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EVERY WEEK

NOV. 21, 1925

Western Story Magazine

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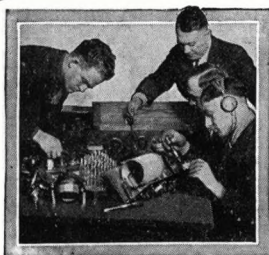


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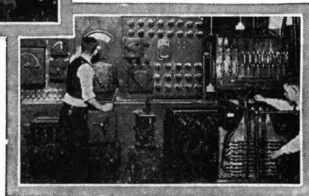
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Vol. LVI

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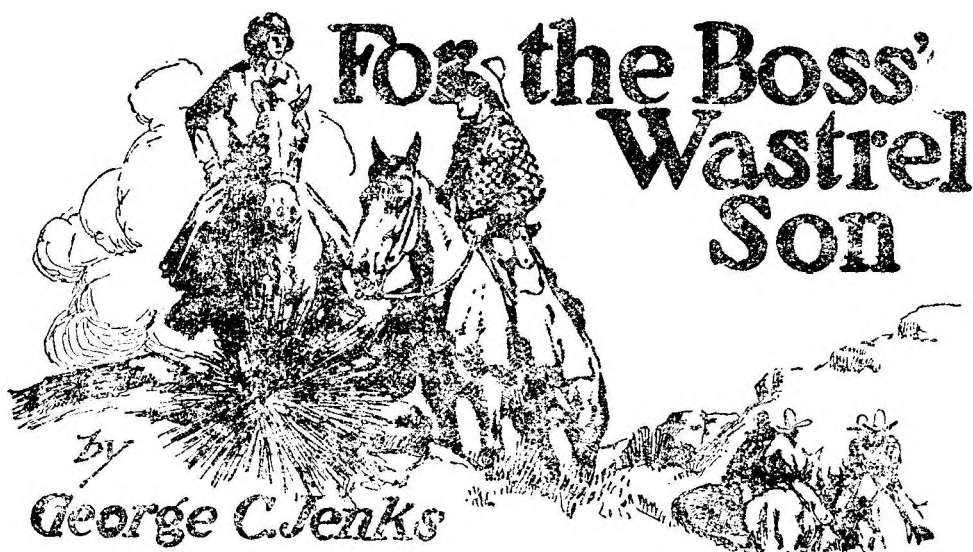
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EVERY WEEK

Vol. LVI

NOVEMBER 21, 1925

No. 4



Author of "A One-man Ranch," etc

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST ROUND.

IN the luxuriously furnished private office of Richard Chalmers, the "cattle king," on the fourth floor of a substantial building in Wyoming's capital city, Cheyenne, a slim-built young man, whose well-cut clothing and rather languid demeanor suggested inherited wealth and city breeding, was talking to a pretty girl about whose dainty figure was the unmistakable aura of the West.

From the large window near which

they stood they had a perspective of many acres of wooden pens, steep chutes, twisting runways, huge slatted railroad cars and snorting locomotives, which, with thousands of bellowing, head-tossing cattle from the Western plains, made up Cheyenne's great mart for beef-on-the-hoof known as the stockyards.

"I don't believe you mean it, Mr. Boyd," said the girl, coolly interrupting a somewhat feverish outburst.

"But I *do*," he insisted. "Why shouldn't I?"

"You're too lazy, for one thing."

Larry Boyd opened his mouth to make a violent denial. Then he closed

it and regarded the young woman with hurt dignity.

"Besides, you *wouldn't* like it," she added. "Before you'd been on the ranch a week you'd be pining for New York, or Paris, or wherever you'd intended to go before you took this wild notion to become an amateur cow-puncher."

"I'm not an *amateur* cow-puncher," he interrupted. "I rode the range in Texas two seasons, and I can stick to the saddle on a fighting bronco or whirl a rope as well as—as——"

"As an *amateur*." She finished the sentence for him with a mischievous laugh. "But of course I don't want to reflect on your ability as a cowboy. I am only reminding you that your experience in that line has been nothing more than a summer vacation. You admit you never had to *work* in your life. If you went out to the Chalmers ranch now, you'd be expected to rough it with the other men."

"And who says I'm afraid to rough it?" demanded Larry hotly. "I know what I'll have to do, and I'm going to see it through."

"But *why*?"

"Why?" he repeated, with unmistakable emotion, as he leaned forward and tried to look into her eyes. "Haven't I let you see why I am anxious to go out to the ranch where you live? Look here, Valerie! If I haven't made it plain enough, I'll say right out now——"

She drew quickly away from his extended hands. "Don't talk nonsense, please," she said coldly.

He was about to seize her hands when there came a sudden interruption.

A big, masterful man, well on in years, whose sharp eyes under their shaggy brows gave the impression of taking in everything at a glance, was striding across the room to a swivel chair behind the great, mahogany flat-top desk. It was Richard Chalmers.

"Well, Larry," he said in a booming voice, grabbing some papers from the desk in the manner of a busy man of affairs. "You are going to tackle the job, I understand. Well, here's the contract. Sign here."

Larry Boyd was the son of Richard Chalmers's only sister, but a man does not become a cattle king unless he is punctilious in business transactions. So Lawrence Boyd bound himself in writing to work faithfully as assistant foreman on the V N cattle ranch in northwest Wyoming, at a monthly salary which was fair—although Larry had been accustomed to spending that sum in socks, neckties and gloves—for the period of twelve months from date.

"Tell your father to come in, Valerie," was Chalmers's curt order. "He is in the next room."

"She don't need to, Mr. Chalmers. Here I am."

A wiry-looking man of about fifty, in the dark-flannel shirt and high-heeled boots of a range rider, with a gaudy necktie and light coat in deference to city custom, had sauntered in. He swept off his Stetson and fixed steady blue eyes on Chalmers. He was Grant Burrows, foreman of the V N.

"All ready to go back to-day, Grant?"

"Makin' the ten train." Burrows, like his employer, was direct of speech. "Aim to hit the ranch before sun-up."

"Very well. Now, about my son. You don't seem to be able to handle him."

"How kin I?" broke in Burrows. "He's the boss; I'm only foreman. I have to take his orders."

"Even when he's drunk," put in Chalmers coldly.

"Alvin is not a drunkard," suddenly interrupted Valerie indignantly.

"Thar ain't a man on the ranch can tell when Alvin Chalmers is drunk," was the dogged reply. "He kin allers ride and swing a rope."

"You see him drinking, don't you?" asked Chalmers, crushing Valerie with a look.

"Shore! He don't make no secret o' that. But his tongue don't never get very thick, an' when he orders things done—even when I know they ain't right—they has to be put through pronto."

"If they *weren't* put through—then what?" demanded Chalmers a trifle scornfully.

"Alvin is a inch over six feet," returned Grant Burrows. "He weighs nigh two hundred and knows how to handle his fists. He kin lick any man on the ranch an' he'll fight at the drop of the hat."

"Hear that, Larry?" Richard Chalmers turned to his nephew.

"Is that the way Alvin runs the ranch—by knocking everybody's block off?" asked Larry carelessly.

"No," answered Burrows. "He doesn't have to—*now*."

"I get you," said Larry. "He gave one or two in the outfit a thrashing, and the result is that everybody jumps when he gives an order. H'm!"

"Meanwhile," interrupted Chalmers, with a frown, "the ranch is going to the devil. That's why I'm sending you there—to help Grant to hold it back—if you can. You will be my personal representative. I'll back whatever you do."

Larry nodded. "Let me understand this clearly, Uncle Richard. In what way is the ranch going to—er—the dogs? Mutiny among the men?"

"The trouble is," replied Richard Chalmers, ignoring the last question, "that our cattle is being stolen literally by the thousands, and we can't trace them. Of course brands are easily changed. But that isn't all of it. Bunches of steers vanish from the range and are never heard of again. It happens that I have facilities for keeping a general eye on the stock-

yards in all cities east of the divide, and would know if a lot of my cattle were brought to any one of them within a reasonable period. But they do not show up. They don't go West, either. I'm watching that end of it."

"Thousands of cattle being stolen?" murmured Larry thoughtfully.

"Yes. I mean that. The V N is one of the biggest ranches in the country."

"These stolen steers might be driven over the border into Mexico, don't you think? No?" he added as Chalmers shook his head positively. "And you blame Alvin for lack of vigilance——"

"For drinking and neglecting his business!" broke in Chalmers angrily. "I have told you that is why I'm sending you out there."

"I see. I'm to grab his horns and bulldog him into righteousness?"

"Put it that way if you like," was the careless reply. "Think you can do it? Burrows admits Alvin is too much for him."

"I can try," returned Larry, while the girl flushed angrily.

"That'll do. You say you want a few months on a ranch to get you limbered up. This job ought to do it. You haven't seen Alvin since you were both little children, I believe?" remarked Chalmers.

"I hardly remember him," was the answer. "But I dare say we can get along together."

"Whether you do or not is of little importance," was the cattle king's rejoinder. "What I want is to know where all those cattle are going to, and why that son of mine doesn't stop this infernal rustling. The first time he swings off the trail and lets drink interfere with his efficiency, take him by the neck and try to club sense into him."

Larry Boyd was silent, and Chalmers, turning to Grant Burrows, asked:

"How many of those crossbred steers

of ours passed through the eastern stockyards since Monday?"

"A thousand head," was the foreman's answer. "That is, with *our* brand," he added significantly. "A bunch of two hundred head of the same sort of critters—at least, you couldn't tell the difference lookin' at 'em—went through Chicago last week. But they weren't branded V N, and the earmarks looked ragged, as if they'd been changed."

"Uh-huh! Well, we won't talk about it here. Walls have ears in a building like this. But I look to you and Boyd to clear up the mystery, if Alvin can't do it." He glanced at the clock. "You only have twenty minutes. Good-by, Larry!"

He shook hands with his nephew, waved carelessly to Valerie and her father, and in ten minutes Larry sat in a train in the big Union Pacific depot, with Grant Burrows by his side and Valerie in the next seat in front.

Larry Boyd would have preferred it if Valerie had been in the seat with him. But at least he could look at her steadily from behind, which was almost as satisfactory, after all. Besides, there was nothing to prevent his leaning forward to whisper in her ear all the way to Rawlins.

It was at this famous old cattle town that they left the train, to start on a long ride through rough, broken country to the V N ranch.

The young man couldn't flatter himself that he had made much headway with the girl on the trip so far.

Everything in the way of clothing and equipment Larry would want on the ranch he bought in Rawlins. So, when he threw his new saddle upon the white-eyed roan Grant Burrows had ready for him, and drew the cinches tight while adroitly avoiding the bared yellow teeth of the man-eating cayuse, one would hardly have recognized in the active young cowboy, the lounging,

fastidiously attired clubman who had signed that contract in Richard Chalmer's office in Cheyenne.

Larry surely may be pardoned if he strutted a little before Valerie when, having finished saddling, he waited with the bridle rein over his arm until Burrows should give the word to mount.

He tried to persuade himself he detected an admiring sparkle in her eye as she vouchsafed him a side glance. He felt that a few looks like that would repay him for the months of hard work he anticipated on the V N—even if he had not desired the work for its own sake. He would have given a great deal to be sure he interpreted that glance correctly.

For it may as well be explained here, once for all, that Larry Boyd believed himself head and ears in love with Valerie Burrows, although he had known her less than a week. He was a highly susceptible, impulsive young man.

The girl had come down from the ranch with her father, who was in Cheyenne, to see the thousand head of cattle he had mentioned safely delivered at the stockyards. Then Chalmers' private stenographer fell sick, and Valerie, having taken a commercial course as part of her education, filled the emergency for several days. Larry, on a visit to his uncle, had seen and talked to Valerie in the office. That was the whole story.

What chance the athletic, good-looking, young millionaire had with the high-spirited, ranch-bred girl was, so far, Valerie Burrows' own secret. He couldn't say, friendly as she was, that she had ever given him encouragement.

The first peep of the sun next day was rolling back the mists from the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains, when Valerie, looking daintily efficient in short skirts, chamois leggings, silver-laced blue bolero, silk handkerchief about her slim neck, and a gray som-

brero, from beneath which her shining hair streamed enticingly, galloped up a twisting path. She reached a lofty pinnacle where only a sure-footed Western pony could have saved himself from going headlong into the cañon.

The morning vapors were still thick, and for a few moments the girl was not quite sure of what she believed she saw as she stared first in one direction and then in another. She called to her father in a sharp whisper:

"Dad, come here!"

Grant Burrows, who, with Larry, was some distance down the perilous trail which wound its way up the face of the cliff, slipped from his horse and climbed to where stood his daughter.

As he joined her, Valerie pointed to the southeast. Her father ripped out an oath. There was a moving cloud of dust in a distant draw.

"What's the—aw—trouble, Burrows, old top?" asked Larry, at his elbow.

Although Larry Boyd was now outwardly a cattleman, some of the aristocratic drawl which suggested Newport and Fifth Avenue, as well as Piccadilly, still clung to his voice, and Burrows replied with irritated asperity:

"What is it? Why, it's another raid on V N cattle! That's what it is! We've got to git them back, and likely 'll be in the smoke! You're wearin' a gun. I hope you have nerve enough to use it."

"You mean there's to be a fight?" Larry's usually sleepy eyes blazed, and his voice rose sharply. "Well, why don't we get after them?"

Larry had already turned to go down to his horse, which stood, bridle trailing, some fifty feet below, when Burrows gripped his arm, saying:

"Hold on, Boyd! I beg your pardon for what I said. I believe you're all right. But here comes Alvin Chalmers down the cañon, and he's the boss. He must have heard of the raid or he

wouldn't be here. It's up to him. We'll go and meet him."

The young man, in the ordinary dress of a cowman, who came rocketing along on a buckskin horse over the dry bed of the cañon, sat easily in his saddle, although Larry, a seasoned horseman himself, wondered why he swayed so much as he rode. As they came close, Larry could make out his face in the increasing daylight, and noting the sagging mouth, the rather vacant stare in the blue eyes, and the hectic spots that showed through the tan on his cheeks, he believed he understood the swaying.

"Hello, Burrows!" His voice was shaky although he was fighting to make the tone dignified. "Back from Cheyenne, eh? And Valerie, too?" He swept off his hat, but his grasp was uncertain and it slipped out of his fingers. "'Xcuse me!" he mumbled.

Drunk as he evidently was, he was too accustomed to riding to find any difficulty in dropping from his saddle and recovering his hat.

In doing so, however, he let go of his bridle without taking the precaution of throwing the reins over his horse's head so that they would trail on the ground. The buckskin, with the usual cunning of a cow horse, took instant advantage of the neglect and had made a jump to get away and have a rollic of freedom, when Larry quickly uncoiled his lariat and brought him up short with a tightened loop over his neck.

It was a skillful cast—for Larry had not only paid particular attention to handling his rope during his two seasons as a cowboy in Texas, but had kept up his practice since. The surprised cayuse, after kicking up his heels as he tried to tug away, gave it up.

Larry dismounted—not forgetting to trail his bridle—and came to the buckskin hand-over-hand on his rope.

Just as he did so, a hand was laid heavily on his shoulder and the thick

voice of Alvin Chalmers barked angrily:

"Come away from my horse, you! I don't allow any man to put a hand on my bridle! And I can lick the hombre who whirls a rope on a cayuse of mine!"

Suddenly Alvin Chalmers aimed a blow at Larry's face. Larry Boyd, a scientific boxer and skillful wrestler, dodged the blow, and at the same moment threw one arm across his assailant's chest. Then, with an expert "back heel," he laid Alvin Chalmers flat upon his back.

It was the first round and honors were easy.

CHAPTER II.

A MATTER OF NERVE.

FOR barely two seconds was Alvin on the ground. He jumped to his feet with more alacrity than might have been expected considering that he was manifestly under the influence of drink, and curiously regarded the smiling cowboy in the new clothes who was now deliberately coiling his lariat.

There was a moment of silence. Then Alvin Chalmers broke into a laugh.

"Say! That was a neat twister of yours," he exclaimed good-humoredly. "I'd like to learn that way of tripping a man. Who the blazes are you, anyhow?"

Larry understood perfectly that it was the alcohol which had loosened the tongue and evaporated the wrath of the young man before him. But he answered as gravely as if he believed Alvin Chalmers to be cold sober:

"I came from Cheyenne with Grant Burrows, to work on the V N. Mr. Chalmers sent me. I'm to be Burrows' assistant."

"Oh, that's it, eh?" interrupted Alvin. "You are the new man my father wrote me he was going to send. I don't see what we want with another fore-

man. Dad said he'd send a good man, but he didn't tell me his name."

"Probably that was because he hadn't made up his mind when he wrote who the man was to be," suggested Larry. "I'm Lawrence Boyd. You and I used to know each other when we were kids."

"Boyd!" repeated Alvin vaguely, as his befuddled brain went through a little convulsion. "Boyd! Why, we must be cousins!"

"That's the way I figure it," was the smiling reply. "We used to play together in the attic in your house in Chicago. Remember that attic?"

"Do I?" responded Alvin, with an alcoholic grin. "Sure I do. So you're little Larry Boyd! Well, well!"

Considering the situation in a confused way for a few moments while absently he took Valerie's gauntleted hand, he broke the silence with:

"But don't ever forget, Boyd, that I can—*hic*—handle my own horse. At any time, day or night, I can ride, rope or fight with any man along Powder River. So take my advice, Boyd, and don't lay a hand on anything of mine again unless I give you the word. We're going back to the ranch house. Come on, Valerie!" There was a proprietary note in Alvin's voice that Larry didn't like.

The girl had made no resistance to his taking her hand. Indeed, she had permitted it to remain there, as if it were not unusual for them to go hand in hand. Now, half drunk as he was, Alvin Chalmers bent his knee for her to step on in mounting her pony. Then he swung smoothly into his own saddle, and, with Valerie by his side, went galloping up the draw, still swaying a little.

Larry Boyd, with a rather sharp twinge of jealousy in his bosom, hurried after them with Burrows. If Larry wondered why they didn't at once go after the thieves, he said nothing. There was time enough for him to act

after he saw what Alvin planned to do in the matter.

The cattle of the V N ranged over a stretch of broken country along the south fork of Powder River, in the Big Horn foothills.

Richard Chalmers, who at the beginning of his business career had lived in Chicago, with extensive interests in the stockyards, had bought the Wyoming ranch long years before when he decided that he wanted to live away from the city and become an active ranch owner.

For years he managed the V N personally and raised cattle, including a large herd of valuable cross-bred steers that were his speciality, and in which he held practically a monopoly.

Later he tired of ranch life and moved to Cheyenne, where he believed he could make much more money in manipulating the cattle market than if he remained a mere ranch owner. He had always been an ambitious, aggressive business man.

Through his native shrewdness, plus his almost uncanny knowledge of the intricacies of the stock-raising industry, Richard Chalmers was now a millionaire several times over, but he never relaxed his personal interest in the ranch which had laid the foundation of his fortune.

He always knew how many thousand steers he ought to have grazing on the far-flung range, and he kept a close count on his cows and calves, as well as of his small, but precious, group of thoroughbred bulls. This personal supervision he had felt to be a business necessity when he had only a hired stranger to act as resident manager, and he kept it up after his only son was old enough to take charge. It was this habit of vigilance, among other things, that had made Richard Chalmers a cattle king.

It was broad daylight when they came with startling suddenness upon a broad

expanse of level plain, that stretched to a great extent on one side. On the other side the winding creek, under the cottonwoods, led past the V N ranch house, only a few hundred rods away.

"Jumping Jupiter!" burst out Alvin, who was ahead.

The trees hid the house from Larry's view at first. But when they came closer he saw that it was a commodious, comfortable-looking residence. It had the usual wide veranda, and the bunk house, cook house, barns, and the extra large horse corral, betokened a ranch which raised immense herds of cattle and did a greater business than most of its neighbors.

All this Larry took in at one sweeping glance, hardly knowing that he had done so.

What really engaged his attention were two horses, with a limp man tightly roped across the saddle of each, and half a dozen low-talking cowboys busily untying the unconscious riders to carry them to the veranda. No wonder Alvin had cried out!

Larry was out of his saddle and running forward. But he did not get to the milling group before Alvin. The ride through the cañon seemed to have partly sobered the young man. He pushed his way through.

"Jake Deane!" he exclaimed, looking into the face of one of the two men hanging across their saddles. "Shot, eh?" He placed his hand on the unconscious man's chest. "His heart is beating. Not badly hurt, I should say. How was it, Alamo?"

"Five hundred steers gone——"

"I know that," interrupted Alvin. "What did I go riding down the cañon for this morning but to get a line on them? What I want to know is how Jake Deane got plugged."

Alamo was an old-time cowman, not tall, but with massive shoulders. His legs were bowed from many years in the saddle, and his leathery visage had

been tanned by wind, rains and sun heat till it had lost all resemblance to human flesh. But the twinkling eyes and wide mouth whose frequent grins revealed good teeth, were very human and made their owner decidedly likable.

"Well, I'll tell yer," he replied, hitching up his chaps with one hand and rolling a cigarette with the other. "If you'll gi' me time I'll shore expound the whole thing. In the fust place, that thar bunch o' steers you trailed through the cañon ain't the cattle what got Jake Deane an' Slim Berry into this hyar mess. It's five hundred more."

Then Alamo, in a maddening monotone, went on to tell in detail how Jake and Slim had come in to the home ranch roped to their saddles, but not hurt except for a bullet that had cut a furrow through Jake Deane's shoulder.

The old cowman had a way of flying off at a tangent now and then, and his tale was not as clear as it might have been. But it did not take Larry long to understand that Jake and Slim had been night riding in a wild part of the range when attacked. Several men who looked like cowboys—five or six—had come swooping down, and, with the expertness of old cow hands, had rounded up the steers and swept them through a narrow pass into the mountains, where a dozen twisted trails split up the herd and made it practically impossible for them to be followed in the darkness.

There were other reasons why the two line riders were forced to give up the chase. The cattle were still being herded into the narrow gorge, when two lariats came snaking through the gloom and caught both Jake Deane and Slim Berry before either knew the ropes were coming.

The loops were drawn up swiftly and the two V N men dragged to the ground.

The next experience for Jake and Slim was their being flung roughly

across their saddles with half-inch ropes holding them helpless. Then their horses, stamped by sharp cuts with a quirt, quickly headed straight for home.

"And that's all we knows," finished Alamo. "We had it from Slim. Jake didn't know nothin' much about it. Seen, Jake got a little previos when they loosened the riata from him so's they could make a neat job of hog-tyin' him. He reached for his gun, which he packs in a holster under his left arm. That might ha' been all right, only one o' them cattle-thievin' birds sees it and gives the gun a upward swipe jest as it went off. The bullet burned a groove in Jake's shoulder an' the pain made him pass out right thar. Slim kept him wide awake, however, an' takes in the whole show. You needn't bother, miss," he added to Valerie. "I kin fix him up pronto."

The two night riders were sitting side by side on the veranda by this time, while Alamo was skillfully binding up Jake Deane's wound. Both of the men were rapidly recovering from their rough experience, although the long jolting ride had almost exhausted them. Slim was the one who gave the clearest account of their adventures.

"It's the Jackson gang, of course, Alvin," remarked Grant Burrows at the end of Slim Berry's narration.

The foreman, with Larry Boyd and Alvin Chalmers, went into the spacious kitchen which opened on the veranda. "What we ought to do is to ride after them as soon as the sun goes down. They're too slick to let us come up with them in daylight."

"I reckon you're right," returned Alvin Chalmers. "Anyway, you and Boyd have got to sleep some, after riding all night. And I want you both along when I go after those fellows. Show Boyd where he is to sleep in the bunk house. He'd better turn in right after breakfast. You too, Burrows. I'm go-

ing to my room. You'd better go to yours, Valerie."

Alvin strode to a door at the back of the kitchen and disappeared. Sober he might be by now, but his bleared eyes and sagging mouth told that the effects of alcohol still clung to him. What Larry didn't like was his air of proprietorship toward Valerie.

Grant Burrows gazed fixedly at the door for nearly half a minute after it had closed behind the young manager of the V N. Then he beckoned Larry, and in a low voice, with some trace of anxiety, asked:

"Think you can put it to the test, Boyd?"

"What do you mean?"

"I heard the old man—I beg your pardon, he's your uncle—Richard Chalmers, say to you yesterday in Cheyenne, that the first time Alvin let drink interfere with his efficiency, you were to take him by the neck and club sense into him."

"Well?"

Grant Burrows regarded Larry gravely in silence for a moment. Then:

"I'm betting much more than even money that you'll have to use that club to-night."

"You mean he is likely to be drunk when we start out to run down the rustlers?"

"That's it. But, whether Alvin Chalmers is drunk or sober, somebody has to take the trail through the mountains after those cattle to-night."

"If Alvin is not in a fit condition to go he'll have to stay behind," declared Larry.

"You think it will be as easy as that?" asked Burrows doubtfully.

"I'll *make* it easy," was the quiet answer.

"He'll put up a rip-roaring fight," warned the foreman. "An' he shore is quick on the draw when his mad is up. You ain't afraid of a gun, I reckon?"

"Yes, I *am*," freely confessed Larry.

"But here's a thing I've pledged myself to see through. So I'll have to take a chance. What else can I do?"

"I'm a chink if I don't believe you have the nerve to do jest that thing!" came emphatically from Burrows.

"I *know* I have," said Larry.

CHAPTER III.

ENEMIES AT FIRST SIGHT.

THERE had been no one to overhear Larry Boyd's positive assertion as to his intended course with Alvin if occasion should arise.

Valerie might have heard, but Larry didn't think so. She had been in the arms of the buxom, gray-haired housekeeper, Aunt Martha, as soon as she had come in, and ever since had taken part in helping to get breakfast over the big cooking range at the other end of the kitchen.

Did she hear? Larry caught a resentful look from her once, and he was not quite happy as he sat down to breakfast. Perhaps she had heard, after all.

Even after the meal he carried with him to the bunk house an impression of a hostile flash of her eyes as she went out of the door, and it was some time before he could drop off to sleep. He tried to assure himself that his wakefulness was the natural consequence of the heavy snoring near him of the two men who had been attacked by rustlers. Perhaps that *was* the reason. Jake and Slim certainly were vigorous snorers.

Undoubtedly, however, the millionaire society man, athlete and globe-trotter, who had been stamped as "girl-proof" in half the capitals and fashionable resorts of Europe, as well as in his own country, had fallen hard for this ranch foreman's daughter. Perhaps it was because she kept him guessing.

For some hours men came and went from the bunk house more or less

noisily, going about their routine work around the corral, barns and stables, but through it all Larry slept peacefully until well on in the afternoon.

He might have slumbered longer if he had not been awakened by a voice almost in his ear—a voice husky from long exposure to the winds, sun and dews of the plains—saying dogmatically:

"Aw! quit chawin' the rag wi'out gittin' nowhar, Slim. I ain't blamin' you an' Jake none for lettin' them cattle stealers rope you like a couple o' six-week calves an' sendin' you home hog-tied on yer own saddles. But when you gits to tellin' me 'bout the ins-an'-outs o' the Big Horn Bad Lands, you've shore got to swing a short rope."

"We ain't sayin' nothin', Alamo, are we?" protested the voice of Slim Berry. "I on'y aims to ask how come you savvy that it's this Jackson gang what's runnin' off all this cattle. 'Tain't on'y the V. N. remember. Every brand around hyar is hundreds o' head shy."

