Western Story

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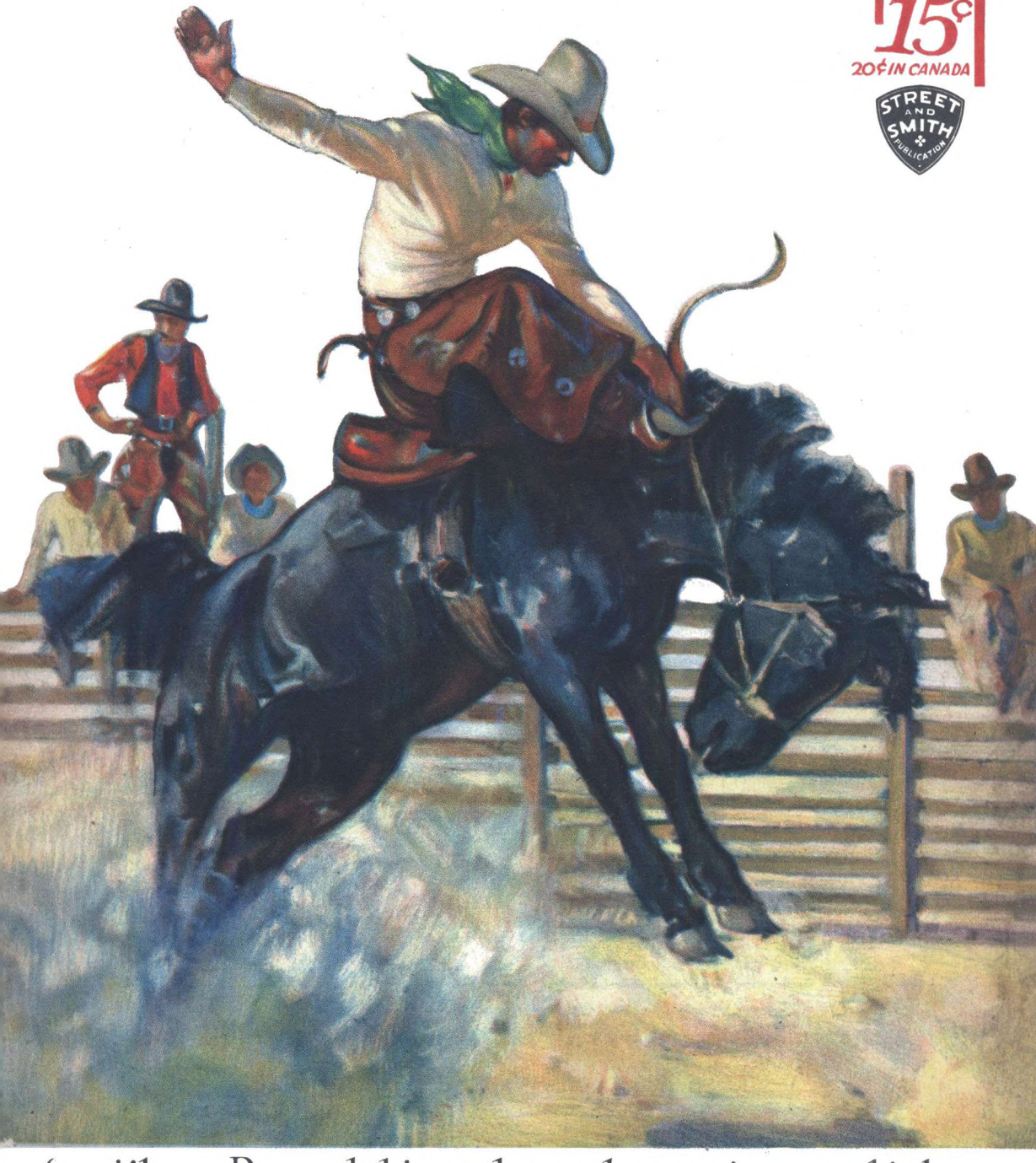
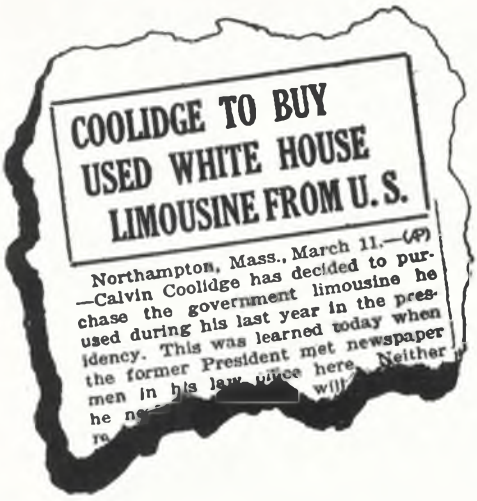


Straight up, Pete rode him and never lost a stirrup or his hat.
from OUT OF THE DARK by WALT COBURN



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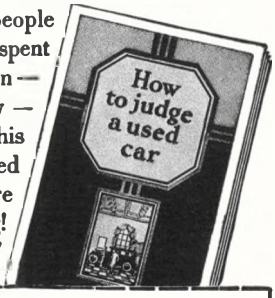

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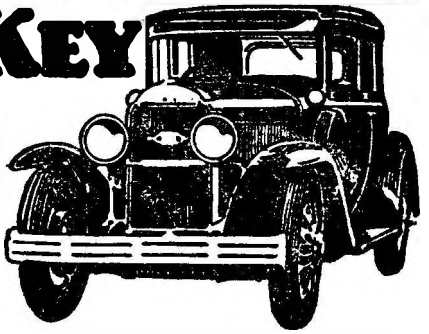

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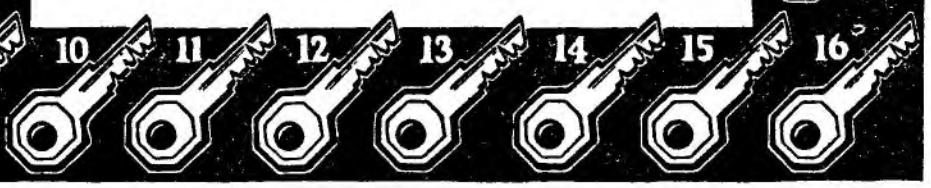

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~but when I started to play the laugh was on them!

"WELL, folks, I guess we'll have to lock up the piano and make faces at ourselves."

Helen Parker's party was starting out more like a funeral than a good time.

"Isn't Betty Knowles coming?" an anxious voice sang out.

"Unfortunately, Betty is quite ill tonight and Chet Nichols is late as usual," replied Helen gloomily.

"I know some brand new card tricks," volunteered Harry Walsh.

"Great!" said Helen. "I'll go and find some cards."

While she was gone I quietly stepped up to the piano bench, sat down and started to fumble with the pedals underneath. Someone spotted me. Then the wisecracks began.

They Poke Fun at Me

"Ha! Ha! Ted thinks that's a player-piano," chuckled one of the boys.

"This is going to be a real musical comedy," added one of the fair sex.

I was glad I gave them that impression. So I kept fiddling around the pedals—making believe that I was hunting for the foot pumps.

"Come over to my house some night," said Harry, "I've got an electric player and you can play it to your heart's content. And I just bought a couple of new rolls. One is a medley of Victor Herbert's compositions—the other . . . "

Before he had a chance to finish I swung into the strains of the sentimental "Gypsy Love Song." The joking suddenly ceased. It was evident that I had taken them by surprise. What a treat it was to have people listening to me perform. I continued with "Kiss Me Again" and other popular selections of Victor Herbert. Soon I had the crowd singing and dancing, and finally they started to bombard me with questions . . . "How? . . . When? . . . Where? . . . did you ever learn to play?" came from all sides.

I Taught Myself

Naturally, they didn't believe me when I told them I had learned to play at home and without a teacher. But I laughed myself when I first read about the U. S. School of Music and their unique method for learning music.

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Out of the Dark

By Walt Coburn

Author of "Man Afraid of His Horses," etc.

THIS story of Montana concerns two men. One of these men was a coward after dark. The other man was called, among harsher names, the cattle king of Smoky River.

There have been a thousand and one arguments concerning heredity, and birthmarks, and such. It would be a waste of time to go into the matter. But certain facts will be set down concerning the night fear of Pete Gillis, and they may be taken or left. On the night that Pete was born, in a sod cabin near the Red River of the South, his daddy, Jim Gillis, was called to the door and shot down by night riders. Twelve buckshots ripped into his body and he dropped there and lay the rest of the night in a red pool at his own doorstep. The tortured mother heard, through the torn echoes of her own screams, the shot that killed her husband. It must be understood that Jim Gillis had been marked for death more than a year ago and the unfortunate plainswoman had dreamed more than a few nights of such a happening. And after the baby boy was born and the kindly woman who had rendered aid still was too terrified to drag the dead rancher inside the house, the pain-racked mother quit her bed and tugged at the stiffened body of her man until she had it inside and the door closed.

They said, during the few brief years she lived after that night, that her mind

was never right. She would not allow a light in the house after dusk and would hide in a far corner of some room, shaking and muttering, holding close to her the child whose body was marked with exactly twelve red spots the size of buckshot. She died when the child was six. Because there were no kinsfolk, Pete Gillis, small for his age, undernourished, timid of manner and shy of speech, was farmed out to a neighbor who was leaving for Texas to make his fortune in cattle.

The boy, from the time he could get about, had a way with horses. A born horseman, Pete Gillis. He grew into a wiry, rawhide-muscled man, a trifle under medium height, quick on his feet, quiet-mannered, sparing of words, and as fearless as a pit terrier—until dark. When darkness came, he would haunt the lighted places. And when there was no lamp or candle light left, he would slip away from other men and hide his bed like some hunted animal.

He became adept, during the formative years of his youth spent on cattle and horse ranches, at concealing this fear of dark places, and those that noticed his peculiar actions laid them to the fact that Pete Gillis had committed some crime and feared capture. And if there came the chance of his weakness being discovered, Pete would draw his time and hunt a new job on a new range. Thus his fear of blackness drove him on from one outfit to the next, into remote corners of the cow country, as if he were dogged by some real enemy whom he feared. And he was past twenty when he rode into the Smoky River country and hired out as a bronc peeler to big Tom Dillard of the Skillet outfit.

Better than six feet tall, with the neck and shoulders and legs of a wrestler, was Tom Dillard, king of Smoky River. His voice was the bellow of a bull, and the slap of his open hand was as punishing as the blow of a grizzly's paw. He claimed more than eighty thousand acres of the finest cattle country a man ever saw. He held it by right of might and the guns of a few men who drew pay there at the Skillet Ranch. There were some ugly stories concerning his methods. Part of the Smoky River range was badly cut up with timbered badlands, and it was broadly hinted that those hills hid the bones of more than one man who had crossed Tom Dillard in one way or another. Men claimed that Dillard had a crew of line riders who kept the Skillet stock shoved back on their own range, but that any choice stray stuff that drifted into the breaks was never let out again on the hoof.

There was a big mining camp in the runty mountains there at the head of the Smoky. Dillard was heavily interested there. He was said to be the silent owner of the boarding house, the butcher shop, the general store, and the three saloons in town. Rumor said that he even collected a tithe from the tinhorn gamblers and the dancing girls in the honkatonks, that Billy Silver, who ran all the gambling and the bars and the dance hall, was not the real ruler of Smoky Butte, but the jackal of Tom Dillard.

Thus matters stood, that sunny day in June, when Pete Gillis rode into the Skillet Ranch on the Smoky, leading a roan pack horse that was a dead ringer for the big roan between his overalled legs.

There were half a dozen men perched on the top log of a round corral there by the barn. From inside the corral there rose short clouds of yellow dust, thudding noises, grunts. Pete pulled up and peered through the logs. He naturally expected to see some bronc twister handling a green horse.

What he actually saw was two men, evenly matched as to size and weight, half naked, pounding at one another with bare fists. Both were big men. Both were badly battered. They were

fighting like two bulls—smashing, butting, grunting, battering at each other with dogged, silent determination.

"Tom's got 'im!" One of the cowboys on the corral slapped another on the back. "I'll take that ten dollars any time now."

"Not yet, stock hand, not yet. Slug 'im, Bones, slug 'im!"

One of the fighters was knocked down. He lurked there in the dust, lifting his bulk on all fours, blood dripping from a battered face.

"Got a-plenty, Bones?" growled Tom Dillard, for it was the Skillet owner who fought.

"Kain't—quit—yet—Tom."

Tom Dillard stepped back, a grin on his smashed mouth. He made no move to take advantage of the other man. "Take yore time, Bones. I'll have one cocked an' primed for yuh."

Bones struggled to his feet, shook his heavy head, then rushed. Tom Dillard sidestepped and swung a terrible left. Bones went down to stay this time.

"The big son shore gimme a game," grinned Tom Dillard, and picking up a pail of water, he drank from it, then soused the rest into the battered face of the beaten cow-puncher. Bones sat up, got sluggishly to his feet, and held out a skinned and swollen hand.

"Yo're the first human that ever done 'er, Tom."

Tom Dillard gripped the beaten man's hand. "Now let's go down to the river and wash up," said he. "Then we'll hit the jug."

The two were weaving unsteadily out of the corral when Dillard spied Pete Gillis, who sat his roan horse, weight in one stirrup.

"Huntin' a job, stranger?" boomed the cowman.

"Fightin' broncs preferred," grinned Pete.

"Yo're hired. The boys'll show yuh where tuh put yore bed an' hosses. I got broncs that'll throw yuh so high yuh'll have whiskers longer'n a mustang's mane afore yuh light. Yo're too light in the beam fer these Montana geldin's. Takes a growed-up man tuh set a Skillet hoss."

"I'll take a whirl at 'em. It'll be my sorrow if I ain't got enough heft, you can bet!"

"So it will, button," roared Dillard. "Come on, Bones, yuh old son."

And he led the way to the river bank, where the two stripped and splashed in the grayish-blue water that gave the Smoky its name.

A tall puncher with a genial grin and freckled hands took Pete in tow.

"Yuh hired out to a tough spread, podner. Tom's a tough 'un. And he ain't lyin' about them Skillet broncs. It takes a ridin' fool tuh take the rough off them big buzzard heads. I ain't aimin' tuh th'ow no scare into yuh, neither."

"They told me Dillard was payin' good money fer a peeler. And I kin use six bits."

"Yuh'll shore earn it. That ain't the half of it, neither. Yuh might as well learn it now as later. Men drawin' Skillet pay just now is supposed tuh do just about what Tom Dillard says. He's got us all filin' on homesteads right now."

"I never saw a purtier country tuh file on," grinned Pete Gillis.

The cow-puncher seemed about to say something, then thought better of it. Pete appeared not to notice. Perhaps he had already heard something of Dillard's methods—how the king of Smoky River paid men to file on land that, when proved up on, would revert back to Dillard. Pete was long-headed at times and, as things proved later, it might have been that his plan was already laid that sunny June day when he rode up to the Tom Dillard place on the Smoky. If so, then Pete Gillis was a braver man than the average.

Before cutting a string of broncs into the breaking corrals, Tom Dillard pointed out a big, chunky-built black gelding. "Dab yore line on that un, Gillis. We'll see how lucky yuh ride. No use wastin' time cuttin' in them green uns till yuh try out ol' Bogus. Ride him, button, and yo're hired—sure."

Pete Gillis rode the big Bogus black, rode him straight up and never even lost a stirrup or his hat. He sat that bronc like a bobbing cork on a rough sea and there was no time when a man could have slipped cigarette paper between the seat of the saddle and Pete's overalls, though Pete admitted a long time afterward that Bogus just happened to be made for him. Easier horses than Bogus had piled him and would pile him again. But the big black gelding got Pete Gillis his job with the king of Smoky River.

Pete, and Dillard, and the puncher with the freckled hands who answered to the name of "Pinkey" cut ten head of broncs into the breaking corral.

"When yuh get the bark peeled off them, Pete," rumbled Tom Dillard in his deep bass voice, "there's more on hand. But I want these ten worked till the sorriest rider in the outfit kin work cattle on 'em. Just because a bronc twister kin ride, he's liable tuh show off."

"Whenever I don't handle these broncs tuh yore likin', Dillard, make out my time. But you ner no man kin hang over the corral and tell me how I'm to handle a green hoss. We might just as well git that settled right now."

Tom Dillard looked down from his six foot two onto Pete's five foot six. Men, especially small men mostly, talked meekly and humbly in the presence of the owner of the Skillet iron. There was more amusement than anger, however, in the big man's scrutiny. The fist-battered gray eyes glittered and danced with cold lights. Then he burst into a gale of laughter and walked away. He did not see the bronc rider's face turn chalky white under its sunburn. Dillon's was too brutish and coarse a nature to understand how ridicule is to a sensitive nature like a dull blade twisted into a raw wound. And men of short stature are apt to be oversensitive. It is a sensitive feeling bred of long years of struggle against odds that big men can never understand because the giants are never pushed about to make way for bulkier beings. They are the pushers. Mainly they are good-natured, slow to anger, tolerant, with the tolerance of the mastiff. They cannot understand why a terrier of light poundage fights larger dogs and keeps fighting until the last gasping, blood-flecked breath is gone from his torn body.

Tom Dillard bought a bitter enmity with a laugh that day. And his brain was too clumsy to know that the hatred of a small man can be stronger than a big man's heavy grudge. And had he guessed why his small bronc rider moved his bed up into the hayloft, his laugh would have been the louder.

For when the bunk-house lamp was out, Pete Gillis would slip away to the loft to his bed. And when twisted, nightmare dreams ripped his sleep apart he would lie there in his blankets, bathed in cold perspiration, afraid of something that he could not put a name to. Sometimes, tired as his body might be from the jolting and jerking of the pitching horses, Pete Gillis would wake at midnight and lie there until daybreak, paralyzed with fear of the darkness about him. This was the man who swore to himself that he would smash the king of Smoky River. The same man who, from breakfast till supper time, gambled with death in the horse corrals and gained the reputation of being the saltiest rider in that section of the cow country.

He could fight, too. One day in town he trimmed a big miner who bore quite

a reputation as a nasty man to whip. Those that saw it claimed that Pete was all over the big miner, hitting, gouging, biting, kicking. Not the stand-up, knock-down fighting of Bones and Tom Dillard, but swift, blinding, tricky fighting, terrier fighting. Anything went. And men began to have a deal of respect for the wiry little bronc twister on the Smoky. All men save Tom Dillard, who liked to josh Pete because he was small.

Pete took it all. And when Dillard got out a blue-print map one evening and showed Pete a spot where he could homestead, Pete readily agreed. Winter was coming along and the bronc-riding season was about over. Pete went in to the county seat and filed on three hundred and twenty acres of the best land on Smoky River. A good-sized creek ran through it. It was all good pasture land, growing blue-joint hay that came to a horse's belly. It joined Indian Reserve, where a man could graze stock on permit from the government. It was a sort of keystone location, at the far end of the Skillet range, where all cattle entering the reserve must be checked in and out. There were already built, and in excellent repair, a cabin, machine shed, weaning shed, and corrals. Several stacks of hay were in the barbed-wire hay corral back of the shed. It was wild hay, but free from foxtail or thistles.

It was always referred to as the "Plenty Warm" place, inasmuch as the springs there at the head of the creek were warm water and never froze, even when the mercury dropped to forty below. The water was uncommonly pure and had a slight iron tang. A stick or two of giant powder, so engineers claimed, might easily open up an underground stream equal in volume to the Smoky. They also claimed that whenever that reservation was thrown open for prospecting, the hills would give up rich treasures, for it was just on the other side of the Smoky range that the Smoky Butte diggings were yielding so much high-grade ore. The reservation line cut the mountains in half.

Instead of going directly to the land office, Pete had gone to a civil engineer who was one of Tom Dillard's open enemies. A man past his prime, with sparse white hair and keen, friendly eyes, he knew every quarter corner in that part of the country and had a fund of stories about the Smoky River.

"You say, young man, that you are going to file on this Plenty Warm ranch and hold it?" repeated the engineer. "It's a big he-job, son. It's been tried before. That's why nobody has the place now. It's the best little chunk of land in Montana. Worth any amount of money if the place is handled right. And if the right man ever gets it and is big enough to hold it, that man is fixed for life. But I reckon you know the history of Plenty Warm?"

"Never heard it."

"It's a forbidden subject at the Dillard ranch. And if a man ever wants to get a rise out of the big fellow, ask him why he never sets foot on that Plenty Warm place. Why don't he? Because he's afraid.

"It's some fifteen years ago that Tom Dillard married a Nez Percé girl. A full-blooded squaw. Not because he was in love, understand. Dillard married that young squaw because she could take up land on the reservation, land that was valuable and would give him an opening onto Indian lands. No doubt he planned it all, even to the allotments his children would receive. A cold-blooded, mongrel scheme! I think he bought the girl for a jug of whisky and ten head of horses, then stole back the horses later on. But he was mighty careful to get legally married. The old government survey then included Plenty Warm as far as the bank of the Smoky. And it was there that Tom Dillard located with his Nez Percé wife. I came past there once and

stayed for dinner. The poor thing was like a captured fawn. Scared to death of the big brute she waited on hand and foot. He gave her nothing but her grub—her grub and frequent beatings when he was on an ugly drunk.

"News of her mistreatment carried home to her people. Her old man and her brother came to take her back. They got there too late. Dillard and Billy Silver were there at the Plenty Warm ranch, drunk as two humans can get. But there was no sign of Dillard's squaw. No sign, that is, except a fresh grave there behind the cabin. And the two bucks rode away again. That night they returned. With them came about fifty young bucks. A war party. Dillard and Silver barely escaped in time, the worse pity!

"The Indian agent made an investigation. But the little grave was empty. Her people had taken her home. Nor could we ever learn where they buried her. Because there was no *corpus delicti*, no dead body to examine for cause of death, the authorities were forced to accept Dillard's story that she had died a natural death.

"But the Indians knew! And Tom Dillard knew that they knew she had been murdered or had killed herself. And the king of Smoky River knows that when he sets foot again on that ranch at Plenty Warm, he'll be killed. That old Nez Percé father swore it, and when an Indian makes a vow, he keeps it. So that ranch has lain idle and unclaimed. It's government land. The Circle Bar uses it when they work the reservation for their stuff. Dillard don't dare run cattle on the reserve, because if he did he'd lose every steer he put in there. He tried it once. A hundred head. The Indians claimed that the lightning struck 'em. An arrow, Gillis, makes no noise. And it took less than two weeks for "the lightning" to kill that hundred head of three-year-old native steers. And the holler that big fellow set up died away in a mocking echo. There are times, son, when Lo, the poor Indian, puts us to shame with the poetry of his justice.

"If a Skillet man files on that place, he never stays long. He returns to Dillard with strange tales of ghosts that ride there of a night; faces that peer into his cabin windows in the dead of dark; the scream of a woman tortured; signal fires and the beat of war drums; his horses run off; night noises that promise death sound out there in the darkness. No, they don't stay. Would you care, now, to tackle it?"

"Yes." Pete Gillis had listened with odd tensity to the latter part of the surveyor's tale. The bronc-fighter's face was drawn and white looking. For he was visioning the torture of those nights. "Yes, I'm goin' to tackle it."

"You've got nerve," smiled the old engineer, and wondered why Pete Gillis laughed so strangely.

"I'm takin' up that place," decided Pete. "I'm holdin' it. And if I kin, I'll whip Tom Dillard at his own game."

"Such is the confidence of youth! With all my heart, boy, I wish you luck. And such as it is, my friendship is always here waiting. Call on me when you have need of it. When you get located, I'll be over to pay you a visit, if you don't mind the company of an old man grown poor in everything save his dreams. A darned old rainbow chaser, too leg weary to travel on in quest of another pot of gold at the end of another rainbow. Good-by, my young friend. I am proud to meet a man of such courage. Another Don Quixote, perhaps. Yet, this world would be a drab place without your breed. Good luck, son."

And there was a queer smile on the bearded lips of the spare-framed old fellow as he stood there, in his little log office, surrounded by the odds and ends he had managed to gather from the remote corners of the earth and now treasured in the last years of his life as

he sat and dreamed of the trackless frontier that men of his calling conquer with transit and level and give into the hands of those who follow, bringing civilization.

The name of the man was Ben Hudson. You may find it on the musty maps on file at far-off government land offices—from China to Brazil, from South Africa to Alaska. When engineers speak the name, a note of reverence creeps into their voices. Ben Hudson, civil and mining engineer. Ben Hudson, sighting at rainbows through a transit. Ben Hudson, who had "shot Polaris" from the Arctic to the equator. He now gave his strange friendship to the little bronc tamer who was afraid of the dark. It was a friendship built on the foundation of broken illusions strongly mended. A friendship that was big because it held tolerance, and wisdom, and understanding, and an indomitable courage that had been finely tempered.

Something in the tone of that tall, wise-eyed old man had melted a lump inside the boy's heart. Pete had to swallow hard before he could tell Ben Hudson that he would be proud to have him come to Plenty Warm.

"When do you plan to break openly with Dillard, son?" he asked, as Pete was leaving.

"Just as quick as I get back to the Smoky range and get my stuff moved to Plenty Warm. When I'm once located, I'll tell him mighty quick exactly how we stand."

"Have a gun in your hand when you break the glad tidings."

"I will." Pete Gillis patted the black butt of the big Colt gun that had been his father's. The gun that had been in the rancher's hand that night twenty years ago on the bank of the Red River of the South, when Jim Gillis had stood outlined against the lamp behind him and had been killed from the dark by the man who led the night riders.

Pete Gillis and his two roan horses eft the Dillard Ranch and traveled away to the east end of the Skillet range. A wagon had fetched grub and camp equipment from town and left it at the cabin at Plenty Warm. It was there, intact, inside the cabin, when Pete arrived at sundown. Pete was unloading his bed when two Indians rode up. One was an old buck, straight as a ramrod, red paint staining the roots of the black hair that was pulled back from a high, wide forehead. It was a proud, stern face, the face of a chief who had followed that great warrior, Chief Joseph. The Indian was War Eagle, Nez Percé, father of the young squaw who had been murdered there inside that cabin. With him rode a younger buck. No friendliness softened their guttural "How!" in answer to Pete's grinning welcome. They sat their ponies in stoical silence and watched him jerk his diamond hitch free and unload his tarp-covered bed. They examined the two roan horses with naïve frankness and seemed a little puzzled that the animals wore no brand. Then they rode away toward the reservation. They had ignored all Pete's friendly overtures and his attempts to explain that he was their friend.

And later, when Pete spread his bed on the wooden bunk in the cabin and began storing away his grub, he made a cheerless discovery. The several boxes of .30-40 and .45 cartridges he had ordered at the store were not there with the grub. Either the storekeeper had neglected putting them in or some one had been there in the cabin before him and had stolen the boxes of ammunition.

The box magazine of his carbine was filled. He had a few loose .30-40 shells in his saddle pocket, a dozen rounds, all told; and five shells in his six-shooter. Pete never carried a full chamber under the hammer of his single-action gun. Because if the weapon should fall and

hit on the hammer, the cartridge might be thus exploded from the jar.

"Seventeen ca'tridges," mused Pete uneasily. "Not so danged many in case Dillard tries tuh smoke me out or them buck injuns gits a hankerin' for my hair. And I'd bet a hat them two bucks knows what become uh them ca'tridges. Well, yuh night-scarin' idiot, yo're gonna have shore pleasant nights here. Ben Hudson wouldn't be lyin'! That ol' feller called yuh a brave man, yuh white-livered, shiverin', scairt-uh-the-dark coward. Brave, say!"

And it never occurred to Pete Gillis that, in thus facing the black torture of those nights before him, he was more than merely brave, that the truly brave are those who fight their cowardice as he was to fight his, as he had been fighting it, since he could remember. It never occurred to him that because he so fought it, he was not a coward. No one had ever told Pete Gillis that the bravest men on earth are those who suffer from fear.

He finished supper and washed up the dishes. His horses were on their picket ropes within a stone's throw of the house. They were one-man horses, those two roan ponies that Pete had raised and made pets of. Because both were confirmed biscuit addicts, he called them Bakin' Powder and Soda. When he was in certain mellow moods he called them the Sour Dough Twins. They were full brothers, with but a year's difference in their ages. Pete could do anything with them. He had taught them all sorts of tricks. But no stranger could lay hand on either of their roan hides. They would even fight a rope if any man but Pete had caught them with it. It would be no easy job to steal them.

Pete barred the door and fashioned heavy board shutters for the three windows. These worked on rawhide hinges from inside. He turned the wick of the lantern low and pulled off his boots and overalls. With a light in the cabin, that horrible fear of the night seemed less poignant and uncanny. He shoved his Colt under the pilow and leaned the Winchester against the wall by the head of the bunk. It was quite dark now, outside, and no moon. From somewhere in the distance came the quavering howl of a coyote that seemed relayed across the rough hills by a score of the prowling animals. Pete shivered a little and swore softly at his dread of the sound. The voice of any night thing was always like the dark making terrible mockery of his fear. He crawled into the blankets and lit a cigarette.

But the tobacco smoke had no taste. The boom of an owl jerked him upright, rigid with fear. The coal of the cigarette was crushed tightly in the palm of a hand that had not felt its burning. Only after several minutes of terror could he move his frozen body and peer out through the hole he had fashioned in the chinking between the logs. It was some moments before his eyes made out the blurred shadows of his grazing horses. He berated himself for a spineless simpleton, an imaginative, frightened——

Listen!

It came from a distance, throbbing like a pulse of the thick darkness outside, rising and falling in its cadence. A Nez Percé war drum. The orange spots of signal fires on pinnacles. The faint breath of a war chant that was like some whispered warning of death. The horses were getting a little restless. To the bronc tamer, suffering the torture of stark fear, there was an unreality about it all. The night seemed teeming with invisible shapes that made noiseless sounds.

Pete's scalp tightened and his hands felt like ice. He was shaking so that he could hardly keep a grip on his six-shooter.

There came a scraping sound. Some

one outside was trying the barred door. Pete Gillis raised his gun, but the weapon wavered, uncocked, as he tried with both hands to steady it like some tenderfoot with buck fever. He kept pressing the triger hard, but was too numb from fear to know that the single-action gun was not cocked.

Then, across the cabin, a bit of chinking was pried loose from the outside. With a dry, toneless cry, Pete extinguished the lantern light. The darkness there inside lessened his chances of death but increased his fear a hundredfold. The horses were snorting and lunging about, out there in the open. Even up on the roof there were sounds. Moccasined feet padded about. Voices whispered and muttered.

Like a trapped animal, shivering, bathed in cold perspiration, Pete Gillis crouched there on his bunk, gripping his Colt until his hands ached, unable to thumb back the hammer.

Then something bulky, and soft, and heavy thudded against the door. The sound sent Pete out of his bunk and onto the floor. He emptied his gun at the door, sobbing like a man gone mad. And he kept thumbing the gun hammer long after the last cartridge had exploded. Acrid powder smoke filled the cabin and stung Pete's eyes and nostrils. And it was not until some time later—minutes or hours, he knew not which—that he realized that the sounds outside the cabin had ceased, that, save for that distant boom of the war drum, the night was quiet once more. The two roan horses grazed restlessly, some distance away from where they should be. Their picket ropes had been cut. But they were too well trained to run off. They would be somewhere near in the morning.

The sound of the horses' grazing had a soothing effect on Pete's ragged nerves. Some of his worst fear had vanished. He repaired the broken chinking and lit the lantern. In a log above the bunk stuck an arrow, feather-tipped, its steel head buried in the pine. The tangibility of the thing, sinister as was its portent, brought a trace of color back into Pete's bloodless face. He jerked the arrow free and held it in his hands. To his great surprise, they were now fairly steady. He rolled and lit a cigarette. Then he pulled on his boots and overalls. He tried to whistle and grinned at the total failure to produce a sound. His watch had stopped and he had no idea of the time. But he knew that sleep was out of the question, and the feeling of being fully clothed somehow made him feel less fearful. There is always something of a handicap in being partly clothed in an emergency. He built a fire in the little sheet-iron stove and made some coffee.

As he nibbled at cold biscuit and sipped the strong coffee, Pete Gillis told himself that he would somehow whip this fear of the night, that here at Plenty Warm he would conquer that cowardice or it would conquer him, that this was a sort of battle ground, that he would stay here and win against the odds piled against him, or be killed. He would never again run from that black fear.

When dawn came, Pete unbarred the door. It was built to open outward, but some weighty object held it closed. After a deal of effort Pete got a window free and crawled out. He went around to see what blocked the door. It was a dead Skillet steer, unmarked by any wound save the knife-slit jugular. The animal had been roped and dragged there, then killed.

Pete saddled up one of his horses and dragged away the dead beef. There was a scaffold and windlass near the stable used for butchering purposes. Pete decided to skin and quarter the beef and let Tom Dillard send a man for it. He was working at this when two Indians rode up, the same two that had visited him the evening before. Neither dis-

mounted. They sat there on their ponies like two graven images, proud, cruel, yet sad. To Pete's pidgin-English attempts at conversation, they gave no response. He invited them to get off and have breakfast. He tried to make them understand that he was asking their friendship. But their stern faces gave not one twitch of understanding. After a time they rode up to the top of a knoll and got off their horses. There they sat, blanket wrapped, though the day was warm, smoking trade pipes that had come from the Hudson Bay Co.'s stores farther North, their fierce, sad eyes watching this white man. And on other knolls were other silent watchers.

Pete shut his cabin door after he had washed his hands. Then he mounted and rode away. The other roan horse followed him along the trail like a dog.

It was a good half-day's ride to the Skillet ranch. And it was past noon when Pete rode up to the house where Tom Dillard sat, his big frame in a canvass hammock on the porch.

"What fetches you here?" grinned the cowman. "Scared out so quick?" His grin held a measure of contempt for the smaller man. He chuckled heartily and slapped his leg. "There was a feller here last night from down in New Mexico. Said he knowed yuh down there. He was right entertainin'. He claimed you had quite a rep down there. Not fer bronc-peelin', however. But fer yore odd habits of a dark night. He told us yuh had 'em shore a-guessin' fer a while, till finally some gent gits wise. He says that down there in New Mexico they call yuh 'Man Afraid of the Moon.'"

Tom Dillard's booming laugh brought a couple of his high-salaried gunmen from inside. They stood there, grinning thinly at Pete Gillis, who stood there on his bowed legs, his lips a bloodless, crooked slit.

"Yes," Pete's voice was a whispering snarl, "Man Afraid of the Moon. That's me, Dillard. But you ain't tough enough to call me that an' still keep on livin'. Fill yore hand, yuh big——"

Pete's hand slid to his gun. But Dillard had been watching. His bulk shot from the low hammock. His hairy fist caught Pete on the point of his jaw. Pete spun about, the cocked gun slipping from his nerveless hand. Everything had gone black in the bronc-tamer's world.

Dillard picked up the fallen gun and began working the ejector. Five empty shells fell on the ground. Pete, in the white heat of his anger, had not remembered emptying his gun at last night's prowlers!

Pete got slowly to his feet. He stood there, dazed, swaying, his fists doubled. Dillard hit him again, then caught him as he sank. And then the big cowman beat and kicked the smaller man into a battered, bruised, broken oblivion. Then he ordered Bones to throw Pete on his saddle and take him back to Plenty Warm. He gave Bones the bronc rider's gun and curt orders.

But even as the cowman, black with a terrible rage, was talking, Pete Gillis groaned and opened his eyes.

"You better kill me here an' now, Dillard," he said through bruised lips. "Because if yuh don't, I'll kill you, some day. I'm holdin' Plenty Warm fer my own. And I'll smash yuh, Dillard."

"Kick him up on his feet, Bones," sneered the King of Smoky River. "Then throw him off the ranch. If he ever sets foot here again, set the hounds on 'im. Man Afraid uh the Moon! When I'm done with him, they'll call him 'Man Afraid uh Tom Dillard.' Kick him off the ranch, Bones."

Under Bones' masterful goading, Pete struggled to his feet, blind from blood and the discolored puffs that were closing his eyes. But there was no fear in his heart as he got into his saddle.

Dillard had gone into the house. Bones handed Pete his empty gun, or-

dering: "Drag it, runt, er I'll finish the job where Tom left off. You may be a bronc rider, but you ain't built fer this fightin' game. Better keep right on movin', Man Afraid uh the Moon. Because I got my own eye on that Plenty Warm layout an' I got the strength tuh hold it. I'm servin' yuh notice. Clear out, er I'll come around some night an' say 'Boo' an' yuh'll run yorese'f to death gittin' away. Git yore relinquishment papers made out an' send me a copy. Now slide out, Man Afraid uh the Moon."

Pete Gillis was sick from pain. Every breath he took sent terible pains through his chest. He could barely see. But he grinned crookedly as he looked at Dillard's big killer.

"When yuh feel lucky, Bones, take yore gun an' ride over tuh Plenty Warm. I'll be there." And Pete gave the roan horse its head and rode away.

All afternoon the little bronc rider kept in the saddle. He was blind. His body was filled with innumerable aches and pains. He trusted to his horse to carry him back to Plenty Warm. Once or twice he was forced to get off and lie down until the black dizziness left. It was almost dark when he reached the cabin. He did not know that War Eagle and his son Blue Horse had followed him the past few miles, puzzled wonder in their eyes. Now, as he unsaddled and turned his horse loose, they sat their saddles not twenty feet away, watching his groping labors.

Pete stumbled into the cabin and lay down on his bunk, sick and exhausted. With a broken sob, he lost consciousness.

When Pete Gillis came to life he was first aware of a light burning. He sat up with a jerk, a sharp cry breaking from his battered lips.

"Take it easy, old man." Ben Hudson's voice was vibrant, soothing, reassuring, a strong friend's voice in an hour of dire need. No angel's note could have been sweeter than the deep-toned voice of the old surveyor.

Ben Hudson shoved Pete gently back and replaced the raw-meat poultice across his eyes. There was pity and a seasoning of kindly humor in his voice.

"From the sign, I'd say that you had ridden over to neighbor Dillard's and declared yourself, my young friend. I had a hunch you'd move along such a course, so I borrowed a horse and rode out. Take it easy, son. I've put some water on the stove to heat and I'm making bandages out of your Sunday-go-to-meeting shirt. That big brute has cracked a rib or two, I think. I'll have you taped up directly. You look like you hadn't won much. There's nothing like picking 'em big and tough. I like the nerve of it."

"Nerve?" Pete grinned mirthlessly. "Nerve, say, I'm a coward! A yellow, snivelin' coward. That's why I tangled with Dillard. Some man had told him why they call me Man Afraid of the Moon. Quick as dark comes, I'm as cowardly as a coyote. Now laugh. Or just go away. I'm not worth the bother, mister. I'm just a yellow-backed coward."

"Afraid of the dark?"

"That's it."

"So are lots of men, lad. Quit maligning yourself. Fear of night is more common than otherwise in mankind. Not so pronounced, Pete, as is your case, but it's there. I suppose it's a natural heritage that comes down from the time of primitive ancestors who hid at night from wild, night-roving beasts."

And as Ben Hudson bathed and bandaged the little bronc rider, he talked on, in that intelligent, understanding way of his, explaining in simple terms that fear of darkness that men have.

Pete Gillis talked. For the first time in his life he made a confession to another man of that black terror that had driven him like some relentless enemy.

He told of his father's murder on the night his mother gave him birth. He told of the twelve red spots that were like bloodstained buckshot on his body, of the years of boyhood haunted by that black fear. He told of his youth, when he went to extremes to test his own courage against men and bad horses. Unashamed, without reserve, he told this older man his story. And Ben Hudson listened gravely.

"Last night must have been tough, Pete. There'll be other nights like it, no doubt. There's a camp of Injuns over on the head of the Kinnikinnik. A few old men and some young bucks. I passed there on the way over. They'll play all sorts of weird tricks, but I don't think they intend any real harm. Once they're convinced that you aren't doing this locating for Tom Dillard, that may put an end to their whizzer. They'll find out in time that you want to be friendly with them. And you'll find them mighty good friends to have. They're a lot like children in the sincerity of their beliefs. They make mighty stanch friends. Some evening I'll tell you what they once did for me. So don't go shooting unless they actually threaten your life."

From far away there came the faint throbbing of the war drum, the faint chant of an Indian song. Doubtless some tribal rite, beyond the understanding of the white man.

Ben Hudson stayed almost a week. "I'll be back again, Pete, when you need me," he said when he left.

And that evening, after Ben Hudson's departure, the Indians showed up at the cabin for the first time since the visit of the surveyor.

War Eagle and Blue Horse rode up about sundown. They got off their horses and sat on the ground near the cabin. Pete, who had listened carefully to Ben Hudson's stories of Indian ways, joined them. He handed his tobacco to War Eagle, who filled the bowl of his pipe, then passed the tobacco to his son. Blue Horse filled and lit his pipe. Pete made himself a cigarette, and the three men sat and smoked in silence. And when the smoke was over, War Eagle took a muslin-wrapped package from under his red Hudson Bay blanket and without a word handed it to the white man. Then the two Indians mounted and rode away. Pete unwrapped the clean muslin. Inside it were the boxes of cartridges that had been missing from the grub list.

So long as Ben Hudson had shared the cabin, Pete's fear of the night had almost ceased to exist. But alone once more, that black thing came back to haunt him. No beat of drum, no weird chanting marred the unbroken silence. Yet that very absence of sound made the night more dreadful. Pete lay there on his bunk, door and shutters barred, the light turned low. Finally, because his body was tired, he dropped off to sleep.

He awoke with a start, his nerves on edge, gripping his gun. From out of the night came the thud of pounding hoofs! Shots! The drunken shouts of white men! Bullets thudded into the cabin walls. A window was smashed by a bullet that buried itself in the thick shutter. Then the hoofbeats died away and the swift riders of the night were gone. Pete pulled on his boots and, forcing back his fear, opened the door. A limp form slid across the threshold. It was a young buck Indian, and he had a bullet hole in his shoulder.

Pete carried him inside and dressed the wound. The slug had torn an ugly hole through the shoulder muscle, but the young Indian did not utter even a groan as Pete cared for the injury. When the bandage was in place, the young buck held out his hand.

"Friend," he said. "Good friend." But he would not remain. Pete watched him get his horse from the brush and

ride away. Pete guessed that the poor beggar had been on guard there on the doorstep, and that Tom Dillard's men had shot him as they rode past, emptying their guns at the cabin that housed the enemy of the king of Smoky River. As the doorstep was in deep shadow, it was probable that they had not even seen the Indian who sat there, his back to the barred door.

Not until daylight did Pete discover the note that had been fastened to a rock and tossed there on the doorstep.

The note bore no signature. It was crudely printed, cryptic in its wording:

Man Afraid of the Moon. Pull yore freight. Hudson put you up to this and if you do not drag it him and you both will have some bad luck.

Pete grinned widely. This warning was tangible enough. He guessed that Tom Dillard, rather than resort to actual killing, would try to scare him out by such demonstrations as that of last night. Failing in that, he would use more deadly methods.

Ben Hudson had expressed the fear that Dillard might even try to have Pete arrested on account of that beef that hung from the scaffold. So he and Pete had buried the meat and the hide. Ben had shot a black-tail buck and the venison now hung under the canvas meat sheets, there on the scaffold.

True to Ben's prophecy, Dillard, Bones, and a stock inspector rode up about noon. Pete greeted them with a cold nod.

"Name yore business, Dillard, then vamose. This is my land, and I reckon yuh might as well git notice now as later that you ner no Skillet rider is welcome here."

"There's meat hangin' on that scaffold yonder. Where's the hide that goes with it?" The inspector's tone was not pleasant. Dillard's power had got him his job and he was acting on Dillard's orders.

War Eagle, Blue Horse, and five or six other buck Indians had ridden up from the opposite direction. Dillard sat his horse uneasily and kept his hand on his gun.

"Scared, Dillard?" grinned Pete. "Man Afraid of his Father-in-law! Likewise, if you three high-handed gents come here tuh kill me, there'll be some witnesses yonder that all yore dirty money can't buy off."

"We come tuh see the hide that goes with that meat," snapped the stock inspector testily.

"Sorry, but the hide ain't here. I give it to a friend."

"Told you we had him," chuckled Dillard. "Put the bracelets on him, inspector."

"Not so fast, amigos," said Pete. "Better have a look at the meat. If the buck deer in these hills belong to the Skillet spread, then I'm shore guilty. That's venison hangin' yonder."

The stock inspector loped over to the hanging meat. His face was stamped with chagrin when he came back. "It's venison, Tom."

"And now," said Pete coldly, "git off my land. The three of yuh. Don't come back here, Dillard, ever. Because it's my right by law tuh protect my property. My gun'll be loaded the next time I jerk it. And the next party of yore night riders that come lopin' around shootin' holes in my cabin is gonna get a dose uh their own medicine. You big oxes make good targets. Now, git!"

The Indians edged closer. Dillard whirled his horse and rode away, his two men following him. When they had gone, War Eagle dismounted. He held out his hand toward Pete.

"How," he said gravely. "How, good friend."

"Old man, she don't savvy much white words," spoke up Blue Horse, and the young buck smiled at Pete's astonishment when he spoke English. "But that old man she's smart about

them things. Long time the heart of that old man is on the ground. You make that old man feel good." And Blue Horse also shook hands. The other Indians followed suit. Then they talked among themselves. And they were made happy when Pete told them to stay and eat.

Eat they did. All that Pete had cooked. Even the sugar can was empty when they wiped their hands on the grass and loaded their pipes with the white man's tobacco. And when they finished their smoke Blue Horse complimented Pete on his horses. So Pete brought up the Sour Dough Twins and put them through their tricks—shaking hands, lying down, picking a handkerchief out of his pocket, pawing the ground.

Never had these horse lovers seen horses do such tricks. And when the two roan animals resented their approach, they nodded great approval. Pete made each one of the Indians a present of a sack of tobacco. To War Eagle he gave a brand-new red neck-scarf of heavy silk. And when they rode away, Pete Gillis knew that he had made friends worth the having.

It would have given Pete Gillis, perhaps, some measure of satisfaction to have known that the Indians had already given him a name which they used in speaking of him. They called him Man Who Fights Alone.

The day following the visit of Dillard and his two men, Pete Gillis saddled up and rode over to the subagency. There he met and talked at length to the subagent and the head stockman who ran the Indian cattle. From there he rode to the home ranch of the Circle Bar.

Lige Watson, owner of the Circle Bar, was home. He was a man past the prime of life, with snow-white hair and beard and keen brown eyes.

"I'm Pete Gillis and I'm located at Plenty Warm, Mr. Watson."

"Taking up that ranch for Tom Dillard, I reckon? Well, young man, shut the gate when yuh leave. Dillard men ain't welcome here."

Pete smiled and shook his head. "I'm takin' the place up to keep. Tom Dillard aims to run me off. Here's a letter from the subagent at Medicine Lodge. I got some hay there, and plenty feed, and the best winter range in the country. All I need is cattle. I got five thousand dollars saved up and Ben Hudson 'lowed you might let me have some cattle on shares. The Indian Division stockman will gimme permit fer five hundred head and will let me have a stout team fer hay haulin' and draggin' a snow plow."

"Where did yuh pick it up, young man?" asked Watson.

"Pick which up?"

"The knack of hypnotizin' Injun stockmen an' agents? First time I ever heard of them two gents givin' grazin' permits and help to a man at Plenty Warm. Those old Injuns would put up too much of a holler."

"War Eagle and Blue Horse was there at Medicine Lodge when I got there. Mebbyso they had somethin' to do with it. Me and the Injuns git along first rate."

"I bet Ben Hudson's behind this."

"Ben Hudson," replied Pete, "said he'd go in with me as a pardner."

"Then that accounts fer a lot of it. Ben stands right alongside the White Father at Washington with the Injuns; spends most of his time livin' among 'em, fightin' for their rights at Washington. Ben could be agent any time he wants the job, but he'd ruther be what he is. Their good friend. That's what begun the fight between Ben Hudson and Tom Dillard. Ben ribs up the Injuns to keep Dillard scared off Plenty Warm. Some day I look for them two men tuh lock horns right, and when they do, one or both of 'em will be killed. You kin have five hundred head uh

cattle and what men yuh need at any time. Likewise what grub, wagons, harness, hosses, or anything yuh need at that ranch uh yourn. Make out a list. Measure up that hay an' figger out what it's worth tuh winter five hundred head uh cattle. And when spring comes, I'll pay yuh in good cows and calves. That Plenty Warm feed saves me shippin' out about five hundred head uh stuff. I'm overstocked. Young man, you won't lose anything with ol' Lige Watson. And I'm right proud to he'p a young feller with the grit you have. Step in the house. I got a keg uh Bourbon that's better'n twenty years old. We'll just lift a horn tuh bind our bargain."

That evening, as Pete Gillis rode back to his place, his heart was light and he dreamed as he rode along. It was mighty good to know such men as Ben Hudson and Lige Watson. It was great stuff to have such men put faith in you. And it was good to be riding home to a man's own cabin. The subagent had appraised the buildings and equipment and stacks of hay on the ranch, and a check had been mailed to Tom Dillard to cover it. Plenty Warm was now Pete's home. In time, when he got his final papers, he would own as nice a ranch as ever a cowboy dreamed about. He'd saved his money and it was clean money, every dollar of it.

There was a girl, too. A girl about as big as a minute, with dark-blue eyes, and a wholesome smile, and a nice, soft voice that Pete could keep on listening to forever. He'd only met her once, that day at the land office, but she'd gone to a picture show with him that evening and had had a soda with him after. She had promised to write Pete after he wrote first. He reckoned he'd write her to-night when he got home. Gosh, it was sure a fine world! Pete whistled as his roan horse paced along the trail.

He topped a ridge and pulled up. It was just past sunset and from where he sat his horse, there on the grassy ridge, Pete could see down into the little valley that was his home.

Trees and service-berry bushes and choke-cherry trees hid the buildings. Meadow larks filled the stillness with their evening caroling. It was a great old world, no mistake.

A thin, bluish spiral of smoke rose from the valley. The smoke widened in volume. Faintly, from below, came the blurred sound of rifle shots. The smile went out of the little bronc rider's eyes and he raced for the ranch, jerking his carbine as the roan horse tore down the ridge.

Other riders were racing for the spot that now was hidden in smoke. Indians quirted their ponies to a run. There must have been twenty Indians there, fighting with wet blankets and sacks at the crimson flames that licked at the dry logs of the cabin, when Pete pulled his blowing horse to a halt.

Some one had fired the shed, the cabin, and the haystacks. Prompt arrival of the Indians had saved the hay and part of the shed. But the cabin was an inferno. There was kerosene inside that added fuel to the hungry flames. Cartridges were exploding. There was nothing to do but keep the other building wet down and confine the flames to the one cabin.

Ben Hudson, his hands and face blackened and blistered, was there with the Indians. Some one had dragged out Pete's bed and war sack.

"Hard luck, Pete," Ben smiled grimly. "But it might have been worse. Lucky it happened in daylight. We saved the hay and shed. And we'll build a new cabin, pardner." He lifted a pail of water and drank thirstily. It was then that Pete noticed, beneath the grime on the old surveyor's face, a ragged wound.

