping before the shack. Then, he threw himself from the horse and ran forward.

"Speedy! Speedy!" he called, in a guarded voice.

"It's Juan. It's the half-breed!" said Speedy.

Instantly he was through the window, going like magic past the form of Joe Dale.

The panting runner paused before him.

"Juan, you idiot," said Speedy, "what are you doing showing your face in town, with a price on your head?"

Juan shook the head that had a price on it, as though disclaiming its importance, then he said: "Pier Morgan, the Señor Morgan, he is gone, Speedy!"

Speedy got him by the shoulders and backed him around until the street light, made of the dull shafts of distant lights, fell upon his face.

"Say that again!" he demanded.

"The Señor Morgan, he is gone. I, señor, have a bullet hole through the side of my neck. That is why the bandage is there. I still bleed, my friend. It is not for lack of fighting, but the Evil One himself came and took Pier Morgan from me."

"D'you know the name and address of this Evil One, Juan?" asked Speedy.

IT is Don Hernando of Segovia, señor. I saw his face only in part. But I knew the scar on his forehead. I was once one of his people. It was Don Hernando, and you will never see Pier Morgan again. He is gone to Segovia. He is gone forever."

"Where's Segovia?" snapped Speedy.

"A little on the other side of the Rio Grande. It is more than a day's ride from this place, señor! But it might as well be the journey of a life, for those who go into it never come back. They are held in the teeth of Don Hernando forever! Ah, señor, it was not carelessness on my part, but——"

"Be still, Juan," said Speedy. "You know the way to Segovia?"

"I know the way, señor."

"Will you take me there?"

"I take you within sight of it," said Juan. "I do not dare to go closer. I have been in the dungeons of Segovia. I shall never go there again!"

"I'll go all the way, Speedy," offered Joe Dale.

"You'll stay here and run Sunday Slough," answered Speedy. "I'll find out about Segovia on the way down, but I imagine that this is a one-man job. You know, Joe, that an army often can't take a place by open assault, but one crook can pick the lock of the gate!"

CHAPTER III.

INTREPID YOUTH.

SEGOVIA stood among rocky hills, bare as the palm of the hand. The town itself was an irregular huddle of whitewashed dobe, without a tree in the streets, without a bush to cast shadow. In fact, vegetable life could not exist beside the famous goats of Segovia which, men swore, could digest not only the labels of tin cans, but the tin as well.

How these people lived was a mystery which it was hard to solve. The naked eye could see almost nothing except, now and then, a dun-colored patch of cattle, scattered here and there in the distance. But distances mean little in Mexico, and a cow will run two days to drink of water on the third. A cow will walk thirty miles a day, grazing on a few blades of grass or tearing at a frightful cactus now and then. Still the cow will live and grow, becoming fat enough for marketing in the early spring.

So it was that the outlying herds fed the town of Segovia. In addition, it was said that some of the hardy inhabitants worked along the river, not as boatmen or agriculturists, to be sure, but in other sorts of traffic, generally done at night, work which pays well per hour, but whose pay and pleasure is well salted with death, now and then,

death that spits out of the guns of Federal patrols and Texas Rangers on the northern side of the stream.

Some of the sons of Segovia, also, went at times to the mines, or to very distant ranches, returning to their homes with money to blow in. They helped to support the two *cantinas* of the town and the little stores, where the women bought each day enough food to keep starvation off for twenty-four hours. There was even a store, in Segovia, where one could buy clothes; and it was notorious that the secondhand department of that store was filled with wonderful bargains, usually in styles and materials from north of the great river.

These people of Segovia were a race apart, a race all to themselves. Almost to a man, they were slender, agile and strong. They were like their own goats, which seemed to eat the sand and the sunshine, for there was little else on the ground where they grazed. They and their ancestors had inhabited this place since the days of the Conquistadores. The old Spanish blood mixed with the Indian in their veins. They were paler than other peons. They bore themselves like caballeros. They were fierce, cruel, revengeful, patient, enduring. They loved their friends with a passion; they hated their enemies with still more fervor. They were people to be noted, and to be feared.

All of these terrible clansmen, for like a clan they clung together, looked down on the rest of the world, and looked up to the castle of Don Hernando Garcias.

IT was not really a castle. Once, to be sure, the walls had been of stone, cut and laid together with the priceless skill of the Mexican stonecutters. But the cen-

turies had cracked, molded and eaten the big stones until they had fallen from their places, and a ragged mass of adobe finished in part the outline of the earlier walls.

Still, it remained a castle to the proud, stern peons of Segovia, the new. When they raised their eyes, a saying had it, they never found heaven or aught higher than the walls of the castle. For in that building, for three centuries and more, there had always been a Garcias called Hernando.

They were as like one another as peas in a pod, all those lords of Segovia. They all looked like the villagers themselves; that is, they were lean, hardy, tough-sinewed, erect, quick-moving, passionate of eye. They all wore the same sort of bristling, short mustaches. They all bore themselves like conquerors.

Sometimes when the people of the town were called the children of their overlord, there seemed to be more than words in the phrase, such a family resemblance existed among them.

Their devotion to their lords of the castle, therefore, was all the more passionate and profound because they looked upon them, in true medieval style, as children upon parents. They rejoiced in the pride, cruelty, and wealthy grandeur of their masters and paid the heavy exactions of the Garcias family with perfect calm of mind. Most Mexicans are resolved democrats, but the men of Segovia preferred to be under the thumb of an autocrat.

For one thing, he preserved them from paying taxes to the State, for when tax collectors came to Segovia they strangely disappeared, and finally they had fallen out of the habit of going to the mysterious little white town above the river. For another thing, according as he

was a great and lordly freebooter, they themselves picked up plenty of profit from his expeditions. And the present Hernando Garcias filled all the requirements.

He was rapacious, stern, and ruled them with a rod of iron. On the other hand, in settling their village disputes, he was as just as he was cruel. Furthermore, he had always had some large employment on hand. It might be the organization of a long march into the interior, where he harried wide lands and brought back running herds of the little Mexican cattle, to be rustled across the Rio Grande and sold "wet" into the Northern land. It might be simple highway robbery, organized on a smaller scale, but paying even better. It might be a midnight attack upon an isolated house, or a mountain village. It might be a stealthy smuggling of liquor or drugs.

But he was always occupied and always providing employment for his "children," as the men of Segovia loved to call themselves. Since he had come into power, they rode better horses, wore brighter sashes, ate more meat. The *cantinas* offered them beer, wine, and distilled fire; they had money to buy it. And what other elements could they have desired in a terrestrial paradise?

THE sun of this day had set, and in the twilight the white town had been filmed across with purple, and the lights had begun to shine out of the doorways, flashing upon groups of children who played and tumbled in the deep, white dust of the streets. Then night gathered about the town, and it seemed to huddle, as though under a cloak, at the knees of the "castle," and about the home

of Garcias the stars drew down out of the clear sky; or so it seemed to the villagers.

It was at this time that a rider on an old gray mule came into the town, and stopped in front of one of the *cantinas* to play on a guitar and sing.

His voice was good, his choice of songs was rich and racy on the one hand, profoundly sentimental on the other. His hair was dark, so were his eyes; his skin was the rich walnut color of Mexico; and his handsome face seemed to fit exactly into his songs of love.

So a crowd gathered at once.

He was invited into the *cantina*. He was offered drinks. Then they brought him some cold roasted flesh of a young kid, cold tortillas, hot tomato and pepper sauces. He ate with avidity, leaning well over his food, scooping it up with the paper-thin tortillas.

A jolly, ragged beggar was this minstrel, with a ragged straw hat on his head of the right Mexican style, its crown a long and taper cornucopia. In the brim of it were a few twists of tobacco leaf and the corn husks for making cigarettes. Furthermore, somewhere along the road, he had found a sweetheart, who had rolled up a number of cigarettes and tied them in pretty little bundles, with bits of bright-colored ribbon. These, also, were attached to the brim of the hat.

He had on a gaudy jacket, the braid of which had tarnished here and ripped away there. His shirt was of silk, very soiled and tattered, and open at the throat. His waist, however, was bound about, and his narrow hips, by a splendid crimson sash. The flash of his eyes and his white teeth as he ~~sang~~, or as he sang, or as he danced, made the tawdry costume disappear, particularly in

the eyes of the women who crowded about the door of the *cantina* to look on at the diversions of their lords and masters.

Particularly, was he a master of the dance, and it was really a wonderful thing to see him accompany his flying feet with strumming of the guitar, while he retained breath enough in his throat to sing the choruses, at least; furthermore, and above all, his spinning was so swift that he could unwind the sash that girded him and keep it standing out stiff as a flag in the track of his dancing, and so remain while, without the use of hands, he wound himself into it again.

The old men sat in the corners of the room and beat time with their feet and hands. Their red-stained eyes flashed like fire. The younger men stirred uneasily, nearer at hand. Sometimes one of them would fling his voice and his soul into a chorus.

SOMETIMES one of them would dart out, with a bound, and match the steps of the visiting master. Whenever a village dancer came out to rival the minstrel, the ragged fellow welcomed him with such a grace, such a bright smile, and nodded in such approval of the flying feet, that each man felt Segovia had been honored and flattered.

It was almost midnight before this entertainment ended. By that time the minstrel had collected, it was true, not very many coins, but he had been surrounded by good wishes and ten men offered to give him a bed for the night. However, it appeared that the little glasses of stinging brandy had done more than their work on the minstrel. And now, like a drunkard, he declared that he would not bother any of them to put him up for the night.

Instead, he would gain admission to the castle, where there were sure to be many empty beds!

They listened with amazement. Some of the good-hearted warned him that Garcias's household could not be wakened with impunity in the middle of the night, but the fume of the liquor, it appeared, had made him rash and, therefore, the whole lot of them flocked along to see the performance.

They even pointed out the deep casement of the room of Hernando Garcias, and then they crept away into hiding in nooks and corners and shadows among the nearer horses to watch the fortune of the rash young entertainer, as he strove to sing and dance his way into the house of the great man!

CHAPTER IV.

MUSIC ON THE AIR.

IN the meantime, Don Hernando was about to sink into a profound slumber with the peaceful mind of one who has done his duty and done it very well.

For a little earlier, that evening, he had arrived with his prisoner, the gringo, Pier Morgan, and had ridden up to his house, not through the village streets, but up the narrow and steep incline that climbed the face of the bluff and so came directly to the outer gate of the building. By this route he came home, partly because he did not wish to be observed, partly because he would thus have his prisoner closer to the dungeon cell in which he was to be confined and partly, also, because he loved to impress and mystify his townsmen.

He knew that some of the household servants would soon spread everywhere in Segovia the news that a prisoner had come, a gringo. Even the little children would soon be

buzzing and whispering. But just as surely as the story was bound to fill every house in Segovia, so sure was it that not a syllable would pass beyond. The secrets of Don Hernando were family secrets, as it were, and the whole town shared in them and rigorously preserved them.

The good Don Hernando, having lodged his captive in one of the lowest and wettest of the cellar rooms of the old house, posted a house servant with a machete and a rifle to watch the locked door. He had then gone on to his repast for the evening, content.

He had been told by Sid Levine that he would have to use every precaution to keep his prisoner from falling into the hands of Speedy again, and this subject constituted part of his conversation with his lady, as they sat together at table. She was a dusky beauty, and now that the years were crowding upon her and she was at least twenty-two, she began to be rounder than before, deep of bosom and heavy of arm. Her wrist was dimpled and fat, and so were the knuckles of her fingers. But her eyes were bright, and she carried her head like a queen, as befitted the wife of Don Hernando Garcias.

When she had seen and distantly admired the new thickness of the wallet of her spouse, he explained the simplicity of the work which he had done. It was merely to receive from one man the custody of another, and to ride the man down across the river and hold him in the house.

"This Levine, who pays me the money for the work, is a simpleton," he said. "He seems to feel that his enemy, Speedy, is a snake to crawl through holes in the ground, or a hawk to fly through the air and dart in at a casement. But I told the

señor that my house is guarded with more than bolts and locks and keys, for every man within the walls of it has killed at least once! This vagabond, this Speedy, of whom they talk with such fear, had he not better step into a den of tigers than into the house of Garcias?"

THE same fierce satisfaction was still warm in his breast when he retired to sleep, and he was on the point of closing his eyes when he heard the strumming of a guitar just under his window.

For a moment he could not and would not believe his ears. Then rage awoke in him, and his heart leaped into his throat. It was true that the townsmen took many liberties.

It was true that they acted very much as they pleased within their own limits, but those limits did not extend to the very walls of the "castle." No, the space between the last of their houses and his own outer wall was sacred ground, and no trespassing upon it was permitted!

"A drunkard and a fool," said Garcias to himself, as he sat up in his bed.

He listened, and from the outer air the voice of the singer rose and rang, and entered pleasantly upon his ear. It was an ancient song in praise of great lords who are generous to wandering minstrels. On the one hand, it flattered the rich; on the other hand, it poured golden phrases upon the singers who walk the world.

The purpose of the song seemed so apparent that Garcias ground his teeth. No man could be sufficiently drunk to be excused. He, Garcias, was not in a mood to allow excuses, anyway.

He bounded from his bed, and

strode to the window, catching up as he went a great crockery wash-basin from its stand. With this balanced on the sill, he looked over the ledge, and below him, smudged into the blackness of the ground, he made out clearly enough the silhouette of the singer, from whom the music rose like a fountain with a lilting head.

Garcias set his teeth so that they gleamed between his grinning lips. Then he hurled the great basin down with all his might.

It passed, it seemed to him, straight through the shadowy form beneath!

Even the stern heart of Garcias stood still.

It was true that his forbears, from time to time, had slain one or more of the townsmen, but they had always paid through the nose for it. The men of Segovia were fellows who could be struck with hand or whip, by their master, but when it came to the actual taking of a life, they were absurdly touchy about it. They insisted upon compensation, much compensation, floods of money, apologies, declarations of regret in public, promises that such things should never happen again. On certain occasions, they had even threatened to pull the old castle to bits and root out the tyrants!

So Hernando Garcias stood at his window sweating and trembling a little, and cursing his hasty temper.

For the song had ceased, or had it merely come to the end of a stanza?

YES, by heaven, and now the sweet tide of the music recommenced and poured upward, flowing in upon his ear. At the same time, Don Hernando unmistakably heard the tittering of many voices.

"By heavens," he said, "the louts have gathered to watch this. It is a performance. It is a jest, and I am the one who is joked at."

He said other things, grinding them small between his teeth. It was excellent cursing. It was a sort of blasphemy in which the English language is made to appear a poor, mean, starved thing. For the Spaniard swears with an instinctive art and grace. There are appropriate saints for every turn of the thought and the emotions. And Don Hernando called forth half of the calendar as he cursed the minstrel.

He turned. The washstand was near by, and on it remained the massive water jug, half filled with a ponderous weight of water. It was not so large a missile as the wash bowl, but it was at least twice as heavy, and it was the sort of thing with which a man could take aim.

The fear that he might have committed murder, the moment before, now died away in him. He wanted nothing so much as to shatter the head of the singer into bits. He wanted to grind him into the ground.

So he rose on tiptoes, holding the jug in both hands, and he took careful aim, held his breath, set his teeth, and hurled that engine of destruction downward with the velocity of a cannon ball.

It smote—not the form of the minstrel. It must have shaved past his head with only inches to spare, but the undaunted voice of the song arose and hovered like a bird at the ear of Don Hernando.

The jug was too small. He needed a large thing to cast.

And presently his hand fell on the back of a chair.

It was an old chair, the work of a master. It had been shipped across the sea. Even its gilding represented a small fortune, and on

the back of it was portrayed the first great man of the Garcias line.

That was why it stood in the room of the master of the house. For every morning, when he sat up in bed and looked at the picture on the back of the chair, he was assured of his high birth and of the long descent of his line, for the picture might have stood for a portrait of himself. There were the same sunken eyes, the same hollow cheeks, the same narrow, high forehead, and even the same short mustache, twisted to sharp points.

He thought not of the portrait, alas, as he stood there by the window, teetering up and down from heel to toe, in the grand excess of his wrath.

But, catching up the chair, he hurled it out of the window, and leaned across the sill, this time confident that he could not fail of striking the mark.

IT did not seem to him that the minstrel dodged. But certain he was that he had missed the target entirely, for the song still arose and rang on his ears!

Then, lying flat on his stomach across the window sill, he remembered what it was that he had done. The chair must be smashed. Undoubtedly, the portrait was ruined.

And woe coursed through his veins! For it was plain that he had cast away with his own hand what was as good, to him, as a patent of nobility!

He groaned. He staggered back into the room, gasping, and buried his fingers in his long hair.

Then he flung himself on the bell cord that dangled near the head of his bed, and pulled upon it frantically, not once, not twice, but many times, and when he heard the bell jangling loudly in the distance,

he hurled a dressing gown over his shoulders.

Hurrying feet came to the door of his room. There was a timid knock; the door opened.

"Manuel, fool of a sleepy, thick-headed, half-witted muleteer, do you hear the noise that is driving me mad?"

"I hear only the music of the singer, señor," said poor Manuel.

"Music! It's the braying of a mule!" shouted Garcias. "Go down. Take Pedro with you. Seize the drunken idiot by the ears and drag him here. Do you hear me? Go at once? Go at once!"

He seized the edge of the door and slammed it literally upon the face of Manuel.

It eased his temper a little to hear the grunt of the stricken man, and to hear the muttered names of saints that accompanied him down the hall way.

CHAPTER V.

THE ANGRY DON.

IN the meantime, he lighted a lamp and paced hurriedly up and down his room. From the windows, he heard again the tittering of many voices.

Yes, it was as on a stage, and the crowd was enjoying him as one of the actors. Rage seized upon his heart. He thought of the ruined portrait on the chair and a sort of madness blackened his eyes.

At one end of the room hung various knives. He fingered a few of them as he came to that side of the room but, remembering the revolver, pistols, rifles and shotguns that were assembled in a set piece against the opposite wall, he would hastily go back and seize on one of these, only to change his mind again. Nothing could satisfy him, he felt,

except to feel the hot blood pouring forth over his hands.

Then came rough voices in the outer court and stifled exclamations from the near distance.

That soothed him a trifle.

He shouted from the window, leaning well out: "Bring up the wreck of the chair and, if you pull off the ears of the singer, I, for one, shall forgive you!"

He retired and sat in another chair, deep and high, wide as a throne and with a tall back.

Seated so, nursing his wrath, his fingers moved convulsively, now and again, as though he were grasping a throat.

Presently up the hall came the voices and the footfalls of Manuel and Pedro. The door opened. They flung into the room the body of a slender man, who staggered, almost fell to the floor, and then, righting himself and seeing the glowering face of Don Hernando in the chair in a corner of the room, bowed very deeply, taking off a tattered straw hat and fairly sweeping the goat-skin rug with it.

"Señor Garcias," said the minstrel, "I have come many miles to sing for you. One of my ancestors sang for yours, generations ago. And so I have come."

The master of the house glared.

Pedro, in the meantime, was presenting him with the wreckage of the chair. The old, worm-eaten wood had smashed to a sort of powder; and of the back panel, in which the face was painted, there remained no more than scattered splinters. He picked up a handful of that treasured panel. Only a twist of a mustache, only one angry eye glared forth at him from the ruin. Garcias dropped the wreckage rattling upon the floor feeling sure that he would kill this man.

He surveyed him, the dark head and eyes, the large, over-soft eyes, like the eyes of a lovely woman. He regarded the smile, the sort of childish delicacy with which the features were formed.

Then he said: "Señor minstrel!"

THE stranger bowed, brushing the floor once more with the brim of his hat.

The fool seemed totally unconscious that he was about to receive a thunderbolt of wrath that would annihilate him.

And suddenly Don Hernando smiled.

It was a smile famous in the history of his family. Every Garcias had worn it. Every Garcias had made that same cold smile terrible to his adherents. All of Segovia knew it. Manuel and Pedro shuddered where they stood. But the idiot of a minstrel stood there with high head.

One thing was clear. To act on the spur of the moment would be folly. Together with the rich, red Castilian blood, there flowed in the veins of Garcias a liberal admixture of the Indian.

That blood mastered him now and, still smiling, he told himself that time must be taken with this affair. The painting on the chair had been a work of art. The revenge he took would be a work of art of equal merit, a thing to talk about. And why not? The fellow was not of Segovia. He was not of the chosen people. He came from a distance!

So Garcias cleared his throat, and when he spoke it was softly, pleasantly.

Another shudder passed through the bodies of the two servants. Like all the others in the house, each of these had killed his man, but the

smile and the voice of Don Hernando, in such a mood, seemed to both of them more terrible, by far, than murder.

"The Garcias family keeps an open house for strangers," he said. "We have rooms for all who come. But chiefly for such good singers. I wish to hear you sing again. Manuel, Pedro, take him down to the most secure room in the house. You understand?"

His fury mastered him; he thrust himself up, half out of the chair, with glaring eyes, but the half-witted minstrel was already bowing his gratitude and sweeping the floor with his hat, so that he entirely missed both the gesture and the terrible expression of the eyes.

Don Hernando managed to master himself. Then he said: "My friend, you will be well looked after. You will be put in a safe place. All the enemies you have in the world could not disturb your sleep, where I shall put you. You, Pedro, will sleep outside of his door, armed. You understand?"

"Señor, I understand," said Pedro.

He had heard the songs of this man. In his heart he pitied him, for he saw that the naked wrath of the master was about to be poured out upon his head.

But it never occurred to him to disobey. Besides, he was really a savage brute. So were all of that household, hand-picked brigands! He soon mastered any feelings of pity or of remorse.

"I understand," he repeated. "The deepest room of the house, señor, if you wish."

YES, the deepest—the deepest! The one with the strongest door," repeated the great Garcias, through his teeth, "the smallest window, and the heaviest

lock; the one where sleeping clothes are always ready, bolted to the wall. You understand? You understand?"

His voice rose to a high, whining snarl, like that of a great cat.

Then he added: "And in case he should want to sing, let him have his guitar. Yes, let him sing, by all means, if he wishes. I am only afraid that he shall be at such a distance that I shall not be able to hear the songs."

Manuel and Pedro grinned brutally. Their master laughed, but the fool of a minstrel was again bowing to the floor and seemed to fail to see or to understand his dreadful predicament.

That was all the better. He would learn, soon enough, what was to befall him! The guards took him to the door of the room.

"Strip him!" shouted the great Garcias, and slammed the door behind the trio.

He went back, then, to the wreckage of his precious chair and picked up, again, the splintered wood upon which the remnants of the portrait appeared. Holding them tightly grasped in his hand, he groaned aloud, with such pain that he closed his eyes.

He went to the window. His rage was overcoming him, and he was feeling a trifle in need of air.

From the open window, he could hear long, withdrawing whispers and murmuring down all the alleys that approached the face of the "castle."

"Well," he said through his teeth. "Very well, indeed. They shall learn that the old spirit has not died in the blood of the Garcias. They shall learn that, if nothing else!"

And his spirit was eased, as he thought of this. There is nothing that impresses a Mexican more than the signs of absolute, even

cruel power. And he was right in feeling that the men of Segovia would be impressed by the object lesson which he would give them, in the person of the young minstrel, the unlucky stranger.

Still, when he lay upon his bed, about to fall asleep, he roused to complete wakefulness.

For it occurred to him that the many bows of the singer, as he stood in the presence of danger, might have been useful in concealing a certain smug expression of self-contented pleasure which, as Garcias remembered, had seemed to be lingering about the corners of the eyes and mouth, every time he straightened.

At all events, one thing was clear, the man was an idiot!

Then he soothed himself by devising torments.

It was clear, above all else, that for the destruction of the famous Garcias portrait he deserved to die. With the placid emotions of a cat about to torment a mouse, the great Don Hernando finally fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

GUEST ROOM.

IN the meantime, the two house servants were conducting the young dancer and singer down winding stairs that sank toward the bowels of the earth, as it seemed.

They grew narrower and narrower. The feet slipped in the moisture that covered the stones. The stones themselves were worn by the centuries of footfalls that had passed over them. And their steps echoed hollowly up and down the descending corridors. The head of the tall Pedro bowed, as he avoided the roof of the passage, rounded closely in. Finally, they passed the mouth of a black corridor.

"Down there," said Manuel, "is the last dear guest that the Garcias brought home with him. He, also, has a secure room. He also is guarded against intrusion. Oh, this is a safe house, friend. Danger never breaks in from the outside."

And he laughed, and his brutal laughter raised roaring echoes that retreated on either hand.

The minstrel merely said: "This should be cool. But also rather dark. However, darkness and coolness make for perfect sleep in summer."

They went on, the two servants muttering one to the other, and so they came to the last hall of all, in which there was the door of a single room; and in the hallway lay slime and water half an inch thick, and the horrible green mold climbed far up the walls on either hand.

There was a low settle in the hall.

"You'll sleep there, Pedro," said Manuel, with a chuckle.

"A plague on my luck," said Pedro. "If I don't catch rheumatism from this, I'm not a man. It needs a water snake to live in a hole like this!"

Manuel was unlocking the door. It groaned terribly on its hinges and gave upon a chamber perhaps eight feet by eight, and not more than five in height. It was like a grisly coffin. A breath of foul air rolled out to meet them.

"Is this—is this the room?" gasped the poor minstrel.

"Yes, you fool!" said Manuel. "Strip him, Pedro."

They put the lantern on the floor. Between them they tore the clothes from the body of the poor singer, and flung them on the floor. But when he was stripped, they paused, and looked him over in bewilderment.

For he presented not at all the

picture which they expected to see, of a starved and fragile body. He seemed slender, in his clothes, to be sure. But he was as round as a pillar. He was as deep in the chest as he was wide, and over arms and back and legs spread a cunning network of muscles, slipping one into the other, strand upon strand. An anatomist, with a pointer, could have indicated his muscles without effort.

"Hey!" said Manuel. "He could be a bullfighter."

HE thumbed the shoulders of the captive. It was like driving the thumb into India rubber.

"But what does it mean, my friends," said the minstrel. "Why am I here? Why am I stripped? Alas, I am a poor man. I have done no wrong."

"Be quiet," said Pedro. "You were told about a secure room and this is it. And you were told about bedding and this is it, perfect to fit you, like a suit of clothes ordered from the tailor!"

As he spoke, he dragged a mass of chains from the wall, and locked them around the wrists and the ankles of the trembling minstrel.

"Ah, my friends," said the youth, "this is cruel and unjust. Trouble will come upon your master, for this act. Trouble, be sure, will follow him! As for me!"

They left the room, slammed the door upon him and turned the key in the lock.

"There's the guitar against the wall beside you. You can play and sing in the dark, amigo," were their last words.

They were hardly gone, when the minstrel raised his manacled hands to his head, and from the base of a curl, he drew forth a little piece of

flattened steel, like a part of a watch-spring.

With this, he began to work, cramped though his fingers were for space, upon the lock of the manacle that held his left wrist.

He did not work long before the manacle loosened. It slipped away, and presently its companion upon the other wrist likewise fell to the floor.

The singer stooped over his anklets. They presented a little more difficulty. But they, also, presently fell away, and he was free in the room.

After that, he felt his way along the wall to the heap in which his clothes had been flung.

There was a bitter chill in the air of the dungeon, and he hastily pulled on his garments, one by one, the shoes last of all. They had soles of thin whipcord, silent as the furred paw of a cat for walking over stone, and light as a feather.

When he was dressed, he went to the door, and felt of the lock. To his dismay, he found that the whole inside of the lock was simply one large sheet of steel! The key did not come through the massive portal!

He stood for a time, taking small breaths, because the badness of the air inclined to make him dizzy. But eventually he had a thought.

Outside, in the corridor, Pedro the guard was already asleep, for the sounds of his snoring came like a drowsy purring into the dungeon cell.

So the prisoner found his guitar and lifted his voice in song.

HE took care in the selection of his music. The ditties that found his favor, now, were the loudest, and he sang them close to the door.

It was not long before there was a heavy beating against the door, and then the loud voice of Pedro, exclaiming: "Half-wit, I, Pedro, wish to sleep. If you disturb me again, I shall come in there and make you wish that it were the Garcias instead of me. He shall have only half of you. I'll eat the other half."

"Ah, amigo," said the minstrel, "I am cold as a poor half-drowned rat. May I not have covering? The floor of the room is covered with wet slime, and——"

"Shiver, then," said the Mexican, angrily. "I have told you before, what I shall do if you sing once more."

The singer waited until he heard the snoring begin again, and then, for a second time, his voice arose like a fountain of light.

The answer came almost at once. The key groaned in the lock; the door was thrust wide; and in rushed big Pedro, cursing.

From the shadow beside the door, the minstrel struck with a fist as heavy as lead, hitting home beneath the ear. And Pedro slumped forward on his face in the slime.

He was quickly secured, ankle and wrist, in the manacles which had just held the singer. And the wet filth in which he lay brought back his senses after a moment or so.

He opened his eyes, groaning, in time to feel the revolver being drawn from its holster on his hip and by the light of the lantern he saw the minstrel smiling down upon him.

Exquisite horror overcame big Pedro. Agape, he looked not so much at the slender youth before him as at a terrible vision of the wrath of the Garcias when the lord of the house should hear of this es-

cape. He could not speak. Ruin lay before his eyes.

"Good-by, Pedro," said the minstrel. "Remember me all the days of your life, and never forget that I shall remember your hospitality. As for your master whom you are fearing, now, don't worry about his anger. He shall have other things to think of before many minutes."

And he left the room before the stupefied Pedro could answer and closed the door gently behind him.

He picked up the lantern and quickly climbed to the black mouth of the corridor down which, as he had been told, the last guest of the Garcias was housed. He could guess the name and the face of that poor stranger!

Down that corridor he went, and presently around a sharp elbow turn the light of another lantern mingled with that of the one which he was carrying.

He went on at the same pace, dropping the revolver which he carried into a coat pocket. He could take it for granted that if a guard waited outside the door of this prison, the face of the singer would not be known to the man.

SO he went on fearlessly and now saw the man in question seated on a stool which he had canted back against the wall. With his arms folded on his breast, he was sleeping profoundly. The minstrel laid the cold muzzle of the revolver against his throat and picked the sawed-off shotgun from his lap.

Then, as the rascal wakened with a start, he said: "Be quiet and steady, my friend. There is no harm to come to you except what you bring with your own noise. Stand up, turn the key of that locked door, and walk into the cell ahead of me, carrying the lantern."

"In the name of the saints," said the guard, "do you know that it is an enemy of the Garcias who lies there?"

"I know everything about it," said the singer. "Do as I tell you. I am a man in haste, with a loaded gun in my hand. Pedro loaned it to me," he added, with a smile.

The guard, one of those Oriental-looking fellows one sometimes finds south of the Rio Grande, with ten bristles in his mustache and slant eyes, studied the smile of the stranger as he looked up and suddenly he felt that he recognized in this man a soul of cold iron.

He rose, with a faint gasp and, striding to the locked door, turned the key and stepped into the gloom within.

There, stretched on a thin pallet of straw, was the prisoner. He had not been stripped; there were no irons upon him. Plainly he had not excited the wrath of the great Garcias to the same degree as the singer, who now stooped over and fastened the manacles which were chained to the wall upon the wrists and the ankles of the guard.

The latter was moaning and muttering faintly: "The saints defend me! The saints keep me from the rage of Don Hernando! Oh, that ever I was born in Segovia!"

In the meantime, the prisoner, sitting up, yawning away, settled his gaze beneath a frown at the other two and suddenly bounded to his feet.

"Speedy!" he cried. "I didn't know you, with the color of your skin, and——"

"We have to go on," said Speedy, calmly. "There's something more for us to do, before we leave the house of the great Garcias. He's fitted the two of us with such good quarters that we ought to leave

some pay behind for him, Pier. Come along with me. This chap will be safe enough here. Rest well, amigo. When the others find you, in the morning, or even a little before, they will give you the last news of us!"

So he passed out from the cell and locked the door behind him.

Pier Morgan, in the meantime, was gaping helplessly at him.

"Speedy," he said, "I'm tryin' to believe that it's your voice that I'm hearing. I'm trying to believe that. I've never seen anything finer than your face, man, and never heard anything sweeter than your voice. But how did you come here? Did you put on a pair of wings and hop in through a window?"

"Don Hernando asked me in," said Speedy, smiling faintly. "He even sent out his men and insisted on my coming in. He's a hospitable fellow, that man Garcias, and I can't wait till I've called on him again. How do you feel, Pier? Are you fit to ride a bit, and do some climbing, perhaps, before we start the riding?"

"I'm fit to ride; I rode all the way down here," said Pier. "And I can ride ten times as far in order to get away. This here place is a chunk of misery. Speedy. I've had something like death inside of me ever since I smelled this dungeon! Let's get out quickly, and let your call on Hernando go!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE HANGING HERNANDO.

THE door of the bedroom of the Garcias was locked from the inside. He had gone to bed, with the flame turned down in the throat of the lamp. Now he awoke, not that he had heard any suspicious sound, but because there was a sighing rush of wind through

the room, as though a storm had entered.

The nerves of the Garcias were not entirely at ease. His dreams had been pleasant, but very violent. In his sleep, he had killed the insolent gringo singer by scourgings that had flayed his cursed body to the bone. Again, he had toasted his feet at a low fire, he had tormented him with the water cure, and he had hung up the American by the hair of the head. Also, he had dreamed of various combinations of these torments and, although it was true that the Garcias was to be the torturer, and not the tortured, it was also true that his nerves were jumping. All the tiger in him had been fed in his sleep. And the tiger in him now demanded living flesh, so to speak.

At the noise of the murmuring in his room, like the rising whistle of a storm wind, he raised himself impatiently on one elbow, and turned his head toward the door.

To his amazement, that door was open!

He rubbed his eyes and shook his head to clear away the foolish vision, for he knew that no one in the house would ever dare to attempt his locked door. Even if there were some one foolish enough to make such an attempt, the lock of the door would itself give ample warning, for the key in the bolt could not be stirred without making a groaning sound, audible all up and down the corridor outside.

He opened his eyes again and scowled at the offending door, but now the vision was more complicated. A man stood in the doorway, and was gliding with a soundless step straight toward his bed. The light of the lamp was very slight but, as he stared, the bewildered Garcias saw that it was the face of the gringo minstrel who was

all the time drawing nearer to him.

He grunted. In the distance, the door was being closed by a second shadowy figure. But there was always a weapon at the hand of the Garcias, and now he snatched his favorite protection from beneath his pillow. It was a rather old-fashioned double-barreled pistol, short in length, but large in caliber. It was equipped with two hair triggers, and it fired a ball big enough and with sufficient force to knock a strong man flat at fifteen yards.

He always had it with him, in a pocket during the day and under his pillow by night. It had served him more than once. He had killed men many a time in his life, but all other weapons had been less deadly than this old-fashioned toy.

So, snatching it out, he tried to level it at the gringo.

But he found his hand struck down, a cleaver stroke, as it were, falling across the cords of his wrist, and benumbing the entire hand.

THE pistol slipped into the sheets of the bed. A second stroke, delivered with the flat edge of the man's palm, fell upon the neck of the Garcias, where the nerves and the stiff tendons run up to the skull.

He floundered a little, but with only vague movements. He was stunned as though with a club.

Before he was entirely recovered from the effects, he found that the minstrel was sitting comfortably on the edge of his bed, toying with that double-barreled pistol with his left hand, but in his right was a short-bladed knife, the point of which he kept affectionately close to the hollow of Don Hernando's throat.

In the meantime, the second shadowy form had drawn closer and

stood on the farther side of the bed. With disgust, Don Hernando recognized the face of Pier Morgan. He had received twenty-five hundred dollars for taking Morgan into the southern land across the river. He would receive twenty-five hundred more for keeping him there, or for making away with him.

This was a bad business, all around. He wished for wild hawks to tear the flesh of the minstrel.

"I see," said Garcias, "how it is. You tricked the guards and got away from them, but you know that you can't get out of the house. Well, then, I am to let you go; through me you wish to manage it, but I tell you, my friends, that you never can persuade me. I know that you will not kill me, because you fear what will happen to you before you manage to get clear of the house. You think that you still have a chance to talk to me, and to give me orders, but every door and every entrance to the house is guarded night and day!"

He laughed a little, as he ended. His fury made his laughter a tremulous sound.

"Speedy," said Pier Morgan, "we can't waste time. We must hurry."

He said it in English, naturally. But Don Hernando understood the language perfectly. Also, the name itself struck his ear, like the blow of a club.

He stiffened from head to foot.

"You are not Speedy," he exclaimed, through his teeth. "Your skin is as brown as——"

"As walnut juice, amigo?" suggested Speedy.

The lips of the Mexican remained parted, but no word issued from them.

Then said Speedy: "You see how it is, Don Hernando? I knew that your house was so guarded that only

a bird could fly in safely through a window. And I had no wings. So I came and sang at night, to disturb you. Do you understand?"

THE teeth of the Mexican ground together. He said nothing. "Then, when you were sufficiently annoyed," Speedy said, "you sent for me to get me into your house and throw me into your hole of a prison. But I expected that, Garcias. I was prepared for all of that trouble, and it was worth while, because I had to reach my friend, Pier Morgan. I knew that it would be hard to hold me in a cell, because I know the language of locks."

The Garcias rolled his eyes toward the door of his own room.

"The others were no harder," said Speedy. "Besides, your men are all fools. Like dogs that are kept half starved. They have plenty of teeth, but no brains whatever. They pointed out the room where Pier Morgan was kept on the way down to your slimy pigpen in the cellar. One of your servants sleeps in one of those cells, and other sleeps in the second. They are not happy, Don Hernando, because they are afraid of what you will do to them when they are set free."

"I will have them cut to pieces," said the Garcias, "before my eyes. I will have them fed to dogs, and let you watch the feeding, before you are cut to bits in your turn!"

"You are full of promises, Don Hernando," said Speedy, "but that's because you don't understand how simply we can get out of your house through that window, with a rope of bedclothes."

"Idiots!" said Don Hernando, "Segovia lies beyond, and will have to be passed through. And there are always armed men there!"

"True," said the minstrel, "and I shall let them know that I am passing. I shall sing to my guitar."

"Are you such a half-wit?" said Garcias with a snarl.

"They know that I was dragged into your house," said the other, "but they don't know that I was treated like a whipped dog."

"Ha?" said Hernando.

"Besides," said Speedy, "I shall have something to show them, which will prove that the Garcias forgave me for disturbing him in the middle of the night."

"What?" demanded the man of the castle.

"A ring from your finger," said Speedy.

Don Hernando gripped both hands to make fists. His fury was so great that his brain turned to fire and threatened to burst.

For he could see that the inspired insolence of this gringo might very well enable him to do the thing that he threatened.

"I shall believe when I see!" said Don Hernando.

"You will believe and see and hear, all three," said Speedy, "for I shall put you on a high chair to look things over. I shall put you where you'll be found in the morning. Tie his feet, Pier. I'll attend to his hands!"

Hand and foot the lord of the town of Segovia found himself trussed and made utterly helpless.

THAT was not all, for then a gag was fixed between his teeth. The language of Speedy was more terrible than the insulting treatment he was giving to his host.

For he apologized, every moment, for the necessity of being so rough with so great a gentleman, in his own house. For his own part, he

regretted such a necessity. He would do much to avoid the occasion for it. It was only, after all, that murder and cruelty and dungeon tortures were not popular on the northern bank of the river, and even here, to the south of it, the people must be shown an example. They must be shown that tyrants are also cowards and that cruel beasts are really fools.

For that reason he, Speedy, intended to give the people of Segovia an object lesson in the person of their master.

As he spoke, he drew from the struggling hand of Don Hernando almost his dearest possession, his signet ring. It was merely a flat-faced emerald of no great value, but it was carved with the arms of the house of the Garcias. That ring and the portrait which had been ruined that night were his two clear claims and proofs of gentility.

He saw the second one departing in the possession of the same scoundrel; he turned blind with fury; when he recovered from the fit, he was hanging from the sill of a window of his room by the hands, his back turned to the wall. Strong cords held him at the wrists. Presently his arm muscles would weaken. The strain would come straight upon bones and tendons. And then the real torment would commence.

But what would that matter compared with the exquisite agony of being found in this humiliating position in the morning by the loyal populace of Segovia?

CHAPTER VIII.

IN SEGOVIA.

IN all the house of the Garcias, among all of his people, was there not one careful soul to look out a window, at this time, and

see the two villains who now clambered down their comfortably made rope of bedding to the ground?

No, well filled with food and drink, they were snoring securely in their beds.

As for the guards, they would be awake. He always took pains to be sure that they would sooner risk their necks than fall asleep either at the main door or at the one that opened over the bluff.

But now he wanted a guard outside the place, and not within the massive old walls!

His anguish grew. He turned his head and saw the wretches standing upon the paving stones at the base of his wall. He bowed his head to stare down at them, while rage choked him, and there he saw Speedy remove from his head the hat with the tattered straw brim and sweep the ground with it, making a final bow.

Anguish, shame, fury, helplessness, fairly throttled the great Garcias.

He became alarmed. He was unable to breathe well. He had to give all his attention, for a time, to drawing in his breath deeply. Fear of strangling at once made his heart flutter desperately. He compared it to the beating wings of a trapped bird, a bird dying of fear.

Aye, he was like a bird, he thought, like a chicken hanging by the feet in the market, plucked, ready for the purchasers to thumb before making sure that it was fat enough to buy and take home.

If only he could cry out!

He had only his bare heels to kick against the wall, and he soon bruised the flesh of his feet to the bone. But no one answered. No one looked out of the adjoining windows to discover the master, so crucified in shame and pain!

Then he heard a sound that fairly stopped the beating of his heart again.

It was rising from the lower streets of the town, and it was the strumming of a guitar, and the sound of a fine tenor voice that rose and rang sweetly through the air.

It was true, then, that the rascal had determined to do all as he had said? Was he to outbrave the fierce men of Segovia and increase the shame of the Garcias? A demon, not a man, was walking down the street and playing on that guitar, singing the words of those old songs!

But Speedy and Pier Morgan did not get unhindered from the town.

IT was said that the men of Segovia slept as lightly as wild wolves, which they were like in other respects, also, and when they heard the voice of the minstrel, one, then another and another, jumped up in the night and went out to see what the disturbance might be. For they had seen the fellow dragged within the walls of the house, and what had happened to him in there was much pleasanter to guess than to see.

So they came pouring out, a score of those ragged, wild men, and found the minstrel, as before, mounted on the ancient gray mule, with a white man walking at his stirrup.

This was too strange a sight to let pass.

There was one elderly robber, long distinguished in forays, known as by a light, by the great white scar that blazed upon his forehead. He was gray with years and villainy, and music did not particularly tickle his fancy.

He took the mule by the bridle and halted it.

"What is the meaning of this?" he

demanded. "I saw you snatched into the door of the castle like a stupid child. High time, too, what with your caterwauling. Now you are here. Who set you free?"

"An angel, father," said Speedy, "walked into my room, wrapped me in an invisible cloak, and took me away, with this man."

"So?" said the desperado, darkening. "I'll have another kind of language out of you, before I'm through."

He pulled out a knife as long as a sword, and glared at the boy in the saddle.

"If you're in any doubt," said Speedy, "take us back to the house. If the Garcias is wakened again, tonight, he will be interesting to the people who disturb him. You, however, are a wise man and know best what is to be done!"

The veteran scowled. Some of his companions had begun to chuckle. They enjoyed his predicament.