"Shore they is," assented Alamo. He was squatting on a stool, a cigarette in his fingers, while Slim sat on the edge of a bunk opposite Larry. "And the way I know it's the Jacksons pullin' off these hyar raids is that I know Jackson's Hole—and the ole Hole-in-the-Wall, too—better'n any man ridin' in Wyomin' to-day. Take it from me, pardner, it's some o' the old Union Pacific holdup crowd that's rustlin' this cattle, though prob'ly thar's younger fellers doin' the actooal work o' runnin' them off."

Larry Boyd kept his eyes closed and lay motionless as if still asleep. But he listened intently to what Alamo was saying. The old man's garrulous talk of old days in the Bad Lands might prove to be useful.

The peculiar thing about the numerous raids that had been made in the last few months was that the cattle, when stolen, actually seemed to vanish

off the face of the earth. That was the puzzle which Larry Boyd was expected to solve. Alvin had failed to do it, but the stern old cattle king in Cheyenne had expressed faith in his nephew's ability to get to the bottom of it, and Larry was resolved that Richard Chalmers should not be disappointed in him.

"This hyar Hole-in-the-Wall," went on Alamo, "ain't Jackson's Hole, you savvy. But it ain't fur away, an' the thieves an' killers what used one knowed thar way into the other. It shorely was bad in the old days. Why, I recollect back in the eighties, when thar was forty murderers in Jackson's Hole, right hyar in these foothills an' a hundred U-nited States troopers was tryin' to dig 'em out. I knows this country, an' I was hired as a scout an' guide. I'm on'y a yearlin' at that time. All the same, I led 'em right up to the entrance of the bowl whar the gang was hidin', an' I'd shorely ha' took the soldiers right in, on'y——"

"Only what?" demanded Slim, after a pause, when Alamo showed no intention of continuing his recital.

"Why, we was ambushed," replied Alamo shortly. "The Jackson gang was hid among the rocks, and they downed twenty of the soldiers with rifles afore we could get to cover. After that, thar warn't nothin' done about the Hole, but the Guv'ment got after the thieves and killers an' redooed thar population consid'able. Yer see, they got to holdin' up trains on the Union Pacific Railroad, and that had to be stopped. Stealin' cattle is one thing, but robbin' the U-nited States mails is somethin' else ag'in, an'——"

The harsh voice of Grant Burrows broke in with a sharp order:

"If you're done lyin' for the present, Alamo, I'd like yer to come out an' ride over to Cody's Pass an' help the boys bring in them cows with the spring calves. They've got to be herded

into the south home meadow. Git a move on, now. Pull yer freight!"

"Shall I go over with him, Burrows?" asked Larry, slipping out of his bunk and beginning to dress. "I want to see all I can of the ranch, and we can't go after the Jackson gang for some hours yet."

"Thar ain't anything particular to do at Cody's," replied Burrows, in a low voice, so that Alamo wouldn't overhear. "But that old-timer never knows when to stop talking, and I wanted to get him out of the way for the present."

"From what he says, it looks as if he does know something about the haunts of the Jackson gang," remarked Larry. "I should think he might be useful to-night."

"Shore he will be useful," assented the foreman. "I ain't figuring on goin' without him. What worries me is that Alvin ain't never come out of his room since he went in, an' you'll remember he didn't eat breakfast."

"Drinking?" asked Larry briefly.

"I ain't sure. But he'd been hoisting the nose-paint in afore he came pirootin' down into the valley whar we met him, an' when he once begins to drink, he's liable to keep it up for a week wi'out stoppin', no matter what's goin' on around him."

"Well, if he isn't fit to take the trail to-night, we'll leave him where he is," said Larry coolly. "Let him sleep it off in his bedroom if he likes. I don't think his help would be of any value anyhow."

Larry and Burrows had strolled out of the bunk house and were walking along by the corral fence, when the foreman uttered an exclamation that was not altogether expressive of pleasure. He was looking at a man on horseback whose well-fitting gray coat and breeches, high boots, with glittering silver spurs, and flowing silk tie that set off the bright colors of his immaculate shirt, stamped him as one who

loved dress and had the means to gratify his taste in that way.

As the newcomer reined up his horse with a great clatter of hoofs in front of the veranda of the ranch house, he took off his wide-brimmed soft hat with a flourish. Then he showed two rows of even white teeth under his black mustache, for the benefit of Valerie Burrows, who had just come from the kitchen door.

"Afternoon, Miss Valerie!" he called out, while his restless dark eyes seemed glued to the girl's face. "Is your father about?"

"Here I am, Burr," put in Burrows gruffly. "Wonder you didn't see me."

"I reckon I was too much taken up with what I saw on the veranda," was the careless answer, as the man slowly removed his gaze from Valerie. "Your daughter looks all the better for her trip to Cheyenne." He turned to the girl. "A doubtful compliment, eh, Valerie? As if it could be possible for you to look any more attractive than you are always, just by going away to Cheyenne for a week."

He slipped from his saddle, flung the bridle over his horse's head, and had taken one of Valerie's hands before she could anticipate his intention. She snatched it away and her face flushed with anger, although she managed to force a smile.

"Sorry I can't stay, Mr. Vance," she said over her shoulder as she opened the door to the house. "But I am very busy this afternoon."

There could be no question that Burr Vance, owner of the Double Bar M Ranch, twelve miles distant, was a handsome man. His features were regular and aristocratic, his complexion clear through its tan, and his erect figure well proportioned. Moreover, he had a deep, resonant voice, and his smile had fascination for many of the opposite sex.

Men did not like him, as a rule, and

there were some women who did not care for the self-satisfied, masterful owner of the rather insignificant ranch, with its small grazing herds and its corral full of fine horses. But Burr Vance did not care who liked him. He enjoyed life, breeding thoroughbred horses and raising enough cattle not only to cover his living expenses and enable him to keep up his horse farm, but to enable him to go away frequently on trips whose direction or object he never cared to discuss. What he did was his own private business, he said.

"What do you want to see me for, Burr?" queried Burrows, his tone taking on a challenging quality. "I didn't know you were home. I saw you in Cheyenne a few days ago."

"What I came to see you for, Burrows," replied Vance, his smile disappearing, "is just this: A bunch of my cattle has been run off within the last day or two, and my men tell me you have been losing some, and that you are bringing a new man here to help you corral the thieves."

He cast a sidelong suspicious glance upon Larry Boyd, as if awaiting an introduction, but Burrows only said:

"Our new man did not come specially for that, Burr. He is here as a second foreman. The V N is a very large ranch, and Mr. Chalmers thinks it is too much for me to oversee the work of so many men as we have riding for us. What were you going to say about this cattle rustling?"

"I have word that you are going into the mountains after them to-night. I am as interested in rounding up these rascals as you and Chalmers are. So, if you don't mind, I'll ride with you and give any help I can. That all right?"

Grant Burrows would have preferred not to have Burr Vance's company in the projected chase. But he could not think of any valid reason for declining, so, with as good a grace as he could

manage, he said he would be glad to have Vance with them.

"Good! Then I'll just stay around till it's time to go. There's room in the corral for my horse, I suppose. I'd like to take the saddle into the house, if you don't mind. There's a lot of silverwork about it, and I never leave it in the outer air when it isn't in use. Might get tarnished."

With the self-assurance characteristic of him, not caring what other people might think or desire, he waited till Pete Carney, the horse wrangler, had come to slip off the bridle and put a halter on the handsome bay thoroughbred. Then he removed the gorgeous Spanish saddle with his own hands, and taking the silver-studded bridle from Carney, went up the veranda steps and into the house, without looking behind him to see how Burrows was taking it all.

"Damn his insolence!" growled Burrows to Larry. "I'm going to crack him over the head with a pistol butt one of these days. He's going in there to annoy Valerie now. He is aching for somebody to lick him."

Larry did not answer. But, thinking of the way this good-looking ranch man had grabbed Valerie's hand, he quite agreed with the foreman.

"I don't believe I'm going to like Burr Vance," was Larry's inward remark.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLASH.

FOR a few moments the foreman of V N and his new assistant stood watching Pete Carney as he hitched the thoroughbred bay to a ring in the corral fence and rubbed him down with one of the coarse cloths that he always carried with him.

Both Larry and Burrows were admirers of a fine horse, and no one could deny the beauty and evident suppleness and strength of this proud-looking bay

that Burr Vance kept for his own use. It was not until Carney was leading the horse to the corral, that the two watchers turned to go into the ranch house.

There was no one in the kitchen but the bustling Aunt Martha, and she was always inclined to resent any one coming in when she was busy.

"Where's Mr. Vance?" she repeated querulously, as Burrows put the question. "How should I know? He isn't here."

"He came into the kitchen," ventured Burrows meekly.

"I know he did," gasped out the housekeeper. "And he asked for Valerie. It's a wonder I didn't bring a skillet down on his head—all dolled up with bay rum and hair grease. What right had *he* to ask for Valerie? Anyhow, she wasn't here—in her own room. I reckon. Then——"

"Yes, Aunt Martha?" put in Burrows, as she stopped. "What then?"

"Oh, he said he was going up to see Mr. Alvin and I guess that's where he is. He went out of my kitchen back into the house. Anything else, Burrows? I've got to get supper ready and I'm all behind hand."

"Sorry to have bothered you," apologized Burrows, as he went out to the veranda. "Come on, Boyd."

"This Vance is with Alvin," remarked Larry. "Are they such close friends that he'd go to Alvin's bedroom without being invited?"

"Vance has done that before."

"Do they drink together?"

"Mebbe."

"But Vance doesn't get drunk, does he?"

Burrows shook his head positively. "Burr Vance is too cunning to let booze git the best of him. He used to be a gambler afore he bought the Double Bar M Ranch two years ago, an' gamblers don't drink as a rule."

"Where did he come from?"

"Ask me an easy one. He don't talk about hisself. This ranch he has, belonged to a old maverick named Corkey—an old-timer who had lived in Wyoming since he was a boy, folks said. Alamo believes he was in with the Hole-in-the-Wall or Jackson's Hole gang back in the Eighties. But that's nothin'. Alamo is a old liar, an' when he isn't lyin', he's dreamin'."

"Did Burr Vance know Corkey before he bought his place?" asked Larry in a thoughtful voice.

"I dunno whether he did or not. The fust I knowed about Vance buyin' the ranch was after he'd been around hyar quite a while,, scoutin' through the country between Rawlins an' Cody, givin' it out that he was in the market for a small place. Then he met up with Corkey. Him an' Corkey rode about over the range and among the rocks in the Big Horn valley for nigh a week, prospectin'-like. Then one day Corkey had gone an' Vance was the owner of the Double Bar M."

"What about the men employed on the ranch?" asked Larry.

"There was only four of 'em, an' they all stayed. Vance brought some thoroughbred horses from somewhars, an' two of the men looks after them. The other two rides herd on the Double Bar M cattle. Thar ain't never more'n a few hundred, 'cause Burr Vance sells 'em off as quick as he can."

"I'd like to see this ranch of Vance's," observed Larry. "We'll ride over there some time, if you will, Burrows."

"You kin git a good look at it wi'out ridin' very far," replied the foreman. "Ill take you up to a place whar you kin see it all spread out like a picture, an' I'll do it right now if you say so. We won't start into the mountains after them rustlers for an hour or two, an' you'll have plenty o' time."

"Thanks!" replied Larry. "We'll do it."

Their horses were quickly saddled. Then Grant Burrows led the way from the grass meadow that ran along the creek under the cottonwoods, where a few milch cows were kept for the use of the home ranch. Swinging sharply to the right, he went down a ravine, and in a few minutes was working along a rocky trail and mounting steadily upward around a towering bluff that reared itself forbiddingly within a quarter of a mile of the house they had just left.

"We don't want to go too far, Burrows," warned Larry Boyd, close on the foreman's heels. "I'd like to start after those miserable thieves as soon as the sun is down."

"That's all right," was the cheerful reply. "We'll be thar when the time comes. Ride easy around this hyar point. Thar's a drop of 'bout two hundred feet on the off side."

As he spoke, the foreman passed out of sight around a jutting crag that might have been put there for the express purpose of hurling venturesome travelers—horses, riders and all—into space, and Larry carefully guided his mountain-wise cayuse past the dangerous spot.

Almost immediately after rounding the crag, they were up on a mesa where scores of V N cattle were grazing. It was a great expanse of grass land which sloped gradually to the open range in the other direction from which they had come.

"Come over, Boyd!" called out Burrows, riding over to the edge of the precipice a few hundred yards from the place where they had reached the mesa. "Sec that line o' trees over thar to the north? That's the home ranch of the Double Bar M. You can't make out the house from hyar, but beyond the trees is whar Burr Vance's few steers picks up a livin'. Over to the west of it is the horse meadows and stables, an' thar's a mile track marked off with

stumps o' trees an' bushes whar he tries out his yearling colts an' two-year-olds."

"It's right on the edge of the mountain valley," observed Larry Boyd. "Bad for strays. Looks as if he might lose cattle among the rocks of the foothills, if he isn't careful."

"Shore!" agreed Burrows. "That's what he says he does. Not strays, either. This hyar Jackson gang drives off some of his steers as often as they does ours, accordin' to him. Of course, they don't get the number they do of the V N, because if they grabbed Vance's whole bunch o' cattle, to the last horn an' hoof, they wouldn't have more than a few hundred. The gang has druv nigh a thousand of our critters at one scoop. Thar's a big diff'rence, you see."

Grant Burrows had got on a favorite topic now, and he was pointing out features of the Vance ranch as seen from this high place of vantage. Suddenly Larry, who had been paying only desultory attention to the discourse of his companion, broke in excitedly:

"Burrows! Look! Down here! Who are those two men riding away from the V N? By Jove! It's Alvin and Burr Vance!"

Grant Burrows wheeled his cayuse to join Larry, who was staring down into the valley from which they had climbed, and, as he made out the figures of two men riding hard among the loose rocks, exclaimed, with a muffled oath:

"It's them, shore as shootin'! That Vance has somethin' up his sleeve. What in blazes is he leadin' that poor drunken devil away like that for? This ain't the first time he's done it! Come on, Boyd! Thar's goin' to be work for you—an' for me too. It's a cinch that Alvin has so much whisky in him, he doesn't know whar he's goin' or what he's doin'!"

Larry needed no urging to go down after the two horsemen hurrying

through the valley, and who passed out of sight even while he and Burrows watched. He sent his cayuse—sure-footed, as all Western horses are—down the steep, slippery path winding around the face of the cliff, at a speed that sufficiently told how important he felt it to catch them before they could get away.

Even though Boyd and Burrows rushed their horses down this treacherous trail, both realized before they had half accomplished the descent, that unless Vance and Alvin came back of their own accord, it would be useless to pursue them without help.

"What do you make of it, Burrows?" asked Alvin, as they halted and tried to pierce the rapidly thickening shadows of the valley. "Looks to me as if Alvin wants to show he can get those cattle back without our assistance."

"Shore he does, an' this hyar Burr Vance has took advantage of him being dizzy with booze to put the idee in his head."

"But why?"

Burrows shrugged. "Alvin is mad because his father has sent you hyar. He believes you've come to sort o' ride herd on him."

"Well, that's true," remarked Larry.

"An' Burr Vance suspects it too, an' he's told Alvin that this hyar is the time when he's got to swing his own rope an' leave you in the dust 'way behind. So it's a clash 'tween you an' Alvin, as I savvy the sitooation."

"Probably," assented Larry. "Now answer this one question, Burrows, because it's the keynote of the whole affair. Do you believe that Alvin, in his present mental state, can be trusted to run down those thieves, with no one to help him except Burr Vance?"

"I don't trust Alvin, an' I don't trust Vance either," was the reply.

"Let's get back to the ranch as quickly as we can," was all Larry replied.

CHAPTER V.

A WILD NIGHT RIDER.

NOW, Boyd, let's have this thing straight afore we goes prospectin' after these hyar wanderin' steers an' the felons as has took 'em. Thar's got to be one of us in command, an' considering what Richard Chalmers said was to be did, it looks to me as if you ought to be the gent to give orders."

"You are the foreman," remarked Larry quietly.

"Shore!" agreed Burrows. "But you are ol' King Richard Chalmers hisself, 'cordin' to what he said in Cheyenne. He said you was to be his personal representative. Put a nick in that word 'personal,' Boyd. And he said he'd back whatever you done. That's cl'ar enough, ain't it? I did not deny then—an' I don't now—that Alvin Chalmers is too much for me—onless I was to use a gun on him, which of course I wouldn't."

"He can be brought to time without that," said Larry. "Let's get our men together," he added, taking charge without further parley. "Where's Alamo?"

Larry and Burrows were standing near the corral, their horses saddled, while several V N riders circled about in the gloom. An atmosphere of repressed excitement pervaded the place, and Valerie and Aunt Martha, standing on the veranda, to watch the expedition depart, were talking in tense tones as they watched the preparations.

As Larry spoke the name of Alamo, that old-timer came forward with the bridle of his bronco over his arm. The butt of a rifle showed in its holster by the side of his saddle, and he carried a .45 hanging down his right leg. The fire of battle could be discerned in his deep-set eyes as he faced the lights of the ranch house, and altogether he was as warlike a figure as ever rode through the historic Bad Lands which ran so

closely to the edge of the V N cattle ranch.

"I'm hyar, boss!" he said. "Burrows gi' me the word I was to go."

"Get on your horse," was Larry's brief order. "Can you depend on that cayuse of yours to hold up with the rest of us over rough trails? I want you all to understand that we don't come out of those hills till we find the steers stolen from the V N, if we have to stay there a week."

Larry Boyd had dropped the drab that had been an affectation of his before coming to Wyoming. He was a stern fighter in manner and appearance now. He might have been one of the pioneers of the eighties—those determined men who set themselves to clean out the desperadoes of Jackson Hole and the Hole-in-the-Wall, and who always fought to a finish.

Alamo replied with indignation in his husky tones, as he threw the bridle back on his tough-looking little bronco, who looked, at a casual glance, to be as old as his owner:

"You don't have to worry none about this hyar cayuse o' mine. Mr. Boyd! He's the finest piece o' hossflesh 'twixt the Tetons an' the Rio Grande, an' I kin prove it. That's on'y one man in the whole V N outfit as kin fork him—an' stay thar. I'm the man, an' when I'm in the saddle on ol' Samson, I kin make him go aawyhar an' he don't never stop till he's chewed up ev'ry cattle thief what comes his way. That's the kind o' hogs ol' Samson is."

Larry was not listening. Satisfied that Alamo and his horse would be efficient in the task before them, the young man was marshalling his force preparatory to starting.

He decided not to take too many with him. He did not expect to get the stolen property as the result of a pitched battle. What he wanted was men who knew something of the intricacies of the Big Horn foothills, and

who could read signs of cattle and men with equal facility.

The alleged fact that thousands of stolen animals were driven into these hills and were never heard of or seen again, would have to be proved to Larry Boyd's satisfaction if he were to give an acceptable report to Richard Chalmers when he had completed his task.

The abrupt departure of Alvin, with Burr Vance, without saying a word to Larry or Burrows, presented a new and puzzling angle which Larry decided to examine later. At present, he was giving all his attention to rounding up his men and, seeing that they were equipped for an expedition which might last for a number of days. He was resolved not to come back without finding out what became of the stolen cattle and obtaining a line on the thieves at any cost of time and labor.

"Do you think you can stand it Jake," he asked of Jake Deane, who had been wounded in the raid of the early morning. "How is your shoulder?"

"Fine as silk!" was the cheerful reply. "The bullet only creased me. It's made me jest sore enough to want to git my hooks on the maverick as plugged me. I has a bandage that Slim put on, wi' some liquid stuff that shore did sing, an' which is healin' it up like magic. Look hyar, Mr. Boyd! This is the stum! Ain't she a dandy?"

He moved his arm about to show that he had full use of it. He couldn't repress a groan as he flung it about, but there could be no doubt that he was full of fight—all the more because of his injury. A wounded bear is often more dangerous than one unburt, as everybody knows.

Larry Boyd nodded. Then, after looking his white-eyed roan over carefully, and making sure everybody was well supplied with cartridges, as well as food for a week, he swung into the saddle, and with a swift backward

glance and a wave of the hand to Valerie and Aunt Martha, rode out of the ranch yard. Grant Burrows was by his side and Alamo. Jake Deane and Slim Berry close behind.

Noiselessly the little cavalcade made its way into the gorge that offered a gateway to the foothills, and immediately all were enveloped in a mysterious darkness which belongs only to the mountains.

For some time there was no question as to the way they were to go. Larry and Burrows both had seen the dust cloud which told of the movement of the bunch of cattle which early that morning had attracted the attention of Valerie when she ran her horse up the steep path to the bluff where she could look over the valley.

This valley led from the open plain which was the domain of the V N, into the heart of the rocky wilderness at the base of the Big Horn range.

When they emerged from the gorge from which Alvin Chalmers had come riding, they halted.

"Alamo!" called Larry softly.

The old plainsman and mountaineer rode forward out of the gloom and was at Larry's side with uncanny celerity.

"Look here, Alamo——"

"You want to know which way to go?" broke in Alamo, with calm assurance. "I'll tell yer. They ain't any doubt 'bout the way some o' them cattle has traveled, 'cause you can pick up their trail in the dust right hyar. Furdur along, whar the rocks is plumb naked, we'll have to use jest gumption an' good, common hoss sense to take us along."

"You're a wise trail sharp, Alamo," put in the gruff voice of Slim, as that matter-of-fact individual came from the rear on foot. "But I'm hyar to tell you thar's signs on nigh every one o' these trails. A big bunch o' cows has been through all of 'em. Them rustlers

ain't no beginners in the game. They scatter the herds every time."

"We'll take the pass straight ahead," decided Larry curtly. "Slim, you go first and lead your horse, looking for hoofprints wherever there is a chance of finding them. Alamo, ride with me. What have you found, Burrows?" he asked in a different tone, as the foreman, who had been ranging about on his own account, came riding up at a gallop. "Any trace of Alvin?"

"I dunno!" answered the foreman. "Thar's some one keepin' close to us, but out of sight."

"Following us?"

"Looks like it. But I can't be certain. I heard the clatter of a hoss when I turned off thar to the right a while ago, looking for something that might help, an' for a minute I had a glimpse of a hat whar it showed above the rim of the cañon."

"Well! What did you do? Ride up to see what it was?"

"Thar warn't no way to git up thar. Leastways, not handy. It was easier to come an' tell you. So——" He broke off. Then, with an excited "Sufferin' cats!" he spurred his horse through the defile facing them.

"Come on!" shouted Larry to the others. "Get on your horse, Slim!"

Slim Berry flung himself into his saddle, and, with Alamo and Jake, kept close on Larry's heels, who, in his turn, was riding like fury to keep Burrows in sight.

It was a perilous, narrow path, with jutting crags in the walls threatening to tear them from their saddles, while loose boulders under foot caused the horses to stumble dangerously as they raced along in the darkness.

For about an eighth of a mile they kept on going, mounting higher and higher.

An ejaculation of amazed terror from Burrows, as he suddenly pulled up, and the fact that Alamo's horse

stumbled and fell, abruptly halted the party.

"Look!" panted the foreman in a hollow voice. "Lord save my soul! What does it mean?"

No one replied to his frantic outbreak. All were staring in astonishment at a horse—the rider bent low over the saddle-horn—rushing at top speed down an almost perpendicular descent from the rim of the cañon on their left.

A moment later he bounded out of sight, seemingly into space. However, for a few seconds the plunging horse had been revealed in a gleam of moonlight. But, in that flash the men all recognized the rider.

It was Valerie Burrows!

CHAPTER VI.

DEAD MAN'S SLOPE.

WITH an involuntary shout, Larry touched a spur to his roan and the spirited animal leaped forward. Only for three or four strides, however. A snort of terror and he stopped very short, throwing himself back on his haunches.

Larry, however, was a good horseman. He lay back, with legs rigid and feet firm in his stirrups, just in time to save himself from going over the head of his big white-eyed roan.

They were on the very edge of a bluff more than two hundred feet above the valley.

His heart rapped wildly as he saw that Valerie, on her sure-footed pony, had leaped to a pathway that wound down the mountainside on the left. He hoped she had her mount under perfect control.

It was only occasional glimpses of the girl that were afforded by the fitful illumination of a beclouded moon. Larry Boyd soon lost sight of her. He clasped his temples in his two hands. Was he going crazy?

"Boyd! Did you see that? Come on! Let's hurry!"

It was the voice of Grant Burrows, sharpened by anxiety, mingled with anger, that caused Larry to turn from his endeavor to pierce the darkness below.

"Don't worry, Burrows. We'll soon catch up to her."

"I'm not so plumb shore of that," returned the foreman weakly. "If you knowed these cussed hills as well as I do, you'd be afraid she might never find her way back. She allers was kind o' headstrong, an' I reckon she is tryin' to show us how a woman kin run down stolen cattle as well as men. She often talks that way, an' this ain't the fust time she's gone pirootin' into the mountains by herself. That bronc she rides is as full o' hell as she is herself. Wait till I git hold of her," he added, with a sudden blaze of wrath. "I'll l'arn her to scare her father like this. I'll——"

"We'll take this trail to the right," interrupted Larry. "It seems to be the only way to get down. Looks to me as if she must have had some idea that Alvin and Vance are close by. Most likely we'll come on all three together. Alamo! Where are you?"

"That thar cussed cayuse o' mine got a stone in his foot—jammed plumb into the frog," replied Alamo grumblingly, as he rode to Larry's side. "I was skeered he might be lamed. But it takes more'n a rock like that to put ol' Samson out o' business. On'y it took me a minute or two to dig it out. What's this about Burrows' gal?"

"You say you know your way about these mountains better than anybody. Take us down the quickest way to the valley. Then I'll tell you what else to do," was Larry's curt order.

"Thar's a trail over hyar what ain't often used," replied Alamo. "The reason is that if yer cayuse gits a inch or so too nigh the aidge, thar ain't no use tryin' to argufy the matter—all you kin

do is to go over, grit yer teeth an' git ready for a hard fall on them broken rocks below."

"Dead Man's Slope," put in Slim sententiously. "Air we goin' to try that?"

"Shore we will if the boss is willin'," returned Alamo. "It's the most direct trail to Jackson's Hole, an' the train-robbin' gang never hung back from using it when the vigilantes was after them in the old days. Some of 'em went over an' was busted into jelly, but *some* of 'em got safe to the bottom. I reckon it'll be the same way with us now."

With this cheerful reminiscence, Alamo turned his horse toward a clump of pines near the brink of the precipice and sunk out of sight as if he had gone down a trap.

Larry Boyd had been close behind, and as he came up to the spot where the old-timer had disappeared, he saw that there was a fissure just about wide enough for a horse, with a path that sloped at a terrific angle to where a jutting rock hid the rest of the trail.

Alamo had run his horse down the short steep pathway and swung around the bluff. Larry turned to speak to Burrows.

"You'd better give me time to get around before you and Slim and Jake follow," directed Larry coolly. "We don't know what's beyond that corner."

"I know," corrected Slim. "An' I'm tellin' you it'll take nerve to keep on. Hows'ever, Alamo can't show me no trail as I won't foller."

Larry did not answer. It was not the peril of the descent that made him hesitate. He was trying to explain to himself what object Valerie could have in coming into the hills. If she were determined to take part in the hunt for the cattle thieves, why did she not come with her father and the others?

Burrows would have objected, of course, but Larry had seen enough of

this independent-spirited girl of the range to know that she would have her own way, no matter what her father might say.