"Yo're hurt, Ben!"

"No." Ben Hudson led the way down to the shed. All the kindliness was gone from the older man's eyes and his face was stern and somehow terrible.

His expression forbade further questioning.

Inside the shed lay Bones, bound hand and foot. A young buck stood near by, a knife in his hand.

Bones was white with terror. One of his ears had been cut. Ben Hudson reached down, a hunting knife in his hand, and the big killer squirmed with stark fear. Ben cut the ropes and kicked the burly cow-puncher to his feet.

"Go back to Tom Dillard," said Ben in a hard, dry voice, "and tell him I gave you back your life. And don't waste time getting off this ranch, or you may never leave it. There's a Skillet horse with an empty saddle that you can lead back. Its owner won't need a horse and saddle, because he's dead. He was cremated there in the cabin that he set fire to. Now go."

And when the frightened Bones rode away, leading the horse with its empty saddle, Ben Hudson's hard eyes followed him out of sight.

"It's war, Pete," he said bitterly, "war. I'm sorry it's not Dillard that's burning, there in the cabin. One of the boys shot the fellow as he came out. They pitched his body back into the fire. It means war to the finish now, war until Tom Dillard and Billy Silver are killed. And of the two men, Billy Silver is by far the most deadly. Tom Dillard may be the king of Smoky River, but Silver is the power behind the throne. Eliminate Billy Silver, and the king would be helpless. Silver is, among the many bad men I have known, the consummate villain of the lot!"

"I've never met Silver," said Pete.

"Then you have something in the nature of a treat in store, pardner. We'll ride over to Smoky Butte this evening and you'll have the doubtful pleasure of knowing the coldest-hearted man in the West, the real king of Smoky River, all argument to the contrary. A rattlesnake warns before striking. But the cobra does not, and Billy Silver is like the cobra. Yes, I reckon we'll have a little chat with that gentleman of the fast trigger, about midnight to-night."

Tall, lithe, with the dark, thin features and the opaque black eyes of a Spaniard. A study in tailored black and spotless white linen. High-heeled boots of the finest leather. A beautifully tooled belt and holster inlaid with solid silver. A silver-mounted, pearl-handled .45 tied at the level of the dropped hand. A man with hair and mustache that were white as the spotless shirtfront. A face stamped with the cruelty and sorrow of a Satan. That was Billy Silver, ruler of Smoky Butte's night life, the power behind the throne of the king of Smoky River. Only the unwise could call this man a tool or Tom Dillard's jackal.

He was dealing stud poker when Ben Hudson escorted Pete Gillis into the First and Last Chance gambling hall. When Silver's black eyes found Ben Hudson, the gambler handed his seat to one of his dealers.

"I was expecting you, Hudson," said he coolly. "I'll chance a guess and back it with a high stack of yellow chips that your companion is the gentleman of parts who has located at Plenty Warm. Will you men join me in a bottle of my private stock? No champagne like it this side of New York. It's been some time, Ben, since you and I have met. I've missed our old-time chats. It's a shame that the only man of real intelligence in this country is my most bitter enemy. Step back to the office, gentlemen, where we may sit down and enjoy our wine."

Billy Silver led them into a room richly furnished after the most fastidious taste. Spanish furniture and hangings. A room of scarlet and black and silver. The bartender brought wine that was iced in a silver bucket. Silver himself served them and filled his own glass.

"To you, Ben Hudson! And to the days and nights we both knew during those years when we followed the long trails and shared a friendship which lies buried in a restless grave. *Salud!*"

And behind the smile on the gambler's cruel, thin-lipped mouth, lay the dark shadow of a poignant sorrow.

"To those days!" said Ben Hudson simply, and lifted his glass.

Pete, but half understanding, felt awkward and out of place. But he drank with these two men and when he set down his glass, Billy Silver flashed him a swift smile.

"Tom Dillard calls you Man Afraid of the Moon. Dillard is a simpleton. A giant with a tiny mind. Ben will tell you that. You have a good eye, Gillis, a courageous eye. Eh, Ben? And youth. Beginning life where Ben Hudson and Billy Silver left off. I'm lost for a sinner, if I don't wish you luck!" He spoke in short, quick sentences, his well-kept hands moving nervously the while, picking up a silver paperweight from the antique table and laying it down, lighting a cigarette, tossing it away after a few puffs, and selecting another from the hand-carved, ivory-and-ebony box, twisting at the carefully trimmed mustache. As if some evil thing inside him kept him in a fever of restlessness!

"We'll be here a few hours, Silver," came Ben Hudson's calm, deep-toned voice. "What we're here for can wait. It won't hurt Pete a bit if he takes a walk around town while we sit here and chin a while."

"You mean," said Billy Silver tensely, "that you'll——"

"That we will sit here and smoke a while and talk, Billy. Relax. You'll feel better. You're like a coiled spring. Or a cobra waiting to strike. Why, man, I know what you're thinking! You're under the impression that I came here to kill you. Let's have a look at your gun."

There was a long moment of silence at the end of which Billy Silver slid his gun from its ornate holster and handed it, pearl butt foremost, to the gaunt old surveyor.

Ben Hudson took the gun and examined it. There was a queer look in his eyes when he handed back the weapon. Pete took this opportunity to slip out of the door. He had the feeling that he had intruded upon something almost sacred.

Perhaps he had, for after the door had closed behind him, Ben Hudson tamped the tobacco into the bowl of his short-stemmed black briar pipe and smiled across at Silver, who sat waiting.

"Billy," said the old rainbow-chaser gently, "you have too many enemies here to go about with an empty gun. Load it, then we'll have another drink."

The two men sat there for more than an hour, and their talk dealt wholly with things that had no bearing on the present situation. They spoke of men and the deeds of men who follow the golden beckoning of the placer camps there on the fringe of civilization. They lived over the days when they had seen life at its quickest pulsing. Snow, and heat, and gold, and blood. Ghosts of dead men came and went. Good men and bad, the weak and the strong of the frontier breed, passed in review as these two men sat and talked. Names! Names that conjured up the brightly painted memories of their yesterdays, when Ben Hudson was young and strong and eager to see what lay beyond the skyline, when Bill Silver's hair and trimmed mustache had been as black as his broadcloth coat.

And finally when the conversation ebbed into silence, these two men sat there and smoked.

"You have given me an hour to remember, Ben," spoke Billy Silver. "A black sheep has so many things to forget, so few to remember! The kiss of a beautiful woman, the handclasp of a

true friend. They're worth more than all the gold we saw taken from the heart of the Klondike, amigo. They are real memories—like lights that shine out of sin's blackness, making that blackness more black, yet dear beyond the price to the sinner. Ben, I'm leaving you soon. Quitting for keeps. I would like to do you a favor before I go."

"Going? Where?"

Billy Silver smiled. "Quién sabe? Who knows, my friend? I am going away. This will probably be out last little chat. And in return for the last clasp of your hand, you who know me for what I am, I wish to do you the greatest favor you can ask of me. I'll feel better, somehow, knowing I have done something for you. Something big."

"There's nothing much, Billy, that any man can do for me. I've more than enough to see me through my last years. Pete Gillis and I are going to live at Plenty Warm. He's a fine boy and we'll get along well together. I want to see that ranch prosper. I saw it first, thirty years ago, and wanted it for my home. It was the place I'd seen in a thousand dreams. I'll build a cabin, there by the spring, and live out my last years there."

"A house by the side of the road"—smiled Billy Silver, and something of the bitterness was gone from his face as his eyes studied Ben Hudson. "A friend to man——" And then he changed to another subject.

"Does Pete Gillis come from down in the Southern country, Ben?"

"He was born there on the banks of the Red River."

"His father, perhaps, was a small owner of cattle there? His name would be Jim Gillis. He and some others were killed there by the night riders from a big ranch farther south who wanted their land and their water and their few cattle. As black a bit of knavery and murder as ever stained the Southwest with the blood of men too courageous to run! Jim Gillis. His wife had a baby boy, born the night her husband was called to the door and killed. The poor woman went insane and death ended her suffering. I heard the story in Dodge one night. It was claimed that the baby boy was marked with twelve red marks. I was dealing monte then at Dodge. It was there that I met Tom Dillard. Does Pete Gillis suspect, Ben, that Dillard was the night rider that killed his father?"

"I'm sure he don't suspect Dillard."

Billy Silver nodded. "Just as well that he don't. Wiser not to mention it to him."

"You're positive that Tom Dillard was the man?"

"Yes. Positive. And Dillard, the clumsy-witted ox, don't connect this lad with the Jim Gillis he murdered that night twenty years ago. Odd how life figures out, eh, my friend? How, in many cases, we suffer our tortures for wrongdoing here on earth, and the wrongs we do are righted? I have no faith, no religion. Perhaps, had I believed in God, my life would have led me along other, straighter trails. My father and mother were devout in their religion, almost saintly in their belief. And they both died martyrs. There, inside the little adobe chapel they had built, on the altar before which they knelt at early morning worship, beneath the crucific with its image of the dying Christ, they were murdered by the Yaquis, down in Sonora.

"I was a mere baby in years. The Yaquis took me into their mountains and taught me to ride and steal and kill. When I grew old enough to know that they were not my people, I ran away. And as I grew older, I fought to survive against all manner of odds. I educated myself with books I stole. I read everything from dime novels to the Bible. And I wondered why, if there was a God, He did not protect His or-

phaned children? Why had He let His worshipers be killed by infidels? Why did He give power and wealth and strength of body to men who used His name only in profanity? I still ask those questions. The Indians call Him their Manitou. Why has that Manitou let them be robbed of their lands, their home? Why has Manitou let the white men shut them inside the barbed-wire fences of reservations where they die like caged animals because their hearts are broken? White man or red man, their bodies are made alike and their souls are made of immortal stuff. But because the white man could kill them with guns and conquer them, the red men are shut in on reservations from where they look out upon the white men who have stolen their homes away from them and who now treat them like animals. Where, then, is that Christianity of which the white man's Bible speaks? Where, then, is the law, the sincere law of the white man that can rightfully call me a thief and a killer? For my wrongs, I pay. Not to your lawmakers, but to my own self. When I die, my game is ended. I push back my chair and quit. That is life, my good friend."

Billy Silver rose and filled their empty glasses.

"To you, Ben Hudson! The one man whose trail has crossed mine to whom I owe respect and gratitude. I drink to your happiness." And when he had drained his glass, he broke it in his hands and let the broken bits fall upon the rug. Then he took his spotless handkerchief and wiped away the drops of blood from the little cuts made by the broken glass.

As Pete Gillis and Ben Hudson rode away in the moonlight, the young bronc tamer wondered why his companion seemed so wrapped in thought. And he wondered just why Ben had brought him to Smoky Butte, and then turned him loose to wander about alone. Ben Hudson had termed the gambler a black-hearted villain, yet the two men had talked as old friends might talk when they meet after a long separation.

As for Ben Hudson, well, he had gripped the hand of Billy Silver in parting. He had given no answer to the gambler's questions on religion and life. He had spoken no word of that which he had ridden so far to talk about. Yet he knew that his unworded message had been understood by the Spaniard who called himself Billy Silver. He had come to beg a favor but he had not spoken of that favor in words. That favor would be granted.

The world had never known the strange ties that bound those two men, a good man and a bad one. Nor would the world ever know the depths of their understanding, the splendid strength of their comradeship. If men could know of it, they would not understand. Because it is given to only a few to know the true meaning of such things, a meaning far past the knowledge of men who walk through life armored with fears and prayers and creeds that hide from their visions the pits of hell and the stars of heaven. Heaven holds back such things until the curtain of death is drawn upon life and men cross to that greater life beyond where they are given vision.

So they parted for the last time, those two men whose trails had met in distant places. And there was only sadness and a great understanding in the heart of Ben Hudson.

Billy Silver had said that he was going away. Ben Hudson wondered just why the gambler was leaving. Some quarrel with Tom Dillard, perhaps. Those two partners in crime hated one another bitterly. Only because they needed one another in business did they stay in partnership. And each feared the other. Let a man too far within your confidence and you make yourself his enemy. To share a crime is to fear

and hate the man who has aided you in that crime's perpetration. Ben guessed that the two had fallen out, that Billy Silver was taking away the power that supported the throne of the king of Smoky River.

Ben wondered where Silver would go. Quién sabe? Who knows? Perhaps some new Eldorado beckoned with its finger of gold. Silver would follow the trail made by the heavy, hobnailed boots of the miner. He would, with his whisky, his cards, his reckless companions, take the dust for which those calloused-palmed men had slaved and starved and shivered and burnt. Crazed by the fiery spirit with which they sought to slake their savage thirst, their buckskin pokes would spill recklessly the gold so arduously accumulated. Silver, with his deck of cards, would collect his tithe, and at last the despoiled and satiated men would go back to their gold pans and their picks with hate for him in their hearts. But he had no pity for them, only contempt for their weakness. Silver was going away from Smoky Butte. What would become of Tom Dillard, the king of Smoky River?

Ben Hudson parted from Pete Gillis at the subagency. "Look for me when you see me, Pete," he said. "I'll send over some men to build a new cabin. There is a tent and supplies on the wagon that is going over to-day from the Circle Bar. But if I were you, I'd sleep in the dugout with the spuds and stuff. I look for Dillard to attack almost any night. As soon as I get the log crew organized and on their way, I'll be with you. Sit tight, Pete. So long."

Pete rode on alone to Plenty Warm. There was a man on horseback there, and as Pete came up, the man grinned in a relieved manner. The rider was the freckled cowboy they called Pinkey.

"Some blanket Injuns have bin watchin' me since I rode up," he said. "I done quit Tom Dillard this mornin', Pete. I'm goin' over to the Circle Bar and hire out to them. Just come past here to tell yuh that Dillard is shore on the prod. Bones come in about daybreak with an ear off and his guns gone. I heard him tell Tom Dillard that Ben Hudson had killed that New Mexico dude that fetched up that ol' lie about you bein' scared uh the dark. Well, Dillard has shore enough got a horn dropped. Him and Bones and three-four of his fancy-priced gun-toters is comin' heer to-night to kill you an' Ben Hudson. I come by to tell yuh to git out."

"I'm located here, Pinkey. I ain't a-runnin'. Let 'em come."

"They'll kill yuh, Pete!"

"Mebbe. But I'm gonna put up some kind of a fight while they're a-gittin' me."

"Pete, was yore daddy killed down South?"

"Yes. Night riders done it."

"And Tom Dillard was the night rider that done it."

"What!" Pete lost something of his calm. "How's that, again?"

"I heard him say so. 'I'll git Pete Gillis,' says he to Bones, 'the same as I got his old man, there on the bank of the Red. I'll make him sure enough scared uh the dark this time.'"

"Tom Dillard killed my dad." Pete spoke as if he were oblivious of the cowpuncher's presence.

"He'll kill you the same way, Pete."

"I'll git a bite while he's gittin' a full meal," replied Pete grimly. "I'll git a bite er two. I will, fer a fact, Pinkey."

Pinkey jerked a freckled thumb toward a clump of service-berry bushes. "Two buck Injuns in that brush. Better keep yore eyes peeled, because they looked ornery. Kinda gives me the creeps around here. I'm a pore, peace-lovin' cuss, Pete. Bones claimed they was gonna scalp 'im. One of 'em made a pass at his hair with a knife, an' Bones loses part uh one ear when he ducked. Ben Hudson let 'em scalp that New

Mexico gent, Bones claims. Said there was a hundred head uh bucks dancin' aroun'. Me, I got a weak appetite fer that kind uh business. Me'n my pony is a-driftin' yonderly. Better come along."

"I've taken up this place, Pinkey. I'm not aimin' to be made into a coyote."

"If I was a fightin' son of a gun," admitted Pinkey, "I'd stay an' he'p yuh. But I'm plumb scary when I sees a gun hammer pulled back. I was cut out fer a preacher, anyhow. Good luck, Pete. Git them bites." And the freckled cowboy rode away singing a doleful tune concerning the fate of a wild cowboy who got shot in the breast.

Pete was unsaddling when the pound of shod hoofs made him look up. It was Pinkey.

"I got tuh thinkin' 'er over, Pete. It's a long ride to the Circle Bar Ranch, an' this private pony uh mine is soft. How's chances tuh stay over night?"

"There'll be trouble, mebbeso, Pinkey."

"I kin sling rocks," grinned the freckled puncher. "An' I kin holler wild an' scary. And if yuh got a shotgun I might make a hand with 'er. Tom Dillard an' Bones called me some names that was right hard fer even a coward like me tuh swaller. Yuh never kin tell, I might put up quite a scrap, onct I got the hang of it." And Pinkey stepped off his horse and jerked off his saddle.

"Wisht my girl could see me now," he told Pete. "She quit me last summer because I let a sheep shearer cuss me out. I never could fight. Gol dang it, since I kin look back an' remember, some kid half my size was always a-runnin' me home from school. Dunno as I'll be much he'p to yuh, Pete. Like as not I'll run like hell. Do you know how tuh talk any Injun?"

"No. Why?"

"Tell them two fellers hidin' in the brush tuh go on home and tend to their own business. Tell 'em I never harmed even a papoose in my life. Tell 'em I'm *muy amigos* with Injuns. I like 'em fine. If they eat dogs an' snakes an' cow innards it's their business an' I never in my life hinted they wasn't gentlemen."

"They done pulled out a'ready," chuckled Pete. "They're good friends uh mine."

"Then why not hire 'em to kill off Dillard an' Bones. Me'n you'll saddle up an' go tuh town," suggested brave Pinkey. And he seemed a little crestfallen at Pete's refusal.

"Come dark," said Pete, "you go into the dugout. I'll pick a good place somewheres and wait for Dillard. This is my fight, Pinkey, not yourn. I want you to stay hid there."

"I'll git me a sock full uh rocks," decided Pinkey, "and a pick handle er a wagon spoke. And mebbeso I won't be so dad-burned scairt onct I git over the first of it. Fightin' them Skillet burglars ain't so bad as mixin' up with plumb strangers. Like I told my girl, there at Chinook, a man's darn loco to hit a plumb stranger in the nose. Yuh never know what he might do. Where's that dugout place, Pete?"

And for all that the freckled Pinkey was a self-admitted coward, there was a comfort in his garrulous presence.

"Two cowards," Pete mused sardonically. "A sweet pair!"

There was a pale moon. Its white light lay across the clearing, which was quiet as a graveyard. The shadows of brush and the buildings took black shapes, like blankets covering deformed things.

No trace of the Indians, no human thing seemed there. Yet Pete Gillis squatted back in the black shadows of a tool shed. Pinkey was hidden in the potato cellar with a hat full of rocks and a hickory club fashioned from a shovel handle. He was all but buried in the pile of potatoes, cabbages, beets, and other vegetables.

It was almost midnight and no trace of any threatened attack. Pete, there in the blackness, was bathed in cold perspiration. It was not fear of Tom Dillard exactly. Rather, it was fear of himself, the sickening dread that he would be a coward when those night riders came tearing up out of the night.

He started suddenly. A lone horseman had ridden across the open clearing, down near the weaning shed and corrals. Ben Hudson? No, because Pete and Ben had arranged signals. Not Dillard nor Bones, because the rider was of slender build and sat his horse with an easy grace given only to tall men with long, smoothly working muscles. A black horse, and the rider wore dark clothes and a black hat. There was the sheen of silver on the saddle and bridle. Too ornate for the average cowhand. A showman's rig. Horse and rider vanished in the shadows and were swallowed by the night. Either the newcomer had taken shelter in the shed, or he had ridden on past along the trail that led to the Skillet Ranch.

"Or else," mused Pete, "it was a ghost."

Then the still night was shattered by a scream, a high-pitched, unearthly scream. It filled the night, shattered the black shadows and the pale moonlight with its shrill vibrations, then ended in a thin, unreal shriek."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Pete Gillis, and he shook like a man racked with chills. He could not hold his carbine steady. His senses reeled with the throbbing echoes of that scream. It was like the scream of a murdered woman who has returned to haunt the nights with her death agonies.

Then, pulling his broken nerves together, Pete Gillis stepped outside, his carbine ready, expecting he knew not what. A rifle shot from the brush sent him back into the shed with a leap. And as if that shot were a signal, a column of riders showed against the sky line, down there by the shed. They rode in single file, clad in long slickers, with black hoods hiding their faces.

Pete thumbed back the hammer of his carbine. With a queer shock he realized that his fear was gone. He was calm, steady of nerve, unafraid. He called out a low-toned challenge to the man who had fired at him from the brush.

"Try again, you sneakin' bushwhacker. Better luck next time. Here come your gang. But while yo're smokin' me up, I'll claim a couple of Skillet gun fanners. I'm coming after your scalp now!" And Pete leaped clear of the shed at the hidden man.

"Hold 'er, pardner!" came the hidden man's quick voice. "Don't shoot. It's Ben. I was trying to keep you inside, you young dunce!"

"Ben, you old bonehead!" Pete crouched beside the older man, there in the brush. "Say, Ben, did you hear that woman scream?"

"Woman?" came the old surveyor's grim comment. "Mountain lion, son."

It was then that the thing happened which upset their calculations. A rider had appeared, a lone rider who rode to meet the hooded mob. Pete heard Ben's quick gasp.

The two watchers saw the mob of eight men halt. One of them rode forward alone, the others dropping back into the shadow at some muffled command.

"What do you make of it, Ben?" whispered Pete.

"Nothing yet. It's Silver. Silver riding to meet Tom Dillard, the king of Smoky River. Listen!"

Silver was speaking, and his clear, vibrant voice, while not loudly pitched, carried well across the stillness.

"You got my message, Tom?"

"Yes. Have you gone clean loco?"

"No. I'm just balancing my books. I sold the Skillet outfit to Lige Watson of the Circle Bar. I've cleaned up

everything in town. Our partnership is dissolved. I'm quitting the game. There is only one open account left on my books. I'm closing that account to-night. Closing it here on this spot and I'm using a .45 to write out the payment. Are you ready?"

"My men have you covered, you snake! Move a finger and you'll be deader than a rock."

"I'll live long enough to take you with me, amigo. And in case I fail, Ben Hudson and his young friend Pete Gillis will finish my job. I warned you, years ago, Tom, that whenever you set foot on this ranch, I'd kill you, even if the Indians did not. Also, I warned you to keep your murdering hands off Ben Hudson, or I'd cut your heart out. I've never broken my word to a good friend or a bad enemy. My gun is loaded. My knife is sharp. I'll fight you fair with whatever weapon you choose. I'm quitting the game to-night, but I'm breaking you, Tom Dillard, before I cash in my last chips. How'll you have it, gun or knife?"

"Knife, you greaser!" Dillard tossed his gun away and the moonlight slithered along the blade of a heavy hunting knife.

"'*Sta bueno,* hombre!" Silver unbuckled his belt and dropped his gun to the ground. He tossed two pearl-handled Derringer pistols after the larger weapon. Then he drew a keen-bladed Spanish stiletto and raised it in a mocking salute. The two horses carried their riders forward at a swift, charging gallop. And while ten feet or more of space separated the two men, Dillard jerked a hidden gun and fired point-blank. Silver lurched sideways, caught his balance again. A streak flashed, like a thin, swift thread of silver, a deadly, accurate streak of silver lightning that struck Tom Dillard in the center of his throat.

Dillard's two hands caught at it there, caught at the pearl, silver-scrolled hilt of the Spanish stiletto that was buried to its ornate hilt in the corded muscles, severing the jugular vein. The big cowman went reeling backward out of his saddle with a choking, rattling gurgle.

Nor did his men wait to offer aid to their dying leader. They whirled their horses and were gone in the night as Pete and Ben Hudson quit their hiding place and ran toward the open space where Silver sat swaying in his saddle, his two hands gripping his metal saddle horn. The gambler's black sombrero had fallen off and his silvery hair shone whitely. There was a widening crimson blot on his white shirtfront. He smiled down at Ben Hudson, the glaze of death already in his dark eyes. Dillard lay dying, there on his back, the pearl handle of the knife now stained red, red gushing across his throat and face.

"Adios, Ben, my good friend. I give you—your house—by the side of the road!" And as he lurched from the saddle, Ben Hudson caught him and laid him gently on the ground.

Out of his life of blackness, Silver had made one splendid gift. He had died for a friend, the only friend the world had ever given him.

War Eagle and Blue Horse had come up. They stood there, silent, grave, stern. Pinkey stood behind them, an awed look on his freckled face as he saw Ben Hudson stand there, his hat in his hand, looking with eyes of pity and understanding down into the dead face of the consummate villain who had balanced his books according to his own lights.

"The King of Smoky River," came Ben Hudson's solemn voice, "is dead. Dead, also is his king-maker. And may God, in His great understanding, find mercy for my friend who has done this thing to-night."

So passed the cattle king of Smoky River. He took with him the last shred of fear in the heart of Pete Gillis. And

the man who was afraid of the dark became as dead as the fallen king.

So this story really has to do with four men. A brave coward, a king, a friend to man, and a villain whose final gesture made possible the lasting happiness that came to Smoky River. Now a cabin squats at the rainbow's end.

BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

Yellow-headed Blackbird

(Xanthocephalus)

TO the Great Plains section of the West belongs the yellow-headed blackbird. Usually it will be found only on the prairies or the less-wooded areas, for to the plains and long grasses it is really native.

This blackbird has distinctive tastes for certain kinds of food and must have plenty of water. Swampy land, or land bordering lakes or rivers, is the preferred location. In the valleys of the Rockies are bulrushes, usually growing beside rivers which overflow their banks. Here the yellow-headed blackbird makes his home. Also, in sections of the South where the iris grows, he often builds.

The yellow-head gathers in large family parties, so that, as a rule, one does not see one or two scattered here and there, but hundreds flying and living in comparative harmony. Year after year they return to the same breeding ground, even though the site selected undergoes great changes, the only reason causing them to forsake it altogether being a lack of water.

When spring comes, the male blackbirds fly to Canada, arriving there about May first. Not so far North, they arrive a few weeks later. As the head of a family goes to a strange city to prepare a home before sending for his wife and children, so the yellow-heads send their male members on in advance. A few days later the females arrive.

It is believed that only one brood is raised each season. The female has entire charge of building the nest. Almost any wet material selected from a near-by stream is used for this purpose. The nest is woven about the stems of the reeds, two or three feet above the water line. When dry, the home is snug and secure. Dry, wide reed leaves for the lining, and often the plumelike tops of the reeds make a canopy over the entrance. Almost always the nest is built upon last year's reeds, which are firmer and stronger than new ones.

The mother bird constructs the home in from two to four days. Three, four, or five eggs are laid, one each day, as soon as the nest is thoroughly dried out. Every complement of eggs seems to be different in color, shape, and size, but every egg in a set is the same color and shape. They vary from a gray-white to an olive-white, covered with large or small dark spots. After ten days the eggs are hatched and the male bird condescends to assist in feeding the babies.

While still more or less helpless the young birds remain a sort of buff color, which blends well with the grasses. The males become blacker than the females and the entire head and throat is a beautiful golden yellow, offset by a black beak. The female has a lighter yellow throat and black markings about the head.

Strangely enough, the yellow-head, for all his beauty, is unable to render a creditable song. He begins, surely, but ends every time a dismal failure. It seems as if he never grows tired of trying, but he never succeeds in emitting anything more beautiful than a few harsh, unpleasant notes, followed by a squeak.

It is only when the farmer's grain is in the very early stages that the yellow-heads become a menace. After the crops are well started they become an economic benefit, for they eat large quantities of insects, grubs, and grasshoppers.

Hungry Flames

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Whoopee!" etc.

"AW, you guys couldn't make money," "Biffalo" Bull snorted in the R Bar R bunk house at "Red" Johns and "Hungry" Hosford.

"Is that so?" Red said.

"Is that so?" Hungry repeated.

"Yeah," Biffalo sneered. "I never knowed a cow-punch yet that had any knack of money-makin'. Cow-punchin' and high finance simply don't herd together. And, anyway, of all the cow people I've ever known that didn't have no talent for money-makin' you two wobble-brains haven't got it in the largest quantity."

"You're going to eat them words yet, Biff," Hungry predicted.

"Maybe and maybe not, but mostly maybe not," Biffalo laughed. "Just the same, what is this scheme you've got?"

"That's what I'd like to know," "Shorty" Nolan put in.

"Yeah—me, too," I said.

"Never mind; you'll find out in time," Red Johns told us mysteriously.

The rest of us certainly were curious about what these two dudes had up their sleeves. It all started when one of the boys happened to overhear them arguing about whether to call their selves Johns & Hosford or Hosford & Johns. Hungry modestly insisted Red should come first and the firm should be called Johns & Hosford, Red meanwhile claiming it ought to be the other way around. By tossing a coin it finally was decided to call themselves Johns & Hosford.

"Golly, I had no idea business men had such big problems," "Slim" Evers razzed the partners, who were sitting at a table with scratch paper and pencils and looking very efficient.

"Oh, it's a terrible life," "Natural" Neely said. "You get rubber checks and have bad debts and people sue you and you go bankrupt and get stuck in prison for embezzlement."

"Yes, and don't forget about getting into jams with the income-tax people when you show any profit," Bill Tell remarked.

"Nuts!" Hungry Hosford answered them, putting down rows of figures. "Now look, Red; here's our initial overhead. Here's what we want to set aside for expansion. After a year, unless our business runs away past our expectations, this sum ought to be our advertising appropriation."

"Be sure that you don't forget office help and rent for office space, Hungry," Red said.

"By gosh! that's right, Red."

"You ain't forgetting your foreign offices, are you?" Biffalo kidded them. "You'll want representatives in London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, South America, China, and Japan."

"A couple of big shots in the business world like you two cuckoos ought to have a New York Stock Exchange seat," Bill Tell suggested. "A seat only costs a hundred thousand bucks or maybe two or three hundred thousand. Get a couple of seats. Tell 'em you want them in the first row and on the center aisle."

All the panning that the boys could give Red and Hungry failed to get a rise out of the new partners. All their teasing and coaxing, too, failed to get either of them to give out even a hint of what their mysterious business was going to be.

Next day, while the both of them were in town—probably to pick out a site for a sixty-story office building, Biffalo Bull thought—a truck rumbled out to the R Bar R, loaded to the top with big cardboard cartons, all marked "Fragile." They had come by railroad freight that morning from the coast, the driver told us as he piled the cartons up beside the bunk house, but what was in them he didn't know.

"Well, hang my hide in a tanyard!" Biffalo exclaimed out suddenly after some snooping around among the big boxes. "Them two idiots are planning to turn bootleggers."

"How do you know?" half a dozen voices asked at once.

Biff reached into one of the cartons where it had been split in handling and from among some excelsior inside pulled out an empty quart bottle.

"There's the evidence," he said. "I bet there's coils and corks and fake labels and everything else in these other boxes."

"That's mighty thin glass for a whisky bottle," Natural Neely observed, holding it up. "Whisky bottles usually are made of pretty thick glass so they don't break so easy if you should happen to drop one, as usually happens with souses."

"I guess that's where they're fixing to take the most profit," Shorty Nolan surmised after thinking it over. "They figure every time a guy drops a bottle and busts it he's coming back for a replacement. It's a wonder to me they didn't buy their bottles from some Christmas - tree - ornament - factory. They'd break a heap quicker."

The boys were more mystified than ever that afternoon when the firm of Johns & Hosford returned from town. They brought some things with them, but those articles certainly weren't what bootleggers use.

They had a lot of red, pink, and blue ribbons. They had a couple of wooden propositions that somewhat resembled a sawhorse, only longer and with a lot of two-and-a-half inch holes drilled into the top piece of wood. There was a big box of corks and several cans of enamel of different colors.

With nothing but evasive answers to our questions, Johns & Hosford got

right to work, painting up the sawhorse things with the enamel and striping and otherwise decorating them in a most fantastic manner.

We sat around them in a circle, wondering what in the world they could be up to. When Biffalo Bull asked if they was fixing to peddle whisky, Hungry merely answered, "Nope!"

Later they unpacked several of their cartons and got out a lot of the thin, glass, quart bottles. These they took over to the pump of a rain-water cistern and filled them with water. While Hungry filled the bottles, Red corked them.

"Oh, I see it now," Shorty Nolan told us. "They ain't going to sell whisky. It'll be gin."

"Gin out of rain water?" Natural Neely scoffed.

"Sure! That's the way they make gin in the big cities now. You go to a bootlegging druggist and right before your eyes he mixes up grain alcohol, water, and juniper berry flavoring, shakes the bottle and hands you what some folks think is gin."

"You're crazy, Shorty," Red answered.

Johns & Hosford then placed some of their bottles upside down in the sawhorse effects by sticking the bottle necks into the holes bored into the wood. There was a dozen in a row.

Honestly, I began wondering about then if they hadn't lost their minds. It seemed so silly—sticking bottles full of water upside down in racks.

I was almost convinced that the both of them were loco when they took still other bottles of water and dressed them up with colored ribbons, tying big bows on them and leaving short and long sashes of ribbon in loops.

At about that time, Barney Garland, the assistant postmaster in town, happened along the county road and stopped to tell us that the Tompkinses, small-farmer neighbors of ourn down the road a spell, had had the scare of their lives from fire.

"From some unknown cause, a woodshed near the house started to burn," Barney said. "Mrs. Tompkins rushed inside and got a fire extinguisher, but the danged thing wouldn't put it out. You know, you're supposed to replace the liquid in most extinguishers from time to time, and Mr. Tompkis had plumb forgot about this.

"The shed just kept on burning and throwing sparks and embers on the roof of the house. They couldn't put it out, but Tompkins, his wife, the kids, and the hired man formed a bucket brigade and kept sousing the roof of the house so that they kept it from burning."

"Hooray!" Red Johns yelled suddenly. If I had any doubts about him and his partner having gone cuckoo, I was over them then.

"Gee, that's swell!" Hungry added. "That's made for us. Could you ask for better advance advertising?"

The two lunatics started to punch each other and dance around like Indians bent on war.

"Say! What ails you?" Biffalo Bull asked them stiffly. "Is that a nice way? You hear a friend and neighbor having a misfortune and you holler 'Hooray!' and celebrate."

"We're thinking of the good of the community," Red said. "This unfortunate incident at the Tompkins household is the best thing that could have happened for the common weal."

I was floored. Red don't ordinarily use big words and fancy talk.

"Before you birds are eaten up with curiosity," he went on, talking naturally again, "I'll explain now what the business of Johns & Hosford is going to be. Take a squint at this."

He handed me a letter-head that he unfolded after taking it out of his pocket. The boys gathered around me and read over my shoulders. Here's what we read:

JOHNS & HOSFORD
Fire Prevention Engineers

Mr. Montana Home Owner:

Two of the greatest friends that Man has are Fire and Water.

They continue to be his friends as long as Man can control them. When dams break, when rivers go over their banks, when floods come, Water ceases to be man's friend. It is his enemy.

When Fire, which cooks our meals, keeps us warm, makes tools for us from iron and steel, and gives us many other blessings, gets out of control, it becomes an enemy.

What does Man use, what has Man used for ages to fight the enemy, Fire, with? The answer is Water. When great conflagrations threaten busy cities, the fireman flood the flames with Water. Nothing arrests Fire so quickly and with such economy as Water.

Keep your home and your loved ones safe with Water.

We invite you to attend a meeting in the Public Square on Saturday at 1 p. m., where the Johns & Hosford Water Bomb will be explained to you. There you will be invited to witness a demonstration of the efficiency of this simple, economical contrivance that will safeguard your home.

Yours for safer homes,
JOHNS & HOSFORD.

"Water bombs? Is them there bottles of water what you call 'water bombs'?" asked Biffalo Bull.

"Precisely," Red answered. "We'll give you a little demonstration. Of course, this and anything that Hungry and I tell you now is confidential."

Red took two generous handfuls of excelsior out of a box and put it on the lee side of a rock. Then he touched it off with a match. I guess you know how excelsior burns—*Whoofffff!*

Very calmly he snatched up a quart bottle of water in either hand and then threw one after the other, like I used to heave hand grenades with the A. E. F., at the rock. The bottles busted, the water splashed all over the excelsior, and—*Pffff!*—the fire was out.

"There you are, gents!" he told us. "You been giving us the razzberry for a couple of days. Now we'll give you a little horse-laugh. Did you ever stop to think that big fortunes have been built on simple ideas? Could anything be more simple? No neat housewife wants buckets of water standing all around her house. But, can she take any offense at our water bombs? Look at them—take your pick of either a nice, enameled rack, attractive to the eye, or a graceful, thin, glass flagon suspended from a nail on the wall by ribbons that appeal to the human being's love of color.

"There they hang—possibly for years—a neat ornament. In nobody's way. Fire breaks out! The home is threatened! Death licks its chops before the cringing little ones! No cause for alarm. Throw a few bombs. Put the fire out before it gets started.

"Can you beat it?"

"Humph!" Biffalo sniffed. "Soon's folks see what your water bombs are they won't buy. They'll just get some old bottles out of their cellars and garrets, fill 'em up, and not pay you a cent."

"Yeah?" Hungry drawled. "Take the average quart bottle filled with water and try to break it easily by throwing it, for instance, against a wooden floor. Half the time they won't smash. These bottles are extra thin glass. We sent all the way to the coast for them. You can't get bottles this thin within hundreds of miles of here."

"Besides," Red Johns added, "by taking large quantities we get a price on them. We get them for five cents. The filling we get for nothing out of the cistern. We aim to sell them for ten cents each. The profit is only a nickel, but it's one hundred per cent profit. We get the nice little racks in town from the carpenter shop for a dollar each and sell them for a dollar and a quarter, delivered. At our price, and considering the neatness, beauty, and utility of our product, no one would think of bothering to duplicate the Johns & Hosford Water Bomb."

I guess you know what Saturday afternoon is like in a small town. Maybe you don't. Anyway, all folks who can ride into town from the surrounding country do their shopping and meet their friends. It's a sort of half day of rest and amusement.

At noon Johns & Hosford had a hired truck loaded up with four hundred of their water bombs and covered by a tarpaulin parked out of sight in the alley behind Angus Renwick's filling station in town.

At one p. m. Red climbed on the base of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in the public square with one of his bombs concealed in a satchel and him and Hungry started a ballyhoo that soon attracted a good-sized crowd. Red proved to be quite a speaker. He must have practiced his harangue a lot on the q. t.

He began by picturing the horrors of fire in the home. He soon had everybody's imagination littered up with smoldering embers that once were proud homes, charred bodies, death, disaster, and desolation. Then he got his water grenade out of the bag and held it high up over his head for every one to see while he explained how efficiently it worked and how cheaply it could be bought. For the women present he showed off his enameled rack and explained how the bottles could be made into decorations with ribbons and whatnot.

It wasn't long after this that I noticed "Hawkeye" Hankins, our town deputy sheriff, shifting around in the crowd, grinning and whispering something into the ears of folks, who started to grin and chuckle as he walked away from them. I wondered what Hawkeye had up his sleeve, because he's a practical joker of the worst kind and the town cut-up.

Red was explaining that if Mrs. O'Leary had had one of Johns & Hosford's bombs when her cow kicked over the lantern there never would have been the great Chicago fire.

"Yeah—but how do we know the dern things'll work?" a man in the crowd yelled.

Red beamed on him. He rubbed his hands together.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "we're going to prove it to you. You all know that abandoned little shanty on Mr. David Welsh's farm ten miles out on the Yellow Dog Hollow road? Well, my partner and I learned that Mr. Welsh was planning to raze it, so we bought from the owner the right to burn it down.

"We'd like all of you to take a ride out that way—it's a beautiful day—and watch us set it afire, extinguish the flames, rekindle them, and smother them with the great Johns & Hosford Water Bomb. We have a truck loaded with our bombs and if you'll just follow the truck—well, folks, you'll see a sight."

Just then Hawkeye got around to me and Shorty Nolan.

"Don't pass this up," he sniggered. "It's goin' to be great. I found their truck parked over to Renwick's filling station and I got every derned bottle emptied of water and refilled with gasoline. They'll never catch on, 'cause the 'gas' looks just like water."

You've seen busy pɛ̄ɔple suddenly forget their important business and go flocking after fire engines? Well, Red and Hungry had used good psychology. They figured everybody is more or less fascinated by a fire, and on Saturdays, when everybody's looking for amusement a fire would draw a crowd. Besides, when Hawkeye slipped the word around that there was going to be a real fire, why, there was no shortage of spectators.

The procession of automobiles following Johns & Hosford's truck made up a regular motor caravan.

I want to tell you here that to get to the Welsh farm we had to ford the

Wild Horse Creek a mile from the shanty we were heading for. Now, in dry weather like we'd had for weeks and weeks, this creek bed is just dry gravel. But, let a good water-bringin' rain came sloshing down and it ain't more than an hour before Wild Horse Creek goes wild. Two dozen little draws down the side of Turkey Run Mountain pour water into it like out of a fire main. If it fills up, it stays filled up for about three days, too.

I remembered this as we crossed the creek bed and looked at the sky. There wasn't a cloud in sight. The sun never shone more brightly since it went into the shining business.

Red and Hungry drove their truck into the Welsh private road, but everybody else left their cars parked on the Yellow Dog Road to make turning around easier later on.

Poor Johns & Hosford! They didn't suspect a thing. Like two kids they gleefully kindled a fire against one side of the old shanty. They didn't notice the grins on the faces of the big crowd standing all around.

"Now watch, folks!" Red shouted as the blaze got bigger.

Hungry was behind him and between him and the 'water' bombs, ready to pass them into his hands as fast as needed.

Sock!

Puff-ff-fff!

Naturally, instead of checking the flames, the gasoline only whooped them up. At the same moment I heard a rumble and noticed the sun disappear. Turning, I saw big black clouds rushing up from the West and heard thunder rolling again.

Red quickly threw another bomb—and another, and a fourth. *Puff-ff-ff! Whish-sh-sh-shsh!*

The faces of the two partners fell. They looked from one to another. Hungry removed a cork and sniffed. Red sniffed. They frowned and cussed under their breath. The first few drops of the threatened rain began to fall.

"When you goin' to put out the fire with your water bombs?" somebody yelled.

"Folks," the panting Red shouted, climbing on a fence post, "we've been double crossed. Somebody took the water out of our bombs and substituted gasoline—a low-down, scurvy trick. If I find out who it was, I'll lick him silly."

The crowd, hiding its grins from Red stood around and enjoyed the fire. Poor Red stood there looking like a nickel's worth of what's-the-use. As I studied him, I happened to notice that Hungry had disappeared.

Meanwhile, the rain began coming down a little faster all the time. Different people began to shuffle off toward the parked cars to get back to town before the Wild Horse Creek got filled. Suddenly the rainfall became a downpour and every one ran toward the cars.

As I turned to go I saw Hungry go up to his partner and whisper something, whereupon Red's face was wreathed in smiles.

Shorty Nolan and I ran to Shorty's flivver and we got in. Shorty stepped on the starter, but nothing started. All around us other starters were grinding and squealing. Not a car would start. Some backfired, but quit right away.

"Somebody unscrewed the rain plug on my gas tank," yelled an angry guy near us.

"Mine, too!"

"And mine also!"

Come to find out, the gas had been let out of every car there.

"Seems to be a great day for practical jokes," Hungry observed mildly from the seat of their truck—the only motor car running.

"Good gosh! If we don't get across the ford before the creek swells our cars will be stuck here for days."

"Hey, folks! These boys all got

gasoline here," one soaking-wet motorist yelled, crawling out from under his tank.

"Sure enough! Will you help us out —give us some?"

"We'll sell you some," Red announced. "We'll sell four bottles—one gallon—to a customer."

"Hooray!"

"At a dollar a quart."

"What!"

"That's robbery!"

"It sells for nineteen cents everywhere!"

"Yeah—but here it sells for a dollar a quart," Red insisted.

"You win. Give me four quarts."

Red took the bills, Hungry handed out the gasoline. It went like wildfire. In a few minutes those two crooks took in three hundred dollars. They even made Shorty and me, their buddies, pay a buck a quart.

Finally, there was only one gallon left. There were seven cars with empty tanks.

"I'll bid for a dollar and a half!"

"Two!"

"Two and a half!"

It finally was knocked down for twenty dollars for the gallon. A guy with a new, shiny car bought it.

As the different autos started away on the run in the rain to beat the flood to the creek, Biffalo Bull, who had paid four dollars for four quarts of gasoline just recently, too, happened to pass Hungry.

"We told you we'd make you eat your words when you said we couldn't make money, you old codger," Hungry laughed. "Eat—and chew each word well!"

"Aw, shut up!" Biffalo Bull mumbled.

Then Hawkeye sauntered up, grinning.

"Now that everything's turned out all right and you fellows are feeling so good and made such a nice profit," he said, "I don't mind telling you it was me switched the gasoline off on you boys. Ha! Ha! I still got to pay the filling station for it. That gas'll cost me nineteen dollars. I thought, maybe since you made a nice profit, you wouldn't mind—uh—reimbursing me. Ha!"

Certainly we'll reimburse you!" Hungry said. "Here!"

Whunk! A straight right to the jaw sent Hawkeye down in a heap and he lay there.

And listen, if you don't think he had to pay for the gas you're on the wrong stagecoach. That filling station is owned, like I told you, by Angus Renwick. Renwick is a Scotch name.

UTILIZING SEAL BONE DEPOSITS

FOR centuries the bones of vast numbers of seal have been drifting upon the shores of the Pribilof Islands, in Bering Sea. There they have lain until the resultant accumulation is believed to form the largest bone deposit in the world. This, however, is merely a surmise, for the bone collection has not been fully or officially surveyed. Representing as it does, though, a vast store of government-owned fertilizer, available for practical use, the deposit is attracting a great deal of local capital to bid for the privilege of recovering the product.

It is roughly estimated that there are millions of dollars' worth of bone in the accumulation. One of the piles is a mile long by half a mile wide, and it is fully six feet in depth. Centuries of the action of ice and waves have formed the bone into huge drifts or windrows. And it is considered possible that sand covers equally as large deposits as are exposed above the ground.

CHINOOK

By John Frederick

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

CHINOOK, a magnificent husky, is owned by Andrew Steen, a stern man, who on the boat from Juneau to Byea becomes involved in an encounter with Joe Harney, a brave youth and gallant fighter. Harpey is apparently about to be defeated when a huge wave washes Steen overboard. Harney rescues him, and on reaching Byea the strangely assorted couple combine forces.

They meet a girl on the trail, Kate Winslow, one of whose dogs is mad. Harney saves her from its attack. The chechahco admires her skill and courage, but Steen seems to detest her. Later they rescue her from some Indians, and Steen points out that some one evidently wishes to prevent her reaching Circle City. Despite his remonstrances, he agrees to Harney's plea, and the three travel onward together.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHINOOK SNARLS.

DEEP sounds of thunder, crashings, and single reports, like the explosions of great cannon rolled ahead of them through the woods, and Steen explained it briefly.

"The ice is breaking up. It's going out!" said he.

And even the voice of Steen rang with enthusiasm as he spoke.

They came on through the woods until the gleam of the lake was before them, and as they halted at Steen's signal of a raised arm, close to the point where the girl had stopped, they could hear the moan and shudder of a saw grinding through green wood. Staring to the left, Harney made out a platform, a shadowy form above it, and another beneath, laboring a long saw through a log from end to end.

"There goes a mill," said Steen gloomily. "That's what we start at tomorrow, old son. She knows her business. Watch her work!"

It was Kate Winslow to whom he referred now.

She was rapidly undoing her sled pack, and taking out the light duck of a small tent, which she next began to

string between two trees. Their own outfit they set up not fifty steps away, and though they had two pair of strong hands, yet hers was snugged down with guy ropes before they had finished, and her ax was ringing in the woods as she cut wood for the stove, and boughs to lay inside the tent.

"Where does she get her strength?" asked Harney, amazed by her dexterity and speed.

"She's got brains in her hands," answered Steen.

There was dry kindling in the stove, brought on from the last camp, and this was now lighted and fed with the dryest wood they could find. Steen tended the stove and started the bacon frying; outside, Harney was building a fire under the kettle which would cook the food for the dogs. When both were ablaze, the men returned to the tent to pull off their heavy footgear and drag on, instead, socks made of caribou-hide with the hair turned inside for dryness and warmth; the footwear of the day hung drying from the ridge line inside the tent.

For there is nothing more important than the feet, in snow travel. One hand can do the work, but a bad foot is ruin or death. So their first care ever was the soaked footgear. The caribou socks were strong enough and warm enough for the camp usage.

When Harney came inside, he found Steen with the flour sack open, mixing in it the flapjack with salt, baking powder, and water poured into a hole made in the flour surface. It followed the bacon into the pan to soak up the thick bacon fat; then beans followed, to thaw and fry, with tea the last of the supper dishes. It was food that even a sailor might have found hard going, but the knifelike cold stimulates appetites in the Northland.

While this cookery was in progress, Harney tried again to talk to Steen about the girl.

He said in his direct and simple way: "Steen, what's wrong with the girl? I ain't seen anything bad about her. She's cool. Yes! But she's got everything else that you could ask. No yellow streak in her, and she's not hard on the eyes."

Steen turned, his face flushed by the heat of the stove.

"You'll find out before the finish," he said. "You'll wish that you'd met up with the old Nick himself before you run into her pretty face up here, son. Mark what I tell you!"

"I'm marking it," said Harney. "I'm askin' you for reasons."

"Oh, hang reasons!" answered the other. "What have reasons got to do with women, anyway?"

He would talk no more about it, while Harney, obsessed with troubled thoughts, swallowed his supper rapidly and did not press the question.

Something, he felt, was wrong. He himself felt a difference between Kate Winslow and other women he had known, but what the difference was he could not place. A certain indifference, perhaps, was the main thing!

He fed the dogs, which had regained their appetites by the rest at the end of the day's work; they ate wolfishly, tails hanging low, backs humped, bellies heaving; and when they had ended their rations, unappeased and furious hunger still blazed in their eyes.

He left them behind him and attended only by the shadowy presence of Chinook walked across to the girl's tent. The stove glowed faintly inside it; the fire for the dogs' food glared before the flap; and the keen, sweet fragrance of boiling tea drifted through the air.

The heart of the man swelled, and only slowly subsided.

"Hello!" he called.

The flap parted instantly.

"Hello!" said she. "Come in and have a smoke."

He entered.

She had arranged everything with comfort, in spite of the haste with which she had worked. She had laid a deep layer of boughs upon the floor, and unrolled her sleeping sack above this. The air of the tent already was warm, and sweet with the smell of the tea. Her footgear hung from the ridge line, close above the heat of the stove, which was not the usual pair of collapsed five-gallon tins, but a rather larger and more elaborate structure made, as it seemed to him, of thin aluminum, and kept very bright and shining by her care!

All things about her were neat. A little writing portfolio of red leather lay open upon the sleeping sack, with the ends of paper and envelopes visible in stacks; a sewing kit was spread out near by for repairs to be undertaken later.

She seated him on the bed and gave him a cup filled with steaming tea, black and powerful.

"How's everything?" said she.

"Why, all well," he answered.