"I ask questions when I can't understand," said he. "Now let me ask these questions again. Señor, the singer, you will sing a new tune, if you try to make a fool out of me. You are here after midnight. So is this man. People do not start a trip at this time of the night."

"Look at his hands," said Speedy.

"Aye," said the other, "I see that they are tied together behind his back. And what do I understand by that?"

"You will understand," said Speedy, "when the Garcias knows that you have stopped me in the streets and made me explain before the people. I am taking this man to a friend of the Garcias."

"Ha!" said the man with the scar, coming a little closer, glowing his disbelief. "Taking him where? How will you prove that?"

He snatched a lantern from the hand of another, and held it up to examine the face of Speedy.

THE latter used the light, thrusting forward his left hand with the emerald ring on the largest finger. "Do you know the signet of the Garcias?" he demanded, harshly. "Would he give it to me for pleasure, or because of an important errand in his name?"

The other was stunned.

He squinted at the ring. The face of it was well known. His companions were already falling back from the scene. They did not wish to interfere where the will of the master of Segovia was expressed in such unconditional terms as this.

The man of the scar no longer hesitated.

He released the head of the mule and stepped back.

"Well, amigo," said he, "there is a time for talk and a time for silence. This is a time for silence. Go along."

"Perhaps you wish to know to what place I am taking the prisoner?" asked Speedy. "You are many and I am one. You can force me to tell you even that."

The man of the scar muttered: "You can take him to Satan, for all I care!"

And Speedy rode on, slowly, through the last street of Segovia, and into the plain beyond.

Once down the slope, he cut the cord that confined the hands of Pier Morgan and the latter gasped: "Speedy, I thought that we were finished, when we came to the gang of 'em. I thought they'd certainly drag us back to the big house. And if they had—eh, what then?"

"Garcias would have burned us alive," said Speedy. "That's what would have happened. But it didn't happen, old son, and the more luck

for us. I thought that the ring would turn the trick, and it turned out that way."

"I've got other things to ask," said Pier Morgan. "But I'll ask 'em after we get on the other side of the river."

It was Pier Morgan who rode the mule across the shallows of the ford. It was Speedy who waded or swam behind until they struggled up the farther bank.

And there they turned and looked back over the dim pattern of stars that appeared, scattered over the face of the famous river.

Then Pier Morgan said: "Yesterday, I thought that I was ridin' my last trail, Speedy. And to-day it don't seem likely that I'm really here, on safe ground, and you beside me. You've got through stone walls, and locked doors, and raised the mischief to get me out of trouble. I ain't thanking you, Speedy. Thanks are pretty foolish things, after all, considering what you've done for me. I've used up nine lives, like any cat, and you've kept me on the face of the earth. That's what you've done. But still I'd like to ask you a coupla questions."

"Fire away," said Speedy, beginning to thrum very softly on the strings of his guitar.

I DUNNO that I understand very well," said the other, "why you wanted to make this here Garcias so crazy mad at you. You done that on purpose, but I dunno what the purpose is."

"You could guess," said Speedy.

"Yeah, I could guess," said the other. "I could guess that life was kind of dull for you up there in Sunday Slough. I could guess that you didn't have your hands full, and that you wanted to crowd in a little more action. So you got Garcias prac-

tically crazy. You wanted to make sure that he'd get together every man that can ride and shoot and come up to the Slough looking for your scalp."

Speedy chuckled a little.

"Garcias can be a pretty dangerous fellow, I imagine," said he. "He has that reputation. But I wanted to have him so blind crazy with rage that he would hardly know what he's about. He'll never rest till he gets at me again, do you think?"

"No, he'll never rest," agreed Pier Morgan. "He'll certainly never sleep until he gets a whack at you in revenge."

"When he comes, he'll come like a storm," said Speedy, "and the first thing that he does will be to get in touch with friend Levine. Isn't that fairly clear?"

"Yeah. That's pretty likely."

"And when that happens, I have a chance to scoop him up along with Levine. And then the charge is kidnaping, with you and me both for proofs of what's happened. And kidnaping a man and taking him across a frontier is pretty bad and black for everybody concerned. I think, if my scheme works, I'll have Levine in for fifteen years, at least. That's my hope. And then I've done what I wanted to do—I've cleaned up Sunday Slough and given it a rest."

"All right," murmured Pier Morgan. "I'm behind you every step, but you must carry a pretty steep life insurance, old man!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE RETURN.

LEVINE was at the breakfast table. His coat was off. He had not put on the stiff white collar that made him respectable for the day. He had rolled his sleeves.

By way of a bib, a large cotton hand towel was stuffed in at his throat. This kept him from the necessity of leaning far forward every time he raised a dripping forkful from his plate. And fried eggs will drip!

A ragged half of a loaf of bread remained at his left hand; a tall coffee-pot and a can of condensed milk were at his right; and the eggs were well flavored by numerous strips of fried bacon.

The precious juices that might slip through the fork were salvaged by using the bread as a sort of sponge. In this way he made excellent progress.

He had a newspaper propped up in front of him, but he paid less attention to its headlines than to the cheerful conversation of "One-eyed Mike" Doloroso, who was lolling in a corner of the room. Mike had just come in and made himself at home.

"Have something?"

"Nope," said Mike.

"Slug o' coffee, maybe?"

"I fed my face a coupla hours ago," said Mike. "I ain't a lazy hound like you, what I mean."

"You got nothin' on your brain to worry you, like me," said Levine. "You got nothin' but hair."

"Ain't I got Speedy to worry me, too?" asked Mike.

"Him? Aw, he don't pay much attention to you. It's me that he wants. What's that yowling out there?"

Mike went to the window.

"Aw," he said, "there's a coupla dozen poor fools walkin' down the street carryin' a big banner, that says J. J. J. for sheriff."

"Close the window and shut the yapping out, will you?" asked Levine, testily. "That tramp, I'm kind of tired of thinking about him."

"Yeah," said One-eyed Mike, "you shouldn't go and get yourself into a stew about him now. You're gonna have plenty of time later on, when he throws you into the pen for life."

"He's gonna throw me into the pen, is he?" asked Levine.

"Sure, so you'll be sure to have plenty of time to think about how he's trimmed you."

Levine paused with a large slice of egg dripping from his raised fork. Twice he tried to put it into his mouth. Finally, he gave up the effort and lowered the fork to the plate.

"Whacha drivin' at, Mike?" he asked. "Stow that chatter, will you? You wanta spoil my breakfast?"

YOU'VE had enough for three men for three days, already," said Mike. "I was just thinking how you and Derrick and Buck Masters had the town all laid out and ready for a trimming. And here comes Speedy, and he gets Derrick first, and then Buck Masters that was sheriff, and now he's gonna get you!"

Levine pointed at Mike with his fork.

"You think I'm asleep on the job, do you? Well, right now, Mr. Deputy Sheriff Speedy has disappeared from Sunday Slough, and the town's gonna wake up to the fact, pretty pronto."

Mike rose stiff-legged from his chair.

"You think that he follered Pier Morgan?" he said.

"I don't think. I know. He started right out. I've sent off another rider, riding fast, to let Garcias know that Speedy has a gray mule that he's riding on. The kid may try to disguise himself or some-

thing. Another day or two, Garcias will make fish bait out of him."

"Speedy ain't so easy," said One-eyed Mike.

"You're telling that to somebody that don't know?" suggested Levine, resuming his eating. "But Mexico ain't home soil for him. He's out of the water, down there. And this here boy Garcias has done a couple things in his life, lemme tell you!"

"All right," said Mike. "You're an optimist, is all I say. But one of these days you may be rotting like Buck Masters. I got a letter from Buck just the other day."

"Why didn't you tell me about it?"

"Because you wouldn't want to see it."

"Why not?"

"Because Buck is pretty sore. He says that he trusted you to fix things for him. He says that he's the goat and went to jail to save your scalp."

"Did the fool say that?" asked Levine, losing a splotch of color out of either cheek.

"Yeah, he said that."

"Prison letters are opened and read!" gasped Levine.

"Aw, they've all heard more than that about you a long while before this," declared One-eyed Mike. "Talk ain't gonna kill you, or you'd've been a sick fish a long while ago, I guess. But Buck is sore, is what I mean."

"I spent a lotta money on that case," said Levine, sadly. "You know what I spent."

"I know what you say you spent," said Mike.

"Look," protested Levine, sadly, "are you gonna lie down and croak on me, too? Are you fallin' away, Mike? Gonna do a State's evidence, or something like that on me?"

"Aw, shut up," said Mike Doloroso. "You know that I ain't that kind. But I ain't a fool. And I'm worried. County courts, they're one thing. You can get to a jury and fix a coupla jurors, or maybe you can buy up a judge. But I tell you what, a Federal judge is a lot different. Look at Buck and Derrick, both. There was plenty of money working for both of them two, but it didn't do no good. Not a dog-gone bit."

THE window that looked onto the street was thrust up with a screech. The face of young Joe Dale appeared in the square.

"Hello, boys," said he.

"Hello, beautiful," said Mike. "Whacha want here, kid?"

"I just wanted to clap eyes on you bozos, was all," said Joe Dale. "I just wanted to ask you where you seen Speedy last."

"We ain't seeing Speedy these days," said Levine. "He don't seem fond of me, no more. We was good friends, once, but he's gone and got proud, since those days."

"Has he?" asked Joe. "That's all right, too. But how far south would your partner, Garcias, trail him?"

"What Garcias?" asked Levine.

But he glanced at One-eyed Mike.

"No, you never seen Garcias, did you?" said Joe Dale. "Lemme tell you, brother. I'm inside the law, just now. But I was outside of it for a long time and got along pretty good. If Speedy don't come back, I'm gonna be outside the law ag'in. I'm gonna be outlawed for shooting the brains out of a pair of fatheads that I'm looking at, right now."

"Breeze along, Joe," said Levine. "You're all right, but you're young. You ain't got any sense."

"I'm just telling you, that's all," said Joe Dale.

"Look," broke in One-eyed Mike. "Speedy licked you so good that you love him now, don't you?"

"He licked me," agreed Joe Dale. "But I can lick you, you slab-faced Irish bum. That's all I gotta say to you!"

"Get out of the window," said Levine. "You're standing on my ground."

Another voice struck in cheerfully from the distance, down the street:

"Hello, Joe! Hello!"

Levine started up from his chair.

"It's Speedy!" he gasped.

One-eyed Mike grunted.

There was a sawed-off shotgun standing in the corner against the wall, and this he picked up and held at the ready. Revolvers were the favored weapons of Mike, but where Speedy was concerned, experience taught him that a gun with a wide spread of shot was more likely to touch the elusive mark.

He stood firm, but his face was very pale.

Sid Levine had slumped down into his chair again. A frightful weakness in his knees had attacked him.

The cheerful face of Speedy now appeared outside the window, at the shoulder of Joe Dale; and behind Speedy loomed Pier Morgan.

Sid Levine became smaller in his chair; a watery pulp. That window seemed to him to open upon the inferno itself, three such enemies were gathered there before his face.

Speedy said: "I took your regards down to your friend, the great Garcias, Levine. He'll be up, before very long, to see you. Just dropped in to say hello to you, Levine. And Morgan wanted to tell you that he'd enjoyed his trip with Don Hernando."

"I don't know what you mean," said Levine.

HE shook his head; his fat cheeks wobbled and bulged from side to side. "You may understand later on," said Pier Morgan. "We're gonna do our best to clear up the idea in your mind, anyway. Hello, Mike! I ain't seen you for quite a spell."

But Mike Doloroso answered nothing at all. He was rather sick at heart.

And so the three outside the window passed out of view, laughing.

They left a silence behind them in the room which had been such a cheerful breakfast scene the moment before. Levine was resting his fat forehead in a fatter hand. Mike remained still, as one stunned by bad news. But at last he began to pace up and down along the floor.

Then he said: "Chief, it looks like we got our backs against the wall."

Levine slowly roused himself and leaned forward.

"There's one thing that we can still try," he said. "And there's one thing that will work."

"What's that?" asked Mike.

Levine beckoned, and the big Irishman came closer to him, and leaned over.

Levine whispered one word, and Mike Doloroso, though a man of exceptionally steady nerves, jumped away as though a knife had been thrust into him.

CHAPTER X.

THE NEW DANGER.

SPEEDY and Joe Dale sat in the sheriff's office; Pier Morgan, exhausted by his long journeying, was asleep in the side room; and the deputy sheriff who, as nine tenths of Sunday Slough declared, was to be the sheriff in full at the next day's election, now sat

slumping in a chair yawning a little, from time to time, and making short answers to the questions of Joe Dale.

"You ought to let the people know what you did down there, Speedy," said Joe Dale. "That'll poll all the votes for you. You'll be unanimously elected, I tell you!"

Speedy yawned.

"Ask Betsy about it," said he. "Ask her what I ought to do."

Betsy was grazing in the lot behind the shack which housed the sheriff's office. It was a good, deep lot, and the grass grew tall in it; Betsy, now that the heat of the day was over, moved slowly, step by step, spreading her forelegs a little and stretching her long neck as she nosed about for choice tufts. Now and then she snorted, shook her head, and lifted it to look about her.

Joe Dale went to the window and looked upon her with a loving eye.

"She's always a little wild in the eye," commented Speedy.

"She's been in some wild places with me," said Joe Dale. "She's a cross between a horse, a friend to talk to, and a watchdog. I'm as safe sleeping out, with her to keep an eye around, as I'd be with two men on guard. Safer, even, because she can use her eyes and her scent, as well."

"Ask her about me," said Speedy.

"What about this fellow?" asked Joe Dale, pleased by the suggestion. "Come here, Betsy, and tell me about him."

Speedy went to the window as Betsy came up to it.

"Tell me about him, Betsy," repeated her owner. "Is he a good fellow?"

She stretched her head through the window and sniffed Speedy's hand, then she drew back a little and shook her head.

"I'm gonna look out for you,

Speedy," said Joe Dale. "I thought you were all right, but trust Betsy. She knows the right sort of a man."

He began to laugh, immensely pleased.

Then he added: "Come here and tell me about him again, Betsy. I want to see you vote twice on him. Tell me what sort of a bad egg he is, will you?"

Betsy came and again sniffed the hand of Speedy, but this time she pricked her ears mischievously and began to nibble at it.

"She knows you're no good and she's trying to bite you," declared Joe Dale. "I'm going to keep an eye on you, Speedy. Here's Betsy says that you're no good at all. Betsy, you're a wise old girl. You know more than I do."

"I've never ridden her," said Speedy.

"You'd better not try," answered Joe Dale.

"Why? I thought that she was as gentle as a lamb."

"She's gentle with me. She's gentle with others, too, but she knows some little tricks."

"Such as what?"

SHE hates spurs. One touch of 'em and she'll buck like a fiend. She's an educated little pitching witch, I can tell you! She learned young."

"How did she learn?"

"Got into the hands of a half-breed son of trouble and learned how to pitch him off every time she jumped, even if he was a pretty slick rider. She's had other chances, too. I've had people try to steal her a dozen times, and she generally gets them out of the saddle before they've gone a mile. A touch of the spurs will always start her."

"Anything else that she doesn't like?"

"She's a balky brute, at heart. She even tries it on me, now and then," confessed Joe Dale. "Sometimes she doesn't like to pass a stump or a tree with a funny shape. And sometimes she'll stop dead at a bridge, and start turning in circles like a crazy thing. I can bring her out of those wrong notions with a touch. But nobody else can."

"What's to do, then?" asked Speedy.

"Get off and lead her. That's the only way. She's always as quiet as a lamb when she's on the lead. She seems to be sure that a man walking on the ground really knows the way better'n she does."

He added: "You planning to steal her, Speedy, asking all these questions?"

"I'd rather have my gray mule," grinned Speedy. "He's slow but he's sure. But some day I might want to make a fast move and need Betsy."

"You don't wear spurs, so you'd be all right on her," said the other. "And I've told you about the balking."

"How fast is she?" asked Speedy.

"She's no racer," admitted Joe Dale. "She looks a lot faster than she is. Somehow, she doesn't seem able to stretch out in a real, long gallop. But her point is that she can last all day, and all night, and she'll live on thistles and drink the wind for a week, and still be able to lope along like a wolf."

"That's the horse for this country," declared Speedy. "Next to the iron horse, that's the way to travel in this country."

"You're still a tramp," grinned Joe Dale. "You'd like to be back on the bum, riding blind baggage, and going nowheres."

"Going nowhere is the best place to go," said Speedy.

"How come?" asked Joe Dale.

"Well, you ought to know how it is. You straighten out for you don't know what, and the fun is all in the getting there. There's no place I've ever seen where I'd like to live. There's no place where I'd like to drop anchor. But to drift from one spot to another—that's a good deal better."

The other stared curiously at him.

"Look a-here, Speedy," said he. "Look at Sunday Slough. Take a place like this, and you could live here fine the rest of your days. The people are all proud to have you around. You could be sheriff here till kingdom come. They'd give you a fat salary. You wouldn't have to keep smiling, up here. The boys know what you can do."

"I've had a good time here, but it's lasted long enough," said Speedy.

"You want to be on the road again?"

"Yes, I want to be going nowhere. I'm tired of having a fixed home address."

A HORSE beat down the street, came to a grinding halt before the sheriff's office, and a big man in shirt sleeves, rolled to the elbows, with salty sweat stains on his breast and shoulders, came clumping into the room.

He had been riding against the western glare of the sun, and now he paused, scowling and blinking, growing accustomed to the dim light inside the house.

"Hullo, Speedy," he said.

"Something wrong?" asked Speedy.

"You bet there's something wrong," he replied. "You know me?"

"I've seen you. I don't know your name."

"I'm Sam Jedbury. I got a claim

up there at the head of the ravine. I went about a mile beyond everything else, and I struck it pretty good. I struck it too good for my health. I'm working along, and getting out my share and a little more of the bonanza, and to-day along comes a low-down hound of a Swede and pokes a rifle into my stomach and tells me that he staked that claim a year ago. Why, there wasn't even a jack rabbit in Sunday Slough a year ago. But that's what he says. And what am I to do? Argue? You can't argue with a rifle, unless you got a gun in your hand. And I didn't have no gun. So I come in here to let you know."

Speedy sighed. "What sort of a looking fellow?" he asked.

"Big and hairy is all I can say," said Sam Jedbury. "Got a mean-looking eye, too. It was like poison to me."

"What sort of a rifle?"

"Winchester."

"I'll go and call on him," said Speedy.

"I'll go along," said the other.

"No, you stay here. You, too, Joe."

Dale had picked a gun belt from a nail on the wall and was strapping it around his hips.

"Hold on, Speedy," said Joe Dale. "You let me tell you something. You've handled a lot of the wild men around here, but you've never handled a claim-jumper before. Those fellows know that trouble is ahead of 'em, and they plan on doing a little shooting. Besides, everybody in Sunday Slough, by this time, knows that you don't carry no gun."

"That's right," nodded Sam Jedbury. "You let us both go along."

"I don't carry a gun; everybody knows it; so guns aren't likely to be used on me," said Speedy.

"Don't be so sure of that," said

Jedbury. "Every gunman in the Slough would be pretty proud if he could slam a slug of lead into you, no matter whether you carry a gun yourself or not. Neither does a wild cat or a grizzly pack a gun, but gents will go shooting for them!"

Speedy shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll go alone," he said. "Don't be surprised if I don't come back for a while. The fact is that I may have to do a little scouting around."

He turned to Dale.

"Suppose that I borrow Betsy?" he asked.

YOU can have Betsy," said Joe Dale, "but I'd a lot rather you'd let me go along with you. You're taking too many chances, Speedy. Some day, you'll lose your bet. Do you realize that?"

"I told you before that I wanted to be on the road," said Speedy. "Here's a trip on a side line, anyway. It may not be much, but I'm going to take it."

So, straightway, he took the mare and rode off. The other two remained staring after him.

"He loves trouble, I reckon," sighed Jedbury.

"It's the only fun he gets," said Joe Dale, and he sighed in turn.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAP.

TWICE the beautiful mare balked, on the way up the valley, and twice Speedy dismounted and led her forward until her step became free and willing, and her ears were pricking. But he had been so delayed by these halts, that it was after sunset when he got to the claim of Jedbury at the head of the ravine.

The claim-jumper was in full view, sitting on a broad-topped

stone at the mouth of the shaft, which lay on top of a dump. It was apparent that he had been working inside the shaft or, at least, making a thorough survey. But now he was merely intent on keeping his fort. He smoked a pipe with a quiet concentration; and he had across his knees a shining new Winchester that would hold fifteen shots—fifteen lives, perhaps!

He was what Sam Jedbury had described—a hairy fellow, with a very considerable jaw to be guessed at behind the tangle of his beard. His great eyebrows bushed out and downward, and the eyes themselves were as bright as bits of flame.

He paid no heed to the approach of Speedy and the mare, but continued to smoke his pipe.

It was only when the deputy sheriff was a few yards away that he picked up his rifle and held it like a revolver in one hand, his forefinger on the trigger and the long barrel pointing at Speedy.

The latter spoke to Betsy and she halted.

"How's things?" asked Speedy.

"Things are fair to middling," replied the other, in his noncommittal way.

"Been here quite a time?" asked Speedy.

"On this stone? No. Whacha want?"

"Just to spend some time with you," said Speedy.

And he dismounted.

"I can't offer you no hospitality," said the man at the mouth of the mine's shaft. "I ain't got no chuck to offer you, stranger. Sorry."

"That's all right," said Speedy. "I just wanted to have a chat with you."

He sat down on a rock near the claim-jumper, facing him. The muzzle of the rifle followed his

movements like the magnetic needle pointing toward the pole.

"You go on and chat," said the miner. "Whatcha gonna chat about?"

"A fellow came into town," said Speedy, "and told me a wild yarn about his mine up here. He said another fellow, who answers your description, had arrived and jumped it. It sounded like a cock-and-bull yarn, but I had to come up here and investigate. I'm the deputy sheriff, you see."

"Wait," said the other, frowning. "You call yourself Speedy?"

"Yes," said the man of the law.

"The Speedy that runs Sunday Slough?"

"I don't claim to run it."

HOLD on, now. You say that you're Speedy, and I say that you lie. Whatcha think about that?" He thrust his head forward and uttered the last words with a sneer.

"Are you sure that I'm a liar?" said Speedy, smiling.

"Sure? Of course, I'm sure."

"Have you ever seen Speedy?"

"I don't need to see him," answered the claim-jumper. "I heard him described enough times. Back in the mountains they don't talk about much else of a winter evening, except to swap lies about Speedy, what he's done, and what he ain't done. I been dog-gone sick of hearing the name, just to speak personal!"

"Too bad," said Speedy. "Maybe I'm not big enough to be the right man?"

"Well, he ain't so very big," said the other. "I'd say maybe he was about six feet, not weighing more'n a hundred and eighty or ninety. But that's big enough. And you're only a runt. You ain't more'n five

nine or ten. You wouldn't weigh a hundred and fifty pounds, hardly! Why, kid, you're a plain fool if you think that you'll kid me into believin' that you're Speedy!"

The latter opened the breast of his coat and showed the steel badge that was pinned inside of it.

"That's all that I can say," said he. "You can believe me or not, but I'll have to take you into Sunday Slough."

"You?" cried the miner.

"I'm afraid that I shall," said Speedy. "Unless you can prove that the mine belongs to you. You drove out Jedbury. He was the first to work it."

"That's a lie," said the ruffian. "I'll tell you what. I staked out this claim pretty near a year ago. I broke the ground. I started things going. Jedbury, he never would've found nothing here, except that he saw where I'd been working, and——"

He paused, scowling.

"I done enough talking," he said. "Talking ain't my style."

"Fighting is more your line, I suppose!" suggested Speedy.

"I done my share of that," declared the miner.

He glared at the smaller man as he spoke.

"I think Jedbury was telling the truth," said Speedy. "You'll have to come to town with me, partner."

"Where's your warrant?" asked the man of the beard.

"Warrant?" said Speedy.

He lifted his brows and stared in turn.

"We don't bother about those little formalities in Sunday Slough," he said. "Not when we have fellows like claim-jumpers to handle."

"I'm a claim-jumper, am I?" asked the other.

His teeth glinted through his

beard as he spoke. Then he added: "You're gonna take me back, are you? Would you mind telling me what you're gonna take me with?"

"Yes, with my hands," said Speedy.

He stood up. "It's getting toward dusk," said he. "We'd better be starting along."

WHEN the miner spoke, it was as if a dog were snarling. "You don't dare do it," said he. "If you're Speedy, I'll tell you what else you are. You're a fake. That's what you are! Now, if you're the wild man that I've heard so much talk about, start something, kid!"

He rose in turn and held the rifle stiffly toward the breast of the man of the law.

"Resisting arrest may be hard on your eyes and bad for your health," declared Speedy. "Have you thought about that, partner?"

"You talk like I needed advice or asked for it," said the stranger. "Now, shove up your hands. I'm gonna show you how I resist arrest! Shove up your hands. I'm gonna make an example out of you. You may run Sunday Slough, but you can't run me!"

Speedy obediently raised his hands, and the other came closer, slowly.

"You have a gun," said Speedy, "and you know that I don't carry one."

"I could lick you without a gun," said the miner, "except as how they say that you're a whole pack of tricks. I reckon that I don't really need a gun, but why should I throw away a bet on a sure thing? I'm gonna skin you alive, Mr. Deputy Sheriff, that's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna teach you what it means to mix up with Bill Parry, and——"

With savage satisfaction he drew nearer to the boy, so near that the muzzle of his gun, though still out of reaching distance, was not, however, out of range of a kick.

And that was what Speedy tried. It was a difficult target, the narrow, gleaming barrel of that rifle, and if he missed, a bullet would take his life the next instant. Murder was no new thing, he could guess, to this ruffian. But he took the chance.

It was a partial miss. Only with the side of his shoe did he touch the rifle a glancing blow. It exploded almost on the instant, but the force of the kick had been sufficient to make it swerve to the side, and the bullet ripped the shirt under Speedy's armpit. Half an inch closer in, it would have broken his ribs and knocked him down.

Bill Parry, as he fired, leaped backward to avoid danger, but he was far too slow of foot.

All the tangled padding of his beard was not sufficient to dull the force of a blow that clipped him close to the point of the chin and staggered him, bent his knees. His head was flicked back by the blow and, though he managed to fire again, it was blindly, at an unseen target.

What happened to him after that, he was never quite sure. He simply knew, all in an instant of time, that he was tripped up, disarmed, half-stunned by a blow on the temple and, in general, felt as though he had been tackled by a combination of wild cat and grizzly bear.

THEN he was lying flat on his back, looking up toward the darkening sky and toward the face of Speedy, who stood erect, panting.

"You'd better get up, Bill Parry," said Speedy. "As I said before,

you'll have to come into Sunday Slough with me. You've resisted arrest, attempted murder and in general played a bad hand. I'm going to see that you get the limit. I'll be lucky if I keep the men of the Slough from taking you out on a necktie party."

Parry did not move. He merely said: "There'll be a necktie party, all right enough!"

"I'm not threatening you," said Speedy.

"Ain't you? But I'm threatening you! You fool, we got everything set ready for you. We got you trimmed and trapped, you swine. If you don't believe me, look around you!"

Speedy, though he did not turn his head, was suddenly certain that figures had moved up behind him during the fight, and that now they were in readiness.

The chill of an unknown dread flowed suddenly like liquid ice through his blood.

Then, from behind him, he heard the last voice in all the world that he wished to hear, the voice of Garcias, saying, with a tremor of joy: "Now, Pedro, now Manuel, take him on each side. If he moves a finger, fill his skin with lead!"

And, for the first time in his wild young life, Speedy made certain of death!

CHAPTER XII.

A DIGRESSION.

CHAINS, irons and locks, they knew better than to try upon the magic hands of Speedy, by this time. They used ropes, instead, not big ones, which may be slipped, but thin, powerful cords that will fit into the very knuckles of joints and which hold as if with conscious force, steadily applied.

They took no chances. They

tied his hands together. They tied him across the elbows. They tied his feet and ankles together; they bound his knees. They put a stout pole down his back, and wrapped him to it with lashings.

Then he heard a voice saying: "There ain't anything he can move, now, but his brain and his tongue."

It was the voice of Levine, and the voice of One-eyed Mike broke in to add: "Yeah, he can think and he can talk. We're gonna see how he can talk himself out of this here pickle."

He came and stood over Speedy, and kicked him brutally in the ribs with his heavy boot.

"You go on and tell me, Speedy. You tell me how you're gonna cut these here cords with your tongue. You got a bright brain in your head, and you got a tongue with a fine sharp edge to it. But now, you tell me how you're gonna talk your way clean out of this, will you?"

"Oh, I'll tell you," said Speedy. "I don't at all mind telling you that I'll get out of the tangle."

"You hear that, Don Hernando?" said the great Levine, laughing softly. "He says that he'll talk his way out of this here trouble. He ain't the kind to boast, neither."

The Mexican came nearer, glaring down at the victim.

"Pedro, give me a whip," he commanded.

Pedro handed him a double-lashed quirt, and Don Hernando struck the bound man across the face.

"There is your answer, dog!" said the Garcias.

The knotted tip of one of the lashes cut through the skin of Speedy's cheek, cut deep, and brought a stream of blood. But he hardly felt any pain. The imminence of death made all lesser things of no moment whatever.

"You are here again, Señor Garcias. This time I did not have to wake you up by singing," he said.

Garcias smiled. Suddenly he squatted like an Indian on his heels, to bring his face closer to that of the helpless prisoner.

"You had a moment in my own house," he said, "when you could have run a knife through my throat. You could have killed me as the mountaineers kill pigs in the autumn, when the frosts begin. But you did not, Señor Speedy. Tell me why, like a blind fool, you let me go."

"Because," said Speedy, "I wanted you up here."

"And so you have me, eh?" said the Mexican.

"So I have you," agreed Speedy. "And Levine with you, and your two man-killers, there, and One-eyed Mike, also. I am only baiting a trap that will catch you and swallow you all!"

HERNANDO sprang up and looked about him in alarm. Then he raised the quirt as though to strike again. "You lie," he said, "and your lies are the lies of a fool! There is no danger near us. I have other men posted. They can see everything that comes near. We are alone here with you, and we intend to see you dying slowly."

He turned toward Levine.

"I told you that this would be the better way," said Don Hernando.

He added, to the prisoner: "Poison was the last thought of Levine, my dear friend Levine. He has a good, quick mind, but I am not a fool, either."

"Find a death for me," said Speedy, "that takes plenty of time, because there won't be any shame in it. There'll be no shame like hanging out a window of my own house,

like a suit of old clothes taking the air. How much do the people of Segovia laugh when they think of you, amigo Hernando?"

The Mexican, in frantic anger, fairly howled out an oath, and whirled the lash of the whip above his head.

It was caught from behind and the voice of Bill Parry exclaimed: "No more of that, Garcias!"

Pedro, on one side of Parry, drew a knife; Manuel, on the other, had a revolver ready. They waited the signal from their chief before laying the rash gringo dead.

But Levine called out: "Stop 'em, Garcias. We don't want anything to happen to Parry. He's all right. He's played the game straight and square with us. We wouldn't've had Speedy now, except for him!"

"He, he," exclaimed Garcias, stammering with rage, "he dared to hold my—— What shall I do to——"

He could not find words, and Bill Parry said calmly enough: "It's all right, Garcias. I know that the kid has to die. He's done too dog-gone much. He's spoiled too many good times. It's the day for him to be bumped off. But don't slam him like that when he can't slam back. You'd never have the nerve to try it, if you and him was alone, and his hands was free!"

"Shut up, Parry!" called Levine.

Don Hernando had drawn himself up, stiff with pride and rage.

"I have come many leagues," he declared. "I have ridden furiously with my men. I suggested this method for catching the snake when I came here. And now I am insulted by a gringo!"

"Señor, señor!" muttered Pedro, warningly.

"Shut up, Parry," repeated Le-

vine, but the miner was enraged in his turn, and his tongue could be as bitter as any in Mexico, for that matter.

He shouted out: "If you call me a gringo, you greaser puppy, I'm gonna——"

He reached for a gun as he spoke, but an unexpected voice broke in on the debate, not that of Levine, or of the followers of Garcias.

IT was Speedy, saying cheerfully from the ground where he lay: "Fight it out, boys. When the last of you are dead, I'll be safe enough."

This logic struck Garcias at once.

"That is true. Why should we fight with one another?" he asked. "To please this demon who lies beside us on the ground? We have come to dispose of him, not of one another."

"You'll never dispose of me, Garcias," said Speedy. "It's not in the cards for you. Neither for that fat-faced Levine. I know my luck that far away. But don't argue with the gringos, as you call them, Don Hernando. They have everything better than you have, stronger hands, better brains; better guns, better horses to ride on."

Don Hernando groaned with fury.

"You say four things and you lie four times," said he. "You are nothing but a lie, a great and complete and horrible lie. We have guns as good, better hands, better wits, better horses."

"You have broken-down, lump-headed, knock-kneed, sway-backed wrecks for horses," said Speedy. "They are the off-casts of the tramps and four-rate cow-punchers, who get tired of them, and sell them for the price of their hoofs and hides. But they're good enough for you fellows south of the Rio Grande.

Plenty good enough! You're proud to sit the saddle on brutes like that. You tie sashes about your hips and feed your horses on steel, so that they stumble along a mile or so, and then drop dead. When they die, you have to wait half a year before you can afford to buy another horse fit for the glue factory, and for nothing else."

If there is any tender point with a Mexican of any pretensions to rank, it is the horse that he rides upon. Speedy already had seen the glorious animal that Don Hernando usually rode. Though it was not in sight, now, he guessed that it must be somewhere near, for it was said that the Garcias rode it in all his marauding expeditions.

Don Hernando, in the long flow of insult that poured from the lips of Speedy, was a mere drifting, staggering thing, so did rage buoy and lighten him.

At last he managed to say: "Pedro, bring me my horse. Even this lying demon will look on it and gasp. Bring the horse and let him see what a gentleman rides in Mexico."

Pedro went for the horse.

Levine, in the meantime, together with Mike, had carefully propped up the helpless, stiff-lashed body of Speedy, against the bank of the mine dump.

He and his henchman sat down near by. And Levine said: "Don't get too hot, Garcias. There ain't any use matching words with this here sneak. He's got a vocabulary longer'n his arm, what I mean. Let him go, and we better put our heads together about the best way of getting rid of him."

But here the horse was brought, a fine gray gelding with black points, gleaming and dancing through the dusk of the day.

THE eyes of Speedy, prepared as they were, widened a little. "Look!" commanded the Garcias, "and then tell me what a liar you are. Say it with your own lips!"

"I see what you have there," said Speedy. "You've got a thing that looks like a horse and seems like a horse, walks like a horse and stands like a horse, but it isn't a horse at all. It's only a pretty picture out of a book."

"Ha?" said Don Hernando.

Levine began to chuckle, almost inaudibly, behind his hand. He did not object to this badgering of Don Hernando. He still owed the man twenty-five hundred dollars—the instant that Speedy was dead—and Levine was not one to love a creditor. One-eyed Mike, too, was looking on with a grin.

"Only a pretty little picture pony," said Speedy calmly. "That's the sort of a pick-up that we give our children to ride. No man would want to be on the back of a horse like that. Take the mare, yonder. She has more brains than you and your men, put together. She'll come when she's called, sit down, lie down, fetch and carry. She'll run faster, and run farther than your gray. She is worth looking at. She has points!"

Don Hernando stared with a fixed passion. Then he said: "You, señor, being about to die, already rave. But I would like to show you how the gray would leave the mare behind him. If they ran as far as that rock and back. Then you would see!"

"Bill Parry will ride the mare and make a fool of your horse," answered Speedy. "Bill, show up the Mexican, will you, and his bragging?"

"I'll do it free and willing and

glad," said Bill Parry. "It's a good mare and a grand mare to look at. Garcias, I'm ready!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RACE.

IN all parts of the world, in all times, there have been strange races, but never one under auspices more peculiar than this. Sid Levine was the only one to protest.

"The kid is playing for time," he said. "He's making fools of us. He may have something up his sleeve. You know that, Garcias."

"What can he do?" answered Garcias. "And what can his friends do? If they come near, we have horses to carry us away, unless we can drive them with our rifles. And before we mount, each of us puts a bullet through the head of Señor Speedy. That much is clear. In the meantime, we really have nothing to fear. We have hours before us. The men in Sunday Slough suspect nothing, and we shall kill this man in so many ways that it will repay us everything that we have suffered from him. Also, before that begins, I shall show him that he is both a fool and a blind man, since he cannot judge horses. Manuel, take the saddle of the gray. Amigo," he added to Parry, "you ride the mare. I laugh, a little, but I will make you a bet, if you wish."

"I got fifty dollars," said Bill Parry, stoutly. "I'll lay it all on the back of the mare."

"I have a hundred," answered the Mexican, contemptuously. "I offer you two dollars for one. Are you ready?"

Parry was already mounted, a big, uncouth form on the back of the dainty Betsy. Speedy looked with interest at the short spurs that ornamented the heels of Parry's boots.

It was an odd miner who wore spurs at his work!

"Any tricks to her?" asked Parry of the prisoner.

"Sometimes she's lazy," said Speedy. "And if she hangs a little, just warm her up with the spurs. She'll go by the picture horse as if he were tied to a post. Give her plenty of punishment if she hangs fire. There's plenty in her, but she's a little petted and spoiled."

"I'll get the speed out of her," said Bill Parry, savagely, "if I have to cut her heart out with the spurs. You can lay your money on that!"

"I'll lay my money on her and you, Bill," said Speedy, calmly.

"Are you ready, Manuel, you lump?" asked Bill Parry.

"Ready," said Manuel, with a sneer of satisfaction.

And he regarded the mare with a glance of scorn. He, for one, knew the value of the gelding on whose back he sat.

"I give the word," said the great Garcias. "You are both ready? Remember, to the rock and back to this place, where I draw a line with my toe. Fortune to the deserving! I raise my arm and when I drop it, send the gray on like a demon, Manuel!"

His arm fell, and the two animals shot away, side by side.

NO! For the gray had a distinct head in front at the very beginning and, running down the very gradual slope toward the big, dark rock that stood on the verge of the trees on the floor of the ravine, with every stride the good gelding shoved farther in the lead, a neck, a half length, a length.

The satisfaction of the Garcias knew no bounds. He laughed and shouted. He roared with laughter, too, when suddenly the mare, run-

ning still more slowly than before, began to buck. The curses of Bill Parry roared back down the wind to them. Even Sid Levine was laughing heartily. And One-eyed Mike smiled a savage smile.

Swiftly the gray flew on toward victory; and suddenly Bill Parry, for all his riding, flew high in the air, fell, and as his body thudded upon the ground, the mare cantered easily forward, carrying with her no burden other than the saddle on her back.

That instant, the Garcias, with a snarl, observed to his prisoner: "Ha? Is she a return horse? Would she run on into Sunday Slough and bring the warning?"

Aloud, he screeched in a voice like the whistling cry of a hawk: "*Hai!* Manuel! The mare, the mare! Stop her, rope her or shoot her down!"

Manuel heard that far-borne yell and, swinging the gray around, observed the riderless mare swinging on down the trail, while the form of her rider lay spread out far behind her.

He picked a rope from beside the saddle horn, opened the noose of it, and went for her with a whoop.

She came straight on toward him, only when the rope was flung, underhand, the noose cutting the air like a knife, the heavy, slender rawhide perfectly thrown, did Betsy leap like a dancer to the side. Half of the noose rapped across her back, and down the valley she went in wild flight, as though the blow had been a signal.

"Shoot! Shoot!" shouted the great Garcias.

And Manuel, with an oath, drew up the gelding, slid a rifle out of the saddle holster that ran under his right knee, and fired from the shoulder. The light was not good, but he was an expert; he took the head for

a target and, at the first shot, she hounded high but went galloping on. At the second bullet, she tumbled head over heels and lay flat upon the trail.

Manuel, putting up the rifle, and turning his head to make sure that she was indeed motionless, turned the gray and came victoriously back toward his chief.

"And there it is," said the Garcias. "It was not I that wished to do this. It was not I. It was you, Señor Speedy. And there lies your horse dead."

"Not my horse," said Speedy. "It belongs to a man who'll follow you and cling to you like a bur. If you manage to do me a harm, I know that he'll have your blood later on."

GARCIAS laughed. "My blood will take care of itself. Welcome, Manuel! It was a good shot. Through the head, I know, by the way the mare fell."

"It was through the head," said Manuel, showing his teeth. "I shot carefully. I clipped her through the brain, just under the ears. The first bullet, it was too far down."

"He knows how to shoot," said Garcias, with immense pride. "He could shoot in the dark, aiming at sounds. That is Manuel, a man in one million fighters."

Big Bill Parry, finally managing to get up from the ground, came back to the rest of the group, limping, shaking his bushy head. For he had been badly jarred by the fall, and there was a dimness still in his eyes.

He came to Speedy, and, leaning over him, he shook a fist in his face.

"I got a mind to smash you," he said, "and I oughta smash you. I was kind of friendly to you, compared to the rest of these here. But I ain't friendly now. I'm gonna

stand by and see them do whatever they wanta. I tell you what, I'm gonna give them a hand in the doin' of it, because I see the snake that you are, Speedy! Yeah, I see it, and I'd put my heel on your head, except that there's ways of making you suffer a lot more than that, before you cash in. You knew that she'd buck like a demon when she got the spur."

"Of course, I knew it," said Speedy.

"You was gonna have her buck me off, and then she'd go into town like a regular return hoss, and start 'em out on her trail, was that it?" demanded Bill Parry.

"Bill," said Speedy, "you have a good, clear-working brain. after somebody else has pointed the way for you. Except for the Garcias, and his man Manuel—Garcias who saw what was happening and Manuel who shoots like ten demons—she would be well along down the ravine, by this time!"

Both Garcias and Manuel expanded with pleasure. Praise is always sweet, but never so delicious as when it has been forced from the unwilling lips of an enemy.

"You see now, gringo, what it means to cross one of my name?" said Garcias.

"I knew that before, Don Hernando," said Speedy. "That was why I hung you like a white flag out a window of your house. I wanted to make sure that you would remember me."

Under the taunt, the Mexican snarled savagely. But he managed to restrain the hand which he had lifted to strike, once more, with the whip.

"There is a time," he said through his teeth, "for brave words. But your time has come to be braver still, when the fire answers what you

have to say, Señor Speedy. My friends, let us sit down and consider, carefully, exactly what should be done to this man. Let us take time, and use much thought. Now there is nothing for us to fear. We may deliberate. Even the tricks of this snake have come to an end!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BETSY COMES HOME.

IT was in the very last light of the day that Manuel had fired his shot and with every moment the gloom increased, shutting in closer and closer upon all within the ravine.

Now, as the men who had captured Speedy sat down to begin their calculations, like so many Indians around the body of a famous warrior, newly taken, Betsy lifted her head, shuddered, and rose to her feet.

She had been wounded twice. The first bullet had cut through the chin and that wound was bleeding fast. The second shot had glanced across the top of her neck, behind the ears. It was the shot which was called, in the old days, a "crease." It was said that the hunters of wild horses, men with a diabolical skill with a rifle, had sometimes brought down the mustangs with a bullet so placed that it nicked, without shattering, the spinal column, just back of the head.

So she had been struck and, thoroughly stunned, had fallen as though the bullet had passed straight through her brain.