Larry wished he could persuade himself that it was not personal interest in Alvin Chalmers that had induced her to take such risks. And yet—he believed there could be no doubt that there was an understanding between Alvin and herself. It filled his soul with rebellious jealousy, and he told himself that even if he had a remote chance with the girl, he could not expect to win her without a battle with the dissipated manager of the V N.

"I'm not going to let that drunken idiot have it all his own way," he muttered. "Valerie is too good for him. And yet—confound it—she seems to be infatuated with the fellow. She must be or she would not be where she is now. Well," he added, "we'll see!"

With the instinct of the experienced horseman, Larry trusted to his horse as he dropped into the narrow pass. The roan allowed himself to slide down the steep run to the jutting crag, making brakes of his four feet. He stopped at an awful jumping-off place at the corner. Fortunately, he had control of his movements enough to leap solidly to a level platform of rocks which had been out of sight. This afforded him an opportunity to "get set" before venturing down the narrow winding trail which led into the black shadows that veiled the floor of the valley. Larry gave him his head.

There was a good moon by this time, but its light did not penetrate far down this mysterious and dangerous trail to which men had long since given the name of "Dead Man's Slope." The name fitted it, for it was not only extremely narrow but it zigzagged so sharply at frequent intervals that only the marvelous instinct with which Providence had endowed the "lower

animals" could make it possible to follow its windings in safety.

All this, with a grade generally of nearly forty-five degrees, made it decidedly interesting traveling for Larry Boyd and his companions.

There was nearly half an hour of working downward on a slanting ledge, the width of which could only be measured in inches. They were in pitch darkness after the first few yards. Suddenly they found themselves on a level, rocky platform and the voice of Alamo was congratulating them, while Burrows went down a few yards more to the valley.

"It shorely was a ticklish trip even for me. I dunno how you all done it," said Alamo patronizingly. "In co'se, I've been down that trail afore. I remember once, when Monte Vantyne—he was a killer—the kind o' hombre who'd plug a man jest for the fun of it—had got the idee that the boys on a ranch at the aidge of the foothills had givin' him away to the troopers, sorter plannin' to ambush him an' hang him wi'out losin' no time——"

"Where was this ranch?" asked Slim, very deeply interested in Alamo's narration.

"It don't matter 'bout that," rejoined Alamo, who didn't like to be interrupted. "But, if you wants to know, it was whar Burr Vance is now, an' they was usin' the same brand that he does to-day—Double Bar M. Hows'ever, as I was plintin' out to you, this hyar Monte Vantyne—he was a leader of the Jackson Hole gang jest because he was so plumb bad, no one dassn't stop him from runnin' things his own way. He killed the owner of the ranch—McBride, his name was—while he sat outside his house one evenin', peacefully smokin'. Then he shot the wife. At the same time others in the gang killed the five men what worked for McBride—jest stepped up to 'em an' plugged 'em without sayin' nothin'."

"When was that?" asked Larry Boyd. "Not lately, of course?"

"No," replied Alamo. "It was when the Bad Lands was full o' outlaws an' killin's was frequent—nigh forty years ago. This Jackson gang used to wear blue bandannas over thar mouths as a sort o' sign so's they'd know each other."

"Did they catch the murderers?" asked Larry absently, for he was thinking of Valerie.

"Shore they caught 'em," returned Alamo disdainfully. "Why wouldn't they? An' what makes it more interestin' is that it was Richard Chalmers—he warn't more'n twenty then—who got on the trail of Monte Vantyne an' helped the vigilantes to rope him, right hyar in these hills. Chalmers allers was a venturesome kid. He was up hyar on a vacation at the time. It was long afore he owned the V N ranch. They give Monte a reglar trial at Rawlins an' soon after hanged him. They got the others too—some of 'em, anyhow—an' hanged them too. I was at Monte's trial, an' I mind how his wife bust out when he was sentenced, holdin' up her baby and shriekin' that the kid would avenge his father when he was old enough. That meant he was to get Chalmers, I reckon. But nothin' ever come of it. Women gits alumb hysterical sometimes. The officers led her an' the baby out of the co't room an' no one ever heard anything 'bout 'em afterward."

It was just as Alamo finished his narration, and before any comment could be made on it, that a streak of blue fire flashed up far away in the blackness of the gorge ahead of them, followed, after a momentary pause, by a sharp report.

"Rifle shot," pronounced Alamo. "A long way off. The time between the flash and report tells that. It was Alvin's rifle too—unless some one else has got a gun jest like it. I know jest

how it sounds. Looks as if they must have met up wi' the Jackson boys an' got to shootin'."

"And my girl must be somewhar in thar," cried Burrows. "Hurry, Boyd—won't you, please?" he cried pleadingly.

CHAPTER VII.

A CONFESSION.

LARRY needed no urging. His mind worked swiftly, and he could not help connecting the rifle shot with some danger to Valerie. He did not forget that Burr Vance was somewhere in the neighborhood, and, with the keen perception of a young man in love, he had perceived that Vance, middle aged as he was, never lost a chance to be attentive to this girl, who disliked his advances.

There were several ravines and cañons which might lead to the hiding place of the cattle thieves, but the rifle shot in this particular gorge seemed to be a sure guide.

The moon had gone higher as the night advanced, and it was possible to ride at a good pace through the long chasm, although, for convenience, they went single file. Larry was first, with Burrows just behind. Then Alamo, and Slim and Jake followed.

After the report of the rifle, there had been no sound to lead them to the person who had fired, nor to the other one of whom the bullet had been intended.

"What do you make of it, Boyd?" asked Burrows, in a low tone, as they came to a place where the gorge branched off in two directions like a Y. "It was jest 'bout hyar that the gun let go."

"I guess so," returned Larry, as he looked about him. "There is a high bluff on the left, and it might be that Alvin saw some one up there who was about to shoot him."

"Some o' that pesky Jackson outfit," put in Alamo. "Quite likely."

"At all events, I think this left-hand trail is the one," said Larry. "The flash of the gun was over that way."

Burrows nodded. Although, under ordinary conditions, he should have taken the lead in such an expedition as this, he recognized the shrewdness and cool-headedness of this young man. At the same time that he knew his own anxiety over his daughter had shaken his nerve and thus dulled his efficiency. Besides, Richard Chalmers' orders were for Larry Boyd to represent him in the event of Alvin becoming erratic.

"Drive ahead, Boyd," he said stonily. "If any o' them dirty thieves has hurt my girl, I'll——" His voice choked.

The rattle of the horses' hoofs on the rocky floor, as they rode on, was echoed and reëchoed by the wall on either side, and when they swung around a bend and came suddenly upon Burr Vance and Valerie, they did not take the man and girl by surprise.

It might have been expected that Vance would have stopped what he was doing, as her father and the others came around the corner. But he didn't. Not only had he his arms around her, but he seemed to have just dragged her from her horse, while she gasped threats and incoherent orders to him to let her go.

Their two horses stood quietly near, their patient attitude making the violent scene by their side all the more dramatic by contrast.

Nothing could have held back Grant Burrows. He hurled himself from his saddle and had Burr Vance by the throat at the same moment that Larry Boyd caught the girl. As she fell backward from Vance's suddenly loosened grasp, Larry saved her from falling.

"Hold on thar, Burrows!" protested Alamo. "Let's hear what the play means afore you choke the gizzard out of him. Speak up, Vance!"

"You blasted fools!" shouted Vance, as he broke away. "What's this all about? I was doing my best to keep Miss Burrows out of danger, and you all jump me before I've a chance to explain."

"Explain!" echoed Burrows scornfully. "You *can't* explain." He made a movement to get at Vance again, but Alamo and the others held him. "I allers knowed you was a measly coyote, Vance. But I didn't think you'd dare go as fur as this. I'll git yer later. Mark what I say! Boyd, I'm goin' to take my girl home. You kin keep up the chase for them rustlers wi'out me."

Valerie, whom Larry had released as soon as she was firmly on her feet, walked around the others, and seized her father by the elbow.

"Wait a minute, dad," she said. "Mr. Vance tells the truth."

"*What?*" blurted out her father. "Didn't I see him——"

"Yes, but, as he says, he was trying to keep me out of what he supposed was danger—perhaps it is—and he was foolish enough to use force. Because I'm going ahead anyhow."

She went to her horse, and, with a foot in the stirrup, turned to Larry.

"I'm glad you are here, Mr. Boyd. Alvin went on just as we caught sight of three strange men slipping among the rocks at the end of the draw, and I would have been with him if Mr. Vance hadn't stopped me. That was all there was to it. Alvin fired his rifle, and then went after them. I was going too, when Mr. Vance caught my bridle, and, when I insisted on going on, pulled me from the saddle. He was rough, but I believe he meant well."

Burr Vance showed his teeth in a scornful smile.

"That was it exactly," he said. "Those Jackson men would as soon shoot a woman as a man, and I had to act quickly to keep Miss Valerie out of range." He swept off his hat in an

elaborate bow. "I beg her pardon, most humbly, and thank her for making it all so clear."

"And I am not going home, dad," declared Valerie, as she sprang into her saddle. "I'm as interested in running down the men who have stolen our cattle as you are, and there is no reason why I should not go with you now, even if I am only a woman. I can shoot straight if I have to, and I know the Big Horn country as well as you do. And I'm not afraid."

"No, Valerie," assented Burrows, with a touch of pride in his deep voice. "You're not *afraid*. You wouldn't be my girl if you were. But, by the Holy James, I ain't aimin' to have my daughter plugged by no cattle rustler's bullet, an' I reckon I'll take you home."

"I won't go!" was her obstinate answer.

He changed his tone to one of pleading. "Now, Val, you know I ain't one to stand in your way when you want to do anything. But this hyar thing ain't for you." Then, as she shook her head in dissent, he went on sharply: "What in thunder's the reason you're sot on doin' a foolish thing like this? I don't see no sense in it."

"I'll tell you why I'm going to do it, dad," she returned, after a momentary pause, during which she shot a peculiar glance at Larry Boyd. "Alvin is somewhere among those rocks ahead of us, and there are at least three men who I believe belong to this Jackson gang of thieves and murderers."

"Well, why is that your business?" demanded Burrows.

"It *is* my business," she returned. "Alvin wasn't quite sober when he left the house to-night."

"That's nothin' unusual," said Burrows.

"I'm afraid not," she answered gravely. "But that makes no difference to me now. Because he may still be under the influence of—of—what he

has drunk, he is sure to be reckless, and the men he's hunting down will have an advantage over him that would not be theirs if he were quite himself. Therefore, we simply *must* find Alvin and help him. It was because I insisted on that against Mr. Vance's advice that you found him keeping me back forcibly just now."

"It is *my* duty to keep after Alvin Chalmers, of course," interposed Larry, taking part in the controversy for the first time. "You and your father both know I came out to the V N with that understanding, and that I gave my word to Mr. Chalmers that I would do it. But why should you feel it incumbent on you to take such risks on Alvin's account?"

"There is a very good reason," she answered. "But I don't care to say what it is."

"You'll have to," threatened her father. "And unless it's something beyond anything I can imagine, you're going back to the ranch with me without any more argument. Now let's have it."

"The reason I intended to take any risks to-night that may be necessary to help Alvin Chalmers," she said quietly, "is that *I have given him a solemn promise to become his wife.*"

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT WICKED GREEN STUFF.

THE effect of this confession, which Valerie obviously had made because there seemed nothing else that could be accepted as a plausible incentive for her determination—varied on her several hearers.

Her father hardly knew whether to be pleased or indignant. He realized that the son of the wealthy cattle king was what would be considered a "good catch" for a girl in his daughter's worldly position. On the other hand, he was afraid Alvin might become a

confirmed drunkard, although he had many sound qualities to counterbalance his besetting weakness. The statement of his daughter did not come altogether as a surprise. Nevertheless it was something of a shock.

As for Larry Boyd, Valerie's calm statement sent a chill through him. He actually staggered. Then, with the optimism characteristic of young men of his type, he resolved not to believe the girl's engagement to Alvin irrevocable until they were actually married.

Meanwhile, he would be a good sport and stick to Valerie through thick and thin, and at the same time carrying out his own promise to Richard Chalmers to look after his son in emergencies.

What Burr Vance thought of the revelation might be gathered by the black frown that contorted his handsome face. He drew his upper lip between his white teeth and bit almost till the blood came. He was holding himself in with difficulty. So far as such a man could care for a woman, it might be said that Burr Vance was infatuated with Valerie Burrows.

To Alamo, Slim and Jake, the disclosing of her engagement to Alvin Chalmers was nothing more than one of those crazy notions, which, in their opinion, a girl was liable to spring on the world at any moment. It might be true, or it might not. Anyway, it didn't matter much to them. It would be better than if she'd been going to marry Burr Vance.

"Well, Burrows?" said Larry questioningly, looking at the foreman.

"She'll have to go, I suppose," was the reluctant response. "She seems bent on it."

Ten minutes later, when they had come out of the ravine and were in the open, with the moonlight streaming down on them, Larry Boyd gazed about the waste of rocks overshadowed by the mighty wall of the mountain on the left. Then he called to Alamo.

"You've been through this before, Alamo?"

"I'll say I have," replied the old-timer confidently.

"You said a while ago that you once guided the troopers and railroad police to the entrance of Jackson's Hole when there were forty murderers in hiding. It was forty, wasn't it?"

"Forty—or fifty," returned Alamo smoothly. "It might have been even sixty——"

"Never mind," interrupted Larry. "Forty will do. You haven't forgotten where that way into Jackson's Hole is, I suppose. We want you to lead us to it."

Almo scratched his head dubiously, knocking his hat far over one eye as he did so, which gave him an air of owlish wisdom.

"Well, now, Mr. Boyd, that was a long time ago."

"Yes. In the eighties, you said," put in Larry. "But most of us can remember things that happened when we were young men, especially anything as important as that hunt for the forty murderers must have been. I wasn't born in the eighties, but I haven't forgotten things that impressed me twenty years ago, or even longer than that. So you take the lead and show us where that opening is."

"It was all hid with loose rocks, and the gang was blamed smart. They had a way of blocking up one entrance and usin' another," prevaricated Alamo. "I ain't rightly shore as I kin p'int the way now."

"Do the best you can," ordered Larry. "Go ahead."

If there was anything that Alamo declined to do, so long as he had a leg to stand on, it was to admit that he had deviated from the strict truth. So he shifted his quid of plug tobacco from one side of his mouth to the other, uttered a sharp "Gid-dap!" to his surly cayuse, Samson, and rode boldly for-

ward through the jumble of rocks, as if he knew exactly where he was going.

Larry Boyd smiled without being observed. He was enjoying Alamo's embarrassment. He turned to Valerie, who had ridden up to his side to avoid Burr Vance, and said thoughtfully:

"It looks to me as if we shall have to find our way without any help from Alamo. Do you know which way Alvin went after he'd fired his rifle?"

"I can't tell you," replied the girl in a tone of chagrin. "Vance pulled me off my horse, thinking that I'd make too good a target for the thieves sitting up there, and when I'd seen that they had darted among the rocks at the end of the draw, and that Alvin was riding after them, I knew nothing more about them. I was too much concerned in trying to fight off Vance."

"And then we came," observed Larry. "Yes, you had your hands full. We all saw that."

"Jackson's Hole is somewhar 'bout hyar," volunteered Slim, who had been near enough to hear the colloquy between Larry and the girl. "But them cattle-stealin' murderers has allers been too smart for any stranger to find in. They's prob'bly twenty ways of gittin' in an' out, all hid. That's why the train-robbin' killers in the ol' days c'd stand off the whole U-nited States army, an' make raids whenever they wanted ter. They went in, an' come out jest as they liked."

Larry nodded assentingly. He had heard so much about the cunning and audacity of the Bad Lands gang in the early days of the Union Pacific, before Wyoming was as well as it is to-day, that he quite appreciated the difficulty that faced him in trying to find his way into their secret lair.

So far as he knew, no honest men ever had managed to reach to the inmost recesses of Jackson's Hole and come out alive to tell of what they'd seen. But after all, that was only tra-

dition. He tossed the tradition aside in his mind, and with a wave of the hand for the others to follow, plunged in among the jumble of rocks, keeping only Valerie by his side.

Alamo had already gone ahead, but Larry was satisfied, from the uncertainty of the old plainsman's movements, that he had no more knowledge of the way into the hidden mountain bowl than he himself had.

The general situation of the outlaws' rendezvous was known to every one, but that seemed never to help those who sought to find their way into it, so cunningly were all its entrances and exits concealed.

When they entered the huddle of rocks amid which the three men they believed to be cattle thieves, as well as Alvin Chalmers, had vanished, they found themselves moving higher and higher all the time.

At last, when they came to a spot which gave a clear view ahead, Larry gave the signal to halt.

As the others reined up, he urged his powerful roan up a narrow and very steep path he had noticed just ahead, and soon was some fifty feet above his companions.

On the rim of a deep gorge, he stopped. The walls seemed to be absolutely perpendicular, and though the upper part of the gulf was lighted by the moon, it was black dark in the far-away depths.

There seemed no hope of discovering the way into the retreat of the outlaws. Yet Larry was convinced the entrance could not be far away. The three men at whom Alvin had fired would be in sight unless they had dived into some convenient hole or passageway that would take them to the hiding place not only of the thieves, but of the cattle that had been driven off the night before. That the stolen herds were concealed somewhere in the mountains was almost a certainty, and all the infor-

mation Larry had been able to obtain pointed to the probability that they were in that part of them known as Jackson's Hole.

It seemed certain that Alvin had discovered the old-time outlaws' den by trailing the robbers so closely that they could not hide from him their way of entrance.

If Larry were unsuccessful in running down the stolen cattle, at least he must find Alvin. He had assumed the responsibility of looking after the weak-willed, though headstrong, son of Richard Chalmers, and Larry did not allow himself to fall short in the task.

He was considering his next move when Burrows came up and said excitedly: "Look here, Boyd! That sneakin' Burr Vance has got away! He was prospectin' aroun' among the rocks, wi' the rest of us, an' got out o' sight for a minute. Then, when the others all come together, after concloodin' thar was no signs of Alvin or them rustlers anywhar within a quarter of a mile at least, Vance was missin'."

"You've looked for him, of course?"

"Shore we have! I don't trust him, even if what he said about tryin' to perpect my girl was true. I've got it in my head he brought Alvin up hyar alone for some object of his own, an' I wouldn't put it past him that he knows more about this Jackson gang than he lets on."

"I've felt sure of that ever since he and Alvin rode away together from the ranch house," answered Larry Boyd. "And I have a conviction he is Alvin's evil genius."

"You have?" interposed Valerie earnestly. "That's what I've believed, but I didn't like to say it when I thought I was the only one having that opinion. If I hadn't believed it, I shouldn't be here now. But when I knew that Alvin had been drinking, and after I saw Vance give him some yellowish-green liquid to drink, I *had* to come."

"Green stuff, eh?" said Larry thoughtfully. "It would hardly be *crème de menthe*. Absinthe, of course."

"That's it," confirmed Burrows, with a scowl of disgust. "This hyar ain't the first time Vance has give it to him, either, 'cause he knows a few swallers o' the damned pizen will make Alvin willin' to do anythin' he asks. It makes the durned drunken fool crazy. For he *is* a drunken fool, even if he is my boss. Absinthe locos him—makes him plumb ravin'. I'm a coyote if I don't believe he'd murder his own father when he gits well soaked wi' that measly stuff. Absinthe is wicked, I'm telling yer."

Larry did not reply. But he was thinking hard. He knew what a dreadful effect the insidious intoxicant had on men of excitable temperament and weak will. More than ever, he knew he *must* find Alvin Chalmers that night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TELLTALE PRICE.

THE girl was looking into Larry Boyd's face with a trustful confidence which inspired him to action, even though he knew all her anxiety was for the whisky-sodden, absinthe-crazy man whose own father could not trust him, and who needed to be watched and guarded this night as if he were indeed an acknowledged maniac.

Larry wished Valerie were interested in himself, for his own sake. But since he had made up his mind that it couldn't be, he'd put all his energy into seeing his fortunate rival out of the mess he'd got into, even if he had to drag him away against his will. He recalled the cattle king's instructions in Cheyenne, to take him by the neck and club sense into him.

Well, he would do that if it became necessary!

Larry looked musingly across the appalling chasm, on the edge of which he

stood, to the confused perspective of rocky peaks, ridges and precipices beyond. He knew that the sinister Jackson's Hole might be somewhere among any of these labyrinthine foothills, and that it was probably close by. Yet the problem of finding a way into the old-time secret robbers' den was rendered none the easier because he was convinced it was not far away. He wondered whether Burr Vance knew more about it than he pretended.

He had just made up his mind to ride to the end of the open space at the foot of the slope when he saw something a little way past the abyss.

A narrow spiral of yellow smoke, which the moonlight made clear to his vision, was rising beyond the opposite rim of the chasm.

"See that, Burrows?" he asked, without turning his head.

"What?" responded the foreman. But the next moment he blurted out, in repressed excitement: "Thar's a fire over thar. Curious those mavericks would camp an' build a fire whar we'd be likely to see the smoke."

Larry Boyd was silent. He was watching the yellow spiral as it wavered and eddied in the night breeze, and he was pleased to see that the smoke was blowing his way.

Suddenly he motioned to Alamo to come over to him.

The old plainsman obediently rode his cayuse to the side of the young man, and, with the instinct of his kind, followed Larry's gaze to the thin column of smoke that was waving backward and forward into broken, vapory ribbons.

"By cracky!" exclaimed Alamo, sniffing. "I git that."

"Of course you do," returned Larry. "There's a strong smell of burning hair. What is it?"

"What is it?" repeated the old-timer. "Holy cats! It kin be on'y one thing, hyar an' at this time o' night. Thar's

some cussed beef robbers blottin' brands. That's what it is."

"Of course it is," agreed Burrows quickly. "They's changing brands over in that valley, an' they's so busy with thar irons they don't think the smoke might be givin' 'em away. But even if we know whar they are, that don't say we can git to 'em. An' yet—we have ter, for if I figger it right at all, we're goin' to find all them V N cattle around that fire, wi' a bunch of Jackson's gang men makin' V N into something else as fast as they can run their irons over 'em. I've allers knowed they must be changin' brands. They couldn't git away with it otherwise. Richard Chalmers knows it too."

The mere changing of brands did not interest Larry Boyd particularly. But he was glad the work was going on at this time, because it told him that they were near Jackson's Hole, in which he expected to find Alvin Chalmers, as well as the stolen cattle and the outlaws who had driven them off.

"It seems strange to me that they would take the trouble to do that work so soon," remarked Larry. "They are not likely to drive the cattle for some time, are they?"

"Mebbe not for weeks or months," returned Burrows. "Then they'll only dribble out a few at a time, so that folks won't know any of 'em has been sold. That's the way this gang works. They git the steers into the mountains an' hide 'em in such a cunnin' way that no one can trace 'em. At least, nobody has up to this time," he added.

"But all these cattle have to be fed," Larry reminded him. "How do they manage that?"

"They steal the feed from barns around the country," answered the foreman disgustedly. "I reckon thar's plenty o' water runnin' through the Hole, so thar's no trouble about that. But hay an' grain has to be got—see'n' as they's mighty little grass in the

mountains—an' the gang jest goes an' takes what they want. By raidin' in one direction one night, and another way a week later, they's able to git away wi' it. They kills a man or two now an' then, but that's no matter, seein' how the killers ain't never caught."

Larry listened in some wonderment to this tale of lawlessness. But he had no doubt of its truth. There was no other explanation possible. Men who would steal cattle wholesale from the range were not likely to be squeamish about breaking into barns for feed for the stolen stock.

Larry Boyd had asked his questions casually. The answers interested him—especially about the feed. But his mind was active as to their next procedure. Burrows was leaving the direction to this young man, who personally represented Richard Chalmers, giving advice only when it seemed desired. That was seldom, for Larry Boyd had already decided what he would do. He gave his orders now crisply and without hesitation:

"Alamo, you say you know these mountains well. Go ahead of the others and lead them to the entrance to Jackson's Hole."

"Jumpin' Christmas!" blurted out Alamo. "Ain't that some big order?"

"I don't think so," was Larry's cold rejoinder. "You can see that smoke. All you have to do is to ride over to it." He turned to Burrows: "You, with Slim and Jake Deane, go with Alamo and find your way to that fire as quickly as you can."

"It ain't goin' to be easy, 'cause we'll likely have to travel a long way, twistin' in an' out, to git to whar that fire is. You comin' too, I suppose?"

"No; I'm going to stay here and watch that smoke. If I stand on the edge of the bluff, you'll be able to see me for a little while, and I can signal you which way to go if you get off the trail."

Larry spoke quite coolly, although he knew as well as his hearers that they would hardly be able to make out his figure in the uncertain glow of the moon when once they were in the valley. Burrows detected the slight smile that curled the young man's lip, and expostulated in a hurt tone:

"That thar sounds like foolishness to me, Boyd, beggin' yer pardon."

Larry saw that the three other men had gone down the slope, out of hearing, and banishing the smile, Larry said in a low voice:

"It's this way, Burrows. If we all go around by way of the valley an' through the muddle of rocks down there, the chances are we'll never find the opening of Jackson's."

"That's what I think," put in the foreman.

"Exactly. So I'm going another way."

"You are?" Burrows' voice rose in surprise. "Then why can't we all go that same way?"

"Because it's a one-man job," was the short reply. "*I'm going down over this bluff* and drop on those rascals from a direction where they won't expect me—from above."

"You don't mean that—on the level, do you?" said Burrows incredulously. "Why, this ain't nothin' but a clear drop of three hundred feet or sech a matter. You ain't got a airplane, have yer?"

"I don't need one," was the calm reply. "I've climbed up and down worse mountain walls than this one, jest for fun. I've gone as high as most of them, up the face of steep places in the Grand Cañon and the Sierra Nevada, as well as in Canada. Give me a finger hold and a niche for my toes, and *I'll* make it."

The cool assurance of Larry, backed up by the lean, athletic figure which suggested a vast reserve of strength and agility, satisfied Burrows. He did not argue any further.

"When you git into the Hole, what are you goin' to do then?" he asked, after a pause.

"I shall have to be guided by circumstances," replied Larry. "The first thing I shall *try* to do will be to open up the entrance, so that you and the others can come in. But Jackson's Hole is a big place. I know, and I may not be able to find it. I depend on Alvin to help me in that. Now, Burrows, take Miss Valerie and join the other men. Good luck to you! Between us, we'll break up this Jackson gang. You see if we don't!"

He spoke cheerfully and even gave vent to a little laugh, but in his heart Larry Boyd knew he was about to venture on one of the most perilous enterprises. He wondered vaguely, but entirely without fear, how it would all come out.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN A GIRL WILLS.

LARRY slipped down from his saddle and threw the bridle over the horse's head, as he said, in a matter-of-fact tone: "You'd better take my horse with you, Burrows. I shan't be up here again. If I want it at all, it will be in the valley, after we've regulated Jackson's Hole." He laughed again.

It was then that Valerie, who had been listening in silence, broke in:

"Are you really going to climb down this cliff, Mr. Boyd?"

"I'm going to try it."

"If you fall?"

"It'll be all right. I shan't then have any further trouble in this world," he replied lightly. Then, in a serious tone: "But I don't intend to fall. In the first place, I can't afford it, because I simply *have* to find Alvin Chalmers so that I can report him safe to his father. Secondly, I'm going to overhaul these rustlers and get back the stolen V N cattle. Lastly, there is no reason for an experienced mountain climber to fall

so long as he keeps his head. So, you go with your father, and I believe I can promise that you'll see me in Jackson's Hole before dawn."