"I mean, 'Little Sunshine,'" she went on, pointing in the direction of their tent.

He grinned as he understood her to mean Steen.

"He's the same, I guess. But I wanted to tell you. Steen's got a hard crust. He's all right, deep down!"

"To you," she answered. "Because you kept the sea from eating him! But I'm not making trouble between you. He's all right. You find 'em that way up North, sometimes. Even the wind's enough to thicken your skin. I don't mind Steen."

He told her that he was glad of that, staring at her while he spoke. The question that would not down came at last to his lips and sounded foolishly loud and booming in the small tent.

"What's brought you up here to make a trip like this alone?"

She looked him fairly in the face and, as always, when once her gaze was fixed upon him, he found her eyes less big, less soft, less blue than they had been before.

"Health," said she.

"Health?" he echoed stupidly.

"Yes," she said. "You take weak nerves as far North as this and they soon get strong again."

"Health!" said he again. "I would've thought—that you'd never seen a sick day in your life!"

"Would you?" murmured she, still watching his face. "Well, I hope to be strong enough by the time I reached Circle City. Strong enough to travel back again!"

She did not laugh as she spoke, but he knew that she was mocking him, and that knowledge did not fill him with anger. Instead, he was embarrassed. Twice, at least, he had been of some service to her, and it seemed that she might speak to him as something more than a stranger.

He would have found some answer but, at that moment, the flap of the tent moved aside.

"Here's some one looking for you," said the girl.

It was Chinook's wolfish face and furry ears that looked in upon them. His eyes glowed, and his tongue lolled out at the smell of recent cookery, and the feeling of the warmth.

"He's sent him to watch you, I guess," suggested Kate Winslow.

"I don't know how to make him out," said Harney. "Whether he's getting fond of me, or wants to cut my throat."

"He's a grand dog," she replied. "Has he a will of his own?"

"Aye, he has a will of his own."

"Well, we'll see," she said. "Chinook! Come here!"

Chinook, instead, lowered his head and crouched.

"Oh, he has a will of his own, well enough," said the girl.

She laughed, but her laughter, musical though it was, passed coldly along the veins of Harney.

"He don't like you. But I guess he don't like anybody," said he.

"I'll try to make him," she answered. "Chinook, come here! Look me in the eye like a brave dog, and come in at once!"

Chinook, to the bewilderment of Harney, actually glided into the tent, but he came upon his belly, wriggling low across the snow.

"Look out!" he warned the girl. "He wants to jump, I think. I'd better grab him!"

"Don't touch him!" she whispered. "Don't touch him. You see! I'll make him kiss my hand!"

He looked at her in increasing wonder, and increasing dread. Her face had grown tense, with slightly compressed lips, and with eyes that blazed at the dog.

"Come, Chinook, come!"

She stripped the glove from her hand and held it out, dainty as the hand of an infant, as Harney thought again, and wondered at the ax strokes which he had heard ringing in the woods.

The wolf dog snarled aloud, but, with his mane bristling until he looked more leonine than ever, he dragged himself forward and forward.

"Here, here!" she said urgently. "Chinook! Do you hear me!"

Suddenly he rose between them, his powerful shoulders braced against Harney's knees, thrusting the man back, while he faced the girl with lips writhed back from the big white fangs.

"Ah, see, see!" said the girl. "He's saving you from me, I think. He's saving you from me!"

She laughed again, a pulse of sound almost too soft to be heard, and without a trace of mirth in her eyes. For they still blazed with that same uncanny, hypnotic light at Chinook.

"Now, boy! Now! Come here!" she commanded.

The whole body of Chinook shook; then his teeth clipped the air with that same swordstroke that had killed many a strong dog with a single blow.

It was almost as inescapable as the stroke of a snake, and yet the girl was able to snatch her hand away in time, while Harney gripped Chinook by the mane and dragged him back.

"Get out, you murdering dog!" he commanded, and swung his hand toward the tent flap.

But Chinook, who was as sensitive to commands as any human, merely sank at his feet, and keeping his head turned toward the girl, silently he snarled his green-eyed hate.

CHAPTER IX.

A MAN, A DOG, AND A GIRL.

AS for the girl, she sank back a little, supporting herself on a hand and arm that, as Harney thought, trembled a little. She seemed pale, and suddenly very tired. Was it only his imagination that traced a film of purple shadow beneath her eyes?

"He has—a will of his own!" she murmured. "He has a will of his own."

"He's a dangerous beast," said Harney quickly. "He's been trailin' me around like a panther. Confound him, if he ain't always with me!"

"Because he loves you," said the girl. "That's the reason of it."

She sat up, as though struck suddenly by a startling idea.

"That's what happened!" said she. "Why didn't I think of that before?"

She then made a brief, impulsive gesture.

"If you weren't near," she said. "Then maybe I could have brought him to time. I think I could."

She looked earnestly into the face of Chinook, nodding, but the dog snarled again, and rising on his haunches pressed close and hard against the legs of Harney, and faced her with the same utter hate.

"How did you do it?" asked she.

"I don't know. I never paid much attention to him," said Harney.

"Petted him?"

"No."

"He was hurt, then, and you helped to take care of him?"

"No. Never."

At this, she lifted her eyes suddenly to his face.

"What did you do, then?"

"I don't know. I can't make it out—if he's fond of me, the way that you say!"

"We'll prove that, too," said she. "Just now he hates me worse than he'd hate a wild wolf, or a lynx. He feels that way about me! Now see if you can make him sit still while I touch him."

She approached with extended hand.

"Don't do it!" Harney begged. "I tell you what—he'll take your arm off. He could chop your hand off at the wrist!"

"I know, but you try to keep him from it."

"Please keep back!"

"He will slash me, if you don't try to handle him. No, not with your hands"—as Harney grasped the neck of the dog—"but with your voice. Try that!"

"Steady, boy!" said Harney hastily. "Steady, and sit still!"

Chinook, tipping up his head a little, flashed a glance into the face of the man; then quickly pointed back at the woman.

"Here, Chinook!" called Harney.

The wolfish snarl rumbled and rose high in the throat of the big fellow, then broke sudenly into the whine of a dog in torment of pain and grief. He pressed back as far as he could against Harney and behold, as the man spoke to him, Chinook put out a protesting paw and tried to thrust the girl away.

"Wonderful!" said she beneath her breath.

But her amazement was nothing compared with that of the man. He looked at her tense face, her pale beauty, her hypnotically intent eyes, and then down at the great massive fighting head of Chinook.

He could not doubt, now, what she had said—that in some mysterious fashion there had been roused in Chinook a devotion to this new master. And, in the same unexplainable manner, the dog had conceived a deadly hatred of the girl. For his own sake, for the sake of the man, he shuddered and bristled as she moved her hand slowly closer. Twice his head jerked convulsively, the fangs bared to strike, and twice the hurried, commanding voice of Harney stopped him until at last, trembling all over, his eyes winked hard shut and he allowed the hand of the girl to fall upon him and rest unharmed for an instant.

At once she stepped back.

Her gaze was no longer for the dog but for Harney, as though she were seeing him for the first time, and in a new light.

"He's yours!" she said. "And he's a treasure. And you don't know how you did it?"

"It beats me," he confessed simply. "I don't foller the ways of his brain. Do you?"

She did not answer, so intent was her study of him.

At length she murmured: "Some have to hunt for their luck, and some stumble on it, I suppose. I'm—I'm going to get out of this stuffy place!"

She pulled the hood of the parka over her head and stepped outside the tent, with Harney following her, bewildered and ill at ease. The forest was still. There was not wind enough to push to either side the thin column of smoke that lifted from above the fire in front of the tent, but it streamed far up, above the tops of the black trees, and made a faint finger pointing against the stars. All were in sight; not a cloud gloomed between the horizons, but the broad sweep of brightness rose from the trees

of the east and descended to the trees of the west in an unbroken splendor.

To these the girl looked up, and he could hear her breathing deeply.

"That's better!" he heard her say to herself.

A hand fell lightly upon his arm.

"I felt giddy, a moment ago," she said. "Those stoves—they eat the oxygen out of the air."

"Of course they do," said he, though he knew that this was no explanation.

"Well—it's all right now."

"I'd better go on back to my tent, then."

"Yes."

"Good night."

"Good night, Harney."

He had turned away from her and made a few steps, when Chinook whirled about at his heels, with a growl. As he looked back, he saw the girl running after him. A word made Chinook leap aside, and she came close to Harney, slipping her arm under his.

"Don't go yet."

"Why," said he, "of course I'll stay till you want me to go."

"We'll walk up and down for a moment," she suggested. "I'm nervous. I don't know why."

Nervous, to be sure! As they walked, she paused now and again like one stopped by weakness, or a sudden thought; but ever and again a tremor passed up his arm from her body, and once or twice she caught his arm close to her, like one clinging desperately to a support.

For a full half hour they walked through the gathering iciness of the night air until she spoke for the first time during that strange promenade, turning, and pointing toward Chinook.

"I know what you think," said he.

"About what?"

"About me. You think that Chinook's right, and that he's discovered something wicked in me. You think that?"

"No. What's the brain of a dog good for?"

"Good for? Why, a dog can begin thinking where people leave off, I sometimes believe."

She paused, leaving him unable to speak, before she went on: "What is in your mind about me? Will you tell me that?"

"A lot of doubts, and a terrible lot of surprises," he confessed in his usual straightforward manner. "I dunno that I make you out at all."

"Am I as bad as all that?"

"It ain't a question of badness, d'you see? It's a question of something else. It's a question of not understanding! That's all!"

She made another pause, and he saw her head nod in agreement.

"Yes," she said, "that's a terrible thing. Not to understand! Not to be able to see! I realized that, to-night! When I tried to understand you, I mean!"

"Me?" said Harney, fairly staggered. "Why, there ain't a thing about me that's hard to understand!"

"No?" she murmured, with a little rising inclination of mockery in her voice.

"Why, not a thing," said he. "I'm about the most simple fellow you ever could meet. Ah," he went on, "maybe I foller the drift that's in your mind. You mean because Chinook seems to 've cottoned to me a little? Why, I don't understand that any more than you do. It just happened, d'you see?"

"Nothing just happens," she answered thoughtfully. "Nothing in the world just happens! Look at him now!"

She paused short, and Chinook, wincing down to the snow, showed her the dim flash of his bared teeth by the starlight.

She laughed at him, a soft flutter of sound that seemed absurdly childish to Harney.

"If you weren't here," she said, "Chi-

nook would take himself for a wolf, and me for a veal. How he hates me!"

Then she tipped back her head and looked up to Harney.

"But he doesn't hate you, and yet I've never struck him or called him names!"

He grappled at the difficulty.

"You tried to make him do something," he said, fumbling for a key to the mystery. "Just by looking, and talking soft—maybe that was what got him scared of you. I dunno. I don't understand!"

"But you didn't try. Only suddenly he was following you at heel. He was loving you, and you didn't guess! But still you say that you're a simple man?"

"Why," said Harney, "there was never a strange thing in my life. It's always been simple things with me. Never nothing much has happened."

"I wonder," she mused. "I'd like to hear a little about you. D'you mind talking?"

"Well," he said pointedly, "I'd say one thing, I didn't come up here for my health. I had pretty good nerves before I started, even!"

She laughed, confessing the hit.

"All right," said she. "I admit that's probably true. It was gold that brought you, of course."

"Gold? Well, I dunno. The fact is that a fellow wants to turn corners."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, the street that you're walkin' on ain't likely to seem the best one in town. And around the corner——"

"Not to get rich?"

"No, not that. I figger that most of the gents that come up here go back lame, and poorer than when they came. Or else they've been through misery, and they try to buy relief when they get back, and the rates is kind of high!"

They laughed together.

"But to get your hands filled with a man-sized job. That's one pretty good thing!"

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEVENTFUL LIFE!

"PERHAPS I understand that," she said. "A man's size job—fill your hands? Well! You came up here for the fun of it, is another way of putting it?"

"Well, maybe so. But I want to talk more about you than me. I'm a common kind of a fellow. I've never done anything interesting. But you——"

He hesitated.

"There ain't anybody else like you, of course!"

"Hum!" said she. "Well, just let me hear about some of the unimportant things, then?"

"About me? About my life?" he said.

"Yes. How many times have you been in jail?"

"Hello! How'd you guess that?"

"I didn't," she said, with laughter. "I simply hit out in the dark."

"Well," he murmured, "that's a funny thing. The first time was just a pair of greasers, but the sheriff, he was a reform sheriff. I mean, the old women and the Sunday-school folks had elected him."

"I see. But what about the two greasers?"

"They was a pair of lit-up, fancy, no account, high-steppin' gents from the wrong side of the Rio Grande," he explained. "The kind that's always lookin' for trouble. When they hit our town they stumbled onto me, and there was a little trouble, so the sheriff he come and put me in jail."

"There was a little trouble. What kind of trouble?"

"Shootin' trouble, nacherally," said Harney. "One of 'em come behind me, and one from the side."

"With guns?"

"Yeah, with guns. The second time that I got in jail was——"

"But I want to hear more about the

first time. One came behind you with a gun. But he missed?"

"No, but my shoulder-blade turned that bullet, and the second one bounced off my skull, but it knocked me down. I had to shoot 'em from the floor. And you take bullets anglin' up, they're apt to hurt. So that was why I got in jail, before the judge heard the rights of the thing."

"Were they both hurt?"

"Yes. They was both hurt."

"They lied about it, I suppose?"

"Why, the fact is that they wasn't able to lie afterward. Both of them bein' dead, as you might say."

"You killed them both?"

"Yes. I killed them both. The second feller, I was kind of sorry for, because after he dropped he come at me with a knife, crawlin'. I didn't want to kill that hombre, so I just tapped him over the head with the barrel of my Colt. But the trouble was that he had a pretty thin skull. The gun barrel, it just seemed to sort of sink right in."

"I see," said she.

She was not horrified. Her voice was still gently musical as she urged him on.

"But you got out of the jail?"

"Yeah. The judge, he was a pretty good sort of a hombre. He understood how things go with high-steppin' greasers. He turned me loose. And the sheriff, he went and took a vacation."

"Well, wasn't that pretty exciting?"

"That? Why, you see how it was. The sheriff was kind of scary and he didn't trust me much, but I wouldn't 've hurt him."

"I mean, the fight was exciting."

"It didn't last long. About two seconds, maybe, while I was falling and getting out the guns. That was exciting. But you can't live on remembering things that only lasted two seconds, I guess?"

He appealed to her serious judgment, and she nodded.

"I suppose you can't. The second time, then?"

"Well, that was a kind of a sad thing. That was down in Chihuahua. There was a friend of mine by name of Giveney with his tongue hangin' out, as you might say, for a game of poker. This here Giveney, he was an amusin' gent, but crooked at cards, and a professional. So finally I says that I'll play. We start blackjack. If he crooked me, I told him it would be a fight, I warned him beforehand. That's the one thing that makes me feel better about it."

He sighed.

"And there was a fight?" said the girl.

"Well, sir, he pulled an ace off the bottom of the pack, along about the end of the first hour, with me a measly hundred in. It wasn't the money he'd lost, but just the old habit is the way that I've figgered ever since.

"But I seen him pull the ace. 'Fill your hand,' says I to him."

"He filled his hand, and I pulled the trigger, and the next morning, there I was in a greaser hoosegow, headed for a rope!"

"Good heavens, did you kill him?"

"It was so close," said Harney, apologetically. "The fact was that I wouldn't have wanted to hurt him, but he was pretty fast with a gun, and I didn't have a chance to think about pickin' the easy spots. It sure was a terrible shock to me, though, to see Giveney sinkin' back in his chair with his mouth open and the eyes starin' wide in his face."

"Horrible!" said the girl.

"How horrible, you'd never guess. But he lived long enough to say that I done right. But that made me feel worse than ever. That sort of rides me at nights, I gotta say!"

"And there you were in jail," she broke in. "For the second time, and to be hung? Was there a good judge in Chihuahua also?"

"Why, as a matter of fact, there

wasn't. So I had to bust out of the jail and get a hoss——"

"How did you break out?"

"Why, I just reached through the bars and got a keeper and took the keys out of his pocket and unlocked the door. It was about noon, when most of the greasers was sleepin'. So I got away all right. It was a mighty fine pinto that I found, and he carried me pretty till I got across the border."

"Was that exciting, or just dull?"

"It was sort of exciting," admitted Harney, "till I realized that it was noon, and the rest of them was sleeping."

"Another dull day!" said she. "But at least you were twice in jail."

"Well, more times than that. The third time, there was three Canucks up in a lumber camp. The three of them and me, we was out on a job together, and along about noon, we got to quarreling, and the whole three of the skunks turned loose on me. And I didn't have no gun!"

He paused and shook his head at the thought.

"That was careless," she remarked.

"Yeah. It sure was, considering that they was Canucks. I ought to 've known better, I must say!"

He sighed, at the thought of such negligence.

"And what happened? Did they have guns?"

"Only two of 'em. The third one had a knife. I had to knock one of 'em down, while the knifer was sinkin' the steel into me. But it turned on the shoulder bone. After havin' the gun, of course it was easy, and I shouldn't 've shot to kill, but the fact was that that there knife hurt like sixty when it grided agin' the bone. And so I just turned loose, not thinkin', as you might say."

"Ah, yes," said she. "And what happened?"

"One of 'em sure had a tough skull, and he lived——"

"Ah, I'm glad that only two were killed!"

"Yeah," said Harney. "The third gent lived for pretty nigh ten days. It was wonderful the way that he lasted."

"What a comfort to you!" said she.

"Speakin' personal," said he, "Canucks don't interest me much. But they jailed me on account of that."

"But why, when the others had attacked you?"

"Well, they said that nobody could 've done what I said had happened. They called me a liar, to put it short. It made me mad to hear the way they talked!"

"And then?"

"They got me convicted, all right, but just at the end down comes a pardon!"

"Was that exciting?"

"What?"

"Why, the fight, the trial, the conviction, and the pardon!"

"The trouble with the fight was that them Canucks couldn't handle guns. The trial would 've been all right except for the lawyer gents, which talked a lot, very tiresome. It spoiled all the days of the trial, I'd say. The layout of grub was pretty bad, too. I was glad to get that pardon before I got indigestion!"

"I understand," said she. "That's six men dead and three times in jail. Well, I suppose life has been pretty dull for you."

"The fourth time was just for breakin' the peace. I mean, I felt kind of foolish and coltish and full of life. Y'understand? Shouldn't talk like this to a woman, but the fact is that I got pied. I mean, I had too much redeye, and made some noise."

"Shouting?"

"Why, it appears like I took a misliking to a bartender in a place, and I throwed him out, and when he come back with friends, I throwed him and the friends out, too, which caused a lot of breakin' of glass, which made the noise, and disturbed the peace, and got me in jail."

"I see," said she. "That's four times. I'm very glad no men were killed, though!"

"Well, there was one that time," said he. "It was a lad by name of Martinez, which he fractured his skull agin' the wall. After I'd hit him, I mean. Then he died."

"Was nothing done about that?"

"Why, no, because it turned out that this Martinez had done a murder just previous, and when they went through his room after his death, they found the stuff he'd stolen, and the judge, he give me a compliment and turned me loose. Very lucky for me, because they fed on rice and molasses, mostly, in that jail, and I never cottoned to rice."

"Four times. No more?"

"The fifth time and the sixth time was both on account of fights that was picked with me by other gents that I didn't bother none. Considerin' that I paid the funeral expenses complete, the judge both times let me go with a caution, as they call it."

"Two more men!" said she.

"There was two, on one of them parties," he remembered.

"And that was all?"

"Yes, sir. Only six times in jail!"

CHAPTER XI.

SHE'S DIFFERENT.

AT this, she laughed again, and suddenly it appeared to him that he might have been ridiculous! Her viewpoint leaped into his mind and he stopped short with a groan.

"Maybe that sounds like a lot of times," said Harney. "Maybe it is. But what I mean is that nothing serious happened any of those times."

"You mean that you got out alive?'

"Never went up to the pen."

"So you came up hunting for blizzards for playmates?"

"Why, I dunno that I'd put it that strong."

"But besides getting into and out of jail, what have you done?"

"Well, what everybody does along the range. Nothing new. Punched cows, a good deal. Did a little prospecting, after I'd had a few spells in the mines; spent a few seasons runnin' wild hosses, too; and had a whirl at lumbering, of course."

"The wild horses. They were pretty exciting, I guess."

"There was some money in 'em."

"You caught so many?"

"The catching wasn't so good. Other gents done that, but we gentled the ones we caught. You take most of those wild caught mustangs and they're never much more pleasant to deal with than a tangle of snakes full of poison. Wild caught mustang's idea of the right sort of a day would make a dog-gone African lion feel like a retired banker. You couldn't get no price for 'em. So we worked out a way of gentling them."

"Who did?"

"Mostly me."

"How did you do it?" she asked, with an almost breathless interest.

He wondered at her restrained excitement, but went on: "By learnin' their language."

"Horse talk?" she chuckled.

"I mean, you know how it is. Mostly, you take a look at a hoss and hate him because he's actin' up. But he's mean because he's scared. Would you like to be tied to a snubbin' post and have a grizzly bear come and strap a saddle on your back, and then get into the saddle and rake your stomach with his claws? No, I guess that you wouldn't. No more would I! No more does the hoss like men! He's snortin' and jerkin' back; and he gets a fool look in his eye. Like the look that most men get when a gun is held under their nose. 'Fool hoss,' you call him. But he ain't a fool. He's only scared. And when I learned that, it wasn't hard to get those hosses to eat out of your hand. I didn't fight

'em. I talked to 'em, like they was in school. I tamed scores of 'em, and we got a good price."

"You tamed them!" she repeated, as if she had heard a marvel. "Tell me. Did you talk to Chinook, too?"

"To him? Why, I hardly spoke a word."

"Have you tamed other dogs?"

"Not a one. They was all tame dogs that I met up with, until I landed in this part of the world."

"You never tried your hand even with a puppy, when you were young?"

"No, I never tried."

"I don't understand," she murmured. "Unless it's hypnosis!"

"I'm no hypnotizer."

"And people, too?"

"What about 'em?"

"You've had a fight with Steen one day, and the next day you've turned him into your friend."

"That was by accident. Which I mean, he didn't want to slide into the ocean, that day. And nacherally, every time he sees me, he thinks of dyin' on dry land, which is more to his likin'."

"I see that you can't help talking small about yourself," said she. "But I'm mightily interested. Tell me—did a horse ever kick you?"

"Well, I dunno that it ever did."

"Did a horse ever throw you?"

"No, I been pretty lucky, that way."

"Yet you've broken wild horses!"

"I used to ride 'em with talk, a lot of the time. I got them used to me, and then it was easy."

"Did a dog ever bite you?"

"No. I guess not ever."

He laughed in his turn.

"I feel like I was in court ag'in," said he, "and about to get thirty days!"

She paid no heed to this interruption, but went on: "When you were fighting Steen on the tug——"

"Yes?"

"What was Chinook doing?"

"Chinook? He was sliding around the floor at the heels of his master, ready to slice into me if ever I did any harm."

"Didn't you knock big Steen actually flat?"

"Yeah. I actually got in a lucky punch."

"And did the dog jump at you, then?"

"He come for me, but changed his mind. I guess he seen that his boss would get up pretty soon."

She shook her head.

"Do you know why he didn't leap at your throat?"

"Chinook? No, I dunno, except for the reason I told you. Or maybe Steen gave him word to keep off, and I didn't hear it."

"Chinook couldn't touch you, that was all."

"I'm not as fast as all that. And Steen had me slowed up to a stop, toward the end. Besides, Chinook can move as fast as a cat, in spite of his weight."

"Of course he can move fast. I didn't mean that he couldn't catch you, but that he couldn't persuade himself to tackle you."

"Well, that might be. He's a real sport, is old Chinook, and wouldn't play two agin' one, likely!"

"Is that the way you explain it?"

"Why, how else?"

"How else, indeed?" she murmured. "I wish I could tell! How else!"

"Is it something important?"

"Important?" she cried at him, facing him almost angrily. "Of course it's important. Call him here!"

Harney made a gesture, and the great wolf dog sprang in front of him, staring up to his face.

"You don't even have to speak to him!" Kate exclaimed. "Keep him there while I say good night."

"I wouldn't bother him ag'in."

She paid no attention, but went straight forward to the dog and Chinook remained where he was, crouching,

showing his teeth, but held in his place by the cautionary finger which Harney had raised.

So she leaned a little above him and took the huge head between her hands.

Then Harney heard her say: "I'd rather be able to make a slave of such a dog than to find a ton of gold under the snow! He belongs to you, body and soul. He belongs to you!"

He was amazed by the seriousness with which she spoke, but he answered: "I've talked up a good deal about myself. Ain't it time that you should tell me something about you?"

"There's only one important thing," said she. "I'm mighty cold, and have to go back to the tent. Good night, Joe Harney!"

She hurried off to her tent and disappeared inside it, while Harney looked vaguely after her, then started back toward his own.

The fire had almost died down, but by the last red glow of it he saw the high-shouldered bulk of the sled dog rise from the snow like a ghost and fling itself across his path. Instantly, the tawny shadow of Chinook hurtled between. Stiff-legged, with bristling mane, he stood above the other husky, and the sled dog, as though ashamed, slunk down into its sleeping place once more.

Harney watched with interest, wondering what the girl would have thought if she could have seen this quick little by-play. He was himself disturbed by the innuendoes and the questions of Kate Winslow, but he could not put them together.

It was only plain to him that she regarded something about him as a mystery.

About him! Simple Joe Harney!

He chuckled at the thought as he entered the tent, and found his partner, by the light of a pine torch, mending patiently and skillfully a torn mukluk.

"Well," growled Steen, without raising his head, "did you tell her everything you know?"

The calm good nature of Harney was strained to the breaking point by this unnecessary rudeness.

But he controlled his voice as he answered: "Why d'you do it, Steen? What's the use always starting trouble? Have I been stepping on your toes or anything?"

Steen rolled back his big head and looked up.

"Don't you understand yet?" he barked.

"What?"

"The girl, I mean."

"I don't understand her," answered Harney. "Dog-gone me if I understand anything about her!"

He added, after meeting the searching eye of the other for a moment: "Do you?"

"I know this," said Steen sternly. "Before you're through with her, she'll make you sicker than malaria, and typhoid fever, and rheumatism, all together!"

"I don't believe it," replied Harney, with a rising anger in his throat. "You don't like her. Well, everybody can't be liked by every one. But the way I look at her, she's got other people beat because she's different! That's all I have to say!"

"Aye!" sneered Steen, "she's different, all right. You can lay your last penny that she's different! You'll travel around the world and never meet another like her."

He added something else in a mutter which Harney could not decipher immediately, but it sounded as though Steen said: "A Gila monster's different, too. But that ain't any reason for making a house pet out of him, is it?"

However, it appeared that Steen had not expected the words to be heard, Harney did not reply, but went straightaway to bed. There he lay awake for a long time after the torch had been ex-

tinguished trying to fit together his whirl of impressions of Chinook, of Kate Winslow, of Steen's cruel comments.

Finally he slept, but in the dark something cold touched his face, and when he stirred his hand, it was licked by a rough tongue.

Chinook stood over him, but as though reassured, the great dog now silently left the tent, and his new master fell asleep again.

CHAPTER XII.

SHIP AHOY!

THEY were up early, with the saw already groaning in the woods about them, and as soon as breakfast was over, they set about selecting a proper place near the edge of the lake, so that they could erect their platform and begin the long agony of cutting timbers out of round green logs.

But early as their start was, the girl was already away from her tent. They looked in for her on their way.

"Well, she's taken herself off our hands!" said Steen with satisfaction. "But no matter what else she can do, I dunno how she can handle the weight of one of them long saws."

"She'll hire some gents to build for her," said Harney. "Hey, listen to that!"

They had come into a thick growth of woods, through which Chinook glided with his usual silent stride, when up went a wild babel of screeches and howls and shrieks that curdled the blood.

"Sounds like half a dozen dogs pullin' the tails of catamounts and gettin' their noses scratched," observed Harney. "Let's go look!"

They broke through into a small clearing at the farther side of which appeared the platform for sawing timbers, and near it a travel-worn and time-stained little tent, out of which the occupant was crawling at that moment. He was a man with a tremendous brush of red beard thrusting out in front of his face, and he shouted with dismay as he saw what had happened.

In the center of the clearing stood Chinook, and all the trees about the clearing fairly blossomed with cats that clambered up and down the trunks, clawed their way along the branches, or lay stretched out at safe heights, looking down with green eyes of rage and fear, and lashing their sides with their tails. They made no noise, now, except for the distinct sound of their claws in the bark of the trees.

"Call off your dog!" said the red-bearded man. "He's scared my whole scow-load of cats into the trees and it'll take me a month to get 'em caged up ag'in! Here, kitty, kitty! Look at 'em! Every hair standin' on end. Confound 'em, I've been feedin' 'em slick all this way to the water, and now they've had a thousand pound of dried fish scared out of 'em. Take that dog away, and then help me climb these trees!"

He began to swear with enormous earnestness as he surveyed the damage that had been done.

"Partner," laughed Harney, "what on earth are you gunna do with these cats?"

"I'm gunna take 'em to Circle City," said the other. "If they ain't worth an ounce apiece, then it ain't true that the town's ate up with rats. They's enough rats in any Yukon town to turn the snow brown!"

"It's true," said Steen. "They ate my grub last summer till I was near starved."

"Sure," said the man of the red beard. "A Yukon rat can eat twice his weight. Everybody knows that!"

"Yukon rats have fires in their stomachs, and they gotta keep them burning or die," agreed Steen. "So you're taking a whole scow-load to the Circle?"

"Sure I am," replied the other. "I'm doin' two good turns, one for them that

I took the cats from, and one for them that I'm deliverin' them to. They ain't no disease worse'n too many of 'em, and they ain't no sickness worse than not havin' 'em at all."

"For every one of these here cats," said Steen, "there's gunna be about fifty dogs standin' waitin'. They ain't nothin' that a husky will swaller quicker'n a cat. Cats' claws only sort of tickle their palate."

However, he and Harney called off Chinook and then helped the redbeard to gather the scowload of cats together once more by climbing the trees, or by coaxing them down; and finally an exhibition of raw chopped fish brought every last one of them scampering out of the trees and back into the power of their owner; so that at last he was to take down the river the strangest cargo the Yukon ever saw.

But Steen and Harney went on to the edge of the lake and saw that the ice indeed had gone out from Lake Tagish, so that the big sheet of water lay rosy in the dawn of the day. Along the shore, they saw three scows in the building, the planks being fitted on over the rude frame of the boats, and already there was a sound of hammering. But what seemed to the two watchers, staring enviously, the most beautiful of pictures, was one completed boat with her thick mast up, and the low square sail set upon it and bellying and tugging in the wind, which now went out into the lake from her anchorage.

"They're free! They're started!" said Harney bitterly. "They'll be down in the fun with the last of the ice, I guess."

"I wonder why they're pulling over toward the shore?" asked Steen.

"It's a trial voyage, maybe. There don't seem to be no cargo much aboard her."

There was a sweep forward and another aft, for handling the clumsy craft, but in spite of her big belly and blunt entrance, she seemed to Harney both a swift and a noble ship, compared to the boat which he and Steen with unskilled hands would be able to construct. Furthermore, that ship was ready at this moment to start for the Yukon, for gold, for the great adventure.

The wind favored her. She came with a curling bow-wave on either side and a deep ripple in her wake. When she came closer, running up along the shore, they could see that she was decked over, fore and aft, a feature which would mean much strength and some comfort for her crew.

"Where is her crew?" asked Harney, seeing no one except a solitary steersman.

"Blanketed behind that sail, most likely," suggested Steen. "They've done a good job, makin' her! Hey! Are they gunna run her ashore?"

For here the boat made a sudden swerve and stood in for the beach. The square sail was let go by the run, and hung flapping and trailing toward the water, while a voice hailed them cheerfully from the steersman:

"Stand by, Joe! Stand by, Steen, and catch this rope!"

It was Kate Winslow who was bringing the boat up to them, the headway being sufficient to waft it in, gently, while she ran forward and threw a line to Steen.

"You might walk her up shore a little," said the girl. "We could be a shade closer to our camps, I guess."

Even Steen was startled out of his usual calm.

"Where'd you get it?" he asked.

"Out of my pocket," she answered crisply, and she would say no more, but stood back to wait until Steen and Harney, working together, had drawn the craft inshore. Then she jumped on the gunwale, and lightly down to a rock, thence to another, and so to the beach.

She stood beside them, nodding at the boat.

"What d'you think, boys?" she asked them in her matter-of-fact way. "Is it good enough for the trip?"

"It'll do fine," said Steen. "You can't do much tacking with any of these scows, they're so green and crank, but that's one of the best. It'll get you down the river in grand style. Where's your crew?"

"I've got a couple of good men," she said.

"Know the river?"

"One of 'em does, pretty well."

"That's what you want," advised Steen, enviously eying the craft. "They need to know where the pinches are likely to come. Why didn't they help you bring the craft in?"

"They did," said she, gravely. "They caught the line for me."

She turned to Steen with a slight chuckle.

"If you're feeling kinder about me," said she, "I thought the boat might cheer you up a little!"

Steen instinctively rubbed his hands together.

"That would take a lot of the ache out of my shoulders," said he. "Well, is it a go?"

"I could be the crew and sleep in the forecastle," she said. "You two would be officers and take the after cabin."

Harney stared at her, open-mouthed, and she noticed the look.

"See how he's staring!" said she. "He doesn't realize that we're too far north for chaperons!"

Harney recovered himself wtih a little grunt of embarrassment and flushed.

"It's a go with me," said Harney. "We'll save weeks; we'll get there with the first. How much do we pay?"

She waved her hand with a brief gesture.

"No pay for you; no price for the boat. That's fair, I guess. I invest the capital, you do the work, and there's plenty of work to take her down!"

Steen laughed out of sheer pleasure. The darkness of his manner toward her now was completely dissolved and he clapped Harney heavily over the shoulder.

"Maybe we've found our luck, after all!" said he. "Come on, Harney, and we'll start shifting our stuff."

They trudged away to the camp. Snow was beginning to fall as the sky overcast, and soon with a smothering thickness, furring the dark branches of the evergreens, and wavering down through every gap in the woods so that one could see hardly an arm's length in front of one's face.

Through this windless mist of white they labored, carrying sleds and all their camp equipment in several loads down to the edge of the water, where the boat had turned into a white ship. It was slippery and wet work getting the goods out to the scow at its moorings, but they dared not bring her in further toward dry land for fear of lodging her on the beach with the weight of the cargo they put aboard, for though all three were traveling starvation light, still the burden of nine dogs and three camp outfits, no matter how small, was sure to tell on such a small scow.

According to agreement, they stowed their dunnage aft, and then went to the girl's camp.

She was not in the tent; when they went out to call for her, they got no answer, the air seeming altogether too thick with snow to let the sound pass through.

So they looked at one another, frowning, and Harney plunged back into the tent for some clew to her mysterious disappearance.

There was nothing to be seen except the open portfolio upon her sleeping bag, and one sheet of a letter, crossed by two worn lines of folding.

He picked it up, merely because there was nothing else that met his eye, but when he turned it over and glanced at the contents, he was frozen in his place.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LETTER UNFINISHED.

IT was not that he was a natural eavesdropper, but that having seen the first words, he could not take his eyes from the ones which followed.

In a man's bold hand, the letter ran:

DEAR KATE: Everything that you ask I have to refuse, and the reason is, simply, that I no longer can trust you!

That was the sentence which gripped the attention of big Harney and held him in suspense, until the reasons were solved.

The letter ran on:

Only in one respect you may have what you want—and that is in regard to the money. Heaven knows that I don't want to make your life as poor physically as I'm afraid that it is now poor spiritually. You shall have enough money to give you comfort, so that at least no one shall be able to say that the lack of funds has forced you into wrong ways of life.

What those ways are apt to be, what they already have been, I hardly can make myself think, even with perfect evidence placed before me, which eyes and ears cannot doubt. But the old love of you persists in a measure, against my better judgment and against my will. There are moments when a sense of your dearness overmasters me, and then I sit with my head in my hands and wonder why I should have needed such a lesson as your coming into my life has given me!

But, whatever your sins have been and may be in the future, at least I feel that I may indulge myself in the luxury of being far removed from them. Even so the knowledge must eventually seep into my world, no matter how remote, for you were made to wreck the lives of good men. The coldness and the selfish calculation which appear in your manner, your face, are only seasoning for the bait, as it appears, and a touch of sin seems to make beauty more beautiful. So I assume that you cannot help making victim after victim, like the poor creatures who were said to throw themselves under the car of Juggernaut. And eventually some echo of their misery will reach to my ears!

Let it be from a great distance, however. That is the one mercy which I ask of life and of you.

As for the tenderness which I poured out on you so long, when you were the center of the world to me and when the house or the garden were empty without you, I don't expect a harvest home. That is gone, thrown away.

Unless, perhaps, as time goes on, I am able to tell myself that there are two Kates, the one I loved, who was worthy of my love; and the one who now lives, sneers at the world with a cold heart, betrays all love, gentleness, and sweetness that comes in her way, and puts poison into the veins of the poor sick world.

However, the time has not yet come, and meanwhile the love which I once felt for you is now merely giving greater pain to all my thoughts of you.

You see that I cannot say that I forgive you. I have tried to bring myself to it, but a writhing bitterness takes hold of me which I cannot master.

I have looked back over this letter, and there is no doubt that it is too cruel to be written even to you, considering the sacred bond that still, I suppose, ties us together, but I——

That page of the letter ended here, and as Harney mechanically turned it and then looked hungrily at the portfolio, he heard the voice of Steen behind him.

"That makes it all pretty clear, eh?"

"I dunno," groaned Harney.

"Her husband's in Circle City begging this wild cat to keep away from him. That's clear, ain't it?"

"I suppose it is. Husband?"

"Well—'sacred bond'?"

"That's right. And the one thing that poor gent wants is not to have to be caught in the same noose that pulled them together once before."

Harney put down the letter exactly as he had found it and turned a sick face to his companion.

"What's the matter?" asked Steen. "You act as though you never could 've guessed that there was dynamite in that package! Didn't I tell you that she was poison?"

"You told me," muttered Harney. "I sort of thought something myself. But —what a letter! From a man that once was married to her!"

"Those are the ones that see the truth —the husbands, I mean."

"But, bein' married to her, no matter what she did, murder, poison, lying, stealing, anything——"

"How could he give her up, you mean?"

"That's what I mean."

"Because she's pretty, you poor loon?"

"Aye, pretty," said Harney. "Beautiful, Steen. I can see her as exact as paint right here in the air before my eyes."

"You've got it!" said Steen, with a penetrating scowl fastened upon the face of his companion. But Harney did not hear the remark. He laid a hand upon the arm of Steen.

"I can make her voice sound up in my ears, man, as plain as the ticking of a clock, and better to hear than doves talkin' downstream in the afternoon. I can think her voice right into my mind and hear the ringin' of the words."

"You've got it," said Steen, with the same bitter sneer of contempt and understanding.

"And how," went on Harney, "could a man that had her for his wife, and her face to see every day, and her voice to listen to—how could a man like that write that kind of a letter?"

"You couldn't? I could! Except that I wouldn't 've been able to rip off the hide as well as he's done. There's a good man, and a patient man. Loved her for years, you see."

"Yeah. He must 've married her young."

"Older than her. That ain't the way that a young man would write a letter. Not so old-fashioned as that. There he was, all those years pouring out his heart, and her kicking it up and down the street. I tell you, there ain't any soul in her, Joe!"

His voice rose in denunciation so fierce that Harney blinked at his companion.

"I dunno anything about women," he admitted. "But you seen from the first that she was no good."

"I seen it. Sure! She looked like just one thing to me, the minute that I seen her pretty face. Trouble. Trouble!"

"She's brave," enumerated Harney, "strong, quick, pretty good-natured, and —she's got a fine laugh, a fine-soundin' laugh, Steen. That's sort of out of the heart, wouldn't you say?"

"You talk like a child," declared the other.

"Do I?" asked Harney sadly. "Still, there she is, alone, bucking the snow—even men wouldn't 've wanted to try that, alone! But she did it. Mad dog jumps her. She don't bat an eye. Murdering swine surround her and begin pot-shooting at her. Well, she comes out of that leaving dead dogs behind her, and as cheerful as May in California."

"Strange, ain't she?"

"Aye, strange, there's no denyin' that. There's no harm in that, either! It takes all kinds of people to make up a——"

"Shut up, Harney. It makes me kind of sick to hear you talk this way. Lemme tell you. Strange women are no good. The good ones live the regular way. They stay at home; they have children; they raise 'em; they make peace around a house; they don't look over the fence too often; and between the front gate and the barn is far enough for them to keep all of their thinking inside. Take a woman that's outside of that, and they's something wrong about her."

Harney groaned. "Aye, maybe you're right. But still——"

"I ain't gunna argue with you. She's poisoned you, already, because she's given you a chance to go ahead and fight a mad dog for her, and get shot by Indians. But look at that letter. There's her husband that's come up here to the end of the world to get shut of news about her goings on. Gives her all the

money she wants. Lets her carry on the way that she pleases. Only asks that she'll stay away from him. And what happens? Why, she's so dog-gone mean that nothin' pleases her except to come a-sashayin' all the way up here and ruin his life for him a second time! Oh, she's a beauty, she is!"

He finished with a snarl.

"You think she's as hard as nails?"

"I know she is."

"But when she read that letter over again, she had to run out of the tent and take the air in the woods. That looks like it hurt her. And—and she's comin' up here to find that husband of hers and say that she was wrong, maybe, in the past. But she wants to make things right, now! She's come up here to beg him to forgive her and——"

"Man, man," broke in Steen. "Think of that frosty eye of hers. Then you try to imagine her askin' anybody's pardon! Besides, she didn't go out into the woods for air, after readin' that letter. She sat here and laughed about it; and while she was laughin', she looked up, and she seen that somebody had come for her!"

"Hold on, Steen!" gasped big Harney.

"Little Joe, you got no eyes. You got no eyes at all!"

"Eyes for what? What you seen?" Harney looked wildly around.

"Look there. Ain't her footgear hangin' there on the line over the stove?"

"Well, what about that?"

"Would she 've stepped out into the snow and stayed away this long in caribou slippers, d'you think?"

"I'm blind—I'm blind! Then—they've come and got her here, under our noses!"

"They've come and got her!" said Steen, with grim satisfaction.

"Where away, then? Where would they've taken her? Steen, Steen, we've gotta find her trail!"

He lurched from the tent; the snow waved in his face like the wide, soft wing of a moth. The day was smothered by it; the trees were like ghosts behind this dense veil.

"Find a trail with this snow comin' down?" asked Steen. "Chinook couldn't do it himself. Besides, what could two of us do, when they's likely to be six of them?"

"Darn the numbers, if I get a chance to use my hands!" said Harney, breathing hard. "Steen, you're smart; you have ideas; give me an idea what to do, will you?"

"Help me finish loadin' the boat, that's all, and then sit down aboard of her and thank our stars that she's been put out of our way, and that we'll never have to weight down our eyes with lookin' at her again!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WITH CHINOOK TO LEAD.

TO poor Harney it appeared indubitable truth which Steen was speaking, and yet his soul revolted at the thought of sitting with folded hands while the girl was carried away. And he told himself, as well, that no human being ever had been more frightfully condemned than was beautiful Kate Winslow by the letter which they had read. For out of the words of the letter he was able to make for himself a picture of the writer, grave, troubled, honest, affectionate. Only those who have tenderness in their hearts are able to be thoroughly cruel, and such was the cruelty of the letter, Harney felt. Besides—it would have needed far less than the denunciations in the writing to convince him that the girl had all the evil qualities which were there attributed to her. He had sensed the same failings from the first moment that he had met her. She was ice—dangerous ice.

He looked at Steen with desperation,

but finally he exclaimed: "Ah, man, are you gunna stand see her go to death?"

"I'd help her on the way," replied Steen.

"Then I'll go alone," declared Harney.

"Go where?"

"I don't know—but I'll try to find the trail."

"When it's blind with this snow?"

"Where's Chinook?" groaned Harney.

"He hated her," said Steen. "He wouldn't follow a step on her trail."

"Unless he thought that we were hunting her!"

At this, Steen laughed aloud.

"Well, try Chinook," he said. "Even with him, you never could make it through her. She's got too long a start on us!"

From the ridge line, Harney took the mukluks of the girl and showed them to Chinook, who crouched snarling in his own wicked, high-pitched whine.

"Dogs, they know people, you bet," said Steen in his gloomy way. "Look at that, Chinook!" he insisted. "That's a kind of a mirror for you to see the girl by."

Harney merely caught up his rifle, and straightaway he issued from the tent.

Before him went Chinook, backing through the soft snow as though he were trying to read the mind of the new master.

Then, apparently realizing what was wanted, he scoured away through the snow, using his nose like the tip of a plough. In this manner he cut in a circle around the tent, but eventually stiffened on one spot with a howl that shrieked in the ear of Harney with a sense of all disaster. He though that he recognized the hunting call of a wolf to his pack as he starts upon a trail. At any rate, Chinook in an instant disappeared.

Harney floundered with haste as he pushed forward, anxious to get close to the sign before the snow smothered it again; but though he hastened, the deep holes which the feet of Chinook had made were filled or drifted across before he reached the spot. He tried to maintain the general direction in which the great dog had gone, but he shook his head with a groan when he came almost at once to an impenetrable thicket.

He turned to the right along this; then recollected that there was no better way of becoming dangerously lost than by changing direction blindly in woods; so he halted.

Above him, the sky was close down, and of a purplish gray, with the pure white of the great flakes streaking out of it softly. They wavered down like wings through the stirless air, and with innumerable pale, cold hands they touched the face of Harney. Confusion grew up in his mind. It was like standing in the horizon; it was like entering the blue of the sky, or in some other way coming to the end of sense experience, so strange was it to see the air crowded by the white falling of the snow.

A shadow wavered toward him through the white twilight of that strange atmosphere, and he saw that it was Chinook, who immediately turned again; and this time went off at such a moderate pace that Harney had no difficulty in following. He increased his speed. The labor of crossing the trails to Tagish Lake had made him fairly expert in the use of the snow shoes, and he had the great advantage of a long stride as against the handicap of crushing weight. So he went on with huge steps, the snow puffing like dust before the strokes of the snowshoes, the rifle swung in his hand after the fashion of Alpine regiments on a forced march.

It was the strangest moment of his life. He felt that now, in relating his experiences, he would not be able to say

that his years had given him nothing but dullness, for they had given him this contact with Kate Winslow, which had sweetness and poison commingled like life and death.

Still there was no breath of wind. The blind limit of his horizon lay never more than a stride or so in front, and he could see the flakes, from the corner of his eye, whirling over his shoulder like dead leaves that follow a running boy. And that made him see again the street of the village of his boyhood, the smoke of Saturday mornings in the fall of the year, when yards were raked and leaf piles burned, and when the racings and fightings up and down the street were followed by flurries of the leaves again. So the white flakes whirled in soundless motion over his broad shoulder; and he quickened his pace, moving with a longer and a more powerful stroke than before, like a big, capable machine.

He kept it up for hours.

In front of him, Chinook appeared and disappeared. Sometimes he faded from view, to come back into the picture again a moment later. Once he stood fast until Harney was almost upon him, allowing the man to see his red-stained eyes, gleaming with incredible ferocity.

It was almost as if the great beast were luring the man farther and farther, not on a trail, but merely to corner and slay him in a remote part of the wilderness.

They passed through a great waste in which nothing loomed through the snow storm, but after this the tall, dark shadows of trees came faintly on the eye of Harney and disappeared again like forms of the mind rather than images of fact.

Then he stumbled, and found that he had tripped on a furrow, such as that heaped by the turning of sleds. He dropped to his knees to study the sign. There were blurred marks of snow shoes on either side. Another in the center, where the driver was walking; or else forging ahead to break trail for the team.

Now the fall of the snow was so much slighter that he could even distinguish the distinct footmarks of the dogs, and found them eight in all. A long team, with three sleds behind it, and three men to guard it all!

He stopped short and actually looked back over his shoulder, so great was his desire at this moment for the companionship of Steen! But, then, Steen was in the right, and he, Harney, was in the wrong. For the woman was totally a creature of evil, and it was only a curse to save her from whatever unlucky fate now had taken her.

Doubtless it was her own husband who had sent out to remove her from the northern trail, a thing that would be accomplished gently, mercifully, and so the matter ended unless she strove again to come onto the northern road.

So thought big Harney, yet cursing as he looked back through the whirling snow, and then forward to the darkening way.

The light of the day had fallen into a dull twilight; the woods thickened; the trees were not lofty, but stood shoulder to shoulder, in many places. They gave the odd effect of heads looking out over a wall and staring at Harney from either side of his way, since the falling snow and the gathering dark piled up an additional duskiness close to the ground; higher up, the heads of the trees appeared against the sky.

Steen! He needed Steen. With that great warrior beside him, he would not have given the battle two thoughts; but now there were three against one! And against one who was no expert on snow shoes, half helpless in this freezing new environment.

He went on, more rapidly than ever, feeling that he must thrust himself boldly and instantly forward upon his

fate, or otherwise his courage would congeal and be incapable of motion.

A shadow drifted among the trees. Chinook, doubtless, gone off to take a separate line, now that his companion had visible signs to follow and did not need a lantern to light him on the way. Harney was glad of that flanking form, for if the fight became a hand-to-hand conflict, then well might the dog become the decisive factor!

And again he stopped short, struck heavily by a thought.

He should not be here. Even now he should turn his back and go toward the camp and the boat on the edge of Lake Tagish!

He knew that he could not pause long, but with the surety of a dropped stone, he must fall to his doom. So he started once again, with a sudden lunge, when from the trees at his left that same shadow stepped forth. Chinook risen on his rear feet?

No, not Chinook at all, but a man with a rifle coming to the shoulder.

While Harney was making sure of this with a slow, numb brain, his own weapon was stiffly carried beneath his elbow, and it was not until he saw the flash of the fire at the mouth of the gun, and heard the clang of the report that he was ready for action.

He had felt the very breath of the bullet in his face as he himself fired hip-high, a trick that he had learned in his boyhood and never forgotten. Snapshots with a revolver are more simple, more expected, but snapshots with a rifle usually are a different matter.

The other began to stagger to the side, like a man slipping down an icy incline. Then he turned and ran face down into the snow.

By this time, Harney was close upon him and found a very sick Indian, a tough and withered fellow of at least sixty. The bullet had gone through his body, and though it had not touched heart or lungs to judge by the bleeding, still there seemed little chance of the old man living.

But Harney said to him: "You speak English? I come back here to find you, if I win!"

The old fellow parted his lips with a grin that showed a few yellow fangs remaining.

"All right," said he, singing out the words in the most amazingly cheerful manner, "I stay and wait here for you, brother!"

Harney backed away, half expecting that he would be followed by a bullet from behind, but the wounded man, having braced his back on a fallen log close by him, now was busily loading a pipe and looked about him upon the darkening woods with the utmost indifference.