But when she gained her feet, she was still able to take the trail. She had been badly hurt, and the blood was running down freely from both her hurts, but the instinct that guided her was as strong as ever, the impulse that had started her down

the trail after she had bucked big Bill Parry from the saddle.

It was the image of her master that lived in her brain, young Joe Dale, whom she had carried through so many dangers and whom she loved with devotion.

The touch of his hand, the sound of his voice, the very pressure of his knee conveyed to her messages that she understood perfectly as a spoken language.

Now she was in much trouble, badly hurt, and she started on toward him. The trail was not a new one. She had traveled this way many times, carrying her rightful rider, and so she went forward without hesitation, slowly at first, until she made sure of her balance.

So it was that the keen-eared men up the valley did not hear her rise and start off through the shadows. The trees closed behind her, unseen, and now, making sure of herself, she struck into a sharp trot and then into a sharper gallop.

She grew dizzy. The effects of the blow on the spinal column could not be shaken off at once. She was rather like a boxer who has received a knock-down blow and rises to resume the fight, though with a brain more than half-stunned.

So she went through the movements of the gallop, staggering a little, and so blindly that presently she struck a tree trunk with a force that almost broke her shoulder, barking away the skin and knocking her to the ground a second time.

She got up slowly, shuddering more violently. But she shook her brave head and then resumed the trail.

It was a strange world that she found herself running through that night. The boulders and the trees were in motion, it appeared, and swayed toward her from either side.

WHEN she dodged, the movement of those things that should have been fixed and rooted in the ground became all the more violent.

She got on until the lights from the town of Sunday Slough were spread out before her eyes, and then she stumbled, blinded by the swirling illumination. She fell for the third time.

It was not the effort that told upon her so much; neither was it the benumbing effects of the bullet that had cut across her neck. It was, rather, the constant flow of blood that weakened her. There was hardly strength enough in her head to lift it from the ground. There she lay for a time, the forelegs quivering, braced far apart, but her brave head fixed toward the goal and her ears pointing forward.

Something had happened to her that she could not understand.

She strove to rise. Her body heaved, and then sank back. She strove again, and this time gained her feet, only to topple over on the right side. She lay for a long moment.

A horse, like a man, can be beaten and discouraged before the body is willing to give way. And so she lay there, wondering what had happened, and with a chill of actual cold beginning in her body and rising into her soul.

All living things have the sense of death, as it steps toward them, even though without pain. And the poor mare knew that greater darkness than the night with its stars was approaching her, but, like all the brave, she was not beaten by two failures, or by three.

Patiently she worked, until once more her head was raised from the ground. Her breathing was harsh and stertorous. She was covered

with cold sweat, in streams. She shook violently with every effort that she made. Finally, however, the hind quarters, that had failed before, reacted to the pressure of her will and she came uncertainly to her feet.

She staggered and almost fell again from the effort, but presently she was able to walk on.

She tried to trot, but it was very hard. The whole landscape immediately became a wavering sea of shadows, mingling with dazzling sparks and long swinging strokes of light.

So she had to fall to a walk, once more. And now, before her, the lights separated and spread apart. A chasm of comparative darkness opened, and she entered the main street of the town. That street, as she turned a corner, opened upon many loud sounds of human voices and laughter.

There were more lights, blazing intensely, close at hand, half blinding her.

Then a dog ran out and snapped at her head. She almost fell as she strove to rear and strike out at him. The dog ran, and she went on, still staggering.

THE dust of the street was thick and deep; she slipped in it as though she were wading through swiftly running water, stepping upon rocks as treacherous as glass.

Men came running out to her. Some one cried: "This here is Joe Dale's mare, and look at what happened to her! Look, will you? Somebody's shot her!"

Hands fell on her bridle reins. She shook her head, though the movement cost her pain, and broke into a floundering trot.

Down the street, two blocks, she

knew that there was a large building, filled with lights, with the sounds of many human voices by day and by night, even, and behind that building there was another of almost equal size where horses were kept and where there was always a cool, sweet savor of hay and of peace.

She thought of that, now. And she thought, too, of the long watering troughs that extended before the front of the hotel, three of them in a row, always with the water flowing musically from one to the other, water kept clean and sweet as a mountain stream, with the small, keen faces of the stars deep down in it.

She had been thirsty before, hard-driven down many a mountain trail and under burning suns, but never had she felt such thirst as this, invading the marrow of her bones. She would drink up the very stars that lay like flickering sparks in the bottom of the trough.

So she trotted weakly, stumbling, on to the front of the hotel, leaving behind her a swirling train of inquiry. There was the black water, there were the stars a-drowning in it. She plunged her head in to the very eyes, and drank and drank again. She lifted her head, infinitely refreshed.

She was very sick, very weak. All was afloat and shuddering before her eyes. But now she remembered her master more keenly than before.

This was where he was to be found. It was into this building that he disappeared at night, and out of it he came every morning. And now, lifting her head, she whinnied, high and sharp. Even the neigh was wrong. She snorted and tried again, and the old bugle note rang out clearly.

Almost instantly a door slammed

and a step ran out onto the front veranda.

"Hello, Speedy," called a voice. "Did you get him?"

It was the voice of her master!

She whinnied again, softly, a note that he would be sure to know, for many a time on night trails she had spoken to him in exactly this manner and he had always known.

He knew now, for he came down the steps with a jump and a lunge. He was at her head. He was touching her wounds. And he was crying out in a voice sharp and wild and high, as she, many a time, had heard the voice of a dog, eager for a fight, and snarling at another. So Joe Dale cried out.

HE stood with his fists doubled. He groaned with the great apprehension that was in him. Other men ran in about him. "What's happened, Joe?" asked Pier Morgan, among the rest.

"They've murdered Speedy, and they've almost murdered Betsy. She's bleedin' to death," said Joe Dale, "and when I get them that done this, I'm gonna have the hide off their backs, and put a quirt on the raw underneath. They've gone and got Speedy, at last!"

The word went like lightning through the town.

There were some who were glad, in the bottom of their guilty hearts, but there were many more who were savagely annoyed and these came out, with guns. They offered themselves and their guns to Joe Dale, as the representative of the missing deputy sheriff.

He picked them with care, a stanch dozen men.

He said to the suddenly gathered posse: "I'll tell you what, boys, Speedy was never got by only one man. There's more than one.

There's plenty of them that were in on his death. We ain't got much chance to nail 'em. Not hardly any chance at all, because the minute that they killed him, they're sure to've busted loose and run, because they knew that Sunday Slough would go clean crazy about the dirty job. But we'll do our best, and we'll do it on the run!"

He turned back to the veterinary who, with shirt sleeves rolled up, was busily laboring over the wounded mare.

"Doc," he said, "you'll do what you can for her. I know that."

He himself went to her and laid his hand on her muzzle. Her soft, whimpering answer almost unmanned him.

He heard the doctor saying: "I'll fix her up, old son, so's you'll never know that anything ever happened to her, except the scars. And you wouldn't want to rub them out. The whole of Sunday Slough wants that writing to remain on her, brother, because it'll remind us how she come in and give the alarm, and I only hope that she ain't come too late!"

Serious and deep murmurs arose.

There was Bill Turner, the news gatherer, standing with notebook in hand, jotting down his observations of her looks at this grim moment and carefully considering her, biting at his lips for all the world like a man who had started to take down an oral interview from a dumb beast.

Even Joe Dale, no matter how his heart was wrung, could not help a faint smile, as he looked at this.

He patted her neck for the last time, sprang into the saddle of a gallant roan mustang, and went at a gallop down the main street of the town, heading toward the upper end of the ravine along which the mines were strung.

All of Sunday Slough was out

there to see the posse pass and wish them luck, and particularly one huge fellow, very drunk, his long wet mustaches blown out into sails as he bellowed: "Ten thousand dollars for the scalp of the skunk that murdered our Speedy!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE FUNERAL PYRE.

HIGH up the ravine, in their deep consultation, Sid Levine and the Garcias worked over the details of their calculations. The ideas of Levine were ingenious.

"Now, I've heard somewheres of a thing like this being done," he said. "I mean to say, they take a lot of men and rope the top of a tree, and pull the top down and stake it. Then they pull down the top of another tree, as far as they can get it, and then they take and tie a man spraddling to the two tops of the trees and break the stakes. Them trees start to spring up, and they take and tear the man in two, and if they ain't too strong, they just do it gradual. Y'understand? They take and rip him like a piece of paper, slow and gradual. And I take that to be a pretty good way with Speedy. It might show other nosey fools what happens to 'em when they get between men and their business!"

"Sure, it'll show 'em," said One-eyed Mike. "You got an idea that time, chief."

The Mexican, Garcias, remained in a profound quandary, lost in devoted thought. The faces of his two warriors were turned steadily toward him.

Then he said: "I have given it careful thought. I see, Señor Levine, that you are a man with a mind. But, also, I remember hearing of other things. There are very

clever Indians in this world. All the brains are not limited to the whites, like you and me. And the Indians had some devices. They would stick pine splinters, good resinous pine splinters, into the body of a man, and then light the splinters, that burned down well into the flesh. They had ideas, the Indians."

"Yeah, there's all kinds of ideas in the world," said One-eyed Mike, "the same as they're all kinds of people. I took a trip over to China, once when I was kind of on the loose and the run, and over there I seen them torture a chink by forcing his joints through pieces of board that was smaller than the bones. Crushed 'em, you see? Them chinks, they got plenty of nerve to stand pain, I know. But that pirate, he just opened his mouth and hollered like I can remember it yet, and feel it yet, too, right down the middle of my back!"

"As a matter of fact," said Levine, "we could do several things. There's no use limitin' ourselves. We got the time and we got the means. I've heard tell, somewheres, about lashing of a gent between two boards, and then sawing through the boards and the man. I mean, the boards keep the saw blade working straight. They clean the flesh and the blood out of the saw teeth. It took some imagining to think of that, I say."

"Well," said Mike Doloroso, "for my part, I never knew anything that much beat plain methods, like tying a gent up by the thumbs and putting a fire under his feet so as he gets tired of hanging that way!"

YES, and I seen a lot of funny things done by just putting a cord around the head of a man," said Levine, "and then twisting the string with a stick. That

makes their eyes pop out, and they holler, you can bet!"

"He is a singer," said Garcias, savagely. "And when he screams, it should be worth seeing and hearing. His face will be good to watch, because it is a handsome face, my friends!"

He laughed as he spoke, and the others laughed, also. He thought so much of his remark that he translated it also into Mexican for the enjoyment of Manuel and Pedro, and those worthies grinned from ear to ear.

Pedro said in Mexican: "Take the arm and bend it at the elbow, and then twist. It does things to the shoulder bones. Things to hear and to see!"

Levine suddenly stretched his fat arms and yawned.

"We been talking for a long time," said he. "I guess we been here for about an hour, tasting this here without doing nothing. Suppose we start. Start anyway, but make a beginning."

"One moment," said Garcias. "Suppose we ask him what he wishes. Señor Speedy, what would you prefer? You have heard us talk of many things."

They had brought a lantern from the mine, and the lantern they now raised to see the face of the victim.

Speedy smiled against the light.

"Try anything you want, boys," he said. "If you can be Indians enough to do the things you talk about, I can be Indian enough to stand 'em without squealing, I hope."

"Talking game ain't the same as dying game," said Levine. "We'll get a song out of you before we finish. Curse you. I always hated the look of your mug from the time that I first seen it. Now you're gonna see what happens when you step be-

tween men and their work. We're gonna show you."

"Look at the way you're winding up, Speedy," said One-eyed Mike. "You've had your day, and right now, back there in Sunday Slough, there's plenty of redeye being drunk to you. They're drinkin' the health of their next sheriff, but he'll be in Hades before ever he'll be in Sunday Slough again. We all know that, I reckon! Oh, Speedy, a fine end you've come to! You'd live your life over again, I guess, if you could do the choosing right now! Speak up and tell the truth."

"Well, I'll tell you the truth," said Speedy. "I've had my fun, and I've had plenty of it. I've been kicked in the face, now and then, but I've been the top dog often enough, too. I've gone where I wanted to go, and when I wanted to go. I have no regrets, and I don't expect that I'll have them when I'm dying here and you fellows play the mischief with me. You can't string it out more than a few hours, at the most, and I can balance a good many free years and happy years against all of that. Go ahead, Levine. Another day or two, and I should have had you."

LEVINE laughed loudly. "You would've had me," he said, sneering. "But you didn't get me. It was a long game, and you won all the tricks up to the last one. But I'm winning that one, Speedy. You didn't think that I'd reach this far or that I was behind that claim-jumper, did you? You couldn't see that that was all a plant?"

"I'd like to know one thing," said Speedy. "Was the other mine? in on the deal, too?"

"Him? Oh, no! He's the honest man that was throwed out. I knew

that he'd go straight to you. I knew that he'd get you started straight up the valley. I knew that you'd come alone, too, because you've built up the kind of a reputation that you don't dare to act like you ever needed any help! I've beat you, Speedy!"

"The simple things will work, now and then," said Speedy, calmly. "Nobody can win all the time. But as I die, I'll be thinking of what the boys from Sunday Slough will do to you when they nail you, Levine. And nail you they will, sooner or later. Gray, and Joe Dale, and Pier Morgan, they'll never give up the work until they've cornered you and rendered down some of your fat into lard."

"Bah," said Levine, sneering, "I've matched my brains against theirs more times than I can count. I've always won before, and I'll win again. I know that I'll win. You're the only man in the world that ever bothered me much. I had Sunday Slough in my vest pocket, before you turned up. I had a million or a couple of clean millions in sight, before you appeared. And with you out of the way, I'll go back and get the town in my hand again."

Speedy shook his head.

"You're an optimist, Sid," said he. "The town knows you now. The whole town knows what a rotten crook you are. And no decent man will ever be seen with you again. You'll have nothing but muckers like One-eyed Mike around you, and cheap greaser murderers, like Garcias."

He smiled again, straight through the light of the lantern, and into the face of Levine.

The latter grew half purple and half white.

At last he said: "It's time to commence, Garcias. There ain't

any use using up words on him, because words don't mean anything to a dog like him. It needs the whip to make him feel something!"

Garcias arose.

"We begin, then. Pedro, what's that on the wind? Do you hear anything? Like horses, coming up the valley?"

"I thought that I heard," said Pedro.

"But now there is nothing," broke in Manuel.

"Very well," said Garcias. "My men and I vote for fire, a slow fire built at the feet; roasting the feet carefully. When the fire has rotted the flesh off the bones, then move it up higher. A man will live for a long time, in flames like that."

BUILD the fire," snapped Levine. "You're right, and I should've known before that I wouldn't have ideas worth the ones that you could trot out. Go ahead, then, and start the fire."

The wood was gathered.

There was a considerable noise of crackling in the underbrush as Pedro and Manuel broke up the fuel small. Then Manuel, with a bit of dry bark, started the fire, heaping leaves over it and the driest part of the brushwood, broken short, until the flames had gathered a good headway and showed a brilliant little pyramid of hungry yellow.

"That is enough to roast the meat," said the Garcias. "Even enough to char it, unless we keep the joint turning."

He laughed joyously, as he spoke, and Pedro and Manuel laid hands on the prisoner.

Levine, holding the lantern high, leaned close over the face of Speedy.

"Can you hold out, now that it's coming?" he asked, sneering. "Beg, you cur. Beg! Promise! Swear!

Now's the time for you to talk. Talk us sick. Maybe we'll let you go! Beg for a quick way of dying!"

But, instead, he saw a gradual and steady smile spread on the lips and in the eyes of the prisoner.

Speedy said nothing at all!

The voice that next spoke was not from any one about the fire, but from the neighboring brush.

It was the sharp, barking tone of young Joe Dale, exclaiming: "Shoot for the legs. We want 'em alive, Garcias and Levine! The rest don't count!"

And rifles spoke like hammer strokes against the ears of the stunned group.

CHAPTER XVI.

SNIPES ON THE WING.

WHEN snipe, feeding in a marsh, hear the voice of the hunter's dogs in the distance, they will rise staggering into the wind, each on a different course. So, when the cry of Joe Dale was heard, the men of the party gathered around Speedy scattered.

Each went his own way, winged with panic. No doubt every man would have been dropped at the first volley, had not Dale issued his orders. He himself could not understand, afterward, why he had shown such stupidity, except that it seemed to him only fair that the creatures who had been about to torment his idolized friend should taste death for a time, themselves, before they suffered it.

As it was, his men strictly obeyed his orders, and fired low. But the light was bad. The glimmer of the flames of the fire danced before their eyes and, though every one was a chosen marksman, the execution was surprisingly slow.

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Big One-eyed Mike, with a howl, doubled up as though the first volley had sent a bullet through his stomach, and in this position he ran like a football player, charging the line, straight for the nearest trees opposite to the line of firing.

A bullet knocked off his hat. Another sliced through the calf of his leg. But these hindrances did not keep him from running at full speed. He flattened the brush before him like a charging elephant, and went on, dashing and crashing.

Sunday Slough saw him no more.

Pedro and Manuel, running in exactly the same fashion, ducked and dodged right and left, heading for the same trees. Pedro reached them without a scratch. But luck was against Manuel. A bullet, flying far higher than the marksman intended, broke the back of his neck and he fell dead on the verge of safety.

Big Sid Levine, screaming like a woman, and like a woman throwing his arms above his head and before him, literally fell forward toward shelter, rushing off in such blind panic that he ran straight into the enemy. A gun butt wielded by Joe Dale with infinite relish struck him fairly on the mouth and knocked out his breath and most of his teeth.

He fell down like one who had received a mortal wound. He had fallen in a dead faint, from which he did not recover for half an hour.

Bill Parry, running for safety, stumbled midway in his course, fell flat, and rolled headlong into tall grass. He had sense enough not to rise again, but crawled away.

He would have been taken, had there been any pursuit, but there was none.

Something else was happening beside the fire that attracted attention that way, and all the guns.

FOR of all the men who had surrounded Speedy, intent on snuffing out his young life in the most agonizing possible manner, only Don Hernando, in the pinch, remembered the work at hand rather than the preservation of his own life.

It was not a blind passion on his part.

The men of Segovia were a part of him, and he was a part of Segovia. He had been shamed in the eyes of all of his people, and he dared not return to them unless he could say that the insulting gringo had fallen by his hand.

He was, at the moment of the alarm, the farthest from the scene of the impending torture, surveying it with a calm and well-pleased eye. But the moment that the alarm came, he knew what he had to do, and started to do it. He sprang straight for his victim.

The first hindrance was purely accidental.

Big One-eyed Mike, turning toward his blind side, with his massive shoulder struck the Mexican and knocked the slighter man spinning with his charge.

As Garcias recovered his balance and darted forward once more toward Speedy, young Pier Morgan came plunging in between. He was still very weak. The riding of the last two days and the strain of the excitement had been too much for him, but he could not be kept from the posse that rode out of Sunday Slough to save or avenge his benefactor.

So he placed himself instantly between Speedy and danger, standing with his legs braced well apart.

He saw Garcias coming like a tiger, and fired, but missed with his shaking hand. The second bullet clogged in the revolver. He hurled

the weapon itself at the head of Garcias, but it flew wild in turn, and Garcias, holding his own bullet with a terrible fixity of purpose, avoided wasting a shot on the body of poor Morgan, merely knocking him senseless with a blow from the barrel of his gun.

That removed the last screen, and with a frightful cry of triumph, he stood over Speedy, leveling his gun.

He wanted to make too sure, or he would have done his work. As it was, he saw the firelight shine into the steady, keen eyes of the prisoner and, as he was about to pull the trigger that would have banished Speedy from the pleasant ways of this earth, a rifle slug tore through the hips of the Mexican and knocked him down.

He struggled to one elbow and strove to fire again. But Joe Dale, running in like a wild cat, broke his gun arm with a kick.

That ended the battle of Sunday Slough, as it was called from that date henceforward.

Men said that all the credit was due to the brains of Speedy, who had devised the liberation of a dumb beast as a messenger. But they gave the credit, as hero of the encounter, not to Joe Dale, or even to gallant Pier Morgan, who had been so willing to die for his friend, but to the beautiful mare, Betsy.

THEY paraded her through the streets of the town, the next day, decked out with garlands of flowers. For she was of a tough ancestry, and she had not lost enough blood to injure her seriously for long. She was weak, but happy with her master beside her.

As for the prisoners, they brought the Garcias, silent and composed, to the town jail, where Marshal Tom Gray took charge of him. With him

they carried the great Sid Levine, fallen forever. He had collapsed completely and had to be carried on a litter, where he lay sobbing out of a broken and bleeding face.

And Speedy?

Joe Dale and Pier Morgan, literally with guns, defended him all the election day from the enthusiasm of the crowds who wanted to break into the sheriff's house.

The election itself was a joke. No man dared to vote against the hero; and in the evening, when the votes had been counted, in the rosy dusk of the day, the whole population of Sunday Slough came trooping to congratulate the hero and make him

the center of such a celebration as the Slough had never known before.

Joe Dale went to rouse him from the sleep of exhaustion, but received no answer to his knock. The door was locked. They crawled through the open rear window, and found Speedy gone.

In place of him was a letter which read:

DEAR JOE AND PIER, AND ALL MY FRIENDS IN SUNDAY SLOUGH: Levine is down. My job is ended. My trail is the out trail. If I'm the sheriff, I resign. Good luck to everybody, but I've already stayed too long in one place. SPEEDY.

That was all of him.

Sunday Slough saw him no more.

MOUNTAIN LION AND LUMBERMAN BATTLE

ALTHOUGH it has been said that the mountain lion is cowardly and never attacks in the daytime, Charles Mattern, assistant superintendent of a Longview, Washington, timber company, has another story to tell.

It was when he stopped at a creek to cool off his speeder that he was using on the company's railroad that he heard an unusual sound and, turning around, encountered a full-grown mountain lion about four feet away from him.

Fortunately the lumberman was a log roller and a wrestler, for he at once was forced to call into play all his previously learned tactics. Leaping to his feet, he started to retreat; but the cat immediately closed in on him. Mattern kicked at his pursuer and leaped to a rock, where he lost his footing and fell. Once more on his feet, he gave the animal another kick to prevent it from springing at him, and at that both man and beast were knocked off their balance. Quick to arise, Mattern leaped to the railroad grade, where he grabbed some rocks, and when the lion again approached him he took aim and hit it square in the mouth. More rocks were thrown which missed hitting the enraged animal, which stood its ground, determined on victory. Mattern, with one rock left, hurled it in the hope of fatally injuring his foe, and this time he was successful, for the rock hit the lion's skull and it staggered back into a near-by thicket.

Not caring to investigate further, Mattern went back to his speeder and returned to camp. An hour later he returned with men from the camp armed with rifles.

Searching through the thicket where the animal had retreated, they found tracks, and then a snarl reached their ears. Wounded among the weeds, this brave fighter raised its head, but not for long. A report from a rifle, and the mountain lion lay dead.



FLAME DRIVEN

By HOWARD J. PERRY

Author of "Fire Tried," etc.

IT was as plain as the nose on your face that "Frosty" Wade was heading for certain disaster; that is, it was to every member of the Lonesome River camp except Frosty himself. Not that the lanky kid with the turbulence of colorless hair, from which his nickname had been derived, admitted as much; but the fact that he remained on the job bore sufficient evidence to the fact that he was totally ignorant of the neat packet of trouble that was in store for him.

Frosty hadn't been in camp long enough to soil his new calked boots before he committed the first blunder that started the snowball of adversity which in a few months grew to monstrous proportions. It all

happened on that first night in Hogan's saloon at the Junction where the loggers gathered to forget the sweating, straining grind of the woods.

Out of curiosity he had joined the hegira to the Junction and had faced the mahogany with the other thirsty members of the crew. "Pinch" Tonkin, bronzed and burly, woods boss of the outfit, sent a ten-dollar gold piece spinning across the wet bar. "They're on me, fellows," he announced. "And we'll drink to the new faller." His black eyes sought Frosty at the opposite end.

The red-faced bartender took the cue with knowing familiarity and placed the whisky bottles and glasses before his customers. As he started

to do likewise in front of Frosty, that individual shook his head.

"Make mine a sody," he said in a voice that carried, without volition, distinctly to every part of the boisterous room.

SURPRISE that was akin to wonder dropped the bartender's jaw. There descended an immediate silence, as every face turned on Frosty.

The youngster might have been alone for all the effect this sudden tense interest had upon him. His blue eyes twinkled as he met the bartender's stupefied gaze.

"Hope you're not all out?" he inquired.

Slowly with almost painful care, Pinch Tonkin replaced his glass and with portending tread stepped toward Frosty. There lay in his black eyes a smoldering gleam and the corners of his mouth indicated the nether regions. Halting beside the youth, he glared down at him.

"Did I hear right?" he demanded. "You ain't drinkin' on me?" Disbelief had twisted his features until they resembled a gargoyle.

The other loggers edged back. The atmosphere around the two was surcharged with a promise of action. The mighty Pinch Tonkin, who was feared by every man in the section, had been insulted by a strippling. The kid would drink now or eat dirt.

As the woods boss spoke, Frosty turned deliberately, his eyes testing him with speculative interest. He might have been gazing upon some odd specimen suddenly called to his attention, so rapt was his expression. But amusement quickly followed and he threw back his head and laughed.

"Gosh, Tonkin!" he exclaimed. "You trying to scare me?"

A hiss of astonishment passed from one onlooker to the next. It was unbelievable. The kid had laughed in Pinch Tonkin's face.

The woods boss recoiled as if from a blast, then leaned forward. But what he purposed to do was interrupted by the big bulk of the bartender who projected himself between them.

"No rough stuff!" he commanded and flung a belligerent look toward the others. "If he starts trouble here, I'll cut you all off for a week, and I mean it. I ain't goin' to have no more furniture busted up in this place."

The loggers knew he was as good as his word and, stimulated by the thought of a week's drought, surged around the inflamed Tonkin and dragged him, kicking and flailing, away.

The saloon man next swung on Frosty. "Get out!" he ordered. "Any one who ain't got no more brains'n you have, ought not to be allowed to run free. Get out!"

And Frosty got, not, however, as one who had been driven, but with the unmistakable manner of one who, oddly enough, was still in command of the situation.

This, his first step toward disaster, was a seven-league stride that fell short of a terrible conflict by the slim margin of the bartender's interference; and later in camp he was protected solely by the strict ruling of Mike Favin, the owner, that any fighting meant instant removal from the pay roll for the participants.

BUT if the faller realized his proximity to possible deadly treatment, he failed to give any indication of it. His impetuous negligence continued to manifest itself, much to the sharp annoyance of the crew.

Even Mike Favin admitted that the youngster was riding for a fall, but in the same breath he confessed that Frosty was a dog-gone good logger and good men were scarce. "Eventually," he muttered to the timekeeper, "Pinch is going to mess him up. There's murder in Tonkin's eye every time he looks at him and, rules or no rules, it's going to happen."

But at that Frosty might have escaped the brunt of Tonkin's wrath had it not been for the sudden appearance of Louise Favin in camp. The vivacious daughter of the owner, having completed the education provided by a doting father, came up to Lonesome River to spend the summer.

Louise was no stranger to the men of the outfit and especially not to Pinch Tonkin. Three years before, the friendship between them had cemented to the firmness of a conviction on the part of the woods boss that he would some day marry Louise. To the loggers it was an accepted fact. To Mike Favin it was not entirely an unfavorable possibility. Pinch was a good woods boss and Favin knew that some day all his timber holdings would be in his daughter's hands and the thought of a husband who knew the business was most satisfactory to him.

As far as Louise was concerned, her commitment had never been expressed. True, she proved by her actions that Pinch was acceptable, but even that individual could not dispel her bubbling coquetry long enough to wring an answer from her. Even the efforts of her father to ascertain her intentions were parried by provocative flippancy.

"Now, dad," she had said, laughing and rumpling his gray hair with her slim fingers, "there's lots of time to get rid of me. Don't go worrying

your blessed old head about a future son-in-law. When I'm ready, I'll tell you and I promise that the man I pick will meet your approval."

Favin snorted hopelessly. "Yes, and the first thing you know you'll take up with some spineless weakling. You're a daughter of the timberlands." He held out his knotted hands. "Your dad built a fortune with these hands and a little brains and it's going to take a lot more brawn and courage to hold that fortune."

Her eyes twinkled fondly at him. "Didn't I say I'd pick a husband who suited you?" she inquired. "Isn't that a whopper of a promise from a modern daughter? Now keep on holding your fortune and don't bother about me."

But that very evening his shaggy brows snapped together when he glanced out of the commissary and saw her strolling toward the river with Frosty Wade.

And the incident was witnessed not alone by Mike Favin. Every member of the crew saw them go and, last of all, Pinch Tonkin, who emerged from his bunk house to come to a frigid halt, his black eyes first dilating with incomprehensible surprise, then contracting to mere slits through which forked hatred, fired by the fuel of the little green god, flashed with searing intensity.

FROM that moment there was no doubt in the minds of the men that Frosty Wade was doomed. In just what form calamity would present itself, they could not say; but its certainty they did not question.

Had it been any one else but Frosty, they might have gone to some pains to sound a warning or, perhaps, have thrown the weight of their loyalty to his side, but the,

faller had made scant effort to win their friendship and now they waited with no little anticipation to see what Pinch would do.

The woods boss acted swiftly, choosing the one weapon he could wield without placing himself in a bad light before the eyes of Louise. From then on, he became the motive power behind a procedure of persecution that had been effective in driving more than one logger from the camps. And in this he soon enlisted the aid of a group of associates who lent their support for no other reason, except that they enjoyed the sport.

The following night, as Frosty crawled in between his blankets, the odor of skid grease rose strongly to his nostrils and his skin came into contact with an unctuous substance that demanded no light to inform him of its nature.

At breakfast the next morning several pairs of eyes studied his face for some betrayal of his reaction to the joke, but they were met with the same impregnable indifference that had hitherto marked his demeanor toward them. And he either disregarded the portent of the incident or failed to recognize the hand behind the attack, for he continued to see more of Louise.

The girl, on the other hand, seemed to enjoy his companionship. The timekeeper, whose philosophy and observation ran deeper than the rest, was forced to admit that they made a pretty dog-gone good-looking couple; and, after all, Frosty had many cleaner qualities than could be usually attributed to the general run of loggers.

Two days later when a bottle of the cook's choicest liquor disappeared and he found it, after a systematic search of every bunk house when the men were in the woods,

under Frosty's mattress, there was a subsequent report to Mike Favin.

The owner, who by this time was not averse to the hope that Frosty would pull his freight, called the faller into the commissary and minced no words in laying the charge before him.

Frosty heard him through with expressionless face. "Mr. Favin," he said, when he had finished, "I've never taken a drink in my life. If you can find any one who ever saw me do it, I'll confess that I stole that bottle and I'll forfeit all the wages I got coming and quit the camp."

"Well," growled the owner, unwillingly impressed by his sincerity, "it looks funny and if it's some one pulling a joke on you, I'd advise you to find out who it is. You have my permission to tear into him." He paused and then went on sharply: "Which reminds me that you'd find it a mighty sight easier going, around here, if you'd act a little more like a regular guy. Nobody likes a spineless fellow, especially in the timber game where intestinal fortitude is what makes men."

FROSTY colored under this, but he said nothing and, finding that Favin was through, he turned and stalked out. As he approached his bunk house one of Pinch Tonkin's friends sidled up to him.

"I heard 'bout that booze, kid," he said. "It was Pinch put it there. You ain't goin' to let him get away with that stuff, are you?"

"I hadn't thought about it," Frosty retorted, continuing on his way, but when he was alone he smiled rather grimly to himself. That fellow wasn't trying to put him wise. He had been commissioned by the woods boss to express those

words in the hope that Frosty would precipitate a combat.

But Frosty didn't; and this fact proved a greater boomerang than anything he had previously said or done. The next day the accumulated chilliness of a snow-weighted forest greeted him in the attitude of the loggers; but the ultimate congealing effect was not attained until Louise frigidly passed him by, nose high and eyes frozen to the front.

This, indeed, was a crowning achievement for Pinch Tonkin, an achievement which he lost no time in taking advantage of, both in strutting manner and insolent words.

However, within a few days, concentration on Frosty relaxed somewhat, due to the general concern over the ominous threat of the fire demon. June panted through, hot and dry. When July wore on without the looked-for summer rains, the forest became a tinder box, waiting only one tiny spark to convert it into a dreadful holocaust.

All day the men worked in the pressing heat, dragging their labor-strained, worry-ridden bodies back at night to camp to fling them, fully clad, on their bunks. With smoking prohibited in the woods, raw nerves, like the forest, lay ready to lash out at the least provocation. Each morning inflamed eyes scanned the horizon, seeking, hoping—but hoping in vain, for only a burnished sun glared across a cloudless sky.

Frosty was assigned to night patrol, a commission none of the men relished. It was following his fourth night on duty, after he had dropped on his bed to instant slumber, when he was awakened by the shrill insistent blasts of the donkey engine. Sitting up, he discovered it was late in the morning. Rushing to the door, his gaze encountered a great billowy mass of black smoke rolling

into the sky above the canyon that bisected Favin's timber. Even as he stood there, its instant swelling told him that a blaze of major proportions was well on the way to disastrous destruction.

Without hesitation he started on a run for the conflagration. Soon he had come to a high shoulder where the whole panorama stretched out below. The canyon was narrow and flanked on the right by an insurmountable wall of rock. Already the fire had spread out for a quarter of a mile, extending from this precipitous granite barricade to the heavy growth of fir that bordered the opposite side. In that first glance he saw that it was eating its way rapidly up the canyon and, once it attained the farther end, it would sweep out into the finest section of Favin's holding.

WHY didn't they start a backfire from the upper opening? But scarcely had the question found expression in his mind before he discerned a chain of smoke puffs rising from the distance. He smiled with sudden relief and satisfaction. The men were backfiring along a wide line. In another fifteen minutes the outer hem of the two fires would join in a great flaming cordon that would slowly converge and beat itself out against the unscalable bluff.

He started to turn back when his sharp gaze caught a movement across a small cleared patch on the left side of the canyon. At the first glance he thought it might be three deer hastening before the onrushing flames, but the next instant his body froze with terrible horror as he made out Louise, her father and Pinch Tonkin hurrying away from the path of the original blaze.

His eyes shifted swiftly and a gasp

of consternation was torn from him. The backfire had already gained momentum and was now within a hundred yards of joining the conflagration from below. Five minutes more and those three would be hopelessly hemmed in.

His blood running cold, Frosty shouted an ineffectual warning, then immediately realized its ineffectiveness. Their ears must be filled with the fiery roar behind them. But they couldn't scale that precipice toward which they were heading. He knew, for he had followed its base during his nightly patrols. Then a lightning thought zigzagged across his brain and resolution hardened within him.

Whirling, he raced down the slope behind him. As he came out on the level below, he felt the hot blast of the circling flames. Already the cordon had joined making the success of his undertaking next to impossible. Yet pulling his hat low to protect his face, he plunged into the smoke.

There was no picking his way except to avoid stumbling. Fire brands began to rain upon him, biting through his shirt and into his skin. His breath came in labored gasps, the hot smoke sucked into his lungs. Still he lunged on. From somewhere above him sounded a mighty hissing, succeeded by a thunderous crash at his heels as a great flaming limb struck the ground and bounced up amid a spray of sparks.

He was staggering now. Would he ever—could he ever reach the other side of that horrible inferno? Despite his care, his foot caught and he pitched headlong on his face where he lay, half stunned. Then, again, he was on his feet, with every breath drinking in furnace blasts of ash-filled air. Choking and strangling, determination drove him for-

ward. Now a crack like that of a rifle above. He glanced upward to see a huge snag tottering like a Gargantuan torch. For a moment he measured its direction. Then he leaped, but fell. The ground shook under him as the giant stump struck the earth not ten feet away. With one more burst of power he dove for an opening between the whipping flames and a cry of relief sprang from his parched throat.

He had got through!

Now to find those three! They were somewhere ahead. He called out and there was an answering yell just in front. Launching into a run, he threw himself through the tangled underbrush and into an open patch.

THE figure of Pinch Tonkin was the first to meet his straining eyes, then, searching wildly, they located the other two. Mike Favin was lying as if dead, with his daughter crouching close beside him.

As Frosty stumbled up Pinch stared with unbelieving countenance. "Wh-what—how did you get here?" he demanded. There was that in his voice that reminded Frosty of a man who has already relinquished himself to death. But he disregarded him as he rushed toward those on the ground.

"Louise!" he cried. "Are you—is he hurt?" His eyes flashed from her startled gaze to the figure beside her.

"Oh, Frosty!" she sobbed. "We're trapped! We're all going to be burned alive!"

He dropped to her side and saw that Favin was breathing hard, his face badly burned and his clothing scorched in many places.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Favin?" he repeated.

Favin shook his head. "Just—just all in. But how did you get here?"

"I saw you from the cliff and I broke through the fire to try and get you out. Can you walk?"

"I—I guess I can in a moment or two," the owner replied. "I—we—tried to get through and couldn't!"

Frosty stood up quickly, the snarl of the fire swelling in his ears. Already the hungry flames were lashing out from the big firs above them. Pinch Tonkin stood in dazed stupefaction. Frosty grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Snap out of it, Tonkin!" he commanded. "Pull yourself together. Help me with these people. There's a slim chance for us."

Tonkin gaped at him. "There ain't no chance. We're through. How you goin' to get us out? We can't climb those cliffs."

Frosty shook him roughly. "You do as I say. Don't go yellow now. Help me with Favin." He turned and assisted the timber owner to his feet. "C'mon, Pinch, let him get his arm around you."

The woods boss obeyed, his eyes constantly drawn to the eager flames.

Frosty directed Louise. "Follow closely. Maybe we haven't a prayer, but we can get to the side of the canyon. That's the last place the fire will reach."

They started off. Favin was able to walk a little. On their very heels, the fire closed in. The heat was terrific and the smoke curled downward, enveloping and driving out the precious air that came from above.

After a few minutes they found themselves at the base of the mountain wall. Here the heat was thrown back at them with withering force. Louise wavered, took a step forward,

then sank to her knees. Pinch looked on with helpless mien.

"Here, Mr. Favin," said Frosty, "rest here. You and Louise. I'm going to look for something." He darted off along the cliff. It must be here somewhere. He had seen it from a distance. Surely he couldn't be mistaken. Then through the smoke he made out a narrow crevice in the rock. He whirled and dashed back to the others.

LOUISE lifted an anxious face. "What did you find, Frosty? We can't stand this much longer."

"There may be a way out yet, Louise," he told her. "Here, Tonkin, get hold of him." He reached down and lifted Favin again to his feet. "Now hurry!" he ordered.

They moved to the crack in the granite wall. Here Frosty stopped and pointed up several feet where a large hole showed.

"Climb up there, Louise," he directed. "I'll help you."

She complied and with his assistance made her way up the erosion until she reached the very lip of the cave.

"Now you go," he said to Pinch.

The woods boss scrambled up eagerly.

Frosty next spoke to Favin. "Help as much as you can. I'll boost you and Pinch will give a hand from above."

It was only a matter of a few moments before they were all in the cavelike hollow of the canyon wall. Frosty viewed it with misgiving. It was much larger than he had thought, but it was not very deep and already simmered from the dreadful nearness of the flames.

"Now," he said, "if we can hold out until the worst is over, we'll be safe." He tried to make his voice

sound reassuring but the blaze was crackling close and the cave felt like a red-hot oven.

Suddenly inspiration seized him. Tearing off his outer shirt, he draped it across the opening.

"Give me yours," he commanded the two other men and soon the entire mouth was covered.

This reduced the scorching temperature somewhat but in a short time unpleasant gases began seeping around the outer edges. Louise and her father lay on the ground at the back of the cavern suffering more than they wanted to reveal, yet each knowing that to remain there was their only salvation.

All at once with the cry of a demented man, Pinch charged toward the opening. "I ain't goin' to be roasted alive!" he shouted. "I'm goin' to run for it!"

Frosty vaulted after him, clutching him about the waist. Pinch turned and drove his fist into his face. And before the youth could stop him he had struck again.

Releasing his grip, Frosty dodged around until he was between him and the entrance. Tonkin fought to duck past him, but Frosty halted him with a vicious uppercut that sent him reeling.

Panting with rage, Pinch came back at him, tiny rivulets of sweat coursing down his bare arms and neck. The rush of his attack sent Frosty backward and he caught himself just at the brink of the cave. As he poised there for a second, the full force of the heat assailed him, seeming to shrivel his skin to corrugations, as the blaze ate up the last of the timber near the face of the cliff. Again Pinch charged. Frosty at once firmly braced himself and met his jabs with power-driven blows. Then they clinched and went down hard.

FOR the next few moments they struggled like crazed animals. Pinch's fingers sought to clutch on Frosty's throat. Frosty tore them loose and struck out savagely. The grim humor of the situation gripped him. All the joy, all the exultation he might have experienced, as his muscles responded to his fierce desire to drive his knuckles into this man's flesh, were dispelled by the fact that he was grappling with him only to save his life.

Their breath rattled from hoarse, dry throats. Pinch was a well-nigh invincible opponent under normal conditions, but now with his mind crazed with fear, he was infinitely more powerful. Suddenly the woods boss wrenched himself free, stood up, and backed away. Then as Frosty got to his feet, he hurled his whole weight at him. In an agony of realization, Frosty knew that if he didn't stop him then, that they would both be carried, sooner or later, into that inferno that awaited them far down below.

He squared himself and swung. Everything he had, his youth, determination and experience went into that blow. Upon its success hung the balance of their lives. He might have dodged, but even his personal feeling wouldn't allow him to see Pinch end up in certain death in that furnace outside.

As the blow met its mark, Tonkin's big body shuddered, wavered around, then sank to the ground. Necessity no longer buoying him up, Frosty, utterly spent, crumpled across his prostrate form. For a long time he lay there, gasping back his slowly returning vitality. When he finally did move, Pinch was still unconscious. Pulling himself together, he mustered enough strength to drag the inert hulk to the rear of the cavern.

Then it was he looked at Louise. Her eyes were brimming.

"I—I saved him for—for you," he told her simply.

She crawled nearer to him and laid both hands on his shoulders. "Do you think I want him? Especially after the spectacle he made of himself to-day? You've proved yourself, Frosty, and I want to ask your forgiveness. If we ever live

through this, I'll never doubt you again."

At that moment Mike Favin who had hitched himself to the mouth of the crevice startled them with a shout. "Look! It's past its peak and is dying down!" He turned on Frosty. "Boy, I apologize, too, for what I've said and thought. You've got enough stuff in you to suit me any time."

THE EARLY BASKET MAKERS

THE nomadic peoples who settled the Southwest some two to four thousand years ago, have left very little evidence behind them to show what may have been their state of civilization, but an expedition under the auspices of the Carnegie Institute started for exploration work in the Guadalupe Mountains in New Mexico a short time ago. They expected to find relics which will give more insight into the habits and practices of that early American race known as basket makers. These people lived in the arid Southwest before the time of the cliff dwellers.

Richard Wetherill, a rancher, discovered the first evidence of the basket-making culture some time in 1890. In a cave in Utah he found stratigraphical evidence of two distinct civilizations; they were separated by a layer of sand and animal remains. The top layer he designated as cliff dwellers, the lower as basket makers, since the dead were buried in baskets, and because, while much basketry was found, there was no sign of any kind of pottery.

Then, about a year later, a cowboy, Charlie Long, made a like discovery in another Utah cave. He, too, named the upper strata cliff dwellers, but called the bottom layer cave dwellers.