He hesitated a moment. Then he held out his hand.

The girl took it—and held it, while she said in a voice that trembled slightly:

"I am not going with my father. I'll stay here, with your horse, until you are safe at the bottom. Dad, you go on."

"But, Miss Valerie," protested Larry, "you can't possibly stay here by yourself."

"Why not?" was her quick rejoinder. "I rode through the hills alone until you found me with Burr Vance, didn't I? I'm going to stay."

"May as well give in, Boyd," said her father. "When she talks in that voice, I know she means it. Val, ride straight through the valley when you're ready to come. You know which way we are going. We'll be on the lookout for you." He took Larry's hand and shook it warmly. "Good luck to you, lad," he added, with an unwonted touch of emotion. "I won't say 'good-by,' Boyd, because I'm goin' to see you inside of an hour, or mebbe a little more. *You'll* put it through, I know."

Without another word, the gruff foreman of the V N swung into his saddle and rode down the slope. He never looked back.

"I wish we knew why Burr Vance slipped away like that," said Valerie, as soon as her father was out of hearing.

"Heaven knows!" returned Larry. "He may have seen something—some sign, like the smoke over there, for instance—and hustled off to investigate. Probably he's back with the other men by now. If not, well, never mind about him. I wish you'd gone with your father, instead of staying here. You'd be safer with him."

"Don't you think I shall be safe with you?"

Larry looked at the girl sharply. In spite of the matter-of-fact way she spoke, her question was enigmatical.

"I don't quite know what you mean," he protested. "You won't be with me, you know. I shan't be here. I've explained that to you already. I'm going to scramble down into the cañon."

"I understand that," she said, and paused. Then, quietly: "*And I am going down with you.*"

"Going—with me?"

Larry Boyd was not easily thrown off his equilibrium, but this cool assertion staggered him, and his response, after a pause, came gaspingly:

"Valerie, do you realize what you are saying?" He regarded the slight young girl, looking so trim and dainty in her Western riding costume, with mingled amazement and admiration. Then: "You can't seriously think of trying to do such a thing! There's a sheer drop here of more than two hundred feet, at least."

"Why shouldn't I do it?" she rejoined. "Are men the only Alpine climbers?"

"I didn't know you'd ever been in the Alps?"

"I haven't. But we have mountains in Wyoming. If I were to tell you how far up I've been in these very Big Horns——"

"But that's altogether different," he interrupted.

"Why?"

"Well, you've climbed in daylight, no doubt, and with a guide, using safety ropes, spiked poles, hobnailed climbing boots, and all the rest of the paraphernalia. Tourists do that sort of thing, I know, but——"

"I am not a tourist, and never have been," she broke in impatiently. "I wish you wouldn't waste time in useless argument. Let us hurry, won't you?"

Larry Boyd was a shrewd young

man. Moreover, he was not unversed in feminine psychology. He looked hard into Valerie's face, bending down close to her, as he endeavored to read her thoughts. What he saw was enough to convince him that further argument would indeed be time wasted.

"Very well," he said coolly. "I see the fire is still burning over there in that other valley. But it might be put out at any moment. Then it would be harder to know which way to go. Here's the place we'll begin."

He had walked to the very edge of the precipice, where some of the rock had broken off.

"There are something like steps for a few feet down," he remarked, as the girl came over to him. "I'll go first."

"Here's your rope!" She handed him the coiled lariat from his saddle. "I have mine. We can perhaps use them if we get in a tight place. I always take a rope when I'm climbing."

Larry merely thanked her. But he was thinking that this girl, who had thought of a very useful accessory that he had overlooked, might prove an assistance to him, instead of a burden, in the hazardous trip they were about to undertake.

He threw the coil over his shoulder and lowered himself into the scooped-out place in the face of the cliff, to go down the uneven, natural staircase as far as it would give them a foothold.

When he had reached the bottom and was looking for some jutting rock below which might sustain his weight, Valerie was by his side.

"Better take a few turns of your rope around this crag before you go any further," she suggested.

It was a good precaution, and he secured the end of his lariat to a solid spike of rock with several turns and a knot that would not slip. Then he passed the wide loop over his shoulders, and drew it tight under the arms.

"I can go down to that little ledge,"

he told her, as he surveyed the wall below. "You come down when I give the word. I'll get a firm grip before I let you come. You may have to use your rope. If you do I'll climb back and loosen both of them."

He said all this without emotion, and the girl took it with equal coolness. Larry was an experienced Alpine mountaineer, and it pleased him to see that Valerie showed not the least flurry, as she nodded acquiescence in his instructions. It proved that she had the right temperament for this sort of work. Nerves are something that no mountain climber dare possess—at least, while climbing.

As he let himself over the edge and felt for the ledge with his feet while holding on at arm's length, Larry kept his gaze steadily on the face of the girl peering over at him. He could not make her expression out in the shadows, but he got the general impression that it showed merely interest, without anything that could be construed as apprehension.

"Mighty brave kid!" he murmured.

"Did you speak to me?" she asked quietly.

"No. Everything is all right. Here's a ledge a foot wide and quite long. I didn't need the rope. But you might want it as you come down. Leave it for me to take off."

Instead of answering, she took the rope off the crag, and after a short "Catch this!" let it fall down to him.

He coiled it hastily, but had not had time to remove the loop from around his chest when he found her by his side.

"That was easier than sliding down a banister," she declared, with a laugh. "I think we can make that other little shelf of rock over to the right. It isn't more than three feet down. It's on *your* side."

Larry took the hint. It would be impossible for her to let herself down

to the place she had noticed until he was out of the way. So, with due caution, he skinned down to the new shelf, having the aid of several projections which made the feat easy.

"By George!" he exclaimed, in a pleased tone. "We're in luck. Come on and you'll see."

He was ready to help her if she seemed to need assistance. But it did not surprise him that she slid down quite as smoothly as he had done it. He determined that, even if he was a member of the Alpine Club, he could not tell this girl anything about mountain-climbing that she didn't know.

As she joined him on what had seemed from above to be a narrow shelf of rock, she saw that it was actually some eight or ten feet wide, extending into the wall, and winding downward at a fairly steep incline, down which they could walk without difficulty.

The pathway was one of those natural freaks common enough in mountain formation. Larry and Valerie were both so grateful for it that they did not trouble to speculate how it had come about.

This path took them down the bluff to within twenty feet of the bottom. In some places there was a gap of a few feet, which had to be negotiated with the greatest caution. It was very dark, and it was mainly by instinct that Larry, who insisted on going first, could ever tell that there was a break. Then he would take a match from his pocket and decide as quickly as possible, before the match burned out, how they were to get across.

But none of these breaks were prohibitive. Somehow they got over them. At last, when they were satisfied that their friendly pathway really had come to an end, they cared little for the labor of working down the wall to the bottom of the cañon, where a narrow stream moved lazily along over its bed of sharp rocks and shifting sand.

The water was cold and sweet, and both were glad to take a long drink.

"Now," said Valerie, as both got up from the edge of the brook, "what next? Do you think it has helped us any to come down the way we came? Wouldn't we have been just as likely to find our way into Jackson's Hole if we had kept with the others?"

Larry was not to be deceived by the doubt in the girl's voice. He knew, as well as she, that it was only pretense. As he left her alone for ten minutes and lost himself in the darkness, she was quite content to wait till he came back. She had confidence in this hitherto idle young millionaire, who had first spoken to her with a Piccadilly drawl and looked the typical clubman.

"This way, Valerie!"

It was Larry Boyd's cheerful voice. It carried a note of something like triumph.

She hurried in the direction of his voice, and felt him take her hand. He did not release it until he had led her through a rift in the wall opposite the one by which they had descended, and after moving through a tunnel for some two hundred feet, came out into the open, with the moonlit sky and stars above them.

But it was not the moonlight and the stars that Valerie was looking at. Her attention was on a long column of yellow smoke, like that she and Larry had seen from the top of the mountain, and which carried with it the pungent odor of burning hair.

CHAPTER XI. OVER THE RIM.

CAN we get to that fire?" asked Valerie, after she had observed that it was on the other side of a long ridge, whose jagged rim was very far above their heads. "It is in another valley, with a mountain between."

"It's not as bad as it looks," was Larry's answer. "That mountain is not too steep to be climbed, and it is not so very high. The main difficulty will be getting down on the other side, I imagine. However, we'll soon find out. If you'll stay here, I'll go up by myself. You're too tired to tackle that job right away."

"I'm nothing of the kind," she protested indignantly.

Then she swayed into Larry Boyd's arms and—fainted.

"Jove!" he murmured. "Here's a devil of a scrape I'm in! What do you do when they faint, I wonder! Water, of course! Lord! I'll have to hustle back to that creek in the cañon, and get——"

He was gently letting her down to lay her on the ground while he went for water when Valerie began to come to herself and said weakly:

"I'm all right now. But—I'm afraid I can't climb that hill just now. I didn't think I was so tired."

"You're just about all in—exhausted," said Larry sympathetically. "To the deuce with the cattle, and Alvin too! We'll look after them some other time. I've got to stay here with you."

He had helped her to sit down on a large boulder. His arm around her waist was supporting her. He knew that she was engaged to be married to Alvin Chalmers, and he had evidence that she cared a great deal for the boulder. But, after all, Larry was only human, and he was in love with her himself. However, though he knew he had no chance of ever winning this girl who had so desperately infatuated him, he was glad of the opportunity to sit with his arm about her. It was with the greatest difficulty that he kept his cheek off the top of her shining hair. He had removed her wide-brimmed hat and was fanning her with it, using his left hand. His right arm was around

her and couldn't be moved—not if Larry knew himself!

"You must go ahead and see this thing through," she said, as she gathered her senses about her. "If you don't, how are we ever to get out of this valley! It looks to me as if there is no way except over that ridge where the fire is."

"We'll find our way somehow," declared Larry carelessly. "But I don't see how I can leave you in this valley alone. It's worse than it would have been up on that bluff."

"Nevertheless, that is what you have to do," she returned. "If you don't I'll go up that ridge myself."

Larry looked into her resolute face, shrugged his shoulders and said to himself inaudibly: "By the gods, she *would* do it."

"Please give me my hat," she said quietly.

"I beg your pardon."

Larry dropped his arm from her waist and handed her the broad-brimmed gray hat. As she put it on—a little rakishly, on one side—he decided that she looked as well in her hat as bareheaded.

"Now, please go," she requested, standing up to prove that her strength was returning. "There may be some secret outlet from this valley. If I can find it, I'll get to my father and the other men. But I hardly think there is one," she added thoughtfully. "If there were, it wouldn't have been impossible up to now to catch these Jackson men. The trail was always lost somewhere in the hills."

Larry nodded. The same idea had come to him. "I guess there is no exit down here," he said. "The original Jackson's Hole bandits must have studied the Big Horn country thoroughly and picked out a place that would be almost impossible to find. The rascals were smart enough to make this valley a sort of outer defence, with no way

into it except down that bluff into the cañon. That is, it looks like it."

The girl had made some signs of impatience as Larry stood looking down at her while he talked. He saw this, turned away abruptly, and having chosen a spot where he could gain fifteen feet or so without much difficulty, he set himself grimly to the task of climbing the crags and loose rocks which reached in a tumbled mass to the summit of the ridge.

It was a laborious task. Not only were there treacherous gorges and overhanging cliffs to be negotiated, but again and again he came to a steep, smooth wall which at first sight seemed unscalable. But Larry's Alpine experience had taught him that there is always a way, provided one keeps cool and is willing to take desperate chances. Twice he used his rope, throwing the loop over a peak and going up hand over hand. He was never halted for more than a few minutes.

Up he climbed, higher and higher, slowly, but surely. But he was glad Valerie had not insisted on coming with him. It was no work for a girl!

He looked back, but black shadows filled the valley now. The moon was beginning to wane. He wondered what Valerie was doing down there.

More than an hour had elapsed since he had left the girl, when Larry, after a leap across a chasm wide enough to call for all the strength and agility he could command, found that he was within a dozen feet of the top.

The fire was still burning on the other side, and now and then he caught a whiff of the burning hair. It made him all the more eager to reach a place where he could look over and see what really was going on.

The final climb was about as difficult as any part of the journey. But Larry used his rope for the last time to scale the smooth face of the ten-foot wall which surmounted the jumble of rocks

reaching up from the valley, and, with a little chuckle of triumph, held on to the jagged rim and peered over.

He was looking into the notorious Jackson's Hole!

It was a weird scene. There were several fires, although he had discerned the smoke from only one, and around each fire were two men keeping running irons hot, while others on horse-back roped and threw the cattle that milled about the great bowl.

For fifteen minutes Larry Boyd, cautiously keeping his head down close to the uneven top line of the wall, so that he would not be seen, watched the work going on below.

It did not take him long to decide that this immense natural basin in the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains into which he was gazing was only a part of the secret retreat known as Jackson's Hole.

How far it extended he did not know. But he noted that, of the thousands of cattle that were stolen in the past few months, not more than a hundred were on sight. These were being systematically branded one by one. Each newly marked animal, after getting away from the iron, was driven to the far end of the inclosure and swallowed up in the jumble of rocks that formed a hidden gateway to some other precinct of the mysterious bandit territory.

At the same time that the newly branded cattle were driven into the rocks at one end of the bowl, others were coming from another part of it, with wild-riding cowboys urging them along.

If Larry had not known that he was surveying an utterly unlawful proceeding, he might have supposed that what he saw was merely the routine work of a legitimate ranch, except for one thing. That was, that in every case the steer or cow now marked already bore a brand that had been burned in long before.

Larry Boyd had had two seasons of range-riding in Texas, and he knew what this meant. The men he was watching were changing the ownership devices of stolen cattle—"blotting brands," to use the technical term.

Suddenly he gave vent to a smothered gasp of astonishment. He had recognized one of the men riding to and fro far below him, who evidently was giving orders to the men driving the cattle. Then he saw another horseman he knew, keeping close to the first at all times.

Hastily coiling his lariat and hanging it over his shoulder, Larry resolved at all risks to make his way down into this heretofore impregnable den of desperadoes.

"By all the gods!" he muttered, as he sought a spot where he might begin his descent without plunging down headlong. "I suspected that very thing!"

The two men he had recognized were Burr Vance and Alvin Chalmers!

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER FIFTY YEARS.

AS Larry Boyd worked his way along the top of the ridge, preparatory to his downward trip, he kept his eye on Alvin.

The erratic son of the Cheyenne cattle king was riding his cayuse up and down, waving his arms and yelling like a maniac. He shouted instructions to the cowboys and occasionally shook a fist at men working with irons at the fires when a steer broke loose before it could be properly branded.

That Alvin was far gone in liquor Larry could tell by the lolling way he swayed in his saddle, as well as by his reckless riding and the purposeless manner in which he kept on swinging his lariat.

Suddenly, and obviously by accident, his loop dropped over the spreading

horns of a huge steer that was racing past. At the same moment his left arm became entangled in the rope and he was dragged from his saddle.

As Alvin lay helpless on the ground, the steer turned sharply with the evident intention of trampling him to death. He would have done it too, only that Burr Vance, on his big bay thoroughbred, galloped up, and, with one slash of a bowie knife, cut the rope.

The steer, bellowing in anger, dashed away to another part of the big bowl, while Burr Vance, leaning down from his horse, pulled Alvin to his feet.

There seemed to be an angry interchange of words, although of course Larry could not hear them at that distance. Then he saw Alvin, staggering and bewildered, raise the quirt which hung to his wrist, and aim a vicious blow at a man who had just put a running iron into a fire.

The man dodged the stroke and involuntarily his hand dropped to the butt of the revolver in a holster against his thigh. Then, as he seemed to realize that his drink-crazed assailant was not responsible for his action, he darted away among the milling cattle out of sight.

Larry watched till he saw that Alvin Chalmers, once more in the saddle, was blustering up and down as before. Then he slipped over the top of the ridge and began to scramble down the rough face of the cliff. He had only one thought in his mind: To confront Alvin Chalmers and force from him the secret of Jackson's Hole.

He was not overcome with surprise at finding Burr Vance connected with the operations of the thieves, who had been preying on the surrounding ranches in the Big Horn country for so long. There had been whispers of something crooked about the owner of the Double Bar M Ranch. Though ostensibly he devoted most of his time to breeding fine horses and sometimes

openly sold a small bunch of steers, a vague belief existed that he had other interests, the nature of which seemed to be a sinister mystery. He had at one time been a professional gambler, it was said, but that proved nothing.

All this Larry had heard. What he could not comprehend was how Alvin Chalmers, the only son of a millionaire and manager of the largest cattle ranch in Wyoming, came to be in Jackson's Hole, and on intimate terms with its notorious gang of desperadoes.

Well, he was going to find out, but he would have to exercise caution. No one realized better than this shrewd young man that a stranger suddenly presenting himself alone in this sanctuary of rustlers and gunmen would have a slim chance of ever getting out alive. With Burrows, Alamo, Jake Deane and Slim Berry at his back, it might be different.

After slipping down a short distance, Larry worked his way sidewise on a narrow ledge until he came to a footpath which zigzagged down until it came to the ground behind a twenty-foot granite wall. A space some six feet wide, separated this wall from the steep side of the ridge.

One end of this rocky pass lost itself in the mountain that overshadowed the Hole, among a pile of boulders. The other led into the open space where the business of branding cattle still went on. This seemed to be a big night with the Jackson gang.

There was no light where Larry stood, except the red glare of one of the fires, and that did not reach him.

He had just time to see that a man in cowboy dress stood close to him, when a pistol flashed before his eyes, and the heavy barrel struck his ear a stinging blow, following it with a crash on his shoulder.

Fortunately for Larry, he had been an athlete at college, and since then had been careful to keep himself in condi-

tion. Which accounts for the fact that he had hurled his assailant to the ground and was kneeling on his chest before the surprised desperado realized how it had happened.

The light of the fire chanced to fall upon the face of the cowboy, and Larry noted that he had a blue bandanna over his chin, partly concealing his mouth. Immediately Larry was reminded that he had observed from above a similar blue handkerchief around the neck of each of the men who had worked about the fires. No doubt the riders also thus concealed their chins and mouths, but he was not sure of that.

He remembered that Alamo had said something about a blue bandanna being the "sign" used by Jackson Hole men in the old days to enable them to recognize each other. But, as the old-timer had explained, any one might wear a blue bandanna, so the Jackson men covered their chins and mouths as an additional signal that they belonged to the gang.

Larry determined that he must have a blue bandanna.

"I hate to do this," he said in a low voice to the man he held down. "But I have to. Don't yell, or I shall have to be rough with you. Nobody could hear you anyhow, with all that racket out there."

It was a rather high-handed proceeding on his part. Larry acknowledged that to himself. He took no account of the Jackson man striking at him with his pistol, because doubtless he had felt that he was within his rights in thus rebuking an interloper. The reason Larry used his lariat to tie the man tightly and to render him dumb by gagging him with the handkerchief he took from his own neck, was that he needed the blue bandanna.

Carefully Larry adjusted the stranger's blue handkerchief over his own chin and lower lip, tying it securely, with the knot at the back of his neck.

Then he observed that the outlaw's hat was much older and flopped down in front lower than his own. So he borrowed that and put it on, tossing his own hat in a corner behind his trussed-up captive. Rudely scrawled on the inside hatband he read "Rafferty."

After a final examination of the stranger's bonds, to assure himself that there was no danger of his breaking loose, Larry swaggered boldly forth out to the open and picked up a running iron lying by the side of the nearest fire.

"Where you been?" was the greeting he got in a gruff, angry voice from another man who was moving over to a steer that had been thrown and held down by three horsemen with the help of their well-trained cow ponies. "I'll handle this steer and the next one. After that you can work by yourself," went on the grumbler, busy with his iron.

Larry felt that he might pass for the man whose bandanna and hat he wore. Moreover, he was glad this other man was so busy that he had no time to look closely at him.

There was something else too. Larry had an opportunity to see that the iron now in use was converting the V N already branded on the steer into a Star M. Three strokes added to the V and one to the N did the business. He never had seen the operation of "brand-blotting" before.

Larry doubted whether there was a Star-M cattle outfit in Wyoming. But that was of little moment. The important thing was that V N brands were being altered, while the manager of the V N Ranch rode up and down, superintending the operation. Drunk though he was, there could be no doubt that Alvin Chalmers was concerned in this wholesale robbery of his own father.

Having satisfied himself that the V N cattle stolen in recent raids were

all hidden in this strange nook in the Big Horn foothills, Larry had no intention of being made to take part in using the running iron. What he wanted was to find some way out of Jackson's Hole and to bring Burrows and the other V N men in. He dared not think of Valerie, alone in that valley on the other side of the ridge.

With his flopping hat and the bandanna—badge of the Jacksons—high on his ohin, he had no fear of being detected as an outsider. He picked up an iron and walked quickly about, as if intent on business.

The voice of Burr Vance just behind him, accompanied by the pounding of hoofs, made him turn quickly. Vance was on his bay horse.

"Hey, you!" shouted Vance. "Didn't you hear me call you? Go with Sherlock to the outside and make sure no one is about. Then hurry back and report to me. You are Rafferty, aren't you? Get a move on, both of you."

A cowboy, whose blue bandanna was up to his nose, and whose flopping hat hid the rest of his face, dropped from a horse and trailed the bridle.

"This way, pard!" he said huskily, as he led his horse up to the wall behind which Larry had dropped from the ridge. "The boss called you Rafferty. You are a new one, I reckon. Don't know as I've met up wi' you afore. Been away for more'n a month, down in the Wind River country. Goin' on this big drive down through to Mex soon as we git all this bunch o' V N steers ready. Mebbe you're goin' too."

Larry merely shook his head. He suspected that his new companion wouldn't have been so loquacious if he'd been quite sober. It seemed as if drinking was a popular amusement in Jackson's Hole.

Sherlock—as Vance had called him—led the way behind the wall into the narrow pass. Fortunately, it was very

dark. They passed so near to the real Rafferty whose bandanna and hat Larry wore, that he almost stumbled over the man's feet.

Sherlock was quite unaware of all this, and walked ahead so rapidly that Larry had no time to see whether his prisoner was still safely bound.

"Hey, Rafferty!" said Sherlock in the pitch darkness a few minutes later.

"Yes?" replied Larry, disguising his voice in a low growl.

"Swing this rock back to where it was when you come through, and don't let it make any more noise than you can help."

"Right!" returned Larry.

The next moment he made out an irregular opening like a low doorway, and following his guide along a tortuous passage, at last saw that he was in the valley on the other side of the ridge—where he had left Valerie.

Larry remembered the instructions of Sherlock to swing the rock back, but took the liberty of disobeying them. He wanted to make sure of finding his way when the time came to return, with the V N men, to Jackson's Hole. He was glad Sherlock was drunk. It made everything easier.

Where was Valerie? Would he find her here, and what should he do about getting her away in safety?

He was considering these questions, making up his mind to knock Sherlock senseless if he interfered with anything he wanted to do, when a shout of dismay by this same Sherlock made him hurry forward to see what was the matter. Before he could ask, Sherlock, who seemed to have sobered, said in a low voice:

"The outer gate is open!"

"What gate?" asked Larry. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," returned Sherlock, in awe-stricken tones, "that after fifty years, some outsider has found the way into Jackson's Hole!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SWINGING ROCK.

WITHOUT a word in reply, Larry dashed ahead to the foot of an incline at one end of the valley, in the shadow of the high ridge.

"Hey, Rafferty!" cried Sherlock. "Stop! Hold on! Stop, or s'help me, I'll bend my gun on yer! Stop, I tell yer!"

Although the valley was too dark for a sure aim, it might have been possible for Sherlock to bring down the supposed Rafferty by shooting in his direction. Larry realized that, but he was too anxious about Valerie to mind risking a bullet from which he figured he had a ten to one chance of escape.

He was not compelled to take that chance, however. As he kept on running toward the place where he had left the girl, he heard behind him a sudden scuffling of feet, a smothered oath from Sherlock and the gruff voice of Burrows ordering him to "Shut up!"

Larry halted and turned to stare back into the gloom. But he did not stand still while speculating on what was going on. The row, with several voices in violent altercation, was behind a great rock which was part of the mountain wall that hemmed in the valley.

To sprint over to this rock was the work of only a moment or two for Larry Boyd. He had not quite reached the spot when the slight figure of Valerie came slipping out of the shadows, with a gasping cry of "Oh, Mr. Boyd, I'm so glad you're here!"

Her hand was on his arm, and he felt it trembling in unison with her quivering tones, as she went on: "I felt sure you'd come—Larry! Dad and the others have taken some man a prisoner, and—and—who's Rafferty?"

The words came tumbling out so rapidly as to be almost incoherent, and Larry knew that the only way to calm

her down was to answer all questions promptly and simply.

He wasn't surprised to find the girl here. He knew, when he went over the ridge, that she would be seeking some way of joining her father and his men. That she should have been successful was just what he expected.

"That man you have caught calls himself Sherlock," he said. "He thinks I am Rafferty, one of the Jackson gang."

"You?" she exclaimed, puzzled. "How is that?"

"A little trick of disguise," he replied. "I partly hid my face with Rafferty's blue bandanna. He didn't want to lend it to me, so I had to knock him down and leave him where he could not get away. Then I took his hat and pulled it well down over my forehead. I'm glad to say it fooled them, and I was sent—supposed to be Rafferty—with Sherlock, to make sure none of the V N men were about. Where's your father?"

Burrows' voice came out of the darkness:

"Here I am, Boyd. I heard what you just said. What are we to do with this hyar Sherlock? He's squirming so we'll have to knock him cold with a chunk o' rock, it seems to me."

"No," said Larry. "Just hog tie and leave him. Gag him, of course. Then tell me how all you fellows got here."

"Ask Valerie!" was the sententious response.

"Valerie?"

"That's what," replied the foreman. "She'll have to tell you. I don't know."

"After you climbed up the ridge, Mr. Boyd," said Valerie, who had conquered her nervousness, and spoke in her usual quiet way. "I set to work to examine this valley. I could not but believe there was some other way into Jackson's Hole, and I determined to find it. Well, I *didn't* find it, but I stumbled on something else. There was a large

boulder in my way—a baby mountain, you might call it. I started to climb over it, when it began to rock from side to side. I suppose I was ten minutes pushing this big rock, and each shove I gave, made it move farther and farther. By this time I began to suspect something, and it didn't surprise me much when it swung far enough to one side to leave an opening I could get through."

"Seems hardly possible," observed Burrows. "But I know it's so."

"Oh, it ain't so plumb curious," broke in the husky voice of Alamo, who, with Slim, had just finished binding Sherlock so that he was a mere helpless bundle. "I've heerd tell of other boulders, weighin' tons, bein' balanced jest the way Miss Valerie says. My grandfather, who come from Cornwall, used to tell about a stone, bigger'n a house, what a baby could set a see-sawin' nigh whar he was born. They called it the 'Logan Stone,' he said. They's others like it in diff'runt places about the world. This hyar one shorely makes a good door for Jackson's Hole."

"That's all right, Alamo, but you've held the floor long enough," interrupted the foreman. "As I said, I *know* it's so about this big teeterin' rock, an' hyar's why: Me an' Slim an' Jake an' Alamo was all prospectin' about in the dark—for we knowed Jackson's couldn't be fur away—when I'm blessed if my girl didn't come bustin' out o' the solid wall. I spoke to her an' when she called out 'Dad!' in a kind o' squeak. I struck a match. It took a few minutes afore she could talk wi'out tremblin' so's I couldn't git the right meanin' o' what she said. At last I made out that you was over in among the Jackson gang, an' it was up to us to go in an' help yer."