It was good, thought Harney, to see any human face death in this attitude. He wished that he had asked the fallen man something about his two companions, but speed was now more important than information, probably. He thrust forward eagerly along the trail, running hard, for the noise of the rifles was sure to have alarmed the drivers of the sleds.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Bull's Luck

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Only a Kid," etc.

"BULL" REGAN surveyed appreciatively the neat array of pies surrounding a pyramid of red-cheeked apples in the restaurant window, and sighed. Dog-gone, but he was hungry! The place was deserted. Why not—why not order up a swell feed, then forget to pay the check? He might get away with it. He had done it before. But no, his luck had been bad lately; they would nab him sure. No more Western jails for him.

To assuage, in a measure, his gnawing hunger, he rolled a cigarette. While searching for a match in an inner pocket, he fished out a bit of rumpled paper. Aided by a good memory, words formed themselves on the smudged sheet.

1. Mind your own bizness.
2. Keep away from the women.
3. No fiting.
4. No crooked stuff.
5. Get a job.
6. Hang on to it.

He grinned. Those were the wise resolutions he had formed in jail.

But, as he mulled over the words, the grin left his face. It had taken him two years to dope out all that. And those few sentences told the story. Running contrary to them had kept him in hot water for twenty years. He might a darned sight rather go hungry for a day or so than go back to jail, where he would be always hungry. Particularly a Western jail. No more Western jails for him; they were worse even than the orphanage and the reform schools with which he had become familiar as a kid. No more crooked deals, not even trimming a hash house out of a meal. No more rough stuff. No more women.

No more women. He was very serious about this. And yet, his experience had been limited. As a matter of fact, he had never known but one woman intimately. But that one had been quite enough. She had trimmed him, proper. A red-headed woman. And so, he was off women, red-haired ones in particular.

He straightened his dilapidated derby and drew his slouching form up to its normal six feet two. Imbued with high resolve, his thoughts far removed from all mundane things, he started away, and walked head-on into a man and woman who were hurrying in the opposite direction. It was not altogether his fault, they had been looking behind, fearfully, as though anticipating pursuit. The woman jabbed a sharp elbow into him, the man swore at him, and they hurried on. Bull stopped in his tracks. He was interested. None of his business, of course, but that girl had been crying. She was in trouble. A pretty little thing. And the young fellow with her was a tough bird. He had a mean face and red hair. Since his experience with the red-headed woman, Bull felt an antipathy toward all red hair. And why were they in such a hurry? Every rod or so, they looked back. They were running now, the man pulling the reluctant girl along. And, as Bull still hesitated, three men brushed past him, also running. Evidently they were following the red-headed youth and the girl. They acted rudely.

The first of his resolves forgotten, Bull trailed along, quickening his pace just enough to keep the three men in sight. In the blackness beyond a sputtering arc lamp, he lost them. Lacking visual objective to sustain his interest, caution briefly resumed sway over his headstrong impulses. He slowed down to a walk, still on toward the dark corner around which the girl and the four men had disappeared.

Suddenly, a shrill scream sounded. The girl's tired, tear-stained face crossed Bull's memory. Poor kid! What were those bozos trying to pull off? He urged his two hundred pounds of bone and muscle into astonishingly rapid motion, and swung around the corner, his square-toed, prison-made shoes skidding over the wet pavement.

It was a fight, sure enough. His first rapid glance assured him of that. The three men had tackled the kid and the girl. Robbers probably! Lilacville was full of hold-up men, according to the papers. Bull's pulse quickened pleasurably. Here was legitimate opportunity to mix into a swell scrap. He would rather fight than eat. Two of the men were wrestling with the red-haired youth. The other crook, the biggest of the three, held the struggling girl. His left arm was locked about her throat. He was choking her. His right hand was lifted as though about to strike her. Bull swore. The big stiff! Hit that nice kid, would he?

The big man never knew what hit him. Bull's fist struck him between the eyes and he went to sleep, propped at an unnatural angle against the brick wall.

Upon the girl's assurance that she was uninjured, Bull turned his attention with savage gusto to the red-haired lad's assailants. This end of the deal did not appear so simple. In fact, it looked as though it might develop into a real problem. The three men had had notice of his coming and were prepared. They broke away from the young man, who was sprawling on the ground, and faced Bull. One of them brandished a shiny gun. But Bull's headlong rush was not to be halted. A downward sweep of his open palm sent the gun spinning into the cobblestone street. His head butted the surprised gunmen. And, as the latter gasped for breath, Bull's fist connected with the point of his sagging chin. Number three swung manfully toward Bull's derby. The head beneath it ducked. Bull danced

aside and struck out swiftly, right and left in rapid succession. And number three joined his friends in the middle of the road.

Vaguely disappointed that the fight had resulted in such a simple affair, Bull turned his attention to the objects of his strenuous solicitation. They were fleeing, the girl in one direction, the man in another. And as Bull pondered on this strange circumstance, a shrill whistle sounded. Quick steps approached along the street. Several running figures passed beneath a dim arc light. Bull caught the glitter of brass buttons and suddenly decided that, regardless of the possible merit of his recent exploit, one hundred per cent safety could be assured only if he and the representatives of the law did not get together. This he had learned by bitter experience. It may have been his six-foot, swaggering bulk, it may have been the too small black derby tipped at a reckless angle, perhaps it was the square jaw and the arbitrary blue eyes—at any rate, no limb of the law had ever, even at first glance, considered him innocent of whatever might be in the wind. As a matter of fact, several times he had been picked out of a crowd of innocent bystanders and summarily charged with some offense which he knew nothing about. And so he took to his heels.

The possibility that he might not succeed in making good his escape did not occur to him.

There was a circus at the far end of the town and the streets were deserted. As Bull ran, however, the suspicion grew upon him that he was not running alone. Other hurrying footsteps merged with his. He looked hastily over his shoulder. It was a cop! The bluecoat was gaining, too. With a sudden burst of speed, Bull rounded a corner and sped blindly down a dark alley. Soft earth deadened the sound of his pounding feet. But his ruse was unsuccessful. The cop followed. "Darned owl," Bull muttered, and struggled mightily for his second wind. But it was slow in coming. He realized that two years in a stuffy jail had not improved his physical condition. He was tiring rapidly. And the bluecoat was still gaining. Bull's breath came in short, labored gasps; his heart pounded wildly, stifling him with its erratic throbbing. And the assurance was suddenly forced upon him that he stood an excellent chance of being captured. By a single bluecoat! The thing to do, of course, was to stop and put up a fight. But, he did not want to encounter a cop. Two years ago he would not have hesitated. But now—no! He was scared. No more Western jails for him. No more——

A hand, reaching out of the darkness, clutched his arm. A voice hissed in his ear.

"This way, bo. Make it snappy!"

Bull came to a plunging halt, spun clumsily half about and dived headlong into the black void where the owner of the hand had disappeared.

While he still leaned, gasping, against a wall, hidden from the street by a door which had closed mysteriously behind him, the cop raced by, his steps diminishing quickly in the distance.

"You're all right, brother——" Bull sought to locate his unknown rescuer in the darkness.

"You ain't such a bad egg yourself. O' course, I gives you the hand because you helps me an' the kid. That's all. I pays my debts. Nobody kin say 'Red' Kelting don't pay his debts."

"Yeah, that's right. Good idea. Pay yer debts."

His breathing again normal, Bull tramped along in silence behind his new friend, who led the way across a vacant, rubbish-littered lot with swift steps.

Finally, he said, "You're the red-headed guy what was with the jane?"

"Right."

"An' them bandit fellers? Does they

travel in gangs here? Holy smoke! Three of them to tackle one feller an' a girl!"

"Bandits? Quit yer kiddin'. Why, buddy, them boys was three of Lilacville's finest. Dick. Cops. Detectives."

The red-haired youth laughed heartily. But Bull did not join him. Cops, not stick-up men! What a sap he had been! Nosing into trouble, for no reason whatsoever. None of his business. Just because that shrimp of a girl had been crying! And now——

Red Kelting steered his bewildered charge out into a dimly lighted street.

"They ain't got nothin' on the kid, see? They was out fer me. They been watchin' her, knowing we'd git together sooner or later. She works in a hash house uptown, an' to-night——"

"She's your wife?"

"Naw, sister. She's only a kid, but she's got sense enough to go straight, an'—— But say, what's your line, bo?"

"Oh, most anything, right now. Construction is my line, electrical construction."

"What! You mean you work fer a livin?"

"You said it."

"But you been away in the 'brick house,' lately. Don't tell me you ain't?"

"Whut of it?"

"Nuthin', only—— Construction, says you?"

For the space of a long city block the youth appeared lost in thought, while he puffed rapidly on a glowing cigarette. Then, "Didja ever hear of the Reading Construction Co.," he asked.

"Sure. Worked for 'em once, back East."

"They're puttin' in a power station out at Thunder River. Their office is here in town. Need men, they do. But they—they're tough guys to work for. Some fellers I know got a little deal on with 'em. Y'see, they're hirin' cheap labor out there an' payin' cheap wages t' everybody. Dan Scanlon, fren' of mine—he was gang boss—he quit yistiddy along with half a dozen o' the boys. The company can't git along without Dan. But they got t' pay him, d'see? Now, Dan and the boys has got a date with the superintendent t'-morrer night. It's about money, an' they ain't a chance in the world but what the company'll take Dan back. Now, like I said, the construction company needs men. I kin hitch you up with Dan an' you play along with him an' you'll git a job. Real money in it, too. How's 'at sound?"

Bull mumbled his thanks. He was not willing to commit himself. Life had taught him to trust no one, and, Kelting had a mean face. Of course, he was the girl's brother. Some merit attached to him, automatically, on that account. Still, it seemed too good to be true, escaping another sojourn in jail by the skin of his teeth and falling into a good job, all within a single hour. No, there was a catch in it somewhere.

Red Kelting noticed the lack of enthusiasm in Bull's manner. However, his suspicions took an unfortunate turn.

"Expected I'd call your bluff on that work stuff! You wasn't stringin' me none, bo. That goody-goody line don't git you no place. Come clean, an' so will I. I'll give it to you straight. I——"

Bull leaned close against his companion. "Listen t' me, kid, I was poundin' rocks in a outdoor gymnasium back East when you was still wearin' baby clo'es. An' I know a lot more about lots o' things than you do. Jails is one of the things. What I mean, kid, I'm following the straight an' narrow. T'heck with you an' your wise cracks! I'm willin' to work for a livin', an' if you meant what you said about puttin' me next to a job, hop to it. But, no more wise stuff, or I'm apt t' forget you're 'Cutey's' brother, an' bust you one, jest fer luck."

And Red Kelting, feeling the bulge of rippling muscle rubbing against his shoulder, became suddenly convinced that here was one who meant what he said. One whom even the threat of the automatic tight-clutched in his fingers would fail to stop. If he had known Bull Regan a little better, his assurance would have been even more certain, and the crafty plan already half-formed beneath his mop of curly red hair might never have materialized.

As it was, he backed down gracefully, if not sincerely.

"No call t' git riled, brother. I meant whut I said about the job, right enough. We're aimin' fer Scanlon's place now. Where you hangin' out?"

"No place."

"Broke?"

"Yep."

"Hungry?"

"Sure. Always."

Kelting paused before a brightly lighted restaurant, hesitated, then, much to Bull's disgust, went on.

"That's where the kid sister works. She ain't workin' t'night. If she was there, she could fix us up so we could eat without bein' seen. It ain't exactly safe for me—nor for you, now—t' take a chance in there. Anyways, Dan'll fix us up. Him an' the boys is keepin' bachelor's hall down the road a piece."

With a comprehensive look up and down the bright street, Kelting switched off into a dirt road leading away from the town.

For a mile or so they plodded on in silence. The muddy roadway degenerated into a rock-littered cart path which zigzagged erratically between clumps of sumach scrub and jagged boulders, tending always farther and farther away from the town. Piles of gravel and rows of dilapidated shacks soon made their appearance and Bull judged that they were approaching a deserted mine. He was suspicious, but no more so than he would have been under less unusual conditions. Fear formed no part of these suspicions. He had nothing to lose and he was quite confident that he could take care of himself under all conditions. It did seem queer, however, that an honest workingman should choose to live in such a remote location? Still, he and the boys had probably gone on a spree and were broke.

Kelting turned abruptly off the pathway and entered a dense thicket of long-trunked fir trees beneath which the ground was carpeted, inches deep, with velvety pine needles. The silence was complete. Bull found himself treading tentatively, with hand outstretched, groping, as though the blackness might any moment develop into a tangible thing.

Circling in an apparently aimless manner among the trees, they came suddenly upon a cabin. Thin shafts of light outlined a ramshackle doorway and boarded windows. Kelting whistled a snatch of popular song. The door opened part way. After a muttered conversation with some one behind it, Kelting passed inside. Bull followed. The door immediately rattled shut and a rusty bolt squeaked into place.

The big, square room was blue with smoke, partly tobacco smoke and partly wood smoke, the latter coming from a stove in the center through the many rust-eaten cracks of which tongues of flame and gusts of smoke shot out into the room. Several candles massed in a battered pan gave a flickering light.

There were six men there, not counting Bull and Kelting. Four men played cards at a dingy table. A fifth lay propped up in a bunk by the wall, reading a magazine. The sixth faced Bull, hand outstretched. This latter was the boss, Dan Scanlon. Bull was quite certain of it even before Kelting mumbled his name. He was a swart, thick man, with a massive head covered with

curly black hair shot with gray, and a short neck set on heavy, sloping shoulders. Keen gray eyes looked unwaveringly from beneath shaggy brows. A broken nose, which had been badly set, lent a sinister cast to an otherwise strong and comparatively pleasant face.

Scanlon looked the part all right, like a workingman, a typical boss of a construction camp, but the rest of the gang did not quite fit into the picture. None of them looked like workers.

"Bull Regan, eh? Name's familiar. Been in the West long, big boy?"

"Couple years." Bull slouched into the rickety chair Scanlon pushed toward him and lit a cigarette.

He was already vaguely ill at ease. None of the men had offered to shake hands with him. This was not at all like the rough friendliness usually encountered in construction camps. Something was wrong. Scanlon's next statement was still more disturbing.

"You ain't been poundin 'stakes with a construction gang all during them two years, boy. Your complexion is too lily-white. Indoor work, prob'ly?" Scanlon grinned.

Bull did not quite know what to make of this. Pounding stakes? Where did the stakes come in in the installation of electrical equipment? Something new, perhaps, but no, Scanlon was laughing. Bull tipped the black derby far back on his yellow head and blew a cloud of smoke through the corner of his mouth, and, although he addressed Scanlon, his gaze included the whole room.

"What's it to you?" he said.

Scanlon continued to grin. Some of the men laughed outright.

"Not a thing, son, only, if you're aimin' to ring in with us, w'y, you gotta know your business. A-1 construction men, we be, eh boys?"

The "boys" boisterously agreed. Bull still was not quite sure whether or not they were kidding him. He was undecided whether to laugh with them or get angry. Kelting's appearance with a tin plate heaped high with baked beans and boiled potatoes, decided him. He laughed. He wouldn't start anything until after he had eaten, anyhow.

While he ate, Scanlon and Kelting talked, their heads close together. After a bit, Scanlon joined Bull again.

"Red says you done him a good turn. That sets you right with me. What Kelting says, goes. Good boy, Red is. Him and his little red-headed sister are going to join up with us on a deal soon; however, what I'm looking for right now is a scrapper, a husky jest like you, a right crackerjack construction man."

Scanlon peered quizzically into Bull's face.

Bull did not know what the man was driving at, but he did not try very hard. The beans were unusually tasty, and he had been unusually hungry.

After a spell of silence, Scanlon continued: 'Y'see, me an' the boys here came all the way from Mississippi at the invitation of the Reading Construction Co. Got considerable of a reputation as a construction boss, I hev. Well, we gits here an' finds this little runt, Rickersfield, jest appointed superintendent of construction. Right off the bat he refuses to pay us what was promised. We quit, pronto. They couldn't git along without us, though, we know that, so we sticks around. They hedged, right enough. We got a appointment with this little shrimp, Rickersfield, t'morrer night. He'll come across, all right. We'll ring you in on account of Red's say-so; three hundred a month. How's that sound?"

It sounded mighty good to Bull. Two hundred and fifty a month for food, fifty for incidentals! Times had certainly changed while he was in jail. One hundred dollars a month used to be good money. Three hundred! He tried to take the good news casually, and nodded, without taking his eyes off the tin plate.

"We'll prob'ly start t' work Monday."

Bull nodded again and added the empty plate to a heap of used dishes in a far corner of the room. Then he lit a cigarette and stretched his long legs luxuriously toward the fire. No longer hungry, and with a good job in sight, he was willing to view all mankind with tolerance. But, for some unaccountable reason, this spirit of friendliness failed to persist. He could not rid himself of the suspicion that these men, Scanlon included, were kidding him. They talked a great deal in low voices, and eyed him with amusement. He did not like this. His natural impulse was to show them that he was not one to be trifled with. He could do it, there was no question in his mind as to that. He could handle all six of them, lay them out cold, in as many minutes. But he had learned many things in jail; one of them was to think twice before starting a rough house. There was such a thing as being framed. These Westerners were queer birds——

Wearied by such heavy cogitation, Bull dozed before the hot fire. Finally, he slept.

He awoke several hours later to find the fire low and his companions sprawled in the bunks along the wall, registering the abandon of complete repose in various discordant snores. Bull obtained the most spacious of the bunks by rolling its occupant out onto the floor. Then, without the slightest heed to this individual's sleepy threats, he turned his face to the wall. The last thing he thought of before going to sleep was Red Kelting's sister. Scanlon had said she too was red-headed. That was a shame. She was a pretty kid, and he liked her. But, if she had red hair—nothing doing. Still—she *was* a real cute kid, and she worked in a restaurant. Perhaps all red heads weren't crooks after all.

Bull awoke so late next morning that his breakfast consisted of the leavings of the six hungry men who had preceded him.

The camp seemed deserted.

A queer noise finally drew him to the back of the cabin. Here he found Scanlon busily engaged in sharpening certain strange implements on a flat rock. They were odd-looking things. Bull did not recall ever having seen anything like them in possession of a construction boss. They looked to him like burglar's tools. Of course, they couldn't be——

Scanlon was too interested in his task to pay much attention to Bull's complaint regarding breakfast. He produced the dollar Bull asked for, without comment.

"Where's the gang?"

Scanlon shrugged. "Dunno."

"I'm goin' t' town. I gotta eat," said Bull.

"All right, but watch yer step. Keep outa trouble. Be back by two o'clock. You're going with us to call on the Reading Construction Co."

Scanlon's warning was really not necessary. Bull had every intention of being cautious. In town he kept to the back streets. But the object of his innocent search evaded him. He was looking for a restaurant. And there were no restaurants on the back streets. Several times he passed within sight of a pretentious, white-tiled eating place, called The Plaza. There was something about this place that was familiar. But, it was on a wide, busy street, and he dared not risk it. Finally, however, his hunger overcame caution, and he ventured across the little square toward the object of his search.

Fortunately for Bull, it was about eleven o'clock, and The Plaza was deserted. A young lady in immaculate white dress officiated behind a wire-enclosed cash register. With a timid glance at the back of her bowed head, Bull caught up a green ticket and a tray and made for the self-service side of the restaurant.

With a goodly supply of food, he

then sought out a table far removed from all windows and set about enjoying his belated breakfast.

So engrossed was he in this absorbing task that he was not aware of an audience until he reached for the sugar bowl, only to see it slide away across the table, urged by a slim, white hand, just before he grasped it. His uninvited luncheon companion was the pretty little cashier. A timid glance assured Bull of this. He hastily removed his battered derby and mumbled an apology. He was invariably tongue-tied and ill at ease in the presence of a woman, hence it was several minutes before his glance lifted above the white hand that methodically stirred a mug of coffee. When he finally mustered the courage to look at her face, however, a pleasant thrill set his heart to racing. Red Kelting's sister! And she was in trouble, sure enough. Her face was sad, her eyes red, as though she had been weeping. Even so, she was pretty. Big, soft, brown eyes, vivid lips, nice teeth. And her hair—it was red, yes, but different from any red hair he had ever seen before. It was dark, except where the sun shone through it. Gosh, but she was pretty! She——

Bull realized suddenly that he had been staring. But then, she had been staring at him, too.

He swallowed hard and nodded sociably. "Hello, kid!" he said.

Her lips parted briefly, but not really in a smile. Her sad eyes searched his face. Bull fidgeted.

"You helped us—Red and me—the other night." Her voice was very low.

Bull nodded and piled his empty dishes neatly one on top of the other.

"Do you know where Red is?"

Bull hesitated. Should he——

"He is my brother, you know?"

"Yeah, I know."

As he still hesitated, "They didn't get him, did they?" she asked.

"No. He—he's all right."

She sighed, relieved. And, with this sigh a certain tenseness seemed to leave her. The corners of her mouth lifted, but still the promised smile did not come. It was evident to Bull, that, as he expressed it, she still "had something on her chest."

She unburdened herself suddenly, talking softly, rapidly, clearly: "Your name is Bull Regan. I know. Riley, the cop, told me. And you're just out of the pen. I don't know why I should ask you to help me. You're probably as bad as the rest. I'm going to, though."

She paused for breath and eyed Bull queerly.

Bull grinned encouragingly. "Shoot," he said.

"It's about Red. He's bad, all right. But, he's only a kid. He's hanging out with a bunch of tough eggs, that's the trouble. Now, I ain't so dumb, an' I know he's trying to work me. It ain't his doings, understand. Somebody else is putting him up to it."

She paused again, looked cautiously about, then leaned across the table. Bull leaned toward her, the better to hear.

"Him and his gang is going to stick up this place."

Bull registered honest amazement. It did not seem possible. Kelting was probably no good, and all that, but—framing his own sister—and such a sister!

She evidently misinterpreted Bull's blank expression as the reflection of a guilty conscience. She shrugged and laughed unpleasantly.

"I'm a fool, I suppose, you're probably one of them; you'll squeal and—— But I had a hunch——"

Bull's timidity and apparent indecision vanished.

"Not on your life, kid, I ain't one of them! Why, why say, I wouldn't pull nothin' like that with you! Me, I'm off the rough stuff. I'm workin' fer a livin' from now on. I don't know nothin' about this business you're talkin'

about, an' I don't believe Red does. He didn't say nothin' t' me about it. You got the wrong steer, sister."

Bull was very earnest. His battered face was red. She watched him closely.

"Perhaps you're telling the truth, that is, about you going straight. But, about the other—you're all wet. They're going to stick this place up, I tell you, to-morrow night. There'll be money here, a good haul. I'll be on duty. I don't dare stay away. If I do, Rickersfield—he owns this joint—will suspect me, anyhow. He knows Red ain't no good. An' I don't dare tell Rickersfield; he'll have the place watched and they'll get Red. Next time the kid it pinched it'll mean ten years, easy. An' he's so young. He ain't twenty yet. He don't know no better."

"Rickersfield?"

"Yes. He's the boss. He owns this place. He owns half the town."

"A little guy?"

"No, man size. A good egg, too."

"Oh, I was thinkin' of a little guy, construction superintendent with the Reading Construction Co. I'm goin' t' work for him, Monday."

The girl shook her head. "This Rickersfield—A. Winslow Rickersfield—owns the Reading Construction Co. There ain't no other Rickersfield in Lilacville, that I know of. But I can't do nothing. If I put up a fight, they'll git rough, plug me, maybe—but I ain't thinking so much about that; what bothers me is, if I raise a rumpus an' they start on me, Red will take sides with me an' they'll git him. There ain't no——"

She broke off suddenly, got quickly to her feet and hurried across the room toward a big man with horn-rimmed spectacles and a plump cigar who had just entered.

This man was Rickersfield, Bull decided. He talked earnestly with the girl. And she was palpably disturbed, resting her weight first on one slim foot and then on the other. The big man's gaze turned often toward Bull. She too looked toward him. Bull decided suddenly that he would go away. Three strides took him to the door.

It was not until he was halfway back to camp that he recalled having forgotten to pay for his lunch. Hurried search discovered the green check punched for ninety cents, but the silver dollar he had borrowed from Scanlon was gone. A gaping hole in his pocket cleared up the mystery. Bull stopped in the middle of the dusty road and swore. Not only had he left the girl without adequately assuring her of his willingness to help, but he had—as she would without doubt interpret it—sneaked away without paying for his lunch. She would think him a liar and a crook, all right, the cheapest kind of a sneak thief, at that. And he didn't want her to think him a crook. He'd show her that he wasn't, too, Rickersfield or no Rickersfield. He couldn't pay for the meal, but he could explain. He pulled the battered derby down over one eye and turned right about toward the town.

When he reached the Plaza Restaurant, it was necessary for him to elbow his way through the crowd. It was noon and the place was full. The girl was in her wire cage. Rickersfield stood behind her. Bull fell into the line of people waiting to pay for their lunches. Rickersfield saw him. Bull met the big man's gaze squarely.

When Bull reached the little window, Rickersfield circled about, drew near the front of the cage. His right hand was fumbling in an inner pocket. Bull's ready anger mounted. The big stiff was reaching for a gun. Why? He, Bull, hadn't done anything.

A fat man preceding Bull paid his check and walked away. Bull edged up to Rickersfield until his outthrust jaw was within an inch of the fat cigar.

"Listen t' me, bo, I got somethin' t'

say t' sister, here, private. Move on 'r I'll break you in two!"

This was no mere threat. Bull fully intended to carry it out literally, if——

"It's all right, Mr. Rickersfield—please——"

The girl's frightened face peered out through the slide in the cage.

For an instant Rickersfield hesitated. It was evident that he was not scared. His glance met Bull's evenly. Finally, his eyes began to twinkle behind their glass shelter. The girl's appeal apparently decided him. He nodded and smiled.

"All right, big boy. Step up and speak your piece."

Bull did. He spoke quickly and earnestly, trying his best to soften his rumbling voice.

"Listen, kid, I beat it without payin' my check. I fergot, no kiddin'. But I ain't got no money, anyhow. I'll pay it, though. To-morrow, maybe. An', about that other business——"

"That's all right, Mr. Regan. Any time. Just sign your name on the back of the check." She interrupted him brusquely and thrust a pencil into his hand.

Bull understood what she meant right enough, but he wanted to tell her—— The line behind him became impatient, began to push forward.

"Well, anyhow, it—it will be all right. Don't you worry," said Bill; and, vaguely dissatisfied, he lurched away.

During the rest of the afternoon, while he watched indifferently the everlasting card game in Scanlon's cabin, Bull's mind was occupied by two quite unrelated and seemingly unimportant queries; first, he wondered what the girl's name was, and second, he wondered if the Rickersfield of the restaurant was the same man he was going to work for? Kelting and Scanlon might have answered both of these questions but neither was in evidence. At any rate, Bull decided that he liked Rickersfield. This for no logical reason. However, the big man had not been afraid of Bull, and, too, he looked the part of a construction man. Bull felt that he would like to work for A. Winslow Rickersfield.

Although Scanlon's instructions had called for the presence of all at the little cabin by two o'clock, Scanlon himself did not appear until dusk. With him came Kelting and a stranger. They arrived in a big car. Bull wondered at this sign of affluence, but asked no questions when, a little later, the whole crew piled into the big car and bounced over the rutted roadway toward Lilacville, evidently to keep the appointment with Rickersfield. Other things occurred to dull his suspicions of the strange, unbusinesslike actions of Scanlon upon reaching town. Red Kelting had said that his sister's name was Mary. Bull liked the name Mary. He thought of little else during the short ride. He was still thinking of Mary Kelting when he finally found himself on guard, as it were, before an imposing white-stone office building containing the offices of the Reading Construction Co.

The men had arrived at their destination singly and in pairs, by devious routes. If Bull's mind had not been so occupied with Mary Kelting, he would have wondered at this. As it was, he did not give it a thought. Scanlon had stationed him at the entrance to the big building, with orders to admit no one. According to Scanlon, the conference with Rickersfield must be strictly private. Interruption of any sort would be fatal to their plans. Superficially, Bull's task appealed to him. He would not have to think or talk; all he had to do was to refuse to all and sundry admittance to the Reading Building. Of course, there was small chance that any one would seek to enter; it was about nine o'clock and the big building, lo-

cated on a side street just off the main thoroughfare, was deserted. Still, even though nothing did happen, he preferred this job to sitting in a close office on a hard chair, listening to a lot of talk which he would not understand.

After which brief review of his situation, Bull stationed himself before the glass door, lit a cigarette and resumed his pleasant meditation on Mary Kelting.

Five minutes went by, ten. Several people had passed, all intent on their own business. A stoop-shouldered man, jingling a bunch of keys on a large ring, made his way slowly along the street trying the doors of the darkened buildings. The night watchman, Bull decided, on his first rounds. Approaching the Reading Building, the watchman, an old man with weak eyes and a long nose, observed Gull questionably. Serene in the security of his position, Bull moved aside obligingly when the old fellow jiggled the glass door. It opened, of course. Scanlon had unlocked it.

"Hey, hey, hey, what's this, what's this?" The watchman squawked shrilly.

Bull grinned good-naturedly. "Nothin' t' git haired up about, grandpa. It's all right."

"All right, is it? Waal now, we'll soon see——" And with unexpected agility, the old watchman pushed past Bull and entered the building.

Bull caught him by the arm, not ungently, and pulled him back.

"Now listen here, you old coot, what's goin' on in there ain't none of your business. But, it's all right, like I said. Trot along now."

"Lemme be! Halp! Halp!"

The old man struggled wildly and kicked Bull in the shins.

Surprised and chagrined, Bull gathered the noisy old fellow up in his arms, carried him down the street for half a block, then urged him on his way with a kick.

"Git goin' now, you old parrot! An' git shut of that noise. Show yer nose around here ag'in an' I'm apt t' fergit yer an old man an' bust you one."

The watchman picked himself up, gazed fearfully for an instant into Bull's angry re dface, then turned, and sprinted nimbly down the street, his keys jingling frantically as he ran.

Bull returned to his post and attempted to forget about the watchman. But in this he was not successful. Just like the old coot to return with half of Lilacville's police force! And then, for the first time, Bull paused to question his own position. If he were pinched, would Scanlon be able to explain things? Would he——

The figure of a man loomed into the circle of light formed by an arc lamp. A big man with black-rimmed glasses and a large cigar. Rickersfield! He was headed for the Reading Building. Bull scented trouble. His slow wits groped for words to support his uncomfortable position. For it was becoming uncomfortable, increasingly so. He looked beyond Rickersfield for the cops. There were none to be seen. He wished fervently that Scanlon and the boys would appear. It certainly was a long-winded conference.

Rickersfield seemed not to see Bull, at first. He approached the glass door fingering a shining key. Bull stepped in his way.

"Nothin' doin', Mr. Rickersfield—jest now. They's a conference goin' on in there an'—an'—the boss said—he—he—didn't——"

Rickersfield stepped back a pace and thoughtfully fingered the key.

"Miss Kelting's friend, Bull Regan, eh? And who is your boss, Bull?"

Rickersfield did not seem to be angry. He looked up and down the narrow street with quick eyes as though momentarily expecting the appearance of some one or something.

"Dan Scanlon."

"Scanlon? Don't know him. What's his line?"

Rickersfield was sparring for time. Even Bull was assured of this and he was beginning to suspect the reason therefor. The cops! The old watchman had probably run across Rickersfield, the latter had called the police, and——

"W'y, Dan's a construction engineer. Worked fer the Reading Construction Co. They tried to trim him. He's in there now. Got a date with another guy named Rickersfield—prob'ly you know him—a little feller, superintendent of construction for the Reading people. My line's electrical construction, too; turbines is my specialty. Scanlon is goin' to git me a job."

Rickersfield chewed his cigar and searched Bull's face in the half light.

"Regan, either you have learned your piece well, or you're an awful bonehead."

Bull paused in the act of lighting a cigarette and pushed forward exclaiming: "What're you drivin' at?"

Rickersfield did not back away. Bull was unpleasantly aware that he was laughing.

"Just what I said, big boy. Now, what if I should tell you that I am armed and that I am expecting the patrol full of police any minute?"

Even though Bull's suspicions had been running along these very lines, he gasped in anticipation of such a thing actually happening. And as he only stared, dumbly, Rickersfield asked:

"What would you do?"

"Me? I'd paste you one on the jaw an' beat it!"

Rickersfield laughed.

"Why would you beat it?"

"W'y—w'y—I been outa jail only two weeks an', believe me, I ain't goin' back. Not into no more Western jails."

"But, if you are here for the reason you say, you are guilty of no wrongdoing?"

"I ain't done nothin'. I'm here fer jest why I said I was. But the cops will drag a guy out of a horspital, even, an' railroad him, fer nothin'. Oh, I know 'em. I wouldn't take no chances."

Again Rickersfield laughed. "I'm inclined to believe you, Regan. I don't know why. Now, what if I should tell you that your friend, Scanlon, has been making a fool of you? For instance, there is no Rickersfield, superintendent of construction, with the Reading Co. My name is Rickersfield. I own the Reading Construction Co. There is no other Rickersfield in Lilacville that I know of. No man by the name of Scanlon has ever worked for me."

Rickersfield waited for this to sink in. It sunk, slowly. Bull moistened his dry lips and tried to speak, but words would not come.

"I suspect, Regan, that you are in with young Kelting and the gang of crooks he brought on here from Helena. If they are in there, now, they are probably rifling my safe. They won't find much, but I don't intend letting them get away with anything, if I can help it. Old Harry, the watchman, started for the police station; he must have got lost. I have been expecting the police every minute. I'm not exactly afraid, but I do not particularly relish the idea of facing that gang of cutthroats singlehanded. However, if the police do not come soon—very soon—I'm going in there to protect my property. Now, if you've got any sense at all, you'll help me instead of hindering me. If you won't help me, however, I'm going in there anyhow. You don't look like a gun-toter; I expect you fight with your fists. Well, I'll be honest with you, I'm not armed either. I fight with my fists, too. Now, how about it? Are you with me or against me? Think quickly. Talk fast."

Rickersfield threw away his cigar and advanced purposefully.

For an instant Bull hesitated. Every-

thing Rickersfield had said was possible, even probable. But his explanation had been too smooth, too simple. He was lying. Scanlon had told him to let no one enter that door. Scanlon was the boss. There was but one man in the world whom Bull obeyed and that man was his boss.

"Maybe you're right. But you can't prove it. An' you nor nobody else ain't gittin' past me, until the boss says it's O. K. He——"

A dull explosion sounded, followed by the crash of broken glass and an ensuing rocking motion of the ground that brought Bull's teeth together with a click.

Rickersfield swore under his breath. Next instant he struck the bewildered Bull on the jaw and pulled open the glass door.

But that blow had cleared Bull's senses miraculously. Here was something he understood, a blow. Nobody could hit him and get away with it. He dived headlong at Rickersfield's legs. No skilled football tackle could have put more spirit into the effort, could have clung more tenaciously. Rickersfield crashed on the tile floor with Bull on top.

But Bull Regan was due for many surprises. Rickersfield was no ordinary antagonist. He was as heavy as Bull, quick as a cat, and undoubtedly skilled in rough-and-tumble fighting. He came to his feet, squirmed in Bull's arms, broke away and struck out quickly, right and left. Bull brought up solidly against the wall with a surprised grunt. But he was not hurt. He brushed the back of his hand across his bruised mouth, shook the hair out of his eyes and rushed in, head down, both arms flailing. Rickersfield was not there when Bull arrived, however. He had jumped nimbly aside and started for the stairway. Again Bull tackled him, football fashion. Again they rolled over and over on the hard floor, grunting, wheezing, struggling, tightly clasped in each other's arms. A dozen times Rickersfield all but succeeded in breaking away, a dozen times Bull held him back. It was a strange fight in a way, strange, that is, so far as Bull was concerned. Many times he could have ended the encounter by cracking Rickersfield's head against the floor, but he did not do it. Rather, he devoted his efforts merely to holding his opponent, which was not at all like Bull. The shortest and quickest way to victory was his motto, as many a bully in many a construction camp could testify. But, somehow, he had no inclination to hurt Rickersfield.

The fight had early developed into a test of endurance rather than an exposition of skill. They rolled interminably back and forth, close-locked, clutching, clothes torn, dirt-smeared, breathing hard.

The end came unexpectedly. Bull was on top of his opponent. Footsteps sounded on the stairs. A white face appeared, another and still another. Bull recognized Dan Scanlon. Scanlon would explain everything. But Scanlon apparently had no intention of explaining. He jostled Bull roughly and dashed through the door. Kelting followed him, and the others.

"Regan, you big lummox, stop those men!"

Rickersfield's voice was unsteady, but it carried that commanding quality with which Bull was familiar. It surprised him out of his uncertainty and he automatically started to obey, but stopped abruptly when he caught sight of a blue-clad figure, running. He darted back into the dim hallway. Rickersfield groped to his feet, clutching at Bull's belt. Bull automatically helped him up.

"The cops!" Bull exclaimed, as he pointed waveringly.

"Sure. I told you."

Pandemonium reigned in the street outside. The big black car that had brought them to town had drawn up

across the street. Scanlon and Kelting and the rest were making for it, when, suddenly, the street was alive with police. Whistles shrilled. There were shots, commands, yells. Scanlon and his men reached the car and piled in. The car sped away. More shots followed it. One of Scanlon's men who had been clinging to the running board threw up his hands and fell backward, sprawling grotesquely in the roadway. The police gathered about the injured man, and Bull suddenly recovered his senses. It had been a hold-up, right enough. And he was a fool, as Rickersfield had said. Gosh, what a fool! If they got him, he would hold the bag! It meant the Stroudsburg jail for his, ten years easy, maybe more. But, they didn't have him, yet. He stole a hasty glance at his recent opponent and was dumbfounded to see the boss of Lilacville observing his indecision smilingly.

"My glasses are smashed Bull, and I can't see very well without them. If you should go away from here, right now, I doubt if I could tell which way you went. I——"

While Rickersfield was still talking, Bull bolted through the doorway and darted up a dark alley beside the Reading Building. It was pitch dark and he ran blindly. A jutting wall threw him off balance and he fell headlong among some half-filled ash barrels. He stumbled on. His outstretched hand encountered a board fence. He clambered over it, ran across an open lot, in and out of countless other streets and alleyways, and finally, bruised and breathless, stumbled upon a dirt road apparently on the outskirts of the town.

He ran on and on. He had no idea where he was going. He did not care, so long as it led away from town. Lack of breath finally compelled him to reduce his pace to a walk.

The pleasant rush of water sounded above the pounding of his heart. He left the roadway and went toward the sound. It was a small brook, lined thickly with clustering alders. He drank thirstily and bathed his throbbing head. The moist, grass-grown bank invited his tired body. He lay at full length and looked up at a single star peeping through some motionless leaves. Many thoughts crowded through his bewildered brain. Chiefest of these, rather, recurring oftenest, was the knowledge that he was hungry. Sharing first place with this desire for food was Mary Kelting. Poor kid, she had been right about Red! However, it looked as though Red had made his escape. But they would get him. And the robbery of the restaurant? Friday night, she had said—to-morrow night. Just like them to attempt it, even after this. He must do something to prevent it. But no, what a sap he would be, to chance another session in jail, just to lend a hand to a woman, a red-headed woman, at that. Anyhow, she was not in such a bad way. She worked in a restaurant. Always plenty to eat. Good stuff, too. Swell apple pie——

Bull awoke with the sun shining in his face. He sat up and stared about in amazement. He was not in the country, but in a park. Just beyond the fringe of alders was a mountain spouting water, surrounded by many benches. Lawns, broken by many flower beds, stretched away on either side of the little stream beside which he lay. Although it was still early, the gravel paths were dotted with people, cutting across the park on their way to business, probably. Bull came cautiously to his feet. He was desperately hungry. He crouched low when he discovered a bench not a dozen yards away occupied by a girl. But even as he peered fearfully through the thicket, she tossed the paper she had been reading into a green can and walked away.

More comprehensive survey of his situation convinced Bull that he had

stumbled upon the one spot in the whole park which afforded adequate concealment. For long he lay still, striving to figure out how he had become so turned around the night before. He knew where he was now. This park was no more than a block from the Reading Building. And down there, at the head of the first street, was the Plaza Lunch, and Mary Kelting. Last night he had run for hours, it seemed, and had ended up within a few hundred yards from where he started!

A clock chimed nine. The early promenaders through the park lessened. Soon the grass-lined walks were deserted. Bull's thoughts concentrated on food. But the more he thought, the hungrier he became. And there evidently was not a chance in the world of eating, for awhile, anyhow. Perhaps not until night. And, perhaps, not even then. He groaned, left his hiding place and recovered the newspaper which the girl had dropped. News was a very poor substitute for food, so far as Bull Regan was concerned, but a glance at the front page completely banished his hunger for the moment.

Inch-high scareheads detailed the high spots of the robbery. In the center of the page was the picture of a man. A villainous-looking rascal. Bull saw the name beneath the picture. He grasped, and held the wrinkled sheet closer to his eyes. Yes, it was Bull Regan. He remembered now, they had taken that picture at the Stroudsburg jail. Four men had held him while they took that picture. One of the guards had been twisting his bent arm. An instant after the camera snapped, he had broken away, and with his manacled first had knocked that guard cold. He grinned at the recollection. Of course, they had beaten him up afterward; it had taken six to do it, including the warden. It was a swell scrap, but they had got back at him during those two long years!

Scowling, he read the story of the robbery.

Old Harry had furnished his description. Rickersfield, however, had refused to make a statement of any sort. Bull wondered at this. He concluded again that Rickersfield was a good egg. If he ever got out of his present mess, he would strike the old boy for a job. Man-size, Rickersfield was, a swell boss!

After twice reading the story of the holdup, some of Bull's optimism returned. There was hardly a word of truth in it. The only accurate thing was the description of himself. Even though this was not at all flattering, he was bound to admit that it was comprehensive, and accurate. However, the picture told an entirely different story. Embryo sleuths seeking to reconcile his picture with the written description would undoubtedly find difficulties.

So far, he had been very lucky. He appreciated this fully. For fifteen years he had been more or less consistently at odds with organized law and order, and during this period certain broad rules governing the conduct of the hunted had become well known to him. He knew that to flee the scene of a robbery immediately, was as a rule foolish. Hence, he was safest right where he was, for the time being at least. Scanlon and the rest of the gang were probably near at hand. The chances were they would rob the Plaza Lunch this very night, as they had planned. This, assuming that Scanlon was an experienced hand at the game, and Bull felt assured that he was. For an instant, Bull considered joining forces with Scanlon, but the notion departed as quickly as it had come. Nothing doing. He was through. And then, Scanlon was a skunk, and had tried to double cross him. Having tried this once, he would try it again. The papers had called Scanlon "Denver Dan." Bull

had heard of Denver Dan Scanlon. A hard guy! But this reputation did not particularly impress him. The harder they came the harder they fell, and Bull registered a solemn vow to break Denver Dan's neck if the chance ever came.

At which point Bull's thoughts turned again to food, and Mary Kelting.

If only he could get into the Plaza Lunch without being seen! Mary would give him a hand-out. He was sure of it. A nice kid, Mary. He liked her. He would like to help her, too. But, he could not do it. It would be, as much as his neck was worth. If he hung around the Plaza Restaurant, they would get him sure. And he did not want to go to jail. It did not matter what his intentions were, good or bad, guilty or not guilty, they would jug him. All of which would not do Mary Kelting any good. Of course, he might wriggle out without getting caught. It would be a good chance to get even with Scanlon, too, the low-down sneak thief. And he wanted to help her. Her hair wasn't really so red.

The day wore on into early darkness. A misty rain accompanied banks of rolling fog that settled thickly along the little stream. Arc lights twinkled like gray stars in the distance. Bull shivered and paced impatiently back and forth through the mud on the river bank. He was so hungry that he would have welcomed anything in the shape of food. He visioned longingly the delectable assortment of pies surrounded by red-cheeked apples in the window of the Plaza Lunch, only a block away. Soon he would attempt it. But no, they would get him, sure! Still, he had to eat. There would really be no more danger in trying the Plaza than any other place, less, in fact. Mary Kelting was there. She would not squeal, and she needed him. He ought to help her. He had promised. And he always kept his promises. What if they did spot him? He could handle a dozen, easy. They would never get him. He would eat—and he would help Mary Kelting!

Acting on this decision, he started toward the string of red and blue lights that marked the Plaza Lunch.

It was later than he had thought. The dinner hour rush was over and the Plaza was practically deserted. Half a dozen men occupied as many tables. Bull pushed through the revolving doors. Mary Kelting saw him the moment he entered. As he came toward her, her quick eyes glanced at the other occupants of the room. Only two looked at Bull's bedraggled figure, and these grinned and winked. Bull recognized them as two of Scanlon's "boys." He scowled fiercely into their grinning faces.

"Hello, kid!" He leaned on the glass edge of the cash register and looked into Mary Kelting's eyes. "How's everythin'? Any news?"

She was silent, and motioned with her head toward Scanlon's men.

Bull sought to reassure her with a disdainful shrug. "Yeah, I know them. They don't amount t' nothin'. W'y, what's the matter——"

Mary's eyes had been searching the rain-washed sidewalk beyond the plate-glass windows and her face had suddenly gone white. She smiled wanly.

"Nothing. I—I'm just hungry, I guess. I've been so upset all day that I guess I forgot to eat——"

"Forgot? Holy smoke? Well, me too, I'm hungry. I ain't et since las' night. What say we eat, kid? Then we kin talk."

She nodded, and after carefully locking the cash register, joined him. She continued to look fearfully through the big window. Partway to the self-service counter, she stopped and pinched Bull's arm fiercely:

"They're here! Oh, I knew it! Red, and—Denver Dan Scanlon!"

Bull followed her gaze just in time

to see Scanlon's broad shoulders disappear in one direction and Red Kelting's checked cap in another.

He patted the girl's clutching fingers reassuringly.

"I'm leavin' you jest a minute, kid. I'll talk to the boys, see. Don't eat till I git back!"

And disregarding her futile pull on his sleeve, he hurried away.

Kelting had disappeared. Scanlon was making his way across the street toward the big automobile.

"You, Scanlon!" Scanlon heard Bull's call but he did not stop.

"Hey!" Bull broke into a run. So did Scanlon. The latter had reached the car and was trying to start it when Bull jumped up on the running board.

'Climb outa there! I wanta talk t' you!"

Scanlon pulled away.

"Don't try fer t' start anythin', now, Regan," he said. "Everything's all right. Come out to the camp to-morrow. I'll fix you up. I'm in a hurry now."

"My business with you, Scanlon, is goin' t' be settled here, right now."

Denver Dan Scanlon reached into an inner pocket at the same instant that Bull's fingers secured a grip on his coat collar.

"You pull a gun, Scanlon, an'——"

"Don't be such a sap, Regan. Here, take this. This is the best I kin do. We didn't make out so good last night. Git goin' now. The boys will think it's all off."

The car started with a roar. Bull slipped on the wet running board, his hold on Scanlon gave way and he landed on his back in the road. An instant later, he was on his feet and fumbling over the roll of bills which Scanlon had thrust into his hand. Mostly ones and twos, about thirty dollars. But Bull was not particularly interested. Scanlon had given him the slip. He had wanted to talk to Scanlon about the Plaza Lunch business. If he could have talked with him for just a minute more, the Plaza Lunch would not have been held up, by Denver Dan Scanlon, at any rate. That individual would have been physically unable to participate in any more holdups for some time to come. But now——

With Mary Kelting's pleading brown eyes beckoning him, his hunger forgotten, Bull hurried back toward the restaurant. As he did so, he spotted Scanlon's car, parked half a block away. Bull swore and hurried his step. If Scanlon pulled any rough stuff on Mary Kelting——

Crossing the street, Bull faced the rain-washed front windows of the restaurant. There were now several people in there. He looked for Mary Kelting. At first he did not see her. The splashing rain distorted the interior of the brightly lighted room. Everything seemed quiet enough, too quiet. For no particular reason, Bull's heart pounded wildly. Ignoring a man whom he took to be a beggar, Bull made for the door. But, the beggar suddenly barred the way.

"Nix, big fella, you stay out!" he exclaimed, drawing a gun.

And then Bull realized that in the restaurant half a dozen frightened customers, lined up against the wall, were fronting three men with guns. Mary Kelting was in the cashier's cage. On one side was Red Kelting talking to her earnestly; on the other, Dan Scanlon, his heavy face scowling. And Bull recognized the man whose gun stopped him as one of the "boys," an Italian who had taken the unappropriate name of Jones.

"What's the matter, fella? I'm in on this," Bull cried.

"Don't try to kid me, Regan. You stand still. Just like we was talking, see. Make a move and I'll plug you."

"But, you're crazy, I tell you. Scanlon is waiting for me."

Bull was a convincing liar. Jones wavered. His back was to the restaurant. Hoping to catch Scanlon's eye, he turned half about. And in that moment Bull's fist caught him under the ear. The man collapsed. Bull pushed into the restaurant.

"Hey, Scanlon, Jones's beat it!"

For a single, breathless instant every eye was focused on Regan's grinning face. "Want some help?" Bull, assuming a nonchalance that he by no means felt, continued to grin, as though this business of holding up a busy restaurant in the heart of a city was an everyday occurrence.

Scanlon made a quick decision. "Take his place, Bull."

"Nothin' doin'. Not me!" Bull came near, and rested an apparently friendly hand on Red Kelting's arm. "I don't like that outside stuff. How about Red here? Come on, Red!" And, without waiting, his grip tightened on Red's arm and he started for the door, taking the bewildered Kelting with him. Kelting alone realized the power in that seemingly friendly grip, but Bull's ham-like hand held the younger man's arm in a grasp of iron. On the wet sidewalk, Bull's grin vanished.

"Kelting, you're jest about one of the most low-down, double-crossing skunks I ever seen," said Bull. "However, I'm doin' you another good turn. Here's the dope. Listen good. There's a nice, wide street; nobody in sight. You beat it! Hop to it with all you got. Git me? I'm watchin' you with a gat trained right between your shoulder blades. If you ain't aroun' that there corner about ten seconds, I'll sock you sure. I promised Mary, see? I promised her you wouldn't go to jail. I didn't promise her I wouldn't put you in shape for a nice ride in a wooden box, though. No beefin', now. Git goin'!"

Propelled by a hearty shove, Red Kelting started for the corner.

There was no need for Bull to make good his threat, which was perhaps just as well. He had no gun. And, even if he had had one, he would not have used it—for several reasons, one of which was that he was a rotten shot.

As he turned away from the fleeing figure, Bull saw that Scanlon had got Mary out of the cage. He held her by the arm. Her face was white. He was hurting her!

Bull fought to control his rage. He entered the room noiselessly, and was close to Scanlon before the latter was aware of his presence.

"Unlock that cash register, you redhead!" the gunman exclaimed, twisting the girl's arm savagely.