These basket makers were long-headed Indians, semi-nomads, and farmed in a slipshod fashion.

Because of the extreme aridity of the country, permanent camps were impossible, hence they were of necessity nomads. But in spite of the limitations of their tools, materials, and natural resources, whatever they did was done well.

Their clothing requirements were few, due to continued warm weather. Sandals of cedar bark or yucca leaves, and a loin cloth, were generally sufficient. In the rare colder weather, a fur skin or blanket completed the wardrobe.

Baskets were used for practically every purpose. All the cooking except roasting was done in these water-proofed receptacles. The dead were invariably buried sewed up in large baskets, which has given rise to the use of the word mummy in describing them.

Some of the baskets are plainly utilitarian, while others are gay with color and ornamented with intricate geometrical design. They are of all shapes and sizes. Some are made so tight that they hold water without being coated with pitch.



A Serial

RANCHER'S LEGACY

By PETER HENRY MORLAND

OLD Tom Baldwin, owner of a big ranch, comes home one night mortally wounded. Of his seven sons, the youngest, nicknamed "Flash" David, is undoubtedly his favorite, but he is usually away from home. On this night another son, "Skinny" Bill, rides off to find him. It turns out that he is in a gypsy camp, talking to one of the prettiest girls there. He and Skinny Bill go on home together and, on arrival there, find the other five brothers in their father's room. After talking with their father for a while, Bill and his brothers leave the room, with the exception of Flash David, to whom his father confides the secret that he has been

murdered. He does not say who did it, as the slayer, it appears, has many names; but he describes the murderer. The father adds that he will be found near women, particularly if one of them is pretty enough. He had killed Baldwin, in fact, because of what he told a woman about him ten years back.

At his father's funeral, Flash David dresses in his gayest clothes and races another man on horseback, Hal Morgan. His six brothers, who are nicknamed "Trot" Peter, "Single-jack" Tom, "Rabbit" Joe, "Blondy" Dick, "Shorty" Hank, and Bill, are shocked, of course. And when Jacqueline Moore, his childhood playmate, reproaches him,

he "sasses" her. He is more interested in a man to whom she has been talking and who, it turns out, is named Tom Winter.

Convinced that Winter is his father's murderer, Flash David goes that night to the Moore house where Winter is a guest. Climbing up by means of a pipe to an upper room, he sees an odd sort of saddle, very broad, but built for a man with uncommonly short legs. Concluding it is not Winter's room, he slides down to the ground and there, from another vantage point, he sees Winter in a room on the first floor. He jumps through the window, has a talk with Winter, tells him he is going to kill him and has hardly got the words out of his mouth, when iron hands seize him and pin his hands behind him. A monster, a frightful dwarf, has him. But through a trick, he escapes and returns to one of his hangouts, Beckwith's saloon, having previously taken farewell of his brothers, refusing their offer of so much money a month, refusing even to take the small legacy left him by his father, a gun and a horse.

Winter follows him to Beckwith's and returns the two guns which he had taken from Flash David, but the guns jam when Flash tries to fire them, although Winter has assured him that they are in just the same condition as before.

After this, Winter brazenly makes Flash David an offer. A truce will be declared, if the young man is willing. Otherwise, Winter prophesies dire things for Flash David. The offer is rejected. Winter leaves the saloon, and immediately afterward Beckwith discovers that the two guns are not the property of Flash David, but substitutes.

It is not long after this that a gypsy is found murdered, that same

gypsy from whom Flash David had won the mare, Rags, at cards. The gun of Flash David is found near the body of the gypsy. Sonia, a gypsy girl, warns Flash, and he escapes from the sheriff and two thugs whom the sheriff, unwittingly, hires to help in the pursuit. Thinking that Flash has made off to the desert shack of Jay Boomer, they start in that direction.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DESERT SHACK.

THEY left their horses at a little distance. Then they spent a full half hour examining the place.

The sheriff was the only one familiar with the outlines of the mare; but the other two, though they had had but fleeting glimpses of her, swore that they could recognize that low-running machine in the darkest midnight by the sense of touch alone.

So they hunted about the place for a sign of the mare, if she were hobbled out on the good grass which grew in small patches here and there, where Jay Boomer's wandering handful of cattle had not eaten it down as close as sheep-bite. However, there was no sign of the mare. She was not in the shed close to the house, and she was not standing in the little corral, either. There were other horses, of Jay's own string, but the mare was not among them.

Then the three forgathered where they had abandoned their own mounts.

"He ain't there," said Hank gloomily. "We better eat some more dust and head back for Pazo."

"My hoss won't make it," said Jim, though not with an air of complaint.

Of the precious pair, he was a little the harder, the more supple sword-steel.

"Well," said the sheriff, "I reckon that you're right. But what's an old sourdough and measly squatter like Jay Boomer doin' with a light burnin' up good oil this late at night?"

THE other two agreed that there might be something in this, unless Boomer had recently been to town and returned with a stock of magazines and papers to read.

But they would stalk the house again. No, it was better to ride straight up to the door, two of them, and let the third man lie out behind and watch the rear door of the place.

A great many of the wiliest of crooks had been caught by that simple device.

"The brightest foxes, they ain't lookin' for the simplest turns," said Hank, and the sheriff agreed with him.

He was appreciating his two helpers more and more every moment that he spent with them. So he gave to Jim the important task of lying out behind the house, while he and scar-faced Hank went up to the front door. When they were a hundred yards away, they saw the lights go out. But they knocked at the door, cheerfully enough when they arrived.

There was no delay. A husky, nasal voice that had a metallic intonation in it, like something long unused, called from within: "Who's out there?"

"Somebody that needs a set-down and a cup of coffee," said the sheriff.

Then they could hear faint mumblings which were distinctly audible

through the flimsy sides of the shack.

The front door opened, and the dull light of a lantern gleamed out at them.

"Hullo, Crusty," said Jay Boomer, holding his lantern higher. "What's fetched you out here? Have I been rustlin' a few mavericks lately? Get down and feed your hosses back there in the shed. I got a bite of barley there. Looks to me like your nags could use it about as good as mine."

"Fetch the hosses out to the shed and throw down a feed for 'em," said the sheriff to Hank. "My old legs are about used up, and I gotta rest 'em. Will you take care of the hosses, Hank?"

"Sure," said Hank, and took the horses obediently away toward the shed.

He yawned as he went, he was so sure that nothing would come out of this cache which the sheriff had led them to. He yawned, and then he cursed softly but, being a man inured to the miseries of labor which is scantily rewarded, he went on again, leading the horses. He found the shed, went into it, and then at the sweet smell of the hay which had been put up that spring and the scent of the barley, hot and moist in the feed box, he felt better and more at peace with the world. As he walked back toward the shack, in anticipation of food, he loosened his belt.

Inside, the sheriff was taking his ease. He had pulled off his hat and actually kicked off his boots. Sitting back in a chair, he spread his tired legs and leaned his head back against the wall. He was firing up his old black pipe, and every time he drew a puff he closed his eyes; every time he breathed the smoke out, he opened them a crack.

OLD Jay Boomer was smoking, also. "There's a lot of coyotes, though," the sheriff was saying, when Hank returned to the shack.

"Yeah, and who wants 'em?" said Jay Boomer.

"Why not?"

"They're mangy," said Jay Boomer. "That's what they are."

He shook his head. He was as thin as a radish and as red. He had a fluff of hair over about half of his head, unevenly distributed. Stiff with alkali dust, it stood up and shone in the lantern light. He was a little man. His back was curved into a hook, despite the meager weight of the head which bowed it. His eyes were covered with wrinkled lids. It seemed a distinct effort that raised them, whenever he looked up. But generally he stared at the floor.

"Well, you get a bounty," said the sheriff.

"Yeah, sometimes. I'm kind of tired of mange and bounties," said Jay Boomer.

"Yeah, a man gets tired of things," agreed the sheriff. "You get visitors out here, though."

"I get too many," said the sour old man. "There ain't no time, hardly, for reflectin' on things. Along comes somebody, and you gotta talk."

He lived forty miles from the nearest town!

"I know the way you feel," said the sheriff. "Me, I got my hands full of people all the time, except when I get out on a trail."

"Man trails are no good," said Jay Boomer. "Men, you take the way they are, they'll get the man that hunts them one day."

"Yeah," said the sheriff. "And that's true, too."

"You oughta quit it," said the squatter in the desert.

"Some day I'm gonna quit it," answered the sheriff.

"That day," said the other, "you'll get a letter all wrote in lead. Well, what you boys gonna eat?"

"I ain't gonna eat," said the sheriff. "I'm gonna turn in and sleep. You mind?"

Old Jay Boomer raised a glance toward the ladder that led to his small attic.

"I got no place for you, boys," said he softly.

"Any old place will do for me," said the sheriff. "How about you, Hank?"

"Aw, I could sleep on planks," said Hank. "I kind of prefer 'em. I'll just take myself out of the way and fetch up in the attic."

He laid hold of the ladder.

"Don't you do it!" said Jay Boomer.

Hank looked at the sheriff, and the sheriff looked at Hank.

"Why not?" asked Hank.

"Why, look at me," said Jay Boomer.

"I'm lookin'," said Hank.

"I'm kind of small and wizened, ain't I?"

"Well, you ain't a heavyweight."

"But I'll tell you what," said Jay Boomer. "That dog-gone ladder, it just bends and squeaks and groans, when I get about halfway up on it. It wouldn't come no ways near to holding your weight, friend!"

Hank stepped back.

"That the last weight that it's held?" he said.

JAY sighed faintly. "Yes," he said. "Nobody ever goes up there except me, mostly. I been figurin' to put up a new ladder, but somehow it don't never get done. You know the way that things go when you're a bachelor."

"I know," said the sheriff.

He had drawn off into a corner of the room, well away from the square black hole which had been sawed into the ceiling. Now he looked at Jay Boomer with a faint smile, and Jay Boomer hastily began to refill his pipe, scowling studiously down at it.

"Built that attic up there without any windows, Jay, didn't you?" said the sheriff.

"Nary a one," said Jay Boomer.

"Well," said the sheriff, "it ought to make a pretty good—cage, say?"

Hank stood also in a far corner, and he likewise was staring upward at the attic trap with a smile.

"I reckon that cage would hold a bird," said he. "What kind of a bird might be in it now, Boomer?"

"I dunno what you mean," said Boomer.

"Kind of a light bird, I reckon," said the sheriff. "Because the ladder's shaky, old Jay says."

He chuckled. Jay Boomer was sweating with distress. Then the sheriff said in a changed tone: "You're all right, Jay. You'd stick by him, even when he got himself outside the law. You're the kind of a friend for a man to have. But we gotta have that boy, and we're gonna have him."

A thin, distant whistle came off the desert like the call of a bird, except that no bird of the desert ever had such a note. When he heard it, Jay Boomer actually groaned with relief.

"All right, boys," said he. "Go on up and take a look at the cage. There ain't any bird in it, though!"

The sheriff started. Hank, with a grim look at Boomer, suddenly wrenched open the door and shouted at the top of his lungs: "Jim! Jim!"

There was no answer.

He and the sheriff seized the lantern and rushed out behind the

house. Near the corner of the horse shed, they found Jim lying on the ground, face downward. A streak of crimson was painted in a glistening stripe across the front of his head.

They turned him over. Hank, cursing bitterly, heaved him to a sitting posture, but his head fell loosely back across his shoulders.

"Dead!" said Jay Boomer in a whispered gasp behind them.

But the great head of Jim now heaved itself up, and a groan bubbled on his lips.

Hank, on his knees, held him by the shoulders and shook him frantically.

"Jim, Jim!" he urged. "What happened?"

The head of Jim still rolled from side to side, but in a flat, droning voice he answered: "It kind of rose up out of the ground. Like a shadow. It kind of rose up, and then it slammed me."

He slumped forward again, into the arms of Hank.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THEME FOR CONVERSATION.

SURPRISES are less dramatic than long expected calamities. Tragedy gathers around the sick man, who has fought for years against his disease. People hold their breath when at last he goes to bed. They shudder when they learn of his death. But when your strong, robust fellow drops dead without warning in the street, we shrug our shoulders, turn up our eyes and say without conviction that one never knows what may happen! Public interest must be worked up. There have to be two good preliminary acts before the tragedy.

So it was in the case of young Flash David.

He had held the center of the

stage for a long time and prepared the public mind for just what had happened. They had watched him with a breathless intensity, as though he were buried powder, with a forest fire near by. Now the word went out that he had killed a gypsy, made a fool of the sheriff and two good fighting men, and a second time in one day had escaped through their fingers!

The sheriff came back to Pazo looking somewhat dour. Hank had vowed never to leave this blood trail. And big Jim appeared with his head tied in a strong bandage. He said nothing. His looks were enough.

No one was surprised that Flash David had escaped from the sheriff. Probably they would have been vastly disappointed in their hearts if Crusty Bill had captured him at the first stroke. That was not how the play was, so to speak, advertised. In the first place, the boy had pointed toward eventual outlawry for a long, long time. But his exploits had been confined to the mysterious realm of "self-defense," or else they had been performed south of the Rio Grande. Now, that he had broken through and struck the law in the face, there would be no peace for him. It seemed absurd that the death of a mere gypsy should have been the cause of his outlawry. But, whatever the cause, it was clear that a man could be hanged for the killing of a gypsy as well as for the killing of a President of the United States.

Now that the boy was cut adrift and was roaming at large, every one looked forward to a long chase. People settled back and shook their heads with outward gravity and inward smiling. If Flash did not give them good newspaper reading for six months at least, they missed their guess.

Good old Crusty Bill, he would stick like a bulldog to the trail, and he would do his best, but, of course, one cannot expect a bulldog to catch a thunderbolt without being badly burned; and already Crusty and his party had been singed, so to speak.

So the downfall of Flash called for neither great sympathy nor great surprise, only a deep interest. There were only three people in the county who so much as guessed that the Flash was not guilty of the slaying of the gypsy. Every one else took it for granted.

Even Jacqueline Moore took it for granted.

SHE was walking up and down along the veranda of her father's house, this evening, with Thomas Winter. The girl had learned from her father, that Winter was a man of consequence. To be sure, even her father did not seem to know very much about Winter's past, but he knew that celebrated names came readily and familiarly to the lips of Winter. The man was familiar with the world from Cairo to Peking, from the Fiji Islands to London. If such a fellow had taken Jacqueline lightly and carelessly, she would not have been surprised and, therefore, she was enormously pleased by his deferential manner toward her. He never talked down. He never appeared even faintly amused by her youth and its absurdities. One would have thought, to watch him, that they had enjoyed equal years, equal experiences.

To-night, their talk concerned Flash David, in whom Winter seemed much interested.

"Nothing is proved, in the first place," said he thoughtfully. "We really don't know that he killed the poor gypsy."

"Oh, stuff!" said Jacqueline

roughly. "His gun was found on the spot."

"Coincidence," said Winter. "A very odd coincidence. Still, one can't call that actual proof."

"Humph," said the girl. "Well, it's enough to hang him! That little coincidence would convince any twelve jurors in this part of the world. All I hope is that he puts up a good fight."

"Before he's caught, you mean?" said Winter.

"Yes."

"Perhaps he won't be caught."

"Oh," said the girl, "they're all caught, sooner or later. He'll be caught, too."

"Poor fellow!" said Winter.

"Why do you sympathize with him?" asked the girl.

Winter paused, clasping his hands behind his back, and looked upward in quiet thought.

"I'll tell you," he said. "When I first saw him, I took him to be a shallow young desperado. But when you told me that there was something in him more than met the eye, I looked again, and I thought I saw what you meant. There was an air about him that detached him from the other cattlemen. He seemed to stand by himself, aloof from the rest. There was something keen and fierce about him. Perhaps he was a robber, but he was also a hero, just like one of the old Greeks that Homer loved so well to sing about."

"You put Flash on a high plane," said the girl.

"Not on such a plane as you put him," said Winter, "because he's your friend, seriously. Am I wrong?"

"Oh, no, you're right," said she. "He's my friend."

"And when one's intimate——" began Winter.

WELL, I can't exactly call him an intimate," she corrected him. "You see, once we were as thick as thieves. We were raised together. But after I went to school, we drifted apart. Now, I never can find out what he's thinking about. He's grown ugly. He takes a pleasure in sneering at me."

"No, no," said Winter. "Sneering at you? Surely not that!"

"But he does!" she said.

"High young spirits," said Winter.

"Just plain ugliness," said she. "The trouble with Flash is that he's bad himself, and he thinks that everybody else is just as bad as he is."

"Of course, you know him much better than I do," said Winter. "But there's an honesty about a lad who goes out alone and throws himself on his father's grave."

"Sentimentality," said Jacqueline. "Moon-staring romance, and all that sort of thing. Byronism. That's what it is! Absolutely nothing but that!"

"Jacqueline," said Winter, "you amaze me."

"How?" said she.

"By the keen, bitter way in which you look through people," he explained. "It's no good trying to hide weaknesses and follies from you, because you see through them. I've never known any one like you, my dear girl."

She was flattered and a bit abashed. She looked straight at him to discover mockery, if it were in his face, but his brown eyes were as clear as could be. It startled her to look into them, they were so unclouded, so boyishly bright.

"Uncle Tom," said she.

"Yes?" he answered, in that rather hasty, deferential way of his.

"Tell me how old you are?"

"Old enough," said he, "to have done more with my life than I've managed to do. Old enough to have found some surer and better form of happiness. Old enough, in fact, to be something more than an aimless wanderer on the earth, Jacqueline. And that's why my heart goes out so to poor Flash David. I can sympathize with him. I know the careless, wild impulses that must be working in him."

"You know!" burst out the girl. "As if you ever did a dishonest thing in your life! As if honesty doesn't shine out of you! Do you know what you are, Uncle Tom?"

"Tell me, Jacqueline," said he. "The preamble sounds promising. Don't let me down flat."

"You're just a big, gentle, simple-hearted boy, no matter what your years, or how far you've traveled over the earth, or what people you've known!"

Thomas Winter looked down to the board floor of the veranda. A roar and chiming of laughter clearly swept toward them from the bunk house.

THEN Winter looked up at her again. "I would never give myself such a clean bill of health," he told her. "I really think, on the other hand, that if you'll consider Flash David——"

"I almost hate the name!" she broke out. "Flash David! I'm tired of hearing of it. He's nothing to me, after all!"

"Ah, but he's a friend," said Winter. "And I think you were saying, yourself, that friendship is a sacred thing. You said it with your whole heart. I know that you meant it."

"I do believe it," said she. "Poor David! Of course, my heart aches

for him. Only, to murder a gypsy, a poor half-witted jockey of a gypsy whom he'd cheated out of a horse—I mean, that's altogether too detestably low."

"Don't call him all those bitter names, Jacqueline," said Winter. "But I see exactly how it is. You really were very fond of the poor lad."

"Do you know?" she broke out at him savagely, her hands clenched.

"Well?" said he.

"I can tell you," she said. "You're a grave for secrets, I know. And I'll tell you what. I loved him, I really did, I loved that horse stealer, that murderer from ambush."

"Loved him?" exclaimed Winter, appearing stunned. Then he added: "But I understand. He has one of the handsomest faces I've ever seen. In fact, almost femininely fine features!"

"That's it," she answered bitterly. "You say that I can see through people. I can't. There I was with my head completely turned by a handsome young rascal, a fellow worth nothing, not even to handle a lariat! Oh, I despise myself when I think of it!"

"But don't try to drive him out of your mind by looking at his faults. Keep the full, fair picture of him before you. After all, it was a grand thing that he did, giving the sheriff and his men the slip, like that."

"He's a fox, of course," said the girl. "And if only there weren't something about him that pulls at my heart—I don't know why—Look! There's one of the men who rode with the sheriff!"

He came through the evening dusk, a dim figure, but the white of the bandage around his head was clearly visible. It was Jim, the gunman.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEWS.

JIM walked up to the veranda and took off his sombrero, thereby showing a wider expanse of white bandage.

"Hello, Miss Moore," said he. "I come up here from the sheriff. I been ridin' with him. Which he sent me a message for you, ma'am, or for your father, rather. He says that Flash is aimin' in this direction, and it seems like Flash is likely to drift around about here. He just wants to send you a warnin'."

The girl smiled.

"He doesn't need to warn us against Flash," said she. "David Baldwin is an old friend of this family."

Jim chuckled. It sounded like a snarl.

"You're talkin' about him the way he is before," said he. "He's a different man now, ma'am. I can tell you that. He don't fork a horse the same way. He don't pull the same kind of a gun. He's turned sour, Miss Moore."

He rubbed his head and added, with another rumbling laugh: "I ain't talkin' about the slam that he handed to me. That's part of the game between him and us."

The girl nodded at him: "Everybody feels a debt to you and your partner, Hank. But you're wrong about Flash, I think. He'll never be sour to any one in this house."

Jim looked at Winter.

"I'll go and find father," said Jacqueline Moore. "He'll want to talk to you, I know. This is Mr. Winter, our guest. He'll be glad to know something about your adventures following this trail, I know."

She disappeared. Jim sat down on the high wooden arms of the steps that led to the veranda floor;

Winter came down and stood before him.

"Well, Mr. Winter," said Jim. "What can I tell you about my adventures and such? You new to this neck of the woods?"

He began to manufacture a cigarette.

Winter regarded him without a smile.

"You've made a pretty picture out of yourself," he said. "And you've done a good job—you and Hank and the fool of a sheriff. I didn't know, Jim, that you'd lost half your nerve and most of your brains, or I never would have brought you out here for this job."

Jim lighted a cigarette. The flame of the match revealed a face contorted and dark under the white smoothness of the bandage.

He snapped the match far away. It made a dying arc of light that disappeared in mid-air.

"What kind of a job?" he asked. "What's to be had out of it? What's the good of it?"

"You're sick of it, are you?" said Winter.

"I'm sick of it," said Jim. "I'm sick of talking the lingo. I'm sick of swaggering around in chaps and all the rest of the paraphernalia. I'm sick of the whole mess and I want to get through with it. We're wasting time!"

I MET that shyster from Denver, that's Taps Isaacson, you remember? He came around and whispered a plant in my ear. It's a hundred-thousand-dollar pick-up. We could make it as easy as taking candy from a baby. We could pull jobs like that, out here where we're not known. But you're blowing in our time for nothing at all. For nothing at all, except what you get out of it."

"Tell me, Jim," said Winter. "What do I get out of it?"

"Aw, I saw her," said Jim. "And I know you. You subtract the pretty girls out of your life, and you'd be worth a hundred million, and the rest of us would have a fat slice, too. But you can't go past a good-looking girl. They bring you up standing. Only, I point out to you that you hang around here and waste our time, while you grin at a girl and make fool talk to her, and send the rest of us out to head off the kid that she really has a liking for. Besides, one of these days they'll wake up and see the whole plant, the gun and the dead gypsy, the whole thing. It's pretty thin, chief. It's pretty thin. I'll tell you another thing. Hank is kind of sick of it, too. This idea of going around and bumping off skinny gypsies that never did more harm than rob a henroost, well, we don't like it."

Winter nodded at him again.

"This is why I like you and trust you, Jim," said he. "Because you get into words everything that's on your great big manly, open heart. Because you're such a straightforward man with your grumbling."

"Go on," said Jim. "I expect to hear a lot worse than this."

"Because you've been rapped over the head and made a fool of by a half-baked lad in the West," said Winter, "now you come to me with your tail between your legs, whining."

"All right," said Jim. "You can say that and a lot more. All I want is a straight crack at that wild cat. But he's as shifty as a ghost. He has his claws into you before you know that he's about."

"And Hank has enough, too?" asked Winter.

"We both have enough," said

Jim. "I've talked it over with him. There's no use throwing your purse away to get back a dollar that you've lost. This kid, Flash, let the regular law handle him. For all the good that you can get out of him, you'd better try to live on cactus thorns, I'd say. He's made up of nothing but rawhide and steel springs, and that's a fact. You'll never harvest anything but trouble out of him, chief."

"Are you through with your advice?" asked Winter.

"Yeah. I'm through."

"Then listen to me: you'll keep after the Flash until you've nailed him."

Jim grunted. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"If I have to, I have to. And that's the end of that," he said gloomily.

"It's not on account of the Flash that I sent for you," said Winter. "It's something a great deal more important, and a great deal worse."

THERE'S nothing worse. You don't know him," said Jim stiffly. "But I've chased him, I've eaten his dust. And I know his speed when he's close up. He's nothing but sleight of hand, if you want to know the truth. When he got at me that night, I grabbed for my gun with one hand and made a pass at him with the other. It was like trying to put out a star. I just overreached myself punching the air and, while I was off balance, he slammed me. He could as well have sifted some lead into my system. It might have been fast work for another fellow, but for him it was dead easy. He could afford to yawn, think it over, and make up his mind between moves. That's how fast he is! Now, tell me what's worse than that?"

"There's a plague," said Winter, "that makes the Flash seem like no trouble at all. You forget."

"You mean Old North?" said Jim. "But he's no nearer than Peking, I guess."

"Old North," said Winter, "will be here inside of two days!"

This news raised Jim slowly to his feet, with a sigh that was half a groan.

"Old North? Here?" he muttered.

"That starts your hair lifting, I dare say?" suggested Winter.

"And what about your own?" asked Jim.

"He's hounded us long enough," replied Winter. "But now he oversteps himself. A Chinese junk, a South Sea Island, a nest of beach-combers, or city streets and crowds, he can work in places like that. But he doesn't know the West. He's overstepped himself, Jim, and we're going to polish him off. We're going to erase him. We're going to wipe him out, Jim. Do you hear?"

Jim grinned widely.

"I'd rather do that," he said, "than have a brownstone front on Fifth Avenue, with two butlers, and a turnout for the Park and all the rest, including a box at the opera. I'd trade all that to see Old North turned into a stiff, and a cold one!" he concluded with vehemence.

"Yes!" agreed Winter. "I tell you, Jim, that my luck is in. I feel it in my blood and my bones. I feel it in my heart. We're going to polish off Old North, because I've laid the lines for the job. He thinks that he's taking us by surprise. Instead, we're going to surprise him!"

"When do we start?" asked Jim.

"You start to-night. Collect Hank. Tell the sheriff anything you please. I'll make my excuses here for a couple of days' absence and

join you about noon. I'm riding from here toward the Ralston Buttes. I'll expect you there."

"I'll be there, and Hank with me," said Jim. "And Heaven help Old North if we have a fair chance at him. How many has he got with him, and do I know any of 'em?"

"Let me tell you something," said Winter. "You won't believe me, but it's true. He's alone!"

"No!" exclaimed Jim. "That can't be straight. Not Old North! The old boy must have weakening of the brain before he'd tackle us all by himself!"

I'VE told you the truth. Tell Hank what I've said," said Winter. "We're going to crowd him into the last corner this time, my lad! Now, get out of here. No, you've got to wait for Miss Moore."

"I'll wait for nothing," said Jim. "This is news that will make Hank stare! I'm gone. So long, chief!"

He strode hastily away, got his horse out of the heart of the twilight, and rode away as Jacqueline Moore and her father came out from the house.

"He's gone," said Winter. "He said that he couldn't wait. He simply wanted to leave the warning."

"A very odd thing," murmured Moore. "Why should Flash David turn against my house? What has he against us?"

"When milk turns sour, it's sharp to every man's tongue, you know," said Winter. "However, I'm sure that the sheriff is wrong. The boy can't be as bad as that!"

"Of course, he can't," said Moore. "Winter, you always show refreshing common sense. Bless the man who puts down scandal."

"Did you talk to that fellow?" said Jacqueline.

"Quite a little," said Winter.

"What did you think of him?"

"Rather a grim figure of a man, I thought," said Winter. "I'm not at all surprised that he's a man hunter!"

"He's a true Westerner, though," said the girl. "Take him away from chaps and ropes and spurs, and he wouldn't know what to do with himself. He's as Western as salt is salt!"

"I suppose you're right," said Winter. "You have a way of looking through people, Jacqueline!"

CHAPTER XXV.

OLD NORTH.

THE day had been blinding bright in the morning, and the sun a power so great that every spot on the earth seemed a focal point upon which its force was gathered as through the lens of a burning glass.

Through this heat rode Old North. Even a stranger would have picked out the word "old" for him at a glance. To be sure, at a distance, he seemed almost like a youth, a mere boy, so short he sat in the saddle and so lean and finely drawn was his face. When one came nearer, however, one saw that his lack of height was owing to the bend in his spinal column, which thrust his chin forward and gave him the appearance of one about to break into a run. There were few lines in his face, but a closer inspection showed that what appeared a smile was merely the double, deep furrowing of wrinkles on either side of his mouth.

Though the rest of his face was not plowed by time, the complexion had an unnatural, fiery red, and the brows had been burned white by sun and time. At a distance, he seemed a youth. At close hand, he appeared aged by centuries. He was

like a crimson mummy, with the skin ready to crack at the first touch.

The mount of this old man was not a horse, not even a mustang. Instead, he had chosen a mule. It was a fine animal of its kind. It was a little inclined to be knock-kneed, as so many of its species are, but its head was small, the ears comparatively delicate, its neck very lean, its loins and quarters powerful. It went with a short, precise step, sometimes fetlock-deep in the sands. But it kept patiently on its way, and an expert could have told, at a glance, that this animal was accustomed to desert life and ways.

The rider allowed the reins to fall loosely upon the neck. Only now and then he corrected its course a little, but the mule knew how to accept a distant landmark as a goal, and to keep on steadily toward it.

The equipment of Old North was a battered felt hat with a high crown and a wide brim that flopped a little above his eyes, a dusty flannel shirt, old blue jeans by way of riding breeches, wrinkled, obviously secondhand boots, and no spurs shining on the heels of them. Hooked over the pommel of the saddle, there dangled a quirt with only one of the several lashes remaining. There was a time-and-weather-cracked slicker bound behind the saddle, and one of the saddle bags bulged slightly with a meager set of provisions.

One would have said that this was a mere beggar, a nameless, poverty-stricken man or, else, a great miser. As a matter of fact, the second case was the real one. Old North could have spent tens of thousands of dollars upon his quest. He had a sufficient backing to credit the expense, and he would not be esteemed more highly for the lack of large expense accounts. Rather

the reverse would be true. But his very soul loathed extravagance. He loved to make five cents do for him what a dollar did for others. It was something of the same spirit, perhaps, which had made him detest crime all of his days; since his youth he had been a man hunter.

There was only one item upon which he had spent money without reluctance.

RUNNING through a lengthy holster that extended down the side of the saddle under his right knee, was the finest rifle that money could buy. One could see that it was cared for as a treasure. The protruding wood of the butt, at easy handgrip from the rider, had the appearance of having been well-oiled recently. The metal work shone, when a touch of the rider's gloves brushed the surface dust away.

As a matter of fact, the life and the future of Old North might depend upon the accuracy of that rifle, almost as much as upon his own skill in the use of it. So he had not hesitated to spend money for his weapon.

He had another gun. It was not visible, being hidden inside his clothes, but this weapon was so old that it would hardly have deserved the name of a gun in other hands than his. It was a short-nosed, bulldog revolver of an antique pattern. It shot high and to the right. Its range was very short. But he knew all of its defects, and constant use during a period of some thirty-five years had made it like his own flesh, a thing that responded to his will almost without the aid of his hand. It had the virtue of shooting a large-caliber bullet hard enough to knock down a man at twenty yards. Its short barrel made it handy for a

quick draw. In the agile, clawlike hands of Old North, the only part of his body which had not begun to stiffen with time and years, that short revolver had accomplished wonders.

So equipped, Old North rode stolidly through the blasting heat of the morning over a desert which was in part a torrid red sand and in part a pale, dazzling gray, with lines and streaks of greasewood running like smoke in the hollows that collected the few drops of the spring rains.

In the afternoon, the atmosphere grew misty, but not with water vapor. It was only the fine-flying desert dust which filled the sky, drifting in from the wake of some far distant storm, perhaps. This clouding of the air did not seem to decrease the heat of the sun. Rather, it brought home the heat as with a blanket, and a fine, imperceptible fall of the desert dust worked down inside the bandanna which was bound about his throat, a faded, secondhand bandanna, and irritated his dry, old skin.

He cared nothing for this. Physical discomfort up to the suffocation point, he had endured too often before to be troubled by it now. So he went on with a steady heed to his direction and cared nothing for his body. So he had done all his life.

His attitude was that of a seeker. The direction of his gaze was toward the horizon, the mysterious and misty line which divides earth from heaven, infinitely fine, infinitely soft, infinitely deep, the despair of all landscape painters. One might have said that he was searching for a distant mountain head, a desired landmark to make him sure of his course. In truth, he was seeing only before his eyes the unforgotten image of Winter, his old enemy, whose trail he had followed so many years.

HE had done other things, also, in the meantime. He had done enough to build up a tidy little fortune for himself, not invested in dangerous securities, but locked up in secure four per cents, as invincible as the Rock of Gibraltar. But ever and anon, he returned to the great quest, the endless effort, like Palomides, forever returning to the trail of the Questing Beast.

Now he felt, in his heart, that he was near the end. He was growing older and older. He could not deny that his crooked back grew every year yet more crooked. Sometimes when he sat down to a supper, he found his right hand trembling. And a man whose right hand trembled, either day or night, had no place upon the trail of Thomas Winter.

This would be about the last time that he would be able to make a determined effort to gain a hold upon the great criminal. And he felt a sense of fate—that either he or Winter must go down in this final trial, as if Fate must pay some heed to the efforts which had been invested before, not allowing him to slip into a green old age with the one desire of his heart unfulfilled!

In the middle of the afternoon, he came to a sharp-shouldered mesa and stopped in the shadow of the eastern side of it. There was no breath of air here. The instant he paused, the sweat began to course down his face, mingling with the alkali dust to scald his skin.

However, legs cannot go on forever.

He got some greasewood, made a wretched fire, and over it prepared some coffee, which he drank with hard, dry biscuits, real ship biscuits, generally considered indigestible, except on the high seas in the mouths of true tars.

He had two canteens of water. He used just enough to make his coffee. The rest he poured down the throat of his mule. And the mule held the mouth of the canteen nicely, accurately between teeth and lips, not crushing the fragile metal, then raising its head and drinking without spilling a drop. It was plain that this mule had traveled the desert many times before and knew that water is better than food, better than wine.

When the coffee and the hard-tack had been eaten, Old North lay flat on his back.

He did not want to lie down. He did not feel like sleeping. Small insects, whirring through the air, lighted hungrily on his face. For a time he brushed them off. Then he realized that he was growing jumpy and that his nerves were taut. So he closed his eyes, bent the full power of his will upon sleep, and in a moment he was profoundly slumbering.

The well-hobbled mule strayed only to a little distance, reaching for the casual spears of dead grass that grew here and there. Not until the sun was down did the sleeper awaken.

THEN he resaddled and unhobbled his mule. He would have been heartily glad of a drink of water. During the latter part of his sleep, his mouth had been open, and for that reason his throat was dry as a bone and gritty with sand. But there was no more water, and much of his march still lay before him.

So he calmly mounted and jounced himself in the saddle. The mule flattened its ears and humped its back. At this, Old North smiled.

"Good!" said he.

For a mule that is ready to buck is a mule that is ready to work. He resumed his journey. The day faded. A dull red came up like a dismal smoke in the west and spread drearily to the zenith. The light dimmed still more. The darkness came.

He no longer guided the mule, but let it follow its own sense of direction.

Then, gradually, the stars appeared, and after the stars the pale, broad face of the moon moved up the eastern sky and gave a ghostly light to the desert.

The mist was still everywhere. Through it, now and then, appeared the faintly glistening outline of a tree, like a stalking body, with arms upraised. And now the square head of a mesa loomed quite suddenly before him.

He had not wasted any time or effort. The mule had kept to its course wisely and well. As the moon brightened, he could see the loom of more distant landscapes. His harbor was almost in sight!

On through the night he went. The way began to climb. The sand gave way to naked rocks underfoot, still hot from the day. The rocks cooled. The night grew old.

And so he came to a narrow defile that opened through the heart of a dreadful region of broken rocks. He checked the mule. Should he go through it, or should he take the safer and longer way around?

CHAPTER XXVI.

DANGER.

OLD NORTH looked up. He could see the dim disk of the moon, fast making its westing, and beside it a small star, lost, refund, and lost again.

Again he looked down at the small

defile, narrow, closed with rocks as with teeth, and he shook his head. So he started the mule on the wide detour which was necessary if he was to avoid this trap. The tired mule stumbled over a rock half hidden in a patch of sand, and this changed the mind of Old North. Some concessions must be made to weariness, on a long march. So he turned the mule back and straight down the defile he went, first loosening the rifle in its holster and touching the handle of his old revolver to reassure himself of its readiness.

Then, all eyes, all keen attention, his head thrusting forward and his eyes noting every shadow to the right and to the left, he went down the little pass. The rocks grated and clicked under the hoofs of the mule. Once it brought down its iron-armed hoof on a stone surface so hard that the clang sounded, in the keenly attuned ears of the rider, like the stroke of a bell.

All his nerves jumped at once. His heart began to race, but he argued that this was a foolish fear; that if he had been upon the trail of any person other than Thomas Winter, he would have had no fear, no jumping of the nerves whatever.

So he went on. He had come to the very middle of the pass when he straightened in the saddle. His eyes searched ahead among the rocks. There was nothing to be seen, but an electric sense of danger filled his brain and his body.

Then a quiet voice said: "Don't turn your head, old fellow!"

He had his right hand frozen upon the handle of his revolver. He considered casting himself from the saddle among the rocks near by, but he controlled the impulse rigorously.

His bones were old and brittle. He could not play cat as he had in his younger days. And that was the

voice of Thomas Winter which had spoken behind him!

Another voice, almost equally familiar, now said: "Shove up your hands, North. Hank, take a look at him, will you?"

"Take a look yourself," said Hank. "I'm not going to touch the old spider."

"Draw a tight bead on him. Get a little closer," said Winter. "I'll fan him myself."

The two gunmen stepped nearer, their guns ready, and Winter walked up to his quarry. He reached instantly for the revolver, as one who well knew where it was concealed. Then he drew the rifle from its holster.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"That's all," said Old North.

"No knife, no little trinkets of that sort, North?"

"No, none at all."

"Then you might slide off your mule and sit down and have a smoke with us."

"Not a bad idea," said Old North. "Give me a hand down, will you? I'm pretty stiff. It's been a long ride."

BUT you're going to have a long rest, now," said Winter, carefully handing the old man down from the saddle. "Sit down here. And take this, North. You'll like it. It's a real Havana. As good as they come."

Jim and Hank, standing near by, kept their rifles at the ready, leaning over the crook of their arms. They glared down at Old North with a strange, patient joy. A collector who at last has found the picture which his heart desires, at a price endlessly beneath his expectations, would stare in this manner at the prize. So stared the two gunmen, drinking in the face of their victim,

and only removing their glances from him to flash at one another looks of understanding.

Old North paid no attention to them, at first. He was refusing the proffered Havana.

"Let me see that thing," said he, taking the cigar. "Now, I can tell by the feel of it, and the handmade shaping of it, and the smell, too, that it's a high-priced cigar. That cigar, now, would cost as much as twenty cents, wouldn't it?"

"Twenty-five," said Winter.

"Take it back!" exclaimed Old North. "Thinking of smokin' money like that, hard-cash money! Why, I couldn't do it. You look at this."

He drew from a pocket a thin black stick, which he broke in two. It snapped like a bit of rattan.

"I know that kind of a cigar," said Thomas Winter. "I even smoked part of one once."

"You didn't like it, maybe?" asked Old North.

"I lost most of the skin off my tongue," said Winter. "Otherwise, it might have been a good smoke, except that it choked me after two or three puffs."

"You're joking, I see," said Old North. "You always would have your fun, Tommy. But the fact is, why does a man smoke? Because he wants to get some nicotine into his system. That's the real reason. Now, there's more nicotine in half of this here cigar than there is in the whole of that fat one you're biting the end off. That's a fact. And I get these here cigars for ten cents. Three for ten cents. About twelve per cent of what you pay, smoke for smoke. I tell you, Tommy, it's the ruin of you, the way that you smoke up money. You take my advice. Save the pennies."

Winter sat down on another stone, opposite the old fellow. He

noded at him, saying: "You're wonderful, North. There's nobody like you. But it's not carelessness with money that's been the ruin of me. Want me to tell you what has been the ruin of me?"

"Oh, I see what you mean," said Old North.

He accepted the light which his enemy was holding, and puffed vigorously. The end of his broken cigar became a glowing, crimson coal, but only thin wisps of smoke issued from the lips of Old North.

"I see what you mean," he said. "You mean me. You mean that I've kept you rolling, kept you from gathering moss, eh?"

"That's what I mean," said Winter. "That cigar pulls rather hard, doesn't it?"

WELL, it takes a bit of patience," said the old man. "But I don't mind. You gotta have patience in this here world of ours. The harder the shell, the sweeter the kernel."

"That's true," said Winter. "You've been a hard nut to crack, but I'm certainly enjoying you now, North."

"I reckon you are," said North placidly.

He pulled so hard on the narrow cigar, that his face swelled and his neck turned red.

Then he went on: "I've enjoyed you, Tommy. I've enjoyed you a whole lot."

"I imagine that I'm getting enough pleasure now to make up for it," said Winter.

"Ah, Tommy," said the old man, "you're young, and that's what makes you talk like that. You think what I've thought for a good many years, that it's the end that counts. It's not, however. It's the work that gives one the pleasure. Here

I sit, a dead man. But what's death? Only a twinge. In the meantime, I've had—how long has it been, Tommy?—about twenty years of pleasure, hunting you like a fox."

"Yes," said Winter. "You've been running me and some of my friends for about twenty years."

"And what a run!" said Old North, closing his eyes and inhaling to the bottom of his lungs with satisfaction. "What a grand run! What bursts across the open, what beating of cover, what getting to earth, what tricks, what doublings, what thin scents and what hot ones! Oh, it's been a grand run. Ask the old sportsman as he lies dying of a fall, if he regrets his life because it has had to come to an end. Then ask me if I regret the long chase after you! No, no, Tommy, I don't regret it. I'm glad of it. You'll need to live another twenty years to have the fun that I've had out of you."

"No regrets, eh?" said Winter.

"Well, hardly any," said the old man. "Of course, it would have been extra sweet to land you in jail, to sit in at your trial, and hear the judge condemn you. But I wouldn't have wanted to be at the hanging of you, Tommy. No, because that would have meant the end of too much. I would have felt that my own life was close to its finish! Nothing interesting left to do. However, I don't regret much. I've spoiled some of the best years of your life. I've wrecked twenty of your schemes, I've saved the world millions of money and, though you've made your thousands and even your hundreds of thousand, here and there, still, I've kept the fox lean, because I've run the fat off him after every meal. Am I wrong, Tommy?"

Winter, his jaws locked hard to-

gether, could not answer at once. Then he said: "It's pretty true, old fellow. You've run me hard. You're absolutely right in everything you say, except in one respect."

"Tell me what the one respect may be?" suggested Old North.

"Only the matter of your dying," said Winter. "It won't be one twinge."

"No?" said Old North. "Something barbarous, my boy?"

Winter nodded. His two gunmen drew closer, like hungry dogs expecting to be fed.

"Something barbarous," said Winter. "That's what I'm turning in my mind."