"She had it absolutely right," said Larry Boyd.

"This girl o' mine mos' gen'ally is allers right," returned Burrows. "But

s'pose you explain jest how it all was, Boyd. If you got in the Hole an' out ag'in alive, you're a wonder, an' I ain't holdin' out nothin' when I say it."

"There was nothing wonderful about it that I can see," declared Larry modestly. "I'll tell you how I got in and out, and you can judge for yourself."

In as few words as possible, Larry told what had taken place since he climbed down the high bluff where he parted from Burrows; how Valerie insisted on going with him, and how eventually, when they got to the foot of the ridge guarding Jackson's Hole, he had to leave her alone in the valley. Also how he had made his way into the great mountain bowl, among the outlaws, without any one there suspecting him.

When he told of how he had seen Burr Vance and Alvin Chalmers riding up and down, overseeing the operations of the rustlers who were herding the cattle and altering brands, the irrepressible Alamo, boiling over with excitement, broke out:

"Durned if I didn't allers know that Burr Vance was pizen. But I don't git it how Alvin kin be in wi' the gang. Thar's somethin' back of it what'll show it ain't Alvin's fault. I'll stand by that. Drinkin' ain't no crime. He's allers been squar', an' I'm hyar to say he is still, no matter how things may look."

It was dark, but Valerie knew where Alamo was standing. As the last word left his lips she seized the gnarled hand of the old plainsman and gave it a warm grip. But all she said was the single word "Thanks!"

"You have the horses here?" asked Larry quietly a few minutes later, when he and Burrows had exchanged what information each had. "You brought mine down, didn't you?"

"Shore we did," answered Burrows. "An' Valerie's little mare come down by her own self right after."

"Well, we shall have to leave them

here for the present. But we shall need them later. What I have to do is to find some way of persuading Alvin to come out. I don't know how I am to do it, but it is the only way I can see to get the better of this gang."

Larry spoke deliberately, as if he were trying to formulate a plan of action, but it was evident he had not perfect faith in the success of his own proposition—to persuade Alvin Chalmers to come out.

"He's half crazed with liquor, you see, Burrows," he said sadly. "In me he will see only one of the subordinates of the Jacksons, and may try to knock me down with the butt of his quirt for my presumption. But there is nothing else to be done. We *must* get him out of that place."

"Why can't we all go in thar an' cover 'em with our guns?" asked Burrows sternly. "There'll be five of us and——"

"Six, dad," interposed Valerie quietly. "I shall go and I have a gun. But we can't shoot. We might accidentally hurt Alvin."

"It wouldn't do," declared Larry, ignoring the girl's interruption. "I admit that five leveled revolvers, taking a dozen men by surprise, will make them throw up their hands. But these men aren't all in one place. Besides, there is more than a dozen of them. The best we could hope for would be a pitched battle."

"Well, what of that?" was Burrows' stern rejoinder. "We should win it."

"Listen!" broke in Larry, holding up a hand warningly. "Hear that?"

The dawn had begun to break, and a gray mist was taking the place of the dark shadows hitherto lurking among the crags and valleys of the foothills.

"It's cattle," pronounced Alamo, after a few moments of silence, during which the whole party listened intently. "Thar's two or three hundred head. I

should say, from the sound of their feet."

"They are on the other side of that gorge," said Larry. "Wait!"

He slipped away on foot among the broken rocks, and was away fifteen or twenty minutes. During that period the sound of tramping cattle became more and more distinct. When Larry at last returned, his face was pale with excitement, and he spoke hastily.

"There's about two hundred and fifty steers, branded V N. They have been driven off the range since we were there last night. There are two men behind them, and they are heading straight for Jackson's Hole. Now is our time to find the other and principal entrance. We'll trail the two riders and go right in with them."

"Then you are willing to risk a pitched battle?" asked Burrows.

"Yes," replied Larry Boyd. "I don't see any way out of it. We have to get Alvin out of that place and we are going to recover the V N cattle—every head and hoof of 'em."

"You aim to shoot down every man in the gang—twenty of 'em mehbe?" asked Alamo.

"It won't be necessary," was the reply. "And this is as good a time as any for me to tell you that we'll shoot over their heads the first time. If that doesn't stampede them——"

"Then—what?" asked Burrows, as Larry paused.

"Only that we are going to get back our cattle, and——"

"And a live V N steer is worth a great deal more than a dead Jackson Hole cattle thief, eh?" said Burrows grimly. "That what you mean?"

Larry Boyd did not reply. He did not consider it necessary. Instead, he gave the word for all to mount. Cautiously they followed him as he led the way to a spot where they could secretly watch the cattle and the two rustlers pass.

The men with Larry Boyd were all seasoned plainsmen, who had each had many a thrilling moment in their rough-and-ready career. But there was not one of the whole five, including Larry himself, whose heart did not thump tumultuously while he watched the stolen steers blunder along up the gorge.

These steers were about to show the way into the main entrance to Jackson's Hole—the entrance through which had been driven thousands of dollars' worth of live stock stolen from the Chalmers ranch within the last year.

CHAPTER XIV.

MONTE VANTYNE'S REVENGE.

WHILE the shadows slowly lifted and everything became more distinct, the little party—with Valerie close by Larry's side—kept the horses out of sight of the two cowboys who guided the refractory steers steadily up the gorge.

It was not until the cattle had all passed out of view around a sharp bend in the trail, with their drivers close behind, that Larry gave the word to follow.

He did not understand exactly how this rift in the mountain would lead into Jackson's Hole, for it seemed to end at a precipice over which it would be manifestly impossible to send the cattle. But the two hard-faced riders, with cigarettes in the corners of their mouths and flopping hats turned back from their browned foreheads, appeared to know perfectly what they were about. Now that they were nearly home and presumably out of danger of pursuit, they raised their voices together in one of those cowboy ballads which are more distinguished for coarseness and volume of sound than simple melody.

Just as it seemed as if the cattle and their drivers must go over the bluff, they swung aside around another bend.

sheltered by overhanging rocks, and vanished.

"Burrows," said Larry. "I will look after Alvin and get him out somehow. I wish you'd keep your eye on Burr Vance."

"You mean, if we ever get into the Hole?" returned the foreman dryly.

"We shall get in," was the confident reply.

He led the way around the bluff, just in time to see the last of the bunch of steers passing between two mighty crags that stood on either side of the entrance to the immense bowl which Larry Boyd had identified as Jackson's Hole.

"Now, boys!" called out Larry to his little band, "fire over their heads and keep it up. Make all the noise you can. Valerie, keep in the rear!"

That the attack was to be in the nature of a bluff had been well understood by the V N men. It was the only chance of rushing the outlaws and taking possession of their long-hidden natural fortress.

So they obeyed Larry's orders enthusiastically. Emptying their .45 six-shooters as fast as they could pull trigger and yelling like demons, they dashed through the portals.

There were only a few Jackson men in sight as the invaders rushed in on the heels of the two who had driven in the new bunch of cattle. At the first volley, the outlaws—those on foot as well as in the saddle—dashed away to the other end of the vast inclosure, while the steers, maddened by the roar of the guns, galloped madly to and fro, effectually preventing Larry and his men following.

Larry saw that the flying outlaws had vanished amid a confusion of rocks, and instantly he guessed that there was another secret division of the Hole into which they could retreat in case of such an attack as the present. He paid no more attention to them, nor to his men

who, having ceased shooting, were following the fugitives headlong. Alvin Chalmers, bewildered, having reined in mechanically, was seemingly in a daze.

Obedying a sudden impulse, Larry whirled his lariat over the head and neck of the stupefied young man's horse, and, with a sign to Valerie to come, led the horse to the gateway of the Hole. Alvin, bolt upright in the saddle, made no resistance.

At the same moment there was a cry of terror from the girl, accompanied almost simultaneously by a single shot. The report caused Larry and Alvin to turn, and the latter seemed partly to recover his senses.

Burr Vance was close behind them, reeling in his saddle. Alamo, with the revolver he had just fired still in his hand, rode up to the wounded man, who, with a groan, fell into the old cattleman's arms. From Vance's nerveless fingers dropped a six-shooter.

"I had to do it," said Alamo. "He was just going to plug you, Royd."

Larry lifted his rope from Alvin's horse, and, with Valerie went to the aid of Alamo.

The three of them laid Burr Vance on the ground. His eyes were closed, but he was conscious and able to speak in a low voice.

"Where's Alvin Chalmers?" he asked gaspingly.

"Here I am, Burr!" answered Alvin, who had joined the other three at the side of the fatally wounded man.

"They've got me!" murmured Vance. "Are you there, Chalmers?"

"Yes. What is it, Burr?"

Alamo opened Vance's shirt and pressed a handkerchief to a widening red spot. He shook his head. The old plainsman knew a deadly injury when he saw it.

"It's just this, Chalmers," gasped Vance. "Before I go, I want to tell your girl—and others—that I got you into this—and why. *You're a dirty*

cattle thief, Alvin Chalmers, and I made you one."

"What do you mean, Vance?" broke in Larry Boyd, while Valerie's face went deathly pale.

"What I say," was the feeble reply. "He belongs to the Jackson gang. It was the absinthe got him. He tried to get away by aiming his rifle at me last night in the hills, but he couldn't shoot straight, the drunken idiot! I could have killed him then, but I want him hanged as one of the Jackson rustlers."

Larry Boyd stooped to wipe the dying man's lips. Vance feebly pushed him away.

"Get out of that, will you?" he whispered fiercely. "If it hadn't been for you, this wouldn't have happened. But there's one thing—you won't get that girl. She'll stick to Alvin Chalmers, and perhaps join the Jackson gang herself," he added vindictively.

Larry looked around and saw that Burrows, Jake Deane and Slim, were riding up and down aimlessly. Not one of the outlaws was in sight. Larry was glad Burrows had not heard this evil prediction about his daughter.

"All this is nothing, Vance," said Larry sternly. "If you'll lie still, I'll see what we can do for you. I have studied medicine, and I worked in the hospitals in France for a while after I was wounded."

"Shut up!" snapped out Vance, his voice a little stronger. "I want to tell you why I dragged Alvin Chalmers down. He always was a fool about liquor. So that helped. Then I got him to drinking absinthe——"

"Oh!" broke from the dry lips of Valerie.

"Yes," went on Vance, with a feeble grin. "You must care a whole lot for this fellow, Valerie, or you wouldn't be here now. Well, you see what he is."

"He will be all right, Vance," interrupted Larry. "I'll see to that. I prom-

ised his father that I'd look after him, and——"

"His father," broke in Vance. "Richard Chalmers! May a dying man's curse——"

"Hush!" Alvin put a hand over Vance's mouth.

"I'll not hush!" Vance weakly pushed Alvin's hand away. "*It was Richard Chalmers who killed my father.*"

"Nonsense!" interposed Larry. "Richard Chalmers! Why, he couldn't have——"

"Richard Chalmers sent my father to the gallows. When he was sentenced, my mother swore that his son—I was only a baby then—would avenge his murder." Burr Vance's eyes began to blaze. With a final effort, he managed to get out: "*My father's name was Monte Vantyne!*"

"Ho! cats!" burst from Alamo. "The man who bossed the Jackson's Hole gang in the eighties, who killed McBride and his wife in the Double Bar M Ranch, and was hanged for it! An' this hyar Burr Vance is the kid that woman held up in the court room when Monte was sentenced. Why, then, Vance's name was Monte Vantyne too. I mind the woman said he had the same name as his father." He looked down at the dead face. "I can see Monte Vantyne in him. He's a dead ringer for the old man."

Alvin Chalmers had seemed to be struggling to free his mind from a mist while Burr Vance denounced his father and boasted of how he had made the son a cattle thief and a member of the notorious Jackson gang, out of sheer revenge. Now, as Alamo spread his handkerchief over the still features of the man they had known as Burr Vance, but whose real name was Monte Vantyne, Alvin began to speak in the hollow tones of one who is just awakening from a dream.

"It was that horrible green devil that

got me into this," he said, with a pleading look at Valerie. "Ordinary liquor, like whisky, is bad enough, and I admit that I have been foolish—even worse—in losing my senses through it. But until Burr Vance got me to taking absinthe I never lost self-control entirely. The awful stuff made me crazy, and when Vance got me in a hole at poker, so that I owed him thousands of dollars I never could pay, I fell into his scheme of driving V N cattle down into Mexico with a brand on them—Star-M—that no one could trace."

"Thar ain't no Star-M iron, that I know of," remarked Alamo. "It's a plumb fake, but it's an easy one to make out of V N. Now, I——"

"Silence, please, Alamo," interrupted Larry. "Go on, Alvin."

"His argument was that I had a right to take what cattle I needed, because everything my father owned would be mine some day. Of course I would not have listened if I hadn't been maddened by absinthe, and whenever I came to myself I always told him I was going to straighten up matters and tell my dad the whole story. It was because I told him that among the hills last night, and he said I was a fool, that I pulled the rifle from my saddle holster and fired. I wasn't quite sober, or I wouldn't have done it. Then he persuaded me to have a drink from his flask to steady my nerves, and I took it without troubling to find out what it was."

"And of course it was absinthe," remarked Larry.

"Yes. After that he gave me some more. I wasn't in a state to resist him then, and when we got to the Hole I

began riding up and down, simply a maniac. That's what I've always been when I came to this place."

He paused and looked at Valerie. "I guess I can see what's coming; you've been loyal and stuck to me because you were sorry for me and wanted to put me on my feet, but I guess it's all over with now. You couldn't care for a man like me, really."

He glanced at Larry. He knew that his cousin had won; he had seen it in Valerie's eyes. It would be the one manly thing in his life, his giving her up, for he knew that Valerie would keep her promise and marry him if he held her to it. She was that kind of a girl.

There was an awkward pause and then Alvin changed the subject abruptly. "Every head of the stolen V N cattle is here in the hills. I can lead you to them."

"And to the Jackson gang?" asked Burrows, who had ridden up at this moment. "I don't know whar them thievin' coyotes went, but they can't be fur away. We'll get them."

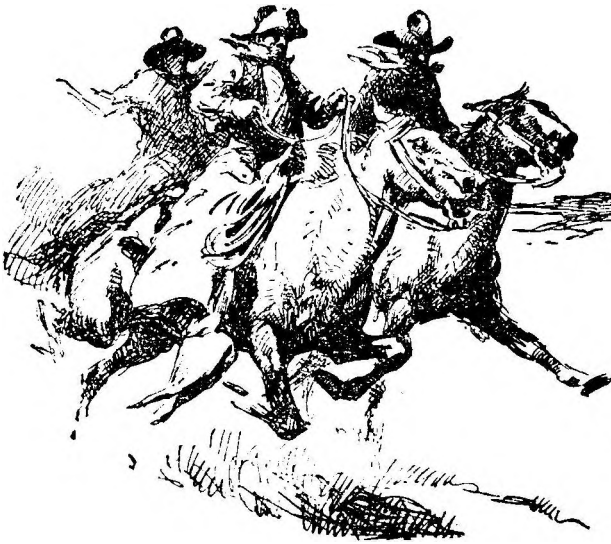
But Burrows was doomed to be disappointed in this. The cattle were all recovered, as Alvin had said they could be, but the members of the gang, hidden amid the peaks and crags of the Big Horn foothills, were safe in rocky recesses that so far had proved inaccessible.

Larry and the V N men had penetrated only to one of a score of the criminal burrows to which has been given the general name of "Jackson's Hole." The full secret of this notorious robbers' rendezvous has yet to be laid bare.



KAIBAB DEER MAY BE HUNTED

BECAUSE of the overcrowded conditions of the deer herds of the Kaibab National Forest, north of the Grand Cañon, in Arizona, hunting of these deer is being allowed this fall. This is done in the hope of thinning out the herds and saving the surviving deer from starvation during the coming winter.



The Biggest Lie

By
Ray Humphreys

Author of "A Mean Un," etc.

QUENE outlaw, more or less, wasn't a matter of consequence, any more, in Los Gatos. When "Bud" Stewart came down out of the Indian Hills country on a tired paint pony and indicated that he was stopping—indefinitely—in Los Gatos, the exasperated sheriff simply mopped his brow; the law-abiding element of the town only sighed in despair.

"Plague on these bad hombres," said the sheriff wearily. "They're sure givin' Los Gatos an evil name along the border. Folks in Custer are sayin' this is a pertected teown, where crooks thrive, but that ain't so. I ain't pertectin' nobody. They say thar's outlaws here, but kin we prove it?"

"We can't," admitted "Whiskers" Tarvin, the town marshal, regretfully. "Now, really sizin' up this new hombre——"

"He's a cool one," said the sheriff. "an' did yuh notice his eyes—sort o' gray-blue with black pin points? Ca'm, collected, an' cocky they means! Might be a gambler ef not worst—he's sunburnt, which means he ain't been out in the open long—melbe just outta jail somewhars!"

"Couldn't be—er—another rustler?" asked Tarvin.

Sheriff Warren shrugged and shook his head. The subject of rustlers was a paramount one—and a delicate one, as well—in Los Gatos. The sheriff frowned, shifted his tobacco, and glanced keenly at the rugged face of the marshal.

"No chance o' that!" said Warren. "I was in the Red Bull Saloon when this rooster struts in—an' so was 'Pud' Johnson, 'Squint' Markey and 'Pal' Geiger—but he never so much as bats an eye. As fer them, they held aloof, plain worried!"

Los Gatos had her suspicions of Johnson, Markey and Geiger. When rustlers were mentioned the grim visages of those three worthy citizens came to most minds, but nothing could be proved. They behaved in Los Gatos, idled and spent money; perhaps it was only a coincidence that every time they left their Los Gatos sanctuary and ventured forth there was soon news of another rustler raid in the valley.

It was whispered that the three so-called respectable citizens of Los Gatos were really the brains of a gigantic cattle-stealing ring. Nobody ever said so out loud. The sheriff had come as

close to doing it as he dared when he had said that Stewart, the newcomer, couldn't be a rustler because—well, he hadn't recognized Johnson or Markey or Geiger, and they hadn't recognized him. Los Gatos, though, prided herself on minding her own business and found the system paid.

There was no outlawry in Los Gatos, nestled back on the uptrail into the Indian Hills, and isolated as it was from the main roads. There were no holdups; there was no claim jumping nor rustling around Los Gatos. What there was of this was in the valley below, so that the jealous valley towns, noting the immunity of their alpine sister, grew suspicious. Having chased bandits in vain, they began to call Los Gatos a crook haven, where outlaws were tolerated knowingly in return for which favor the town was granted absolute freedom from outlawry.

So it was that Stewart, the newcomer, attracted less attention in Los Gatos than he would have in Custer, Blackhawk, or Aspen. Tall, spare and silent, the stranger offered no explanation of himself or his reasons for coming to Los Gatos. He put his pony up in the feed barn, took a room at Twin Pines Hotel, and settled down to a life of easy contentment—a secret source of worry to both factions in town, although on the surface none noticed him. The outlaws—or those who were suspected to be such—looked upon him in suspicion, while the cowed law-abiding element held aloof, too, for they feared the worst of him.

"He's no trash," was the way Luke Parslow put it, later, "he's either on the dead level, or he's a big gun an' may have designs on the bank—or Williams' jewelry store."

"I'm keepin' my eye on him," said Sheriff Warren, "an' let him so much as look cross-eyed, an' I'll clap him in the jug so fast that he'll not know what struck him."

The very next day the crisis came, and it was Sheriff Warren who got the worst of it. Stewart, wandering along the sidewalk, had stopped in front of Williams' jewelry store to look in at the glittering display in the window. The sheriff edged up and tapped the stranger on the shoulder.

"I wouldn't want any o' that junk too much ef I was yuh," suggested the sheriff, "unless yuh intends to *buy* it legallike!"

The hint was not lost on the stranger. He colored and then shot a withering glance at the sheriff, and the small crowd that had tagged the sheriff along the sidewalk.

"Don't be givin' me no threats, sheriff," said Stewart, smoothly, "fer they don't take; seein' yuh are plumb scared o' rustlers an' highwaymen, how come that I should be at all afraid o' yuh?"

That settled it. The sheriff slunk off. It wasn't very many hours after that that Stewart was accepted as a comrade by the tougher element. The wise crackers noted that Stewart seemed pleased. He smiled for the first time, and he tossed off several rounds of drinks as the occasion demanded. He was introduced to Johnson, Markey and Geiger and became quite "thick" with them. As word of this sifted through various channels to the sheriff's office, Sheriff Warren banged his desk.

"A crook an' a rustler, most like!" he exclaimed, "but he'd better try nuthin' rough around this town while I'm here!"

Beulah Ward, the telephone operator at the tiny Los Gatos exchange was the last to lose faith in the stranger.

"I thought he was so good-lookin' an' straightlike, same as a general," she confided to her friends, "an' when he comes in to put in a long-distance call I cracks something about the dance Sat'day night, but all he does is look

cold at me an' say that he never did and never will—like blue-eyed girls!"

Beulah's blue eyes snapped.

Meanwhile, basking in the smiles of the pack, Stewart seemed to grow in strength and popularity. He admitted that he was sunburned because he wasn't used to the sun. From that admission, it was but a step to the confession that he was just out of a jail—a penitentiary, in fact—and the doors hadn't swung open for him, either. He had escaped. He had dug up the loot he had taken from a bank five years before, for which he had been serving time, and—

"I'm lookin' to homestead me a piece o' land back in the hills an' hide out thar until they fergit about me," he said.

"Yuh come to the right place, ol' man," said Pud Johnson, in admiration. "we figgered yuh was dodging—but we wasn't sure until yuh had that tilt with the sheriff—however, ef I was yuh I wouldn't git too flip."

"Shucks!" said Stewart, "ain't this a pertected town? I was tol' that it was jest about—"

"Waal, it is, sort of," agreed Johnson, "but we don't make ourselves strong as hoss-radish around here as it is. We mind our affairs an' the town minds it—but we don't do no broadcastin' er nuthin'—y'understand?"

"Sure, Mike!"

So Stewart became one of the boys at the Red Bull hangout. He was an acceptable recruit to the ranks of the outlaws, though they constantly cautioned him not to say too much, for he was given to boasting of his criminal adventures—a thing the smaller fry of the profession in Los Gatos had religiously avoided, always.

"I stuck up a bank messenger in St. Paul," bragged Stewart, over his cups in the Red Bull, "an' had to leg it quick to make a clean git-away; cleared out with ten grand."

"Thousands, he means," whispered Johnson to Markey.

"But the best piece o' work I ever did was in St. Louis—held up a swell joint there—diamonds an' pearls—had to shoot a clerk just a little bit—in the arm—cleaned up two grand outta that sellin' to a fence two hours later."

"Sssh," warned Johnson, "yuh talk too loud, feller, an' too long—yuh'll put the world wise!"

For their own safety as well as for his own, the gang at the Red Bull endeavored to muzzle Stewart. They explained that nobody had any proof against anybody yet—but that if he kept on boasting it was bound to stir up trouble that might involve them all. They suggested that Stewart go find his homestead and obtain it, before somebody tumbled as to who he was and spoiled things.

"The sheriff here is a dumbell and a coward," they told him, "but the sheriff next door, in Conejos County, is a smart cookie an' rarin' to go like most new officials. He's sworn to clean us out—though he don't know us, an' we don't know him. But, feller, yuh he keerful, that's all—go git yuhr homestead pronto."

That was the reason Stewart started to exercise his paint pony. He cautiously inquired where the county line was, and he was careful to remain in San Luis County, where he was safe. He rode in all directions seeking the proper hide-out, and he was absent for several days at a time from Los Gatos. It was during one of these absences that Johnson, Markey and Geiger mounted horses. With a small group of friends they rode away into an October night after the town had settled down.

"Wish Stewart was along," said Markey.

"Nervy enough," agreed Geiger, "but this ain't his line. Just as well he ain't here or he'd been wantin' to horn in."

"The purse ain't big enough to split many more ways," said Johnson, laughing, as the cavalcade clattered away in the dark.

When Stewart did return, three days later, Los Gatos was buzzing with scandal. There had been a big rustler raid in the valley. The sheriff at Custer, in Conejos County, had telephoned over to tell Sheriff Warren, it was rumored, that if Warren didn't arrest the rustlers, who were hiding in Los Gatos, then Sheriff Warren could expect to see the neighboring sheriff pop into town and seize the men he wanted. It was no secret that the other sheriff had named his men but that Sheriff Warren was afraid to act, having no direct evidence, and being fearful of a suit for false arrest if he got the wrong men. Stewart heard all this as he stabled his pinto in the feed barn.

Down at the Red Bull, where Stewart swaggered as soon as he saw his horse properly fed, Johnson, Markey and Geiger and others were in earnest conference. They brightened when they saw Stewart and beckoned to him. Then he heard the story of the threat of the Custer sheriff all over again, but from a different angle. He smiled grimly as he listened. Then he laughed.

"Ef it gits too hot fer—well, fer anybody—here," he said, "yuh all can beat it to my homestead—yep, got a shack up an' a wire fence around the place—it's back on the ol' trail to Indian Hills, nice an' lonesome—an' by the way, my place runs square acrost the old trail an' I've closed it up, stringin' a three-wire fence right smack acrost it."

"The heck yuh have!" cried Johnson.

"Agent said I could," said Stewart.

"But man—why, that trail——" began Markey.

"Don't I know what yuh're gonna tell me?" demanded Stewart, grinning, "yuh're gonna say that trail is th' quick-

est an' best way out in case o' trouble—mebbe I don't know that. That's why I wanted it! If I'm on one side an' somebody is after me, on t'other—waal—it'll delay them a bit."

"But, lissen," cried Johnson.

"Any time one or more o' my *friends* wants to get through," said Stewart, and he winked at his hearers. "they're welcome—but bring yuhr own wire cutters—that's all!"

Talk drifted then, but not very far from the subject closest to the hearts of the crowd. It was agreed, however, that the Custer sheriff wouldn't dare to invade Sheriff Warren's bailiwick, and if he did so presume to act, what proof had he?

"It's a big bluff," said Stewart wisely.

Dawn, though, found a worried pack in Los Gatos. As the day passed without further news from Custer, however, the tension slacked a bit. By noon most of the gang was jocular again. Stewart, happening to visit the telephone exchange to ask if any calls had come for him, was so nice that Beulah Ward's interest was aroused anew. She couldn't help but admire tall, straight-standing Stewart, so she tried again.

"Thar's another dance, Mister Stewart, this Sat'day night," she remarked, after assuring him that no calls had come for him while he was away, "ef yuh should happen——"

"I tol' yuh I don't like gals with blue eyes!" snapped out Stewart, "when yuh git another pair, ef they're violet er brown er black——"

"Shut up!" exclaimed Beulah indignantly.

At the Red Bull, shortly after, Stewart announced that he was riding out although he omitted to name his destination. Nobody asked. He shook hands all around.

"Don't let that Custer sheriff git yuh, Stew!"

"Git me?" asked Stewart. "how an' what fer? What proof has he got on me—or on anybody else, eh?"

Stewart's optimism was contagious and after he had ridden away the gang agreed that his view was the right one. What could the Custer sheriff do if he did come for them? What evidence did he have that would stand in court? And how hot they could make things for him if he couldn't stick them, and they could show he had gone out of his own bailiwick to kidnap them!