"What do you think? Red skipped too, boss," announced Bull. He was flirting with death. Of this he was well aware. Hence, his guileless grin may not have registered the sincerity intended. At any rate, Scanlon pivoted about with a snarl. He dropped the girl's arm. An automatic pistol flashed into his hand.

But he was a split second too late. With a single motion Bull swept Mary Kelting behind him, and his clubbed fist smashed into Scanlon's face. It was a terrible blow. Scanlon crashed against the wall. His knees sagged. The gun fell clattering. But he was not out. Bull pulled Mary down behind the cashier's cage where she would be out of line of any stray bullets from the guns of the three other holdup men, and met Scanlon as he came erect. But his swinging blow did not connect this time. The gunman ducked and caught Bill about the waist. Close-locked, they struggled, overturning chairs and tables. Scanlon's grip tightened as the effects of Bull's blow wore off. His evident intention was to crush his opponent. The strength of his arms was prodigious. But Bull was not dismayed. To him, there was nothing new in rough-and-tumble fighting. He locked his left

arm under his opponent's chin and struck downward with his right fist. Due to his greater height, there was considerable purchase behind these hammering blows which centered on Scanlon's uptilted jaw. Denver Dan withstood three of them. Then his grip weakened. Following the fourth blow, Bull pulled away, struck out mightily, and Scanlon fell like a log.

Carried forward by his own weight, Bull crashed into an upturned chair and fell against the wall. This undoubtedly saved his life. A gun roared three times and little chips of broken tile dropped away from the wall at a spot exactly in line with where his yellow head had been not an instant before. Breathing hard, dazed, Bull grappled with Scanlon, who was crawling to his knees. His clutching fingers lacked strength. He swore and strove to clear away the red mist that swam before his eyes. He struggled upright, bringing Scanlon with him, and sought futilely to focus his opponent's blurred face.

Then, his head cleared. His vision returned, and he saw A. Winslow Rickersfield, holding him by the arm and grinning at him. Mary Kelting held his other arm tightly. In her free hand she brandished a wicked-looking automatic. Scanlon's gun! Scanlon had collapsed and several bluecoats were carrying him out to the patrol wagon.

Bull shook the hair out of his eyes and pulled away from Rickersfield to grope for a cigarette. Mary Kelting found a match for him. Through the haze of smoke, Bull saw that the restaurant was empty of all but Rickersfield and the girl and the frightened counter clerks, who now one by one made their appearance. His sullen scowl gave way to a blank expression. Why didn't the cops take him? Caught red-handed, he was. Who was there to say that he was not one of Scanlon's gang? Mary Kelting, perhaps, but, she didn't know, and now the place had been stuck up, no one would believe her.

"Well, Bull, looks like you cleaned house, you and Mary," said Rickersfield, his eyes twinkling.

And, as Bull merely grunted uncomprehendingly, he went on: "She stuck up three of them and telephoned while you were busy breaking Scanlon's jaw, cracking a few of his ribs, and so forth, as I understand it."

"And I ain't pinched?" Bull was incredulous.

Rickersfield laughed. Mary Kelting patted his arm. She laughed, too, but her eyes were filled with tears.

Bull put his lips to the glinting hair that curled about her ear and whispered:

"They didn't git Red."

She shook her head and smiled brightly. Bull was fascinated by a strange something he saw in her wet eyes, hence it was that he scarcely knew Rickersfield was talking to him.

"You can start work Monday, Bull. I need construction men, need them badly. What do you say?"

Bull understood this. After what he had seen in Mary Kelting's eyes, he was prepared for any good fortune. He grinned from ear to ear.

"Sure," he said, and fumbled with Rickersfield's outstretched hand.

He watched the big man disappear through the revolving doors, then he grinned happily down into Mary Kelting's flushed face.

"C'mon kid, let's eat," he said.

Rustlers' Rock

By David Manning

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

MICHAEL TIRREL rides to Los Cavallos to find his brother Jimmy's enemy. He wins a fellow-traveler's money, horse, pawn ticket for a diamond stickpin, and clothes. Later he has some misadventures; and a pawnbroker offers an enormous sum for the pin. Michael rejects this, and rides away on Molly Malone.

Jimmy taunts him with his new prosperity, he sees the pin, and Michael is puzzled. Jimmy promises to explain. Michael investigates a noise and returns to find Jimmy killed by a knife thrust from in front. "Dutch" Methuen, Jimmy's friend, arrives. The sheriff is sent for. Mike unearths a red wallet which Jimmy said belonged to Bramber, his enemy. In it is a direction signed by a mark similar to the pin. Michael, everywhere taken for Dan Finch, is given a letter, signed by Peter Lawrence, which urges Finch to return to Kate. Michael constantly encounters a man with curious agate eyes. He escapes from the hotel and reaches the stable. Here a voice says to him, "I guess you're our man."

CHAPTER XV.

NOT WORTH A BAD NICKEL.

"WHO'S that? Who's that?" demanded Michael. "Ain't that Sam Lowell, the deputy sheriff?"

"It is!"

"Why, dashed if I ain't glad to have you here! Come in, Lowell, or shall I come out?"

"If you come out, come with your hands in the air. That's all I have to say to you."

"What do you want with me?"

"I'll tell you when I have you!"

Tirrel hesitated. "Look here," said he. "This is darn funny!"

"I don't see it that way," replied Lowell.

"Well," said Tirrel, "I never was afraid of the law before, and I'm not gunna begin now!"

And he stepped through the doorway.

"Hands up!" said the sheriff. Behind him there were four or five men.

"Are those the skunks who tried to murder me in my room?" asked Tirrel.

"Murder? You?" asked the deputy excitedly.

"You heard me talk, Lowell. I won't put my hands up. I'll go with you, if you want, but I won't put my hands up, and I'll keep my guns, because I'm not gonta be murdered offhand here in Los Cavallos!"

"You talk like you were loco! Who ever heard of an arrest that left the guns on a gent?" demanded the sheriff.

"You can hear of it now!"

"I've got you covered, man."

"You ain't got me dead, though. Not in this light! You got your free chance, Lowell. Start shooting, and you may drop me, but I'll take you with me, by gosh!"

Lowell fairly panted with angry impatience.

"What d'you want?" he said.

"I want to go with you wherever you want, while you explain to me what this is all about!"

"Come along, then. You gotta right to know."

In this manner, therefore, it came about that Tirrel was ushered forth from the stable and into the hotel. The commotion, which had died down immediately after the shooting, had now blazed up again, as though a far more important event were taking place. The patio was filled with scurrying, half-dressed figures, and every one was asking questions, every one making random replies.

And Tirrel walked with a gun in either hand, a very grim and ready-looking figure, with the deputy sheriff immediately behind him. He was taken up the steps to the front entrance, and there the proprietor was waiting for them. He was more suave than ever, and bowed them into his own office, a pleasant, large room.

Tirrel, thoroughly roused, walked up to him.

"I think," said he, "that you're the coyote that's underneath all this. The fact is that you've had a hand in the whole affair. You've let in the pack that tried to nab me a while ago. Is that right?"

The proprietor was still nodding and smiling a little, as though the main desire of his life was to understand what his guest wanted, but he could not comprehend the language in which the other spoke.

Lowell broke in: "You've got enough trouble on your hands now, without trying to make trouble for other people!"

"What sort of trouble?"

"You've murdered Jim Tirrel, and you're going to hang for it, and that's my firm belief, Dan Finch!"

"Finch?" shouted Tirrel. "You blockhead, I ain't Finch!"

"No, you're another Tirrel, I guess?"

The deputy sheriff was grimly sarcastic.

"Why, you simpleton," exclaimed Tirrel, "I can get a thousand men to prove that I'm Tirrel!"

"You can?"

"Yes, of course."

"Where are they?"

"Anywhere from Tucson to San Antone."

The deputy smiled sourly. "But not here in Los Cavallos?"

"Why, certainly not! How could I know a flock of people up here when it's my first trip here?"

"Your first trip?"

"Yes."

"You don't know anybody?"

"No."

"Then how does it come that so many here in town know you?"

"How the deuce should I tell?"

"You can rave, Finch, but it won't do you any good. The law has wanted you for a long time. It's got a long

list agin' you. Now it's got you cornered. You've murdered a gent who had his gun arm helpless. The tree ain't yet growed high enough to hang that kind of a skunk from!"

The deputy sheriff was young; his wrath possessed the fury of youth. Moreover, behind his speech there was the deep-throated murmur of approval from the men back of him. They kept their ominous faces toward Tirrel, eying him as though he were a beast.

"I'd like to know," said Tirrel, "who dares to say that I'm Dan Finch!"

"Would you?"

"I would."

"Finch," said Lowell, "this is conversation that had oughta be saved up for court. But I got reasons for talkin' this out with you. Suppose I send every man out of this here room, will you turn your guns over to me and have a quiet chat?"

"I'll do that."

"Let's have the guns, then."

"Let's have the room empty, first."

"You gotta make the first move."

"I'm to trust you?"

"That's the way it'll have to be."

"Since I come to this town," said Tirrel, "I've had a knife drove at my throat; I've been shot at in the woods, and I've had a gang of murderers bust into my room to-night. Now you ask me to trust you or anybody else in this here town?"

"It'll have to be done. Finch, do what I say, it'll be better for you!" He said this without anger, very seriously.

And Tirrel answered, after a moment's consideration: "There are the guns!" He laid them upon the table.

Lowell turned instantly on the others.

"We want the room to ourselves," said he.

One of his men protested: "You don't know Finch. He's as tricky as a fox, and his bite is poison!"

"Do what I tell you," commanded the deputy sheriff. "And bring out my hoss. You better bring out Finch's mare, too. She'll have to be shifted over to the jail stable."

This insistence finally removed the others from the chamber. Tirrel remained alone with Lowell. His guns were in the possession of that youthful officer of the law—as brave and steady a youngster as ever wore the badge of that dangerous office in the West. And Tirrel knew definitely that his back was crowded against the wall.

The deputy began, when they were alone: "I want to get at one thing first. You say that your room was entered by a gang of gents that was after you, to-night?"

"They were your men, of course?"

"Mine? D'you think I try to do murder at night? What are you talkin' about, Finch?"

"Partner," answered Tirrel, "no matter who you think I may be, don't use that name to me! My name's Tirrel. I'm Michael Tirrel. I've never wore any other name for a minute during my whole life. I've never been in jail. I've never done a crooked job. I can get a thousand men to tell you about me!"

This assurance, not untouched with anger, had some effect upon the deputy.

He said, frowning: "Well, call yourself what you please. I ain't the judge of your case. But I gotta judge you in part. Lemme hear about this raid on your room?"

"Last night, I heard the key fall out of my lock. I got up and investigated. There was nobody outside the door. How did the key fall? Well, suppose somebody was trying to get an impression of the lock?"

"Well?"

"To-night I lock my door again. I wake up a while ago. The door is open, the chair I propped agin' it is being lifted to one side. Gents come in; a ray out of a dark lantern is sifted onto the bed; I see the gleam of a gun in the gent's other hand, and I shoot out

the light. They run back into the hall. I take my stuff and get through the window onto the top of the next house. There a gent stands up behind the chimney pot and sends three slugs my way. I drop him. He rolls down the roof and lands in the roof-gutter. I go down through the skylight to the street and find the town quiet again. I don't suppose you heard the guns at all, maybe?"

To this sneer, the young deputy answered calmly: "There ain't any use in talking this way to me, and you know it. Of course I heard the guns! I've heard guns before in Los Cavallos. My job was to get you."

"So you sent up men to murder me in bed, eh?"

"Those weren't my men—if it happened the way you say."

"No?"

"No, I sent up my boys to see if you were in your room. While they were gone, I watched the hoss, here, thinking you'd come for her if they alarmed you and you got away. And that's the way that it turned out."

"And them that tried to murder me?"

"I'll look into that later. My job is to save you alive for a decent trial. And it's going to be a hard job. This town is pretty hot about you; the jail is a flimsy shack. If the crowd wants you, they're apt to lynch you. But here's my proposition to you. Write out a confession that you killed young Jim Tirrel, and I'll try to shift you out of Los Cavallos to a safer jail. Otherwise, your life here in Los Cavallos ain't worth a bad nickel!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RED WALLET.

TO this odd speech, Tirrel listened with a good deal of composure. He even turned his back on the deputy sheriff and looked out the window. It opened upon the patio of the hotel, and there he saw that a considerable crowd was gathering and each moment growing more dense. In obedience to the orders of the deputy sheriff, his own horse and that of his prisoner had been taken out into the open. Three or four lanterns, also, had been lighted, and the patio was given a very wild effect by the shifting of the lights as they swung in the hands of those who carried them; for the shadows of the people in it sometimes appeared gigantic and sometimes dwindled into dwarfs.

There were already twenty or thirty men in that patio, half-dressed some of them, but all fully armed.

And the first person Tirrel saw was the unmistakable fellow of the clouded agate eyes, leaning against a corner of the building with a shotgun beside him.

That crowd was rising against Michael: for that matter, it was not strange that, according to Western ethics, a man who murdered a cripple should be summarily executed by public vengeance, without waiting for the instrumentality of the law's machine. But, as in most cases of mob violence, the danger was simply that they would pick the wrong victim.

He turned away from the window toward his captor, and found Sam Lowell resting a revolver on the back of a chair.

"You're takin' no chances, I see," observed Tirrel, with a cold sneer.

"I can't afford to," said the deputy sheriff. "I've heard a long lot about you for a good many years, Finch, and it's gunna be a grand boost for me if I can bring you up for trial."

"Aye," said Tirrel, "that would make you pretty famous."

"It would," said the boy. "And that's what I want. Fame! Fame! Fame!"

He bent back his head as he said it; savage ecstasy was in his face; he even trembled a little. And the older man, watching him, knew at once that either

glory or death, or both together, could not be very far removed from the path of this youngster.

"But if the mob takes me away from you and strings me up to a tree, what then? That spoils the party, so far as you're concerned?"

"It does."

"Particular if it's found out that they've strung up the wrong man?"

"Well, that's true," said Lowell, good-natured again and unperturbed.

"It don't bother you, then, that chance?"

"Not much."

"Would you mind tellin' me what it is that makes you so sure that I'm your man?"

"Well, there's the make-up of you. I've looked over a dozen descriptions of you. You see? They all tally, very exact. Man about six feet tall, a hundred and seventy pounds or a little more, lean face, strong shoulders, sandy hair, intelligent-looking, pretty brown, hair sunfaded. All those things fit in with you. Age between thirty and thirty-five. Well, there you are! It's a pretty close fit, ain't it?"

"You know," commented the other, "that there's a thousand men on the range that would fit in with the same picture."

"Maybe there's about a thousand. Well, there's other things, too."

"Such as what, then?"

"There's the hoss. How would you dodge that? Why, I've heard about the mare for a couple of years. I suppose that you'll be telling me that the hoss is just a close copy, too? Or are there a thousand more like her?"

"I hope to Hannah that there ain't!" said Michael. "But, for all that, ain't it a chance that she could really belong to Finch, and that I could be named Tirrel?"

The deputy sheriff shrugged his shoulders. It was clear that his mind was made up.

"Suppose I told you, then, that I was coming out of the desert, and at a water hole, on the edge of the hills, I met up with Finch, and that we played a long game of poker, and that I cleaned him out of everything that he had—down to his skin. I got his clothes and his hoss. He got mine. I had some worn-out old rags, and a lump-headed mustang. Suppose I told you that?"

The deputy sheriff raised a finger and pointed.

"Finch," he said sternly, "why d'you keep on bluffing? It's known for a fact that you went to the pawnshop here, and that you paid five hundred dollars on a pawn ticket that Finch himself had left here the last time that he sneaked through the town. Don't that link you up with him pretty close?"

Tirrel, listening, saw that the case against him was fairly well closed; it would take direct testimony other than his own to convince this or any other man.

Sam Lowell summed up quietly, and with effect:

"These things don't work up by addition. You gotta multiply. First off, suppose somebody says: 'There goes Finch!' I look and I see a man the same age and general cut and line and weight and look of Finch, why, that makes it pretty sure that Finch it is, don't it?"

"Who pointed me out to you and called me Finch?"

"That ain't to be brought up," said the sheriff.

"All right."

"Then comes the fact that you wear jus' the same sort of clothes that he used to wear, down to golden spurs! Well, that ain't making just twice as sure that you're Finch; it makes it ten times as sure. And when on top of that we find out that you got the mare that Finch always used to ride, and that answers her name of Molly the

same as a dog would, why, that don't double the proof, but it multiplies it again, and by a hundred. There simply ain't a chance in a thousand that you ain't Finch! You'd not be content with that—no, by gosh! You even redeem the same pawn ticket that Finch sure was knowed to of left behind him! Well, that makes it one chance in ten thousand or a hundred thousand that you ain't him! And there you are!"

"You'd hang me on that, I suppose?"

"Old son," said the deputy, "if it was in my hands, and I was judge and jury all combined, I'd string you right up and make no more expense and trouble."

"But you want to get your reputation out of it, of course!"

"You understand me now!"

"And the fact that I'm Finch proves that I murdered my brother—Tirrel, I mean?"

"He was killed by somebody that he knowed—somebody that could walk right in and he not think him an enemy."

"Because he was stabbed from in front?"

"Yes, that's one reason. He never made no outcry, neither. He didn't have the time for that."

"What would my reason be for murderin' him, then?"

"A dashed good one! He'd borrowed a lot of money from you. He thought that you'd come to collect. So you had! But you wanted the cash right then, and when he put you off again, it peeved you a good deal. He started to write out a note promisin' to pay you, some time soon. But you wouldn't listen. You got to wranglin'. Then you stabbed him to the heart. He crumpled the paper up in his hand and it fell in a corner when he fell. But there 'Dutch' Methuen found it after all of us left. It was the shaky writin' of a gent writing with his left hand. It was interrupted right in the middle. But there's the case all out agin' you. D'you doubt that?"

Michael could not doubt it. As the deputy spoke, with a swift and burning conviction, he was himself almost persuaded that, in a dream, he must have done as was said of him.

The deputy saw that he had gained much in this talk, and now he said: "Take another look out the window, will you?"

Tirrel did so, and the crowd had gained considerably; a grim lot of faces they presented to the eye. The man of the agate eyes no longer waited at the corner of the building; in fact, at that moment there was a knock at the door, and a voice called through:

"Sheriff Lowell!"

"Yes, Mr. Chandos!"

It was the voice of the man with the agate eyes: a soft, deep, and very rich voice.

"I'm glad to hear you speak, sheriff. I know that's a dangerous man that you have in there with you—a desperate man, sir! I advise you to search his pockets thoroughly while you have a chance."

"For dynamite?" chuckled the deputy.

"You might see if he has—let us say, a red wallet on his person!"

In spite of himself, Tirrel could not help starting, and by bad luck, that start was seen by his captor, and the eyes of Lowell instantly narrowed.

He called his thanks through the door, and then as the footfall of Chandos departed, he approached his prisoner.

"Even Mr. Chandos knows about you," he observed, "and I see that he touched the quick, that time. I suppose he never makes a mistake."

"I never heard of Chandos before."

"I suppose you never did," sneered Lowell, "but it appears that he's heard of you. Now, partner, you sort of see how the position sizes up, and that the

best thing that you can do is to do what I want you to."

"Beginning where?"

"A written confession. On the strength of that I may be able to save your life."

"By getting me out of the town, you mean?"

"Yes, to another and a safer jail. I've got a fast hoss. You've got one, too. I think that maybe we could beat out the crowd!"

"Thanks," said the older man.

"You won't do it?"

"No!"

"You'll be dead before morning, then."

"I'll have to die, then, and if you're an honest man, you'll curse yourself for this before the week's out!"

"I'll take that chance. But what I want now is to go through you. Hoist up your hands."

Slowly, Tirrel obeyed, and at the first dip of the sheriff's hand, he drew out the red wallet.

CHAPTER XVII.

ESCAPE!

NOW, at the glimpse of the red leather, and the memory that the paper with its strange message was contained within it, Tirrel winced a little, and the deputy sheriff noticed the wincing. He said in a sharp, ugly tone: "You don't like it, eh? I've an idea that you'll like things a lot less before I'm through with you."

Instinctively, and not with malice aforethought, he emphasized the last remark by jabbing the muzzle of his revolver a little deeper into the ribs of his prisoner. It was the worst thing he could have done. Logically, as a level-headed man, Tirrel saw that he was at the mercy of the other; but every man of pride possesses a last barrier which may not be surmounted by another without bringing resistance. Defeat can be recognized, but insult will not be endured.

So, without thinking, Tirrel jerked his two fists down and beat them into the face of the deputy. The knuckles of the left hand tore and bruised the flesh over the bridge of the sheriff's nose; but the right hand like a hammer struck on Lowell's temple, and his wits went blank. His forefinger did not curl around the trigger. But he sank limp toward the floor.

Tirrel supported him a little and laid the youngster prone. He was limp as a rag; his eyes were a little opened, and looked like death, but dead he was not.

This was the deciding instant. It did not occur to Tirrel to wait until the deputy had recovered, in order to have the law's protection against the crowd. He only made sure that it would be some time before the man of the law recovered his wits. Then he stepped to the window and looked out. The crowd had grown more dense in the patio. There were a hundred men; and every man of the hundred was armed. They were gathering in close, serious groups, here and there, and if ever he had seen a lynching in the air, Tirrel saw it now.

He turned back to the deputy sheriff. He took from him two revolvers, a packed cartridge belt, and a Winchester which was leaning against the wall. The sheriff's sombrero, too, by lucky accident, fitted him to a T.

As for the rest of Tirrel's possessions, they were neatly done into a pack which was strapped behind the saddle upon the back of the mare. From the window he had another glance at her, and saw her tossing her lovely head, and shaking it against the restraint of the bridle. There was a close group surrounding her; no man in the world could rescue her by a sudden dash, and yet it seemed to Tirrel, at that moment, that liberty regained without her

was hardly worthy to be called liberty at all!

He heard a groan from Lowell, at this point, and stepping back to the fallen boy, he quietly and quickly prepared a gag which he fitted between his teeth, and then with Lowell's own irons, he fettered the hands and the feet of the deputy.

By this time, the eyes of the latter were wide. He made no attempt to speak against the gag, but with burning eyes of shame and hatred he watched the other at work.

Finally, Tirrel paused above him. "Thanks for the hat," said he. "I don't know where we've put mine. As for the rest of it, you've worked your best on me; I don't blame you for having been wrong. So long, Lowell. I wish you luck everywhere else!"

He stepped to the door, unlocked it, and listened a moment. There was no sound in the hall. Quickly he jerked the door wide and peered up and down. The corridor was empty, so he walked on down it toward the front of the hotel, turned down a smaller side passage, and so came, uninterrupted, to a door which opened directly upon the street. It was so little used that it was locked, and the key grated heavily in the lock. But, a moment later, he stood in the street. Up and down it he heard voices, he saw people coming like iron filings toward a magnet; and in the plaza the band halted in the midst of a stirring air. The news had come there, as well, and stopped the music, like a leader's command.

He himself, his sombrero drawn down well over his eyes, walked briskly along toward the gate of the patio, and as he went, he heard from within the hotel the distinct sound of irons clashing. He remembered, too, that he had foolishly failed to lock the door behind him, when he left the deputy.

He reached the mouth of the patio, then, and looked in upon an excited crowd just as a window went screeching up and a voice shouted:

"He's gone! He's fooled Lowell, and he's gone!"

Tirrel called loudly: "Molly! Molly!"

And he stepped back against the wall, still calling. Molly came with a snort and with rattling hoofs. Out she came, swinging grandly into her stride, and Tirrel leaped at her and struck her side like a wild cat. With all except his left hand he missed, but that caught the pommel of the saddle, and he flung out to the speed of her gallop like a streamer in the wind.

Then he managed to catch hold with the other hand and drag himself onto her back. He looked back and saw men surging out from the mouth of the patio. Guns crackled. He turned Molly down the first street on the right.

He was by no means sure of Los Cavallos, but he hoped that he would strike a quick way out. Molly flew through a narrow, winding alley and brought him out, presently, upon a pleasantly wide and straight avenue that pointed fairly for a gate of the town.

Toward that goal he forced her at a wild gallop, and saw an ox-cart being maneuvered rapidly into position to block the exit. They kept some watch and ward, in Los Cavallos; more than once the sudden closing of their old-fashioned gates had kept mischief out or kept miscreants in to be disciplined for their crimes.

And now the alarm-bell was beginning to crash and clamor. It was beaten with such vigor that there was no chance for any note to rise and swell and boom, but the next harsh impulse came crashing at its heels.

In the meantime, the cart, in spite of all his haste, had been deftly backed into place, and the driver now sheltered himself on the far side of his span. One massive panel of the gate itself had been forced home; and the second panel was creakingly started.

That way was stopped, it appeared, and Tirrel looked desperately back across his shoulder.

There was no chance to retreat. Two streets converged toward the gate, and both of these were now thronged with hurrying riders. They were not wasting ammunition. They saw that they had their man neatly bagged, and the yelling of their triumph rang in the ears of Tirrel like the shouting of the waves of the mighty sea on a hollow shore.

He gathered the reins of Molly, prepared to swing her around, for he well knew that, with their blood so well worked up, if the crowd had contemplated lynching before, it would now tear him limb from limb. Perhaps if he had charged at them, a revolver spitting fire from either hand, he could send some of them to death before him. Perhaps he could even split a lane through them and, twisting through the center of the town, secure another chance to flee. But without Molly Malone—for the gates would be closed against him, then.

So he reasoned, as he flashed a look across his shoulder at the hurry of the crowd. Then he turned forward again and a sudden hope bloomed in his mind. The cart which partially blocked his way was huge, high, cumbersome, but the span of oxen were not over large, and they stood close together——

An Indian yell burst from the lips of Tirrel. In a red fire of enthusiasm he rushed the mare for the pair of silver-white oxen, and she acknowledged the work that lay before her by shaking her head, and then pricking her ears most gallantly.

A slight pause in the gallop, an upward tipping, a mighty spring, and she soared above the span as they grunted and swayed their horns in fear beneath her. The driver, with a yell, toppled backward upon the earth, mortally frightened, and Tirrel and the mare shot on through the unclosed panel of the gate.

It was of the heaviest oak; and now, pushed stoutly from behind, it was jammed shut after him, as though to secure his retreat.

He was grateful for that blank spot out of which so many rifles would otherwise have peered after him. The road wound before him across perfectly level meadows; he left it, and riding hard to the left, he was quickly within the safe, dim borders of the woods. And from the moment when he left the gate behind him, not a single shot had been fired at him.

He pulled down the mare to a dog trot. He wanted to listen well to the forest noises, but there was a light wind blowing, and its continual whispering among the leaves and the voicelike groaning of bough on bough, now and again, would have been sufficient to cover the approach of a hundred careful men.

Moreover, there was two days' rest in Molly; so he let her range on again, he hardly cared where. Wherever he went, from this time forth, he would be a marked and wanted man; and he wondered where the adventure had begun.

It was not when he struck the blow at the deputy sheriff; neither was it the mysterious hand which had struck down his brother and shifted the blame upon his shoulder; neither was it his visit to the pawnshop; not one of these was the beginning, but all had come from the letter of his brother calling on him for help. That letter had begun the trouble, and the chance meeting with Dan Finch at the water hole had given a resistless momentum to it.

Grimly and bitterly he wished to encounter Dan Finch again!

In the meantime, the mare strode on steadily, tirelessly, covering the easy slopes of the road with her smooth pace, until he came out of the woods and

found before him, from a hilltop, a scattering of lights strewn across a small valley.

In the very next hollow, he overtook a teamster whose blacksnake was encouraging eight mules, which lugged in creaking unison at their collars. A big, iron-wheeled wagon rolled noisily behind them.

"What town is that?" asked Tirrel. "That one ahead of us, I mean?"

"That's Glendale," said the other.

And the sound went like the music of a bell through the mind of Tirrel. He had heard the name before, and he remembered the face of Kate Lawrence as though she had appeared at that instant, with a candle in her hand.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DANIEL FINCH.

THE string of mules, at that moment, dragged the wagon to the top of the grade and, without a spoken order, they halted, slacked the fifth chain, and panted in unison. The teamster looked fondly down upon the scattering of light.

"Yep, there she lies!"

"I've heard of Glendale, somewhere," suggested Tirrel.

"You have, have you? Well, you ain't the first."

"You got some climate here, I reckon," remarked Tirrel.

"You aiming to settle down?"

"I'm tired of the range. Why not a place like this here Glendale?"

"Well, why not?"

"That's orchard land, by the way the trees grow."

"It might be, at that. Nobody does much except wheat and barley. People know cows better than they know plows in this part of the world."

"That's so, too."

"But Jud Fisher, he's got a couple of apple trees in his back yard. They've growed up fine and big. Though I can't say that the apples on 'em are very good. You aim to buy a place?"

"I've got only a little money. I'd rent, and try to save."

"That's a long row to hoe. I've tried that myself. I ended up with nothin' but a half interest in these here mules."

"It's a fine string, partner."

"It ain't bad."

"No, you got some weight in these wheelers."

"I got a green near-leader, but she's learning. She's got the brain for the job, but she's ornery!"

"You gotta have time to make a near-leader."

"There's nothin' truer than that! You skin mules?"

"I've done it. How many people you got in Glendale?"

"Two hundred and fifty by the last census. Some folks estimate it up at around three hundred and fifty now. I reckon maybe that's stretching it some."

"Got some rich people?"

"Bigbee is worth nigh onto half a million, some says. He keeps fine hosses. Always buyin' land. Regular land hog, is Bigbee. Lawrence used to be rich, too, I guess. But he's lost his!"

The heart of Tirrel stirred. His patience, it seemed, was about to be rewarded.

"How'd he lose it?"

"He lost it always raising the same crop. Wheat used to be lucky for him. So he thought that it always ought to be lucky. But the ground won't stand it. You can't raise twenty crops of wheat hand running off no ground, no matter how rich it is."

"You gotta summerfallow it, of course."

"Every other year. And even then you'd oughta switch crops now and then. But old man Lawrence, he wouldn't hear no reason. He's busted, now."

"Bankrupt?"

"Sure! He would be, except that young Bigbee hankers after the Lawrence girl and wouldn't let his old man foreclose."

"Bigbee gunna marry her soon?"

"I dunno. You never can tell. You take a girl as pretty as her, and you never can tell what way she'll jump. She might go and pick herself up a millionaire somewheres, or again she might up and run off with some ornery cow-puncher that ain't got a cent. I better be sashayin' along. I'm late tonight."

Another question came to the lips of Tirrel, but he choked it back. It would hardly do to ask questions too freely, but in this case there was no need. As the teamster drew the blacksnake from about his neck, he pointed.

"There's the Lawrence house yonder, on the hill. You can see the top-story lights above the trees."

He called good-by and snapped the blacksnake, shouting loudly: "Gee up! Yeah!"

The mules, flattening their ears at the familiar command, leaned forward and stuck grimly to their collars. The wagon groaned, hung in its tracks, and lurched reluctantly forward. So Tirrel waved his hand to the teamster and jogged on into the lead.

The first turn to the left was a narrow country lane pointing straight toward the Lawrence house, and up this he turned his horse. The road dipped twice into shallow hollows, but, rising, each time he had a closer view of the Lawrence house, the lights shining more boldly through the surrounding screen of trees; and so at last he came to close range.

He noted that the trees were not merely a little grove planted about the house, but apparently an extensive forest, which extended down from the highlands into the valley beyond. Somewhere among the trees he was reasonably sure of finding good quarters for the rest of the night. Or, it might be, he could feed the mare at one of the tall haystacks. For, like many another Western farmer, the poverty of Mr. Lawrence did not prevent him from carrying on his operations on a comparatively large scale.

Tirrel left the mare in the grove at the left of the house and wandered nearer to explore. The grounds of the house itself were set off by a picket fence, very old and broken-down; and half a dozen fig trees, very ancient and vast, shadowed the lawn, which was simply an alfalfa field, irrigated by the windmill which ceaselessly spun and clanked in the breezes which blew over this high point. Tirrel went to the mill first and drank deeply of the chilly water which gushed from the spout into a tin trough, and so was conducted toward the alfalfa.

He was curiously excited. No matter how he told himself that his halt at this place was purely a matter of accidental convenience, he knew in his heart that he had come hoping for the first glance at Kate Lawrence in person.

He passed behind the house, circling softly about the creamery. A dog ran out at him with a snarling challenge. He caught it by the scruff of the neck and choked it to silence. Then he threw it from him, and it sneaked silently away. He had learned that trick in old days. Granted a certain speed and strength of hand, it never failed to work.

So he came toward the front of the house. There the murmur of voices, speaking only occasionally, sounded cool and peaceful in the quiet of the evening. Tirrel slipped through a hedge of rosebushes, and silently drew nearer.

There were four people on the veranda—a bald-headed man asleep over his newspaper; a gray-haired woman, knitting; another, younger man, indis-

tinguishable in the greater distance and the shadows at the end of the porch; and, close to him, Kate Lawrence.

It was not that Tirrel could see her clearly, but he knew her at a glance, as though she were a creature differing from other women and to be known by her own light. He could see the curve of her cheek, and the high light which played and died upon her temple as she turned toward her companion. And Tirrel, on his knees in the brush, watched with the eyes of a wolf.

The woman stuffed her knitting into a bag.

"Peter's sound asleep," said she.

"He has been for a whole hour," said the girl.

"Dear me!" said the other. "Think of that! I wondered why he didn't answer me. I'd better be getting him in to bed, Kate. Peter!"

A long, soft snore was the answer.

"Peter, it's time to go to bed."

"Aye, Delia."

He stirred; his hand fell from his knee and dangled far toward the floor. His head fell forward.

"Dad!" said the voice of the girl.

He raised his head, blinking.

"He always would hear you," complained the wife. "Peter, do come along to bed."

"I must have dropped off for a moment," said Lawrence, stretching and yawning.

"Are you coming to bed?"

"Yes, yes. I disremember. We was talking about something important, or was that just a dream?"

"We were talkin'."

"Yes."

"About Kate, I reckon?"

"Aye, about Kate."

"Is there anything settled?"

"Everything!"

"Hold on! I don't recollect——"

"You sat nodding. We thought you were saying yes. Maybe you were only going off to sleep."

"Maybe," said the farmer humbly. Then he added: "Wait a minute, Delia, will you?"

"You'll be off asleep again in a minute, if I wait for you."

"I want to know what was decided?"

"Well, Kate, you had better tell him."

"Dear dad," said Kate Lawrence, "we all think it's best to let Dan have his way."

So you all think so!" exclaimed Lawrence. "Well, I'm one that don't!"

He struck his hands together heavily.

"Father!" exclaimed his wife. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself? To talk like this right to Danny's face!"

"Would you a lot rather that I'd say it behind his back?"

"I'd rather that you'd go to bed and be quiet and talk in the morning, if there's any talk to be done!"

"I'll say my say now," said Lawrence. "I got nothin' agin' Danny. He's made a lot of money, and he's made it young. That shows that he's got either brains or luck. And I dunno which is the best of the two to have! He allows that he loves Kate. Everybody allows the same thing, for that matter! But I tell you straight, Danny, I got nothin' agin' you, but I jes' nacherally can't settle myself down to the idea of you bein' the husband of Kate."

"Peter!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawrence. "You're gunna ruin everything! I knew you would! Are you gunna try to bust up Kate's happiness?"

"Kate!" called her father.

"Yes, dad."

"D'you love this feller so's you can't live without him?"

She took by the hand the man who sat beside her, and she drew him forward. So Tirrel saw her fully for the first time, walking hand in hand with Daniel Finch.

"D'you love him so's you gotta have him, Kate?"

"Yes!" said she.

CHAPTER XIX.

EAVESDROPPING.

THE father listened to this statement with a frown, but finally he nodded and then shook his head.

"You're old enough to run your own affairs, honey," said he. "You got a right to do as you please. Only I want to say to you that this is a thing where one step forward never can be taken back. You've thought of that, honey?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm gunna go to bed. Good night! Finch, you're a powerful lucky feller."

He went into the house with a somewhat dragging step. Life had been a heavy burden for Lawrence, and he showed the weight he was carrying. His wife went behind him, pausing at the screen door to smile back hopefully at her daughter and her lover.

"Don't you be stayin' up too long," she warned them. "To-morrow's a new day; and you can't settle everything in the world in one night!"

So Finch and Kate Lawrence were left alone, and Tirrel, the eavesdropper, crept closer, without shame.

The moment the screen door had jangled shut, and the steps of the older people had faded out of hearing into the house, Kate Lawrence turned her back on her lover and walked to the front of the porch.

Dan Finch hesitated a little, doubt and distinct trouble in his face. Then he followed her.

"Shall we take a stroll through the woods, Kate? It's cooler out there."

She turned back to him, but, instead of answering, she merely looked him up and down and shrugged her shoulders.

"Look here," said Finch, "if you're going to take it as hard as all this, I'm not the gent to drag you into any marriage, Kate."

She said simply: "Well, I've taken the plunge, and the water's pretty chilly!"

Her matter-of-factness was a shock to Tirrel. She was as calm and deliberate as could be. Gentle and lovely as her face was in repose, when she spoke, her eye was as direct and as straight as the eye of any man.

Finch did not attempt to become sentimental. He met her on her own ground.

"Of course it's chilly," said he. "Always is. Every girl cries when she leaves her home, for instance."

"I won't cry. I'm a thousand miles from crying!" said Kate Lawrence.

"Fight, then," chuckled Dan Finch.

"I'd rather fight than cry."

"Mind you, Kate, I'm not putting the whip on you."

"You're not. No. It's only wretched luck that's whipping me."

"In what way? In wishing me on you, you mean?"

"Why couldn't I lose my heart to you, Dan, the way that I've lost my head?"

"If I've got one," said Finch, "I'll get the other before long. I've got a fisherman's patience, Kate!"

"I suppose you have."

She faced him, frowning, a weight of some decision in her eyes.

"If it don't work," she said, "it will be an awful smash!"

"It's got to work! The way you see it now, Kate, you don't know how I'll work to make a go of things!"

"I think you will," she said. "And, once I'm in harness, I'll pull my share of the load no matter how sore my shoulders get. Still—that doesn't make love!"

"No," he admitted. "But it makes friendship, and that's a lot safer basis to start on, most of the time, than love. That's blindness. But you're not blind. You have your eyes wide open and you can see the facts about me. If you care a little about me this way, then

I'll take my chance to get your love afterward. That's reasonable, I think."

She considered this.

"Yes," she decided. "That's reasonable. But still I hesitate. It's like staking all your money on one race. Because, to my way of thinking, a girl can only marry once."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. And of course I don't wonder that you hesitate, Kate. If I had longer time, you could take as long as you wished."

"You really have to go, Dan?"

"I have to. There's nothing for it except to get under way. I should be in London in a couple of weeks at the latest."

"London!" exclaimed the girl.

"That'll be a trip for you, Kate!"

She sighed.

Then he added gently: "As for the old folks, everything'll be fixed for them as neat as wax. You can depend on that!"

"There's nothing but kindness in you, Dan!" cried the girl with an impulsive richness in her voice. "Ah, what a godsend you've been to poor dad! And whatever happened to him would happen to mother, too!"

"Look here," said Finch, "sometimes I'm afraid you're willing to marry me only because I have helped out your father!"

She said thoughtfully: "Well, there's something in that. But you know, Dan, what holds me back most is your own mystery."

"Mystery?" laughed Finch.

"Yes. Exactly that. For instance, who's the man we heard is in Los Cavallos?"

"You mean the fellow they called by my name?"

"Yes."

"Well, there are plenty of men who look like me."

"But there's not another mare like Molly."

"She probably ain't much like Molly. People haven't any close eye for the looks of a hoss."

"But where is Molly? You've never come here before without her!"

"I had to leave her behind to rest up. She can't go forever."

The girl shook her head.

"That's all 'honest Injun'?" said she.

"Of course it is, Kate."

"All right," she answered. "But it worried me, just the same. It kept me worried. Where was Molly Malone? I couldn't get over that, you know. And it still stays a little in the back of my head. Then came this talk about Dan Finch in Los Cavallos—well it muddled me a good deal."

"How could they really know me over there? I've only made one flying trip through!"

"I've heard that. But there are other things—well, I won't ask questions. I've put my money on the horse, Danny, and there's no use thinking while the ponies go to the post!"

Tirrel had heard enough, and rising from his concealment in the shrubbery, he sauntered forward into the light. He had left his rifle with Molly Malone; but his Colt was conspicuous on his right thigh as he walked into the light. The girl saw him first and cried out a little, surprised.

"Is that you, Billy?"

"My name is Michael," said Tirrel. "My name is Michael Tirrel; excuse me for comin' in so late."

So saying, he walked slowly and steadily forward, and up the veranda steps, keeping the closest eye upon Daniel Finch. The latter, at this unexpected apparition, started, changed color, and then his eyes rolled very wildly. For an instant, Tirrel was sure that a gun play was coming, and he kept his hand in readiness for the draw.

But perhaps the death of the rabbit at the water hole was in the memory of Dan Finch, at the present moment. And his gun remained in its holster.

The girl, in the meantime, was watching both men with the most intense interest.

"I've been listening out in the brush," confessed Tirrel. "I've been hearing you talking together, since your mother and your father went into the house."

She exclaimed: "That was a fine thing to do!"

"I had a reason for it," said Tirrel. "I wanted to hear this gent talk."

He raised his left hand and pointed with deliberate insult at the other. While Dan Finch, grim, silent, waited.

"There's no use talking here," said Finch. "If you've got anything to say to me, Tirrel, we'll step off into the woods and finish it!"

He had made his voice hard, as he spoke, but there was no real confidence in his manner.

Tirrel smiled in his face.

"I want to say some things here before Miss Lawrence. I want her most particular to hear 'em."

Finch turned sharply upon her: "Kate," he said, "you'd better go inside."

She did not hesitate. "I'll go in," she said.

"You'd better stay," said Tirrel.

"I don't listen to blackmail," said she.

"If I say a word that isn't true—why, here I am up against the great Dan Finch, the gun fighter. I'd be afraid to tell a lie about him! Isn't that so?"

She paused at the door.

"Good night, Danny," said she.

Tirrel stamped impatiently.

"You're losing a chance. Lemme show you that I've got the right to talk. I'm the other Dan Finch. I'm the Dan Finch that your father wrote to in Los Cavallos!"

She closed the door which she had been opening. Then, turning back on the porch, she said crisply: "I think you ought to do something about this, Danny."

"I'm gunna do plenty about it," said Dan Finch. "Tirrel, I'm inviting you to step off into the woods with me."

But Tirrel merely laughed.

"Molly Malone is waiting out there," he said, "but I don't think she's waiting for you."

"Molly!" cried the girl.

"Sure," said Tirrel, "I'm the gent that he left Molly with—for a rest."

CHAPTER XX.

THE CAVE IN THE WOODS.

AT this, and the sneer with which it was said, the girl started. She asked suddenly: "Is there something in this, Dan?"

Finch answered hoarsely: "There's nothing that can't be explained. I—I wanted to cover this up, Kate. I'm willin' to admit that. I met up with Tirrel in the desert, when I was comin' back. We got to gambling, and he cleaned me out of everything, down to my boots and my pocketbook. He got Molly, too."

"You gambled Molly away!" she exclaimed.

"Aye—I'm ashamed of that," said he.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I've heard worse things," she said.

"I could tell you a story of four sevens," said Tirrel slowly.

Finch turned deathly white, and the moisture stood upon his forehead.

"What's the story?" asked the girl, looking not at Tirrel, but at Dan.

"Kate," said Finch, "I want to ask you something pretty important."

"What is it?"

"I want to ask you to go inside and leave me alone with Tirrel for a while. In the morning there'll be a chance to make everything straight with you."

"I'll not be here in the morning," said Tirrel. "I'm being hunted as Dan Finch—I'm wanted for murder. I'm wanted for the murder of my own brother!"

Dan Finch said with desperate eagerness: "Tirrel, I know everything that you've got in your mind to say. You've got some reason behind it, too. But I'm going to ask you to spend one hour with me. We'll leave the house and come back to it inside an hour. Kate will still be up. We can finish the argument with her, then."

"You're making a pretty big mystery out of this," said Kate Lawrence. "D'you think that that's wise?"

"I don't suppose it is," said Finch. "But where there is a mystery, I've got to face it. Tirrel, I ask you for Heaven's sake to do what I say!"

This he said with such entreaty in his voice and with such almost panting earnestness that Tirrel paused and then weakened.

"I'll go with you, Finch," he said. "I'm a fool to do it, but I'll go along—and head myself into a trap, I suppose!"

"You'll go—that's all that I want!" said Finch. "Kate, we'll be back inside of an hour."

She nodded. And she looked at Dan Finch with what appeared to Tirrel to be a mixture of contempt, and pity, and surprise.

Finch led the way down the steps of the veranda, Tirrel walked close behind him. As soon as they were among the trees, he drew a revolver and carried it openly in his hand. And he warned Finch that he was watchful, and certainly that he would be merciless.

"You're a fool to be afraid of me now," said Finch. "Don't you see? I've got to bring you back to her and put myself straight with her again through some yarn you'll tell. I've got to convince her that I'm O. K."

"Man," answered Tirrel, "you'll never do that in a thousand years!"

Finch stopped short, fumbled blindly, and finally leaned his hand against a tree.

"D'you think that?" he said in a shaken voice. "D'you think that she's as savage against me as all that?"

"I think she is. I know she is. I watched her face when she was talking to you."

Finch groaned. "It's miserable business," said he. "She believes that I was up to some crooked work against you."

"Well, Finch, you sent me up to Los Cavallos to be murdered. You know you did."

"Who said so?"

"A knife that barely missed my throat, and bullets that barely missed my head. Are those pretty good reasons?"

Finch said: "What have I to do with that? I ain't been near Los Cavallos since I seen you last."

"Of course you haven't. You sent me on there to eat lead in your place. I dunno all about it, but I know that much, and I'm gunna let the girl know, too."

"Are you?"

"I am."

Finch laughed, both with savagery and with triumph. "You wait and see!" said he. "You're gunna do nothin' of the kind. You're gunna march on with me and see something that'll change your mind!"

And he strode ahead.

He said, as he walked: "It's got to go through. I've worked it too far. I can't break down now!"

He was arguing with himself, and he added to Tirrel: "I'll convince her again through you. I'll make her think through you that this was all right!"

He laughed again, as he said this. And even in the darkness, Tirrel could see that the man was nodding his head as he walked along.

For his own part, Tirrel had not the slightest idea of what could be lying before him. He could not conceive anything but a bullet through the head that would make him change his mind;

and, as Finch already had explained, he would be ruined with the girl unless he brought back Tirrel alive and well at the end of the hour.

They had walked straight on into the woods, keeping up a brisk pace. The forest grew more and more dense. It was a second-growth wood, with a tangle of cow paths worked through it in all directions, a perfect labyrinth through which Tirrel's guide seemed to hold the thread, for he never faltered.

The terrain was now greatly broken. The trees thinned out; huge boulders thrust up everywhere, prone upon their sides, or angled awkwardly upon corners and edges. It was dark, very hard rock, yet it had been weathered here and there into poor soil, and everywhere lines and plumes of brush grew out upon the big boulders.

They already had been walking for twenty or twenty-five minutes, when Finch turned into a veritable grove of stone, intermixed with lodgepole pine. He took the lantern that he carried and cast the glimmering ray carefully before him, now and then probing the dark with it, and then proceeding confidently, as though these pencil-strokes of illumination recalled the whole text of his surroundings to him.

Tirrel had more or less to flounder in the rear, making great efforts, but constantly stumbling.

Suddenly Finch paused. "Suppose I wanted to get rid of you?" he asked.

"Well?"

"Would it be hard for me to sidestep around one of these rocks—and then to hunt you down like a cat hunting down a mouse?"

"Maybe," agreed Tirrel. "There's something in that."

In fact, there was everything in it, and he saw that he had practically disarmed himself in permitting himself to be led into such surroundings.

However, he followed on still until Finch suddenly leaned over and laid hands upon a rock. With a heave and a grunt he pried up a two-hundred-pound slab and rolled it back. It opened upon a deep, narrow well of darkness, into the mouth of which Finch sent the prying ray from his lantern.

"We go down there," said he.

And immediately he descended, going down by jerks, as though using irregular steps. Tirrel paused for a moment on the verge. He told himself that he was, very likely, entering his own grave. But then he nerved himself again and, fumbling inside, he found the first step and gradually moved downward.

The dimensions of the tunnel increased every moment. First, he could stand erect, and second, he no longer touched wall upon either side. And, as he began to breathe more deeply of the cool, damp, confined air of that underground region, he was suddenly met by a blinding torrent of light.

It dazzled him but it did not keep him from action. His Colt glittered instantly in his hand; but the light went out, and the voice of Finch was laughing.

"You see what I could've made happen to you, Tirrel, if I'd been of a mind?"

"Try one more trick like that," said Tirrel, "an' you'll be tagged with lead. Now, what's all this here foolishness about?"

"I'm gunna tell you a story, old son," said Finch. "But first I want you to look at this here."

He sent the beam of his lantern upon what appeared to be a great rock coffer. It lay in the center of the cave, which made a room of some size, the entrance tunnel narrowing and rising like an awkward flight of steps to the side of it.

"You see?"

"I see," said Tirrel, his heart suddenly leaping.

"Well, I gotta tell you a story about what's in it. In the old days, they used to have sea pirates, and they used to have land pirates, y'understand? And the birds that cruised around on shore used to get pretty fat, what with Spanish gold and silver, and with crosses from the churches, covered with emeralds, and pearls, and rubies, and all kinds of things. They had the jewels that they'd whittled here an' there off the robes of the priests. And they lived pretty gay on those things, if they wanted to spend money as they went. But some of the best of 'em at the sea-pirate business, they never spent much on this side of the water. They wanted to get back to their own old country—maybe Spain herself, or to England, or to France, most likely. They wanted to spend that money where the spending would bring in the wine! Y'understand?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, one of those gents that had been mighty successful, and that had stowed away a whole load of stuff out of churches and church treasuries, this gent, he up and dropped his collection here, and probably got crocked before he could come back for it.

"Later on, another gent of our own times, he had a good reason for finding a hiding place—and he happened to stumble upon this, and this is what he saw!"

As he spoke, he thrust aside the covering rock and revealed the interior of the great stone casket, entirely empty!

CHAPTER XXI.

UP A TREE.

OUT of the throat of Finch came a strangled cry. He dropped upon his knees and thrust his hands blindly into the cavity.

He stood up, staggering, and with the lantern fully unveiled, he threw the light here and there across the floor of the cavern. Something glistened. He leaped at it and raised in the palm of his hand a large pearl, such as might have made a pendant.

"They've got away with the whole booty; they've left only one drop of the treasure behind. But you can tell by this, Tirrel. I was gunna split the whole thing with you, half and half! I would have paid you fair and square to keep away from Kate Lawrence with your talk. I would have paid you up to the hilt to go back there and undo the harm that you've done me with her already. And now I've been cleaned out!"