THERE have been Indians out here who could give you some good ideas," said Old North. "Tying to a stake or a rock, if a stake is not handy, and then shooting out bits of the victim. That's a good dodge."

"Yes, that's a good dodge," agreed Winter. "But I have something better than that. I'm not going to tie you up."

"No?"

"No, in fact I'm going to turn you loose."

"I don't understand that," said Old North.

"You will, when the time comes. Have you finished that cigar?"

"As much as I care about just now."

"Then we'll ride on a little distance."

Old North carefully put out the fuming coal on the end of his cigar, looked at it attentively to see that not a spark remained, and then put the butt into a pocket.

After that, he cheerfully put his foot into the stirrup and dragged himself rather painfully up to the saddle. He sat there, panting some-

what, while the other three rode out around him in a close escort on fine-limbed horses.

Then they passed out of the throat of the pass, and into the moon mist that lay over the broad plain beyond.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JUMPING NERVES.

ON that same evening, when Old North rode on his jogging mule into the dull desert twilight, Flash David came out of the sandy leagues, mounted on the good mare, Rags, and made for a light in the midst of the plain. As he came on, he heard a cow bawling in the distance and a coyote yelping farther off.

These signs of life made Flash think of food. He was very tired and he was very hungry. He was learning rapidly that the land beyond the law is a hungry domain, so he freshened the pace of the mare and, at a long, rolling lope, he came up within dusky sight of a small shack.

There was not a shed, not a barn near it. There was only a corral fenced with barbed wire strung on crooked sticks of mesquite. It was a mystery that such a place should have been taken for a human habitation. The explanation was simply that in this district, for unknown reasons, more grass grew than in the surrounding landscape. Perhaps there was an upward shelving stratum of rock that came close to the surface and brought with it a slight subsoil irrigation. At any rate, the grass was there, not in close-growing lawns, but in ragged patches, here and there. A corn-fed cow would have starved to death here inside of a fortnight. Even desert cattle could not fatten on the

land, but they kept skin and bones together, put out long shanks and ranged about fifty mules for their rations, reaching a marketable size at last.

Even so, it was a precarious business. And the Cary family had known many seasons of famine. They could not have told why they persisted in living in this place, instead of driving their herd farther north toward better watered land, better grass, easier living, larger and surer profits. Something had come to them out of the desert like a spell, and it held them still. It held old "Pa" Cary, his slovenly wife, and his three gaunt sons, who were as black as Mexicans and as lazy as the heart of "to-morrow."

When Flash rode up, he dismounted and threw the reins. Then he walked in and leaned in the doorway, making his cigarette and giving the family a careless word. They all got up to receive him. One of the sons went out to unsaddle the mare and give her a feed out of the single half sack of barley which they possessed at the time.

Said Mrs. Cary: "Not that you ain't welcome, Flash. But it always seems kind of a shame to me, feedin' hosses on what's plenty good for people to eat. But go right ahead, Charley. Here's come a time when the poor Flash has gotta depend on a fast hoss and a strong hoss, and whatever we've got is his."

Then her husband spoke: "Aw, shut up, Lou, will you? Shut up and give your face a rest. Set yourself down here in my place, Flash. No, you set yourself down here. I don't want no more. I'm all finished. Set yourself right down here. Ma, put on some more potatoes to fry, will you? Is that steak cold? You better wait till we heat it up a mite, Flash."

FLASH took the proffered chair, with some unwillingness but, since the other insisted, he sat down. He declared that the steak was exactly as he liked it, lukewarm, and he shoveled onto his plate two slices that were as thin as the sole of a shoe, and almost as tough, with strips of yellow fat decorating the edges.

But quality in food made no difference to him. Nourishment was all that he wanted, and this he could receive even at the Cary house.

He was made as much at home as possible. It was not the first time that he had used their house as a stopping point when he crossed this section of the desert. And whenever he stopped, it meant a small but important present of cash to the head of the family.

After he had finished solids and got down to a third cup of black coffee and cigarettes, they opened fire with many questions and many comments.

"All this for a dog-gone gypsy!" said the head of the family. "I dunno what people are thinkin' of, Flash. I dunno what's come to the West. There was a time when a man was a man, and he was allowed to take his pleasure, like a gentleman had oughta be allowed to do. If there was a few Injuns or greasers or Negroes or such in his way, nobody asked no questions about what happened to 'em. They'd as good ask why he smashed the beer bottle out of which he'd drunk the beer. What difference, so long as he paid for the beer? But things is different. There's too much law. There's too many old hens around. Always scratchin' and cackling, and trying to raise trouble. I never seen nothing like it. It pretty near makes me sick. All this for a gypsy. I'm sorry for you, Flash."

"I'm sorry that you wasn't a boy twenty years back!"

"They've stuck a price on my head, now," said Flash.

"Come along!" said Mrs. Cary.

"They've put five thousand on me," said the boy. "And the fact is, I didn't kill the gypsy. But that doesn't matter. The gun that was swiped from me was found on the spot. However, that don't matter. Five thousand is what they've put on me, dead or alive!"

"Five thousand dollars!" said Mrs. Cary, and her eyes glanced aside, as though she saw a ghost.

"That's plain murder!" said the father of the family. "That'll get you done in, one of these here days. Mind what I say. It'll get you done in one day! Somebody you think is a friend'll stick you between the ribs!"

"Five thousand dollars!" said Mrs. Cary.

"It's enough to set up a ranch with, about," said one of the boys, under his breath. "You could just soak in that money and——"

"Pete!" said the mother to him sharply. "You go and fetch in another cup of coffee for Flash, will you? What good are you for, anyway, settin' around, mumblin'."

"He has a turn for business," said Flash carelessly. "He's thinking how far five thousand dollars would go around. Well, folks, I'm going to turn in."

THEY led him up the ladder to the attic, and there he was shown a bed which was just a pallet of straw laid on the floor with a roll of blankets ready at the foot. Such as it was, it was the best bed in the place, and in the coolest place, for the wind blew through a small window at one end of the attic.

There the Flash turned in, but at the very instant when unconsciousness was creeping over him, a thought struck him like a spur. Suppose that danger came upon him while he slept here? Suppose that the patient sheriff or Winter, or the two of them together, should round him up in this place? He would be no better than a dead man, of course.

He tried to force himself to sleep, but sleep would not come. At last, he simply surrendered to his jumping nerves. He did not go down the ladder. The creaking of it would waken the sleepers beneath him and force him to answer embarrassing questions. He simply pushed his pack out the narrow attic window, lowered it to the ground with a cord, and then followed in person, climbing down the sheer face of the wall like a cat.

Near a corner of the corral, he unrolled his blankets and lay down. Rags came instantly to watch over him, sniffing now and then at him, through the pronged strands of the wire.

It seemed warmer outdoors than it had within. Heat still appeared to be breathing up from the ground. But the open, secure face of the starry sky was above him, and Rags was near by. She lay down with a grunt, and a moment later he had closed his eyes and slept.

He awakened with a start.

It was not the dawn light which had startled him. It was the sound of voices, murmuring close at hand. He lay wide awake, but with all his senses keen as a sharpened knife.

The first voice which he heard, he knew. He turned his head and saw two men dismounting from their horses close by the corral. They were hardly ten steps from him, and the voice was that of Pete Cary.

He was saying: "Come easy out of that saddle. He's a cat. He's got a cat's ears. Step easy out of that saddle, because the creak of stirrup leather would be enough to bring him up, all standing."

"I dunno that I care," said another familiar voice; it was the sheriff who spoke. "I dunno that I care. Now, with us on this side of the house and the rest of the boys on the other side, I reckon that we can take care of him, no matter how stiff he comes up standing. What guns did he pack upstairs with him?"

"He's got no rifle," said Pete Cary.

"Then he's got no chance!"

"And what about them five thousand dollars?" asked Pete Cary, softly but eagerly.

"There's four of us, countin' you," said the sheriff. "You'll get your share. You'll get your split. That's all!"

"I oughta get more. I ought to get a half, anyways!" said Pete. "Look at what'll happen. Pa'll hate my spots as long as I live. So'll both my kid brothers hate and despise me, kind of. Only ma, she won't mind so much."

THE sheriff said gently, with a sort of pity in his voice: "Tell me, old son, it was your ma that put you up to this, wasn't it?"

"Now, how did you guess that?" demanded Pete, his astonishment very easily read, even in his gasping whisper.

"I seen the hungry look in her eye once," said the sheriff. "Trust a dog, but never you trust a she-cat that's got young. It's time for us to get in on the game. I'll tell you what. You'll get two shares. You'll get your quarter, and you'll get my quarter, because I don't sort of cotton to taking money out of a thing like this."

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"Now, what d'you mean by that?" asked Pete Cary. "Would you turn down pretty close onto fourteen hundred dollars? And what for, I'd like to know?"

"Why, son," said the sheriff, rather sadly, "I dunno that you'll ever quite understand. But this here business that I'm in, it kind of gives me the creeps, now and then. Let's close in on the house. We've talked enough—enough for me, anyway!"

They moved on toward the house. They did not turn to look back, for they might have seen a figure like a ghost rising from the ground.

They did not turn back, and it was not until some minutes later, as they crept closer beneath the imagined peril which the house contained, that they heard the beating of hoofs and then, looking off toward the horizon, they saw a horseman, riding slowly, on an animal which galloped with a long, easy stride, swaying across the horizon stars.

The sheriff stood up with a grinding of his teeth.

He said nothing, but young Pete Cary, who also had seen the passing phantom, knew perfectly well that the departing rider was none other than the man he had attempted to betray, that his betrayal was known, and that he had brought dishonor on his name. He was a mere traitor, without a traitor's reward.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NOT MADNESS, BUT MISERY.

FLASH went on slowly, for he was too deep in thought to pay much heed to the way before him. His main interest was in what had happened the night before, and he saw clearly that now he must distrust every man. Old

friendships were now of little value. He must judge every man with a new eye, for what they had been before they might no longer be now.

Five thousand dollars!

He could remember, now, how the words had come lovingly off the tongue of Mrs. Cary, and the brooding light which had been in her eyes, as she echoed and reëchoed them.

Money had ever been, to Flash, merely something to fight for, play for, gamble for. It was stuff which glittered as it was thrown away, so to speak; but it was not worth working for, not worth keeping. What could any man desire more than clothes enough to cover his back, gaudy ones when his fortune was ripe, boots on his feet, and food enough to fill his hide? As for the money which other men loved to put in the bank, which they treasured and loved and fought and died for, it was foolish stuff! Yet, now it was revealed to him that others, who were his friends, could value the stuff more than they valued human affection, human blood.

He was like a wolf, like a coyote. There was a price for his scalp!

He did not blame Mrs. Cary very bitterly. He could remember, in the past, small acts of kindness, almost of affection. He could not doubt that, from time to time, she actually had felt an honest kindness toward him. It was simply that she loved five thousand dollars more than she could love honor and friendship.

It was a bitter lesson for Flash. It had not seemed a hard thing, in the other days, when he thought of the time when he might be living outside the law. But the reality was a thing that bewildered him with its lonely hardness. He rode by himself. He lived by himself. Even Don Pedro Beckwith, as most

people called him, probably could hardly be counted upon now as a true friend.

Five thousand dollars—that was the rock upon which all men's honor might be wrecked!

The sun brightened, grew intensely hot above him. Then he turned the head of Rags straight toward the house of Moore, where he would find Winter. That account he must clear off at once and, having accomplished this, he would leave the country. He hardly knew in what direction he would head. It must be simply away. He wanted a new sky. The very sight of the Devil Mountains seared his eyes and made his brain ache as though the naked range itself were hostile to him.

There lay before him a peculiarly bitter tract. Even with Rags beneath his saddle, he shook his head and frowned as he looked forward to it, for it was a stretch of rocks and gray sand, with little or no vegetation.

ONLY here and there a stubborn cactus had treasured up inside its rind a few drops of water from the rainy season, and here and there a wretched mesquite showed a tuft of yellowish leaves, a small token of the many yards of rootage which stretched underground toward moisture.

But he put Rags at this bitter reach.

The sun, as it neared its zenith, became scalding hot. It was like a continual dripping of powerful acids over his head, his shoulders, his back. He had to shrug his shoulders to loosen the flannel shirt. He felt that his skin was blistering, even beneath the cloth, for there was here not a breath of wind. The distant foothills cupped the sun and fenced

back the winds. A weight of heat, like the pressure of a hand, bore steadily down upon him. Even Rags was feeling it, tough daughter of the desert that she was, and shook her head with such impatience that her bridle chain jingled against the bit.

Flash had been across that torrid strip more than once before this, and he knew its length exactly. He also knew the rate at which they were traveling, and could accurately gauge the length of the journey that lay before him. This was what kept him resolute. Otherwise, after a small dip into that furnace, he would have turned back and taken the much longer but cooler way around the rim of the fire, so to speak.

Right up above his head, finally, the sun stood still, and his shadow disappeared under the moving horse. It was at this moment that Flash had his first sight of what he considered a mirage, for the moment.

The loom and glint of a moving creature came to him, far away. He stared at it.

It was neither antelope nor wolf. It moved so slowly that he had to watch it fixedly before he was sure of the motion. He shook his head, at what he considered a mere optical delusion, and continued on his way. He forbade himself to glance in that direction. But, when he glanced again, there it was, and much nearer. He had drawn even with the thing, and now he knew, beyond a doubt, that it was not a fiction of his mind.

So he turned the head of the mare toward this moving object and his increasing curiosity made him bring the mare to a canter. He swept rapidly nearer and, as he came on, his bewilderment increased.

For it seemed to be a man or, at least, a creature that moved upon

two legs only! It gleamed in the sunlight. It seemed naked. But Flash told himself that this was madness. He became cautious. The thing could not be a naked man. No naked man, not even a Negro, could live many hours in this fiery furnace.

He rubbed his eyes. He forced Rags to a full gallop and, sweeping up on his goal, at last he could be sure.

He was right. Incredible as the thing appeared, it was a man, a naked man!

SOME old prospector had gone mad in the quest for gold, perhaps, and, tearing off his clothes, had walked out to find the most horrible of all deaths, more horrible than death in the flames, because the torment was so infinitely more prolonged, so delicately gradual in its cumulative effect.

A madman would take some handling, perhaps. A tap over the head with the butt of a revolver might be necessary. But Flash did not shrink from his duty; he could not have left even a crippled dog exposed to this frightful misery.

He rode straight up to the sufferer, and what he saw made him dizzy with the horror of it.

It was an old man, a very old man. His back was humped by the cruel weight of time. His face jutted forward, a crimson face, with deep lines beside the mouth that gave a horrible suggestion of smiling. There were white brows, time-faded, and a strange look about the features as of a predacious creature. Naked and helpless as he was, there was something formidable about that poor old fellow, slogging across the desert. His face was resolutely turned toward the cool blue shadows of the distant hills. It must have been clear to him that he

would drop down before he could reach them, but still he went on with shortening steps, plodding steadily along.

What a will was here! It made the heart of the boy leap. In one instant he dismissed from his mind all thoughts of madness. Such a man could not be mad. He was thousands of leagues from insanity.

At first, Flash thought that a thin white cloth, like a shirt, had been draped over the shoulders and the hump of the naked back, but as he came right up, he saw that the white was merely that of a continuous blister. Such an agony of pain must possess this aged fellow as would have made many a younger man scream with the suffering, but the wrinkles beside his mouth merely deepened.

Flash leaped from his horse and threw the reins. But he had to step straight in front of the old man before the latter would halt. As he halted, he wavered weakly. He put out a hand as though to brush the interruption from his path. Then he seemed to recover himself and his presence of mind.

"I thought you were one of them," he said. "I'm wrong."

The voice was such a thing as Flash never wished to hear again. The swollen tongue only dimly, thickly divided the syllables and sounded the consonants. And the words came slowly, with a croak, out of the throat of the sufferer.

Flash was ripping the slicker from the back of his saddle.

The only thing he said was: "Somebody stripped you and turned you loose?"

A dull murmur of assent answered him. Flash said no more. He was merely blind with rage. He wanted to do murder, a thousand murders on every one of the scoundrels.

He carried with him a small can of salve. It was little Señora Beckwith's panacea. One could apply it to wounds, skin troubles, insect bites. One could make small pellets; for, taken inwardly, the effects of this marvelous medicine were beyond belief, according to the Mexican woman.

SOME of this salve, hastily worked soft in the palm of his hand, Flash rubbed over the blistered parts of the man's body. Upon the head of the old fellow, he placed his own sombrero. He pulled off his trousers and made him put them on. No close-fitting garment could be allowed to touch those broiled shoulders and that back. Therefore, the slicker was draped over the hat and hung as a shade over the upper body.

Then the Flash helped the other into the saddle.

Two things impressed him.

The first was that he received not a word of thanks or of joy from the old man. The other was that the veteran continually stared straight before him, toward the cool of the shadows among those distant hills, as though he were steadying himself with a fixity of purpose.

Then the Flash ran bareheaded at the bridle of the mare and went straight toward the goal.

When he looked around, he could see the tortured rider clinging to the pommel of the saddle with both hands. His smile had deepened to a grin of agony, but not a murmur came from his lips.

Every half hour, the Flash paused and gave his companion a small swallow from his canteen. Too much of anything on the stomach, even water, would be dangerous to a man in his condition. And so they crossed the final stages of the desert.

And, at last, they were climbing the hills.

The bared head of Flash, well-thatched as it was with hair, had begun to sing and ring before they finally were struck by the gracious breezes from heaven, that meant more to them than cool water to the

drought-stricken. Straight before them, Flash saw a small grove of pines. He reached the edge of its shadow before he heard a faint sound behind him. Looking back, he was barely in time to leap and catch in his arms the limp and unconscious body of the rider.

Watch Flash! See what he does to those scoundrels! He'll certainly hand 'em something luscious in the next issue.

AMERICA'S LAST FRONTIER

THE United States government purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 for the sum of seven million two hundred thousand two hundred dollars, or a price of two cents per acre. Since that time the furs, fish, and metals taken out of the country amount to a sum considerably in excess of one billion dollars.

It is a common error to regard Alaska as a land of continual winter with its attendant ice and snow. There are, of course, great arctic wastes, but much of the country has the four distinct seasons.

Salmon, halibut, cod, and other edible varieties of fish are found in the waters to such extent that Alaska holds one of the foremost positions in the world in this industry.

Big game offers a paradise to the hunter. Bear, moose and many animals which have disappeared from other parts of the United States are plentiful. Brown bears are found weighing over a ton, and with a skin measuring thirteen feet.

Because of the practically limitless supply of spruce, there is considerable interest just now in the manufacture of pulp and paper. The Federal government recently granted concessions to two companies, who plan to start with an output of two hundred tons per day and gradually increase until five hundred tons output per day is achieved.

The interior of Alaska offers a rather serious problem. Natural conditions indicate agricultural development, but there are various reasons which negative this possibility. The valleys are fertile, plants grow easily—are of a prodigious size and fine quality—in the spring and summer, but there is always the possibility of early killing frosts to face. The growing season can be likened to that of Maine, but the staple crops, corn, potatoes, cereals, berries, et cetera, require a hot August sun for ripening, and that month in Alaska is generally a time of rain and cloudy skies.

Reindeer are also being bred, and a herd of buffalo was kept under guard at the college until it was proved that they could take care of themselves, when they were turned loose in a favorable locality. Many localities are engaged in fur farming with varying success. The animals raised are foxes of different kinds, mink, and muskrats.

Mining is still the most important industry. Without doubt, there are many valuable ore deposits yet to be located all through the territory.

Alaska is America's last frontier. It has great natural beauty and charm, and will amply repay the traveler in search of adventure.



THE DEER TRAP

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Duck Gravy," etc.

AN old Indian had predicted the Puget Sound country would see a snow one squaw deep during the winter and the whites had laughed. Many a winter passes without so much as a flurry. Besides, what does an Indian know about weather forecasts? But it came and without warning. The cold snap of the eastern Washington wheat and cattle areas leaped the Cascade Mountains and mixed with the warm, moist winds of the Pacific and only the rising and falling tides of the sound seemed able to cope with its depth.

Judge Hoyt, who spent his money liberally in restocking depleted game areas, voiced a plea through the newspapers and over the radio to

feed the huddled groups of half-starved birds about the homes on the outskirts of communities. Mixed with the song birds were glorious Chinese pheasants, pert quail and modest native pheasants, tamed by hunger. The moody blue grouse were faring well enough in the foliage of the deeper timber and thousands of ducks, deprived of grain fields, turned to the tide flats, followed the water's edge in its ebb and flow.

"And if this keeps up," the judge said seriously, "it is going to take a heavy toll of deer. It might be a good idea to send a game warden to Glacier Basin and check up on conditions."

Joe Maxwell, county game warden in whose district the Salmon River

country lay, shook his head. "I don't know whom we'll send. Not many fellows in these parts who are fast on snowshoes. Those who are swift don't know that upper country. It would be suicide to send a man unless he knew the country."

"How about Buck Reagan?" Hoyt inquired.

BUCK" was a favorite of the judge's, thanks to the young deputy's success in arresting and convicting several wealthy game-law violators. "He's a Middle West boy and is familiar with the cold and snow. Then, there's Walt Crissman. He goes in pretty strong for winter sports. He usually snowshoes from Longmire's to Paradise Valley on Mount Ranier each winter. He might go up. He knows the country."

"Walt is out, judge," the warden insisted with unusual firmness, considering he was talking with the judge. "Buck convicted him of shooting ducks on Salmon Lake. There was a tough fight, which Buck won. To make matters worse, the court gave Walt a term in jail. It effectively stopped poaching on the lake, but Walt's in a revengeful mood."

"I imagine he is repentant," the judge generously contended.

"Not yet, he isn't. He hates all game wardens now and he's threatened to square accounts with Buck. It is not likely he would care to assist us. I'll have Buck come in and talk things over. He's somewhat inexperienced, but shortly after his appointment last fall he acquainted himself with the district."

Buck Reagan came in two days later, cheeks ruddy with cold and exertion, eyes sparkling with health. He had added a few pounds since leaving an office desk for frontier

life and physically he was as hard as nails. "Can you use skis or snowshoes, Buck?" the warden queried.

"Practically raised on snowshoes," the youth answered. "Why?"

"Think you can make it to Glacier Basin?" Maxwell asked.

"Sure! If you give me the time. Why?"

"In the past game has taken refuge in the basin. The grass grows tall there and it is very plentiful. Winds blow the snow about and expose naturally dried hay so that deer winter there very well. But it's a trap if the snow becomes too deep. Take a look at the situation. If it is as bad as I think, we'll have to organize a crowd of sportsmen to go up and open a trail out. Plenty of the boys will help in a pinch. You don't need to pack grub other than what you'll use on the way; the rock cabin at Windy Point is stocked. I'll give the newspaper boys the story that you're going. It'll create interest and make the organization of a rescue expedition easier. When can you start?"

"In an hour or so," Buck answered. True to his word, he was gone hours before the story appeared in the newspapers. Following instructions, he did not hurry, but picked his way with care, holing in when the storm grew too severe. Weight was cut to a minimum, and so he carried neither six-gun nor rifle. A hand ax was necessary to cut fuel. This he carried in his belt along with a hunting knife.

Progress became more difficult after he left timber line, the third day, and he was exposed to the gales rushing unchecked from the northeast. Once he paused and considered a ledge, a short cut to the country beyond, but dangerous. "No," he muttered, "when a man's alone in this country he can't take a chance."

HE descended and pushed through a mighty drift which filled a gulch, then began the upward climb. As Buck reached forth to grasp a small tree and thus help himself up a steep pitch his heart almost stood still from surprise. The tree was barren of snow, as though some other hand had gripped the tree. A glance about confirmed this belief. All the trees were bending under the weight of snow. And yet no footprint was visible.

His first impulse was to laugh at the idea of another in so forbidding a country. Who? And what was more important, why? He brushed aside the snow which drifted about and an exclamation escaped his lips. There was no doubt now; there was just a trace of a snowshoe webbing, but it was unmistakable. "I don't understand it," he muttered. "Placer Brown's down in his cabin and so far as I know he's the only human being within thirty miles. It's no place for a morning stroll. Huh! Maybe the Windy Point cabin will give a hint!"

Dusk was near as he crawled up the last rocky ridge to the cabin. The builders had taken advantage of two things, a flat ledge and a cave five feet deep. Around the cave they had built the cabin of rock slabs, carefully cemented. Half the cabin was filled with fuel gathered during the summer. Three double bunks, one above the other, stood in one corner; in the other, a table, stove and screened cupboard in which were stored canned goods. Buck tossed his sleeping bag and ax to the floor and climbed the remainder of the ridge for a look into the basin. The snow in every direction was smooth and unmarked.

"Most of the deer cleared out, I guess. That's a load off my mind.

But—well! Well! Cougar tracks, eh?" He dropped to his knees. The tracks were fresh and unusually deep. The animal was experiencing difficulty in dragging his bulk through the soft snow. Five toes were visible where the left paw had left an imprint, but two toes were missing from the right footprint. Despite the cold and semidarkness, Buck whistled in amazement and looked apprehensively about. Cougars will attack a man when hungry. "That's Three-toed Pete's footprint!"

"Three-toed Pete" was famous in the Salmon River country. Several years before he had lost two toes in a trap. Profiting by this experience, he had carefully avoided traps and the haunts of mankind. Dogs set on his trail were never seen again. Patient riflemen had never got the tawny beast in front of their sights. Buck had heard many tales of the big cat, but this was his first personal proof of its existence. "And no gun!" he muttered. "Let's hope he isn't hungry. I sure hope the mysterious gent who left that snowshoe print keeps his eyes open. This'd be a tough place for a man to get clawed or hurt. Take a long time to get him out."

Returning to the cabin, he started a fire and shed his heavy clothing. "Now for a good meal," he said, chuckling in the tone of a healthy youth. He opened the cupboard and looked in. It was empty!

PERHAPS it was a second or two, perhaps thirty seconds before Buck Reagan could find words. In so far as he knew, he was the last person to visit the rock cabin that fall. Hunters, fishermen, timber cruisers and forest-service men all had departed. "Placer Brown! No, Placer would never

violate the code of cleaning out the grub in a shelter cabin without letting us know. Queer! It means three or four days without food, even if the weather's good. I can make it through, though."

He melted snow, drank a pint of hot water by way of warming the inner man and called it a day. Peering through the window, he noticed the storm had broken and a few cold stars were visible. Even the wind had died down, as though it had spent itself in a futile endeavor to stop the warden. The cabin being stuffy, he opened a window, then crawled into his bag to speculate a few minutes before sleeping. Of course, there must be a direct connection between the unknown wanderer and the missing food. "But what is any one doing up here without letting some one know about it? It's suicide. Oh well!"

He was dozing off when a low moan came from beneath the window. He lifted his head, tense, still half asleep. Then the moan was repeated to end in a horrible scream. To Buck it was something not human, something that had sifted down, unchanged, from the Dark Ages. It came again. This time it was closer, distinct, but he knew it was far from his window. The first moan had been deceptive. The last was blood-chilling and human, the cry of a woman. Buck thrust his head through the window. "Where are you? What's wrong?" Again it came and now he understood. "The cry of a cougar. Three-toed Pete and——"

Words, thoughts and movements were suddenly stilled. The cry was answered—a cry, heavy with conflicting emotions, fear, despair and something of defiance, as though the creature's voice was seeking to ward off attack, yet instill courage in self.

Buck cupped his hand to his ear. It came again, heavier, the voice of a man in dire need, and then it ended. "Buck! Buck Reagan!"

Shaking with excitement, Buck caught up ax, flashlight, and stepped into the night. "Where are you?"

Far below came the answer. "Down here! Down the ridge, to the left, then you'll see me!" The voice almost died. "That cougar's hungry!"

Following directions, Buck descended and came to a stop. A steep slope dropped away for nearly two hundred feet and the light picked up a sprawled figure half covered with snow. "I'll get down there some way," Buck shouted. "Hang onto your courage!"

Back and forth through the night the desperate warden searched for a path without success. He dared not take a chance of injury. In the end he returned to the cabin and came back with a long rope. With this he lowered himself the remainder of the distance. The man had fallen on a ledge covered with a considerable quantity of snow. "I hit here," he gasped, "everything began to slide. I shed my pack, then clawed. Managed to hold on, but the pack's gone!" The voice was vaguely familiar. "Listen!"

FROM the darkness, distant, but almost directly below came the faint roar of the upper Salmon River. "If we slip——" Buck ventured.

"A thousand feet straight down, Reagan," the man said. "Don't know me. Well, you're going to."

"Walt Crissman!" Buck cried in astonishment.

"Yeah!" The other's voice was grim. "I said I'd get you for arresting me on Salmon Lake. I got myself instead! I'm tellin' you this so

you can decide whether to roll me over the edge and forget the whole business or risk your life trying to get me out of the country."

"I'll drag you out, of course," Buck assured him.

"Wait! I'm not through yet. I read about them sending you up here. I knew the country, I could make faster time for that reason and it looked like a chance to square accounts. I reached the cabin, destroyed all the grub and slipped on my way down the ridge."

"I understand," Buck said quietly, "the idea was that I should starve to death."

"That's it!" He breathed hard a moment, then said with a snarl: "Well! Let's get it over with. I tried to murder you. You might as well square the account. You can't leave a live man and you can't take an injured man out without starving. But you can give me a shove and then maybe get through."

"I'm taking you out," Buck answered quietly. "I'm human! Not revengeful, though I've stood for a lot. You could have helped, with your influence, instead of hindering, but we won't talk about that now."

"Get me out, Reagan, and I'll square accounts another way—plead guilty to any charge you want to bring, tell the whole sordid story of small revenge and see that you're well paid. Now I'm going to tell you what you're up against—my leg's broken!" His face twisted suddenly with pain as he shifted his position.

"I thought as much. I'll go back and get my sleeping bag and fix you up. We can't chance moving you while it's dark." Buck began climbing, with the aid of the rope. So Walt had tried to starve him for revenge. Some lanes are long in turning, but this turned quickly. It

would make a fine story for the newspapers. Revenge would be sweet. It would put the rich playboys in their place at last and Judge Hoyt would see to it Walt went to prison instead of county jail this time.

Later he helped the injured man into his sleeping bag and saw him faint from pain. But he regained consciousness and drank some hot water. Neither mentioned food, though both were hungry. Daylight was long in coming, but when it came Buck was ready with a plank for the injured leg and branches for the man himself. He strapped Walt to the branch and began dragging him, stopping frequently to clear the way, following a distant but safe course and by mid-afternoon both lay on the floor of the shelter cabin, exhausted.

He strapped Walt to a bunk, then endeavored to set the leg. Walt groaned with anguish, then fainted. It was queer, Buck thought, he did not scream until after he had fainted, but the pain was as great. "Pride," he muttered. "Pride drove him to attempting my life. Yet pride made him set his teeth and not scream, just groan. Pride's queer."

IN the morning they took stock. "I'll see if I can get us some grub," Buck suggested. "I can't drag you far—starving!"

"Better forget me and go through. Send help back!"

"You'd be gone by then!"

"What of it?"

He did not answer. Buck Reagan wouldn't leave a dog to die in such a country, nor his worst enemy. Besides, Walt must be punished, the playboys taught a lesson, the account squared.

He searched about for a mountain

beaver's den, anything. But the country seemed barren. At length he came onto a deer's trail. It was floundering through the snow, a young buck, no doubt, caught by the storm. It was dark when he returned, but during the night he heard the cougar scream. "I'll never forget that scream," Walt muttered. "He saw I was down, sensed I was helpless and smelled the blood of my cut hand. He was hungry—desperate. I was—food!"

"I'm hungry—desperate," Buck answered. He was up at daybreak and into the basin. He found where the buck had spent the night and floundered on its trail. His legs were heavy and he was tired. An hour passed and then he caught sight of the buck leaping, falling, leaping. The youth hurried, but the buck, though handicapped, was swifter. The distance separating them widened. He tried short-cuts, without success. Suddenly the buck turned and came toward him. Amazed, Buck watched from behind a hump of snow. Instinctively he noted he was down-wind. He gripped the ax tightly and waited. The buck was the margin between life and death for two men.

The buck looked back frequently, then the warden understood. The tawny form of a great cougar came into the open. The animal's wide paws gave him a distinct advantage, though his lean stomach plowed a furrow through the snow when he broke through the crust. He could understand Walt's terror now. It was reflected in the deer; utter hopelessness.

For the moment Buck forgot his own helplessness as the wild drama unfolded. In his time the cougar had killed hundreds of deer. Each move was calculated. He leaped a split second before the buck strug-

gled upward. The claws dug deep into the shoulder, the hind claws clung to the side, the fangs found the throat. That was all. The cougar lifted his head and looked about, one paw, the paw lacking two toes, resting on the kill. Around lay the trampled, crimson snow.

Something of animal courage came into the youth, prompted no doubt by hunger. He gripped the ax and advanced, crawling slowly forward, heart pounding, body shaking with a mixture of fear and excitement. But even as the body trembled it cried out for food. "I'm going to have it!" he screamed as though to hearten himself. And the cougar snarled and crouched. "I'm taking it! Get out! I'm taking it!"

THE cat snarled and then advanced, the youth stopped and began to retreat, then hunger spoke. He gripped the ax still tighter and turned. "The cougar fears nothing that crawls," he muttered, "maybe I can stand, but snowshoes are awkward if I want to get away." He stopped to reflect. "There can be no get-away. I can't retreat. So I must go ahead."

He stood up and courage stood with him. The cat remained on the defensive, then seemed undecided as step by step the human animal drew nearer. The peace of the valley, broken by the bawls of the buck, were now broken by the snarls of the cat. The jaws opened wide, white vapor came forth in angry puffs. One paw clung to the kill, half dragged it, then let go. Still snarling the cougar grudgingly gave ground until the man stood with one foot on the kill. Reaction came and Buck tottered, then instantly sensed the weakness, paused, then half ad-

vanced. Buck held his nerve by sheer will power, the cat slunk to the nearest thicket and watched, eyes flashing hate, tail lashing nervously.

Buck cut off the lower legs and head and dressed the carcass, then he lifted it to his shoulders and staggered toward the cabin. From the thicket slunk the cougar to eat the remains.

THE features of the man on the improvised sled were contorted with agony. His face was gray, almost green at times. "My leg," he groaned, "I can't stand it, Buck. I——" With an effort he set his jaw. "I'm a yellow dog. You know it or I wouldn't have thought of revenge. Don't mind my chatter, just keep draggin' the sled. Talk makes the pain easier. Pull! Pull! Get me out of here. Pull!" He was panting. "I know I'm going to prison, but I don't care. Destroying grub! Deserve it! Papers will play it up. It'll be great stuff for 'em. Pull! Don't like our crowd. Your innings, Buck. You deserve 'em. Ah!" He dropped back, exhausted and the sled moved on.

At noon they stopped and broiled deer meat over an open fire. They wolfed it down without salt and said little. The fifth night, it would be, and the timber was mighty. They were in the lower country—perhaps to-morrow or the next day—Neither dared think beyond the immediate hour.

Dawn brought an unbroken trail through which the warden staggered. The sled jerked and hurt the other's leg. Tears came from his eyes, but he set his teeth. Hours later the sled stopped and Crissman straightened up. "Look," Buck cried, "they're coming for us!" His hand, raw from constant tugging at

the rope, groped at a fir sapling. "I guess I'm about all in myself! Judge Hoyt in the lead, dignified as ever; Joe Maxwell behind, along with some of your friends, Walt!"

"Listen, Buck, I'll try not to cave in now that we're safe. What I said before goes. I went in there, a yellow cur, seeking revenge and I'll plead guilty to any charge you bring. That's that! Now for the debt I owe you, kid. I can't repay it—money wouldn't pay you, there isn't enough and your sort don't want it." He lifted his right hand and the greenish-gray features winced from the effort. "For now, let me shake your hand and say, 'Thank you, Buck!'"

THEIR hands met. "Forget it, Walt!" He looked up. "Here they are, newspaper men, too. Cameras!" Then people crowded about, asking questions and there was much in Judge Hoyt's penetrating eyes. The faces of the playboys were drawn and their eyes never left the young deputy warden's face. They knew why Walt Crissmann had gone in.

A reporter was the first to speak. "What happened, Reagan?"

"Nothing to speak of, except what happened to Crissman. I went into Glacier Basin, found the game had left. Crissman goes in for winter sports and got the idea into his head he might give me a hand—show me short-cuts. He slipped over a ledge and broke his leg. That's all. He gave me a hand; I've given him one; now we're all square."

A flush came over the grouped faces of Walt's boon companions. They shifted uneasily and understood much and guessed more. They saw the tears come from beneath Walt's tightly shut lids when he muttered: "It's all right—it's the

pain!" But it was pain not of the leg now, but of the heart.

Judge Hoyt watched Buck Reagan eat his first good meal in days. "You're a fine boy, Buck, but you didn't deceive me. You concealed

much—a coyote went into that country to get you."

"Maybe," Buck grudgingly admitted, "but a man came out!"

"No, Buck, you're only half right—two men came out."

*A Thrilling Novel, "THE MASKED RIDER," by ROBERT J. HORTON,
in Next Week's Issue.*

SALMON FISHING

EVERY year, on May 1st, promptly on the stroke of twelve, noon, a "gold" rush is on in Oregon. The gold being royal Chinook salmon. In all the West there is nothing more colorful or spectacular than the salmon-fishing operations on the Columbia River.

Salmon fishing is Oregon's third largest industry, and it is estimated that two thousand gill-net boats dropped their nets into the Columbia at the opening of the spring drive of 1931.

For five months previously the men who direct these boats have been busy mending nets and living off the savings of the last drive. Then, when the season opens, the air is filled with the hum of gas motors propelling fishing boats, and the roar of the steam turbines operating the machinery in the canneries.

The city of Astoria is the center of the industry, while some dozen or so smaller communities, above and below, have a share in it. Some twenty thousand persons owe their living directly or indirectly to the returns from the ten-million-dollar salmon catch.

Several weeks before the season opens the vanguard of the salmon herd has been edging its way into the Columbia River, urged on by instinct to their spawning beds, and the State fish warden, M. T. Hoy, with his deputies, has been on guard to prevent poaching and "jumping the gun." If Mr. Hoy can prevent it, there will be no fishing before his gun announces the zero hour.

In the 1931 season, thirteen canneries, ten on the lower river and three above the confluence of the Columbia and the Willamette at Vancouver, Dodson, and the Dalles, employed from thirty-five to one hundred workers each. Cold-storage plants scatter up and down the river, eager to bargain for the surplus catch.

The salmon pack in recent years has often been as much as half a million cases, valued at from \$5,600,000 to \$7,500,000, the value fluctuating according to market conditions. The records of the State fish commission for sixty-five years show a total of 26,360,667 cases, valued at \$203,588,350 as coming from the Columbia River canneries. This tremendous industry had its birth in 1866 with a pack of 4,000 cases valued at \$64,000.

From one half to two thirds of the season's catch is used up by packing, the balance of the salmon, about \$2,500,000 worth, goes into storage.



A Serial

WHITE WOLF

By GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

IN Circle City, Alaska, there is a remarkable man nicknamed "Cobalt," red-haired, blue-eyed. Tales of his physical prowess have persisted over a period of years. Many have seen and can testify as to his extraordinary qualities, as, for instance, Tom Chalmers, the narrator of the tale.

There also lives in Circle City a young and beautiful woman, Sylvia, the daughter of Henry Baird. Most men, it seems, find her irresistible. But a certain impish quality in the girl leads her to jest at love, and when Cobalt, determined to marry her, asks what kind of engagement ring she prefers, she replies: "No ring at all." Instead, she would like to have the skin of the White Wolf, the monster of the North, which has terrorized the whole section about

the town. Cobalt regards her answer as a promise of marriage.

Undaunted by the experience of others, he starts out after the terrible beast, taking with him a sled and eight dogs. He, like the others, sees his dogs destroyed by the White Wolf. But he keeps on and finally lassoes the monster alive, returning with him after a year and using him as a pack animal. The White Wolf has been tamed, but it is plain that he hates his master.

Together, Cobalt and Chalmers start for Sylvia's home, taking the wolf along, that she may see for herself that he has been caught without wound from gun, knife or trap; that the skin of the beast is intact, as she had stipulated. Arrived at the Baird home, Cobalt presents the White Wolf to Sylvia, making it

plain that he holds her to her promise of marriage. She says she will marry him. Cobalt returns to his work in the mines, leaving the wolf with Sylvia.

Chalmers and Baird, however, feeling that Sylvia does not care for Cobalt, decide to carry her off before Cobalt returns. Accordingly, that very night, in a heavy snow-storm, the three of them leave Circle City, heading south. Although they carry their own outfit, sleds and dogs, no one sees them, as a dense fog has settled over the town.

The White Wolf, which had been left behind, escapes and catches up with them. He kills one of their dogs but, in spite of this, Sylvia regards him as a talisman and, when the rest of the dogs are killed by wolves, Sylvia and the White Wolf pull one sled together, while the two men pull another, abandoning the third sled.

It is bitter cold and, while they are seeking protection from the storm under an overhanging bank, Cobalt passes them with four dogs and a sled. They reach Skagway safely and in a saloon in that town the two men run across "Soapy" Jones, a criminal whose life Baird had once saved. Soapy, because he is grateful, after his fashion, agrees to get hold of Cobalt and hold him until Sylvia, her father and Chalmers can sail for the United States.

In this saloon, owned by Soapy, who apparently is running the town of Skagway to his own satisfaction, there is a bartender named Jess Fair. On one occasion a new deputy sheriff ventures into the place, with the intention of arresting Jess Fair, who is wanted for murder in the States. Fair shoots him dead.

In this same saloon Chalmers and Baird meet Cobalt, who apparently

cherishes no particular ill will toward them. Shortly after this Cobalt is attacked by two thugs, but Chalmers saves him.

Baird is anxious to have a talk with Soapy Jones and accordingly goes to the private room of Soapy, taking Chalmers with him. A door just back of Chalmers opens and he has a feeling of uneasiness and danger.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOAPY'S CABINET.

MY own eyes would not have served me as well, at that moment, as the eyes of my friend Baird, for he was facing me, and in his face I saw, mirrored, the danger which was coming on me from behind.

I still wonder that I did not cry out or leap to the side, or attempt to pull out the revolver which Cobalt had given me, but I was paralyzed. Hands suddenly gripped me by each arm; there was enough power in their grasp to have mastered ten people like me.

Then Baird got his voice and shouted: "Soapy, is this the result of your promises to me?"

"What promises have I made to you?" asked Soapy coldly. "You never mentioned this sneaking fellow."

He pointed at me. It was not pleasant to have Soapy scowl and sneer at one. His scowls and sneers were likely to possess a peculiar efficacy, as all men knew. His gestures generally were quite as effective as ax or sword strokes.

"He's with me; he's my man," said Baird frantically, as the others drew me back toward the door. "I owe him more than I owe any other man in the world. He's been more

a friend to me and to my daughter and——”

“What are your friends to me?” said Soapy.

He grew white. His face shone as if it were freshly covered with grease.

FOR my part, I pitied poor Baird. The fury of the gangster was so intense that I felt that I was as good as dead. I was not even badly frightened. The horror which I felt of that black-bearded ogre was sufficient to make all other fears as nothing.

“My friends are nothing to you,” said Baird. “But you owe me something. You’re a man who pays his debts of gratitude. You won’t let harm be done to poor Tom Chalmers?”