It was still early that night when a tiny light glowed on the switchboard in the Los Gatos exchange, and Beulah Ward plugged in. It was almost ten o'clock—quitting time—and here was a long-distance call from Meeker, down the line. She pressed her hand receiver closer.

"Los Gatos," she answered.

"A Mister Shaw calling Mister Stewart, Los Gatos!" said the Meeker operator, "will yuh ring Mister Stewart?"

"I'd wring his neck ef he was here," answered Beulah, hotly. "He isn't here and I don't know where he went— I saw him riding out of town several hours ago——"

"Just a minute, Los Gatos!" and the Meeker operator clicked off. She was back in a moment, though.

"My party wishes to talk to you and give you a message for Mister Stewart when he returns," said Meeker.

"All right," replied Beulah, yawning, but she straightened up as a man's voice came over the wire——

"Tell Stewart," said the voice without preliminaries, "that a posse from Custer has started in—to Los Gatos—for three rustlers thar, names o' Johnson, Markey an' Geiger, but that they're also lookin' fer him as an escaped convict! The down roads are guarded an' he'd best make fer the hills—through that old trail—it's the only way—now yuh tell him, sister, or——"

The connection was broken.

The girl, her eyes wide, sat back—so Stewart was an ex-convict, after all! The man who had so carefully snubbed her was a hunted outlaw! And now she would——"

"Yes, I'll tell him!" she cried bitterly, "I'll tell Sheriff Warren—that's what—I'll——"

She fumbled with her connections.

Meanwhile three shadows had fled up the main street, bent low over horses, and had disappeared up the road toward Indian Hills. They were riding desperately and silently, although the thud of hoofbeats heralded them on their way. The cavalcade had flashed past the sheriff's house long before the call from Beulah had reached Warren.

Meantime, too, another figure was scurrying along a trail from Meeker which led to the hills country. This was the man who had telephoned the warning to Stewart. He was stretched low over his pony's neck; now and then he laid the quirt down on the pony's flanks—it was a race!

In Los Gatos, after the operator had told the sheriff what the Meeker caller had told her to tell Stewart, there was instantaneous commotion. The sheriff tumbled out and hastily collected a posse. He must make a showing. Then it was found that the supposed rustlers had left town. The trail was soon picked up, and the posse swept away in the night.

The moon, drifting high above the Indian Hills, looked down on the frantic riders making for the deep shadows of the mountains. Johnson, Markey and Geiger were making good time, whipping and spurring their frantic mounts along the highway, shouting now to one another as they fled! If the Custer sheriff was coming it was time they were leaving! It had turned out fine—their tapping of the telephone wires—and thanks to Stewart's, unknown friend in Meeker they had had warning! They wondered what had be-

come of Stewart—probably he would be caught like a rat in a trap. Would the operator give him the message, or did she tell Sheriff Warren about it? At any rate they owed their get-away to Stewart and his friend.

"We'll strike the hills by daylight," cried Johnson to his companions, "an' then that plagued fence o' Stewart's that he was tellin' us about—we'll have to cut it——"

"We'll have time!"

"We're at least two hours ahead!"

Along another road, far to the south, the solitary rider from Meeker raced madly. He pulled up, finally, as he came to the intersection where the road crossed the Custer highway. Here three other riders joined him and the dash to the hills was renewed with greater vigor.

The moon, had she glanced down toward Los Gatos, might have seen still a third group of riders straining through the night—Sheriff Warren and his posse, trusting to luck to beat the Custer sheriff to his quarry and thus, to some degree, save the face of Los Gatos. It was a desperate effort.

Johnson and Markey and Geiger, however, had the head start and the edge as well, because they knew their road. They goaded their horses on without pity, yet the east was streaked with the first ribbons of light when they swung off the main pike and clattered up the logging road that would lead them to the old trail that led into the back hills.

"Once we're on that trail they'll never head us," said Johnson, "daylight or no daylight——"

"Yuh said it, boss," cried Geiger.

On they tore, like specters of the night. An hour later dawn was upon them, but they reined in at a signal from Johnson, who was several yards in the lead.

"Thar's that blamed fence!" whooped Johnson, pointing along the dim trail,

"straight acrost the trail—nice thing to smack inter at night, eh? Good thing we knowed it was here—bet he never figgered this fence would slow us up—an' him, too, mebbe, ef he's skipping somewhar behind us——"

"Cut the dog-gone thing!" cried Markey.

The tired horses stopped willingly even before the anchoring reins dropped. The three riders sprang to the ground. Johnson was pawing himself over for his wire cutters, but Markey hastily produced his pair.

"Here, hold this strand!"

The three crowded close and snip went a wire; quickly Markey reached for the next strand.

"Hands up—yuh coyotes!"

The clarion command, shrilling through the early morning, startled the three men. They looked up—to see Stewart, a few feet away, his leveled rifle aimed at them.

"Stewart!" screamed Johnson.

"Hold up yuhr hands!" cried Stewart.

"But——"

"Up—up with 'em—or I'll blaze away!"

The hands went up, quickly, and Johnson choked on the frantic words he tried to utter. Geiger sagged, but Markey, coolest of all, snarled at Stewart.

"Yuh locoed rube—it's us!" he cried, "Johnson an' Markey an' Geiger—yuh're stickin' up yuhr pals—this fence surely——"

"Yuh're cuttin' my fence!" roared Stewart hotly.

"Yes—an' we're cuttin' fer the high timber, too," yelled Geiger, "an' we got word fer yuh—a pal o' yuhrs in Meeker telephoned to say that a posse was comin'—fer us—and fer yuh—yuh ex-con—so we started——"

"Hold up yuhr hands!" cried Stewart again, "who phoned an' what did he say?"

"A friend o' yuhrs," howled Markey, "said a posse was comin' fer the three rustlers—meanin' an' namin' us—an' likewise fer yuh—so we blew."

"All right, boys!" cried Stewart. The three fugitives started to drop their hands only to bring them up again at a menace from the swaying rifle, as three other men, in answer to Stewart's last yell, sprang out from behind some rocks and dashed straight at the fugitives.

"Friends o' mine," introduced Stewart, with a grim smile, "keep yuhr hands up—Johnson, Markey, Geiger—until the bracelets click!"

That took but a minute. Even as the three pairs of wristlets snapped a whooping and a thunder of hoofs sounded down the trail. The next instant Sheriff Warren of Los Gatos and his breathless posse heaved into sight and slid to an abrupt, reckless halt. Warren swung his gun down at Stewart.

"Yuh're a danged escaped outlaw an' I want yuh!" sang out Warren. Stewart only grinned back at him.

"Who said so?"

"Yuh've been braggin'——" began Sheriff Warren.

"It's a lie," said Stewart, laughing, and his men laughed with him, "put up yuhr gun, Warren—I'm a liar! I lied about bein' a crook to git in with these outlaws—an' I lied to them about me homesteadin' here—I ain't; an' I lied about this fence stretchin' fer miles, as I told 'em—it's just acrost the trail and over the ridge on both sides, to make it look like it stretched a long ways."

"Well——" cried the rattled Warren.

"I did that so I could ketch these coyotes without a gun fight," went on

Stewart quickly. "It was me who phoned in that fake warnin' from Meeker—I figgered Johnson had the wire tapped—an' he'd take the telephone advice an' flee this way—I lied when I made them think that I was sure because they was cuttin' my fence—I did that so they'd admit they was rustlers an' fleein', in the hearin' o' my men here, who can swear to it now."

"But—but *who* are yuh?" faltered Sheriff Warren.

The man known as Stewart advanced and stuck out a hand.

"Sheriff Warren, I'm Sheriff Graham o' Custer—came over incognito, so to speak, to trap these rustlers that we want so bad. They're here, an' I want yuh to arrest 'em legallike seein' this is yuhr county—after that yuh can turn 'em over to me!"

Sheriff Graham gave Warren a glimpse of his badge.

"So yuh're th' new sheriff at Custer," gasped out Warren, "an' yuh said yuh was a ex-con—that was the biggest lie o' all."

"Yuh're wrong, Warren," said the Custer sheriff, laughing again, "I told the *biggest* lie to that little phone gal back in Los Gatos—told her I didn't like blue-eyed gals when I certainly do—but I did that so she'd be sore at me and would be sure to repeat the fake warnin' I phoned in to myself to yuh, so that yuh'd come, as yuh has, an' could formally arrest Mister Johnson, Markey an' Geiger fer me. I want yuh to tell her how it was, fer me, an' apologize, fer I may not see her again very soon."

Sheriff Warren's eyes twinkled, and he held up a hand.

"*That*," he said, chuckling, "is the biggest lie o' all!"





The Runaways

By

George Owen Baxter

Author of "Fire Brain," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

SAMMY MOORE runs away from his severe Aunt Claudia, with a violin-playing tramp who has heretofore been accompanied solely by Smiler, a white bull terrier. "Lefty" is a red-headed, left-handed gentleman of the road, who is given to making weird fabrications concerning his past.

The two avoid capture by the reward seekers by resorting to ingenuity. On reaching a far town, by riding the rods of a train, Lefty becomes "Uncle Will." Sammy's blind, impoverished uncle. They create a hard-luck story that, together with Lefty's fiddling and Sammy's singing, opens the town coffers to them.

As they are counting the loot they have so easily acquired by trading on the town sentimentality, Jake, Lefty's hunchback enemy, enters their room. Tremendously strong and ruthless, he is the one person of whom Lefty is afraid. Jake has his eye on Sammy, whose voice seems advantageous. He finally compromises by accepting half the money.

Lefty, Sammy, and Smiler start to make a hasty escape and are almost overtaken by the treacherous Jake.

They now tour the country in a horse and buggy, working the old stall of blind uncle and singing nephew. Finally they reach Lefty's home town. Lefty weaves a picturesque explanation concerning his wandering life to his girl friend, Kate Perigord, who later trips up Sammy and learns the truth. But Lefty's lovable, harmless rascality has made her impervious to his stories.

Sammy, Lefty, and Smiler are forced to leave town by the arrival of a banker, Mr. Johnston, from the first town in which they had made such a grand coup. They hide in an isolated house, and are there found by Jake and two confederates. Sammy sees his beloved Lefty stabbed to death by Jake, and only saves Smiler by promising to work for Jake, "Boston," and "Pug."

Jake, disguised as a cripple, has Sammy sing on the street corners, thereby making quite a little money. They always camp outside the town. Jeff, an old friend of Jake's, comes along with a scheme. They rent a house near the bank, and start to tunnel their way to the vault.

Sammy is discovered looking at the tunnel, and is almost killed. He saves his life by making a fairly plausible lie about chasing a ferret into the cellar.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BREAD WINNER.



HAD an idea then that maybe I would win through. Boston said: "Do we want to start living on hope again right away?"

"Is the money that is inside of the safe in a bank—is that what you call just hope?" asked Pug.

"I believe in luck like that when the money is right inside of my pocket," replied Boston. "And if that *don't* go

through, then where are we except where we was before, bunning our way across the country and half starving a good part of the time! The kid is a good thing for us, ain't he?"

The other two both agreed that this was right. "Besides," said Boston, "you ain't asked him what he thought that tunnel down there meant!"

"That's right!" said Jake. "He's only a kid. Sammy, what d'you think that hole that you seen in the cellar is for?"

That put my shoulders up against the wall again. I could of choked that Bos-

ton for suggesting such a question; and it seemed to me that I saw him lick his lips like a hungry cat while he watched my face while I was making ready to answer Jake.

I didn't know what to answer, for a minute; then I told myself that maybe it was better to come right out with the truth, because if they saw through a lie, there was no doubt about them killing me that minute.

I said: "Why, the minute I saw it, I figured that it was a tunnel started to rob the bank."

Jake gave a grunt, and his nostrils flared out—very queer to see. He said: "You hear him, boys? But I guess that he was wrong. It was only a grave that we was digging!"

He begun to laugh, which made me sicker than ever to hear him. But Pug cut in with: "Well, kid, what made you think that it was to be used to rob the bank?"

I said: "Why, I thought that anybody that had good sense wouldn't be so foolish as to throw away a chance like that."

There was a change in the air right quick. Pug stepped back with a grin and nodded to Jake.

"This kid is all right," said Jake. "He's one of us, even though he don't act quite like one of us. But then, he ain't quite wore off the fancy notions that he got from Lefty, just yet."

So I saw that there was another chance for me, and Jake nodded his head. "There ain't any use jumping at conclusions," said he. "I guess maybe that he don't mean us no harm and—you get out of here and start breakfast, you little rat."

When I came to the back door I jumped through it and ran as hard as my legs could carry me. When I got to the back fence, I stopped and gave things a think. No, I saw that it wasn't at all likely that just a kid like me could get away from a gent like big

Jake. So I turned around, came back and started the breakfast fire. Then I prepared and gave them a plenty big meal.

They had been working a lot of the night. Now they lay around all day and in the evening I had to go out with Jake and try to make another raise out of the crowd.

It worked pretty good. The men all remembered us. When they saw us coming they gave a yell and made a ring around us. When I finished up the first song with a dance, one of the men said that I needed a better surface than that to dance on. He said they ought to take me in and give me a chance on the bar. So they picked up me and big Jake, too, carried us in and sat up Jake at one end of the bar to make the music and they stood me up on the bar to sing and dance.

That bar had started when Crossman started, kept on growing, all the time. There were rival saloons, now that the mines were opening up pretty strong, but Double Luck saloon had grown more than all of the rest. There was about a mile of bar.

I did my turn on that bar with those gents standing around, yelling, hollering and having a fine time. They chucked everything that they could reach into Jake's hat. Then they called for the dog, and Smiler went through his act with me.

That brought them down more than if they had never seen it before. One gent just down from the mines and all covered with dust, got up and said that everybody in that saloon—there must have been about two hundred men there—was to drink with him and on him. At fifty cents a throw, that was a considerable treat, enough to make the boys give him a cheer.

He said he didn't care about the money, but that if he was able to digest it, he would dissolve the gold and drink that to see if it would put a gilt edge

on a whisky drunk. He said: "But the first glass that is filled will be the kid's. Give Sammy a glass there, bartender. And fill it up to the top. The kid has danced for us and now he is gunna drink for us."

There was a glass stuck in my hand and a bottle raised—when wham! went a gun. That bottle just turned into crumbling glass and flying whisky in the hand of that bartender. He let out a yell, jumped back and began to dance around, yelling that his eyes was put out. They weren't, but they felt about that bad, because a lot of whisky had got into them.

"The kid *ain't* gunna drink," said a voice that I had heard before. There was the gent with the red hair and the red mustaches.

Well, that made the man who was buying the drink so mad that you wouldn't believe it. He said to the red-whiskered gent that he would take him outside, and that he would break him into little pieces to see if he could find the place where such a fool idea could start in to circulate through his system.

Somebody up and said in the sort of a whisper that means something: "Look here, Charlie, don't you be a fool. That is 'Red' McTay."

I had never heard of Red McTay before. That was one trouble with the mountains and mountain men. A gent up there was like a grizzly or a wolf—he had a regular range and that range he very rarely got off of unless he was crowded. A gent could work up a reputation that was a regular snorter in one range, and in the next range he wouldn't be knowed at all, or he would be just a name, you might say.

But it was plain that the man they called Charlie had heard of Red McTay: it was plain that he had heard plenty about him. He sobered up, got a little pale, and looked around pretty foolish.

This Red McTay was not like a lot

of other fighting men. He seemed pretty decent, saying: "I'm not in here to look for trouble, partner. I want you to have your little drunk and all the fun that you want. But I happen to own this saloon, and no kid has had a drink in it yet, and no kid is gunna have no drink in it so long as I'm alive and wearing a gun that ain't been worked overtime."

Red went on: "Charlie, don't bear me no hard feelings. But I couldn't let a thing like this happen. And I know if you had had one drink less under your belt, you wouldn't of wanted the boy to put away that 'red eye.'"

Then he stepped up to the bar and said to the bartender: "You skunk, you're fired! Get out of this saloon and out of this town, and get mighty fast!"

The bartender didn't see any use in asking questions. He just up and started and got, while Red got behind the counter and peddled out the drinks faster than you would believe.

That round went down, and then I did another dancing turn. When I got through, Red McTay took me and Jake into a little back room of the saloon, saying to Jake:

"This kid that you have picked up means pretty good business to my place, here. I suggest that it would be a good thing, partner, if you and him agreed to come down here regular and turn on your act. Or I could do better than that. That mouth organ of yours does as a novelty for a while, but I've got a real piano in this joint, and I have a real piano player. You can stay home and rest up those legs of yours—if they really need any rest—and you send down the kid here to collect, every evening!"

"That is extremely soft for you," replied Jake. "I throw all the trade your way—and you let me do it and pass the hat. But what would I get on the side? I might go over to some of the small

saloons and raise the crowd for them, just as easy."

"You couldn't," said McTay, "for two reasons. One is that they ain't as well known. The other is that they ain't got the room, and they ain't got the decent liquor. However, I can make it more worth your while here, and I'll give you a flat rate of ten dollars for every evening that the kid comes and sings and dances here."

Jake didn't have to think that over none. He just made Red agree that *he* was to get the pay and not me, and that after the hat was passed and everything collected, it was to be sent to him and not just given to me. All of that was agreed to. After that, Jake and me went home.

You would think that he would have been a little grateful for what he had got out of me this time, and the prospect of the easy money that was still to come, but he wasn't. He started in:

"Well, you see that there is a little difference between me and Lefty, that rat! He let you sing around on the streets, but I get you a swell indoor job where everything is easy for you, and where you got a whole bar for dancing on by yourself, and where you will have a real piano player for to accompany you—but that Lefty—he was such a skunk that he——"

I couldn't stand it. I said: "Leave off slamming Lefty, will you?"

He had got me just inside the house; he slammed the door hard and said: "What might you be meaning by that, you young rat?"

Well, I shouldn't have said it, but I hated Jake so, and I was so sad about Lefty that I couldn't very well help busting out:

"Because you ain't worth a trimming off of his fingernail!"

He just drew in his breath and took me in one hand by the hair. With the other hand he bashed into my face and knocked me silly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NEW ACT.

WHEN I saw that fist hanging in the air over me I figured that I was no better than dead, but after a while I came to with Boston sponging my face. There was a big cut under one eye, and my face was swollen up, a good deal.

Boston helped me to sit up. He said: "Poor kid! It don't seem possible that a man the size of Jake could hit a kid the size of you, but there ain't no doubt that he's just a brute."

I said nothing, for I couldn't help remembering about how he had closed me into the cellar and then called the others. Of course, he knew right away what I was thinking about.

Well, he had an explanation for that, even. He said that he had seen me down there in the cellar, and that he had closed the door for fear that one of the others might see me there, but that when he come back from the cellar, Jake seen something in his face and had cornered him, making him confess what he had seen.

"Otherwise," said Boston, "he would of wrung my neck, and thought nothing about it, because you know his style!"

Maybe Boston thought that I was pretty simple. I pretended that I believed him, because there is no use in having people that you live with know that you can see through them easy.

I went to bed after talking to Smiler a little and feeding him his meat.

After I had been asleep for a while, I heard the men cussing and ramping downstairs. I listened for a while, and I heard them run into stone. They had dug the tunnel a little, both ways, but it looked like a solid wall of rock. Then they tried to dig down under, but the rock seemed to stretch just as far down, too.

They didn't know what to do; they

groaned and swore that somebody had put bad luck on them, and Jake said that it was me, because he said that I was Lefty's luck, and that you could steal a man's purse, but you couldn't steal his luck.

Well, I was feeling too glad about them losing out in the tunnel to worry about what they thought of me, so I went to sleep again.

Those rascals didn't sleep though. The next morning they were still groaning and saying that it was just like having thousands of dollars sliding through their fingers.

All that day and the next they sat around, worrying. The next day after that, in the afternoon, Jeff dropped in to ask how things were coming along. They told him that they were snagged, and he seemed a good deal upset by what they said. I gathered that this Jeff was the night watchman over at the bank. After that, I didn't have to ask any questions; I knew what was what.

He was the one who had started everything the minute he saw Jake in town. He had a hope that maybe he could help Jake to clean out the bank, and he had suggested renting this shack and digging in from there.

Now that there seemed to be no very good chance of breaking into the bank and cleaning up a lot of money that way, Jake and the rest got to thinking that I was more important, and started taking good care of me. They put bandages on the cut under the eye, and they fixed me up so that in two days I could go back to the Double Luck saloon of Red McTay and sing there. In the meantime they mostly sat around and squabbled about who was to do the cooking while I was on the shelf. All the time they were talking and wondering about what they could do to tackle the bank in some other way. Jeff came every day with some new suggestion. However, nothing was done. In the

end, the talk always wound up just the way that it had started, with nothing accomplished.

I went down to the saloon the next evening; Red McTay met me there and had a talk with me in his little back office. He took me in there and he sat me down on his desk, right in front of him, and then he leaned back in his chair and blew cigarette smoke at the ceiling and he said:

"Well, kid, I suppose that you ran into a door in the dark, didn't you?"

I asked what did he mean.

He said: "I suppose Jake didn't hit you. I suppose that you just cut yourself up by running into the door."

I saw that he was trying to get something out of me, but I would stick to the yarn that I had planned out with Jake. I said: "No, but I fell down the cellar stairs."

"You weren't *knocked* down the stairs, I suppose?" remarked Red.

I said that I wasn't.

"Lemme know how you fell into the hands of that big gorilla," said McTay. "Did your old man sell you to him, or did he kidnap you?"

"No, Jake is my father," I said.

"He is my uncle, then," said Red McTay, and he brushed out his mustaches so that they stuck right out stiff to the side, like the horns of a bull. "Now, look here, kid," said he. "do you call your own dad by his first name?"

"When his back is turned," said I.

McTay said:

"Look me in the eye and tell me that he is your father!"

Well, I couldn't have done that, a little while before. But since Lefty had been taken from me, I didn't seem to have very much spirit. What was happening didn't make very much difference. So I could look right into those bright eyes of McTay as easy as nothing.

He leaned back and shook his head.

"Poor kid! I suppose he's got you

so paralyzed that you don't dare to even make a break to get free. You wouldn't trust me, now?"

I only smiled at him. I knew that he was a pretty brave man, but I knew that Lefty was brave, too; and I saw what had happened to him. No, I wasn't trusting any man to get me away from that Jake. I don't know, now, what I was waiting for. But sometimes I figured that it would be a lot easier to die right quick and be rid of everything.

When Red saw me smile at him, he got up and shrugged his shoulders.

"You're too old for me," he said. "You can give me aces and spades, and you'll still win. You go in and try over your songs with Jack, the piano player. He's right in the back room and—hey! what's that?"

We heard some dogs baying in the street, very deep and mournful; then we went to the window and saw a man go by with two great, big dogs on leashes. They were tugging and straining at the least, slavering at the mouth, almost, they were trying so hard to get at a man running along the street ahead of them and pretending to try to get away. The man who held those two dogs was just able to manage them.

It was the faces of those dogs that interested me most, because they didn't look like Smiler; their faces were all covered with folds of loose flesh; their lips hung down, and their ears were very long. They looked extremely wise and sad, you know.

McTay said: "Bloodhounds, and cracking good ones, if they're up to their looks. And this here is the very town that may be having a use for them dogs, almost any of these here days!"

Well, I went back to see Jack, who was a little pink-eyed fellow, always having a cigarette hanging out of one corner of his mouth. He kept it there, wabbling up and down, even when he talked. He always was in his shirt

sleeves, and his shirts had big, bright stripes in them. He wore little elastic bands around his upper arms, to keep the sleeves right up to any place on his wrist that he wanted them to be, and this Jack was finished off with bow ties, knotted just perfect.

He didn't think much of me, and I didn't think much of him. Yet, when we started rehearsing, we warmed up a good deal. He was slick on the piano, and he seemed to like what I did with my voice and with my feet. He knew a good deal about dancing, himself. He said that I had a good start; that if I kept on practicing, I might get somewhere with that art of mine. So he showed me a trick or two; then we had supper together, and he talked all about how he had been on the vaudeville stage, in the little-big-time, he called it. He had always done pretty good, but he had never been able to get talented partners to work along with him; so here he was out in the sticks, where nobody appreciated his art and his talents.

Our act went over fine. I had Smiler there, and he did his little act, and enjoyed it. I enjoyed the singing and dancing; afterward, I fed Smiler his raw meat in front of all of them. When they tried to feed him, too, he just wouldn't eat for them, any more than he would eat for me, the first time. They all said that he was a wonderful dog. Because it works the same way with dogs and with people, I guess. The ones that you can handle and run dead easy, no matter how useful they may be, don't seem half so wonderful as those that wander around and act wild, whom *nobody* can control.

I finished up that job that night a little tired, but pretty well worked out and hungry and fit. I pranced out of that place with all of the boys hollering for more. McTay told them I needed a rest, and that this wasn't the last time I was coming down that way.

On the street, when I got a little ways

from the saloon, I stopped and leaned up against a tree. Smiler, he came, sat down on my feet and whined. That was his way of asking me to go and find Lefty for him.

It was a clear, cold, mountain night. The air you breathed ran down into your lungs as cool as water and very sweet; I leaned there against the tree, and I couldn't help wondering how it was that the stars was so bright and so happy, and why it was that I hadn't never noticed it before—when a gent came along and stopped beside me.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE MAN IN THE NIGHT.

HE asked: "May I have a moment of your time?"

I replied: "That's all you *can* get out of me, stranger. Nothing but time. And right now, I got little of that. So mosey along, will you?"

He stood back a little from me, and I thought that he was taking his distance to make a swipe at me, so I said: "Partner, lemme give you some free advice that is a lot better than anything that you'll ever find in a guide book—which is: Leave me be and don't start no rough stuff, or this little dog of mine, that has started purring, will just naturally chaw your windpipe right in two!"

"Ah?" said the gent in the darkness. "You keep a guard with you, youngster, I see?"

"Sure," said I, "that is just what I do. But look here, if you're down on your luck, here's a quarter. It's all I got. It'll get you the shady side of a meal in this town. Or it'll get you one drink. Which is more your speed, I suppose."

He didn't say anything for a minute. Then: "Thank you."

I was already pretty near to forgetting him, resting against that tree.

I said: "For what?"

"For the money," he answered.

"All right," said I. "Now run along and leave me be. The dog is enough company for me."

"And yet," said he, "I think that you could spare me something more."

It riled me a little, I got to admit. It ain't everywhere that you find a growed-up man that will bum off a kid like I was. So I said to this man in the night: "You ain't born to starve for the lack of asking, I see. Now, what might your line be?"

"Why," said the gent, "you seem to have guessed it quite accurately. I am only a beggar, my friend."

You could see that he was one of them that get along with a soft voice and plenty of use of it.

"Well," I said, "I am a beggar, too."

"Do you call it that?" he asked. "But it seemed to me that you were working very hard and honestly for what you got, and that you deserved it."

"I don't remember any face in there to fit up with your voice," I said. "Where might you have been standing?"

"I was outside of the window."

"Outside!" I exclaimed. "Why, you poor boob, that was a free show. If it had been an honest show, it wouldn't have *been* free. But you could have been in there for nothing. What's more, lemme tell you that the singing and particularly the dancing warms them up a good deal, and you could have bummed a good many quarters off of them at the wind-up of a song or of a dance. It makes them feel free-handed."

He answered: "No, they wouldn't have given anything to me—not willingly."

"They know you, do they?"

"Yes," said he, "they know me!"

He let out a sigh, stood there a moment, saying nothing.

All at once, I feels sort of pulled to him and sorry for him.