"Who could have done it?" asked Tirrel.

"The rest of 'em did it. I'd made fools of 'em. I had it all to myself. And they've trailed me down—Heaven knows how! How could they ever have found this place? I found it myself only by a freak of chance, but they've found it after me."

He beat a fist into his face.

"I'll be after them again, like a bloodhound!" declared Finch. "Tirrel, come with me. Here's the proof of what it is. Look here! I'll give you this thing. It's worth a couple of thousands, anyway. I'll willingly give you that to begin with. Here, take it, will you?"

But Tirrel drew back.

"To help you trail those others?"

"Yes."

"Who are they?"

"Throw in with me, and I'll tell you everything. I'd want no better partner in the world than you if there was a fight at the end of the trail!"

"Thanks," smiled Tirrel.

"You'll do it, eh? Of course you will!"

"What makes you think I will?"

"Because there's a million apiece in it! It ain't the bank notes so much, though there's over half of a——"

He paused.

"Tirrel, will you throw in with me? Will you be with me in this deal?"

"I wouldn't be with you," said Tirrel, "for the sake of ten millions. I want none of your dirty game."

"Hold on!" muttered the other. "Lemme think for a minute. I'll give you reasons enough, in a minute, Tirrel."

He walked slowly away, and paced back and forth.

"It's no good," Tirrel told him. "I came out here with you because I was curious; not because I ever intended to take anything from you."

"And why should you be so dead set agin' me, will you tell me that?"

"That seems queer to you, does it?"

"It does."

"Because you've been wanting me murdered, Finch, in your place at Los Cavallos. You sent me up to the town for that end. You even gave up the mare, so's you could let them fill me full of lead. What answer have you got for that, Finch?"

"I'll answer the whole thing in a way that'll surprise you," said Daniel Finch. "Just gimme a chance to think it over, will you?"

"Take as long as you want. You'll be explaining away knives and bullets, Finch! A fine talk you'll have to make!"

"I'll explain! I'll explain!" said Finch eagerly.

With head bowed, he disappeared into the darkness of the cave as he spoke; and for a moment he did not return. The next Tirrel heard was a loud crash of falling rock at the mouth of the cave, and he saw with what childish ease he had been tricked and trapped.

Stifled with distance, and more than that by the small aperture through which he was calling, came the voice of Finch:

"There's the explanation. May it satisfy you while you lie there and rot in the dark, Tirrel! You've changed your mind. When I wanted you to show-down, you backed out. You've run off, and even left Molly Malone behind you, you were so keen to get away from me. That oughta satisfy the girl, eh? And it oughta satisfy you, Tirrel, and you'll have time enough to think it over!"

There was another heavier fall of rock, and a settling of that which covered the cave mouth. Earth, loosened inside the tunnel, fell with a rattling shower. And dull echoes traveled slowly back and forth.

Tirrel, like a wise man, sat down in the center of the cave and gathered his thoughts. The dampness and the staleness of the air, hardly noticed before, now became chokingly important. He lighted a match to look about him, and the flame burned small and blue.

It was so small a circuit of the walls that that match alone enabled him to make it, constantly looking up toward the corners of the walls in the hope of spotting some crevice. But he saw nothing except a surface of ragged and apparently solid rock.

No doubt, in the meantime, Finch was watching a while, rifle in readiness!

From the main body of the cave two branches extended, perhaps the course of the subterranean stream which, in past ages, had dug this channel through the earth. On the right-hand side, the passage dipped sharply down beneath a solid wall of rock, and disappeared as into a well of darkness. To the left, it was equally blocked by a sheer wall of earth and pebbles.

But it was the one possible solution to Tirrel. Rock he could not work with his bare hands, and he knew well enough that the mouth of the cave was now buried under a mass of those big rocks which he had seen hanging near by, already staggering upon a precarious balance. There remained this one possible place. He fell to work upon it

not in hope, but simply because to sit idle would bring madness on.

With the butt of a revolver he struck at the gravel-and-sand wall which choked the passage. It crumbled rapidly. Once the surface crust was broken, he was able to scrape it away with his bare hands, and presently, after a scant half hour of work, he thrust his arm straight through a hole. A few seconds widened that aperture so that he could wriggle through. And, lying on his side, he scratched a match and held it before him. He could see nothing but rough edges of the rocky tunnel until, as the flame of the match died, he thought he saw above him a faint gleam, like a high light in the eye of a wild animal.

The red cinder of the match died; and now he saw not one gleam, but many, high and far. The stars!

In ten seconds he was out of that weak trap and standing up, breathing deeply, thanking Heaven, it is to be feared, without much profound feeling, for already his mind was reaching forward to his return.

How should he meet Daniel Finch again, and could he prevent that clever fellow from finding the mare which was tethered in the woods? Perhaps if he so much as called to her, she would answer, whinneying. So the search of Finch would not have to be long!

In the meantime, he had the tangled labyrinth of the trees to thread. He closed his eyes and mapped the direction as well as he could. Then he took note of the trees, slightly mossed on the northern face of the bark, and thereby giving him all the points of the compass.

So he set his course and worked patiently along the line which he had set for himself, often checked, often blundering, but, as nearly as he could, staying to a northeasterly direction. In this manner he came, at last, out of the trees and the rocks and into the more open country, and as he did so he saw the lights of a house glimmering steadily through the brush to his right. He came closer. There was no doubt about it. That was the house of Lawrence, from which he had departed not so many minutes before!

Somewhere in it, by this time, was doubtless that archscoundrel, Dan Finch, telling his calm lies to the girl. Tirrel set his teeth and gripped the butt of his revolver. Then he went on a straight line, not for the house itself, but for the mare.

He found her safe, and his heart beat far more freely. She had finished grazing and lain down. She got up with a groan of straining cinches to nuzzle him in welcome.

He untethered her and let her follow behind him through the woods, for he had an odd feeling that he would not be safe, separated from her; and also, he wanted her to be present when he found Dan Finch and fought him for the possession of her—and for that other, higher, unnamed stake.

Coming back toward the Lawrence house, he saw that the veranda was now dark. There were only three lights, two on the ground floor, and one on the floor above. The two lower ones were shuttered, so that the rooms could not be examined. The upper light, however, could be easily explored by means of a big tree which grew not far off.

Quick and soft as a cat, Tirrel climbed to the upper branches, and looking through the window, he saw Kate Lawrence sitting in a chair that faced the window, in a position of the most utter surrender and exhaustion. Her face looked very pale. Her hair straggled into wisps. Her lips were wearily parted. One hand lay in her lap; one fell down toward the floor, and her head sagged toward one shoulder.

She might have sat for the picture

of a dead woman; or certainly of a woman asleep. But he suddenly knew that she was neither dead or sleeping, but utterly exhausted.

Finch was not there, then! And where would Finch be? Had he not returned to the house, according to his boast, to let the girl know all that had happened—supposedly—to the false Tirrel?

It was inconceivable that he had failed to do this, and so right himself if he could. And perhaps it was because the girl had been able to look through his lie that now she sat overwhelmed with weariness and shame in her room.

Whatever his reasons, Tirrel formed on the instant a most rash and unwise resolution. It caused him to slip down the trunk of the tree and go straight to the wall of the house. He went up to the top of a window on the first floor with perfect ease. From the casing which topped this, he was able to stand on tiptoe and reach with his fingers the sill of the window of the girl's room above, and fixing his grip there, he drew himself up bodily, for his arms were very powerful. In an instant, he sat in the open window; the girl sat opposite him, her eyes wide, now, looking at him with the most unspeakable horror.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

HOLE-DIGGING SNAKES

THE snake has never been popular with man, and though it is admired by some for its agility, its grace—and even nowadays for its skin—it has never seemed to command the respect of any one. But it must not be forgotten that snakes have one unusual quality—some of them, that is—they dig their own holes in the ground.

The ordinary underground snake does not dig its own hole but makes use of burrows or tunnels created by other creatures. The hole-digging snakes have somewhat cylindrical heads, bodies, and tails, and are thus equipped for their home-making industry. But, to the pessimist, this attribute of the snake will only make him increasingly disliked. Most of us have to use our heads, and use them vigorously and constantly, to provide ourselves with houses, but here is the lowly snake who may use his head, and body, and tail for the purpose! After some instants of reflection, one decides—well, who wants to be a snake, anyway?

DAYS OF '91 RESTORED.

BACK in 1891, there was a stampede in Cripple Creek, Colorado, when Bob Womack, a cowboy of the Broken Box brand, struck it rich in Poverty Gulch. The lode he opened up yielded close to half a billion dollars in gold.

This year, too, there was a stampede in Cripple Creek, for people have not forgotten 1891. It is true that this was only a mock stampede, staged to celebrate the former triumph, but there was plenty of enthusiasm in evidence. Those who "rushed," started out with picks and shovels for the scene of the original strike. The prize was not so great this time—fifteen hundred dollars in gold, planted as a prize for the lucky participant—but ardor in the hunt was not lacking.

People came from many different parts of the country to take part in the celebration.

GRUB

By Seth Ranger

Author of "The Blind Leader"

THE geese had gone South; fresh snow had covered the higher peaks and was now graying the timber; the water was running low in the sluice box, yet Warde continued shoveling in. He cursed the frosty nights, the short days, the country, and his partner, but he continued shoveling in.

For six days and nights now, he had been at it without rest—a mountain of a man, driving a shovel into the pay dirt and tossing it into the sluice box where a stream of water entered clear and emerged muddy. His face, hands, and clothing were covered with blue muck. His bloodshot eyes, rimmed by the muck, seemed to flame at times. There was an amazing amount of power in the hands and arms—arms as large as many men's legs—after six days and nights.

Diller, his partner, came up with a bucket of tea. He weighed a hundred pounds less than the giant, but he was wider between the eyes. "Tea?" he said.

"Yeah!" Warde drove the shovel out of sight. "Dirt's freezing," he snarled. "Water's getting low!" He drank a quart of scalding tea in great gulps. He was an unpleasant spectacle, huge, grimy, unwashed. Diller looked away.

The thick, powerful hands gripped the shovel handle again.

"Better call it a season," Diller suggested.

Warde turned on him furiously. "I want the gold that's in that dump—every nugget! I figure to get it."

Of late he had used the pronoun "I" a great deal. It was seldom "we"—and they were partners.

Diller studied him curiously. "No need of killing yourself," he suggested, "I've checked up. We've taken thirty thousand in gold out. That's fifteen thousand apiece. The mine will be here when we come back next spring—so will the dump and any dust that's in it."

"I aim to get mine now," Warde repeated.

"Then we'd better clean up!"

Without waiting for an answer, Diller hurried to a wooden gate and shut off the water where it ran from the flume to the sluice box. Warde watched the clean-up closely. Each nugget meant something to him. He held them in the hollow of his big hand and looked at the dull metal almost reverently. When the gold was removed, even to the sweeping out of cracks, Warde growled, "Turn in the water!"

"You're foolish to kill yourself. That dump will be here this coming spring. You've been at it six days now, practically without rest," warned the giant's partner.

"A man at Nome shoveled in for thirteen days without——"

"Oh! You've heard that story, eh?" Diller interrupted.

"I'm good for eight days more. That'll better his record. No man can outstay me in anything. Besides, I want that gold. Will you turn in the water or will I have to do it?"

"I'll do it," Diller answered. "I'm sticking until you get enough of it, or the freeze-up comes."

They were a curiously self-confident pair. Warde was the cave-man type. He gloried in taking what was his by main strength. There was something primitive in his running down a mountainside, leaping obstructions, as he carried a sheep or caribou on his back. The gun in his hand might well have been a club. The setting, otherwise, had not changed—mountains, sky, sun, and man had been the same for ten thousand years. Diller never looked upon the sight without feeling that he had seen it before—centuries ago.

Diller's ancestors, lacking the physical strength of Warde's, had been forced to use their brains to survive. Perhaps one of them invented the bow or the spear. In any event, the subsequent generations had relied on brain, not brawn; they had survived and grown wider between the eyes and less heavy around the jaw and arms.

The weather changed rapidly overnight. The film of ice on the pools thickened. It was necessary to break through the frozen armor of sand and gravel covering the dump. Ribbons of light, mostly white, but occasionally tinted, fluttered from the Northern horizon into the sky—the aurora borealis. Diller continued performing his share of the labor to the limit of his strength. He shoveled in, cooked, rustled fuel, and poured hot coffee for the bigger man.

It was four o'clock one morning when Warde entered the cabin. He was reeling from exhaustion. The freeze-up had come and with it physical reaction. He pulled off his wet clothing and flung himself into his bunk. He did not move for forty-eight hours. Then he stirred and looked about. His eyes fell on Diller. The smaller man was stuffing the gold into moosehide pokes. Diller regarded the gold without emotion. He might have been a teller in a bank. It was something Warde failed to understand. Virgin gold, torn from the gravel, aroused in him the spirit of conquest. He gloried in driving through to bedrock—tearing, taking, then tearing again. Afterward, he liked to let the nuggets slip between his fingers and drop on the table. His eyes gleamed now as he looked at the pokes. Presently he spoke. "How much?" he asked.

"Well over two thousand ounces," returned Diller. "At sixteen dollars an ounce that's roughly thirty-two thousand dollars. Sixteen thousand apiece."

Warde rolled from his bunk and seated himself at the table. His great, hairy arms went around the pile of gold. He swept it toward him. "Thirty-two thousand dollars' worth!" he cried. "A man can have a lot of fun on thirty-two thousand dollars."

Diller said nothing, contenting himself with studying his partner's emotions. "If I hadn't stuck those extra days," Warde observed, "it'd been thirty thousand or less." Reluctantly his arms relaxed. He stepped over to the Yukon stove and pulled down a pair of socks hanging on a line over it. He appeared to brood deeply as he seated himself. He rubbed the socks between his hands moodily. "Thirty-two thousand dollars!" he repeated.

He dressed and looked outside. The thermometer registered ten degrees below zero and was dropping. The Northern Lights were crackling. It was a beautiful sight, seemingly very close. But the dull gold in the moosehide pokes was more beautiful to him. The air was crisp; sounds carried far. On a neighboring ridge a wolf howled.

Warde entered the cabin. "Cold!" he growled, and looked at the gold again. "Let's eat!"

Diller served up a caribou mulligan and bannock. "Grub's low," he announced; "the sooner we get out, the better."

Warde did not answer. He gulped the food down, three quarters of it, eyes on his plate. Diller ate his quarter, sufficient for his needs, in silence.

"We might as well come to an agreement," Warde said suddenly.

"We came to an agreement last spring. You came off the steamer with a hundred dollars in your pocket. I had another hundred, a knowledge of the country, experience, and a creek that was supposed to have gold. You had youth and strength—great strength. We pooled our resources and agreed to split, fifty-fifty."

"Yeah! But I done most of the work. I'm stronger than you and could keep at it longer."

"True! But I taught you mining. Coming into the country with me brought you sixteen thousand dollars. You'd have worked a long time for that if you hadn't met me."

"You'd had a tough time without my strength, too."

"Exactly! That's why it's fifty-fifty."

Warde began to breathe hard. "I'm changing it right now. You take a quarter and I'll take three quarters, or——"

"Or?" Diller's eyebrows lifted slightly.

"Or I'll take the whole clean-up, Diller. I worked like a slave. By the gods——"

"Sure! And so did I! Fifty-fifty, Warde!" Diller was amazingly cool.

"For a little guy you've got lots of nerve," admitted Warde. "I could throttle you with one hand, hold you clean off the floor and let your feet kick."

"No doubt of it!"

"Do you take my proposition or don't you?"

"I don't," Diller snapped.

"Then she's wide open. There's the gold. The best man wins it!"

"Don't be absurd, Warde!"

"I'm getting next to myself," Warde snarled. "You're the absurd one. You have your chance for a quarter. For the last time, I'm giving it to you."

"Before I refuse, Warde, I want to tell you something. This strength thing goes back thousands of years. Then, as now, the big man considered himself supreme. How did the little man survive?"

"The big man let him. Just the same as now I'm giving you a chance."

"Wrong, Warde, dead wrong! It was dog eat dog, then, and it is now. Not being able to whip the big man, the little fellow used his brains. That is what I intend to do, Warde. Now I'm going

to make you a proposition. You had better take it. It's the original proposition, fifty-fifty."

"No! You get twenty-five or nothing."

"Your proposition is rejected."

"Then I take the gold, Warde; get it if you can!"

An automatic pistol leaped into Diller's hand. "Stow that gold into your pack, Warde, it's mine and you're going to pack it out for me."

Warde laughed. "The big man uses his brains, too!" he cried. "Go ahead, blaze away." Then he fished a cartridge out of his pocket, gripped the bullet, and slowly pulled it from the shell. This done he emptied the powder and replaced the bullet. "Get the idea? Sure you do!"

Diller lifted the pistol into the air and fired. The snap of the cap was his answer.

Warde's grin merged into a snarl. He sent the table spinning and leaped at his partner. Diller smashed the pistol into Warde's face, drawing blood. It was the only blow Diller struck. The next instant Warde lifted him clear of the floor and hurled him against the wall. The structure rocked from the impact, but heavy underwear and a caribou-skin parka helped break the force.

Diller fell, stunned, to the floor. He shook his head slightly. "Your round, Warde," he muttered.

"The only round. It's not over yet!" The flickering candle light sent Warde's distorted shadow dancing on the log walls. He advanced, murder in his eyes, the cave man minus the club and not needing it. His hands were sufficient for the thin throat of the other.

Diller's voice came cool, unafraid. "Be careful, Warde, to use what brains you have in committing this murder. A bullet hole in skull or bone is bad evidence to leave behind. A blow from a club often leads to an arrest. The officials know we are in the country, alone, and they may ask you some pointed questions. Better plan to finish me off in a way that won't be easily detected."

The words, spoken calmly, served their purpose. They prevented Warde from finishing off the helpless man. Brain had triumphed over brawn for the moment, but only for the moment. In the distance a wolf howled again. "Game's left the country," Warde mused, "and the pack's hungry! Tooth marks on human bones might look better than bullet marks."

He lashed Diller's hands and feet together. While Diller watched, with thoughtful eyes, Warde prepared to leave. He stowed the gold in his pack, then added a pile of grub. The pack, with its sleeping bag, rifle, and ax was too heavy for even his great strength.

"Ah, Warde! I could give you some advice, now, but I don't think I will. You can't leave the ax, nor the gun, nor the bag. Which will it be, gold or grub?" Diller's eyes narrowed. "I can answer that. A man of your strength could probably go a day or so without eating."

"I can go five," Warde growled, "I've got the strength!" He tossed out several pounds of grub and Diller smiled. "What are you laughing at?" the big man suddenly demanded.

"It's queer," Diller said softly, "but it's something you won't understand. The winner will know he's won—if either wins—but the loser will never know that he lost."

"You're going to know right now that you've lost, Diller," Warde retorted. "I gave you your chance," he added, as if seeking to justify his act. But he did not hesitate. He carried the helpless man some distance from the cabin and dropped him to the frozen ground. Then he returned for his pack, closed the door, and headed for the end of steel, somewhere beyond the mountains.

He knew the way to the little railroad town. Last spring they had started

there and Diller had pointed out the various landmarks. He could not lose the way. And he would have several days to make up a story about his partner going hunting and failing to return. Overhead the northern lights crackled and sent ribbons into the sky. The wolf howl floated on the crisp air. He was nearing the cabin. Frost formed on Warde's parka facing. He brushed it off, then bent lower from the weight of his burden. "It's getting colder," he growled, "but a strong man can stand anything. I am a strong man." Again the wolf's howl floated lazily down the valley.

Diller was freezing. He knew it, but he smiled grimly. "Scared him out of killing me," he muttered. "It wasn't because he wasn't equal to it. He was ready; saw it in his eyes. But he was afraid it'd be hung on him. Scared him out of it!"

The frost was working swiftly. But the hot, caribou mulligan he had eaten was helping Diller to fight the frost. He rolled over and over to the brink of a cut half filled with snow. Two hundred yards away he saw the wolf skull from one clump of brush to another—a sinister gray shadow.

Diller gave a final roll and dropped ten feet, smashing through the crust and into the deep snow beneath. He had learned the processes of the animal as well as the human mind. For a few minutes, at least, he need not worry about the wolf. The cut was too suggestive of a trap. The wolf's hunger must first overcome his fear, then he would consider attack. Covered by the snow, Diller had beaten the frost for a period at least. He made no attempt to untie the wrist lashings. His fingers were too stiff for that. Instead, he pulled up his parka and worked off his right mitt, then thrusting his fingers into the pocket he warmed them against his body for several minutes. Next he warmed the left fingers in like manner. Finally he worked his fingers to a penknife he carried and opened the blade.

Diller worked swiftly from that moment. His naked hands against the snow were growing stiff again. He sawed the blade against the thongs and twice he felt the prick of the point as it slit his flesh. With victory almost within his grasp the knife slipped from his fingers. "Expected that!" he muttered. "Hello! There's the wolf!" Vapor from a breathing animal drifted above him. He shouted suddenly and lifted his feet into the air. The movement sent the wolf back a few yards. He circled the spot while the man pressed his hands together and applied all his strength in the hope of breaking the half-severed buckskin thongs about his wrists. Slowly he could feel them give. The final effort forced a groan from his lips. Then his hands jerked free. He rolled over and found the knife. Two quick slits were sufficient to free his feet.

He tried to stand and fell back. His feet were frozen. Warde's great strength had cut off the circulation. He crawled from the cut and moved slowly toward the cabin, penknife in hand, eyes on the wolf. Several times the creature circled, maddened by hunger, yet fearing the man scent. Had Diller attempted to run and then fallen, the wolf would have obeyed the pack instinct to leap on living things that fall. But the man was already down, crawling, frequently snarling his defiance.

He pulled himself up to the latch and flung open the door of the cabin. It closed behind him. He stirred up the nearly dead fire, then cut off his moccasins. Heroic methods immediately followed. He poured the last of the coal oil into a bucket and thrust his feet deep into the fluid. Flame seemed to sear his flesh to the bone. Moisture poured from his forehead. Diller swore through set teeth and saw it through. "It's a long

ways to the end of steel," he muttered, "but if I baby these feet I can make it."

He smiled grimly as he contemplated the stock of food. To cut down the weight of his pack, Warde had left a quantity of trail grub behind. "I can use it! I'll need it!" Diller growled, talking to himself to keep his mind off the pain. "Warde, poor chump, will eat to-morrow and for a couple of days after that. Then he'll tighten his belt and go hungry. And he'll never know who was winner and who was loser." Some of the grimness faded from his face. Something like sympathy came instead. Possibly the cave man who invented the bow and arrow smiled with the same sympathy as he beat back a man with a club. "I tried to save him. But it was him or me; brain or brawn."

Diller remained in the cabin for two weeks nursing his feet, then with the last of the grub in his pack he headed for the end of steel. He moved slowly, following the trail left by the big man with the heavy sack. Again and again Warde had broken through the crust from the sheer weight of body and burden. Only a powerful man could have pulled himself out. The trail led straight to a high peak and then skirted the base. He had emerged from the back country through a windswept pass. Diller had to crawl here, but he made it.

There was an old camp with blackened stones just beyond where great boulders offered shelter. Here Warde had camped. He had eaten a heavy meal, as the number of bacon rind scraps proved. A tremendous amount of food was required to feed so great a body when it labored.

For four days Diller trailed his partner, nursing a tender foot, yet always making the camp Warde had made. The fifth camp revealed an interesting collection of equipment—coffeepot; frying pan; an empty sour dough can, which had been baked that the last bit of food stuck to the tin might be obtained.

There were no more camps after that—merely places where Warde had paused to rest. But Diller never failed to stop. Again and again he stopped and made hot tea and ate some food before battling with the cold. He could picture the scene of another day. Warde was driving himself ponderously ahead, by sheer brute strength. He was a human tractor overcoming every physical, visible objective. Yet the frost was conquering him. Twice he had built fires. The trail changed after that. He appeared to be favoring his right foot. Later he had cut a cane, which often went deep into the snow before finding solid or frozen ground.

The sixth night, when Diller crawled into his sleeping bag, he muttered, "To-morrow—sure!"

Dawn of a brief day. The sun was shining, but the temperature was still low. Diller studied the trail a mile from his camp. Warde's foot prints were not as deep; the load was not as heavy. Diller followed the prints to a pile of boulders. Wolves had once denned here. He prospected with a stick and uncovered fifty pounds of gold hurriedly cached. He left it there. He could not burden his own tender feet with the extra weight.

Five miles beyond he rounded a turn. The trail ended abruptly. Ahead the snow was unbroken. The end of steel was less than twenty miles away. A man, seated on a boulder, his pack resting on a higher rock just behind, was apparently waiting for him. The resting musher did not look up, but sat there, relaxed, resting.

Diller stopped and no detail escaped his experienced eye—the drawn, bearded face; the attitude of dejected desperation. A cave man who at last understood that he could not get through the speeding arrows might have looked like that. "Frozen stiff," Diller muttered, "poor devil!"

He did not approach the frozen man

but plodded on to the end of steel. The road-house keeper who was also ticket agent and deputy United States marshal. "Hello, Diller," he cried, "been expecting you out. Kinda worried about you, too. Didn't like that pardner of yours."

"He's back twenty miles, resting. He started out ahead of me, taking all the gold and some grub. You'd better go out and bring his body in."

"Double crossed you, eh?"

"No, double crossed himself," Diller answered, "didn't take enough grub."

"You can't get far on an empty stomach when it's this cold, Diller. It takes grub," agreed the marshal.

THE POPULAR PARKA

ONE accomplishment of the Byrd and Wilkins polar flights which has not been greatly heralded by the newspapers is, according to a prominent reindeer owner of Nome, Alaska, the definite proving of the fact that the parka is the best investment of the aviator for winter flying. Both the army and the navy departments of the United States have been investigating this question of winter attire for the aviator, and have shown special interest in the parka as a possible part of official equipment for government flyers. Commander Richard Byrd has ordered parkas, mittens, and other arctic apparel, made by Eskimos, for use in his antarctic expedition.

The parka, which is a loose-fitting coat with a hooded collar, made of reindeer hides and trimmed with wolverine or frost-proof fur, is best made by Eskimos. Their skill seems to be unduplicated; and, there being plenty of supplies and workmen in Nome, where much of this manufacture is done, there seems to be no cause for fear of a diminishing supply for many years.

FROM MONTANA TO RUSSIA

THE largest wheat grower in the world, Mr. Thomas D. Campbell, of Montana, has been asked by the Soviet government to give them the benefit of his knowledge and experience in introducing the American idea of production into Russian farming.

At his farm in Montana Mr. Campbell has sixty-five thousand acres annually under furrow and his average yield of wheat is five hundred thousand bushels, and of flax, one hundred thousand bushels. Mr. Campbell farms in all ninety-five thousand acres.

A Russian commission came to this country some time ago to investigate American methods, for the Soviet government plans a development of ten million acres in an effort to turn their country into one of the world's leading exporters of grain. It was at the invitation of this commission that Mr. Campbell went to Soviet Russia, where he plans to remain for six weeks.

While it is of course natural that the Russians should turn to the world's largest wheat grower for advice in their agricultural experiments, there is something particularly gratifying to Westerners that one of their member should be appealed to. A distinguished Frenchman, writing of the United States said, in effect: "You don't know the country if you don't know the West." It is said everywhere that the aim of the Soviet government is to keep abreast of the times, and their action in this case shows that they are well aware of the West and Westerner.

One Jump Ahead

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Not of the Card," etc.

THAT morning, bright and early, Manuel Perez was at the sheriff's office. He was there so early, in fact, that he found the office locked and he had to wait around outside until he saw Sheriff Joe Cook and "Shorty" McKay, the deputy, coming up the walk. Then Manuel hobbled forward as quickly as he could manage with his wooden leg. There was a smile on his face and his right hand was extended as he neared the two approaching officers.

"Ah—señors!" he exclaimed cordially.

"Why, hullo thar, Perez!" said Sheriff Cook warmly, taking the Mexican's proffered hand. "Glad to see yuh. Ah—er—when did yuh git back? Out on parole, I suppose?"

"That ees eet—parole!" announced Perez, shaking hands with Shorty. "I git back early dees mawnin'. Eet ees long time since I be here, eh, señors? Eet ees long time I be in eet—de beeg house, what yuh call heem! One, two, tree years—but now de parole he come an' I be back! But——" The smiling Perez shrugged his shoulders. "I have no de dinero—de money!" No cow—no bla-bla sheep; de place eet fall to eet's ruin! When I go away to de beeg house yuh say mebbe should I straighten up, yuh say, when I come out yuh really help me, sheriff—so I come!"

The sheriff's eyes traveled swiftly over Manuel Perez. The Mexican, bad as he was, had always been pitied by the sheriff. Perhaps it was because Perez had one leg off just below the knee. He hobbled around on a "peg." The sheriff had sympathy for any such unfortunate, even if he was a convicted rustler. Looking at him now Sheriff Cook saw the marks of the penitentiary on his care-lined face and his lack luster eyes; Perez had aged in the three years he had been in prison. He wore a

prison shirt now, and a pair of coarse, prison trousers.

"Come in the office, Perez," invited Sheriff Cook. "I guess me an' Shorty mebbe kin figger some way o' helpin' yuh out. I guess the best thing to do is to try to git yuh a job."

"*Si, señor!*" agreed Perez, hopefully.

"Perez," said the sheriff, after the trio had entered the office, "yuh got off light when yuh drawed five to seven years. I know yuh'd been rustlin' calves for a long time, although we couldn't prove but the one case on yuh. I suppose yuh're through with that fer all time, eh?"

"*Si!*"

"I hope so!" said the sheriff. "I'll ring up Earl Wettengel an' see ef he kain't put yuh on as a sheep-herder out to his place until we mebbe kin find something better. Ef Earl ain't got nuthin' open I'll call Art Wachter an' ask him to give yuh a job, Perez. Me an' Shorty ain't such hard hombres, Perez, as yuh know. It was our duty to see yuh got punished for rustlin', but now that yuh're out on parole we're more'n ready to help yuh beat back ef yuh'll jus stay on th' square."

"I swear eet!" said Perez hastily.

"How long yuh been out, Perez?" asked Shorty, as the sheriff reached for the telephone directory.

"I git out de beeg house yesterday noon," said Perez. "I ketch de train to Salida; a friend bring me in wagon here. I come right to yuhr office, but eet ees yet locked up."

"Central, give me Monte Vista 234 R, please," began the sheriff, but he hung up the receiver when the office door banged open and old "Grandpa" McMeel stumbled into the office, his washed-out-blue eyes as wide as saucers. The sheriff and Shorty both sensed instantly that something was doing! Grandpa McMeel was too calm, too easy-going ordinarily, to come leaping into the office without waiting to knock, all breathless, his chin whiskers jerking convulsively as he tried to master his excitement.

"Gents!" burst out Grandpa wildly.

"Take it easy, take it easy, Grandpa!" suggested Shorty, jumping up to help the old man to the nearest chair. "Jus' ketch yuhr breath afore yuh try any talkin'. Yuh ain't seen a ghost, has yuh? Or the courthouse ain't on fire, or——"

"Ghost! Fire!" cried Grandpa shrilly. "Huh! Say, thar's devilment afoot, that's what! Leave it to me to find out about it, too! I wasn't a Injun scout fer nuthin' in my young days! Thar they was, down under the bridge, workin' with them flash-on-an'-off lights an' shovels, an' diggin' fer all they was worth——"

"Who?" asked Sheriff Cook suddenly.

"Who? How the heck do I know?" thundered Grandpa peevishly. "I seen 'em, that's all! They was a-buryin' a body, I figgered! Or a-diggin' one up, mebbe! I don't know! I wasn't so sure, either, until this mawnin'. Yuh see I had a toddy las' night over to 'Pap' Stewart's house an'—— But this mawin' I goes down thar, under the bridge, an' thar it is, purty as yuh please, a big hole!"

The sheriff looked at Shorty and Shorty looked at the sheriff, while old Grandpa fought for more breath. Manuel Perez, his face wearing a puzzled expression, got up and sauntered over to the window, as though withdrawing, as best he could, from a conference that might be more or less private in nature, judging from Grandpa's preliminary revelations. Shorty glanced at Perez just as the sheriff, recovering himself, asked Grandpa a question.

"Yuh say yuh seen a big hole under the bridge?"

"Sure," cried Grandpa breathlessly,

"an' tracks, too! They was two men down thar workin' las' night—about midnight—an' I could hear the shovels a-goin'. I leaned over the bridge an' I could see their flash-on-an'-off lights, too. They dug up a big box an' lugged it off. They waded Coyote Creek with it, an'——"

"Two men," repeated Sheriff Cook. "Yuh can't describe 'em——"

"Describe 'em, heck!" said Grandpa angrily. "They was shadders, that's all—shadders! I tell yuh it was dark as a bag o' black cats! I went down this mawnin' an' saw the hole an'——"

There was a rap at the door and before the sheriff or Shorty could sing out an invitation to enter, it swung wide and in stepped Fred Speers, bubbling over with excitement. He wasted no time on preliminaries at all. He blurted his story right out!

"I seen somethin' funny las' night down under the bridge!" he exclaimed. "I was settin' down on the bank o' Coyote Creek with my gal friend when I hears two men comin' splashin' across the creek, sheriff! They're usin' spotlight! I figgers they're robbers, mebbe, an' me an' my gal jus' holds our breaths! So they don't see us, but they goes up under the end o' the Third Street bridge an' digs up a box an' then they goes back across creek——"

The sheriff pushed his chair back from the desk.

"We know all about that, Fred," he said; "Grandpa McMeel here jus' reported it. I reckon we'd better go take a look at that hole right now, Shorty. As fer yuh, Perez, I'll have to postpone seein' about a job fer yuh a few minutes while we looks inter this hole business. Yuh wait here, an' when we gets back I'll call some o' them sheep ranchers an'——"

"Surely," agreed Perez bowing, "but mebbe I like go look at hole, too—ef sheriff no object to eet?"

"Half the town's thar now," put in Grandpa McMeel suddenly. "I tell yuh, sheriff, it's devilment, that's what!"

There was a hole under the east end of the Third Street bridge, sure enough. Quite a hole. The two mysterious men, whoever they might have been, had spaded over an area fully twelve by ten feet. They had dug extensively, it appeared, to locate the box, and had evidently taken it from a depth of some two feet or more near the far end of the excavation. The soft earth had crumbled in, however, and there was no telltale impression left to give the officers any accurate idea of the size of the box that had been unearthed. There was quite a crowd of interested citizens around and they had tramped out some of the signs about the place, no doubt. But the trail the men had taken to the river was plain enough—and quite astonishing in itself.

"Great sufferin' jack rabbits!" exclaimed the sheriff, as he stared at it. "That was some box they got outta thar, Shorty. Lookit, they drug it clear to the river—a long, narrer box—thar's the trail clear as daylight right to the water!"

"Yep," said Shorty glumly, "an' that's all thar is, too. Thar ain't no footprints at all, boss; that box they dragged wiped out the prints. What do yuh know about that?"

The sheriff swore softly under his breath.

"This is a hot one!" he remarked, as he stared around the crowd. "What do yuh suppose could have come off here las' night? Speers, yuh saw the men, what did they look like, eh? Was it too dark fer yuh to get any descriptions?"

Speers, thus honored before the whole crowd, shook his head.

"I saw 'em purty plain, fer they passed close to me," he answered. "They was both tall, easy over six feet, an' husky! An' once, when one feller

was holdin' a flash light an' the other feller was stooped down, draggin' at the box they'd finally found. I saw that the stooped-over feller had light hair. I guess that was about all, exceptin' it was a big, long, narrer box they got out an' drug away, an' it was heavy; an' they must o' been big fellers because they lifted it an' carried it as soon as they struck the creek ag'in on thar way back. I guess that's all."

The sheriff put his hands on his hips.

"A fine howdy-do!" he remarked savagely. "Gosh knows what them birds dug up from under this bridge! Buried treasure, likely, or mebbe a body! But more probably gold, or some other kind o' loot—mebbe smuggled stuff from the border—an' they didn't leave a blamed clew either! A nice mess, folks, I'll say! Shorty, what do yuh make o' it all?"

Shorty stared around blankly.

"I dunno," he said, "it looks kinda funny, doesn't it?"

The "buried box" mystery forthwith became the great sensation of the San Luis Valley. There were all kinds of rumors afloat instantly, of course, and everybody had his or her pet explanation of the mystery. There were many who thought that a body had been exhumed from beneath the end of the bridge. There were as many others who firmly believed that a fortune in smuggled jewels or contraband narcotics from the border had been dug up and carried away. And there were many odd explanations, too.

"I maintains that it was Injun treasure," insisted old Grandpa McMeel hotly, "an' I blame myself fer not goin' right down thar when I saw them two ruffians workin' thar an' stretchin' 'em out cold with my cane! I could o' done it, too, ef I had jus' been sure I saw 'em like I thought! I had them two toddies up to Pappy Stewart's house just afore an'—an'—waal, I weren't sure I did see them two fellers thar——"

"I could 'a' reached out an' poked a stick at 'em an' made 'em put up their hands!" said Fred Speers. "I was that close to 'em, but my gal friend was scared to death! An' I didn't dare take no chances! O 'course, I could o' licked 'em both in a rough-an'-tumble fight, big as they was; but waal—it weren't no time or place to start a lot o' cussin' an' trouble."

Sheriff Cook was worried. As soon as he got back to the office, trailed by the sad-looking Manuel Perez, he slumped into a chair and sighed in despair.

"Ef it ain't one thing it's another, with this job, Manuel," he explained. "Did yuh notice whar that feller Shorty disappeared to?"

"He say he look fer clews," answered Perez.

"Oh," said the sheriff. "Yes, I remember, so he did. Waal, I looked an' thar wasn't any, Perez. What do yuh think about it, eh? Somebody had somethin' valuable hid thar?"

"*Si*," said Perez. "Mebbe some robbers long time ago hide stuff thar, who knows? Whar I was—in de beeg house, sheriff—I hear often those robbers speak o' buryin' their loot."

The sheriff nodded.

"That's the answer, Perez, in my mind; it might have been some o' that Alamosa bank loot that was stolen eight years ago; or mebbe some o' that Como stage gold bullion that was taken twelve years ago. I'll have to look up them old jobs—an' speakin' o' jobs, I'll call up about yuhrs right now, son!"

The sheriff was successful. On the third call Jack Quinn, a sheep rancher on Larimer Creek, agreed to take on Perez, the ex-convict, provided the sheriff thought he would go straight. The sheriff said he did think so, and the deal was made, after which the sheriff lectured Perez again, got that honest fellow's sworn promise to be good, and started him on his way with

a loan of two dollars for grub en route. Perez was bubbling over with gratitude.

"*Gracias*, sheriff!" he exclaimed. "I go Señor Quinn's at once. Mebbe some day Manuel Perez able to pay sheriff back for kindness. Watch an' see! Adios, senor!"

When Shorty reported, some hours later, that he had been unable to find a single clew in the vicinity of the Third Street bridge, the sheriff was not at all surprised. He had not expected Shorty to find any. He said so. He also pointed out to his disappointed deputy that he himself had searched the scene rather thoroughly while making his first investigation of the place and had not found anything. It looked like a hopeless proposition.

"Not a danged clew," said the sheriff. "But I got my mind made up as to what it was, Shorty. It wasn't no body business. It was loot buried thar from the Alamosa bank robbery eight years ago. They never caught the crooks, an' never found trace o' the dough. It was that or else the loot from the Como stage robbery twelve years ago, or from some other job. We ain't got a chance in ten million o' landin' them guys, despite the description Speers got. We kin check on the descriptions we got at the time o' them Alamosa an' Como stage robbers an' see ef they coincides with Speer's descriptions o' the men last night, but outside o' that——"

"I'll check on 'em," said Shorty, moving toward the door.

"Go ahead," said the sheriff wearily, "an' meanwhile I'll stay here an' do a little heavy thinkin', Shorty. We kain't afford to overlook no bets, ef thar are any bets. Yuh remember what Fred Speers said—big giants o' fellers an' one with light hair. It's a purty meager description, but it's all we got, Shorty!"

Sheriff Cook, however, had little time to do much heavy thinking, as he had put it. Shorty had not been gone more than thirty minutes when in came "Doc" Healey, and Eddie Owens, and Bert Clark, the county commissioners, and they were considerably excited. They got down to brass tacks immediately.

"Sheriff," said Owens, "yuh ain't forgot, I trusts, that this is the year o' the spring elections in this county. Yuh're up fer reëlection ag'in, I presume, an' so are we county commissioners. Yuh remembers that?"

"O' course!"

"Waal, therefore, me an' Doc Healey an' Bert Clark figgered we'd better drap in on yuh an' see what yuh think about this buried-box business. Everybody's talkin'——"

"Sure they are!"

"It's a sensation; it's either good business or bad business fer all o' us," went on Owens sadly. "Ef yuh clears up the case, it's a big help come election time; but ef yuh don't an' the other side makes political capital o' yuhr failure, we're all liable to sink together."

The sheriff frowned.

"Yuh ain't tellin' me no news," he snapped; "it's jus' one danged thing after another in this office. We no sooner gits one case cleared up than here comes another; but this one, gents, this one ain't no cinch. We got no clews."

Commissioner Bert Clark spoke up quickly.

"Waal, I'll tell you one thing, yuh won't get no clew settin' thar in yuhr chair!"

After that remark the atmosphere became rather strained. The sheriff ignored Clark's question as one far beneath his notice. The other two commissioners, not being as frank as Clark, said nothing more on the subject. They spoke on the spring wheat prospects, the weather, the new railroad that was coming in to Alamosa. They left, with awkward farewells, shortly after

leaving a worried sheriff behind them. He growled as the door closed on them.

"I wouldn't give 'em the satisfaction o' arguin' with 'em about whether I kin git clews settin' here in my chair or not," he grunted. "I wouldn't dignify such a impudent question with a answer. Still, I reckon, mebbe I'd best——" He got up and slapped on his big black hat. "I'll go down an' look that place over ag'in!"

And he did. The crowd was gone now. Only a few boys hung around, thrilled with the very atmosphere of the place. The sheriff poked here and there. He followed the strange trail of the dragged box to the creek bank. He reassured himself that the trail did actually vanish in the creek bed. The bed was sandy—shifting sand that would cover any trail almost instantly. And there was nothing about the hole now but a million footprints. The sheriff shook his head mournfully.

"No use," he muttered, "no use!"

He stared about, trying to think if he could be overlooking anything. It did not seem so. He glanced this way and that and a thought struck him. He wondered if Shorty had combed the dead weeds and the brush to both sides of the bridge end. It was hardly likely that it was worth while, still——

The sheriff went at the thing methodically enough. He strode back and forth, up and down, this way and that, covering all the weeded area on the south of the bridge without discovering anything other than old tin cans, pieces of wood, scraps of iron, and the other débris that one might expect to find along a creek bank. He finally crossed under the bridge to the north side and began his investigations there. He had not been at work ten minutes on that side when he stopped in his tracks with a surprised snort.

"By golly!" he exclaimed, and stooping over he picked up a rusty old black wallet. There was a rubber band around it. He snapped the band off and opened the wallet. Empty! Visions of greenbacks, calling cards, the owner's name and address, perhaps—all faded away. Empty! But no, it wasn't empty, after all! There was a newspaper clipping in one pocket of the old wallet, a clipping slightly yellowed with age. The sheriff took it out carefully, inspected it, held it closer to read:

FIND NO TRACE OF BANK ROBBERS

ALAMOSA BANDITS FADE INTO THIN AIR

As the *Clarion* goes to press this Thursday no trace has been found of the three gunmen who entered the Alamosa bank last week and got away with eight thousand dollars in cash and five thousand six hundred dollars in negotiable securities. They have apparently disappeared into thin air. Sheriff Ralph Baird of Alamosa has worked tirelessly in an effort to trace the men, but without avail. The reward of one thousand dollars offered by the Colorado State Bankers' Association has so far borne no fruit. It is hoped, however, that——

Sheriff Cook read no further. He put the clipping back in the wallet. He placed the wallet in his pocket.

"Great sufferin' jack rabbits," he exclaimed hopelessly, as his face grew longer, "jus' as I thought! It was th' Alamosa loot that was buried here. What them crooks got away with las' night! Eight years! Eight years that eight thousand dollars plus that five thousand six hundred in securities has been buried under this bridge here in Monte Vista, right under my nose!"

The sheriff stalked on, like a man in a trance.

"Las' night they come back an' git it, provin' that I am asleep on the job! They was in town las' night an' got away clean! Further, that loot has been there eight years, an' now it's gone, an', also, them robbers must have been here a little after that Alamosa job, eight years ago, to bury the stuff in the fust place! Gee whiz, what a nice mess now!"

The sheriff headed for his office with rapid strides.

"What the heck am I goin' to do?" he asked himself, as he strode along. "It's a cinch thar's no ketchin' them Alamosa robbers now ef they couldn't be ketched eight years ago when the trail was hot! Findin' that old wallet jus' proves what I feared, an' that's all. It don't help none otherwise. It jus' makes the case more hopeless than ever! I kain't see any use——"

The sheriff swallowed hard.

'No use in announcin' anything about the findin' o' the wallet," he decided disgustedly. "It only makes matters worse than ever. It proves I was asleep eight years ago to let that stuff be buried here then, an' that I've been asleep every day since while it's been here, as waal as las' night when they come an' got it. I better keep that wallet business under my hat!"

But he did not. When he got back to the office and found Shorty full of hope that the mysterious box case might be solved, he could not keep his secret. He cautioned Shorty first to keep what he was about to say in strictest confidence forever, and then he blurted out the sad truth:

"Shorty, we ain't ever goin' to ketch them box fellers. They was the Alamosa robbers, sure enough, look it here what I found in the weeds down near the Third Street bridge!"

The sheriff produced the wallet. Shorty read the clipping eagerly. When he had read it through and examined it closely he looked up at the woebegone sheriff.

"I still say," said Shorty, "that we got a chance!"

The next morning the sheriff, having spent a sleepless night, came down to the office wan and haggard. He had no faith in Shorty's optimistic predictions of the evening before. Since finding the wallet with the telltale newspaper clipping in it, the sheriff had given up the box case as a matter that was not to be solved. It was hopeless, he had decided. There was nothing left to do now but to face the music, and the anticipated opportunity to listen to some sad music was not long denied him.

The commissioners arrived shortly after nine o'clock.

"Waal," asked Commissioner Eddie Owens mournfully, "what luck, ef any, has yuh had in the box case, sheriff? We are naturally anxious to know ef yuh got any clews."

The sheriff answered the question carefully. "No luck whatever," said he.

"Huh," said Commissioner Bert Clark, "that's bad, sheriff, mighty bad. The public clamor is increasin'. The rumor is spreadin' everywhar that mebbe we ain't goin' to ever solve the case."

The sheriff took his pride in his hands—what he had left of it. He tried to smile at the commissioners and failed.

"That rumor, gents," he said slowly, "is—is jus' about correct. I figger it's—it's right. We ain't goin' to ever git the men who got that box, however——"

The sheriff produced the old wallet.

"I found one clew," he said unhappily, "an' this is it; a ol' wallet, evidently dropped by one o' the crooks who come fer that box. Thar's a clippin' inside that tells the tale—here it is—yuh gents kind read it."

He passed over the clipping and sighed. After all, it would not have been right, he decided on the spur of the moment, to keep that thing a secret from the county commissioners. They had a right to know—the worst. He watched their faces as Clark read the clipping aloud—and the sheriff knew it was his official death knell as sheriff of Monte Vista that the commissioner was reading.

Clark finished. The commissioners were silent.

"I take it that the clippin' settles the box mystery case—an' settles me!" said the sheriff softly. "It means—that clippin'—that it was two o' the Alamosa bandits who came back an' got that buried loot—the Alamosa loot—the other night. It means we'll never get 'em. It means that they was not only here the other night, but that they was likewise here after the robbery when they buried the loot—here twice an' we didn't get 'em either time. That loot was here all those eight years an' we didn't get it——"

The commissioners coughed, fidgeted.

"Ef it helps the party any I'll up an' resign," offered the sheriff meekly. "I have made up my mind. Yuh kin put up a new man fer sheriff come election, an' mebbe win with him—seein' yuh probably kain't win with me when this news gits out."

Commissioner Clark nodded.

"Yuh're takin' the matter sensible, sheriff," he agreed. "I think yuhr suggestion is the only suggestion possible."

The sheriff reached a trembling hand for a pad of paper. He would write out his resignation as a candidate for re-election now. It could be announced at once and——

There was an interruption, however. Shorty and Manuel Perez and Fred Speers appeared in the open doorway suddenly. They entered quickly. The commissioners stared, but it was the sheriff who spoke up, thickly, in a strange tone.

"Shorty, I'm busy jus' now—ef it ain't important I wish yuh'd wait outside. Hullo, Perez, yuh git fired offen yuhr new job already? Good mawnin', Speers. Now ef yuh all will——"

"This matter won't wait," said Shorty, taking in the situation at a glance. "Whatever yuh was aimin' to write down on that pad had better wait, boss. Looky here——"

Shorty yanked a bundle from his shirt front. A bundle wrapped in newspapers. He quickly broke the string that held it. He spread the bundle out on the sheriff's desk. Money! Greenbacks! Dozens of them. Hundreds of them. A young fortune in currency!

"Thar, boss," said Shorty softly, "thar's what was in that box that was dug up out o' the ground under the end o' the Third Street bridge the other night. It's money. About six thousand dollars in cold cash—as I counted it hastily. The box itself has been discarded somewhars, but it doesn't matter much. Perez here kin tell us all about the box. In fact, he's already told me —confessed—that that dough is his loot from many a rustlin' deal afore he went to the pen. Yuh remember he had no money when we arrested him? He pretended to be broke. Waal, he was canny enough to have buried his roll under the bridge jus' afore we pinched him. An' while he was in stir he planned how to git it."

Shorty grinned at the startled commissioners.

"Perez planned waal, but I was jus' one jump ahead o' him all the time, it seems," Shorty went on. "He said he got in town the other mawnin' from the pen, havin' left thar at noon. I thought it strange he should come direct to us to git him a job when he could o' gone to his old Mexican friends. He was still playin' that poverty gag. I checked up on the pen, though, an' found he had left thar twelve hours earlier than he said—so that he could o' been here when the box was dug up.

"Perez an' Speers here dug up the box. I had suspected that Perez was in on it as soon as I heard the report, because the trail o' the men had been obliterated by the draggin' o' the box, as we thought. An' why? Because Perez knew his peg-leg marks would

give him away. That's why they came an' went by wadin' the creek. But it wasn't a box they dragged after them. Perez simply scraped his shovel along as he made fer the creek, bein' careful to follow the same path down as he had took comin' up.

"Perez got to our office early for two reasons. Fust, to impress on us that he wanted a job, that he was broke, an' that he meant to go straight. Also, he wanted to be here when we opened so he could hear if Grandpa McMeel, who had stumbled onto things, reported to us. When Grandpa came in with his story, Perez moved to the winder, signalin' Speers, who was waitin'. Speers came in an' reported what he had seen, bein' careful to give us bum descriptions. Ol' eagle-eyed McMeel couldn't describe the men it was so dark, but Speers could—an' that's why I suspected Speers.