“Chalmers? Is that his name?” said Soapy. “He looks like a cur to me. He has the hang-dog look. What use would he be to any man in the world? Why do you want him, Baird?”

“I want him——” began Baird.

At this moment there came three knocks in quick succession on the door of the little cabinet.

“Who’s there?” demanded Soapy.

He did not wait for an answer, but opened the door in person.

Framed in the opening appeared two men who supported a third man between them. The man was limp as a rag. His clothes were torn. His face looked as though it had been beaten with heavy clubs.

I cannot describe the look of his features or the swollen, closed eyes. I thought he was dead, and so did Soapy, apparently.

“Who is it?” he asked, and added: “What do you fools mean by bringing a stiff here?”

“He’s alive,” said one of the two men. “We found him. It’s Blacksnake Loren.”

“Who jumped him? What gang did this?” said Soapy. “What in the mischief is happening in Skagway?”

“No gang. Cobalt done it,” said one of the men.

“You lie,” said Soapy. “Blacksnake is a man-breaker. He’s been in the ring. He’s wrestled, too. No one man could do that to him, unless he used a club!”

They said together: “We seen it!”

“What?” shouted Soapy. “You saw it and you didn’t give Blacksnake a hand?”

“It happened kind of fast,” said one of the men sullenly. “I was taking him in front, and Buck, here, behind. Blacksnake, he jumped out of the doorway and Cobalt sort of exploded. That’s all I know what to say. He exploded. He seemed to hit us all at once. I went down hard. Through a haze I seen that Buck was down, too, and poor Blacksnake, he was in the hands of Cobalt all by himself. First, he struggled. Then he was just hanging like a rag out of those hands, and Cobalt dropped him into the mud and——”

“Get out of my sight,” said Soapy through his teeth.

They backed up. Soapy slammed the door again. If he had been angry before, he was almost hysterical now. Not that he shouted or pranced, but the fury showed in his rolling eyes and in the twitching of his lips, now and then, which gave him a most animal and frightful appearance.

BAIRD, I must say, was a fellow of a great courage. Even then he did not keep still, but went at Soapy vigorously.

“There’s the man you promised should not be hurt,” he said. “And you’ve sent three of your best to murder him!”

"Murder him?" said Soapy, beginning to pace up and down.

He laughed a little, excess of passion making the noise bubble over at his lips. Then he added: "Three of my men were to take him without more than giving him a crack over the head, but I wish now that I'd had them poison him. I will. I'll have them bump him off. There's room for him in the sharks of the Pacific, maybe. There's no room for him in Skagway!"

"I don't think you'll have him killed," said Baird, always surprising me with his equable manner.

"Don't you?" asked Soapy.

"No," said Baird. "There's too much honor and decency in you. You're not a fellow to break your word of honor, which you've given to me."

One of the men who was holding me broke into a loud, braying laughter. Soapy glanced at him, and the glance was enough. The fool cut off his laughter so suddenly that he almost choked. I heard him stifle and gag.

"I've made the promise and I hope that I'll keep it," said Soapy, "but I've never made a promise that has cost me more. You," he barked at the men who held me, "get that trash out of the room!"

"And do what with him?" said the one who held me.

"What do I care?" asked Soapy. "Just get him out of here!"

Baird exclaimed. He ran across the cabinet to get to me. He would have caught hold of me, I think, but they thrust him off, dragged me through the door, and hurried me almost at a run down a small corridor.

My brain was whirling. I should not have been surprised if the final blow had fallen on me from behind at any moment. Then they took

me up a short, narrow flight of steps, kicked open a door, and thrust me inside.

"Fan him," said one of them.

They fanned me. They went through my clothes and took from me, however, nothing but my gun and a small pocket knife. When they had finished with that, one of them said:

"Are we gonna waste time over him?"

"What do you think?"

"I'd tap him on the head and see how much salt water he can drink."

"I dunno. The chief didn't say."

"That's because he didn't care."

He said that he didn't care."

There was this conversation about my life or death being carried on, and I, listening, with the last hope gradually flickering out.

"If he don't care," said another. "Suppose that we bleed him for what we can get."

"He's got nothing. He looks poor."

"He's from the inside. He must have something."

"Soapy don't like it when you bleed without orders."

"I'd like to get somebody's opinion."

"My opinion is what I said before. Soak him between the eyes and see how far he'll float on the tide."

I STARED about me at the room and the faces. The only window was shuttered. The place was as dark as night. One lantern burned on a small deal table which stood in the center of the compartment. In a corner, there was a cot with a thin straw mattress, but no bedding on top of it. I knew that the stuffing was straw, because it stuck out in a bristling handful from one torn corner.

Worse than all else, the miserable room was dripping with moisture. There was a dark, shallow pool in one corner, with a limp piece of paper half sunk in it.

Altogether, it was as depressing a cell as I ever have seen.

"I'm not gonna stay here forever," said one of the men.

"Let's do something."

"The gent that makes the wrong step for Soapy never gets a chance to make another."

I blessed that thug for his cool common sense.

"There's the door to Jess Fair's room," said one. "Jess, he'd know what to do with the bird."

"Go on, kid. You find out."

"Yeah," said the kid. "The rest of you ain't so keen to bother Jess, are you?"

He sneered back over his shoulder at them as he went toward the door. What a face the "kid" had! White, scowling, with puckered brows and ferociously flaring nostrils, there was still an element of debauched youth in him. He had big shoulders and a big, square jaw. And now he paused by the opposite door and knocked, gently, almost reverently.

A quiet voice called out to enter, and the kid opened the door. I looked straight into a room of about the same size as the one we were in. But it was arranged more pleasantly. There was at least covering on the cot. Quantities of spare clothes hung from pegs along the walls. A small stove burned in the center of the room and near the stove, propped back in a chair with his heels on the edge of the table, was Jess Fair, reading a magazine. He held it in one hand, the read pages turned back inside the hollow of his palm. He looked across at us with a quiet indifference, as cool and smiling as when he stood be-

hind the bar. He showed no surprise at the sight of me.

"Hello, Chalmers," he said. "Poison might have been better, at that, eh?"

"Yes," I said frankly. "I think that it might."

"Shut up, you," snapped the kid at me. "Hey, Jess, what'll we do with this sap? Sock him or tie him?"

"What's the order?" asked Jess, not even giving me a second glance.

"There wasn't no particulars. Soapy said he didn't care," came the answer.

"Soaking him takes less time," said Fair.

"That other guy, that friend of his, has he got a real pull with the chief?" asked the kid, rather anxiously.

Jess Fair looked at the ceiling and yawned.

"Yeah," he said, "I guess he's got a pull, all right."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE KID.

IN this manner, by a casual speech, my life was undoubtedly saved. When I think back to it, I feel that this incident better illustrated the cruel callousness of Soapy's gang than all their murders. To kill me or not to kill me was a mere matter of convenience. It was only extraordinary that they wasted so much time in debate, and I am sure, if the remark of Jess Fair had not turned the situation in my favor, some one of my precious guards would have ended the dispute by braining me on the spot. Not that Jess took any personal part in the question. He merely delivered the one opinion and then, turning his eyes back to his magazine, he recommenced his reading, saying in a

drowsy murmur: "Shut the door, will you?"

They shut the door. I noticed that they closed it quietly, as if thus to show their respect, and this alone would have been enough to establish Jess as a person of importance.

When they had me again in the other room, the kid said: "Tie his hands, and you birds slide. You find out something about him. Did he bring anything out of the inside. If he did, we'll get it. Go on!"

They thought this idea was a masterpiece. They tied my hands as he had directed, and I was allowed to sit on the bed. The kid took his place on the table, dangling his legs. His head sagged forward and thrust out like the head of a great bird. His back sagged and bent forward. He made a cigarette out of brown wheat-straw papers and some tobacco in a sack. He lighted it, tucked it in a corner of his mouth and spoke, the cigarette flopping rapidly up and down while he talked. It never was shifted from this post until it was burned to a butt.

"That's likely to stick and take off some skin when you peel it away, isn't it?" said I.

"Aw, maybe it sticks sometimes," said the kid. "That don't make no difference. That's nothing. What was your lay before you come up North?"

"My lay? Oh, I was a common puncher."

"Was you? That's no kind of a lay, is it?" he suggested.

"It's pretty hard work. It's all right if you like it. Cows and horses, I mean, and plenty of roof over your head."

"You mean sky? Eh?"

"Yes," said I.

"No, I guess you never scrape off your hats agin' that roof," said the

kid. He grinned a little at his own remark.

"I've had a mustang buck me up to the rafters of that same little old sky," I told him.

He lost interest in this conversation and yawned, exhaling a quantity of thin, blue-brown smoke. Just then we heard Jess Fair cough, a light, barking sound in the next room. The kid listened, canting his head to one side, instantly intrigued.

"Listen to him," said he.

"It's not a very good-sounding cough," said I.

"He's cooked," said the kid, and nodded in confirmation of his words. "He's cooked, all right. You hear that?"

HE had lowered his voice, so that the sound of it might not reach the man on the farther side of the flimsy partition. "He just sets there. He can't sleep," said the kid.

"The cough keep him awake?"

"The cough? Yeah. Maybe the cough, partly. He's got something on his mind."

"Nothing seems to bother him a great deal," said I.

"No. Because he's cooked, and he knows it. That's why he gives you the glassy eye. He knows that he's cooked!"

He laughed a little, inviting me to share in his amusement, but I could not laugh.

"He knows he's cooked. That's why even Soapy is afraid of him. When you know you're cooked, you don't care about nothing. That's the way with Jess Fair. That's why he could go and get anybody, because he don't care."

"I wonder if he could get Cobalt?" I asked him.

"Cobalt? Oh, that's the strong boy from the inside. Sure, Jess

could get him. Jess could get anybody. He always has."

"What's Jess done?" I asked.

The kid jerked up his head and stared at me.

"You think I'm a fool?" he snapped. "No, no, brother. I ain't as simple as that. I don't know nothing about him. Not a blooming thing. There was a bird up here from Tucson. He said he knew a lot about Jess. He comes in and hunches up to the bar, shakes hands and calls Jess by his first name and old hoss. But he lost his memory the next day."

"He shut up, did he?"

"Sure he shut up."

The kid silently explained by placing a forefinger between his eyes and moving the thumb as if on a trigger.

"Yeah, he lost his memory," said the kid. "He didn't have nothing left to remember with. But Jess is that way. He ain't no historian. He hates history, matter of fact."

I left the subject of Jess Fair.

"What was your lay, kid?" I asked him.

"Me?" said the kid, puckering his white fleshy brows. "Aw, I dunno. I kind of floated around. I punched a cow or two myself," he concluded cautiously, eying me.

"Where was that?"

"Oh, around here and there," said the kid vaguely.

He warmed up.

"I'll tell you what," said he, "if I'd had a chance, I would've stuck to it. I liked it. I had everything from pretty near blizzards to pretty near sunstrokes. But I liked it all. Horses like me, if you know what I mean. They take to me and I take to them. There was a little ornery no-count filly on a ranch that I raised on a bottle till she could take to hay and stuff. I raised her my-

self. They used to laugh at me. She'd foller me around. They called me the 'old mare' on that outfit. That little beast, I tell you what, she used to come and steal lump sugar out of my pocket. She never thought I knew. She was a little witch, that filly."

He laughed silently at the memory of that distant joy.

"What did you call her?" I asked him.

HER? I called her the Princess. That was what she was like. When spring come around, she lost her pot belly, and the way she stepped around, she looked like she could gallop on clouds. That was the kind of a look she had."

"What became of her?"

He scowled at his knuckles.

"Well, I moved on. That's all."

He stared earnestly at me.

"You know the way it is," he went on. "The way some people are, they never forget nothing. They never give you a chance."

He sighed.

"That little witch," he said, "she come into the bunk house after me one day. They was playing poker. She stood there and looked on, with the lantern reflected in both of her two eyes. She looked like she understood. I called her the Princess. That was what she was like!"

I thought that I could see the slender filly with her eyes like two stars. I wondered if she might not have been able to bring the kid back into a clean life. But now she was only a symbol of all that was true and beautiful, from which the cruelty of justice had parted him.

We fell silent, partly because the thoughts of the poor kid were far away and, in part, because a strong wind had come up, battering and

clattering away at the building, slamming doors, rattling shutters, and making conversation more or less difficult.

So great was the force of the wind that the door to the room in which we sat oscillated violently back and forth, stopped, and slammed, and shuddered noisily again.

"You've had a rough time of it, kid," said I.

"Me? Aw, I don't sob about it," he said hastily, defending his manly spirit. "I don't hang around and sob about it none."

The door opened. And in the opening stood not one of the gangsters, but Cobalt!

He closed the door behind him, slamming it carelessly, as though the wind had accomplished the thing. And the kid was so thoroughly deceived that he did not even turn to look!

I tried to think of something to say to get the attention of the kid and keep it. But he chose this moment for yawning!

Well, I knew that was the end for him. Up came Cobalt, tiptoe. The floor creaked under him at the last moment, and the kid jerked his head around, to be caught in Cobalt's hands.

Have you seen a cat strike its claws into a bird and seen the poor thing flutter and turn limp? Or have you seen a mountain lion strike a young deer and watch the deer fall? I have seen those things, and I thought of them as the terrible grip of Cobalt paralyzed the kid with the first pressure. As though his fingers were talons, they seemed to drive into the boy.

There was no question of resistance. Cobalt lifted him from the table; the kid vaguely struggled with his arms and kicked with his legs. Then he was still. He did not even

cry out. With hypnotized eyes he watched the face of the other.

"What was it? Jujutsu?" he asked.

Cobalt placed him on the cot beside me. He stuffed a wadded bandanna into the mouth of the boy and lashed it securely in place with a cord. He cut the rope from my hands and, with an addition to it from the twine which he carried, he trussed the kid, hand and foot.

I leaned over the boy.

"Can you breathe all right, kid?"

I asked him.

He jerked his head to signify that he could. He shook his head again, looking at Cobalt, as much as to say that no ordinary but a supernatural agency had taken him in hand. I almost agreed with him.

Cobalt was already at the window shutter. He worked it open and told me to climb through. I told him to go first, but he took me under the pits of the arms and lowered me through the opening like a sack. My feet struck the ground, and the cold wind whistled about me; then Cobalt jumped down at my side.

At the same time, we heard a door open inside the building, and the voice of Jess Fair was saying: "Hey, kid, what's the big idea of all the cold air?"

We waited to hear no more, but went hastily down the street.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LITTLE SMASHING.

WHEN we had gone a short distance down the street and saw that there was no sudden pursuit, I asked Cobalt how he had managed the thing. He said that he had seen me enter the place, doubted my safety there, and made

a tour around the outside. Luckily he heard voices, mine among them, so he spotted the room where I was kept and entered by forcing a nearby window.

I remember, as he described the thing, he made it seem the most natural and normal act, a thing to be expected of any one. But I know that the house of Soapy Jones was a tower of dread to every one in Skagway. Not another soul in the world, I verily believe, would have dared what Cobalt dared that day.

It does not seem much compared with his final exploit in Skagway. It hardly seems to be a stepping stone to the tremendous achievement with which he staggered us all, and which I shall have to describe, presently. Yet his present exploit of entering the Soapy Jones place, was alone enough to shock the whole of Skagway into attention, you may be sure.

As we went down the street, the wind hurling us forward so that we had to lean back against it, we fairly stumbled into two other pedestrians who were going along with their heads down, bucking against the wind-driven sleet. It was the pair who, together with the kid, had taken me in hand.

I made a dive for one of them, shouting out to Cobalt. I think I should have had my hands full, for the fellow I tackled was a robust rascal. But when the two saw me, they were limp with astonishment. They did not even defend themselves. We got their guns from them without an effort.

They kept saying: "Did Soapy do it? Did Soapy turn you loose?"

"Cobalt pried me loose from Soapy. That's all," said I. "And one day he'll go back and take an hour off and kick that whole shack to pieces!"

"I almost think he will!" said one of the thugs. "If he's got you away from Soapy, he can do anything."

We took them to the police. The thing was a perfect farce. The moment they found out that the two we had with us were accused of being employed by Soapy Jones, the police would have nothing to do with the case.

I don't think they were originally honest fellows whom he had corrupted. They were thugs themselves, members of his gang, wearing uniforms.

They asked me what I had to prove what had happened to me and that anything had been done against me by the men who worked for Soapy. I showed them my wrists, which the ropes had chafed, and Cobalt told how he had found me sitting with my hands tied together and under guard in the dingy room. They merely shrugged their shoulders. The two crooks we had taken in with us began to feel at home and to make a loud, violent defense of themselves.

I shall never forget the scene.

THE storm had covered Skagway with a twilight dimness.

Two greasy lanterns flickered on the walls of the little room. By the stove sat one deputy, his feet wrapped in a quantity of sacking. At the desk was another, a desk spotted with many ink stains, though I don't think that it was much used for writing purposes. The fellow at the desk had a protruding chin and a protruding forehead. When he smiled, he seemed embarrassed. And he ought to have been embarrassed, for he was one of the worst thugs I ever have seen in my life.

When we saw that nothing could be done, Cobalt stood for a time

with his eyes half closed, the old, familiar demon beginning to glisten in them. I knew that something was about to happen, as surely as when one sees the powder trail burning and the open powder cask to which the fired trail leads.

The thugs and the more crooked deputies were beginning to grin at one another and enjoy themselves, when Cobalt said: "The whole pack of you are a lot of thieves and crooks. You're all working for Soapy. I've known it for some minutes. But I'll tell you what, boys. I'm going to give him a message. I'm going to give him a letter, and you can tell him how I punctuated it, and where I made the underlinings. It won't be a long letter, but it will say something."

With that, he leaned over and picked up the writing desk. The deputy behind it was knocked out of his chair, and fell sprawling with a yell, while Cobalt poised that heavy mass above his head and hurled it at the stove.

It knocked that stove to smithereens. It knocked over the second deputy as well, and it covered the floor of the shack with rolling coals and flaming brands of wood.

What a screeching and a yelling went up from that pair. The thugs tried to get out, but Cobalt threw them back into the place and bolted the door from the outside.

What a yelling started then! They were sure that they were going to be burned alive, and I suggested the same thing to Cobalt.

"Don't make much difference," said he. "But they won't burn alive. They'll be smoked meat, though, before they get those embers out. They'll be singed meat, too."

They were, too.

We stood across the street and

heard the four screeching for help and battering at the wall of the shack for ten minutes. And no one came to their aid!

Well, that was Skagway, in the palmy days of its youth!

Finally they broke open, not the door, but a section of the wall of the shack. Three of them pitched out into the mud of the street and wallowed in it as if they loved the sty. Then one fellow got up and reeled into the thick white smoke that poured out of the shack. He came back dragging the fourth and last of the quartet, who had been overcome with the fumes.

"There's about half a man in that one," commented Cobalt.

I could agree with this, but a moment later the whole four spotted us, where we stood howling with laughter across the street. I thought they would go mad. They danced and raved and tore, and the two deputies started on the run to arrest us. But the other thugs held them back. What they said to them did not take long, but it was enough. Those deputies stopped short, like dogs when they run out of a village to chase coyotes and find a wolf instead.

SO Cobalt and I went on together, unharmed, and I very thankful to Heaven and Cobalt for the dangers he had put behind me this day. We went to the hotel, and there he turned in with me.

"They've had time to think things over. It won't hurt if I go in and talk to them a little now?" he suggested.

I insisted that it was high time that he should do so, but I'm afraid that there was not much heartiness in my voice.

When we walked in, the proprietor

stared at us with open mouth. How much did he know? I never could tell. I could only guess that he was a complete scoundrel.

"Out again, you see," I said with mock cheerfulness to him.

He did not reply. He gaped only wider, and his face grew more pouchy, I thought, as we walked by him.

"He's one of them, all right," said Cobalt. "You're in a snake's den, here."

I felt that we were. But how was it possible to get a better place in Skagway?

I could hear the excited voice of Baird before we got to the room and, when we knocked on the door and he saw us standing there, it warmed my heart to hear the way he shouted out his pleasure and dragged me in, thumped me on the shoulder and swore, even then, he had been mourning for me.

"That fiend of a Soapy Jones hates you. He's withdrawn all his promises. He swears that he'll start with you and finish by making hash of Cobalt. Cobalt, why have you crossed him so often?"

"Because he's been in my way," said Cobalt, and it was a characteristic answer.

Sylvia was eating ham and hot cakes with plum jam, a frightful combination, but one gets peculiar hankerings after an "inside" diet. She had a great pot of steaming coffee beside her and a stack of pancakes a foot high. Now she stood up and told us to finish off for her.

So we sat down. Up there in the North it seems as though every one is always hungry. Food is as welcome a sight as bank notes in milder climates.

Sylvia stood by, simply passing things to us. It was her father who did the questioning.

"What happened?" he said. "Where did they take you? Did Soapy change his mind at last?"

"Cobalt pried me loose from Soapy's gang," I said. "He came into the house and he got me loose from them. He says it was simple!"

We all took a turn looking at Cobalt, but his face was hidden behind a tilted mug of coffee.

"They've got a lot of chickory in this coffee," says Cobalt. "Hand me another slab of those hot cakes, Sylvia."

He heaped his plate again. That furnace of his needed continual stoking.

"You can't pass it off like this, Cobalt," said Baird. "It was a grand thing. I think that I'd rather knock at Satan's gate than go near his place again. Soapy is a madman, now. Some of his best men have been manhandled. You've done him a great deal of harm.

HIS gang takes it to heart that they haven't been sent on your trail from the first, in numbers, not to take you, but to murder you. That would be safer. They say that they might as well be sent to bait a grizzly bear. I think they're right. I was a witness of a half riot that started in Soapy's office, if that's what one can call it. They want your blood, Cobalt, and my solemn advice to you, son, is to clear out of Skagway and get as far inside as you can, as fast as you can. There's nothing but poison waiting for you here."

Cobalt nodded cheerfully at him.

"Do you think I'll back down?" he said. "Not I! Not for fifty like Soapy. The bartender, though, is a different matter. I think if there were only two like him, I'd give him plenty of room. It's good advice. It's kind advice, Baird. But

I'll stay on here and try my hand with Soapy, first."

When he had said this, he turned and looked deliberately at the girl.

One could tell what he meant. It would be Soapy and the gang first. Afterward, came Sylvia!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RIGHT CLUB.

I WAS sorry, somehow, that Cobalt had to ring in his unfortunate attitude toward Sylvia at the very moment when we were all looking up to him as a sort of demigod.

Silence fell upon us, but out of the silence came something of the old sharp hostility. I could see the eyes of Sylvia turn bright and cold, and the jaw of her father was set.

Sylvia went on serving until the edge of that vast appetite of his had been dulled. Then she said: "Make yourself a smoke, Cobalt?"

He had no makings. So she took mine and manufactured a cigarette for him. I wondered why she had learned the rather difficult and delicate little art of making cigarettes, when she herself never smoked them. At any rate, she made the cigarette for him, presented it for moistening to him, finished it off, gave it into his hand, then lighted and held the match for him.

As the first big exhalations of smoke went upward, she stood close before him and looked down at him through the smoke.

"Listen to me, Cobalt," said she.

"Aye," said Cobalt. "Now that you've soothed me, you can use the club on the poor beast."

She brushed the smoke apart a little with her hand.

"I'm only going to tell you the truth, Cobalt," said she.

"Let me hear it, then," said he.

"It's this. It's the reason why you won't want me any longer."

"Go on," said he.

He actually smiled at her.

"It's because I care for another man," said Sylvia.

This struck me, I know, with a great shock. It seemed to strike her father, also, hard enough to bring him out of his chair. But Cobalt merely shrugged his shoulders.

"You remember the story I once told you, my dear?" said he. "About the thief and the emerald? Would the thief have cared where the emerald wanted to go or what the emerald felt about him?"

"You don't mean it," said Sylvia. "You're not as hard as you make out. You're a terribly great fighting man, Cobalt, but your heart is not so hard as you make out. It does make a difference to you! Particularly when you know that it's a friend of yours."

"Ah?" said Cobalt. "And what do you mean by that?"

"A friend whose life you've saved, and who has saved yours. That's what I mean," said Sylvia.

Cobalt stood up at last and gave me such a look as no man receives twice from another.

"You mean Chalmers?" said he.

"Yes," said Sylvia. "That's whom I mean."

I could not speak. I wish to heaven that I could have spoken. It would have meant all the difference afterward.

I could only stand there mute, like a fool, with a ringing in my ears that came from the thunderstrokes of my heart.

BUT I heard the voice of Cobalt speaking, and the sound of it was wooden and dead, saying: "Well, that's right, Sylvia. You've picked out the right club.

It's the only club in the world that would have stopped me, I suppose. But you've stopped me now. I'll go out and get a little air."

He went past us, three standing lay figures, and the door closed gently behind him.

Baird recovered himself before I did. He was greatly excited and, going up to Sylvia, he caught her by the hands and shook them, not in congratulation, but with a vigorous impatience.

"Did you honestly mean it, Sylvia? Was it only a ruse?" he asked her.

She nodded her head. She had the look of a sleepwalker.

"Yes, I meant it," said she.

Baird seemed to feel that he could get no more out of her. He turned back on me, crying: "How long has this been going on? What's been between the two of you?"

I made a helpless gesture. My brain was still spinning.

"I don't know anything about it," said I. "She's flirted with me a little. She'd flirt with a wooden Indian, for lack of something better. But I never knew that she cared a rap. I still don't think she does."

"I do," said Sylvia. "But I've been shameless. I haven't asked if you care a rap about me, Tommy."

"This is the most extraordinary thing that I've ever heard of," said Baird. "You mean that Tom Chalmers hasn't spoken to you, and yet you talk like that to Cobalt?"

"Do you want to call Cobalt back?" she asked him.

He threw up both his hands.

"Great heavens, no! Let him stay away. I'd rather have you committed to the arms of an avalanche than to see you married to that man. But Chalmers—why, he's older, he's married, he has children."

"He's only thirty-two," said the girl. "He has a pair of darling youngsters. Don't you think that I'll be glad to have them for mine and mother them?"

"I'm beaten!" said Baird. "I don't know what to think or to say."

"Don't you think or say a thing," said she. "Let water run downhill. That's the best way. Tommy, you tell me, and let father hear. Do you think you can come to care about me?"

She came across the room toward me. I stepped behind a chair. At that she stopped. She let her head fall a little on one side. Her great blue eyes were soft with a sort of despair.

"You don't want me, Tommy. Is that it?" she said.

"Look here, Sylvia," said I. "You know mighty well what I mean."

"I'm going to get out of here," said Baird.

"You stay right where you are," I called after him.

HE turned at the door and looked back. "I don't want to interfere in your private affairs with Sylvia," he said. "I can't stay here."

"You can, though," said I. "I want you to stay long enough to explain why you're in a sweat."

"I've heard and seen enough in the last five minutes to make an Egyptian statue break out in a sweat," he answered.

"Then I'll tell you why you're in a sweat," said I. "You're thinking that I'm nothing but a fellow on the make. A chap with a small bit of money, no great ambitions, and nothing but the hope of running cows on some range land ahead of him. Am I right?"

He came halfway back across the room.

"Oh, talk to him, daddy," said the girl. "Try to persuade him for me. I know that you love Tom!"

"I respect you, Tom," said Baird. "I have an affection for you. You've done a grand thing for me, and for Sylvia, and I realize it. Don't think that I don't. There's no other man in——"

"That's all right," I broke in. "Now let's have the other side."

"You've expressed the other side," said Baird. "I mean, Sylvia is growing up toward another sort of life than what you offer to her."

"You mean," I said, "that you don't want to picture her in the kitchen of a small ranch house, washing dishes and turning around to see that the boiling beans still have enough water on 'em. Is that it?"

"Well, that's about it," said he.

"You see how it is, Sylvia," said I to her.

"All of this has nothing to do with it," said that girl. "You have to tell me whether you care about me, or not."

"You're wrong again," I told her. "You know that every man in the world who has seen you cares about you, either as the thief cared for the emerald or as something he wants for a real wife. I care for you in both ways, somewhat. You know that I do. But I'm afraid of you. Besides, you'd always be in second place in my home."

"Is there some one else?" asked Sylvia.

"There's my dead wife," said I.

Baird muttered: "This is too painful! I'm going out. Sylvia, perhaps you'd better talk about this another time?"

"We'll talk it out now," said Sylvia, "if Tom doesn't mind."

"Go on," said I. "I'm glad to talk it out and have it done with."

"I swear," said Sylvia, "that I

never would be jealous of her poor, kind ghost."

I shook my head.

"But I would always be making comparisons. You're ten times cleverer than she was," I said. "And you're a thousand times more beautiful. But she was as clear as crystal. You take a mountain spring, Sylvia; it may not be very big and it may not be very important, but almost anybody could sit a day and look down at the water bubbling and listen to its song."

"You mean," said she, "that I'm complicated? I'm really not. A little play-acting—I'll wipe that out, if you want."

TO change you would be to spoil you," I told her. And I think that I was right. "Great Scott, Sylvia, to kiss the tips of your fingers would be joy enough to make me giddy. That's all very well. But I see the truth of this situation. You've only used me to shunt poor Cobalt away. You'd—by heaven, now I think that I see the truth!"

"What is it?" asked Sylvia.

"Stand away from me, then," said I. "When you're so close, Sylvia, I begin to forget everything. I can't think. But isn't this true? There's another man you like a lot better than you like me."

"I? Nonsense!" said she.

"There is," said I. "Confess it!"

"You're an odd man, Tommy," she replied, with a shadow in her eyes. "But you know, Tom, I think if we lived together we would each grow to love more and more. I've never met any one so gentle and understanding as you are."

"Thank you," said I. "But now, look here! Suppose that I name the other man for you, the man you like better, but are afraid of."

"Stuff!" said Sylvia, but she went back a step from me and seemed alarmed.

"I saw it in your face a while ago," I declared. "I saw it when you stood yonder and parted the smoke and looked down into his face. You're afraid that he's too great a force; that he'd dash you around the world, you don't know where. You'd rather dodge him and attach yourself to me, because I'm harmless, and because, somehow, Cobalt won't persecute you so long as you're with me. But Cobalt is the man you love. Stand there and honestly tell me whether I'm right or wrong?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SYLVIA GOES NATIVE.

I CANNOT tell, exactly, how the idea came popping into my brain. Perhaps it was the memory of a certain curious tenderness that I had seen in her face as she stood before Cobalt. I was continually studying her expression. Her words mostly told you nothing. Sometimes they would be expressing only the shadow of the real truth about her and, when that thought came leaping into my mind, I threw it at her. The result was a shock to me and to Baird.

For Sylvia, the keen, clever, invincible Sylvia, who all her life had done exactly as she pleased, who was strong by nature and strong by habit of thought, no matter how delicately she disguised her power of brain, this Sylvia now looked rather wildly about her, and then she ran to her father and, like any tiny child, threw herself into his arms and began to sob and sway and tremble with a passionate grief.

The great White Wolf came out of the corner in which he had denned himself all this time and

crouched near by, studying the situation, trying to make out whether or not the girl was being attacked and ready to cut the throat of the attacker.

That was a picture and a thing to hear as well, what with the wild sobbing of Sylvia, and the voice of the storm wind that was mourning outside.

I started out of the room, tiptoeing.

But Baird stopped me.

"You'd better stay here and see this thing through with us," he said. "You've qualified, I'd say, as a sort of second father to her, Tom. You've seen through her as I never would have."

I stopped, of course.

Sylvia left her father's arms and went over and threw herself on the bed. There she lay still shaken by her sobbing. Baird wanted to go to her, but I held onto him.

"Don't you go," said I in a whisper. "She's having it out with herself. There's a pack of wild cats screeching and clawing in her just about now."

He mopped his wet face and grunted; but he took my advice.

The storm in her ended. The sobbing ceased; she lay still for a moment; and then she got up and went to the washstand. I poured some water into the bowl. While she washed her face, lifting the icy water in her cupped hands and holding it a long moment in place, I picked a towel off the rack and gave it to her to dry with. Then I got a cup of coffee for her.

She sat down at the table and reached blindly for me, giving my hand a squeeze. Baird stood by as one who looks from a distance on a strange happening.

At last the tremors left her and the cup of coffee was finished.

"I wish that I smoked," said Sylvia. "I wish that I smoked! That would be comfortable now! I'm going to learn."

SHE never would, I knew. She never would foul her hands with yellow or stain her lips with tar and nicotine.

"You talk, father," she said. "You suggest what we should do."

Poor Baird remained standing, stock-still. Now he shook his head.

"You know, Sylvia," he said, "that there's not much in me that can be useful for you in the way of advice. I've never really understood you."

"Oh, that's why I've always loved you so," said Sylvia. "You try, Tommy."

"I think that Cobalt ought to be in on this," said I.

"No!" she cried out, hoarsely.

I was astonished and shocked by her vehemence.

She went on: "You're tired, Tommy, or you wouldn't suggest that, since you've seen so much. You know that I've been hypnotized by Cobalt from the first. But I feel that it's merely hypnosis and, if ever I belonged to him, some terrible thing would happen. I think of him as one might think of murder!"

I stood up and said that I was going to bed. My poor brain was not worth a rap, it was so befogged. So I went to the door and got to the room which Baird and I occupied.

He followed me in just as I covered up as warmly as I could. Both in brain and body, all the strength was washed out of me.

"She wants to be alone," said Baird. "I don't know why. I wish to Heaven that I could see a way out of this. But I can't. There are too many threads. While we strug-

gle with our own little problems, we forget that we're all caught in the spider's web, Soapy and his Skagway gang. That would be enough by itself, but with this other thing added—I don't know, not unless Cobalt himself breaks the web!"

I shook my head. Sleep was coming over my mind like dark clouds in a sky.

"He can't do that," I remember saying. "Not even Cobalt can do that. One man, two men, even half a dozen. Yes, he could handle them. But this is different. Here you have something extra. Here you have Soapy and his cohorts. And there is that smiling young demon, that Jess Fair."

"The bartender with the buck teeth?" said Baird. "What of him?"

"Oh, you'll hear of him before the wind-up," I remember muttering. And then blessed sleep came over me, as rain comes over a dry land.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BUCKING THE THUGS.

I SHOULD have been there, though I have heard accounts from so many eyewitnesses of all that happened that my absence hardly matters. After all, I could not have been inside the brains of those who were in action. And every word, look, gesture, intonation has been mentioned to me, I'm sure, at one time or another. For what did Skagway have to think about afterward? What else was there to talk about?

At any rate, there is no use crying over spilled milk. I was asleep when the crash came. I was up there in my room, sound asleep, and poor Baird was in the room, also, softly cursing my snoring, but too sympathetic to awaken me.

I slept and dreamed of Sylvia, of

course. Her delicate grace, as I remember, I found turned into a beautiful painting—all the life of her transformed into a brilliant shadow by the Grace of the Powers of this world who wanted to preserve her as she was forever, never aging, undying.

While I dreamed, Cobalt was in the street.

When he got to the entrance of the hotel, he paused for a moment in the doorway and looked over the men who were lounging there. They were chattering, laughing, joking. When they saw him, they were silent. For Skagway knew Cobalt by this time, you may be sure! The latest comers and the oldest dwellers knew all about him. He had split open the mind of the town and put a new picture inside of it, so that the murders and the robberies of Soapy's gang were no longer the only important themes of current news to be gossiped over.

One of the men by the stove said: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Cobalt, but is it true——"

"Not 'mister,'" said Cobalt. "I never wear a title, man. This is a little too far north for titles."

He went out into the street without waiting for the other man to complete his remark. I suppose it would have been a question about one of Cobalt's famous feats on the inside.

There in the street, where the wind howled and beat, Cobalt was seen to stride up and down for some time. What was going through his wild brain at that time? Well, I suppose that it was the same theme that filled my poor brain as I slept, beautiful Sylvia. Perhaps he had a few thoughts for me, also. I dare say, he must have wondered how she could give herself to an unimportant chap like me, a comparative

weakling. It must have been the bitterest gall to him. A sense of vast defeat, too, must have been in his mind. He had never failed before, when he bent all his will to the work. But now he had failed miserably.

I don't know what he would have done, if chance had not given a direction to his misery. As he walked through the cold, driving mist of the storm, he heard a groaning, cursing voice ahead and a big man came stalking through the dimness, walking with uneven strides.

COBALT listened, drinking in the sound of another's sorrow. Then he took the other by the arm. "What's the matter?" he asked.

The big man cursed him and tried to shake him off. Of course, he merely shook himself, not Cobalt.

"What's the matter?" said Cobalt.

"Get your hand off me," shouted the big man, all his grief turning into rage, and he raised a big fist to strike.

Cobalt picked the fist out of the air and pulled it down.

"Now tell me, what's the matter?" said he.

The other grunted.

"It's Cobalt," he said. "I didn't know you in the whip of the wind. Aw, it's nothing, Cobalt. They've trimmed me. That's all. Not much. I had a hundred ounces. It ain't a fortune. But it was all that I brought out with me."

"Soapy?" said Cobalt.

"Yeah. Who but him?"

"One of the crooked machines? You gambled on 'em?"

"I started. I wasn't losing fast enough. They rolled me. They soaked me and rolled me for my wad. That's all. It happens every day."

"It's too bad," said Cobalt.

"It ain't the money," said the stranger. "It's me being such a fool. That's what grides on me. Look at me! Forty-eight. Born with nacheral good sense. Now, see what's happened to me. I'll have to go back inside. And I'd rather walk into fire and brimstone."

"Why not go another place for your money?" said Cobalt.

"Hey? What?"

"Why not make a shorter trip to get your dust?" said Cobalt.

"I dunno what you mean."

"Go to those who have it now. That's a shorter trip than Dawson or Circle City."

The stranger laughed.

"I'm to go in and ask them for it, eh?" he asked.

"Why not?"

"Nothing wrong with that, except that I'd just get rolled again," said the tall man.

"Everybody gets rolled a few times in his life," said Cobalt. "Let's go back and see what happens."

"In Soapy's place?" gasped the other.

"Why, where else? Come along. We'll both ask for it. Two hands are better than one."

"By thunder, I see what you mean," said the robbed man. "But I'll tell you what. You have nerve to do anything, but I haven't. I've had enough of Soapy Jones and his gang. I like life pretty well. That's all. I won't go in there again!"

YOU don't know yourself," persuaded Cobalt. "The fact is that you're aching to get back in there and hand 'em some talk. Tell 'em that they don't play fair. Tell 'em anything surprising and new!"

The other laughed.

"You're a card, Cobalt," he admitted. "There's nobody like you."

"Come on, then," said Cobalt. "You come back with me and I'll get your money for you."

"What!"

"I mean it."

"Get my money away from those men?"

"I'll get your money for you, or I'll die trying," said Cobalt.

That was enough. That old-timer thought of his hundred ounces, he told me afterward, and he thought of nothing else. He turned right around and down the storm-swept street he went with Cobalt. They came to the door of Soapy's place, pushed it open, and entered.

Of course it was packed. Weather like that would have sent people to any hole, for the sake of the warmth alone. Besides, as I have said before, the people of Skagway never got tired of gratifying their curiosity and showing their courage by going into Soapy's den.

I said it was packed. As a matter of fact, the majority of the people were in the gaming rooms. The bar was not at all crowded; and Jess Fair was not attending it. He was enjoying a rest, a thing he allowed himself for only a few hours every day. Men said that he loved nothing in life except to stand there behind the long bar, peddle the drinks and look into the faces of the customers with his pale, expressionless eyes.

It was another matter, after the new pair entered—the big fellow and Cobalt. They got at a corner table with a couple of chairs and there they sat.

"We'll warm up a little, before we start talking," said Cobalt. "What's your name?"

"Joe Porter."

"All right, Joe. We'll warm up a little, and then we'll begin to argue with them."

"If there's any talk to be done," said Joe Porter, "why shouldn't we do it now, before the place gets crowded?"

"It's crowded now," said Cobalt, as cool as you please. "That fellow with the yellow face in the corner—that half-breed, or whatever he is—he's one of the bouncers. And he's a crowd in himself, if I'm any judge of some of the bulges under his clothes. There's another bouncer at the bar, and two more beside the door. They're all full of guns. Do you pack a gun yourself, brother?"

"I've got an old bull-nosed .44," said Joe Porter. "But I ain't much with it, and I don't aim to use it unless I have to. Self-defense, or something like that!"

"Well," said Cobalt. "Seventeen hundred dollars is part of yourself. You'd be defending that!"

Joe Porter rubbed his knuckles through his beard.

"Are you gonna make a fight out of this, Cobalt?" said he.

"There may be a little fighting," said Cobalt.

THEN I dive for the floor," said Porter. "I ain't no hero. I'm for the safest place, and the floor's the safest." Cobalt laughed.

"You're all right, Joe," said he. "I like a man who speaks his mind."

"The crowd's thickening up a good deal," said poor Porter, not relishing his position a bit.

The word had gone instantly through the place that Cobalt was there and, of course, that was enough to bring people with a rush. They came swarming in from the gaming rooms. They thronged before the bar and every one of them had his

eye upon Cobalt and Cobalt's rough-looking companion. I suppose that crowd was as hard a looking lot as ever gathered into one room.

"Do you see the fellow who rolled you?" asked Cobalt of his companion.

Porter took off his hat and rubbed his head. There was a great lump on the top of it, where he had been slugged.

"Over there," said he. "That fellow with the Stetson hat on, the pale-gray hat and the skinny face. He's the one, I guess, that done it."

"Are you only guessing?" said Cobalt.

"Well, I had a drink or two on board," said Porter.

"We'll try to find out," stated Cobalt. "Hello, friend!"

He signaled to the man in the Stetson, and the latter turned slowly toward the table.

He was a man of middle height with a wizened, evil face. I have seen him myself, and his hands, his mouth, the very whites of his eyes were tobacco-stained.

"Yes?" said he to Cobalt.

"Partner," said Cobalt pleasantly, "sit down with us and have a drink, will you?"

The yellow-stained man hesitated a moment. I have often wondered whether fear or courage made him accept the invitation, since he must have seen Porter sitting there as big as life, ready to accuse him.

But up he came and down he sat, signaling to a boy to bring on the drinks. And they had a round of them. Cobalt turned his drink around and around. He did not taste it. The other turned down his glass in a moment.

He coughed.

"The stuff's wildfire!" said he.

"Yes. It gets into the brain, all

right," said Cobalt. "What's your name, partner?"

"Name of Louis Trainor," says the thug.

"Let me introduce a friend of mine," says Cobalt. "This is Joe Porter. Porter, Mr. Louis Trainor."

The two looked at one another, without shaking hands.

"I guess we've met," said Porter.

"I guess I've seen you somewhere," said the thug.

"It wasn't my hand you shook," said Porter.

"No?"

"No, it was my head that you knocked on and my poke you entered," said Porter.

COBALT laughed. The thug followed his lead, and laughed in turn. "I don't know what he's talking about," he explained to Cobalt.

"That's a pity," said Cobalt. "Maybe your pockets will remember, though."

"What?" said Louis Trainor.

"Maybe your pockets will remember," said Cobalt again. "Turn them out and let's see what's in them."

Louis Trainor was not a fool, and he was not a coward. His hands twitched once, and then they remained still, on the edge of the table. His eye shrank from the steady gaze of Cobalt and wandered, first, to the right and then to the left, with significant glances.

"You help him," said Cobalt to Porter. "You see that he is feeling pretty tired and doesn't want to budge his hands from the edge of the table. One would think that he even felt it was dangerous to move those hands. So you just dip into his pockets for him, will you?"