"Look here," I said to him. "I have been talking sort of rough. But if

you're down on your luck—I could *raise* some money for you, pretty quick. Are all the boys in Crossman down on you?"

"All, or nearly all," he said.

"Then why do you stay here?" I couldn't help asking.

"There is no place for me to go. I may as well make my effort here as in any other place. I may as well go to work here, you know. If I can't succeed in this rough little town, I'll never succeed anywhere."

That made me loosen up and give him some good advice. I said: "You look here. This town looks simple. But it ain't so simple as it looks. These gents with the hard hands, their *skulls* ain't so hard and thick. And mostly, they got no use for a gent that won't work. I dunno what your line may be. Maybe you're a pretty talented blind man; or maybe you're no slouch of a cripple; or maybe you got a spiel about a lung disease and a family back home waiting for you—I dunno what your line may be, but just because you fail to work Crossman, ain't a sign that you can't work other places. Why, back in the little town where I come from, it was dead easy for a bum to get along. You couldn't batter three doors before you would get a regular sit-down meal, with a napkin and everything. Why don't you try some of the dressed-up towns? They're really very much better!"

He didn't say nothing to this, either; but I could see that he was thinking it over. It struck me kind of sad, him being a growed-up man, to be standing there like that with his hands hanging at his side, getting advice from a kid like me.

He says at last, in that soft voice of his: "Yes, it is worth a try. I might knock at the kitchen doors—I might do that!"

That let in a light on me.

"Oh, you been trying the *front* doors, have you? Well, unless you're an a-

number-one man, you ain't gunna be able to do that and get by."

"Yes," said he, very sad, "you are right. I am not talented enough to go to the front doors and beg there—that is why they will give me nothing!"

I got sort of confidential with him. I never, hardly, felt so sorry for anything as I was for him—next to being so sorry for Smiler, because he missed Lefty so bad. But I thought I could help this gent along, so I said: "I'll tell you something. You got a good voice, which it is a great help. You got a good, soft voice, and you can work it pretty smooth. Your line had ought to be the women. You keep away from the rough men and you try the ladies."

He threw up his hands and he give a sort of groan and said:

"Ah, I've tried the thing before, and I know that you're right, boy. I know that you're right, but I don't want to work with the women. I'm tired of it. I'm sick of it. And that's why I've come up here into the wilderness. I want to work with men—real men—and I don't care who they are, so long as they are men, men, men!"

He meant every word of that.

I said that I was sorry, and that he had better come back with me and let me get him a stake from Red McTay. I knew that Red was awful generous.

He said: "It's not the money that I want, my son. It's not the money!"

That put me up against it, and I said: "Well, you're too many for me! What *do* you want?"

"Oh, I only want the scraps of the lives of men—the time that they throw away—the odd minutes. I would give all my soul if I could persuade one real man to open his heart to me. So that in the end I could give!"

I couldn't help laughing.

He asked: "Why do you laugh at me, child?"

"I don't mean to hurt your feelings."

I said, "but it sort of stepped on my funny bone, when I hear about you wanting to *give* things to people. May I ask, maybe, what you *got* that you can give?"

"That is it!" he said. "What have I that can be given away? What have I that is worthy to be picked up and saved by another man? I don't know—I don't know!"

"I see," I said, "you've been pretty rich, I suppose?"

"I thought that I was very rich. I thought that I was almost one of the richest of men."

"And then you went bust?"

"Yes."

"All in a day?"

"All in a moment!"

"Somebody double crossed you, then?" I asked, because it is always sort of sad to see a rich gent that is down and out.

"No one deceived me," he said. "It was all my own self-deception. I was a fool! A fool! My gold was nothing—lighter than feathers!"

I could see that he was sick with himself, so I didn't say anything back to him to let him settle down, if he would. Then he said: "But you are right. I must not try the front doors. I must be humbler still. And I must go to the kitchen doors and beg there."

"Not that you would get much coin——" I had to put in.

"Money? Money? No, that is not what I want. But only the time, which is more precious than money."

"I never seen time," said I, "that couldn't be bought."

"Ah, but there is, in nearly every man's life. He does not know it until it is too late. When he lies dying, then he knows that there is time which cannot be bought and paid for! When that moment comes, then men will listen to me, but it is too late!"

"Too late for what?"

"Too late to make an exchange of

what they have on this earth for the great peace, child."

"Look here, bo," I said, "this is sort of big talk. What do you know about great peace, and all that sort of tripe?"

"Little or nothing, perhaps," he said, and began beating his hands together, "but something, I trust, has been revealed to me! I think there has been granted to me some power to help men to a knowledge of that which follows after death."

That hit me where I lived, of course. All at once it busted out of me, and I said: "Now, you put it to me straight, if you got any dope on that, what chance has a poor bum—a regular poor old tramp—got of getting to heaven?"

"I don't know," said he. "I would have to see the man. Was there honesty in him?"

"No," says I, "he was a cheat."

"Was he at least true and faithful to those who loved him?"

"No," I said. "He left the finest woman in the world."

"The judgment will fall hard upon him, then," says the man in the darkness.

I was afraid to go on for a minute, because there was a sort of a thing in the voice of this here man that gave me a chill—as if he really *did* know. I changed the subject and said: "Well, this is queer, you and me talking like this, but from what I can make out, you ain't got no bundle. You ain't no bundle stiff. You're a regular tramp royal."

He said nothing; his head had fallen; he was thinking hard. It brought back the thought of him I was missing so terrible bad. All at once I hollered out: "Partner, surely there is one chance for him. There is a ghost of a show for him!"

"Did he at least," said the man in the dark, "give the labor of strong hands to help his fellow men?"

"No, he was just a hobo," I had to admit.

"Then he is lost!" said the man in the night.

I shouted out at him: "You lie! You lie! He's gunna go to heaven. If he ain't in heaven, I don't want to go there. I *wouldn't* go there. I would slam right out of the door of heaven. And you—you don't know anything about it, anyhow!"

He said: "Ah, son, you are right, and your friend is saved: if he has done enough on this earth to win the love of even one person, even of a child. Yes, and love would take the dog at your feet and carry it into heaven. But for those who have not found love or made it, they will eat bitter bread alone on this earth and when they die——"

Here his voice busted off a little and he stopped. And then it seemed to me that I would have gone on listening to him forever. I was about to ask him a lot more of questions, because what he had said was so wonderful, but all at once, he seemed to forget me. He walked back from me until the light from the nearest window hit him.

And what d'you think I saw? Why, I saw a gray head—it was nearly white and the black and white collar put on backwards of a minister!

It gave me a terrible chill.

CHAPTER XXX.

ENTER "JUD."

WE went on living like this in Crossman for a long time. There was nothing for those three back at the house to do. They just lay around and blossomed out in the money that I was making for them. They had plenty of good clothes and the house always filled up with food that was the best money could buy for them. In the days, I did all the cooking. In the nights, I used to go down to the saloon and do a turn there with Jack.

His pay had been double since he started working with me, so he took to the job very kind, though still hankering to get back to the little-big-time, as he called it. He was always working out new stunts with me, new steps for my dances and new songs for me to sing. He taught me some old plantation songs, and one night dressed me up as a nigger boy in ragged clothes, no stockings on, and barefooted. I had on a man's shirt, all worn out at the elbows.

That night, when the boys began to holler for me, Jack announced that Sammy wasn't there that night, being sick, but that he had a little nigger boy that would want to sing for them.

So he brought me out. It was a cold night, and in those rags I stood shivering in the corner. All the gents stood around sort of hostile, saying: "Hey, Jack, what kind of a joke is this, any ways?"

"Aw, give the kid a chance, will you?" Jack said, and he sat down, starting to whack the piano. I tuned into one of those songs.

Now, you would think that all of those gents, hearing me sing night after night, would sure have recognized my voice. But it was disguised some with the dialect of the darkies, and I made my voice pretty throaty, too. Also I was colored up pretty good by Jack, and he had it down so pat that he even made it paler on the palms of my hands.

They didn't know me! No, sir. I got up there and I sang those songs, and they stood around, getting more and more enthusiastic. Finally one of them said: "Why, this nigger kid can sing *better* than little old Sammy can!"

The rest of them stood around and laughed at him, real superior, saying: "Now, that shows what an ignorant guy you are. You don't hardly know nothing! Sammy has got some real art in him. Besides, he can dance!"

"Maybe the black kid can dance, too,"

said the man. "Here's a ten spot, kid, if you will dance for us!"

I started and did a verse of another song; then I danced through the chorus, just speaking the words. You know, there is a lot of things that you can do with your feet bare that you can't do when there is shoes on them; a shuffle sounds funny, but pretty good with bare feet doing it. Before I got through, those gents yelled and hollered and raved around, saying that I *was* better than Sammy was. They wanted me to sing a lot more, but Jack wouldn't let me, and I sneaked away.

That started a lot of talk. Oh, they were a dumb gang; they never once suspected me of being Sammy, and the nigger boy "Jud," all in one. The next night they hollered for Jud; then some of them hollered for Sammy. Pretty soon Jack said that he would bring out Sammy for them, though I was still feeling a little sick.

So I came on that night, and I sang some of the *silly* songs for them—about how you love some girl, or about a girl who is dead and done for—I mean, like Annie Laurie and like Ben Bolt. I did those songs with a quiver in my voice, and those miners stood around just too worked up to say anything at all. A lot of them came up and shook hands with me, saying that I did them more good than a church ever could.

It is remarkable what a lot of bunk there is in the corners of music—how much sham and fake, you know!

I went on being Sammy for some nights, and then there was a regular roar for Jud. Jack said I would have to be Jud again, so we tried it once more, and Jack said that it wasn't any joking matter, now, because not one of them miners ever suspected that Jud and Sammy was the same. It wouldn't be safe to let them guess, because they might take it out on him. I suppose that he was right.

They had got quite worked up about the two "kids." Half of the town, they swore that Sammy was the best singer and dancer of the two, and some of them swore that Jud could just sing and dance circles around Sammy.

The next night, there was three or four *real* coons in that crowd; they let out a mighty big holler when they seen my black face coming. The sight of them scared Jack and me a lot. Jack said: "Now keep a tight grip, for my sake. Because, if they find out what you-all are, they'll tar and feather me, sure, for making such fools out of them; and if you say *one word* in the hearing of them niggers, they'll know that you're not real. So don't do nothing but sing!"

I did just that, and when they saw that I was so scared, at first, they all hollered out and told me not to be afraid because they was all my friends.

That wasn't what I was afraid of. I was scared that they would see I was a faker, and partly I was afraid that they would begin asking: "How comes it that that kid, that got a whole barrel full of money just the other day, ain't got any now, at all? And how comes it that he ain't been able to buy himself any clothes?"

Those ideas never seem to come into their heads, and they just didn't think at all, nor do figuring, you see?

I cut loose and sang and danced the best that I knew how. The most tickled ones in the whole crowd were the niggers themselves! Yes, it beat all to see how proud and glad they were that their race had turned out a boy that could stand a crowd of white folks on their heads like that.

Well, it went off fine. Then one of the gents that thought Sammy was still the best singer of the two got up and he said that there was only one way to settle it. That was to have Sammy and Jud sing right together on the same night.

They made a great ruction about that, and finally they made so much noise that Red McTay—of course, he was in on it—came along and said that they should have what they wanted, just two nights away!

Jack and I were mighty scared. But McTay took us back into his room and said that it would be easy. He said that he would have everything ready, and that first I would get out there as a white boy—in my own skin, you know. After I had worked for about half an hour, I would go back and get all blacked up; then I would come back and do Jud for them. Nobody would be allowed to come near me, and it would work fine.

That was the way that it was planned. Everything was got ready. In that little back room, they laid out the rags for Jud, and they fixed up the blacking, and they got all handy.

In the meantime, for two days, gents had been dropping into Crossman and coming around to find out about the song contest. There was a good deal of excitement. Some of the boys got together and laid out money with each other. They appointed a couple of gents judges, and they all said that they would stick together and stay with the decision that the judges made. When that evening came, there was a reason for Jack and me to be excited, reason for Red McTay, too, because for days the money had been flowing like water across his bar.

Well, sir, when I came out there in my own skin, I saw half of the crowd looked hostile and half of them looked tense. When I turned loose and sang and danced, half of the crowd gave me a real cheer, and the more I sang and danced, that much more they sat around, looking easy and contented and laughing at the other half. The boys betting on Jud got more and more gloomy.

When I finished, half of the boys were yelling, and the other half didn't

let out a peep. I sneaked to the back room. Jack and McTay blacked me up fine and quick. In twenty minutes I went back into the saloon and believe me, I *was* scared. Those that had bet on Sammy looked pretty sure of themselves; those that had bet on Jud, especially the niggers themselves, of which there must have been twenty—they just looked like drawn razors!

I told myself for sure that on an important night like this they were sure to see through me. I started in and was doing pretty good; the niggers were beginning to smile, when all at once I stuck a slivver into my foot—and sat down with a yell.

Well, there was a roar and a groan and they started for me to help me up—all of them who had bet on me looked bluer than indigo ever looked. I saw what would happen. I knew that the minute they got to fooling around the blood, they would see that my skin was white. So I got up and yanked that sliver out. I waved to them and made myself grin, though it hurt like sixty, and I went right on dancing, leaving little red spots behind me.

Well, sir, it made a great hit with all of them. They applauded so hard they nearly busted. Then Red McTay tied up my foot, and I turned loose and danced and sang a lot more, winding up with a silly song about how swell it was living in my native Africa, how fine my wife and I were getting along, when the cruel white man came along and ripped me away from my native log hut, making a slave out of me, giving me beef-steak instead of bananas to eat, giving my free feet shoes to wear, and that sort of rot.

When I got through, there were tears in the eyes of nearly everybody. There was no doubt about the decision. Sammy was a back number, and little Jud was the king. The ones that had bet on Sammy didn't even peep.

The funniest thing was the niggers,

because the way that they let on and ripped around, it would of done you good. The first thing that you know, a couple of them landed a-hold of me and stood me up on the bar. They had a drink, and they jammed. each of them a month's wages down into my pockets—which they had made—and a lot more by what they had bet on me and won.

They were so heated up that finally all of them busted out, and *they* started singing, grand and harmonious.

There I was in the midst of what was supposed to be my kind, but they didn't see anything wrong about me. I guess they *couldn't* see nothing wrong with me. If somebody had said I wasn't a little nigger boy at all, they would have carved him into bits right then and there.

Finally they turned me loose. I got away and got the blackness off me. McTay told me he was putting away fifty dollars for *me* whenever I wanted it. And Jack was so scared and tickled that he hardly knew what to do.

Altogether, it was a boss show and a very funny evening, but I wouldn't like to go through another like it.

The queerest thing was that even after all that ocean of money had rolled into the pockets of Jud, those block-heads didn't seem surprised when I would come out and sing in rags, a few nights later.

After that, Sammy didn't make much money. He was just sort of tolerated; it was Jud that everybody wanted to hear!

Well, now I got to stop telling about this foolishness and tell you about what happened that was a lot more of importance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SUCCESS.

WIT was Pug who turned the trick when the rest of them would have been ready to throw up their hands and give up. I suppose Pug was used to taking

punishment in the ring and so he had got into the habit so that he was even able to take it *out* of the ring. When the rest of them were sitting around, folding their hands, while they were thinking and talking about what had best be done, Pug used to go down with a crowbar and a pick; he would pound and chip away at that wall of stone that they had run into. Finally, one night right after I had got the black washed off my face and gone home, I came in to see Pug just coming up from the cellar, all covered with dust. Jake gave him a sour look and asked how it felt after being a gopher to come up and be a man again?

Pug rolled a cigarette, sat back and grinned, saying nothing. But his little pig eyes were full of light. Pretty soon, Boston up and said: "Look at his hands!" Meaning Pug's.

When he pointed it out, we all saw they were certainly a sight. Ordinarily those hands was pretty hard and caloused up, because Pug wasn't afraid of work, but now there were plenty of blisters on them. His hands was a sight, for sure.

Jake laughed and said:

"Look at that! There's a gent who loves work so mighty well that he just couldn't stop and lay off it, you see. He had to pitch in and smash up his hands drilling away at a rock that didn't have no end to it. Look at that! He just got himself about wore out—on nothing!"

He lay back and he laughed and laughed. The idea of ever working—unless it was to do a mischief to somebody—had probably never come into Jake's head in his whole life.

Boston laughed a little, too; he always laughed at the same things that amused Jake.

Pug said at last:

"Who says that there wasn't any end to that rock wall?"

Only that, but what he said wasn't so

important as that light which was in the back of those little pig eyes of his. Jake gave him one long look, and then he jumped up without saying a word and he started for the cellar.

"What is it, Pug? You ain't done something, have you?" asked Boston.

Pug grinned and wouldn't answer until pretty soon Jake come up, fair flaring with excitement, crying: "Pug has wore a hole through the rock! Clean through!"

We all ran down to look.

When the lantern was raised, there was the hole, sure enough. Pug had banged away at that wall of rock, at the end of the passage, and finally he had punched a crowbar through. You could see the big chunks bitten out of the rock all around that hole, where Pug had grabbed up the crowbar and worked like mad to find out if it hadn't been a mistake. Pug, when we saw the hole, began to laugh, and shake, and laugh some more, because he was feeling pretty good, you can depend upon it, and he was pretty nearly wore out.

Boston and Jake started to work, then, and I went back up to my room in the attic with Smiler. I could hardly sleep, hearing the little thudding of the crowbar down there under the ground. It almost seemed to me that I could feel a little jar.

I wondered why it was that the people passing in the street didn't notice it, too, and come in there to investigate. They didn't. And by the time that the morning had come that rock had been split right in two. It was only a great big slab of stone that come sticking up there almost to the surface of the ground. A stratum, I suppose that you would call it. That's what they called it in the newspaper, afterward.

There was no more work for me at the saloon, after that. Jake didn't want to risk having me around other folks for a while, for fear lest I might let something drop and so spoil all of their

work right after they had wasted about five weeks of work and of hope.

I stayed at the shack, and when Red McTay came to inquire about me, Jake told him very ugly that I was sick. When McTay asked how long would I be sick, Jake said that I would be sick just so long as he pleased. Which was about the truth, too; and McTay had to swallow that and go away.

It was day and night work, now. I had to keep the coffee pot on the fire all the time, because one or other of them was always coming up to have a swig and a dash of whisky, and then go back. Mostly it was Boston, though, who had to come up and get refreshment. I couldn't help noticing that though he *seemed* to be working almost as hard as either of them, his hands never got calloused.

It was Jake who shone now. Now that he had hope of something right ahead of him, he had the strength of five men in each of those big, ugly hands of his. I went down there and watched him work.

Now, Pug was a good, strong, hard-working man. He could use that crowbar pretty good and chip off the rock pretty fast. When Jake started, it was all different. He had an extra big bar that he worked with, almost twice the size of the other; yet he handled it with a stroke as easy as you could imagine. He would fly into a sort of passion of joy at his own strength, and he would drive that bar whole inches right into the solid face of the rock and break off great, big chunks. I saw him rip off his coat and his shirt and his undershirt and tear into the work until his face and his whole body turned red and then redder. Still he kept on giving that rock sixty.

When he had worked a couple of hours, he would come up and throw himself on the floor and toss out his arms and lie there sprawling, awful big and awful ugly to see, with his big

chest working up and down like a bellows. He would close his eyes and snore till the house shook for half an hour. And then he would roll over, grab a bottle of whisky, turn about a pint of it down his throat, and then he would eat a couple of pounds of beef that I had fried for him and toss off a couple of big tin cups of coffee as strong as lye. After that, he was ready to work again.

I noticed, too, that his hands never seemed to get sore. They just chafed up and got a little white and rough looking; he seemed to be made of entirely different kind of stuff from other men.

Now they carried their trench along right up to the wall of the bank, working only in the middle of the night, when they was pretty close. When they got to the foundation wall, they had another tough job, but Jake, nearly single-handed, wore it through in a single shift.

I saw his crowbar, afterward; the cutting edge was as broad as the side of your finger, that good steel having been beaten and smashed against the rock for so long. Nobody else could have used it for anything, but when Jake wrapped those fingers of his around it, he could plunge it right through solid rock. I don't think any man ever lived who had the strength that he had. He was blind and drunk with it. There was no bottom to it. It was like a well that he could bail out of more and more. The more that was taken, the more ran into the well for him to pull up to the top.

He worked like seven men, and while he was doing that, he really ate like seven men. I have seen him, my own self, eat a whole chicken, half a pound of bacon, a lot of bread, and drink a quart of strong coffee and finish off with a big bar of chocolate. That was just a lunch for Jake, and after he had been sweating down there in the trench,

he would be hungry again in a couple of more hours, maybe.

The next morning, after they got through the foundation wall, Jake said:

"I hope they don't stamp none on the floor of the bank, to-day, because if they do, they are gunna hear a hollow sound, as sure as you live!"

They didn't stamp, I suppose, because the next night they all got ready. The three horses were saddled and put in the shed behind the house; old Tippet was harnessed up to his buggy, and I was told to come along with them and keep close, not that they wanted me to see what they done, but because they wanted to have me where they could watch me all the time.

So Smiler and I were there and saw everything.

They took an auger and bored up a hole through the floor. Then they sawed out from that hole until they had got a big square opening that a man could get through, easy. Then they came up; Pug went first, and Jake threw me up after him—Smiler just jumped.

We were in a place all surrounded with tall iron bars, and in the end of that room was a great big safe.

Everybody stepped back, and Boston peeled off his coat and began to work. He had some soft, yellow laundry soap and a little flask of "soup." With that he was gunna open that safe.

You could see, now, why it was that they put up with the laziness and the shiftlessness and the lying of Boston. It was because that they needed his brains. He changed, too. He got less ratty looking around his eyes. He stood up straighter; there was a smile on his mouth that made him look almost handsome. He moved so deliberate that he seemed to be going very slow. Jake got terribly impatient.

Boston kept right on, making every lick count as good as two, not saying a word except very polite and fine Eng-

lish, like: "Will you be good enough to pass me that flask, Sammy? And mind that you don't drop it, because it would stuff us out into thin air like nothing at all! Thank you very much!"

That was Boston and the way he acted, now that the pinch come. Pug was pretty good, too. But Jake—well, I was surprised!

CHAPTER XXXII.

ROBBERY.

YOU never could have said that Jake wasn't brave. In his way, he was as brave as could be. But his way wasn't the way that was needed just then. Boston would have taken water from a Chinaman, any day, when it came to fighting. Here, when the danger wasn't a gun pointed at him, but was just imaginary, and what *might* happen, he was a regular hero. His color was fine, and he was cheerful, and he worked away, humming. This was just the thing that he needed to make a real man of him, you might say.

Pug was sort of tense, but very steady. He meant well, and he wouldn't run. You could tell that. Only this sort of danger just numbed his brain a little.

The worst was big Jake: he was paralyzed. Every minute he was thinking that he heard noises. When he heard them, he turned as white as a sheet.

His eyes was wandering all the time, and he couldn't keep still. First he was at the front window, and he came sneaking back to say: "There is somebody watching us from across the street!"

Pug was staggered for fair, and I felt mighty sick. Boston just said: "How can they be watching us? You simply saw a light on the glass of a window. Go back and see if I'm not right."

When Jake went hurrying away, Boston said: "Papa is a little nervous

to-night; for two pins, he would chuck the whole deal. He is seeing himself in stripes, about now!"

Boston laughed, but you can bet Pug and I didn't so much as smile. Not us!

In another minute, back came Jake, whiter than ever. He was just shaking with the strain, and he said: "You may have been right about the window, Boston, but I saw two shadows sneak around the corner, and I know that they were men. That dirty Jeff has double crossed us, and there's about twenty men hanging around this bank, laughing up their sleeves, ready to nab us when they hear us blow the safe. Boys, they're laughing at us! And I say that it's time to throw up this job!"

Boston, as cool as ever, gave Pug and me a look. He smiled a little and said: "You boys run along, if you want. I'll keep your shares—till you call for them, if you want."

"Is she about ready?" said Jake.

"Yes."

"Will it make much noise?"

"Yes. Quite a bit."

"But they'll hear us, boys—and we're goners—they'll block up the end of the tunnel—they've got it blocked already—or they'll cave it in on the top of our heads. You can be pretty sure of that! There are some smart men in this town. And they're watching me. They know that I haven't rented a house next to this here bank just for nothing!"

"Get back, all of you, and lie down!" ordered Boston.

We did it. There was a sound like a big gun fired under a blanket, and then a crash. When we looked through the swirl of mist, there was the door of the safe lying on the floor, blowed clean off from its big hinges. That nitroglycerin had turned the trick.

"Quick!" said Jake. "Now grab the stuff and run—I'll—I'll go first and clear the way for the rest of you——"

Well, what do you think that Boston did? He just sat down there and he

rolled a cigarette as calm as you please. He looked over at where the three of us stood trembling, and he said: "A fine lot of yeggs, you fellows are!"

Jake cried: "Boston has double crossed us! Well, you'll be a dead man before——"

In his crazy head, he was sure that this idea was the right one, and in another minute he would have done for poor Boston sure. Even then Boston was cool. He said:

"Jake, steady down. You know what they have on me, if they catch me. And you know what they have on Pug. It's twenty years for Pug—and for me"—he give a funny, horrible quick jerk of his body and stretched his lips wide and tight—"Salt Creek!" said Boston. "Keep your nerves up, Jake, because this party is only beginning. What can we get at to grab, now?"

You see, he was right, because the inside of that safe was all lined with little faces of drawers, each one of them locked, and each one of them fitted in very neat.

Still, there was a way to get at them, and Boston tackled them with a small chisel and a three-pound hammer. He would start one of them a little and then he would take a can opener and fetch that drawer out. The minute he had it out, he would pass it behind him, and the other two would go through the contents as quick as a wink. You would hear them say: "Negotiable stuff!" or "Nothing at all!" as Boston fetched out drawer after drawer.

Boston didn't seem to be interested in what they said or in what was in the drawers. He was happy in wrecking that safe and in beating the steel, and in getting those drawers out so that somebody else could read all of the secrets that was in them. That was his peculiar way of getting pleasure out of life. I suppose that there were hardly twelve times in his whole life when he was really all contented, and those times

were always when he was wrecking a safe, somewhere or other.

Right in one minute I could see why Jake and Pug had put up with him so long; I could see why they would have put up with him a lot longer, still. He was worth it and a lot more.

Now there was a noise at the door, and Jake jumped about ten feet and dragged out a gun. Then he crawled up on the door, with Pug behind him. I heard a whisper—and then that door opened!

It wasn't an enemy. If it had been, he would have died very pronto. It was only Jeff—and he stuck in his head and said: "You guys are taking all night! Get a move on you, will you? I'm breakin' my heart out here—and I think that some of the boys are beginning to move!"

"Was there much noise?" asked Jake, all trembling?"

"Like a house falling!" said Jeff. "And I can hear every lick of that hammer, now, as plain as day!"

"We'll make our start now!" says Jake, just turning green. "We've got something. It's better than nothing!"

"So long, boys!" said Boston. "You can have what you got and I won't put in my claim for it. Not for a minute. I'll be contented with what I get after you're gone!"

Well, they couldn't stand the idea of running off and leaving that Boston behind them to gather up the primeest part of the loot. They hung around, and he went on opening drawer after drawer until Jake was like a crazy man.

They were getting into the cream of the stuff, now, and more greenbacks were coming out than you could imagine. Still there seemed to be more to come. Jake would curse and moan and beg Boston to come away; then he would make a bubbling noise in his throat and gloat over something that Boston had just handed in back of him.