"When yuh found the wallet, boss, I was sure it had been planted to throw us off the track on a hopeless angle. I learned at the *Clarion* office that Speers had been in, right after the case had become public, to give his story to the editor. He was alone in the office for a time. The old files are thar. I looked up the issue eight years back that carried the item that was in the wallet. Sure enough, that clippin' had been clipped, an' jus' recent, because thar was new fingerprints on the dusty file. See? So I went out to the ranch whar yuh had got Perez his job an' cross-examined him. He had the dough on him. He confessed everything, includin' the fact that Speers had been in the rustlin' game with him afore he went to the pen. Speers, however, didn't know whar the swag was hid until Perez got back, told him, an' together they arranged the job o' recoverin' their dough—easy enough ef ol' Grandpa McMeel hadn't butted in!"

The faces of the county commissioners relaxed.

"This," said Commissioner Clark, "jus' about clinches the election this spring, sheriff. Yuh done fine work. Yuh got our heartiest congratulations! The story o' how yuh solved the most bafflin' case in years in Monte Vista, will sure make good readin'. Folks all through the valley will lift their hats to yuh, sheriff—an' vote us all back inter office, sure as shootin'!"

The sheriff pushed away the pad that he had been about to write on when Shorty brought in Perez and Speers.

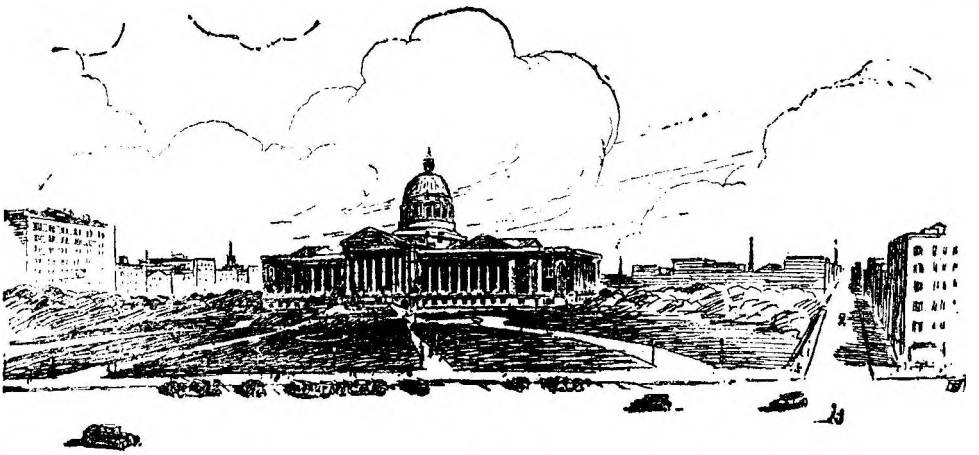
"Yes," he agreed, grinning, "I guess the election's won right now. Ef re-elected gents, I has but one pledge to make now, an' that is—I will reappoint Shorty McKay as my deputy for another term because—waal, gents, I like Shorty a heap!"

"Amen to that!" said Commissioner Clark fervently.

A COSMOPOLITAN ELK

THE large bull elk seen this fall grazing with cattle in the fields near West Fort Ann, twelve miles northwest of Glens Falls, New York, liked company, and apparently was not provincial in his tastes. Whether or not he was cognizant of the fact that there is no open season on elks in this State cannot be determined, but with magnificent unconcern he wandered into the very camp of his traditional enemy, man, and found the place to his liking. Fortunately for him, game protectors are perfectly aware of the game law and have taken the utmost care to guard the visitor from hunters.

It is the belief of Game Inspector M. B. Leland of the New York State conservation department that the animal strayed down into these regions from the Whitney preserve, one hundred miles farther north in the Adirondacks.



Pioneer Towns of the West

By Duane Clark

Jefferson City, Missouri

THE capital of Missouri is Jefferson City, which is also the county seat of Cole County. Located near the geographical center of the State, on heights overlooking the Missouri River, it is one of the fastest-growing cities of the Middle West. From a population of nine thousand six hundred and sixty-four in 1900, it has grown steadily until now there are nearly nineteen thousand inhabitants, an increase of fifty per cent in the last seven years.

The city is situated at the intersection of three United States Highways— Nos. 50, 63, and 54. Two trunk-line railroads and two branches furnish excellent passenger and freight transportation. Jefferson City is on the main line of the Missouri Pacific lines operating between Kansas City and St. Louis, it being one hundred and twenty-five miles from St. Louis and one hundred and sixty-five miles from Kansas City. The main line of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railway, operating west from St. Louis direct into Texas, gives fast passenger and freight service to Jefferson City. It is the hub of Missouri's fast-progressing highway system. Headquarters for the Missouri Bus Association is located here.

Through Jefferson's splendid Chamber of Commerce, an air field has been established. The importance of air travel is increasing and being realized daily.

It was on New Year's Eve of 1821 that Governor Alexander McNair, first governor of the State, approved a bill which located the State Capitol at Jefferson City. The following year the town was laid out, and four years later the first capitol was built.

The original statehouse was destroyed by fire in 1837 and a more commodious

edifice was begun, which took five years to complete. Bayard Taylor, traveler and poet, described the site of the capitol on the bluff overlooking the river as "the most picturesquely beautiful enjoyed for such a purpose by any State in the Union."

In 1911 this building was also destroyed by fire, and the present magnificent structure took its place. It was erected under the direction of a bipartisan commission of four members, who turned the new capitol over to the State in 1918, but, due to the war, dedicatory ceremonies were not held until October 6, 1924.

Thousands of artists and others who appreciate real beauty visit the capitol every year. No particular section of the building is devoted to an art gallery, but the paintings and sculptures are a definite part of the whole decorative scheme, which extends to the park surrounding the building.

Among the paintings included are: Charles Hoffbauer's "Glory of Missouri in War," in the house chamber; four panels by Richard E. Miller, in the senate; murals in the dome, by Frank Brangwyn; "Missouri in War," and "Missouri in Peace," By Oscar Berninghous, Fred G. Carpenter, N. C. Wyeth, Adolph Blondheim, Henry Reuterdahl, R. A. Kissack, Frank B. Nuderscher, E. H. Wuerpel, Charles F. Galt, Ralph Chesley Ott, Tom P. Barnett, Robert Ball, P. Humphrey Woolrych; and in the governor's reception room, four panels by Gari Melchers.

At the main entrance of the capitol stands a statue of Thomas Jefferson, by J. E. Fraser. It was from this president of the United States that the city took its name.

In addition to the art features of the capitol are the Soldiers' and Sailors Museum, and the complete and interesting natural science, historical and agricultural museum of interest to student and layman. From the two hundred-and-sixty-foot dome of the building may be had a most inspiring view of the city and surrounding country. In the capitol dome is the radio broadcasting station WOS, owned by the Missouri State Marketing Bureau.

The supreme court building is a beautiful brick structure, facing the capitol, which contains one of the most complete law libraries in the world. This library has the reports of the highest courts of every English-speaking nation and of every State in the Union. It is valued at a half million dollars.

Then, there is the State penitentiary, a city of industry in itself, manufacturing products for State institutions.

Jefferson City has thirty-four industrial establishments, including three large shoe factories; one of the finest color-printing establishments in the country; tire chain and wood products factories; a large milling concern; paper box and broom factories; ice cream and beverage manufactories, and is the headquarters and home office of a chain of work-clothing factories. It is also the headquarters city of the Capital Mutual Insurance Association.

Large shops of the Missouri Pacific railroad are located at Jefferson City. There are four banks and nine building and loan associations. Up-to-date wholesale and retail trade establishments serve an ever-expanding trade area. Several fine hotels house transients and residents.

Because the city is in the center of an important agricultural territory, dairying, fruit growing, and poultry raising are being largely developed, together with grain farming, and beef cattle, hog and sheep production. In what is known as the "better farming program," a county farm agent and college of agriculture representative is employed. Farm organizations in the county include the farm bureau, farmer's cooperative warehouse, and farm clubs.

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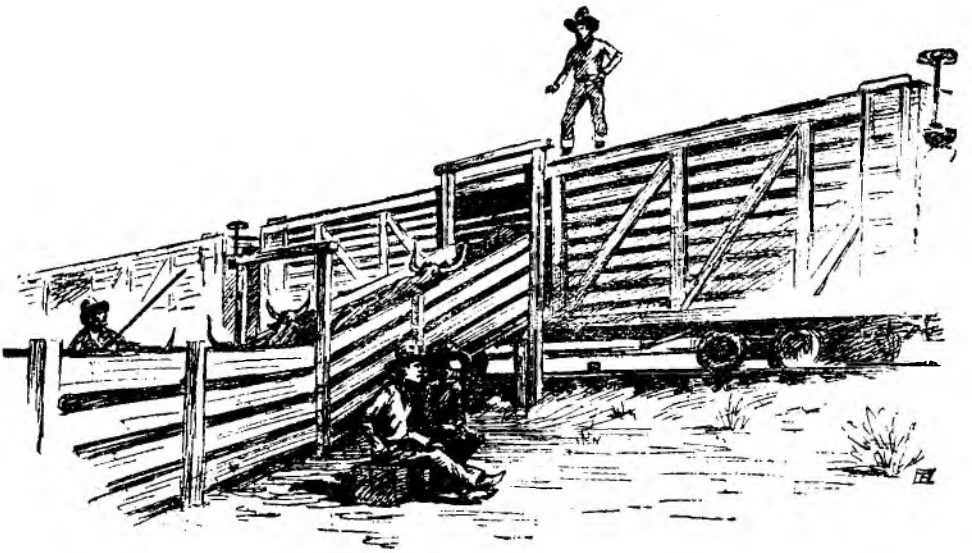


Holed Up!

By Harley P. Lathrop

Author of "Fast Colors," etc.

ROLLED in his blanket, his saddle for a pillow, and the dying embers of his supper fire winking at him redly through the dusk, Lampassas had just concluded that from now on his chief aim in life would be to acquire money. In other words, he meant to get rich and in as short a space of time as possible.

In making this resolve, Lampassas was starting from taw, so to speak, for his present material wealth was small. He possessed a bang-up black pony which was staked a short distance out on the prairie; a blanket roll and rigging, a six-shooter, a coffeepot, frying pan, and tin cup; the clothes he wore, and a five-dollar bill safely cached in an inside pocket.

Of course, if one wished to add several intangible assets such as youth, good health, and experience, these items would swell the list materially. Lampassas was just past twenty-five, blond as a young Viking, sound as a new-minted dollar, and clean-limbed as a racing greyhound. Moreover, since leaving home at sixteen, the years had been checkered with many and varied happenings. He had been an acknowledged top hand in a score of outfits; soldier of fortune during three separate revolutions below the Rio Grande; ranger, deputy sheriff, and town marshal for stated intervals; and once for the brief period of one season, a contest rider following different rodeos.

"One trouble with yo'," Lampassas was chiding himself aloud, "is, yo've got an itchin' foot—yo' never stay put long enough to get established anywhere; an' another is that yore too dog-gone easy about money, too particular how it's come by, and once yo'

do get it, the first hombre with a hard-luck tale takes it away from yo'. But from now on things are goin' to be different. Yore goin' to freeze onto every dollar that comes yore way no matter how, an' put it out of circulation. Hear me!"

The black pony grazing near by was the only one who heard and as nature forbade his responding, Lampassas rolled over and went to sleep.

Late the following afternoon he hooked a job. It was with about as sorry an outfit as he had ever encountered. He came upon the crew at a wide place in the road which contained a general store, a few brown, unpainted shacks, and an acre of cattle pens adjoining a rusty red station bearing the sign "Deever's Switch."

Five hands and a foreman were camped beside the pens. The foreman was a spare, grizzled old-timer whose riding days by all rights should have ended a decade before. The hands were little more than kids, not one older than sixteen. There was no remuda of extra horses in sight, nor any chuck wagon in attendance. The six were eating a canned supper evidently purchased at the general store.

In response to the foreman's invitation, Lampassas dismounted. The old-timer introduced himself as "Dad" Clark and after a short conversation asked Lampassas if he would care for a few days' work.

"We got a train load o' steers to gather and ship out of here to-morrow, an' another train load to go from Alton the day after," he explained. "I'll pay you three a day and furnish grub. I need another bang-up good hand and you look like you might know your business."

Any sort of a job would have appealed to Lampassas in his present financial condition. So he accepted with a nod and staked his horse out to graze.

He exchanged barely a half dozen words with either his new employer or the youthful crew that night. Excusing himself on the grounds that he must interview the agent, Dad soon took off in the direction of the station. The crew likewise vanished on his heels in the direction of the general store. For want of company, Lampassas presently spread his blankets and went to sleep.

The following morning Dad led the crew to a pasture some three miles from Deever's Switch where the steers to be shipped that day were assembled. The pasture contained several thousand acres and was thickly pockmarked with gopher holes.

"You lope over to yonder end and start shovin' 'em this way," Dad directed Lampassas when the gate clicked shut behind them. "Meantime, we'll be throwin' 'em together from this side."

Lampassas had ridden barely a quarter of a mile when, chancing to glance back, he observed that the rest of the crew had dismounted and were congregated about a man lying on the ground. Instinctively, he pulled up and waited for the fallen rider to regain his feet. When after several moments this failed to happen, he spurred back.

A comment from one of the hands appraised him of what had happened. Dad Clark's horse, stepping into a gopher hole, had fallen and broken the old man's hip.

Notwithstanding that he was in excruciating pain, Dad still retained command of the situation. "Ease me over on my side, boys," he was directing, "and sort of prop up my hip a bit. Now put my saddle under my shoulders. There, that's fine." He paused to wipe away the beads of moisture gathering on his forehead. "You, Bud, hit for Deever's Switch," he ordered further, "an' telephone Doc Bishop at

Alton. Tell him what's happened an' have him hurry down here. Get a rustle on now, son."

Bud was the youngest of the lot and this was his first prairie accident. White-lipped and a little faint, he mounted and spurred off. The rest of the crew stood helplessly about gazing down at the injured man with pity sobering their eyes.

Upon dismounting Lampassas did not join them but fumbled through the roll behind his saddle, from which he drew forth a small, smoke-blackened pot and a handful of coffee. Next he filled the pot from a near-by pond and started a fire of dried grass and weeds. It was the characteristic act of an old campaigner. For nothing is calculated to hearten an injured person like bitter coffee, scalding hot.

From the tail of his eye old Dad observed the tall blond puncher's actions, and he seemed to gather fresh heart. "You boys go ahead and round up them steers," he told those beside him. "When you get 'em bunched, I'll send this new man out with orders."

Presently, when the coffee had boiled, Lampassas produced a cup from his roll and brought this together with the pot to Dad's side. Adjusting the saddle a bit more comfortably, he offered him a brimming cupful.

With the hot coffee warming him, a flush of color stained the ashy gray of the old man's face. He set the cup down and after thanking Lampassas appraised him shrewdly. "You ever load out any cattle?" he inquired at length.

"A good many," Lampassas nodded.

"Well, that eases my mind considerable," Dad declared. "Now I wonder would you take charge and load out these steers; then to-morrow do the same thing up at Alton? I'll make it worth your while. Say five dollars a day instead of three."

Lampassas fished a stubby pencil from his pocket. "I'll go yo'," he said. "Give me the dope where to bill the dogies."

"You won't have to tend to that," Dad explained. "I'm buyin' this stuff on four bits a head commission for another man. He's at Alton now shaping up the second bunch and figures to ride the empty stock train down. He'll look after the billing and also pay off the owner who will be waitin' at the pen."

"Fair enough!" agreed Lampassas, restoring the pencil to his pocket. "Any directions about the shipment that goes from Alton?"

"That's my home," explained Dad. "It's fifteen miles north of here. After you load this shipment, you better drag out for there. In the mornin' when I'm feelin' better you can hunt me up bright and early and I'll tell you how I want things handled."

"But there's something else, now I think of it," continued Dad. "I put up five hundred dollars option money on each of these shipments. This buyer, Chet Morgan, agreed to refund that and pay me my commission immediately the cattle are aboard the cars. Business is business, so I'll leave you collect."

"If he forgets, I'll jog his memory," Lampassas promised.

By now pain, which for the time being had ceased, was again gripping Dad. Lampassas plied him with hot coffee, making him comfortable as circumstances would permit.

Possibly an hour later the doctor came speeding across the prairie. Lampasses assisted in getting the patient aboard the doctor's wagon. When they had departed he rode out and assumed charge of the round-up.

By noon he had the steers penned. The owner was waiting and within an hour the empty stock train rolled in with the buyer aboard.

Lampassas' first impression of Chet Morgan was unfavorable. He was a slick-looking, shrewd-faced man of medium size with mean close-set eyes and a mouth like a slit in a blanket. Taking into consideration his immaculate and somewhat exaggerated cowboy attire, the soft smoothness of his hands, and a few idiosyncrasies of speech, Lampassas immediately classified him as a "yard shark."

Now, a yard shark is a species of human vulture who hangs about the stockyards fattening on honest cowmen's misfortunes. For instance, if the market is temporarily glutted, if a cowman is in difficulties with the railroad over cattle injured or killed in transit, and needs cash immediately, the yard shark steps in.

For a sum far below its actual worth, he will considerately take the shipment off the stockman's hands, reselling or settling within the next few days at a substantial profit to himself.

Perfectly legitimate, yes. But, nevertheless, a cut-throat business in which a man with a shred of heart or conscience stands small chance of success.

In his surmise Lampassas was right. Chet Morgan was a yard shark who, banking on his knowledge of present market conditions, had transferred his activities to the range in hopes of pulling off a killing or two.

He evinced scant interest when, after introducing himself, Lampassas explained what had befallen old Dad. "Broken hip, huh?" he repeated, his eyes carefully appraising the blond-headed substitute.

"Appeared like it," affirmed Lampassas.

"Well, that's his hard luck. If you're in charge, hop to it and get these cattle aboard. I'll tally 'em up the chute with the owner and pay off on that count."

The loading progressed slowly under the handicap of a green crew. Finally, however, it was accomplished. When the door rasped shut and the bolt shot home on the last steer, Lampassas clambered up on the pen, from which point Morgan and the owner had taken tally.

Morgan was filling out a check for the amount due the owner. The check, Lampassas noted, was the sort not uncommonly furnished by commission houses to speculators whose judgment they were willing to back. It was signed by the commission house, certified by their bank, and carried a blanket mortgage in favor of the bank covering the cattle until sold. Thus seller and bank alike were protected. From this Lampassas deduced that the cattle were going direct to market.

"I'll take a check coverin' the old man's commission and forfeit money now," he said to Morgan when the owner had departed.

The speculator shot Lampassas a quick side glance. "The mischief you will," he replied.

"Old Dad's orders," Lampassas explained. "He told me that I should make sure to collect after the steers were aboard."

"Well, you got your wires crossed," Morgan declared. "He meant after the last shipment went aboard."

A dull red began to stain Lampasses' face. He had distrusted this fastidious, overkeen-looking yard shark from the first, and this lame subterfuge confirmed his suspicion that the man was at heart a crook. It would have given him infinite satisfaction to take Morgan by the nape of the neck and compel him to write the check under pressure. But he resisted the inclination. After all, it was no concern of his. He had followed orders in loading out the cattle and afterward demanding payment. If Morgan refused, that was between him and old Dad.

With these thoughts in mind, he started to clamber down from the pen. This motion of departure caused a sat-

isfied gleam to show momentarily in Morgan's eyes.

"Hold on a minute, cowboy," he said when Lampassas reached the ground. "You goin' to have charge of the loading to-morrow?"

Lampassas nodded.

"And see Dad in the meantime?"

"Some time before I go to the pens."

"You tell him what I said about payin' off for both shipments at once. Ease him off so he won't worry and send some one meddling around. You do that and I'll make it worth your time."

More than ever now Lampassas was convinced that the yard shark meant to crook old Dad. But there was nothing he could do save report his suspicions to his employer. So with a shake of his head that might mean anything, he started for his horse.

The crew had already departed north after promising to be on hand in the morning. A moment later Lampassas was headed in the same direction, leading behind him old Dad's saddled pony.

Lampasses rode into the outskirts of Alton just at dusk. At the edge of town he hailed a small boy.

"Where does Dad Clark live, son?" he asked.

The boy pointed at a left-hand lane. "Down that way," he said. "It's the last house. Got a barn, corrals, an' everything."

The barn proved little more than a huge shed, the corrals a net-work of chicken wire, reënforced with poles, and the house was a tiny weather-beaten affair, badly in need of paint. Taken by and large the place was as time-scarred and battered as the old prairie veteran who called it home.

Turning in at the open gate, Lampassas entered the corral and after unsaddling Dad's horse hunted out a feed of oats from the barn. It was dark by this time, and while there was a light in the house, he had no intention of calling before the next morning. More than likely Dad was asleep, but in any event he would scarcely be in shape to welcome a visitor before then.

Lampassas, however, had failed to reckon on the sharp ears of "Ma" Clark. He was just closing the corral gate when Ma stepped out on a side porch, with a lamp in her hand.

"You bring Dad's horse home?" she called.

Coming toward her, Lampassas explained that he had seen to the pony for the night and in the morning he would again look after him.

At the sound of his voice, Ma raised the lamp a little higher. "Lands sakes!" she exclaimed as its rays fell on Lampassas, "I expect you're that yaller-headed hand Dad left to look after things. You tie your pony, young man, and come right in. He'll be wantin' to see you when he wakes up."

Although this was contrary to his plans, Lampassas had no grounds for refusal, so after securing his horse he followed Ma within.

The interior was exactly what one would expect after viewing the house from the outside. It was furnished in the style of a quarter of a century previous and constant usage had worn everything threadbare. Yet there was an air of comfortable hominess that pulled queerly at the wandering cowboy's heartstrings. It was reminiscent of his own childhood home, where life had been one constant endeavor to make both ends meet.

Ma Clark was a little, round woman whose apron strings were tied so tightly they seemed to cut her in half. Her eyes were a faded, trustful blue, and her gray hair was twisted tightly in a knot at the back of her head. She beamed hospitably on Lampassas.

"You set right down here in the kitchen while I get you a bite to eat," she directed. "I'll bet you haven't had

anything since mornin'. Have you now?"

Lampassas grinned and Ma, shaking her head, began to bustle about the stove. As she worked, her tongue ran cherrily on.

"Dad's hip wan't broken after all," she exclaimed. "I guess you thought it was, and doc did, too, at first. But it is only a bad wrench. Before a month is out Dad'll be hobblin' around and probably back on a horse in six weeks."

"I'm sure pleased to hear that," Lampassas told her.

"It was hard on 'pa comin' when it did," Ma Clark said. Then she drew from the well of her life's experience. "Still, it's been my observation," she continued, "that most everything, no matter how hard it seems at the time, is meant for the best. Mebbe it's so in this case. At least it'll keep Dad from buyin' any more steers on commission this spring. We done right well on this deal but on the next we might lose all we made and the forfeit money besides. You never can tell. I've seen such things happen."

Lampassas agreed that anything was possible in the cattle business, and Ma Clark rambled on. She told how after deducting the expenses for hand hire, she and Dad planned to invest the remaining money in dairy cows which they would keep right here on the place. "We can afford to hire a man with the milkin' and then make a nice livin'. How'd you like a job like that?" she finished, stealing a covert glance at Lampassas.

"I don't guess I'd care for it much," he told her gravely.

Ma nodded her understanding. "I know jest how you feel," she said. "Dad felt that way, too, about milk cows when he was young. Rather work eighteen hours a day as a cowboy and stay poor than get rich dairyin'. Handlin' cattle get's in your blood. Not that I regret Dad's bein' a cowboy all his life. But honestly I don't know where we'd 'a' ended up if it hadn't been for this commission deal turnin' out the way it did. Sold our home likely, lived up the money, and then gone to the poorhouse."

This particular train of thought served to set Ma Clark's active mind off on another tangent. "I near forgot," she said. "Did you bring Morgan's check coverin' the commission and forfeit money? Dad said he told you to collect it."

One of the hardest tasks Lampassas ever faced was when he was forced to shake his head. Ma Clark's faded blue eyes took on a troubled look and in her dismay she almost dropped the dish she was holding.

"But—but——" she stammered. "Morgan's breakin' his contract. Settin' right there in the next room he promised Dad the forfeit money and commission would be paid the minute the steers went aboard the cars. Course we might get by, if he did beat us out of the commission. But if he didn't pay back the forfeit money! Why, we mortgaged our home for a thousand dollars to pay down on the two bunches! I didn't want Dad to do it, but he's that easy. Morgan argued it would be better for him not to take a hand in the transactions until Dad sewed the two bunches up. Claimed they could be bought cheaper that way. You—you don't think he means to cheat us somehow, do you?"

Not only did Lampassas think it, he was morally certain of the fact. Morgan's actions, coupled with the suggestive promise he had dropped, were to his mind convincing proof. But to impart his suspicions to this motherly old soul, especially when the loss of the forfeit money meant the probable losing of her home, was more than he

had the moral courage to do. So Lampassas, gentleman that he was, lied grandly and well, planning when the occasion presented itself to talk the matter over with Dad.

"No'm," he said, "I'm satisfied Morgan's straight as a string. He just preferred to make the payments in one lump, which is natural seein' he's usin' commission company's checks. Don't yo' worry, ma'am. To-morrow at this time yo'll be settin' on the top of the world, thanks to yore husband's tradin'."

"Well, I'm so thankful," Ma exclaimed with a sigh of relief. "For a moment I was a mite uneasy."

A little later, after he had eaten, Lampassas went in to see Dad, who meanwhile had awakened. The old man had appeared none too robust before his accident. Now, owing to hours of suffering, he looked just what he was—a broken-down old cowboy, frail and worn, with the best of his life behind him on the prairie.

Notwithstanding that he had encountered many other battered old saddle-relics during his wanderings, the sight of Dad gave Lampassas a sudden shock. Somehow, this was nearer home.

For upward of an hour they visited. As tactfully as possible Lampassas tried to convey his distrust of Morgan's intentions. But Dad waved the warning lightly aside. Poor, trustful old man! With his sublime faith in the other fellow's intention to do the right thing, it was not difficult to understand why he attained the sundown side of life without acquiring a competence.

Yielding to the old couple's urging, Lampassas consented to spend the night with them. He ate an early breakfast and received detailed instructions from Dad concerning this day's shipment.

When he went to the corral to saddle his horse preparatory to departing for the pens, Ma accompanied him, keeping up a steady flow of conversation. She patted his shoulder when, yielding to a sudden impulse, he assured her he would be back that afternon bearing a check for all that was due them.

"My," she said, "I wish pa and I had a boy like you!"

All during his ride to the shipping pens, which were at the opposite edge of town, Lampassas felt like a man headed for his own execution. Owing largely to his own lack of backbone, he reproached himself, both Dad and Ma Clark believed their money was absolutely safe; while he knew the exact opposite was true. For, so far as he could see, there was no way in which to make Morgan disgorge against his will. Even should he refuse to allow the speculator to load out the immediate shipment, nothing would be gained thereby. The owners of the cattle would retain Dad's five-hundred-dollar forfeit and any commission would go glimmering, with no ensuing sale

A hundred yards from the pen Lampassas decided there was only one thing to do. He would load out the cattle and again attempt to collect. If Morgan still refused to pay, Dad could have recourse to law. This decision, however, yielded scant comfort. It would be a case of "Out of the frying pan," Lampassas felt positive. Morgan was slick enough to leave himself a loophole somewhere.

Now, as it chanced, the owner of this particular shipment had contracted to deliver the cattle at the shipping pens. Taking time by the forelock, he had started well before daylight. As Lampassas rode up he had just turned the penned herd over to Dad's crew of kids and, with his hands, was preparing to ride into town for breakfast.

Morgan, in company with another man, sat perched on the loading-chute gate viewing the milling steers. Tying his pony, Lampassas headed in that direction.

As Lampassas drew near, Morgan beckoned him to join them and introduced his companion as a Mr. Carver. Next he led Lampassas into the angle of an unoccupied pen.

"Listen, cowboy," he began, pulling out a pocketbook, "have you thought over the proposition I made you yesterday?"

Downing the impulse to plant his fist square on the point of this double-crosser's jaw, Lampassas mumbled indistinctly.

Either Morgan mistook the reply for assent, or reasoned that money would be the deciding factor in cinching Lampassas' loyalty, for he shoved two yellow-backed bills under his hand.

"Here's a hundred for your work yesterday and another hundred so you'll back up my play to-day."

Mr. Chet Morgan, smooth, slippery, and as crooked as a ram's horn, was about as near becoming a hospital case as he had ever been during his entire lifetime. Only the thought that here in his hand was a small fraction of Dad's forfeit money, held Lampassas in check.

"Now, what I want you to do is this," continued Morgan: "When you cut out a carload, if they shape up small, give 'em the bum's rush up the loading chute and into the car. But if they carry plenty of size and bone, let 'em lag. In other words, give Carver an eyeful of the top cattle and as short a sight as possible of the light weights. Understand?"

Lampassas immediately surmised what was in the wind. No doubt, Carver represented the commission house that was furnishing the money for Morgan's speculation and Morgan wished to impress him with his ability as a buyer. It was a moth-eaten trick and, judging from Carver's appearance, would prove of no avail. For Carver bore all the earmarks of an experienced cowman.

"Whatever yo' say," Lampassas grunted.

"Then get busy like I told you," directed Morgan.

When the stock train drew in the pens became a hubbub of clashing horns and pounding hoofs as the loading began. Car after car was filled.

Meanwhile, Morgan and Carver sat close beside the loading-chute gate arguing. So busy was Lampassas and so great the furor, that he caught nothing save an occasional derisive gesture from Carver when a light-weight load was rushed up the chute.

At length the last steer went aboard and the crew in a body made for a watering trough outside the pens.

Standing alongside the chute, the station agent had been taking final tally. Now he signaled the owner, who had been watching the work, to come over and compare counts.

Lampassas approached Morgan and his companion, who were still in the throes of some discussion. As he drew near he heard Carver exclaim: "Two dollars, that's the top!"

"You're crazy!" Morgan retorted. "Think I ain't wise to what stuff is worth on the market? Those steers are dirt cheap at three dollars a head above what they are costing me, and you know it."

Lampassas stopped opposite the pair. He had decided to hang around until Morgan paid for the cattle, then demand a final settlement on old Dad's account. If Morgan attempted further evasion, he meant to get word to Dad as quickly as possible.

Lampassas had paused but a moment when the conductor came clambering into the pens, red of face, and with a pugnacious look in his eyes. "Who's the big cheese around here," he inquired belligerently.

"I'm making this shipment, if that's what you mean," Morgan replied.

"Then you get to work and tie those

three young bulls in the third car back from the engine," the conductor stormed. "You can't put anything over on me. This train don't roll until those bulls are fastened."

Now most railroads have a set rule which states that bulls in transit must be securely tied. It is a wise regulation, for a peevish bull—and few are otherwise—can cause much havoc with his horns. Like most rules, however, it is often evaded. Lampassas had called Morgan's attention to the bulls when they went up the chute, but Morgan shook his head.

"You win," he now said to the conductor, and grinning at Lampassas told him to get busy.

Lampassas crossed to his horse and presently returned with several lengths cut from his rope. "Yo'll have to help," he told Morgan. "It'll take two of us."

Morgan nodded and clambered over the pen, Lampassas following.

"Couldn't have happened better," Morgan exulted to Lampassas as they walked toward the head of the train. "That fellow Carver is trying to buy these steers as they stand. He's offered two dollars a head profit, but I'm hanging out for three. Mebbe he'll meet my price if we take our time and let him worry a little. If not, I'll close with him anyway."

So that's who Carver was, Lampassas reflected. He had been mistaken, after all, in thinking him the commission company's representative. As he and Morgan walked forward, Lampasses decided it was as good a time as any to demand a show-down.

"About old Dad's commission and forfeit money," he demanded when they came opposite the car. "As long as yo' intend to turn this shipment to Carver, suppose yo' give me a check right now?"

The proposal came as an absolute surprise to Morgan. His face mirrored perplexity at first, then anger. "You got two hundred. Ain't you satisfied?" he snapped.

"It's only a tenth of what you owe," Lampassas replied evenly. "The forfeit money and commission amounts to two thousand."

"What you tryin' to do, hold me up?" Morgan bellowed.

"No," bluffed Lampassas, wondering what sort of reply would be forthcoming. "I'm only tryin' to keep yo' from getting into trouble and at the same time, making sure I won't have to hang around this section indefinitely as a witness. Dad will go to law if he don't get his money."

"Law be blowed!" exclaimed Morgan. "Think I'm a fool? That check I gave yesterday has a notation saying 'in full payment for the cattle.' If it had said 'final' payment, Clark might have had a leg to stand on. As it is, he lost his forfeit money when I paid for 'em in full. Savvy?"

The point, while a trifle technical, was properly taken. Lampassas recalled having heard of a court ruling to that effect.

"Well, how about the commission, then?"

"How about any contract coverin' that, either?" scoffed Morgan. "One man's word is as good as another's in court, if it comes down to cases. But what of it?" he continued in a wheedling tone. "Be reasonable, cowboy. You say you want to blow. Well, I'll add another hundred and you light out soon's we finish tying these bulls. I ain't any crazier about appearing in court than you are. And with you gone, it's a hundred to one Clark won't sue. What say?"

Lampassas was in the mood to say plenty, but at that juncture the fireman came walking back from the engine. Morgan seemed a trifle relieved at his appearance. "Let's get this job over with and talk later," he suggested.

Now, most cattle cars contain a porthole at one end designed for the express purpose of admitting one to the car in cases of necessity, after it is loaded. Climbing up between the cars, Lampassas opened the porthole and peered at the sea of horns and backs within. For as much as a minute he gazed, while his eyes lighted with a sudden resolve and the first smile of the day curved his lips. At length, when he clambered down beside Morgan, he was limping perceptibly.

"Yore goin' to have to crawl inside and do the job," he said. "Somehow I twisted my ankle."

Morgan nodded, and securing the several lengths of rope climbed up between the cars. When he disappeared Lampassas took the watching fireman by the arm and led him toward the engine.

"Listen, friend," he said, "what's yore next stop?"

"Junction City on the main line, sixty miles north of here," the fireman explained.

Lampassas displayed one of Morgan's hundred-dollar bills. "Would yo' ride a passenger that far and guarantee not to let his yelling bother yo'?" he asked.

The fireman reached for the bill and winked. "Listen, bo," he said, "that means thirty-three dollars for me and the same for the engineer and head shack. I'll guarantee any one of us will ride a regiment of screeching baboons from here to Halifax for that much."

"Fair enough!" grinned Lampassas. He shoved the bill into the fireman's hand and walked back to the second car.

From beside the track he picked up a loose railroad spike and carefully selected a sizable cobble from the right of way.

Five minutes later he entered the pen where the owner, together with Carver and the station agent, waited. "Where's your boss gone to?" inquired Carver.

"He decided to take yore offer and not come back," Lampassas explained vaguely. "Said for yo' to pay off the owner and make out a check to Dad Clark for the balance. It represents what's due the old man on this shipment and one that was made yesterday."

For a perceptible space Carver hesitated, pen poised over an open check book. It was the moment Lampassas dreaded. On Carver's decision rested the success or failure of his wild scheme.

But help came from the most unexpected quarter. "Dogged if that don't ease my mind," exclaimed the owner. "I stopped in to see Dad on my way from breakfast a while back. When Dad told me Morgan hadn't paid off for yesterday's shipment, I was afraid he meant to flimflam the old man somehow."

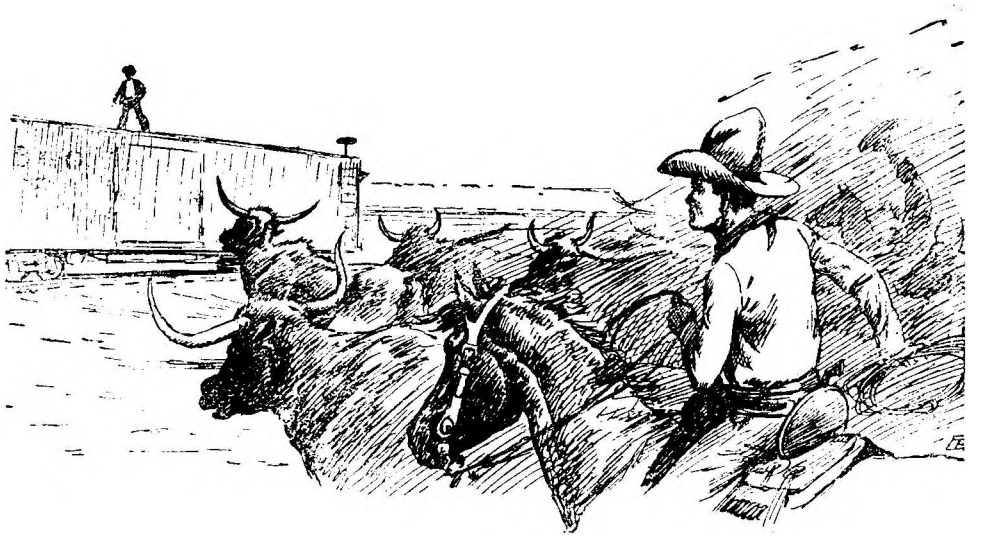
"He did," said Lampassas shortly. "But I persuaded him to change his mind."

For at least a moment Carver's eyes rested on Lampassas while he deliberated. Then he slowly wrote two checks. One he tendered to the owner, the other to Lampassas.

Lampassas waved it one side. "I'll leave it to yo' men to see Dad gets it," he explained. "Me, I'm a hundred dollars to the good on two days' work, so I'll be driftin'."

"Just a moment," Carver called with a grin as Lampassas moved off. "What did you do with Morgan or his body after you persuaded him?"

Lampassas grinned back. "When yo' get to Junction City, look in that bull car up ahead. Something seems to tell me he's in there, with the porthole nailed shut, meditatin' on his sins."



Black Sheep and Lambs

By Hugh F. Grinstead

Author of "Tin Can Bandit," etc.

IT was after sunup when "Rusty" Fenton awoke, stretched leisurely, and got up from his bed of musty hay in one corner of the empty cattle car into which he had crawled at dusk the evening before, just as the long train pulled out from a distant station. He knew that the car was now stationary, and had been for an hour or two. He peered through a crack in the slatted side, but instead of the dingy railroad yards that he expected to see, he beheld open country as far as the eye could reach.

He crawled out through the door and to the top of the car, from which vantage point he could view the country for miles in every direction. A whitewashed cattle pen and loading chute on one side of the track. Except for the dwindling lines of steel that were lost in the distance to east and west, there was no other evidence of civilization to be seen.

Little clumps of dwarfed mesquite and an occasional cactus relieved the monotony of grassy plain, while far to the south could be seen a faint line marking a range of hills. Strain his eyes as he might, Rusty could discern no sign of a habitation in all that expanse of open country.

"Ain't that the luck?" he muttered. "Ditched a hundred miles from nowhere. Nothin' to eat or drink, and nowhere to go. Train stops here once a week, maybe, and then a guy has got a slim chance of hoppin' one."

Rusty Fenton was almost as effectually stranded as if he had been on a desert island, for he was not wise to the ways of the unfenced country. For all the twenty-odd years of his existence he had trod city pavements, and had seen the country only from moving freight cars as he made his way from

one city to another. A few times he had been ditched and forced to walk on to the next station. Not until now had he brought up where there was not so much as a farmhouse, from the back door of which he might beg a handout. It was a discouraging situation for a hobo who had already missed two meals in succession.

Like a shipwrecked sailor marooned on a reef, Rusty sat on the edge of the car roof and continued hopefully to scan the horizon. He had a vague knowledge of the purpose of the cattle pens, and reasoned that there must be houses and ranches at no great distance. How to reach them was his problem, for he had no knowledge of the art of laying a course and holding to it without the guidance of city rectangles. To him the trackless prairie was as an uncharted sea.

As his gaze swung around to the north for the third or fourth time, he glimpsed a cloud of dust. He watched it for a few minutes, and saw that it moved. After a while he concluded that it was gradually coming nearer, though still a mile or two away. He logically surmised that something or somebody was approaching across the prairie, and he decided to wait where he was for further developments.

After a time he became conscious of a confused murmuring sound, from which was presently distinguishable the shrill yells of men and the raucous bellowing of cattle. When the dust cloud was wafted aside by a puff of the early morning breeze, he saw the leaders of the moving herd coming over a slight rise of ground. Their long horns gleamed white in the sunshine, the thunder of their hoofs was a continuous low rumble.

Rusty looked about him uneasily. He had never seen so many cattle at one time, and the advancing line of horned heads was formidable in appearance. Had he recognized a possible avenue of escape, he would have beat a hasty retreat. But the car upon which he sat appeared to be the safest spot in sight, and there he remained while the noisy herd drew nearer. Nor were the horsemen, when they finally broke through the screen of dust, more reassuring. Tanned and bewhiskered, their features obscured by a coat of dust, they dashed here and there upon plunging mounts, urging the cattle toward the whitewashed pens by the track.

There was no escape from these relentless riders, the cattle were literally shoved through the wide gateway into the nearest pen. Not until every one was safely inside and the gate closed did the men cease from their task. There were six of them, each carrying a six-shooter in a holster at his side. Some of them rolled cigarettes and smoked, one dismounted to tighten the cinches of his saddle, while the others talked and looked about. One spied Rusty seated on top of the car, and called the attention of his companions to the stranded hobo.

"Say, what kind of a bird are you, anyway? Where did you light from, and where are you bound?" one of the cowboys asked.

"Me? I'm a tourist," Rusty replied. "Was ridin' a rattler across to me summer home when they ditched me at this winker."

"Ridin' a rattler?"

"Aw, I'm a hobo, and was heatin' me way on a freight train when they set me car off here on this sidin'," Rusty explained with a frown of defiance. "I was just waitin' fer the next train goin' my way."

"I reckon you'll have to wait a long time, then. We're aimin' to load cattle into these cars soon's the eastbound local comes along, and far as I know there won't be another train stop here before the fall shippin' begins. Figger you'll have to hoof it if you're in a hurry."

A sarcastic reply was on Rusty's lips.

He had a sort of contempt for the unsophisticated lads from the country; "hicks," he called them. But something about these dashing riders warned him to be careful of his words. He was not so sure he had not fallen in with a gang of brigands, and certainly he had no desire to antagonize men bristling with firearms. He held his tongue, and the horsemen took no further notice of him. They busied themselves separating the cattle, driving some of them into an adjoining pen.

It was about this time that Rusty sighted a wagon approaching from the same direction from which the men and cattle had come. A cover of dusty canvas was thrown loosely over the top, and a box the width of the wagon bed projected from the rear end. The driver stopped when he was within two hundred yards of the stock pens, climbed down from the seat, and began unhitching the team. When he had slipped the harness from the animals, hobbled them and turned them loose to graze, he began to gather fuel for a fire.

Rusty watched all this with growing interest. A fire on a day like this could mean but one thing—food was about to be cooked. He had on more than one occasion partaken of the stew prepared in hobo camps, cooked in tin cans or whatever might be at hand; but he was about to witness for the first time the preparation of a full meal over a camp fire. He was quick to guess that the meal was being prepared for the men with the cattle, who had doubtless been compelled to start with their herd long before the breakfast hour in order to reach the railroad ahead of the local freight.

Presently a curl of smoke ascended from the pile of dry fuel that the driver of the wagon had gathered; the rattle of pots and pans reached the ears of the hungry hobo. Longingly, he watched the man as he made numerous trips between the fire and the big box at the rear of the wagon, the lid of which had been let down to form a table. But hungry as Rusty was, he lacked the courage to ask for food before those fierce-looking riders had been fed. He thought he might then venture to ask for the leavings.

In an incredibly short time, almost before the men at the stock pens had completed their task, the cook had the meal ready. Making a megaphone of his hands, he shouted:

"Come and git it!"

There was an answering shout from the horsemen as each scrambled down from the high fence and made for his mount. Rusty envied them the prospect of a hot breakfast. He could see the steam rising from a pot of coffee, and fancied he caught the odor of frying bacon. Then it was that one of the riders, a tall middle-aged man with iron-gray mustache, looked toward the grimy figure atop the stock car. This man had the look of one in authority; it was evident that he was boss of the gang.

"Say, son, ain't you missed some meals?" he quietly asked. "It's agin' the rules to let a critter of any kind go hungry on Box M range; tumble offn there and make a run fer the chuck wagon."

Rusty grinned. That sounded very much like an invitation to eat, and he needed no urging. It was with some misgivings that he swung down the iron ladder at the end of the car and dropped to the ground. However, if these armed horsemen had designs against his life or liberty, he would be no safer from them on the car than he would be on the ground. And after all, he had nothing to lose. He might even be able to pick up something besides his breakfast, for he had nimble fingers. Articles lying loose were considered legitimate spoils by his ilk. He had seen the inside of a jail more than once because things had a way of sticking to his fingers.

Not until all six of the men had galloped off toward the wagon did Rusty follow. He had no desire to come close to those cavorting steeds. With the exception of dogs, which he feared, his experience with domestic animals was extremely limited. As he approached the wagon he saw that the men had already dismounted, leaving their mounts standing a few yards away. Their attention was centered upon the food before them, so that they gave their visitor no more than a casual glance as he came up.

"Grub pile, help yourself," invited the foreman when Rusty halted uncertainly.

The hungry hobo took the tin cup offered him, and when he had filled it from the coffeepot sitting on the coals and had helped himself to bread and bacon, he began to eat ravenously. To his surprise, the men paid him scant heed after the first casual appraisal. Few words passed between them as they ate. Each, as he finished, got up from the ground where he had squatted while eating, and began rolling a cigarette.

It was much to the liking of Rusty Fenton to be thus let alone while he ate. He was usually called upon to answer a string of questions more or less embarrassing, concerning his past and the immediate hopes of the future, before being fed. The other men had all finished before he was half through. It was much warmer than it had been an hour or two earlier, and several of the men pulled off their coats and tossed them on the wagon.

Rusty was still eating when the local freight whistled and slowed to a stop. The six men betook themselves at once to the stock pens, where for the better part of an hour they were busily engaged in prodding the cattle toward the loading chute and into the cars, as each was shunted into place. When Rusty had devoured bread and bacon and guzzled coffee until he could hold no more, he got up and wiped his hands on his trousers.

The smoking stub of a discarded cigarette gave forth an enticing odor. At another time he would have appropriated it without shame. But better than that, he had seen the protruding corner of a sack of tobacco that had been carelessly thrust into a compartment of the grub box at the rear of the wagon. When the cook moved around to the other side of the wagon out of sight, Rusty reached quickly for the tobacco, thrusting it into his jacket pocket. Already he was picking up something he could use later. He smoked just as he dined—whenever opportunity offered.

With all his pots and pans stowed away, the cook went for his team, which had wandered off toward a grassy flat a hundred yards or so from the wagon. Left alone for a few minutes, Rusty instinctively began to cast about for something he might appropriate safely and with profit to himself. Had he been asked why he committed petty thefts, he would have been at a loss to give a reason. Possibly it was because such things had always been expected of him. Unguarded goods were legitimate plunder, according to the code under which he had been brought up, and he merely ran true to form whenever he found himself alone with movable chattels. The ethics of honest conduct were beyond his grasp.

His eye fell upon the coats the men had left. He wondered if the pockets contained anything worth taking. It was not likely, he thought, that any sane man would be foolish enough to throw his valuables around so carelessly. If so, he deserved to lose them.

The wagon was between Rusty and the men at the loading pens, and the moment the cook was out of sight, he began a hasty exploration of pockets. Almost the first garment he touched was a gray coat he had seen on the back of the middle-aged foreman. Nimble fingers darted swiftly into an inside pocket and closed over something bulky. He

withdrew his hand quickly, to stare with bulging eyes at the thick wallet of red leather he held. It was stuffed full of something soft and yielding. With fingers that trembled a little, Rusty undid the fastening and took a peep at the contents. He gasped when he saw the green corner of a bill. He refastened the wallet as quickly as he could and looked about guiltily.

The best he had hoped to find was a few nickels and dimes that he might secrete in the toe of his shoe, but here he found himself in possession of perhaps hundreds, or even thousands of dollars in currency. This was no petty prize of a quarter or half dollar snatched from a child and made way with in a moment. Besides, there were no crowds of people wherein he might lose himself. He was wary; he must not be caught with the wallet in his possession, nor was he willing to return it to the pocket from which it had come. He had never done so with the trifles he had purloined in times past, why do so now?

His movements still hidden from the other men by the wagon, he crouched low and took a dozen quick steps. He looked back and saw that he might go a little farther without being seen. He crawled five or six yards to a mesquite clump. With his hand, he scraped away the loose sandy soil about the exposed roots, thrust the wallet into the little cavity, and covered it quickly. Barely three minutes had elapsed before he was back at the wagon. With hands in his pockets, he walked out in full view of any who might chance to look his way.

He grinned at his own astuteness; he had done a bold thing and was rather proud of his cunning. The cook, returning with the horses, could see him standing there where he had been five minutes before; a search of his person would reveal nothing incriminating. His first impulse had been to take his leave at once, strike out along the railroad track, and return after dark to recover the wallet he had so shrewdly hidden. But on second thought he discarded that plan. Precipitate flight was always the most convincing evidence of guilt.

No, he would remain right where he was until the others left, or as long as he might consistently do so. Such action would be disarming. The loss would probably be discovered before that time, and a search of his person would prove him innocent. The owner would think he had lost it elsewhere. On the other hand, if he should be caught in flight, he might be put through the third degree and forced to tell the truth.

The train with the loaded cattle cars departed, the riders caught up their mounts, and prepared to leave, the cook had his horses harnessed and hitched to the wagon. The boss of the outfit, the owner of the thick wallet, rode alongside the wagon. Rusty's heart beat a little faster as he waited for the man to reach for his coat and thus discover the theft. But no such thing happened. When he had given orders to the cook, the man turned to Rusty.

"Say, young feller, how'd you like a job?" he asked.

Rusty regarded the bluff cattleman with suspicion. So that was the game, to feed him first, then try to make him work on some farm. Well, he'd show him it could not be done. A job of any sort was last on Rusty's list of wants. But perhaps this was but a snare to catch him, with the pocketbook for a decoy. Rusty hesitated; he was always wary.

"Give you forty a month and found to herd sheep," the man continued. "Easy job, won't take you no time to catch on. Sellin' off the cattle on the home range an' runnin' sheep, need another herder. Jump on the waggin an' ride in to the ranch. If you don't like the job you won't have to stay. You

can ride in to town first time the waggin goes for grub."

Rusty's suspicion was but partially allayed, yet that idea of applying for work was not bad. As soon as the theft of the wallet was discovered, his movements would doubtless be watched, he might be nabbed in the act if he came back for it to-night or within the next few days. He must be content to wait.