Porter, grinning, half frightened, surveyed the crowd around them. Every one was interested, but no

one seemed inclined to interfere. The whole thing had been so soft-voiced that no one of the spectators could be actually sure of what was taking place.

But they began to suspect when they saw Porter go through the pockets and up the sleeves of Trainor.

He pulled out of them a queer heap of things.

From a breast pocket of the coat, he took a handkerchief with a moistened corner and a red-and-blue chemical crayon for marking cards. From a side coat pocket, he took a slung shot with an elastic wristband. From the belt of Louis Trainor he removed two knives, one a regular bowie, the other a slender sailor's dirk. He also got from Trainor a deck of cards, probably already prepared to be slipped in the place of an honest deck. He took out a good revolver, .32 caliber. Trainor, in his shooting, apparently did not wish to strike heavy blows, but deadly ones.

Porter found, finally, a gold belt strapped about the waist of the thug.

In it, there was a considerable quantity of dust. Cobalt weighed it with his hand.

"About forty ounces in this," he said. "Where's the other sixty, Trainor? Did the house take all that for a commission, or did you split a part of it with your pals?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Trainor.

He looked wildly about him and savagely. The crowd was half laughing and half growling. The pile of crooked implements on the table was a sufficient comment upon the character of Trainor, and even a complete thug has some scruples of conscience about seeing himself exposed.

"You go up and invite me to sit down here," said Trainor, "and you order up drinks, and then——"

"And then I take a look at you," said Cobalt, "and I think your lining will be more interesting than your exterior. And I seem to be right."

"I'll get your——"

"If you stir those hands," said Cobalt, almost under his breath, "I'll take you and break you in two! Now listen to me. I want to learn what you did with the other sixty ounces. You got those forty from this fellow, didn't you? You're the one who rapped him over the head and rolled him for his wad, aren't you?"

He was so quiet that Trainor looked at him twice before he understood that there was a tiger, and not a man, sitting there before him at the table.

He moistened his stained lips, and then he said:

"I rapped him. I wish I'd smashed his skull in for him. I slugged the fool and I rolled him. And——"

He hesitated, and then he went on, seeing the danger in Cobalt's face:

"I got twenty ounces. Twenty went to my side-kicker. Sixty went to the house. It's a hog!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SHOW-DOWN IN SIGHT.

WE'LL take the forty ounces for security," said Cobalt, after he had heard the confession of the yegg. "And then we'll look to the house for the rest. That sounds fair, doesn't it?"

Trainor said nothing, for the good reason that there was nothing to say. He got up suddenly and walked off into the crowd, leaving

his crooked implements behind him on the table. Men sneered at him and shouldered him as he passed, for his villainy had been too clearly exposed. He would never again be a useful member of any gaming house in the Northland.

He pressed through, regardless of the looks and hard words that he got from all sides. In the farthest corner, he found a bouncer and said to him: "What's your job? To stand around and watch holdups in the shop?"

"You dirty crook," said the bouncer pleasantly, "I wish that I'd had the picking of your pockets myself. What do I care what happens to you in this shop? It's happening to you, and not to the shop. It's just another act to keep the show running good and smooth. Don't stick out your jaw at me, or I'll bust it for you!"

"You know the chief wants us to pull together," Trainor said to him.

"The best thing that the chief could do," said the bouncer, "would be to slam you out into the street. You're no good. You're a spoiled egg in this house, from now on."

Trainor regarded him wickedly, but seemed to see that there was something of truth in what he had heard. Therefore, he walked on. He tried another bouncer, with the same results.

Finally he saw that there was nothing to be gained directly from others. He said to a third of these fighting men: "Bill, lemme have the loan of a gun, will you?"

"So you can use it or so you can hock it?" said Bill.

"So I can use it," said Trainor.

"Well, all right," said Bill. "It ain't nature for me to keep a man out of a fight if I see a good way of getting him into it. Here's a gat. Go and use it, but use it good. That

gun has told the truth to four men in its day."

"I'll use it like an angel, and no mistake," replied Trainor, and he turned to make good his promise.

He was the cornered rat, now, ready to show his teeth. But as he turned toward the table at which big Joe Porter and Cobalt had been sitting, other things were happening in the room.

I have often wondered and often asked how it was that Cobalt was able to sit in that room so long before an attack was made upon him. I have often asked, but the answer was always a mere conjecture. Probably, in a case of such importance, the bouncers wanted an order directly from Soapy, or from his lieutenant, Jess Fair.

As soon as Trainor left the table, Cobalt singled out a lanky fellow with a sour, dignified look. You could not tell whether his pride was mostly nature or simply a stiff neck. Cobalt called him over, and the fellow came, suspiciously. He was not one to let himself be trapped, as Trainor had been trapped, by getting within the reach of those famous and terrible hands of Cobalt.

INSTEAD, he paused at a little distance. And the crowd gave suddenly, back to a good distance. For this looked like a gun play. They got so completely out of the way that Cobalt could talk to this ruffian without much danger of being overheard.

"You're Booze Gabriel, aren't you?" said Cobalt.

"Yeah. There's some that call me that," said Booze.

"You're the finest fighting man that Soapy has, they tell me. The finest fighting man in Skagway. Is that right?"

"Are you aiming to kid me?" asked Booze. "D'you think that I rate myself along with Jess Fair?"

"Oh, Jess is in a class by himself," said Cobalt, with a wave of his hand, indicating the exception. "I was meaning, among the regular run. They tell me that you're one of the best."

"I ain't here to brag," said Booze Gabriel. "What are you driving at, Cobalt? Is it me that you want to break up next?"

What a curious thing it must have been to see Cobalt there in that saloon surrounded by enough guns to blow him off the earth and out of all recognition. Yet, he could pick a man out of the crowd and make even the hired ruffians come to his call!

"Will you sit down and liquor with us?" asked Cobalt.

"No. This is my day for standing," said Gabriel, with a great, stretching grin that suddenly made him look like a wolf. "I ain't sitting down to-day."

"All right," said Cobalt, "maybe you can make a better speech standing up. A lot of the greatest orators like to be standing, I suppose."

"What kind of a speech am I going to make?" asked Booze Gabriel.

"You're going to tell me what's what about Soapy Jones."

"Oh, I am, am I?" drawled Gabriel.

"You are," went on Cobalt. "I've heard a lot of rot about him, since I came to Skagway. A lot of people say that you boys throw in with him partly because you're afraid to stay out, and partly because of the money that you make working for him."

"And what's your idea about that?" asked Booze, cautiously trying out his man.

"My idea," says Cobalt frankly, "is that you all know down in your

boots that Soapy is one man in a million."

"You're right. He's one man in ten million," said Booze Gabriel emphatically.

"And that's why you stay on with him. Thuggery isn't all the truth about him. What is the truth, Booze?"

"Why," said Gabriel, "this here talk is takin' a kind of a strange turn, which I would like to say that Soapy Jones ain't wearin' his right moniker. I ain't tellin' nothing. I'm only saying that Soapy ain't wearin' the true moniker that belongs to him."

"Of course, he's not," said Cobalt. "He wouldn't hurt his family. He wouldn't drag them down by letting the weight of his reputation fall on their necks."

"No, he wouldn't," said Booze Gabriel, straightening a little. "The fact is that Soapy's a gentleman, and don't you make no mistake."

"That's not the mistake that I'm making," said Cobalt.

SUDDENLY, he laughed. The whole crowd could hear him say: "Great Scott, Booze, would I be here if I didn't know that Soapy's a gentleman?"

That was a poser for them. They looked at Cobalt, and they looked at Gabriel, then at one another. Soapy Jones, a gentleman? That was a new conception, to be sure!

Cobalt went on developing his theme: "The fact is, Booze, that a gentleman once is a gentleman always. That's the point, isn't it?"

"You bet it's the point," said Booze Gabriel. "And I've known Soapy——"

He stopped himself.

"All right," said Cobalt, "you've known him for years, haven't you? And you've always known what he

is, at heart. And that's why you're with him. Am I right?"

"Of course, you're right!" said Booze Gabriel.

"And that's why I'm sitting here in his saloon," said Cobalt. "Because I trust him."

That was about as odd a speech as ever was heard in Skagway. It stunned the crowd that listened. A stir and a murmur passed through the listeners, hearing, as they thought, that Cobalt was making overtures to the master criminal of the town. For I think that most of the law-abiding had begun to hope that Cobalt, out of the greatness of his strength, might provide the rock on which Soapy was at last to split.

"You're here because you trust him," echoed Booze Gabriel, not comprehending at all.

"Of course, I am," says Cobalt. "It's because I know a gentleman's reactions. He may tap a few fools on the head, here and there—not referring to you, Porter—and he may slip a knife into somebody's gizzard, from time to time. He may mark a card and he may put a brake on a roulette wheel. But his instincts are right when it comes to a pinch. So I came in here with my friend Porter. I want to talk to Mr. Jones. I know he will realize that the time has come for him to step out in person. Another day, he might send one of his agents, to speak to another man. But the time has come when I have to see him face to face, and he has to see me. We both know it."

He pointed.

People suddenly turned their heads toward the farther doorway, expecting something to appear at once.

"I know," said Cobalt, "that he won't even come into the room behind me. He'll come through that

doorway, so that we can face one another as gentlemen should."

Booze Gabriel began to straighten and his color brightened, as well. I believe it was a fact that he was long devoted to Soapy. There were others of the gang, like Jess Fair, who had followed Soapy for years, with a strange fascination.

"I'll tell you what," said Gabriel, "my boss will meet any one, any time, on his own level. Are you asking to meet Soapy now?"

"That's what I'm asking," said Cobalt.

"All right," said Gabriel. "I'm gonna go and tell him so!"

AND he turned on his heel, briskly, smartly, like a soldier, and marched out of the room, the crowd making way for him.

Said Joe Porter, softly: "You ain't gonna do it, Cobalt?"

"No?" said Cobalt. "Why not?"

"If you do, you're a dead man," said Porter.

"How's that?" asked Cobalt.

"You're dead on two counts. One is that Soapy himself is a regular wizard with guns. They say that he's as slick, almost, as Jess Fair,

when it comes to pulling a Colt and using it, front end or back. And the second count is, even if you drop Soapy, his boys will load you full of lead afterward! You can't get past those two counts!"

"Perhaps I can't," said Cobalt, "but I'm going to try."

"You ain't!" urged Porter. "You're going to get out of here, and you're going to get quick!"

Cobalt merely smiled on him.

"You're a dead man otherwise!" said Porter. "And I'll have you on my conscience all the rest of my days!"

"I'm nothing to have on your conscience," Cobalt is reported by Porter to have said. "If I live or if I die, there's nothing much to have on your conscience, Porter. Life's not a song to me. The taste has gone out of it!"

Porter argued no longer. He sank back in his chair and sat there, rigidly, waiting.

And when he looked around the room, he saw that everybody else in the place was waiting in the same manner and that all realized, like him, that the show-down between Cobalt and Soapy Jones was about to follow.

A deadly fight between two perfectly matched men! And the saloon crowd getting creepy and dizzy while they wait for Soapy and drink their grog!

Who would miss it?

A FATAL ERROR

WHILE a grebe, one of our swimming birds, was hunting for a river upon which to alight in Sequoia National Park, California, not long ago, he suddenly spied what to him looked like a fine quiet stream with smooth and pleasant banks. The grebe swooped down upon what he expected to be the surface of the water. But alas he skidded cruelly onto a wet, hard highway.

Badly bruised, the bird was picked up by kind park employees who gave it every care within their power. In spite of this, however, the grebe died a few days later, and thus, like so many humans, had to pay with his very life for one silly little mistake.



COLD BLOOD

By GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN

Author of "Quicksilver And Toby," etc.

I WASN'T born like these hot-blooded colts in a padded box stall, with clean straw on the floor and a half dozen horse cuffers standing around with blankets and hot-water bottles, ready to ease me from the temperature of my mother's body into the world. I got dumped on the grass and when I'd sneezed a few times I tried to get up to see what had happened and how much of this world I could grab for myself.

From the time I can remember getting my first drink of warm milk from my mother, I've had to scrap in order to get along. At first, it was to keep from falling down while I sucked. My legs were so long for my body that I had to brace them, so that I looked like a queer little sawbuck, and when I attempted to

move I tumbled over on the grass and lay still for quite a while.

My mother didn't seem in the least worried about me. She grazed on the rich, sweet grass in the little park just below timber line, where she had gone when she knew I was coming.

I liked the feel of the sun on my body, and so I lay still and got my first lesson in having to fight living things. Two black-and-white birds floated down from a near-by tree. They had long black bills and shiny green necks, and they began to pick at the soft jellylike substance of my little hoofs. For the first time I saw my mother angry. She trotted over to me, her ears laid back on her neck, her teeth flashing. The magpies flew away and mother stood over me, switching at the flies and

pretending to be asleep until the two cruel birds got tired of waiting and left.

ADVENTURE for a range colt begins about one day after he is born. By that time I could walk without tipping over, unless my legs got tangled up or I stumbled over a log. My first fright came from a mother grouse I found in the bushes with a lot of tiny little balls of down around her. She flew, squawking, into my face and looking so fierce with her feathers all ruffled up that I ran to my mother and stayed there until I felt more courageous.

Mother had to watch close against the magpies that came circling about. Later I learned, if they can eat off the soft hoofs of a newborn colt, that the little animal will die, which is what the birds want.

For a week we stayed in the park, then my mother led me by easy stages down a long grassy slope to where there were a lot more mares and colts, some not any older than I.

The leader of the band was a great black stallion called Nero, and I was proud when I saw that my coat was exactly like his. Up till now my adventures had been only those that any colt might have had, but that day I saw something that impressed upon me the danger of straying far from the herd.

The mares were grazing in a little park below a rim rock. We colts were playing near by when suddenly a great yellow beast came sneaking out of the woods straight toward us. I was so scared that I couldn't move, even when the older colts went screaming to their mothers. I just stood there and gazed in horror at those awful fiery eyes and those terrible lips drawn back over white fangs. It's the loss of power to

move at such a time that makes colts easier for the mountain lions to catch than calves or even fawns.

I guess I was charmed like a bird that can see only the glittering eyes of a snake. Anyway, I hardly realized that the dark form that flashed past me was my father, old Nero, until I saw the cat spring high in the air with his feet all spread out, and then drop back to light on Nero's back with his sharp teeth fastened in my father's neck, and the long sharp claws of the lion tearing great strips of hide loose with every stroke.

It sure looked like the lion had it all his own way, and probably with any other horse than Nero he would have, too, but Nero had fought and killed lions before, and instead of trying to buck the big cat off, as an ordinary horse would have done, he dashed under the overhanging boughs of a big spruce.

The lion shut his eyes and hung on, in spite of the tearing and raking of the limbs, but before he could get a good hold again, Nero threw himself on the ground and rolled over. The lion, forced to get away or be crushed, sprang light as a thistle-down high in the air out of danger and then dashed in again with ears laid back and a scream that made me tremble all over.

The lion tried for Nero's throat, but only gave my father a long, ugly cut on the side of his neck. That miss was the last one for the lion. As he alighted on the ground, Nero's right foot flashed down and struck the lion a blow, the sound of which I have never forgotten.

WHEW, what a fright that was! And how scared we all were when Nero left off pounding the lion's carcass on the ground and came to where we were

all huddled beside our mothers. We didn't leave that park for a long time. Nero got awfully thin and there were great white streaks on his side and back where the lion's claws had raked and the poison had caused infection.

It was about a week after the fight with the lion that I first saw a man, and I was nearly as afraid of him as I was now of lions. He was with another man and they sat on their horses for a long time, looking at us and talking in their funny way, pointing at us with their front feet and making a noise such as my mother makes when she wants me to come.

I kept my mother's body between me and the men, even when they kept riding around trying to get a look at me. From the first, I seemed to know that these creatures were the ones that would bring the most suffering and pain into my life.

"He'll be a tornado on wheels, Slim," one of the men said. "He ought to be taken in to the ranch and handled while he's young. Let him run wild until he's three and I wouldn't want the job of breaking him."

"We can't drive the band in now," the other man answered. "Nero is all cut up from his fuss with a tree cat. It wouldn't do to move him now."

"Yeah, you're right at that," the first man said, "but, believe me, that black colt will have all of Nero's fightin' qualities, together with the meanness of a broncho mother, and I never saw a colt from that buckskin mare yet that wasn't a mixture of dynamite and snake poison."

So, before I was a month old, I had the name of being bad, and as soon as I got old enough to understand I lived up to the reputation.

That winter we went down low

in the foothills where the snow was not very deep, and in the spring while we were all too weak and poor to care much what happened to us, a lot of men riding grain-fed horses, well shod, rode into the piñons and hazed us out into the open country.

About fifty colts were cut out of the band and put in a little pasture, and that was the last I was to see of Nero or my mother for a long time.

I went clear around the pasture, trying to find a hole I could crawl through or a low place I could jump, but that fence might have been one of the rim rocks above the back range as far as I was concerned. Next day was one of the worst ones of my life and the one I remember most clearly. We were driven into a corral where the smell of blood and hair made me sick with fear. We all went crazy and tore our hides against the fence as we rushed about trying to dodge the awful ropes that hissed above our heads.

I saw Blaze, a colt I had played with ever since I could remember, jerked to the ground, and heard his cries and moans as the hot irons seared his flesh. Once I started to go in and help him, but a man hit me over the head with a rope and my ears hurt so that I couldn't force my body any nearer.

"Get the black, Pedro," a man yelled, and then that awful rope tightened about my neck.

I SET back against it, but the more I pulled, the tighter it gripped my throat. The air whistled through my nostrils and I opened my mouth, struggling to get a bit of air into my lungs. The sides of the corral tipped up like a cake of ice I stepped on one time when we were fording the river, and I found myself flat on the ground,

with a man on my neck, twisting my nose up in the air.

My feet were pulled tight by another rope, and all I could do was to fan the air with my hind feet, which did no more harm than a grouse beating its wings. I could breathe now, and what a joy it was to pull in great gulps of cool air. For a minute I lay still. Then, as terrible pains shot through my shoulder, I strained on the footrope and bumped my head on the ground. Something inside of me surged up and almost made me scream, but I snapped my jaws shut and put all I had into holding them tight so that these men who were torturing me should not know how near they had come to conquering me, if that was what they wanted.

"What a horse he'll make!" a man said to the brown-faced one who held my head. "See, he never squealed when the iron bit into his shoulder. If he's broke right, he'll be worth a hundred dollars when he's three years old."

This man's voice was different from the others, and there was something in it that seemed familiar. It made me think of the strong, silent mountains with the morning sun just breaking against them, but the snarl of the brown-faced man was like that of a cowardly coyote I had once seen with a foot fast in a trap.

"He will always be broncho, Señor Thorne," the man they called Pedro answered. "It is one bad mixture of bloods, that of the fighting stallion, Nero, and that of the mare, Comanche Kate."

"Nonsense," answered the man with the pleasant voice. "If he's handled right he'll be worth a dozen mild-mannered colts. Put him in the little pasture and I'll gentle him myself."

I was too weak from pain and

fright to do anything but walk away from that awful place as far as I could toward a shady part of the pasture where I saw two big horses lazily switching at the flies. There was a stream of fine water bubbling down through an aspen grove, and ferns and columbines were scattered about, but I hardly noticed the things that until now I had loved.

Instead of the warm blood that had always tingled through my veins, I was full of the poison of hatred. If only I were as big and strong as Nero, I would watch for a chance, and how I would love to feel the flesh of Pedro torn in pieces by my jaws, or sinking under the blows of my feet! Even then, while my body still ached from the strain and burning, I did not hate Thorne. It was the brown-faced man, Pedro, I wanted to kill.

No one bothered me during the next few days. The grass in the pasture was sweet and good. Birds I had never seen before sang in the willows along the stream. At first I was terribly lonely for my mother and the colts of Nero's band, but I didn't cry or wear myself out running around the pasture. I seemed to know it was no use to attempt to get away, and gradually I forgot my hatred of Pedro in my friendship for the two horses that were in the pasture with me.

ONE of them was a gray with a black mane and tail. His name was Chief, and he was nice to me, showed me where the salt ground was and led me to the best grass. Cutter, the rangy sorrel, paid little attention to me. He was always looking off toward the south range as though that was where he wanted to go.

"It's because he's crazy to work cows," Chief told me. "Cutter is

the top cutting horse of the Bar K remuda. Thorne wouldn't sell him for any money."

"What do you do?" I asked.

Chief yawned and slouched over, resting one hind leg. "My job is just roping," he remarked modestly.

"Do you mean you throw those awful things on colts' necks?" I gasped.

"Oh, no," Chief answered. "The men do that and they never use a rope-horse on colts. There's too much danger of breaking their legs. I'm used on cattle." Chief took a long breath and raised his head proudly. "Big stuff, three and four-year-olds. Any horse can hold calves and yearlings."

I spent hours with Chief and learned a lot about the reason for the men doing the things they did. Sometimes in the evenings Thorne would walk out across the pasture, and as soon as Chief or Cutter saw him they would trot to him and put their noses against him and make funny little noises such as my mother used to make when I had been away for a while and came back to her. But I kept as far away as I could and took good care to move on whenever Thorne started toward me.

One morning Pedro came out and drove us into the corral. Pretty soon Thorne came in and put a bridle on Chief. A tall, slim man caught Cutter and they rode away, leaving me all alone. I wasn't tall enough to see over the corral, but I pecked between the poles, and when I saw I was going to lose Chief, the only friend I had, I squealed as loud as I could.

Pedro came out and told me to shut up. Right away I forgot the nice things Chief had told me about men, and I screamed at Pedro like a wild cat. The meanest look I'd

ever seen on any creature's face came on Pedro's. He got a long pole and poked it through the fence, prodding me with it. I struck at the pole with my feet, grabbed it between my jaws and fought it until I was lather all over and so weak from rage that I had to stop.

All the time Pedro kept taunting me, until the sound of his voice was harder to bear than the hurt of the stick. When he saw I couldn't fight any more, Pedro opened the gate, and I was glad to go back to the places I knew in the pasture and rest.

About sundown Chief and Cutter came back. They looked gaunt. There were rings of dust about their eyes and great square patches on their backs where the sweat from under the saddle blankets had dried, but they seemed happy.

"It was a great day, son," Chief told me. "Thorne has bought the Flying M herds and we're to rebrand all the cattle."

CHIEF was full of things that had happened that day and what a wonderful man Thorne was. Cutter, too, had a lot to tell me.

"You should have seen me once," he bragged, "when a Flying M steer broke away from the cut. Slim was riding me and I put him up close beside the steer. Slim reached down and got hold of the steer's tail and dallied it about the saddle horn. I've done this trick before, and when I felt the pull I spurted ahead, and we busted that dogie aplenty hard. You should have heard the cow-boys yell."

I had intended to tell Chief about what Pedro had done to me and ask him why he had been so mean, but Chief was hungry and, as soon as he had told me a little about the ex-

citing day they had had branding cattle, he got busy cropping grass, and I knew he didn't want to be bothered, and the longer I put off talking with Chief about it, the more it came to me to keep still and wait for a chance to even up with Pedro. If I'd only told Chief then, he'd have given me advice that might have changed my whole life and saved me years of suffering.

Chief and Cutter didn't work the next day nor the next, and when I asked Chief why, he said that Thorne was good to his stock and never worked a horse more than two days out of six.

The next time I was driven into the corral I was watching for a chance to get away from being tortured by Pedro, and when Thorne opened the gate to lead Chief out I dodged past him and ran as fast as I could toward the open gate beyond the barns. If I had waited until Thorne or Slim had put their saddles on their horses, I would have been quickly overtaken and roped, but the sense of being free, together with my fear of being tortured by Pedro, made me run faster than I had ever run before.

I paid no attention to where I was going. The only thing I wanted was to go as far as I could as quickly as possible. I ran through the timber and came out into a valley that was strange to me. Being only one year old, my lungs were not fully developed and I found myself hard put to keep my mouth closed and breathe through my nostrils.

I leaned against a tree for a minute and took two or three good, deep pulls through my mouth to ease my aching lungs. Then I dashed on across the valley and up a hill into broken country where great blocks of sandstone had rolled down from the cliffs above, and here I

knew I was safe from any horseman. I lived here among the rocks the rest of the summer, and only when the snow on the high mountains drove the deer down into the piñons was I forced to go lower in order to avoid the mountain lions that followed the deer.

The spring I was two years old came near being my last one, and only a piece of luck saved me. As the snow melted on the foothills, something stirred me to go back into the high mountain where I had been born and hunt for Nero's band. I did not know, now that I was a big, well-shaped young stallion, that I would not be permitted to come into the band where my mother was already caring for another colt.

I TRAVELED at night until I was well beyond the ranch, then I began to seek the high places in the early mornings and late evenings. From here I could see far across the range, and I found many bands of horses and hundreds of cattle. Sometimes I saw riders working among the cattle, but memory of the tortures I had suffered caused me to hide from them. I had learned to turn upwind and keep a sharp lookout for lions and the few timber wolves yet to be found on the high ranges.

The grass was springing up as the snow line drew back, and I put on fat quickly. Except for the longing for my own kind, I was happy enough now, and my lungs had grown so that I was deep-chested and could breathe easily, even on the high peaks above timber line.

One morning I had crossed a ridge and was grazing down toward a little park, when suddenly I caught the scent of the band I had been hunting and ran squealing like a colt, down through the trees. At the

sound of my coming, Nero sent forth a warning whistle, and the mares bunched up in the middle of the open place with the young colts in the center, while Nero, with head held high, came trotting to meet me.

I was running toward him, full of happiness at having found the band, when suddenly his ears flashed back on his neck, his eyes blazed green, and he rushed at me, his great jaws bared and snapping. I was so surprised that he nearly struck me down with his front feet, but I managed to jump to one side and luckily for me got behind a small timberline spruce.

Nero caught on his hind feet and whirled after me, and by now I knew that this was a matter of life and death with me. If I had turned away from the band, Nero would have let me go, but the old impulse to run to my mother when danger threatened, caused me to do the worst thing I possibly could have done, dash straight across the park for the band of huddled mares and colts.

I was lighter than Nero and had a yard or two start, but, in spite of my speed, Nero's teeth ripped down my hip as I dodged into the band. The mares, whinnying to their babies, the angry squeals of the old stallion, together with the pain from the blow I had received, knocked all ideas of a happy reunion with my friends out of my head, and I ran into the forest, just escaping being killed by my father.

For the next few weeks I grazed at a respectful distance from Nero's herd and made no attempt to enter the park where they ranged. My wound healed quickly without leaving a scar, and, though I had lost some flesh, I was well and fit.

One day as I was standing watch-

ing the band from a distance, a young chestnut mare stuck up her head, sniffed the air and left the others. Nero at the time was on the far side of the park and did not see her, or he would have driven her back. She came to me and a little later we went down the gulch to come out in another park. Two days later I picked up three more young mares from another herd and, anxious now to get them as far as possible away from Nero, I led my little family over the ridge into another valley.

WITH a harem of my own to care for, I hunted up a valley below the rim rocks where there were fine cold springs and big grass. Deer were plentiful and that should have taught me that lions would be hiding in the caves, but by now I was becoming so sure of myself that I wouldn't have let that keep me out of the place, even if I had thought about it.

One of the mares had a yearling by her side, the only colt in my band, and my next greatest adventure came through him.

I had led the mares to the lower edge of the valley one evening and was grazing a little distance away when I was startled by a scream of fear and turned to see two cats, one old she-cat, the other a half-grown male. They had cut in between the mares and the yearling and were chasing him as he dodged from one side to the other of the open ground. The mares, with the exception of the mother, huddled in a bunch, while that one rushed about, dashing at first one and then the other of the lions. They paid little attention to the attacks of the old matron, as she was pretty heavy and unable to turn quickly.

My blood seemed to turn to fire

in my veins. All the rage that had been bred into me surged into my brain as I rushed into the fight. The old lioness quickly realized the difference between avoiding an old mare and keeping out of the way of a three-year-old stallion. She left off chasing the yearling and ran straight for the rocks, her long tail sticking up as she bounded over the grass, but she was no match for me in speed, and ten yards from the safety of the cliffs I landed a blow that broke her back.

I left her writhing and snarling and dashed back just in time to knock the young lion away from the colt he had cornered. For the first time since Pedro had tortured me with the stick, I used my powerful jaws—shut them down on the cub's neck and, dragging him out into the open, beat his body till I was tired of the evil-smelling thing. The old lioness was dead when I went back to see, and I celebrated my victory with a squeal that made the echoes ring back from the cliffs.

From then on the lions let us alone, and we lived in the park until winter snows drove us down into the cedars.

By the time I was four I had a nice bunch of mares for whom I dared any danger. I had killed two lions and a wolf. No other young stallion dared to come onto my range and I had lost all fear of Nero.

My experience in keeping away from men when I had first escaped enabled me to avoid the horse round-ups, and I now had quite a lot of unbranded sons and daughters. I was afraid of no living thing and led my herd where I pleased. One day, neglecting to test the wind, I came out of an open thicket, and there not fifty feet away, was Pedro, sitting on a scrawny, ewe-necked pony that I might have killed with

one blow of my hoof. There were two other men with Pedro, brown-faced ragged riders, on horses no better than the one ridden by my old enemy.

THE scent of Pedro's dirty body was the same as it had been three years before, and for a moment the old fear of him nearly caused me to halt. Sweat broke out around my ears and my limbs trembled. If Pedro had ridden away then, I would have never bothered him, but instead he jerked a gun and fired into my body. The sting of hot lead was all that I needed to bring back the memory of the day I had been branded while Pedro sat on my neck.

It was as if the months of wild life were swept away and the only thought in my mind was the memory of the things I had suffered from him. I had my father's courage and fighting qualities, added to my mother's quick temper and testy disposition. I was no more afraid of Pedro than I would have been of a cowardly coyote. The pain of the bullet in my shoulder only made me more furious. I charged straight at Pedro, regardless of the gun that flashed and roared in my face.

My front hoofs cut down past the brim of Pedro's hat and knocked the pony flat. My jaws barely missed Pedro's brown neck. "The black demon!" he cried out and he rolled over out of my reach. I stopped as quick as I could and turned back. The horse I had knocked down was up and running away, squealing like a rabbit. I didn't care for him, though, if he had come to my band I should have chased him as I would have any gelding. It was Pedro I wanted to kill, but he had climbed into the branches of a tree and was safe.

The old lust to feel his bones crunch between my jaws came over me and drove me crazy with rage. I charged toward the other two men who deserted their horses and, grabbing up sticks, clubbed me off.

Several times I felt the hot sting of lead, but it only served to madden me the more. Then a gun roared close to my head and I felt my legs give way as I crashed to the ground.

I don't know how long I was out from the bullet that had grazed the spinal cord in my neck, but when I could see and hear again, Pedro and his men were gone and my band with them. I went to the nearest stream and drank to cool the fever in my blood. Then I took up the tracks of my mares and followed them down through the roughest part of my range until I came to a new corral hidden in the canyon.

I could smell smoke and burning hair and hear the moans and cries of my colts. Still I felt no fear for myself. The calls for help were all that I could think of, and I charged against the gate which broke under the force of my weight, and went straight toward where one of the colts lay stretched on the ground just as I had been three years before. I could hear the pounding of hoofs behind me, but I did not look around. I was thinking of nothing but the man sitting on the head of the colt.

I hoped it was Pedro. My jaws fastened in his shoulder and I tossed him high in the air to fall outside the corral. I heard Pedro yell.

"Look out, here comes Thorne!"

I TURNED to seek Pedro, but he was already dashing away into the broken country with one of his two men. Thorne on Chief, Slim on Cutter and several other riders

of Thorne's surrounded the corral. They fought us back and strengthened the fence with more poles, until I saw it was no use to fight any longer. Thorne rode up beside the fence and looked at me for a long time.

"Do you know that stallion, Slim?" he asked finally.

"I'm not sure," Slim answered. "He's got your brand on his shoulder and he's the shape of old Nero."

"Do you remember the black yearling we caught three years ago and kept in the little pasture?"

"By dogies, you're right," Slim answered. "That's the colt growed up and got him a family."

"I'll tell you something else, Slim," Thorne went on. "After Pedro left, I suspected that he was stealing colts from me and I had him watched. He's been living down here south near Taos watching for a chance to make a big haul and, but for the nerve of that horse in busting up the party, he'd have done it, too."

Thorne went to the place where I had thrown the man. I heard them talk for a long time and then Thorne came back.

"That Mexican that the black pretty near killed is Joe Campus. He's an old friend of Pedro's. He says that Pedro used to tease the colt when he was in the corral just to see him fight. The horse has remembered all these years, and it's a lucky thing for Pedro that he didn't get hold of him, or he'd never have quit pawing him. That stallion is a range hero, Slim, and I want to take him to the ranch as carefully as we can and take care of his wounds."

I felt weak and sick, now that the fight was over, but Thorne and Slim knew how to handle me so that I could not hurt them or myself. I

was held between Chief and Cutter and taken back to the ranch and put in a box stall.

Thorne's voice was as pleasant as the rippling of a cool stream on a hot day. He talked to me and rubbed my head and neck while two men poked probes in the holes and took out the bullets Pedro and his men had shot into me. Instead of the hate that had nearly made me a killer horse, I came to love Thorne and whinny when I heard his voice.

He comes now to my stall often and talks to me when he's troubled. Sometimes he tells me that a horse that could fight his own way with lions, wolves, other stallions and men, has something few men have got, and when Thorne lays his cheek against mine and rests his arm around my neck, I forget the cold and hunger, the lions and all the rest, and think only of the pleasant things that have come to me and I'm glad I came back to the ranch.

*In Next Week's Issue of
Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine*

THE MASKED RIDER

By ROBERT J. HORTON

A handsome outlaw in pursuit of the Dark Ages—that is to say, when a pretty young woman sassed him, he picked her up and rode off with her. Rather pleasant, all around, we'd say! Why did they call 'em the Dark Ages, anyhow?

IDAHO'S COUSIN

By HUGH F. GRINSTEAD

Of all things! Idaho wanted some relatives!

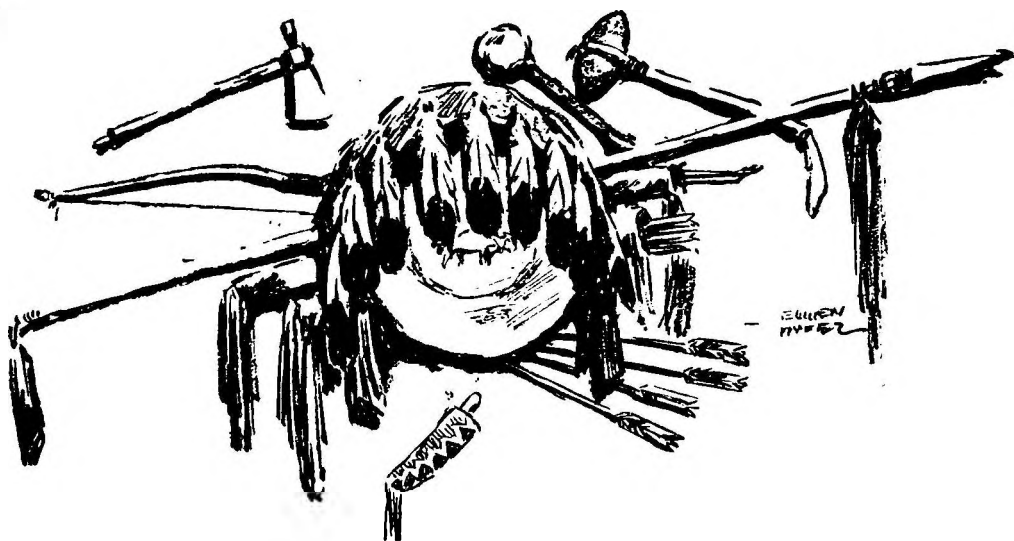
Also Features by

Peter Henry Morland
George Owen Baxter

Guthrie Brown
And Others

15c A COPY

AT ALL NEWS STANDS



INDIAN WEAPONS

The Atlatl

By CHARLES L. McNICHOLS

IF you are treasuring a triangular object of chipped flint, two inches or more in length, that you have picked up in the old back pasture and think is an Indian arrowhead, you are deceived. Arrowheads don't come that large. What you have is the head of a far older weapon called the "atlatl dart." These darts were used by American Indians for thousands of years, while the true bow-shot arrows were used but a few hundred, and in some parts of this continent never came into use.

Most people think of the primitive Indian warrior as always having been armed with a bow and a tomahawk. As a matter of fact, both of these weapons are newcomers to America. The white man brought the tomahawk, and the bow was introduced by some savage invaders from Siberia a very few centuries before the white man came. In fact, the earliest of the Spanish

conquerors found that the highly civilized Mexican races did not use the bow.

The chief projectile weapon of these people was the dart thrower that we have come to know by the Aztec word, atlatl. It is exactly the same thing the primitive Australian blacks call the "wommera," or throwing stick. It is, at its simplest, a stick between one and four feet long with a notch or hook at one end to fit against the butt of the spear, and some sort of a handle at the other to give the thrower a good firm grip.

THE idea of this weapon is that it propels the spear or dart after it leaves the hand of the thrower, thereby giving the thrower the same advantage he would have if he had an extra joint to his arm. The result is that a light spear can be thrown three to four times as far as with the bare hand.

We don't know how primitive man came to invent this device, but invent it he did, at different times and at different places, all over the earth. It seems to be the first thing he figured out after he began to chip flint and make fire. The black fellow and the Asiatic Negroids both developed it, and neither of these races is supposed to be more than three or four jumps ahead of the gorilla in intelligence and cultural attainment. So did the American Indian. But the queer part of it is that the American Indian never invented anything better!

It is astonishing enough that the so-called basket makers and mound builders of our own United States were content with such a weapon when they were advanced enough to cultivate beans and corn, weave cloth, and even make themselves copper armor. But when we find the mighty city-dwelling Mayas, who built huge stone temples and knew more about mathematics and astronomy than the whites did at the time of the discovery of America—when we find that these very civilized people equipped their well-organized armies with nothing better than the atlatl, it seems positively unbelievable.

Of course, the Mayas and the almost equally advanced Aztecs "dolloed up" their spear throwers to a great degree. They decorated them with feather pompons and gold-and-ivory inlay, and some that have come down to us and can be seen in various museums are covered with exquisite carvings. But all that did not make them a bit more effective as weapons than the Australian's wommera—probably not as much so, for the black fellow's stick was generally longer, and therefore gave more throwing force.

The extreme range of an atlatl—
WS—9C

thrown spear or dart was around two hundred and seventy-five feet, or less than a hundred yards. The exceptional warrior might have done better, but the normal fighting and hunting range must have been even less. Contrast this with the fact that the even none-too-effective Indian bow will cast a stone-headed war arrow over two hundred yards, while a good bow of European manufacture has a range of five hundred yards or better.

Then, too, the atlatl dart was quite large—from five to seven feet long, and about the thickness of a man's thumb. While it was feathered like an arrow, it was really a small spear, and twenty of them would make a bigger bundle to carry than fifty bow arrows. Hence the atlatl warrior was at a double disadvantage when facing the bow warrior. His weapon was out-ranged, and he couldn't carry a like amount of ammunition.

IT was only the fact that the bow people were savages, really less intelligent and less advanced than the atlatl men, and came into this country in small, unorganized bands, that kept their predecessors from being exterminated. Probably they did wipe out the first tribes they met on the Alaskan coast, but they certainly lacked the organization necessary to carry on a rapid conquest. At any rate, the bow traveled faster than the people who brought it. Some escaped captives, or the fleeing survivors of a massacre, probably got hold of one of those wonderful new weapons, saw how simple it was to construct and operate, and spread the news among the aborigines.

Right then and there the tribe of the fugitive discarded its atlatls entirely and became bowmen. In the

well-preserved ruins of the old Indian villages of the Southwest that scientists are now exploring, atlatls are found in the older sites and bows and arrows in the more recent villages of people of the same race. Never the two together.

When the bow was adopted, the atlatl was discarded entirely as not worth having. Other older weapons, such as the modified boomerang that the desert Indian still uses to kill rabbits, were retained, but the atlatl went out completely.

As far as the hunting and fighting tribes of the North were concerned, the bow was so far superior to the atlatl that the latter wasn't even worth house room. But the civilized Aztecs kept the atlatl even after they knew all about the bow. Cortez fought regiments of atlatl-armed warriors, and had savage bowmen for his allies.

The reason the Aztec kept to the old weapon wasn't entirely due to stupid conservatism. The atlatl is a good one-handed weapon.

The thrower simply grabbed both atlatl and dart in his right hand, fitted the butt of the dart against the hook, and, holding the haft with two or three fingers of the same hand, drew his arm back and threw with quick, deft motion, releasing his hold on the dart, but hanging onto the atlatl. All with one hand. The other hand could in the meantime be busy with defensive operations.

From the frescoes on the walls of the great stone ruins that these people left in Mexico and Central America, we see that the Mayan warriors fought in compact, well-disciplined ranks, each one of them defending himself with a shield or often simply a club held in the left hand. Each one was trained to be so dexterous with the use of the

club that he could knock the oncoming darts out of the air. He was probably expert enough in its use even to knock down or ward off the swift-flying arrows of the bowman. But he needed one hand continually ready for this defense. Hence the Aztec and Maya retained the old weapon.

THE only advantage the atlatl had over the bow is that it is a good one-handed weapon. But that was no advantage at all to the hunting tribes in mid-continent America, whose battles were bushwhacking contests, fought from cover. The atlatl is an extra poor weapon for bushwhacking. The bowman can shoot very handily while lying prone behind a rock, but an atlatl can hardly be used in that position. The increased range of the bow over the atlatl wasn't of any great importance to the close-fighting Aztec armies or to the Mayan hunter, who found his game in the thick jungle, but it was an immense advantage to the hunters in the desert, plains, and more open woods of the North, where even a ten-yard gain in effective range might save a lot of long and tedious stalking.

Then the atlatl dart couldn't penetrate an object any deeper than the length of its six or eight-inch foreshaft—enough to kill a man or a deer, but insufficient for the slaughter of the large Northern game such as elk, moose, and buffalo. It's very doubtful if a buffalo could be killed with an atlatl dart. On the other hand, a good bow can drive an arrow clear through a buffalo.

But where one-handedness was an advantage, the atlatl remained in use, and despite the bow, it is used in certain parts of this con-

tinient to-day, even where guns are at hand and ammunition is fairly cheap.

The Eskimo, from Alaska to Greenland, still uses the atlatl when hunting birds from a canoe, and so do Indians who live on the reed-grown lakes in Mexico. The reason is the same in both cases. The hunter needs his left hand to paddle his canoe. Both the Eskimo and the Indian use frail, one-man crafts with which he penetrates swamps and marshes, a "loaded" atlatl ready in his right hand, prepared to cast the instant a bird breaks cover. A flick of the wrist and the dart has sped, before the bird has fairly started in his flight. Under such conditions a bow would be useless and a gun awkward.

A peculiar coincidence is that both Mexican and Eskimo have evolved much the same kind of a bird dart. It is a straight stick five or six inches long, with a three-pronged head, like that of an old-fashioned fish gig, with six or eight inches between the outer points. This gives the hunter over a foot of

"spread" on his shaft and minimizes the chances of missing.

Several tribes of Eskimo hunt seals with a light harpoon that is likewise thrown by an atlatl. Here again the hunter is in a tricky canoe and needs a weapon that will give him a quick, one-handed shot.