"Sure, yes; I was lookin' fer work," he replied, and instantly recognized his decision as a diplomatic move. It was a step farther toward diverting suspicion, and again he told himself he had nothing to lose.

Rusty climbed to the seat by the side of the driver, who clucked to his horses. Thus began the drive to the Box M Ranch. The driver was feeling in his pockets for something. Presently he reached under the seat and brought out a box containing half a dozen sacks of tobacco. He selected one and put the others back. When he had rolled a cigarette, he passed the tobacco and papers to Rusty for a like purpose.

"Feller uses a heap of smokin' out on a trip. I'd have swore I had nigh a full sack in the chuck box, but I couldn't find it. Reckon some o' them cow-punchers got it," the man lightly observed.

Rusty chuckled inwardly as he took the proffered tobacco. He would save the pilfered sack against future needs. Awkwardly he rolled a cigarette, trying in vain to imitate the deft manipulation of his companion, who used only one hand while he drove with the other.

The cook was loquacious. His talk was chiefly of things about which Rusty knew little and cared less.

"Ed Martin has lost a lot o' money right lately," the man ventured after a short pause.

Rusty involuntarily jerked his head around at the mention of lost money. He had already learned that the middle-aged boss was owner of the Box M Ranch, that his name was Ed Martin, and that the cattle loaded at the pens were some he had just sold.

"Lost it on cattle since they went down so low," the cook explained after a moment. "Reckon he figgers to make it back runnin' sheep; him that ain't never done nothin' but raise cattle! Wool has gone high, and this range between the ranch and the railroad track ain't fit fer nothin' but sheep. Ain't no cattle on it to speak of, not since old Ed sold 'em off to pay his debts. Allow what few cattle he's kept will be run over toward Dry Fork, t'other side of the ranch, and the sheep out this way. They don't mix to do no good, cattle and sheep don't. Funny thing, they usta have cattle and sheep wars, but fellers would have to fight theirselves now, so many of the old-timers turnin' to sheep raisin' to keep from goin' broke."

Assured that the lost money mentioned was not that in the red-leather wallet, Rusty lost interest in the rest of the explanation. It troubled him not at all that the ranchman had lost money raising cattle, and was turning to sheep in order to recoup his failing fortunes. The difference between sheep and cattle was not quite clear in the hobo's mind.

"Them rocks out there the size of a hoss was washed there time of a big rain," the cook began after a short interval of silence, pointing to a heap of boulders that lay along the bed of what appeared to be a shallow wash, now dry and in many places overgrown with grass.

Rusty sniffed contemptuously. A flimsy yarn like that was not worth his notice. He had heard men lie before. Anybody could see they were crossing nothing more than a little ravine that would never be more than knee-deep if it rained every day. He kept his counsel and let the other man talk to his heart's content.

Apparently luck traveled with Rusty

this day. Who could say the pocketbook had not been jostled out and lost along the road? Arrived at the ranch, he was careful not to touch the coats or go near them. The cook gathered up the garments and carried them to the bunk house to be claimed by their owners when they came in.

When the ranchman appeared a little later, Rusty experienced a momentary panic. It was like listening for the clap of thunder after a flash of lightning, this waiting for the outburst following discovery of the loss. Silence was more ominous than open accusation, but Rusty betrayed none of the uneasiness he felt.

"Take you out with the sheep in the mornin' and show you how to manage 'em. Ain't got arry dog to help, but it won't be no job for a husky youngster like you to manage a bunch of lambs and ewes," the ranchman told him an hour or two later.

"But say, you got to have some different togs before you go out among the cactus and mesquite thorns," he added. "Go in the storeroom and pick out overalls and jumper, and a pair of shoes. You can find something near your size, and take anything else you see that you'll need."

Rusty grinned as he went about this outfitting. This big ranchman was certainly a simple rube. Had not even asked him where he had worked last, or if he had ever served a term in the penitentiary or jail. Foolish enough to pick up an unknown hobo and let him take whatever he choose before he had done a lick of work. No wonder he'd lost money. He was due to lose more.

For the first time in his life, Rusty saw himself arrayed in new garments from head to toe. It was with a prideful strut that he reported to the ranchman to have the items charged. This was much easier and more desirable than begging cast-off clothing; for it was no part of his plan to pay for them in work or otherwise. For some reason he could not quite understand, he took none of the small articles lying on the shelves in the room.

In the interval before supper he loafed around the bunk house. Several garments, property of herders or hay hands who were out at work, hung against the wall. From the various pockets of the garments, Rusty's nimble fingers extracted small coins to the value of almost a dollar, besides two sacks of tobacco and a pocketknife.

"Reckon I won't be in no hurry to leave a bunch of babies that leave their change layin' around like this," he muttered to himself as he pocketed the purloined articles.

Noon the next day found Rusty alone with nine hundred bleating ewes with lambs at their sides. The ranchman had gone about other affairs after giving the new herder the few simple directions he would need in caring for the flock. Ignorance of the country and fear of the unknown kept Rusty from faring farther from the ranch than need be. He would go farther another day, he told himself, eventually as far as the stock pens, where he would recover the stolen wallet with its treasure. In the meantime he must appear to be interested in the task he had been set to do.

At night the sheep were penned near the ranch house, and Rusty slept in the bunk house with the other men. Experienced herders had a camp to themselves several miles away.

"You're doin' fine fer a green hand," the ranchman declared when Rusty drove his flock in the second night. "I'm trustin' you to see they ain't none of 'em lost no time. Every one of 'em is worth money; seven or eight thousand dollars is in that band, more if wool keeps goin' higher."

A new sensation swelled within the hobo, something he could not quite analyze because it was foreign to his past environment. He had been trusted with

something for the first time, something depended on him. And that night, when he was alone in the hunk house for a little while, he did what only a short time ago would have been the height of foolishness. He quietly returned the stolen money and other articles to the pockets from which they had been taken, as near as he could remember.

But the next morning he pushed his charges out as fast as they would go, and came at noon to the limit of their grazing ground, the railroad track near the shipping pens. Although a stiff blow and a rain during the night had obliterated his tracks, Rusty was now sure of his direction. He had taken note of clumps of mesquite, hills, and ravines, and had learned how to lay a course by the sun and the distant hills that never changed.

When he came within sight of the whitewashed pens, he left his flock for their midday rest and hurried on eagerly. He would first find the ashes of the camp fire, and from that he could go unerringly to the little mesquite clump where he had hidden the wallet. He looked back uneasily, not quite sure he was not suspected. It troubled him somewhat that no news of the theft had leaked out.

But search as he might, he could find no trace of the camp fire, the place where the wagon had stood when he rifled the pockets of the coat. The wind and the rain had effectually washed out every sign, sand had drifted here and there to form scattering hummocks before the rain came to flatten them and wash the loose sand down upon the short grass.

Cursing and grumbling because unnecessary caution had caused him to delay his hunt until now, when there was nothing left to guide him to the spot, Rusty explored the base of a dozen mesquite clumps without success. There were a hundred such clumps, every one alike, within a radius of fifty yards from where the wagon had stood. After an hour he gave up the search for the present and went back to the sheep, which had begun to move about restlessly. He would begin a systematic search the following day and keep it up until he found the thing he sought.

Rusty found that herding sheep was not like working under a taskmaster. There were hours when he sat in the shade of a mesquite and watched the lambs frisk about when they were in the mood.

"Cunnin' little critters, they are," he would say to himself with a chuckle of delight at their antics. "It's more fun than a show to watch 'em. Didn't know brutes ever had fun like humans."

One day he picked up a crippled lamb and carried it as the sheep grazed homeward, bringing it at last to the pen with him at night. He doctored the injured leg and carried the little creature on other days when it lagged.

"Ain't lost arry lamb yet, have you?" the ranchman asked one night when Rusty penned his flock. "That's what I call doin' well, better'n most," he added when he knew that not so much as a lamb had been lost that first week.

But there came other days when Rusty renewed his search for the loot he hoped to find. He searched out the mesquite clumps singly and in groups, with no success whatever. He wondered if by any chance the wallet had been found and taken away from the place where he had hidden it. When he thought he had looked among the roots of every mesquite clump within reasonable bounds, he went over the ground again.

He gave up in disgust. He would be leaving now, he told himself, there was no reason why he should stay longer. Twice he started off, only to return when he looked back to see the sheep scattering hither and yon without their shepherd. He could not quite bring himself to desert them now; wolves

would get some of the lambs if they strayed off, and others would be hopelessly lost. Then he recalled that the flock had been intrusted to him; he must care for them until night. He would wait until the sheep were safely penned, then take his leave.

But that day passed and others after it until the week was finished and another begun; still Rusty did not go. He had never been quite so well satisfied in all his life; eating three meals a day and sleeping in a bed at night. He was in no great hurry to be gone. There were times when he almost forgot what had brought him to the Box M Ranch.

There were other times when he was not so well pleased with himself. Something inside, something that had never been there until now, gnawed him persistently.

"Rainy season will be comin' right off, from the looks o' things," the ranchman remarked one morning.

It was the next day, a little after noon, that Rusty heard thunder, a rare sound in that region. A small cloud hung low in the northwest. The cloud grew and spread upward, and after a little while scattering raindrops fell. Rusty drove the sheep toward a long flat, near which was a rocky ledge where he might find shelter if it came to a hard rain. Along one side of the flat ran the overgrown wash that he had crossed time and again. Just a little way above were the heaps of boulders which the cook had pointed out that first day.

Wind came with the scattering raindrops, and the sheep huddled in the lee of the rocky ledge until the blow was over. It went as quickly as it came. Within half an hour the clouds were breaking up, the sun peeped through a rift. But the rumbling noise, as of thunder, persisted. It came from the direction of the low bank of cloud that still hung in the northwest.

The rumbling increased in volume. It sounded like the roar of an approaching train; but the railroad lay far off to the south. The sheep, no longer distressed by the wind and rain, were grazing free, scattering fanwise toward the far slope. Wonderingly, Rusty walked out in the open where there was nothing to obstruct the view. He stood looking toward the head of the dry stream bed, where still lay the bank of cloud, and from whence came the roaring sound.

As he looked, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and stood staring for a moment. Then, in the grip of a superstitious fear, he turned about to flee from that which he could not comprehend. What he had seen was a solid wall of foaming, muddy water that filled the stream bed from bank to bank and eddied into the side coves as it came on. It was still a quarter of a mile away, and he could see flurries of dust started by the current of air that preceded it; dust that had not been laid by the light shower that fell.

Rusty had never heard of a cloudburst. He did not know that the little flat where he had taken refuge was but the widened bed of a stream more than thirty miles long, that in flood time it was a raging torrent, taking with it whatever lay in its path. Ten months in the year it was apt to be bone dry in the lower reaches, and often two years might elapse when there was scarcely enough flow to disturb the grass that rooted where there was enough soil to sustain it. But the little cloud that hung toward the headwaters had poured a flood into the shallow channel that could carry scarce the half of it; so that it must spread out over the bordering flats.

As Rusty turned to run, he saw there before him the grazing sheep, all unmindful of the danger that threatened. They were fairly in the path of the oncoming flood, not by any possibility could they escape if they kept on in the

direction they were headed, toward the farther slope across the wide flat.

Rusty halted in his flight, impressed by a sudden realization of his responsibility. He must get the sheep to safety, must turn them back to the near slope that lay behind them. He circled them at top speed, but already half a dozen of the leaders were far ahead of the others, halfway across the low flat. He let these leaders go, mindful that the minutes spent in running after them would be needed if he was to get the bulk of them out of the path of the flood. Better to lose a handful than the whole band.

But a sheep is an obstinate and foolhardy creature. Where one goes the others must follow. Cursing, beating, and kicking, Rusty consumed valuable minutes in getting the heady ones turned back. The first lapping waves of the downwash were about his feet when he finally got the milling sheep to the edge of the nearer slope and in a fair way to safety. At that, an old ewe, evidently thinking her lamb was out there with the half dozen bolters, started back. She splashed into the roily water, and the next moment was swept off her feet by the current. A score of others whirled about to follow. Unless checked at once, the whole flock would be swept away in a senseless stampede.

At a bound, Rusty was in water up to his waist. He caught the floundering sheep and literally flung her out upon the bank. Another and another he flung likewise as they crowded into the slack water that eddied back from the onrush. He could see that he had about checked this mad panic of the silly creatures. Shouting and shoving, he felt the mass of them yield and move toward higher ground.

Then Rusty saw from the tail of his eye a splotch of white, and caught the plaintive bleating of a lamb above the roar of water. He turned to grab at the struggling creature, which was rapidly drifting into the current. His arm was not quite long enough, and he took a step into deeper water. But where there had been only knee depth a moment before, it was now halfway to his thigh. He leaned outward to snatch at the woolly head, missed, and lost his footing.

He struggled in a vain effort to win back to land, but was hurled and tossed about like a piece of driftwood. He was sucked beneath the water, and a moment later rose strangling to the surface. He tried to shout, but his puny effort was barely audible to himself above the roar all about him. Again he was under water, and when he come momentarily to the surface he fancied he heard shouts not his own. A time came when he scarcely knew whether he floated or sank. His last sensation was as of a wire or a cord that cut into his body and tugged until it seemed about to pull him in two. Then everything went dark and oblivion descended upon him.

It was a long time after, whether days or hours Rusty could not tell, when he came to himself completely and knew that he was on his bed in the bunk house. Two of the cowboys stood awkwardly by, one of them slowly coiling a wet rope. Ed Martin himself was seated not far away.

"Lafe here roped you and pulled you out when you was goin' under fer the last time," the ranchman explained in answer to the question in Rusty's eyes. "Ain't a man in a hundred would have done wh' you did—saved nigh all that bunch of sheep from drownin'. The boys seen you from a distance, but couldn't git there in time to help you with the sheep. They was just in time to pull you out of the water, which was lucky."

Rusty was silent. He saw the ranchman bring out something from an inner pocket and hold it up to view. Rusty stared incredulously, for in the hand of his employer was the red-leather

wallet, soiled and scratched, but otherwise the same that had been hidden among the roots of a mesquite clump. The eyes of the hobo narrowed, and into them came the old look of defiance. So he was about to be confronted with his guilt!

"I owe you a heap, young feller," the rancher was saying. "Not just because you saved my sheep fer me, but account of me judgin' you harshly fer a little while. See this here wallet? Well, the day you happened along, when we was loadin' cattle at the pens, I lost it. Bein' as you was new come and a feller that was givin to changin' about frequent, I allowed maybe you'd took it. I ain't one to accuse hastily, so I went back next morning' to look. I found the wallet right by a mesquite stool, tooth marks and scratches all over it, like as if a coyote had gnawed it. Looked like he'd scratched about some, maybe tryin' to bury it like a dog does a old shoe. Coyotes is foolish like that about leather, can't hardly put it where they won't smell it out."

Rusty drew a deep breath as of relief. It seemed that he slipped from beneath a load; he was no longer disturbed by the feeling within.

"A man that treats dumb critters like you do can't be noways bad, and I'm plumb ashamed I ever had such notions," continued the rancher. "If you ain't holdin' no grudge agin' me fer it, I'd be pleased to shake hands with you. More'n that, I'd like fer you to stay and watch over them sheep long as you will. What you say, son?"

"Me? I've shed me wings; this was the place I been lookin' fer," Rusty replied with a grin, as he extended his hand to be grasped by the only man that had ever trusted him.

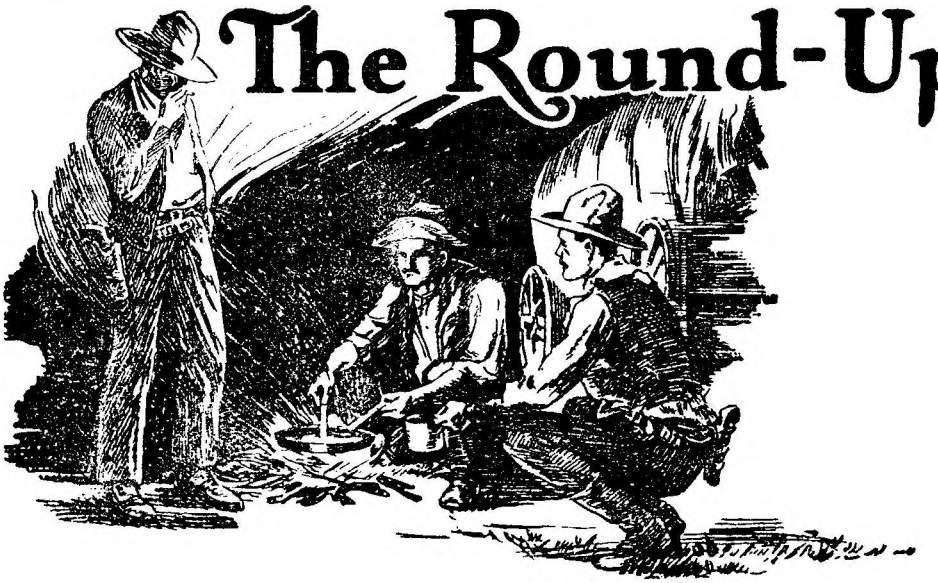
There were a lot of things Rusty might have told about himself, but all that was in the past. The future, as he saw it, was more to his liking. He had much to gain.

A REMARKABLE INDIAN PROPHECY

IT has been well said that a prophet is without honor in his own country. But here is a remarkable instance of an old Indian's prophecy coming true.

Many years ago, when Sioux City was but a trading post, an old Indian predicted that a tornado would never strike the town on account of the rivers. But, of course, the prophecy was forgotten and it was only the extreme aptness of events that caused some old-timers to remember it when a tornado recently swept the surrounding country and then seemed about to strike Sioux City itself. The great black cloud came sweeping out of the southwest spreading desolation as it passed and hurling itself onward until nothing was before it but the "Old Muddy" and the city. When the catastrophe seemed imminent, the great funnel-shaped cloud was apparently broken by an immense blast of air and the city was spared.

The Round-Up



WHERE did the foundation stock for our wonderful Western ponies and horses come from? Good old-timer, G. E. Lemmon, Lemmon, South Dakota, will give his opinion, and if there is any one who should be in the know, it's brother Lemmon.

Just canter over here, old-timer, take this here saddle, and tell 'em:

"Boss and Folks: Have read the short article in a recent issue of Western Story Magazine, entitled 'The Début of the Wild Horse.' It made the assertion that practically all wild horses in America are the offspring of domesticated animals, escaped from Cortez and De Soto, between the years 1520-1542, and that the Indians, after they became quite numerous, evidently captured and tamed them for mounts of warfare and the chase. I now beg permission to give my version, gained from personal observation in childhood and the observations of my father, who crossed the plains in '47 with the second emigrant train to cross.

"In all, my father crossed the plains seven times. He also ran a Ben Holliday Stage Station—Liberty Farm—fourteen miles from the present city of Hastings, Nebraska, from '59 to '66. After that, we went onto Union Pacific construction, following it to completion at Promontory Point, Utah, in May, 1869. I was born at Bountiful, Utah, in '57, and traveled from there to Liberty Farm by four-horse carriage at the age of two years, in 1859.

"Now I have spent my life as a cowboy on the Western and Southern plains, and I never saw or heard of a full-blood Indian in the pursuit of catching the so-called wild horse. I do not dispute that they might have done so. However, when my father first went West, he found the Indians poorly mounted, except the Cayuses of the West Coast, who likely got their mounts mostly from the Spaniards of Lower California. Father and I were convinced that the stocking of the Western plains with the so-called wild horse was brought about mostly by spirited horses from the emigrant and freight trains that were stampeded by the Indians but not captured by them, as no white man's horse likes the Indian smell, and in many instances would not submit to capture by them. Of course the spirited animals were a

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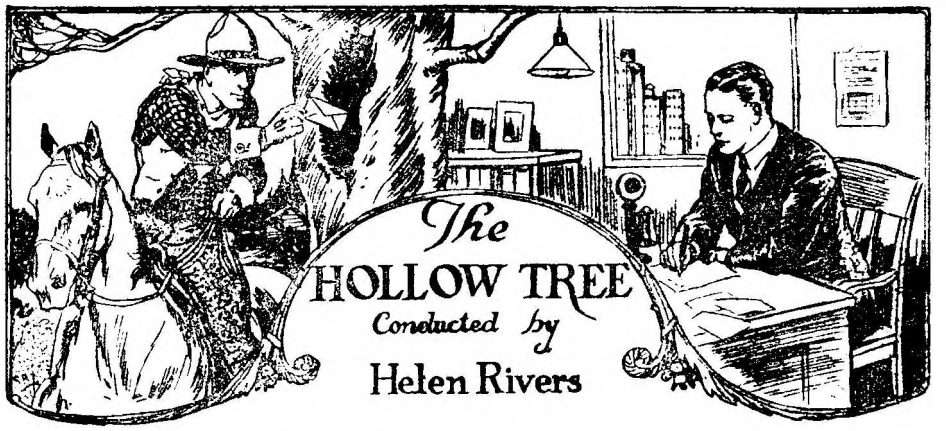


Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through the Hollow Tree.

WESTWARD of the foothills of the Mission Range is the Flathead Valley country of Montana. Stretching to the north of Flathead Lake is the Glacier country of the great Northwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: This is the famous Mission Range and Flathead Valley country, just one hundred miles south of the great Glacier district in northwestern Montana. The Mission Range stretches along the east side of the valley floor—a rangeland of ninety miles, and it is a trek of about ten miles from the Flathead Valley into the Mission Range mountains. The valley of the Flathead River is but forty-five miles long, and a little less in width. Flathead Lake is at the north end of the valley, and Polson, the county seat of Lake County, is on the shore of the lake. The Saint Ignatius Mission is at the other end of the valley. Missoula, the nearest city of any size, is to the south, in the well-known Deerlodge Valley country.

Although there are no large ranches here, as there were in Deerlodge Valley, the famous old cowboy range to the south of us, there are a number of small cattle ranches throughout the valley. In the southern end, south of Ronan about fifteen miles, is the national bison range. Here are elk, buffalo, and antelope. And in the Mission Range the hunter may go to stalk the deer, bull moose, elk, and bear. Hunting is one of the sports of the valley, and the hunters here know where to go to get their limit in deer, elk, and bear. The Indians organize hunting parties every fall, taking their families with them. They pack their tepees up into the mountains and dry or "jerk" their meat and tan the hides while on the hunting trip.

Flathead Valley is also a fisherman's paradise. Just south of Flathead Lake are the rapids—the well-known rapids that are the home of the trout. And seventeen miles to the south, in the middle of the valley, is Ronan Lake, where silver salmon are caught. Trout are caught in nearly every stream in the valley, and the streams are many, for this is the county of lakes, in Montana.

We will be glad to hear from the young married folks of the Gang. So speak up, folks, if you are interested in hearing about the Flathead and Mission Range country of Montana. LLOYD AND ESTHER HARLEY.

Ronan, Montana.

Old gold-rush town of Colorado.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My stamping ground is two miles up in the mountains of Colorado, in the famous old gold-rush town of early days. Gold was first discovered here in the two-mile-high Rocky Mountains, forty miles west of Denver, in 1859, just ten years after the famous rush of '49 to the Coast. Cen-

tral City, forty miles west of Denver, is the old gold-rush town of Colorado. It was the chief and first "find" of the West after the famous '49 stampede. Thousands of the settlers of the West were brought into Colorado by this second big stampede of the old gold-rush days.

Folks, I'd like to yarn with you-all—young and old. A. M. ROBINSON.

Box 171, Central City, Colorado.

Old cattle country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a dyed-in-the-wool Western hombre who has spent the past few years prospecting and mining in the West. At the present my pard and I are camped in northern Nevada, one hundred and ten miles from the nearest railroad. We get our mail across the line, in Oregon. This little spot is right in the middle of the old cattle country, but the sheep moved in about thirty years ago, so most of the old cowhands have turned prospectors.

If any of you folks want to know about prospecting or mining, just come ahead. Gold, silver, copper, and quicksilver are found in this part of the country.

JAMES J. BURNS.

Denio, Oregon.

Cut-over land.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: A lot of folks are wanting to get out into the open country where hunting and fishing are good and land is available. I wonder if folks know that there is a lot of cut-over land in northern Wisconsin that is suitable for farms and ranches. If any one is interested in this part of the country, I'll do what I can to help him out. J. BRANTIGAN.

1901 Twenty-first Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Would-be homesteaders.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was for many years out West, but at present myself and family are in the city. We are hoping to drift out West and take up homestead land in Colorado or southern Wyoming, and would like to hear from folks out that way who know about homesteading conditions in that part of the country.

Let us hear from you *muy pronto*, folks.

E. A. H.

25 South Street, Box 302, New York City.

"My husband and I are thinking about taking up a homestead in the West or in Canada. Will the folks who know about homesteading conditions please write to us? We'll be looking for some helpful suggestions, folks." These Gangsters are Mr. and Mrs. R. L. Kline, 129 North Elmira Street, Athens, Pennsylvania.

Trekking the Mission Range is taking the trail of the big game of the Montana mountains. Let the Mission Range hombres be your guides. Let the friend-maker badge introduce you to the pards of the Mission Range.

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 Buffalo district of Wyoming.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am interested in homesteading in the Buffalo district of Wyoming, as I understand that this range is about the best land open for entry that is suitable for dry farming and stock raising. I am planning to go to the Buffalo country within a few months, and would appreciate a few lines from some of the homesteaders who have already taken up land in that district. I know quite a bit about homesteading in general, the cost of filing, improvements, et cetera, and will be glad to pass on any information that I can in turn. Let's hear from you, homesteaders, *muy pronto*.

CLARENCE V. CROUNS.

Survey, Nebraska.

Webfoot wants a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Here is a webfoot who is looking for a pard—a pard who is a square shooter and not afraid to work. I work in the fruit, and of course I travel around a bit. It is lonesome trekking the lone-wolf trail, and I am looking for that square-shooting pard *muy pronto*. I'm nineteen, hombres.

KERMIT E. BARKHURST.

Box 90, Route B, Eugene, Oregon.

Old-time prospector wants a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have prospected for a good many years, and I know the game as the old desert rats knew it. I have found some rich mineral formation in South America, but at the present I lack the grubstake to work it. In the meantime, I have a line on a good location in one of our Western States, and I want a pard—preferably with a car—to go with me. If this hombre proves the right kind of a pard, I will go fifty-fifty on my South American adventure with him.

So, come on, pards, for there's no time to be lost. A. J. WALTER.

Route 9, Coldwater, Michigan.

Looking for a pal.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am looking for a pal, a real fifty-fifty pal, who wants to go West. He must be a lover of the outdoors, and fond of hunting and fishing. If he has a car, so much the better. He'll find me a square shooter. G. V. COLE.

42 Myrtle Avenue, Nutley, New Jersey.

"I will soon be an ex-marine, and I would like to homestead somewhere in the Southwest, preferably in New Mexico. How does one go about it? Could a hombre make a living raising sheep on a homestead, or would he be obliged to farm the land? I hope that some good homesteader in New Mexico or adjacent States will write me some information on this subject of taking up land." This Gangster is Private L. M. Garrigus, Company A, Marine Barracks, Mare Island Navy Yard, California.

"Won't some good hombre come forward and tell me the chances of being a sheep-herder? I'm twenty-one, folks. This little city of Vergennes, way up here in little old Vermont, is the smallest and third oldest city in America. Please don't overlook me, hombres, for I need your advice," says John L. Judd. His address is care of V. I. S., Vergennes, Vermont.

"I would like to communicate with some sheep-herders or cowboys in Colorado or Montana. I have traveled some, but have never been West, and am planning to go West this summer. I'm seventeen, pards." This Gangster is Kyle Trent, 113 Depot Street, Salem, Ohio.

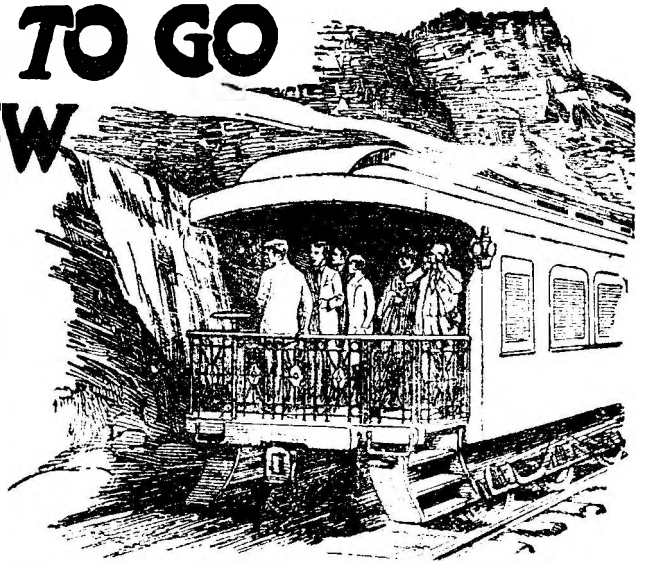
"I would like to hear from some of the Hollow Tree Gang who live in or are acquainted with the Southwestern section of the country, preferably Arizona, California, and Nevada. And I certainly would be glad to hear from some one who lives in Las Vegas, as I understand that Las Vegas is not far from where the great Boulder Dam will be constructed. Now, pals, please don't disappoint this hombre." Address the letters to William W. Allen, Overlea Post Office, Baltimore, Maryland.

"At the present I am residing in Minnesota, although at different times in my nineteen summers I have lived in various places, including North Dakota and Canada. Here's hoping my letter brings eagerly awaited results, folks." This Gangster is Bill McCue, 1356 St. Clair Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

"We are a couple of hombres who have traveled a lot in a short time, and we are also keen on all sports. We'd like to get a few pals from across the big pond." These Gangsters are Fusilier Sam McRoberts, 6945121, and Fusilier J. Hanna, 6975220, D Company, the Royal Irish Fusiliers, Akbar Barracks, Agra, U. P., India.

"I love the outdoor sports and ranch life. I have spent a few years in Canada on ranches. Some day I hope to go to California, and would like to hear from some of the Californians, especially the Gangsters living on fruit ranches. I am thirty-eight, and would like to hear from some folks about my own age." This Gangster is Emily Smith, care of Mrs. Cobb, 25 Agincourt Road, Hampstead, N. W. 3, London, England.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE



by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

IT seems to us that a great number of hombres are exhibiting a mighty keen interest in Uncle Sam's forests these days. Nor do we wonder, for these areas offer ideal vacation places to the lover of the outdoor West. Arch O., of Memphis, Tennessee, writes us that he is heading for one of these cool sequestered spots, and he is asking some questions, the answers to which I think will prove helpful to any other prospective campers in the national parks. Arch says:

"I expect to put in a long and happy vacation camping out in one of the national parks of the West this summer, Mr. North, and want to ask you some questions. Is camping free? Are there regular camp grounds that one must use, or can one pick out his own camp ground? Are there any rules which must be observed? May one cut the boughs of trees to use, say, for making beds? Is it permitted to collect dry wood for fuel? And now, if it isn't asking too much of you, would you please tell me something about the Gallatin National Forest?"

Camping is free in any part of the national forests. In some areas, improved camp grounds have been established for the convenenience of the public. Camping upon them is not compulsory, however, if other places appear more attractive. If Arch likes human companionship, he may prefer one of these camps. If, on the other hand, he is one of those chaps who goes in for solitude, he will discover many stretches of timberland entirely unimproved where he can pitch his tent and enjoy the beauties of nature in undisturbed privacy.

The chief rule to be observed by campers in the national forests is to exercise the greatest care with camp fires, and indeed with fires of all kinds. The Federal laws provide a fine of not more than one thousand dollars or imprisonment for not more than one year for carelessness with camp fires. The forest service expects that all campers

will maintain their camps in neat condition.

If Arch is camping in an unfrequented spot where there are large numbers of evergreen trees it will be all right for him to use boughs for making beds, but if he has pitched his tent in a spot where there is a great deal of camping, it is obvious that such a practice would soon destroy the beauty of the camp ground and must be forbidden. Yes, campers are welcome to all the dry wood needed for fuel or other purposes around camp, but the green trees must not be touched for tent poles or other uses unless dead material suitable for the purpose is not available within a reasonable distance.

And now for the facts about the Gallatin National Forest. This forest comprises nearly a million acres and joins the northwest corner of the Yellowstone Park. The Gallatin River, which forms one of the three great branches of the Missouri, runs through the heart of the forest, below which it waters one of the most fertile valleys in Montana. The eastern portion of the forest drains into the Yellowstone River.

We think Arch has chosen an excellent spot, for this region is noted for its rugged scenery, its big game, and fine fishing. A surfaced highway extends along the West Gallatin River from Bozeman, the forest headquarters, to Yellowstone Park, forming one of the main feeders to the western entrance. Along this highway there are excellent camping places, resorts, and hotels. There are also two permanent year-long rangers stations where information about the forests is always cheerfully given.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this region is the Petrified Forest, the first sight of which, we prophesy, will give Arch a great thrill. He will find this forest on the summit of the Gallatin Range just north of Yellowstone Park. It contains hundreds of specimens, ranging in diameter up to twenty feet and resembling our present-day coast fir and redwood.

The Northwest is mighty popular with our readers just now, whether they are looking for vacation spots or places to settle down and make a home. It is the latter quest that is taking T. O. P., of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, out to the Evergreen State. He writes:

"I've been a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for a number of years, Mr. North, and have been impressed by the accurate information which you have given to hombres asking questions about the various parts of the West. Now I'm coming to you myself for some facts about Pend Oreille County out in Washington. I'm considering pulling up stakes here and making for this region with the intention of settling down there for life. Under the circumstances I want all the information possible. To be specific: Can you tell me just where this county is? What the transportation facilities are? What the principal industries are? And won't you please add any other facts which you think a prospective settler should know."

We surely can and gladly will. Pend Oreille County is located in the extreme northwest corner of the State of Washington, bordering British Columbia and the State of Idaho. It embraces an area of fourteen hundred miles and contains six thousand inhabitants. Entering near the southeast corner, the Pend Oreille River flows almost due north, traversing the length of the county. Mountain ranges lie on either side of the river, with peaks rising as much as four thousand feet above the valley. The elevation of the valley itself averages two thousand feet above sea level.

Transportation facilities are good, for Pend Oreille County is served by two trunk railway lines, the Great Northern, and the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul. Three interstate highways—the National

Park to Park Highway, the California-Banff Highway, and the Theodore Roosevelt International Highway—converge at Newport, the county seat. This town, by the way, is an up-and-coming place, with a population of fifteen hundred.

The principal industries of the county are lumbering, dairying, farming, and mining. There are one and three-quarter billions of feet of standing timber, of which approximately four hundred and fifty million feet is valuable white pine. Many acres of logged-over lands are available for grazing purposes and the dairying industry is making good headway.

T. O. P. will find some choice valley land in Pend Oreille County where diversified farming is carried on. Considerable hay and some grain are raised. Orchards are also appearing. Fur farming is being started with conditions ideal for success. The hills contain various kinds of minerals which in time will, no doubt, be developed. In fact, one valuable mine is operating on a paying basis at the present time.

The Kaniksu National Forest, which includes an area of over five hundred and seventy square miles of county, provides a permanent scenic and recreational center for settlers. All the varieties of small game are found here, together with deer and black bear, so that for the sportsman this is a happy hunting ground. And in the many lakes and small streams of this county the angler will find several varieties of trout and game fish.

Altogether, it seems to us that Pend Oreille County offers a fair opportunity to the homeseeker who, like T. O. P., wants to make a fresh start in a new, uncrowded country. If any other hombre would like more information about this section I shall be glad to send an address from which it may be procured.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

CARTER, JAMES E.—J. E., Jr., is a darling and needs his daddy. We are desperate. Please send for us. Important letters for you held at this office. Address A. D. C., care of this magazine.

HOBBY, CARL.—Formerly of Hot Springs, Arkansas. Last heard from in November, 1925, when he was a sailor on the U. S. S. "Whippoorwill," at Honolulu, Hawaii. Have recovered from the accident. Please write to Baby S., care of this magazine.

GEESEY, HARRY.—Last heard from in Hermiston, Oregon. Information appreciated by I. B., care of this magazine.

DAY, SUSIE.—Taken from Oulagah, Oklahoma, thirty-three years ago by her father, Jim Day, when she was six years old. Information appreciated by Mollie Shinely, 311 West Maple Street, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

H. A. F.—Please write home. Polly, care of this magazine.

BOGUE, JOE.—My father. Last seen in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1917. Has several children, who are believed to be married. Am alone and anxious to find my family. Please write to Lee Bogue, care of this magazine.

SCRUBBY.—I think I know you. Please write to Brother, care of this magazine.

FREDERICKS.—I was placed in the Five Points House of Industry, 155 Worth Street, New York City. Would like to get in touch with any of my relatives. Please write to Amelia Fredericks, care of this magazine.

KITTY.—Received letter. Everybody O. K. Sorry you have been sick. Please write again to Milly, care of this magazine.

JONES, WILLIAM.—Left Louisville, Kentucky, seventeen years ago. Information appreciated by his oldest son, John, care of this magazine.

ATTENTION, SHIPMATES.—Boys who were in No. 2 Turret aboard the U. S. S. "Nevada" in 1923 and 1924, please write to Steve Beckely, 1174 Cicotte Avenue, Lincoln Park, Michigan.

CORNISH, CHARLEY.—Formerly of Redding and Anderson, California. Please write to your cousin, Jessie Ford, of Altimas, California, now Mrs. Jessie Russell, 1116 Sixty-sixth Avenue, Oakland, California.

BRETTON, LOUIS and **MARY**; and **EDMUND TISLAW.** Last heard from in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1897. Please write to Mrs. C. M. Russell, Two Buttes, Colorado.

KILGORE, DAVID PORTOR.—Fourteen years old. Was adopted from a home in Denver, Colorado, seven years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, Ralph J. Kilgore, U. S. S. "Stewart," 224, care of Postmaster, Seattle, Washington.

CAMPBELL, VIRGIL.—Twenty-five years old, and has brown eyes. Do you remember "Two Bits"? Please write to Lillian, care of this magazine.

TATE.—Stephen T. Tate had five children—Rachel, Susan, May, John, and Robert. They lived in Paris, Texas, thirty-five years ago. Information concerning them, or their children, appreciated by Mrs. Idella Tate, R. F. D. 3, West Plains, Missouri.

HUNT, OLIVE.—Twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Duluth, Minnesota, in 1922. Please write to your brother, Box 121, Cheyenne, Wyoming.

FREEMAN, RAYMOND.—Forty years old. Weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Last heard from in Rosedale, Mississippi, in 1927. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. H. H. Arnold, Box 322, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

CAIN, GEORGE, JR.—Very important. Please write to your sister, Christine, now Mrs. L. C. Perkins, Jr., 1558 East One Hundred and Fifth Street, Los Angeles, California.

TROTTER, JACK.—I need you. Please come home, or write to your wife at Tonkawa, or care of this magazine.

AHEARN, FRED.—Born near Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada. Last heard from in Bradford, Pennsylvania. Brother of John, Anna, Olive, and Marcella Ahearn. Information appreciated by John E. Hearn, 743 Parker Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts.

WIERSMA, ERNEST.—Last heard from, some time before the World War, at Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Please write to your brother, Clause Wiersma, Hollandale, Minnesota.

MEYER, EDWARD JULIUS, or **JULIUS EDWARD V. WALLENTINOTTI.**—Thirty-seven years old. Five feet, six inches tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. Formerly of Levico, Sud Tyrol, Austria. Has lived in Chicago, Illinois, and in Cleveland, Ohio. Do you remember Hattie of Warren, Ohio? Please write to Hattie Aug. S. M. L., care of this magazine.

MADELINE.—Received your letter. Still think of you. Please write to the same place, and send your address, or write to R. K. S., care of this magazine.

PLANTE, JULIA.—At one time worked in the Riverside Mills, Providence, Rhode Island. When last heard from was working in the Georgiaville Mills, Georgiaville, Rhode Island. Please write to D. D., care of this magazine.

ATTENTION.—Members of the 127th C. A. C., between 1908 and 1911, please write to W. W. Bair, 307 South Michigan Street, South Bend, Indiana.

LYNCH, JIMMIE, and **BARNEY HILL.**—Members of the 318th Engineers, Company D, A. E. F. Please write to W. W. Bair, 307 South Michigan Street, South Bend, Indiana.

HELEN, J. N.—Everything paid. Cafe sold. Please write at once to Mrs. J. N. Helen, care of D. F. Monroe, Memphis, Texas.

SPRIGGS, WILLIAM F.—Forty-two years old. Last heard from six years ago. Believed to be in the West. I am alone and sick, and I need you. Have always loved you. Please write to your daughter, Thelma Spriggs, 1 Baltimore Place, Atlanta, Georgia.

CARR, TOM A.—Last heard from in Fort Eustis, Virginia. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. M. D. Foard, 1714 Laurel Street, Columbia, South Carolina.

MARGUERITE.—Of Wisconsin. Lived with Jennie Hamilton, in Ohio, before the World War. Please write to Jimmie, care of this magazine.

BRINK, ALLEN.—What has happened to you? Boots is a year and a half old now, and is talking. Can't live without you. I won't tell any one where you are, if you will write to me. Mabel and Boots, of Hartford, Connecticut, care of this magazine.

BUTZER, GOTTLIEB.—Left home fifteen years ago. Information appreciated by his daughters, Hazel and Esther, care of this magazine.

DURANT, PAUL and **HOWARD.**—Dad died in April, 1929. Please write to your heartbroken mother, at the same address, or care of this magazine.

MARSH, ARTHUR STEPHEN.—Fifty-three years old. Last seen about nine years ago. Please come back or write to your daughter, Margaret Jean Marsh, 13 Burrows Street, Geneva, Ohio.

MARSH, HARRY ALBERT.—Twenty-nine years old. Last seen in Cleveland, Ohio, two years ago. Please write to your sister, Margaret Jean Marsh, 13 Burrows Street, Geneva, Ohio.

MUCH, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Remember our days in Miami? Please write to J. E. Kirkland, 942 Hunt Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

SEALE, GLADYS.—Of Vondado, Louisiana. Remember E. K., at Jackson? Please write to E. K., 106 East Second Street, Austin, Texas.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any one who was connected with the Dennison, Texas, Band, in 1887 or 1888, in order to prove the death of its teacher, Frank Philip Conway, so that his widow can secure a pension. Information appreciated by Mrs. Nannie Conway Newton, 631 Shaefer Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

CLARK, JAMES.—Twenty-two years old. Six feet, three inches tall. Last heard from in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, three years ago. My letters returned. Please write to your mother, care of this magazine.

G. G.—Are you lonesome? I am, too. Worried. Please write to N. 22 North Thirty-fourth Street, San Jose, California.

MAX and **CHUM.**—We are still at the old stand, waiting for news. P., Box 566, Deer Lake, Montana.

RIGLEY, KATHERINE.—Last known address was 810 East Ninth Street, Kansas City, Missouri. Please write to Short Cut, care of Mrs. L. W. Boost, 119 West Third Street, Jamestown, New York.

BONDARUK, FRED.—Dark complexion and about five feet, ten inches tall. Has a scar on his left thumb. Left home November 5, 1923. Last heard from somewhere out West, in 1925. Information appreciated by his sisters, Helen, Mary, and Jennie, care of this magazine.

FLOWERS, WILLIAM.—Please write to Ramona Reynolds, Box 232, Englewood, Colorado.

DUVAL, CLARENCE S.—Six feet tall, gray eyes, and dark hair. Formerly of Newport, Vermont. Information appreciated by his daughter, Myrtle Duval, 62 Coventry Street, Newport, Vermont.

DONOHO, HOMER C.—Eighteen years old. Dark hair and gray eyes. A small scar on each temple. Left home in May, 1926. Last heard from near Kevil, Kentucky. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. E. W. Donoho, Route 3, Mayfield, Kentucky.

PIPPIN, WHITE.—Your father and your son, Nobel, are dead. Please write to Walter, care of this magazine.

HALEY, CHARLEY.—Last heard from in Nashville, Tennessee. Information appreciated by his niece, Elsie Haley, care of this magazine.

SHOWERS, FANNIE.—Do you remember the jockey who came to the Myrtle Point Fair, in 1926? Please write to Harry Mitchell, care of this magazine.

BLAZIER, CLYDE R.—Thirty-one years old, blue eyes and fair hair. Was in the navy during the World War. Last heard from in New York City working as a salesman. Last known address was, in 1926, Hotel Colonial, 814 Columbus Avenue, New York City. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Annie Blazier, McRae, Arkansas.

ASHLEY, JAMES.—Please write to your mother, Mattie Bryan, care of J. W. Simmons, Box 361, Montpelier, Idaho.

PARKER, ERNEST and **FRANCES.**—At one time ran a cafe in Boise, Idaho, and, later, one in Kansas City, Missouri. Last heard from in 1919, when they were running a delicatessen in Utah. Have one daughter, Frances, who is about seventeen years old. Information appreciated by an old friend, Paul G. Stevens, Box 128, Centerville, Washington.

H. V. L.—No one wishes you harm. G. E. B. well and is in the third grade. Misses you. Dad and I are not very well. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

MILTON.—Your silence is breaking mother's heart. Please write to her, or to your sister, Laura E. Bell, care of this magazine.

WILSON, TEX.—Do you remember the boy who was with you when you were with the Lu-Clar Vaudeville Show, in Montana? Please write at once to Edward R. Gune, 809 South Noland Street, Independence, Missouri.

PHIPPS, JOE MORRIS.—Twenty-eight years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. When last heard from, in March, 1921, he was leaving Akron, Ohio, for Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Victor Keene, 193 Alexander Street, Akron, Ohio.

HANSON, PETE and **FLORENCE.**—Pete was last heard from in Kimball, South Dakota, in 1911. Florence's maiden name was Brayton. Please write to your old friend, Mrs. Pauline Parsons Stephenson, Route A, Box 115, Cupertino, California.

DAVIS, MRS. O. V.—Last heard from in Houston, Texas, in 1926. Information appreciated by her brother, L. F. Hunt, Box 678, DeRidder, Louisiana.

LADUE, JENNIE and **EMERY.**—Last heard from at Dekalb, Illinois. Please write to your brother, Charlie, care of this magazine.

BRUNQUIST, EDWARD.—Born in Kewanee, Illinois, nearly sixty years ago. Last heard from in Alaska, ten years ago. Please write to your brother, Merle E. Thompson, 2423 Eleventh Street, Rock Island, Illinois.

PEIRCE or **PEIRSON, GODLIE MAE.**—Twenty-seven years old. Five feet, nine inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Formerly of Coon Rapids, Iowa. Last seen in Omaha, Nebraska, in November, 1922. Information appreciated by Antoinette Christina Schneboyer, Elbert, Iowa.

COOK, FLOYD.—If you still remember your little friend of 1922, please write to E. H., care of this magazine.

ELSTON, JIM and **ROSE.**—Last heard from in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1926. Have bad news for you. Please write to J. E. Winans, care of Hackett's Store, Fiftieth and Brighton Avenues, Kansas City, Missouri.

BENJ.—I need you now. Please write to your mother, care of this magazine.

GARLICK, CLYDE W.—Please write at once to your brother, Winifred, care of this magazine.

McCLENDON, ROBERT.—Son of Marie Tolliver of Hollywood, Alabama. The father of Eugene, Carrine, and Robbie Lee McClendon. Last heard of in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Information appreciated by Eugene McClendon, 1900 Jackson Avenue, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

PRICE, CLIFFORD.—Thirty-nine years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, dark hair, hazel eyes, and fair complexion. Weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Last heard from in Westwood, California, in 1926. Information appreciated by Mrs. Emma Price, Box 75, Copperopolis, California.

POPE, B. M., or **BARNEY FOLK.**—Fifty-nine years old. Light hair and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Last heard from, several years ago, in Yakima, Washington, in the lumber business. Have good news for him. Please write to Mrs. Helen F. Harper, 623 North Twelfth Street, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

HYDE, ED.—Last heard from in Denison, Texas. Information appreciated by M. Briscoe, Route 1, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

BISHOP, JAMES.—Born in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania. Was in Battery K, at Fort Hamilton, New York, in 1892. Information appreciated by Charles H. Bishop, Hospital, French Camp, California.

JEWEL, HENRY.—Twenty-nine years old. Five feet, five inches tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. Weighs about one hundred and twenty-five pounds. Last heard from in Vernon, Texas, in January, 1927. Jack and I are both married. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Willie Malcom, Route 1, Box 26, Gurdon, Arkansas.

NOLAN.—Information concerning the descendants of Patrick Nolan, who left Menagh, County Tipperary, Ireland, about fifty years ago, appreciated by Cousin, care of this magazine.

EMERSON, RALPH WALDO.—Twenty-nine years old. Formerly of Chelan, Washington. Served four years in the United States army. Last seen in Oregon. Information appreciated by Marjorie Emerson, 555 South Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

McKENNA, JAMES.—Forty-one years old. Formerly of Glasgow, Scotland. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by Mother, care of this magazine.

DOLAN, LEROY.—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, four inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Information appreciated by W. Burch, 297 Adelphi Street, Brooklyn, New York.

KIRKWOOD, LEW.—Believed to be in Bluffton, Indiana. Ten years is a long time, and now happiness is just a memory. Do you remember April, 1920? Please write to your old pal, Fritz, care of this magazine.

INMAN, FAN.—In Toronto, Canada, in 1917. Please write to F. J. W., care of this magazine.

BABCOCK, FLORENCE.—Was in Syracuse, New York, and in Troy, New York, in 1902. Knew M. Slater. Information appreciated by Bessie, care of this magazine.

GILLESPIE.—United States war veteran. Was in France in 1917, and in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1919. Please write to F. J. W., care of this magazine.

SLATER, MARGARET and **FRANK; BAKER, ETHEL** and **FRANK.**—Were in Syracuse, New York, in 1902-03. Please write to Bessie, care of this magazine.

VENNER, MARIE and **FRANK.**—In Troy, New York, in 1901, and in Brooklyn, New York, in 1902. Please write to Bessie, care of this magazine.

WILLS, or **WILKES, ELIZABETH.**—Knew Marie Bernard in Troy and Cohoes, New York, in 1902-03. Please write to Bessie, care of this magazine.

McGUIRE, BERT.—We are worried. Have important news for you. Please write, as soon as possible, to your Sister, care of this magazine.

TAGGART, BENJAMIN.—Sixty years old. Five feet, nine inches tall, and light complexion. Left arm paralyzed. Please write to Sarah Taggart, 2 East Peach Street, Bozeman, Montana.

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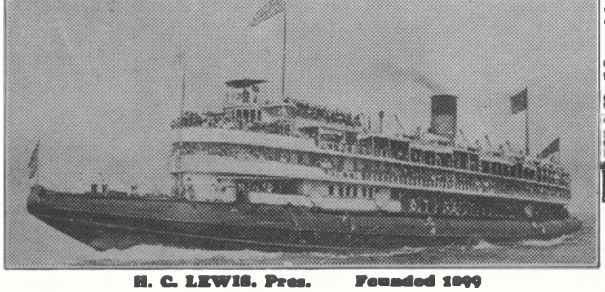

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