Down in the jungles of Central and South America there are tribes that still haven't adopted the bow. They are very primitive people indeed, but the real reason is probably the fact that they hunt in such thickly wooded country that the range of ordinary hunting shots is very short.

The bow reached South America, not by the Isthmus of Panama, which is still atlatl country, but by water from the West Indies, brought probably by the far-traveled Caribs, who learned its use from our Southern tribes.

The South American Indians that use the bow have never evolved real arrows. They shoot the same long, slender spears that they were accustomed to use not long ago as atlatl darts.

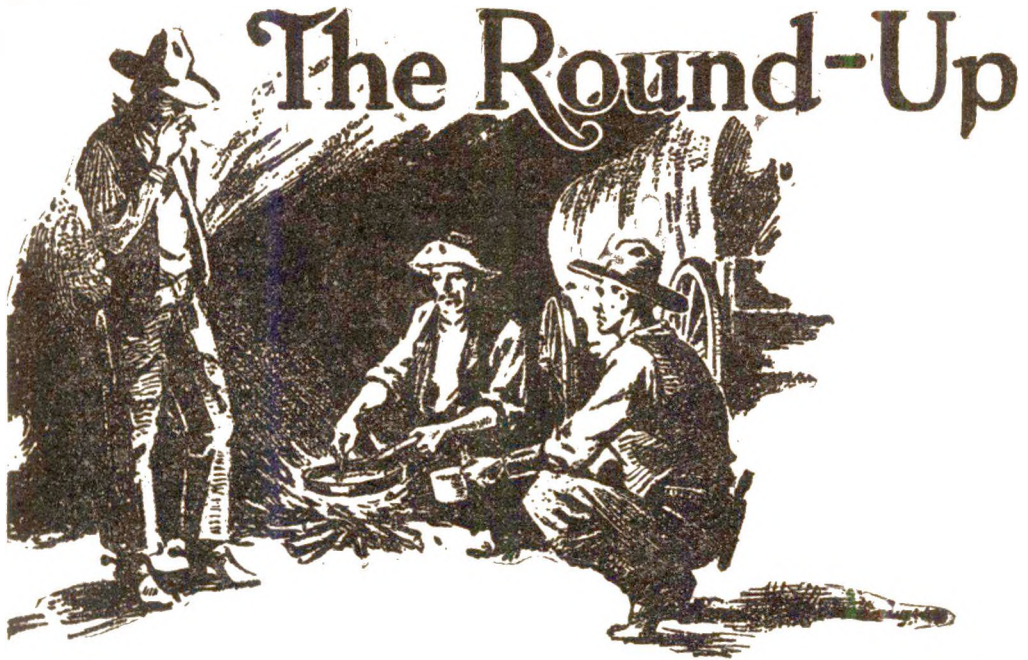
Coming Next Week, "IDAHO'S COUSIN," by HUGH F. GRINSTEAD.

CAMP FIRES FOUR THOUSAND YEARS OLD

WITH Doctor A. R. Kelley, director of Illinois archaeological explorations, as their leader, an expedition from the University of Illinois has been excavating at Starved Brook, on the Illinois River. Nine feet from the surface of Plum Island they have found camp fires which burned in the Mississippi Valley at least four thousand years ago, according to geological evidence.

Five, or possibly six, different tribes of Indians lived in this neighborhood, as evidenced by the different kinds of pottery which they made and also by different methods of mound construction, burial customs, and burial furniture. The latest tribe was the historic Illinois tribe, which was one of the great Algonquin groups.

When La Salle explored this section, the Illinois Indians had a very large village at this point.



RIGHT from a section of the country where some of the best stories are laid, lopes into the fire-light Roderick J. Teeters, Box 53, Yaquina, Oregon. Now, Roderick, he's for us and has been for us for nine years. Tell them, Roderick, and may your tribe increase!

"DEAR BOSS: For nine years I have been a reader of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine and I haven't missed a copy in all that time—pretty good average, if I do say so myself. In all that time, also, I have read every story; and I have found few or none that I didn't enjoy.

"Say, you want to keep a good grasp on that Seth Ranger hombre and keep him busy writing, if you have to force him on the point of a gun! That fellow can write. Remember 'For Life and Gold'? Thought you did. That was a masterpiece. Also, don't forget to keep Joseph Hook busy.

"Going back to the subject of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, it is the finest one of the outfit published. I read a few others while waiting for it to appear on the news stand, but they simply don't compare. I'm sorry that I won't be able to subscribe by the year, as I have done the last few years but this would be impossible on account of frequent change of address in the future. But in the meantime news-stand dealers are going to see me every week.

"Excuse the chatter, folks, I'll be leaving you now. Good luck."

A kind word from a man who knows—J. V. Coleman, of Sioux City, Iowa. Prick up your ears, Lang Slauson, there's something nice coming:

"DEAR BOSS: Some time ago, we noticed a story in your Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, entitled 'A Rusty Gun Speaks,' by Lang Slauson, which we thought was a very good yarn.

"To-day we have just read 'Sonny Jim's Claim' in the January 9th issue by the same author. This is an exceptional story. I have crossed the Rocky Mountains many times and have driven them lengthwise from Mexico to Canada and this is the first vivid description I have ever read of one of the valleys without having to wade through a lot of tiresome details.

"The story also contains romance without mush and adventure without an overdose of blood and thunder and it has created a little character in *Sonny Jim* that crawls into your heart and stays there. We congratulate both you and the author on 'Sonny Jim's Claim.'"

A report from over the border to the north, folks. It's none other than K. C. G. Dreyer, 137 Sackville Street, Toronto, Canada. Here's where Joseph Hook gets a cheering slap on the back:

"DEAR BOSS: Here's me. And says you, Who's me? And how did you get away back there? Well, I just can't tell you but nevertheless I've been sittin' in, and I've been listenin' to your healthy chatter for some long time but just couldn't make up my mind to tell you. Yes, I've been reading and re-reading Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for a long while and let me tell you that it's good.

"For the love of Mike, Bill, slide over and let me have a man's size slab of this bench for a few minutes. What's that? Whose stories do I like best? Why, I read them from cover to cover. They're all good; they have to be or the editor wouldn't print them. He'd just naturally slip them back into the mail box. He knows more about them and he can pick and choose better

than I can. But, say, waddies, wasn't that 'Self-snarled,' by Joseph F. Hook, in the issue of December 10th, a ripper? It sure brings up the better side of a sheriff, and many a sheriff is a real two-fisted man, done up in ton-lots. Here's hoping that your stories continue as good, for many could not be improved upon, and I don't mean 'mebbe so.'

"Good-by, folks, I'll bid you good-night. I'll slip around again some night and mebbe stay longer, but I must be driftin' and catch up with Bish. Split the wind, old Paint Hoss, we're behind time."

A recent issue would have been a banner one for John Byrne, 203 Harrison Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey, if Bob Case had had a story in it, along with Baxter, Frederick, and Brand. We will have to wedge in a story from Bob very soon.

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: I have been a reader of your magazine for more than ten years, and the standard of fiction is improving. This week you give us a story by George Owen Baxter, a continued story by John Frederick, and another by Max Brand, and the coming week a story by Peter Henry Morland. Some week you will give us a number by those four and include Robert Ormond Case. When this happens, it will be a number worth binding in leather. I read Western stories in 'high-hat' magazines, but I have yet to find stories that stand in the same class as that of any of the five writers I have mentioned.

"Here's wishing you continued success in your efforts to make Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine the best of its kind."

Pure, crystal-clear mountain spring water has nothing on this for un-

alloyed praise in general. It comes from Mrs. Thomas Sawyer, Meadowside, Ontario, Canada, who is another admiring neighbor. Welcome she is to the fold.

"HELLO, COWBOYS: Waal, now, you seem so happy around that camp fire that I was just wondering if there was room for me to sit down and see what all the pleasure is about.

"Now, I'll bet you have been reading the latest Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine. Ain't I right? No one could help being happy after reading one of them books. There is only one thing wrong with them, and this is it. They are too interesting for me anyways, for when I get a hold of a novel in your magazine, by the time I've finished reading some of it I'm so goll blinkin' hungry, and the fire is dead out, even on real cold days, and at night my hubby is almost thinking of getting up for breakfast before I get a wink of sleep. They are the best books that ever were printed, and I mean it. There's no use trying to write down my favorite stories; I'd have to buy a typewriter to save time and strength. And the best authors are any that write even the smallest story in Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine. Well, I'd better move on and give others a chance to get a word in."

Listen, young lady from Montana, and B. Kroll, from Solway, Minnesota, will teach you how to train that pony to do some tricks:

"DEAR BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: I keep up to the minute on Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine. It's sure some fine book, pictures and all.

"The young lady in Montana

wants to learn trick riding. Well, she is in for a long spell of training. First, she needs a pony trained to go the rounds of the ring about twenty feet across rope and post, and a large box to slip on the horse and off, and lots of straw or sawdust to fall on, 'cause you learn faster when you fall hard—part of lesson. Teach the pony to come to you when you crack the whip; only, whip him on the heels and pet him on the shoulder when he turns his head toward you one half-hour each day and not over an hour any time.

"Then teach him to follow the outside rope or put rope on each side and have him in command, so he lopez slowly at all times. Then learn to ride standing on feet, then on your head, but you do better by having a ringmaster to keep the horse agoing steady. After you get to doing all the stunts you have seen in the circus, you can demand a good salary from some horse circus.

"I am an old ring trainer and, if there is any one wishing to know how to teach a horse any tricks, I will give them the where and how free for the asking."

When it comes to runnin' down strays, we claim that the lads and lasses who ride range in the Missing Department overlay and overlap all others. We keep right on finding them, and how! Comes now Mrs. A. B. Dennison, P. O. Box 191, Stephens, Arkansas, to tell us how we rounded up a long-lost uncle.

"DEAR BOSS: I wish to thank you for helping me in finding my long-lost uncle. I cannot thank you enough for your kind service.

"We have been constant readers of your fine and clean book, and hope to continue to do the same.

"We are your faithful friends and boosters."

The HOLLOW TREE



Conducted by
HELEN RIVERS

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.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write Miss Rivers to this effect, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

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.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

IN the Swiftwater, Rainbow, Swift Creek country of the Canadian Rockies, there are homestead lands waiting for the pioneer who treks into the wilds of British Columbia. "Swiftwater Bill" knows this mountain-glacier country of the great Northwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Can a long-time trail trekker get a chance in the old Holla? I have spent the biggest part of my thirty-two years a-roamin' this old globe by train and by boat. I came into the heart of the wild Canadian Rocky Mountains here four years ago with one cent and a jackknife in my pockets. I found this little valley and took a notion I would homestead. To-day I have a clear title to 280 acres of fine land and I have a good grubstake put away besides.

I am a lover of the wilderness country

and all the game that goes with it. I never kill wild game unless I am out of chuck, or unless the bears get too bothersome. Sometimes the bears start on my stock and then I go after them. There is a big cinnamon bear around here that comes into the shack to eat. I've got him trained now so that he will sit at the table but, believe me, he sure had the cold shivers running up and down my back for a long time. Yes, we sure have plenty of wild life in this country. Some of the fur folks here are wild goats, longhorn sheep, grizzly bear, black bear, cinnamon bear, wolf, coyote, martin, mink, wild cat, and mountain lion.

Now maybe you-all would like to know something about these wild woods. Waal, folks, I am sixteen miles from Mount Robson, the highest peak of the Canadian Rockies, and I am forty-five miles out of Jasper National Park country. But listen, folks, this little valley is only eight miles from a big glacier, and I can see snow all year round only half a mile from my shack.

And, then, can you beat it! There is a sure-enough hot spring twenty miles south of me! But, say, I am four miles from my nearest neighbor, so you-all can see that I'd like to do a little visitin' by mail with a lot of you folks. Yep, I'm a bachelor.

Anybody want to know all about home-steadin'? Waal, just come right along. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Providin' I don't git too many, I'll sure enough answer all letters upon the day of arrival.

SWIFTWATER BILL.

Care of The Tree.

The Hollow Tree pards have found a ranch—Rancho Dos Amigos.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

My Holla Tree pard and I have settled down at last on Rancho Dos Amigos, the "Ranch of Two Friends." Don't you-all think that's a kind of spoofy name? We have a lot of fun out of it and, besides, it describes us to a tee. You see, after looking around all the length of the Pacific Coast, at least the California part of it, we found this rancho. It was about two hundred acres, mostly woods. But such woods! Towering trees that seem to reach up to the clouds, some as thick as the body of an automobile; others, gigantic Christmas trees so beautiful that I can never tire admiring them.

And underneath all of them there is such a jungle of wilderness as would gladden the heart of any nature lover. For, although we are only seven miles from the nearest railroad town, we are up in the mountains, in a canyon tucked away in a narrow valley. The valley is called Stringcreek Valley, so when any one in town asks where we live I tell them in Stringbean Valley! There's plenty of wild life in Stringbean Valley, of course. We see deer almost every time we go to town or take a walk around. Foxes yap at the moon at nights, as do the coyotes. There are birds a-plenty, too, some in the most gorgeous raiment a person could imagine.

A nice little cabin went with the place and, after cleaning it out, our first job was to pipe water to it from a spring in the woods. We are going to raise chickens on our rancho and besides them we'll raise ducks and frogs and mushrooms! So you see, if one thing doesn't go so good, we'll always have another string to our bow. We also have about fifteen acres of cleared land for which we are building an irrigation system and that also will help out some.

Of course, there are a few drawbacks to a life like this. Mail comes only three times a week and a trip to town must be made for everything we need from the stores. But we love our peaceful rancho with our nearest neighbor about a mile and a half away from us, and a two-mile private road leading to the rancho from



Folks, wear your friend-maker badges and speak up to "Swiftwater Bill," who can tell you-all about the mountain-glacier country of the British Columbia Northwest.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

the main trail. Woods are so thick and far-flung that it is easy to lose your bearings and your trail. There are few fences in this country, so one treks and treks until one finds that the back trail has gone home by itself, leaving one alone.

Well, folks, so long, and glad to hear from any of you, for the pal and I will have plenty of time to write this fall and winter.

HAPPY JACK.

Rancho Dos Amigos, Hearst Road, Willits, California.

A trekker of the Gulf trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

There's no one loves the West better than I, nor who has seen any more of it without ever having actually lived there. Yet you-all sure get me hot under the collar by your constant talk that leads around to the assumption that all the he-men of the good old U. S. A. are corralled out there. Now let me tell you-all that there is more romance in one hour's cruising out on the Gulf of Mexico than you can find in a month on any cattle ranch.

Yep, the fathomless blue under your boat is teeming with life—and riding the waves is just as dangerous and "hard-to-brand" as any loco longhorn on land. There's no cow waddy of your West who can ride the bow of my boat and steer his

course by the stars when that boat is bucking the waves: one minute her nose pointed toward the sky and the next minute headed for one, two, or, possibly, three miles deep! I was never a bronc buster, but I can ride some bad ones at that, as well as handle a rifle and a six-gun.

Now, folks, I'm only one of two thousand or more men corralled here who read every issue of Western Story Magazine, and who feel about the way I do. Speak up, folks, and let's hear what you think about all the he-men in the country being corralled out in the West!

N. C. ZIEGLER.

Box 893, Soldiers Home,
Johnson City, Tennessee.

"Texas" Wilson wants to hear from the West, Mexico, and Hawaii.

"I hail from a farm, where it is rather lonesome. I would like to hear from girls from everywhere, especially the West, Mexico, and Hawaii. I am seventeen years old. I'll be very glad to tell the girls all about where I live and also exchange pictures and post cards with them. So if any girls want to hear about New York State and New England, just let them write to me pronto." This is Miss Texas Wilson, R. F. D. No. 3, Coleman Avenue, Elmira, New York.

From out California way comes a little farm girl.

"I am a young girl of sixteen who lives on a farm near Turlock. I am fond of riding horseback and I love all outdoor sports. I would like to correspond with all young folks who care to write to me," says Mary Brockman. The address is R. F. D. 1, Box 391 A., Turlock, California.

Warfield is inviting the ink-bottle busters his way.

"Staying in the same town, folks, is mighty lonesome, so I hope that some of you ink-bottle busters will

take a pasear over my way. I am sixteen years old, fond of horses, the outdoors, and all sports, especially swimming. Yep, I sure will answer all letters, from all hands." C. P. Warfield lives at 3 Womach Street, Eldorado, Illinois.

From far-away Australia comes Myrtle Ford.

"I live in the great southern wheat belt in western Australia where wheat and sheep are the main industries, with a little dairying and poultry farming as side lines. I would like to hear from folks anywhere in the States, Canada, and Alaska. I am a girl, nineteen years of age." This is Miss Myrtle Ford's address: Ashfield, Via Pingelly, West Australia, Australia.

A newcomer from India visits the old Holla.

"I can ride, shoot rifle or revolver, and play all sports. I've been stationed at Gibraltar, visited Spain, where the bullfights are, and can tell you considerable about Africa. Now I am stationed in India, and this country is a lot like a desert country in many respects. Pard, stretch your fingers, grab a pen, and write. I have plenty of snaps to exchange," says Drummer F. Butler. The address is First Band, East Surrey Regiment, Napier Barracks, Lahore, India.

Speak up, hombres.

"Just a few lines, folks, to ask if any of you hombres happen to know an old Western song called 'California Joe.' If so, will some one please send it along, *my pronto?* Thanks." David Long, care of The Tree.



WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE exploration of inaccessible and little known country is the joy of the real Westerner. Rough trails, lack of accommodations, and an entire absence of sign posts do not deter the man with an adventurous spirit from invading the most remote of frontiers. Among this group of explorers with a genuine pioneer spirit is Dave W., of San Francisco, who is asking some questions about Wayne Wonderland in Utah, one of the most

fascinating regions in the entire West and one in which we feel sure many of the readers of this department will be keenly interested.

"I'm one of those chaps who are always looking for new worlds to conquer in the way of truly primitive land, Mr. North. Recently somebody told me about a region in Utah, known as Wayne Wonderland, and ever since then I've been eager to hit the trail. But unfortunately I have been unable to get any reliable information about this

section, so I'm turning to you, because you seem to have the facts about every little spot, however remote, on the map of the West.

"I'd like to know what that country is like. I've been informed that it possesses some wonderful scenery, that it is filled with Indian relics, and that it is still an honest-to-goodness frontier. I'm looking for just such a country as I'm happiest far away from civilization. I might even build myself a log cabin and stay there!

"Could I find this Wayne Wonderland section well marked on a road map? If not, can you tell me how to get there? Are there any little villages in that region and, if so, what are their names? In fact, I'd like any and all facts that you have up your sleeve and under your big sombrero as well."

Well, we take our two-gallon hat off to Dave for digging up this topic for discussion, and we take pleasure in airing all the information we have been able to collect on this colorful region.

This frontier country lies 170 miles in an airline southeast of Salt Lake City, and it is so inaccessible, due to lack of roads, that it remains virgin land. Beginning at the northern line of Wayne County, Utah, and extending south through San Juan County to the Arizona border, this area of several hundred square miles

is so rich in wonders that it has been christened Wayne Wonderland. The southern part of this region is the famous San Juan Basin, where desperadoes and bad men, both white and red, held undisputed sway until comparatively recent years.

It's hard to describe this rough and broken country, but perhaps it will give Dave an idea of what it

is like if we tell him briefly that it is a red sandstone wilderness of yawning canyons and towering buttes, of granite domes and varicolored monoliths. Here he will find natural bridges, interesting cliff dwellings, and petrified forests. And when he reaches that remote country he will rub elbows with real frontiersmen, with Indians and cow-punchers, and he will be entertained by

hardy settlers in their log-cabin homes.

If Dave looks this region up on a road map he will be rewarded only by a large white space, with some marks, indicating the Henry and other mountain groups, and some lines showing the Fremont, Dirty Devil, Green, San Juan, and Colorado Rivers. As a matter of fact, no roads cross this country and it is unknown except to the Indians and cattlemen who have journeyed through it.

We will console Dave, however, if he is beginning to lose heart, by

SPECIAL NOTICE

LAND IN THE PEACE RIVER COUNTRY

The man with the pioneer spirit will find good land open to settlement in the Peace River country of Canada, a frontier which offers much to the newcomer who is willing to live frugally and carefully until he gets a start. For those who can face pioneer conditions, the homestead still provides an opportunity to build a home in a new land. For an address from which a pamphlet, describing the Peace River country homestead lands, may be obtained, write to John North, in care of Western Story Magazine.

telling him that two stub-end roads enable the adventurous motorist to penetrate the region for forty or fifty miles. If he is willing to ignore perilous heights and narrow trails, he will be rewarded by the sight of a country of magnificent scenery. Leaving San Francisco he would reach Wayne Wonderland via Reno, Salt Lake City, and Bryce Canyon.

Dave may be interested to hear that there is a movement under way at the present time by the Associated Civic Clubs of Southern Utah, to secure the conservation of this scenic region as a national monument or park, and to hook it up by adequate roads with the national park-to-park system. Until that day arrives, however, Wayne Wonderland will be reached by following a rough and almost impassable route.

After leaving Salt Lake City Dave should turn south on U. S. 89 until he comes to Manti, 128 miles from Utah's capital city. Then he continues south 40 miles to Sigurd, at which place he turns east toward the Wayne Wonderland, on State Highway 24. After traversing a pleasant valley and climbing a 9,000-foot summit, he will reach the little fishing village of Loa, which is the gateway to Wayne Wonderland.

From this little frontier settlement of log cabins Dave will follow a 60-mile road that leads through canyons, between high walls of red sandstone, surmounted by giant and freakish monoliths, into the heart of a colorful and wild country. On the way he will encounter numerous inspiring and strange sights, among which are some interesting cliff dwellings which are attributed to a race preceding the Aztecs. Those rude habitations of a bygone age, in which beautiful baskets, finely woven cloth, and artistic pottery

have been found, are well worth an examination.

The next stop for Dave will be Fruita, a three-family hamlet in Fremont Gorge, the walls of which are decorated by numerous Indian pictographs. From this point, with the help of a horse and a guide, Dave may visit the Hickman Natural Bridge, a 125-foot span across a tributary gorge, reached by a hard climb of two and a half miles.

If Dave wishes, after this adventurous chapter of exploring has been closed, to continue his travels into the San Juan Basin country, we would suggest that he make a wide, high, and handsome detour by way of Bryce Canyon, the Kaibab Forest, Lee's Ferry bridge, on through the heart of the Navajo Reservation, and via the Blanding gateway. En route he will ride along the bluffs of the San Juan River, cross that muddy stream on a swaying bridge made of telephone wire cables, and enter a tiny hamlet called Mexican Hat.

Fifty-seven miles more of rough going will bring him to Blanding, which is the beginning of another sub-road that will give him a glimpse of the San Juan Basin wilderness. To Dave's undoubted surprise, he will find this road a good one, for it was built mostly by the U. S. forest service through LaSal Forest. This trail climbs over Brushy and Elk Mountains and will afford Dave some real thrills in the way of spectacular panoramas.

From Elk Mountain the road winds down toward a great wide valley of the Slick Horn range and comes to an abrupt end at the rim of Armstrong Canyon.

And here, unless Dave wishes to build that log cabin, he will probably turn and retrace his steps toward San Francisco.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are coöperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer your questions regarding firearms of any make or age. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE only important improvement which the shotgun possesses over the old fowling-piece is the principle of choke-boring. No one knows exactly who discovered this means of causing the shot to fly in a closer group and act effectively at longer ranges, but it is generally agreed that an American was the author of this idea. Choke-boring is accomplished by narrowing the barrel slightly toward the muzzle; in a ten-gauge gun the last two or three inches of the bore are made about four one-hundredths of an inch smaller than the remainder of the barrel; as the gauge of the gun decreases, the amount of choking is reduced.

The operation of the choking principle is not fully understood, but photographs are taken by shooting against a wire which controls the camera, and studies of the resultant pictures seem to offer some explanation of this problem. First, the top wad of the shell comes out of the barrel, followed by the shot, then another wad, with a felt wad and a cardboard wad bringing up the rear. It is thought that the wad behind the charge temporarily holds up the forward blast of gas just as the shot leaves the muzzle and allows the shot to leave in a straighter line than it would in an unchoked barrel, which would not impede the progress of the wad. Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that

most double-barreled shotguns have one barrel open and one choked.

"Guns and Gunners," serves Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine readers.

Shotguns, rifles, pistols; new ones, old ones; soldiers and hunters; trappers and traders; all are discussed at one time or another in this department. Questions are cheerfully answered, and shooters are assisted in forming clubs, competing for free medals, and receiving free firearms literature. Write us to-day!

Small-bore weapons are becoming more popular.

HOWARD BRACK, Lowry City, Missouri: The Colt "Ace" is a caliber .22, long rifle, automatic pistol, made to resemble the famous Caliber .45, government model; in fact, it is built on the same frame and has the same general appearance and feel as the military pistol. The magazine

holds ten cartridges, while the .45 automatic pistol magazine holds only seven. Colt also makes a new "officers' model" revolver, caliber .22 long rifle, which is identical in construction with the larger caliber "officers' model." Both of these weapons give the user of larger caliber weapons real practice with low-power ammunition without sacrificing accuracy.

It is always well to know the open seasons for game.

MR. L. F. TAYLOR, Hyder, Alaska: The open season for deer in 1931 was from August 20th to November 15th; for moose, from September first to December 31st. There was no closed season on black bear. The killing of females and young mountain sheep, moose, deer, and mountain goat kids was prohibited. Your territorial game commissioner can give you the latest regulations upon request.

ENTRY BLANK FOR PISTOL AND RIFLE MATCHES

GUNS AND GUNNERS, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine,
79 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York:

I agree to the conditions of the matches as described in the issues of January 23 and 30, 1932.

Put cross in box opposite your order:

☐ I inclose ten cents to cover cost of four (4) standard, 25-yard, American slow-fire targets, and certificate for witnesses, for pistol match.

☐ I inclose ten cents to cover cost of four (4) official, 50-yard rifle targets and certificate for witnesses.

☐ I have in my possession the targets designated for the rifle (or pistol) match, but inclose four cents' postage for certificate for match witnesses.

☐ I inclose thirty cents for copies of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine for January 23 and 30, 1932.

Name.....Street or Box.....

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

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine and Detective 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 a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," or cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

HARRINGTON, WILLIAM DEWEY.—Formerly lived in Miami, Florida, but was last heard from in Long Beach, California. His father is very ill, and is not expected to live. Will any one having his address please communicate at once with Mrs. Clyde Sisson, Davis, North Carolina.

ATTENTION.—On September 12, 1931, between 9:30 and 10:30 p. m., a checkered cab ran down a man at the corner of Grandriver and Cass Avenues, Detroit, Michigan. The man wore a blue serge suit and a light cap. He was knocked to the pavement rendered unconscious for several minutes, and suffered internal injuries from which he later died. It will be to the advantage of any one witnessing this accident to communicate with N. P. McGill, 1606 North Alamo Street, San Antonio, Texas.

GAYLOR, GEORGE ALFORD.—Left Dallas, Texas, October 8, 1929. He is twenty-three years old, six feet tall, weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds, and has black hair and brown eyes. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by his father, J. W. Gaylor, Route 1, Ladonia, Texas.

PIRO, BENNETT.—Lived in Chicago, Illinois, in 1920 and 1921. He is short, with dark hair. It will be to the advantage of any one knowing his present location to get in touch with V. Paige, Box 308, Brockton, Massachusetts.

NOTICE.—About twenty years ago, when I was three years old, I was left by my mother on the steps of a police station at Sixty-seventh Street and Broadway, New York City, with a note stating that I was Benjamin Ayres. I was taken to the New York Foundling Hospital, and was later adopted. In 1912 or 1913, Reverend Ernest R. Eaton, of the Madison Avenue Baptist Church, Madison Avenue at Thirty-third Street, New York City, which my mother had attended, received a letter from her, postmarked Baltimore, Maryland. This is the last that was ever heard of my mother. I should be greatly pleased to hear from her friends or relatives, or from any one who can give me information concerning her. Please address Benjamin Ayres, care of this magazine.

ELKINS, BILL and FIELDS.—Brothers of my father, Doc Elkins, who died thirty-nine years ago. Bill was last heard of in West Point, Bullet County, Kentucky. Fields was in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Information requested by Mrs. Lutisha McDaniel, Capitol Hill Station, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

KAPPE, ADOLPH.—Came to the United States from Wertheim, Germany, when a youth. Lived in Chicago, Illinois, until about ten years ago, and was not married. May be living in Michigan or Wisconsin at present. A relative would appreciate any assistance in locating him. Address Florida, care of this magazine.

SMITH, KATY M.—About fifty-five years old. Moved with her family from Oregon to Florida, and was last heard from near Longwood, in 1921. At that time her eldest son, Raymond A. Smith, aged twenty-seven; her daughter, Olive J., aged twenty-five, and another son, about twenty-three years old, were with her. Her husband, Howard Humphrey Smith, is now in a hospital at Little Rock, Arkansas, and her youngest son is anxious to get in touch with his mother, brothers, or sister, as there is an estate to be settled. Any information will be greatly appreciated by Arthur Joseph Smith, Koch Ridge, Arkansas.

RINGLAND, E. O.—Last heard of five years ago, when he was on his way to Memphis, Tennessee. His wife and son are greatly in need of him, and would appreciate any help in locating him or his people. Please address Mrs. S. E. Stelling, Route 1, Box 656, Beaumont, Texas.

WALKER, CLARA MAY and GEORGIA ARRIE.—My sisters, who were in Davis, Oklahoma, about fifteen years ago, and later went to Oklahoma City. Clara May would be about twenty-five years old now. As a child, she had brown hair and was very large for her age. Georgia Arrie, who is a couple of years younger than Clara, was small for her age, when last seen. She had dark hair and dark-blue eyes, and was cross-eyed. Will any one knowing the whereabouts of either or both of these girls, please notify Alva Walker, 510 North Arizona Street, Shamrock, Texas.

DAVENPORT.—I forgot to give you my address when I gave you my picture. I still have the doll's arm you gave me on the Greyhound bus from Pittsfield to Springfield, Massachusetts. I meant every word I said. Please write to Jack Williams, 251 Main Street, Branford, Connecticut.

CLEMONS, MRS. EDNA HART.—Lived at 117 East 115th Street, Cleveland, Ohio, in August, 1927. At that time she was working in a beauty parlor, and probably follows the same occupation at present. Her brother would be glad to hear from any one who knows her whereabouts. Address William Hart, 415 Madison Avenue, Findlay, Ohio.

NOTICE.—Would like to obtain information regarding a little girl who was kidnapped in 1929. Her given name is Carmen Esther, and she would now be six years old. She may go under the name of Zink, Weber, Murphy, or Smith, and may even be represented as a boy. She is believed to be around the mines in Kentucky, and would be accompanied by a woman of dark complexion and an older man. Please address any communications to Carmen, care of this magazine.

FREEMAN, AGNES.—Lived in Georgia Street, Los Angeles, California, about eleven years ago. She is about sixty-five years old, of medium height, with dark-brown eyes and dark hair. Mole on left eyelid. Has one son, Harry, who is married and living in New York City. Her sister, who has good news for her, would be grateful for any assistance in locating her. Kindly address Mrs. Ella R. Hopkins, 807 Tenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

WELCH, HARRY WESTON.—Born in Brooklyn, New York, fifty years ago. He is five feet seven and one half inches tall, with light-brown hair and blue eyes, and wears glasses. He has been living in California more than sixteen years, and was last seen in San Francisco five years ago. He was then an agent for washing machines. Will any one knowing his address kindly send it to his sister, Mrs. Mary R. Hockin, 4073 Twenty-third Street, San Francisco, California.

NOTICE.—I was born June 16, 1890, and was placed in an orphanage at 175 East Sixty-eighth Street, New York City, by a woman, on October 16, 1890. My name was given as Cecilia Gonzalez. Would appreciate hearing from any one who can give me information regarding my parents or other relatives. Address Mrs. Cecilia Krystof, Norway, Michigan.

BRIDGES, WARREN NEWTON.—Accountant, about fifty years old. Left St. Louis, Missouri, ten years ago, and may now be in California. Had two sisters, one of whom was in vandœuvre. His parents are buried in the Bellefontaine Cemetery, in St. Louis. Any information as to his present whereabouts should be sent to S. O. S., care of this magazine.

DIEGMAN, ARTHUR.—Thirty-three years old. Five feet eight inches tall. Slender. Dark-brown hair and blue eyes. Has initials A. D. tattooed on forearm. Left home May 30, 1929, and has not been heard from since. His wife has gotten a divorce, and all is settled. It will be all right for him to come home, and his mother is very anxious to hear from him. Please forward any information to Mrs. Ellen Diegman, 222 Beecher Avenue, Havenna, Ohio.

BORE, RUTH and JESSIE.—Were in Union, near Huntington, West Virginia, when last heard from. Went to school in Colcord, 1930-1931. Please write to your old schoolmate, Ruth's partner in playing pranks. Address Wee, care of this magazine.

GRETHER, MRS. KATHERINE.—Was kitchen supervisor over the girls in Stockdale School, Colcord, West Virginia, in 1930-1931. Will any one knowing her present whereabouts kindly communicate with Wee, care of this magazine.

OSBORN, RICHARD LUTHER.—Missing for more than seven years. He is about sixty years old, short and heavily built, with auburn hair, blue eyes, and a broken nose. He used to work at cleaning wall paper. His mother has been blind for the past three years, and is anxious to hear from her son. His last known address was Medicine Lake, Montana. Kindly address any information to Mrs. Luther S. Dotts, 221 Cedar Street, Perry, Oklahoma.

KERLIN, CHARLES SIMONS.—Thirty-nine years old. Formerly of Mason City, Iowa. Mother and dad are both living, but can't last much longer. They are both longing to see you or hear from you, as are all the rest of us. Please get in touch with your brother, George Kerlin, 7143 Madison Avenue, Hammond, Indiana.

COOK, MRS. MARY.—Daughter of Hugh Wallace. She married Robert Cook in South Dakota, and had four children, Perry Cecil, George Henry, Mary Esther, and Charles Francis. She was last heard from in Newburg, Indiana, and is thought to be married a second time. If any one knows her or her whereabouts, please notify her son, George Henry Cook, 210 West Main Street, Rochester, New York.

TUFTS, S. S.—Last heard from in 1912, when he was in Denver, Colorado. His sister and her fifteen-year-old daughter need him badly. Information appreciated by Mrs. Elsie T. McKinney, 196 College Avenue, Waterville, Maine.

BARNETT, GUSTAVE.—Of Jewish descent. Five feet four inches tall. Weighs about one hundred and fifteen pounds. Has dark hair, streaked with gray, and very thin on top. Gray eyes, long nose, and wears dark-rimmed glasses. Is extremely nervous. Missing since June 29, 1931. His wife is ill from worry, and his son begs that any one knowing his whereabouts please communicate at once with D. G. Barnett, care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—I was born in or near London, England, about 1908, but was reared by a Mrs. Reese, a widow living in New York City, until 1920. Before her death, Mrs. Reese confessed that she was not my mother, but that I had been taken from England some nine or ten years previously. No further facts could be obtained regarding my parentage. I vaguely remember a lady, and a large brick house. Any information that could possibly enlighten me would be greatly appreciated by James, care of this magazine.

TRIECHEL, ALMA, PAUL, and ALBERT.—Were placed in a Lutheran Children's Home in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, in 1900. There were two other children, Ida and Hattie, but it has been learned that they are dead. Any information regarding the three living children will be gratefully received by their mother, Mrs. Herman Triechel, 624 East Vester Avenue, Ferndale, Michigan.

BARRY, ROBERT LAWRENCE.—My cousin, who is believed to be in Chicago, Illinois, at present. Several months ago he was in St. Louis, Missouri, to attend the funeral of his uncle Alexander, in Pine Lawn. He is about thirty-six years old, of medium height and build, with brown hair and blue eyes. Rob, do you remember Lena? I'm her girl. Write to Mrs. C. Marchand, Box 737, Route 14, St. Louis, Missouri.

GILLEY, CLARENCE.—Believed to be in Wyoming. He is of French descent, and walks with a limp. I married your father, Eugene Gilley, in Meeker, Colorado, in 1919. Upon his death, July 16, 1919, all his property was turned over to me. As you still have an interest in the Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, I wish you would get in touch with me, and straighten the matter up. Address Mrs. Emma Frances Shupp, Box 253, Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

HODGES.—Would like to locate relatives of Bill Hodges, who lived just over the Arkansas line in Missouri, some thirty-six or thirty-seven years ago. Do any of you remember Ellen Hotchkiss, who stayed with you all for three months? Please write to her daughter, Mrs. Belvie Girtman, Route 3, Box 22, Ada, Oklahoma.

HARGETT.—Am anxious to locate relatives of my grandmother, Elizabeth Hargett, who was a native of Illinois. She was a school-teacher, and married a man named George Hotchkiss about fifty-five years ago. Some of her people inquired for her around Batesville, Arkansas, but failed to find her. She heard of it only after they were gone, and has now been dead for thirty-five years. Information of any kind will be welcomed by Mrs. Belvie Girtman, Route 3, Box 22, Ada, Oklahoma.

GLASSON, E. H.—Missing for five years. A moulder by trade, and a member of the Old Fellows. Nicknamed Frenchy. He is fifty-two years old, five feet seven inches tall, has gray hair, hazel eyes, sallow complexion, and a pleasant smile. All is forgotten, and his family is anxious to hear from him. Address Mrs. E. H. Glasson, 419 South Sixth Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

BURNS, MICHAEL J.—Left St. Ignace, New Brunswick, Canada, several years ago, and was last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio. His only sister died of late, but his two brothers are still living, and would be very glad to hear from him. Kindly address any information to his niece, Mrs. Mary Stewart, Kent Jet, New Brunswick, Canada.

GILLESPIE, PHILLIP, and family.—Last heard of in Toledo, Ohio, when they were planning to go to Missouri. Formerly lived in Oklahoma. Mrs. Gillespie is the daughter of Lon Foraker, of Missouri. I have news for them, and would appreciate hearing from any one who can give me their present address. Mrs. Luella Doyle Walton, 209 Marks Block, Marion, Indiana.

LEONARD or SMITH, HARVEY.—A carpenter, who formerly lived at 320 1-2 West Colorado Boulevard, Glendale, California. Went to Chicago, Illinois, in March, 1929. He is about twenty-eight years old, six feet tall, weighs around one hundred and seventy-five pounds, and has blue eyes and fair hair. Will he, or any one knowing his whereabouts, please communicate with his old pal, Jimmy Frazier, care of Mrs. Harold Proctor, Apartment 30, Plasker Court, Tillamook, Oregon.

JOSEPH, CARL LEVANT.—Thirty years old. Please write to your father, E. G. Joseph, 240 High Street, Hornell, New York.

DAVIDSON, JAMES HAROLD.—Was district manager for the Keystone View Company, in Oklahoma, in 1928. He is between twenty-five and thirty years old, and is believed to have married a girl from Oklahoma City. Any information concerning his whereabouts, or even the address of the Keystone View Company, will be appreciated by Mrs. Maude Bingham Ridge, Route 1, Belmont, Mississippi.

HAWKINS, OTIS KENT.—Nicknamed Micky or Ted. About twenty-six years old, with sandy hair and blue-green eyes. Several tattooed patterns on his arms. Last heard of in April, 1928. Any word as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated by Tattoo, care of this magazine.

SPEARS, ALEX or MACK.—Lived in Hot Springs, Arkansas, until shortly after his wife's death in 1898 or 1899. He is fifty-eight years old, rather tall, and has gray hair. Has two children, a boy and a girl. Was last heard of about seventeen years ago, when his cousin saw him in St. Louis, Missouri. At that time he was about to sail for Spain. Word from or about him will be welcomed by his daughter, Mrs. Lottie Trotter, General Delivery, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

PATTERSON, COLIN HOOD.—Of Scotch descent, and often called Scotty. He is a plasterer by trade, and disappeared one morning about a year ago, while he was out looking for work. He is fifty-two years old, five feet five and one half inches tall, and has gray hair and blue eyes. His family is in dire need of him, and ask that any one having information about him communicate with Mrs. C. H. Patterson, 1726 1-2 South Third Street, Ironton, Ohio.

JOHNSON, KATE, of Indianapolis, Indiana; ANDERSON, ODESSA, formerly of California; THORNTON, BARBARA, of Columbus, Ohio.—Former patients of mine. I have news of great importance to them. Any assistance in locating them will be appreciated by Doctor Steven J. Klein, 48 Thirty-third Street, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

NASH, CLAUDE EDWARD.—About fifty-eight years old. Last heard of in Missouri. Has a brother named Benjamin Franklin Nash. Information welcomed by Mrs. Oliver Nash, 412 Lewis Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

TROTTER, RAYMOND.—Last heard from in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, in 1922. Word from or about him will be thankfully received by Bryan Krisle, Fort Crockett, Texas.

GRAHAM, OLLIE BELLE, alias GRACE ALLEN, nee KING.—Forty-one years old. Five feet four inches tall. Weighs between one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty pounds. Has dark-brown hair and pale-blue eyes. She is my mother, and left me in Kansas City, Kansas, when she went to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1923. She has not been heard from since. Will any one knowing her present address kindly notify Florence Graham, 3213 Troost Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

PINKLEY, ANDREW J.—Last heard of on the Black-foot Reserve, in Montana, about twenty years ago. Please communicate with I. T. Whistler, Wellington, Nevada.

MURCHISON, A. H. (SANDY), wife MAUDE, daughter DOROTHY, and sons HARRY and BILL.—Were at Wildorado, Texas, in 1920-1921. Would like to hear from any of them. Address Roy Fowler, Route 3, Box 242 A, Phoenix, Arizona.

GARRISON, OSCAR.—Please write to your mother, at 1327 South St. Francis Avenue, Wichita, Kansas.

BROCKWAY, R.—Would like so much to hear from you. Wrote several letters, but most of them came back. Also wrote to J. W. C., but they hadn't heard. We are all well. Please write to F. G. W., care of United Minerals and Mines Company, Old Blewett, via Leavenworth, Washington.

SHEETS, GYDIA.—Last heard of in Connersville, Indiana, in 1922, where I was employed in a life-insurance office. Kindly communicate with Evert K. B., care of this magazine.

MANNING, MARK.—Please write to your mother, who is very anxious to hear from you. Mrs. Manning, care of this magazine.

MEDOWELL, CHARLES JAMES, alias JIM COALTON.—Disappeared July 6, 1926. He is a World War veteran, six feet one inch tall, slender, with brown eyes and hair. Will any one knowing his present whereabouts kindly write to me at once, as I have wonderful news for him. Also sad news. Will be very grateful for any information regarding him. Mrs. Virginia Armbruster, 13832 Newbern Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

MICHAUD, FRED H.—Last heard from five years ago, when his address was 303 Gunnell Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He is about twenty-eight years old. Any word from or about him will be greatly appreciated by his sister Neta, now Mrs. Alban Gailliant, Leger Corner, via Moncton, West County, New Brunswick, Canada.

MERRILL, CLYDE.—Was working for the Bell Telephone Co. in Somerset, Kentucky, in 1930. His sister would be grateful for news of him. Kindly write to Ruby Merrill, Mayo, South Carolina.

BENOIT, PAUL.—Have some good news for you. Please write at once to your old pal, Wally F., Route 15, Knoxville, Tennessee.

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