That Boston was clear grit to the

bottom of him—and when he had opened the last drawer, he spread it out, himself; there were four sheafs of bills with five thousand dollars printed on the wrapper of each bundle.

You wouldn't think that there was really that much money in all the world!

Pug had been keeping pretty close tab. He had that sort of a head on his shoulders, going pegging along all of the time and making pretty good headway. He said:

"We got about fifty-two thousand dollars in cash. And we got about that much more in stuff that we'll have to give a fifty per cent commission on if we want to get rid of it! Boys, the four of us ought to clean up about twenty thousand iron men apiece!"

Can you think of that?

You remember the widow back there in Gunther? The one, I mean that Aunt Claudia used to bust herself to get to the notice of? Well, it was said that she had twenty-five thousand dollars in the bank, but mostly folks thought that it couldn't be so much, it was such a terrible pile of money. And here were four rapsallions that was to get that much apiece! It didn't seem very much like justice, as maybe you'll admit.

Boston said over his shoulder:

"Jeff gets his share, I suppose?"

"Why, ain't he been promised?" said Jake.

"He's been promised enough," said Boston. "I don't want to beat him out of nothing. Only—twenty thousand—for what he's done—it's a good deal!"

"And too much," said Pug.

"I think that you're right, Boston," said Jake. "But now let's get out of here—I think that I hear——"

We didn't wait to hear what he thought. We dropped down into the tunnel.

Once outside the bank, Jake seemed to clear up and lose a good deal of his

scare. He grabbed me by the shoulders and said:

"Now, Pug—Boston, what about the kid?"

I heard Pug growl: "Aw, leave the kid be. He hasn't done any harm."

Boston didn't say a word, but I thought I saw the shadow of a gesture that he made.

"I dunno," said Jake. "I hate to take him along, because if a pinch comes, he'll be a terrible nuisance. I sure wouldn't leave him behind if I thought that there was any danger that——"

"Ain't there plenty of room for him in the buggy behind that Tippetty horse?" asked Pug.

I could have blessed him for thinking of that.

"That's so," said Jake. "I guess that he would fit in there, pretty good. Who's to drive the horse?"

"Jeff."

"Where's he now?"

"He'll be out at the end of the tunnel in the house."

It seemed a shivery job to be sitting there in that lonely house, waiting for the robbers to come back.

"You offer Jeff a flat ten thousand dollars," said Boston to Jake. "That's enough for him, and too much for him."

We hurried on down the tunnel toward the house.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TRAILED.

WE came down to the end of the passage, and as we came up into the house, we could hear some people going by in the street. Then there was a rapping at our front door.

Boston and I started for the rear: Pug stood and hesitated. Jake was the man, now. He went right to that front door, opened it, and said as pleasant as he could:

"Well, gents, what's up at this time of night?"

"I see you're dressed," said a man out there in the street. "Maybe you've heard something in the bank?"

"Not a thing," replied Jake. "What's up?"

"We don't know. Griffiths, here, thinks that he heard a crash in the bank, a little while ago. We can't find the night watchman there, just now. The scoundrel seems to be off drunk, somewhere!"

That was Jeff, that they meant, of course; if Jeff had stayed on at his post, there wouldn't have been any doubt that the trouble that followed would have been dodged. But Jeff's nerve failed him.

Jake told those fellows that he was up because he had a toothache that wouldn't let him sleep, but that if there had been any noise in the bank he would have been sure to hear it. The men went on, but we could hear them talking; finally they decided that they had better get the president of the bank and have him take a look to make sure that there had been no trouble there.

That was all that we wanted to see. We got into the back yard; there was the horses all saddled, and Tippetty standing under a tree, harnessed up to the buggy. Jeff had done that part of his work. If he had only gone back to stand guard at the bank till the last minute, the danger would never of come!

Well, they gave Jeff a mighty rough reception and a lot of growls when they met him, but he give them back as good as they sent. He said: "Here's right where we whack up, now! I'll take my share, thank you!"

"You'll take a busted head!" said Jake, very ugly.

"You can't bluff me out," said Jeff. "I know that they're stirring around, looking, right now; and if they hear a gun go, they'll come swarming. I'll have my share."

Jake cursed something grand to hear,

but he told Boston to hand over ten thousand dollars to Jeff. Boston did that. Jeff lighted a match, looked, laughed and said:

"I'll take mine in cash!"

They had given him some bonds, or something like that. Jeff was too wise for that, and he held them there, no matter how much they cursed and raved, until they had given him the ten thousand in cash.

He said: "All right, boys. I have your number, and I know that this is likely about a third or a quarter of my real half. But now I'm in the boat with you, and I have to follow orders for a while. I'll have a chance to remember you later on!"

I could see that Jeff was really fighting stuff. There was Indian in him, and no doubt of it. War-path Indian, I mean!

Jake said:

"You boys pelt along. Boston, you ride first, because you got a pretty good eye for trouble and a pretty good lying head on you. Jeff, you drive next in the rig with the kid.

He came in the rear, behind the rig, with Pug. We were to head up the road to the first forking; then, for fear lest people should wonder at a rig and three riders going along together, the buggy was to take the right branch and keep along it down to the river, and the riders were to take the left branch and then turn up the river road and meet us there. Then we would all turn down and go across the river at the bridge.

That was easy and simple, and in another minute I was in the rig. Jeff had the reins, and the dog was behind us. Jeff didn't like that.

He said: "You can see that dog like a lantern, here in the night." Throw him out!"

I said: "If folks see a dog along, they ain't gunna ask no questions. Bank robbers don't go around with pet dogs, do they? Besides, if it comes to a pinch,

most of the boys in Crossman know me pretty good."

That had a lot of weight with big Jeff and he said that I had sense. He drove Tippetty down the road and took the right fork. Tippetty was full of the dickens. He hadn't done a stroke of work for weeks and weeks and he was as sleek and full of the devil as a river in spring, when the snow water comes boiling down. He kept shifting around, prancing, throwing his head and shying at nothing, until Jeff begun to rage around and say that the horse was no good.

I said: "Lemme have a try with the reins."

"Why, kid," said Jeff, "he'd pull you right out of the seat."

"You try me."

His arms were beginning to ache, already. Tippetty had such a hard mouth, so he gave me a try. The minute Tippetty heard my voice, he straightened out, stopped his prancing and went along as smooth as running water. Jeff was very tickled.

We got to the fork of the road, and we heard the heels of the three riders go scooting down the left branch of the road.

"They've left us, now," I said.

"I hope they have," said he, "but I doubt it. They don't want to chuck you up, kid. You've been too much cash in their pockets."

We came slanting down to the river, pretty soon, and Jeff said:

"Now, I know this creek, and they ain't likely to. I know that the bottom, right here, is pretty broad, but the bottom is hard sand, and the water ain't running more than hub deep. I say that we had ought to try to cross right here and take the road through the willows, on the far side. I know that road, and they don't, and it ain't likely that they would find us there."

That sounded reasonable, and it sounded very good to me. Because I

didn't want to see any of these three, ever again. So I said that I'd try the water with Tippetty. He came down to the bank, and I didn't urge him. He just looked around as though he wanted to make sure that that was where I intended him to go; then he pricked up his ears and went in as dainty as a cat. There was no fear of anything in Tippetty, he was so brave!

Pretty soon he was trudging along through the water that come boiling and foaming up around the buggy, but he didn't make any trouble about this sort of work. Once, we dropped into a hole; the current caught the buggy and sagged her downstream so hard that Tippetty nearly went under. But he scrambled like a dog to find his footing, and then he got it and brought us through safe to the far shore.

A minute more, and we were up the shallows, through the long reeds and on that road through the willows that Jeff had told us about. We just drove a little piece down that road. The surface was soft sand; it deadened the beat of the hoofs, and there was no noise made by it except the whishing of the sand as it swished off from the wheels.

Then Smiler jumped up with a start, and Jeff asked if the dog saw something. I said that was hardly likely, but that maybe he heard something, so we stopped.

The minute that we stopped, we could hear it pretty good. It was the mournful sound of dogs baying away off in the distance. It sounded like it came from right ahead of us. But I knew that that was wrong.

"What the devil is that?" asked Jeff; "is it wolves ahead of us?"

"I said: 'It sounds like wolves, but it ain't. I've heard them voices before, and they came out of Crossman. It's a big pair of bloodhounds, and they've started those dogs on our trail, Jeff!'"

Jeff said: "Well, I hope that they have, because when they come to the

forking, they'll be sure to follow the strongest scent, and that means that they'll go along after the three of them and not bother us at all."

That sounded like pretty good logic, too. Just the same I couldn't help worrying a good deal, because, though it's not so hard to fool people, it don't seem so easy when they got the wits of a dog along to help them. I remembered the picture of those big bloodhounds a-straining away at the leash. It troubled me. They looked able to match up with a lion, each of them!

We drifted along very snug in the buggy; I didn't push little Tippetty none, because I figured that this soft sand would tire him out quick, and it was better to save his speed for some hard place in the road.

That seemed like good sense to both of us; just the same it would have turned out better if we *hadn't* gone so slow in through there.

We hadn't plugged along for another mile when there was a soft beating in the road behind us. I looked back, and the first thing that I seen was a big, clumsy shadow of a man in the saddle on a horse. Behind him there was two more. I told Jeff that we was lost.

He got out his gun. I thought at first that he would start shooting at once, but he waited until they come up close. Then he sang out: "Boys, you keep your distance."

Jake said: "Jeff, we don't want no trouble with you. That was a pretty dirty trick that you played, trying to run away from us, like that, but we'll forgive you and remember nothing. All that we want, right now, is to have your help through this mess. Because they've turned loose the dogs after us! And you surely know this country pretty good!"

Jeff says: "Look here, you can follow me, if you want to, but don't come too close, I warn you. Because I ain't gunna stand for nothing. I don't trust none of you, and I want for you to know it now!"

That was talking up, as anybody would have to admit. So we went along like that, with Jeff and me leading the way and the riders behind, them yelling at us to forge ahead faster. Jeff told me that we was doing pretty good, and not to wear Tippetty out—which I did just what he said.

Then we came to a fork in the road and Jeff had me stop.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



NOTORIOUS BANDIT AT LARGE

WHEN Sheriff Oliver Colyer, at Torrington, Wyoming, received word from the Mexican authorities at the international boundary line across from Douglas, Arizona, that they were holding "Slippery Jim" Hill, a notorious bandit, "wanted" by Colyer, and that they would turn the man over to him on payment of twenty-five dollars to cover expenses they had incurred. Colyer sent the money and then patiently awaited word to go for his prisoner. He learned later that Hill had escaped from his Mexican captors and that they were unable to find him again. At first, they went to Douglas, Arizona, and picked up another man, whom they endeavored to palm off on the sheriff as Slippery Jim, but Colyer refused to accept the substitution and insisted on having the right man or none. The Mexicans then admitted that Hill had escaped and that they were unable to find him.



Northern Terror

Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Northern Love," etc.



FOR once Ted Bartley seemed unable to dispose of the meal, miner's measurement, "Bud" Cochran set before him. "What's the matter with you now, Ted, no appetite?"

"Say, Bud, were you ever in love?"

Bud blinked, then grunted: "Huh?"

"If you were in love with a girl, Bud, and her father had made the crack that nobody could marry her unless he was big enough to put the old gent on his back, what'd you do?"

Bud saw Bartley was serious. "Well, if I was a big cuss like you, clean of mind, able to give a girl a home, I'd walk right up to the old man and flop him on his back as a matter of accommodation, then I'd marry the girl and live happy ever after."

And right there Bud unintentionally started a-plenty.

"I believe I'll do it!" Bartley exclaimed, and his appetite returned instantly.

He was a deep-chested youth who had spent his childhood in Alaska, attended the school of mines at the University of Washington, found time to play on the football team, and was now proving true to the blood of his ancestors by return-

ing to the frontier as a mining engineer. He jammed on his hat and was gone exactly a half hour. His clothing was badly mussed up, there were several scratches on his big arms, and his face wore a puzzled expression. Bud maintained a discreet silence, and at length Bartley spoke.

"As an adviser of young men in love," he muttered, "you're a good miner. Old Jim Arnold nearly killed me."

"Oh, so it's Jim's girl you're in love with, eh? Why didn't you tell me, and I'd have advised you differently. Jim just lives for that girl; like any good father he's scared to death she'll marry the wrong man. He still thinks she's a baby. What'd Jim say?"

"Told me to come around again when I was feeling strong. Now what'll I do?"

"I'm hanged if I know," Bud admitted helplessly.

Yes, Bud had certainly started something this time.

At this same moment Jim Arnold was experiencing an uncomfortable session with his daughter. Hours of exercise every day for many years had given Arnold his chest, shoulders, and arms. He had mushed trails and finished fresh when other men had died. Now he did

not consider the passing years. It was his code that a man was as old as he felt, and he felt like a colt most of the time.

When Ted Bartley appeared and announced his intention of putting Arnold on his back, the older man had grinned. A moment later he had flattened Bartley, and reentered his home. All his life he had cared for his own, and it was impossible for him to realize that Ted, for example, could care for Roberta Arnold as well as he could.

"Well, 'Bobby,'" he announced, "I just took a fall out of young Bartley. You see——" He faltered; there was something about her expression reminding him of a glacier. "I've always looked out for you, Bobby. As a girl you were sickly and——"

"Sickly?" She spoke with scorn. "As a child, perhaps, but from the day I entered school I've played girls' games and sometimes boys' games. Three letters for basket ball in high school, and so far I've won two in university."

Usually at this point she relented, called him a dear old dad, and made peace, but she was rather fond of Ted Bartley, and had rather expected the husky youngster to put her old dad squarely upon his back.

He had not realized the things she had *done* Outside in high school and college. He only saw her as a baby born amid the uproar of the Nome stampede, pink and helpless. The doctor had hurried away to patch up damage caused by the settlement of a claim dispute with six-guns, and for a while they thought she wouldn't live.

"You see, Bobby, you're only a helpless little girl and you'll always need your old dad. This is a tough world, I know!"

"You've frightened away every boy who ever called on me," she cried furiously. "Ted is the only one to come back again and again." Her temper was aroused, and the fire of her spirit struck

the fire of his. People with like natures who love one another deeply quarrel with fury when they disagree. "I don't need your care," she continued; "I've spent a lifetime on the frontier, my lifetime at least, and I'm past twenty. If I couldn't stand alone I'd hate myself. I'd sooner have some one dependent on me than be leaning on others. I'm through, dad; if you interfere with my friends again, I'll surely leave."

"Leave, eh?" He was just a bit cold himself then.

"Leave!" she repeated. "Support myself."

It was beyond his understanding that his baby had grown and was a young woman. "Support yourself!" He roared with laughter; mockery crept into his tone against his will. "Try it! You'll be back in a week. Now forget this nonsense and run along quickly to bed."

She turned, hurried upstairs, and began furiously to pack her trunk. She might even marry Ted Bartley if he'd just ask her once more.

She carried her suit cases and steamer trunk downstairs when her father was out. Later she loaded them onto the basket sled and harnessed her team. The first snow was flying, but navigation had not closed.

A half mile from her home she encountered Ted Bartley. For the second time in the past few hours he was dumfounded. "What does this mean, Bobby?" he inquired.

"It means I'm tired of being babied and looked after. Imagine an Alaskan girl of twenty who can't make her own way in the world. Dad just laughed at me. I've some pride."

"What are you going to do?"

"Get a job; work, prove that I can take care of myself, then go back and make up!" She kicked at the snow with a small, neatly moccasined foot.

Ted Bartley knew more about mining

than he did about girls. She was like a game trout on the end of a line. Give her line, tire her, then slowly land her. Instead Ted hauled in hand over hand and broke his line. "Listen, Bobby, forget this idea of conquering the world; it's a tough job; too tough for the average girl to stack up against. We'll slip down to the commissioners and be married, and——"

"Oh, will we?" Just like that. "Doesn't it sound romantic; exchanging dad's watchful eye for yours?"

It didn't sound a bit romantic, and it moved Ted to being masterful. "Now listen, Bobby; I love you too much to permit you to do something desperate in a fit of temper. Now please listen to reason."

That was a slip he tried to choke back. She did what any girl does when comments are made on her reasoning. She became a lady of the frost, turned her team, and left him standing there.

It was his turn to kick the snow, and he did a better job than she had done. "Dog-gone!" he muttered. "I can whip a blizzard, drive the meanest dog team in harness, wrest gold from a mountain, but I'm hanged if I can handle a girl—right."

There are not many places a girl can hide in Winton, but Roberta Arnold had vanished the next morning. Jim Arnold first discovered it and decided he would tear Ted Bartley apart and put him together again, when he met Ted coming down the trail. "Bobby and I had a spat," Bartley explained, "and I want to square myself."

"How's that?" roared Arnold. Ted explained in detail. "Why, hang it, Bartley, I thought she'd eloped with you. Great guns! Where is she?"

A quiet search brought a rumor that she had taken passage on a river steamer. Arnold hired a fast gas boat, and by noon that day had overhauled the steamer. She was not aboard. The

father groaned. "Looks like we both went off half cocked, Ted. M'gosh, what'll we do next?"

"You don't suppose she tackled the winter trail outside this early in the season?"

"No, she couldn't make it. She'd have to travel on grass in spots." Arnold was sure of this. "I'll spank her, so help me," he said, "once I can get hold of her. I don't care if she is twenty years old. I'm about crazy with worry. No, I won't spank her, either; I'll be too glad to get her again. Say, Ted, you don't suppose she's—dead?"

"Oh, m'gosh, no!" Bartley answered. "I'm afraid she'll get in a mess trying to show us up. We'd better get back to Winton."

Nor did Winton have anything to offer. They even examined the winter trail for two miles. Not a sled had passed over it. Three weeks passed, then Bud Cochran hurriedly rounded up Ted Bartley and Jim Arnold. "Here's a message I got from Seattle this morning; came part way by cable; some of the way by telegraph, and the rest of the way afoot. It's from a bureau-of-education man down in Seattle." It read:

DEAR COCHRAN: A Mr. Robert Arnold has given you as a reference in making an application to teach school in Alaska. A vacancy existed at the time and we assigned Mr. Arnold to Akutoff without examining into his character. Kindly let us know if he is a man of determination and character. The post is difficult in that the natives are under the influence of the ancient shaman, or medicine men. Efforts to educate the children are resented; our last teacher driven from the community, no one else cared for the position, thus we were delighted to obtain Mr. Arnold's service.

Respectfully,

DUNCAN McDONALD.

Both Jim Arnold and Ted Bartley swore with feeling. "And they sent her into that, thinking she was a man," Arnold said, groaning. "She signed her application Bobby, that's the name everybody calls her by, and that chump

of a McDonald figured it meant Robert. Ted, what'll we do?" Before Bartley could reply, he answered his own question. "Navigation out there has closed by now. We've got legs, son, and we'll use 'em. Maybe you can put me on my back before this mess is over with. We'll get to Seward on the jump; maybe charter a gas boat from there; after that——"

"Let's start now!" interrupted Bartley. "Poor, dainty little Bobby in a mess like that."

"Only a little girl," Arnold was almost sobbing.

Bud wiped his eyes. He had known her from youth. "Still, boys, she looked to me like a good man to have in a tight place. There was something about the way she handled a team. And you know she fooled us by blazing a new trail through the mountains to the winter trail. The Siwash I've had out looking at deserted cabins found that out."

A few bleak rocks lifted like fangs above storm-lashed waters. Twenty miles or so off the schooner *Silver Star's* beam, the Alaskan coast line lifted above the horizon—rugged, notching the sky, perpetually blanketed with snow that fed warm, fertile valleys in summer. The schooner was ice battered from a trip into the arctic, the sails were gray and weather-beaten, but she was a mighty fine craft to be aboard in a storm. Captain Olson stood on the deck with his parka hood thrown back, eying his passenger with a mixture of surprise and admiration. Then he turned to the mate. "Move your stuff into my cabin; I didn't know we were taking a girl aboard. Tell the cook to do his best." The cook was already doing that. Several seamen and the mate decided to shave at once.

Roberta Arnold smiled and Olson conducted her to the mate's cabin. The skipper was studying her closely as if weighing the future. She was a fair-

sized girl with dark hair and eyes, and she had come aboard at Seward after a session of cabling to the bureau of education at Seattle. He noted her glances were brief and comprehensive, her arms strong. "A fine, strong body," he mused, "so she may get away with it, but I can't think what Dunc McDonald was thinking of to send another woman to Akutoff."

It was several days before he felt well enough acquainted to speak his mind. "You're a fine, strong girl, but you've no business at Akutoff."

"Why, Captain Olson, I'm making my own way in the world; teaching is one thing I can do, so why not teach where there is an opening instead of waiting for something?"

"It's a man's job. The last woman was frightened out. McDonald advertised for a man, but none wanted that game."

"Why?"

He studied her as he explained the situation. "Can you use an automatic pistol?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"Then I'll give you this, and use it if you have to. Also here are a couple of hundred rounds of ammunition. Let 'em know you can shoot straight, and perhaps you won't have to shoot—straight."

For the first time she paled slightly, but lost none of her resolution. "Mr. McDonald doesn't know he is sending a girl," she confessed.

"Doesn't, eh? Then, b'gosh, he's not sending a girl. I won't land you," the skipper snapped out.

"You have no choice in the matter, captain," she sweetly explained. "The board chartered your schooner to land teacher and supplies at Akutoff, and the teacher wishes to be landed."

"Huh!" He reluctantly admitted defeat. "Take the gun and use it," he repeated. Aside from this worry, he had others. There was more than an even

chance he would be caught in the ice. He drove the schooner at top speed, using both sails and power at times, then one morning he dropped anchor in an ice-fringed bay. Winter was here; communication was cut off except to those who cared to risk hundreds of miles of mushing overland.

A seaman with hip boots stepped from a dory and carried Bobby Arnold ashore. Natives, gathered on the beach, were watching proceedings with interest. A half mile away the schooner rode on the bay. Even while landing supplies the fringe of ice had narrowed. The seaman touched his sou'wester. "Good luck," he muttered. His gaze as it swept the natives was threatening, then he splashed out to the dory.

The girl sighed deeply. It was all over now, she had burned her last bridge resolutely. There was no turning back. Sullen faces regarded her steadily, and search as she might, she found no softening expression of welcome. She was an intruder. She smiled on the smallest girl, and because children are children the world over, the tot, fairly greasy with an unmistakable odor of dried salmon hovering about her, smiled back. The mother's stern lines softened briefly.

"I want several boys to carry my things to the schoolhouse," Bobby announced. "I am the new teacher!" Silence, then a grunt in dialect. Young men picked up the baggage and led off. The girl followed, and the entire population brought up the rear.

She found the building stocked with fuel, school supplies, and provisions for herself. "To-morrow," she announced, "school starts!"

No one replied; the natives moved away in silence. She was alone. Through hard work she fought off the nameless dread that swept through her at times. There was much to be put in order, for the previous teacher's departure had been hasty. It was nine

o'clock in the evening before she found time to prepare a meal. Outside, a threatening storm was sweeping through the village. Papers on her table stirred violently and fluttered to the floor, a cold blast of air struck her, then silence. Instinctively she turned and found a young girl crouching on the floor. Bobby smiled in relief. "Who are you?"

"I am Mary, that is my Christian name. I am a Christian; I want to learn, and so do some of the others, but the shaman——" She shuddered. "To-night he forbid any attending school. Each white teacher brings trouble, he told them. One year it was what you call the flu. Many died. Then it was the trappers returned without a catch. Another year it was a poor run of salmon. The shaman tells these things because the teachers are making him lose his power. He has many of the old folk on his side. Don't ring the school bell to-morrow; there is hate in some hearts."

She remained crouched as if fearing some one might peer through a window and observe her. Then with a smile she vanished into the storm.

A knock increased the pounding in the girl's heart as the back door closed on Mary. She opened the front door, and the shaman entered with a flurry of snow. Hate was in his evil eyes. When he spoke, Bobby realized he had associated with whites long enough to master the language, and no doubt realize the fraud of his witchcraft.

"The people are angry; the gods are angry that you white teachers come again and again with your lies. Trouble is upon us, we are dying off because of you. You can't go back, for the schooner has left, but if you ring the bell or attend the sick as other teachers have done——" His eyes glittered and he advanced a step. "In the spring the schoolhouse will be cold and silent."

The threat was not lost upon her. The test had come.

Her reply was short and pointed, spoken in a voice from which fear had been driven with an effort. "Bunk! Ah! I see you understand bunk and many other things. You are a fraud, know it, and are profiting on the ignorance of a poor people. I'm not afraid of you. Besides that, remember the coast-guard vessels will be calling next summer. Do we understand each other perfectly? Good—now go!"

The shaman nodded, but there was an expression in his eyes that hinted at future trouble. "Many strange accidents can happen to a young man or woman so far from help. And who, among my people, would dare brave the wrath of the gods by speaking?"

People can force themselves to take a determined stand, but they cannot force sleep. Bobby Arnold spent a restless night, ate lightly at breakfast, and then rang the school bell. Its clear tones sounded through the storm; the clock ticked silently, and a half hour later a frightened figure took her seat. The other seats were empty. "Bless you, Mary," the girl whispered, "your courage will carry you far."

Mary was nervous and glanced frequently toward the door. "The shaman said death in a strange manner would come to any who attended school," she managed to say, "but—I came."

"He lied, Mary. Nothing can happen to you. To-morrow, others will come."

Mary shook her head. She knew her people. The next morning even Mary did not appear. The schoolhouse was a thing shunned by all. Late that night the girl opened a window and listened. For an hour she had been conscious of a subdued din and occasional screams. The sound came more distinctly and the sudden scream of Mary's youthful voice startled her. In the single cry she found terror and pleading. "Mary, my one friend!" she whispered. Then she loaded the pistol, donned a light parka,

and headed for the cabin. She was surprised at her calmness; perhaps it was the heavy sag of the gun that gave her confidence. She threw open the door and entered. The air was heavy for lack of ventilation. The shaman stood near the wall, and a woman looked at the girl with frightened eyes. "Go!" she cried. "You have brought down enough trouble. Mary spilled hot water on her leg and——"

"Spilled or poured?" the girl demanded. "Do you want me, Mary?"

The girl nodded. "It hurts so!"

Bobby Arnold's lips were set as she hurried back to the school for the first-aid kit. The shaman was at the door when she returned. He eyed the pistol and gave a sign to a young man near the stove.

A canopy had been erected over the bed, and Mary's mother and father were bound tightly to the girl with blankets. The parents seemed beside themselves; hissing, spitting, and emitting weird cries to frighten the spirit. Mary had lapsed into unconsciousness, the rubbing and rolling she had received being more than she could withstand. As she pulled the blankets aside, the young native jerked her pistol from the holster. The shaman advanced. "Get out! You can't give her your medicine or tell her of your God!"

It was evident a physical test, as well as one of wits had come. The shaman was advancing; the others were awaiting his orders. An iron kettle was within reach, and she lifted it above her head. "Now you leave!" she ordered, panting. The shaman's muscles tensed, and he leaped. The kettle caught him in mid-air, with the force of strong arms behind it. He collapsed, and the young buck lifted the automatic, pulling the trigger.

There was no report, for she had forgotten to slip a cartridge into the chamber. His amazement hardly ceased before she was upon him. She jerked the

gun from his hand, and pulled a load into the chamber. Then covering him, she dragged the mother and father to the floor. "Get up, wrap Mary in blankets, and carry her to the schoolhouse. Hurry!"

On the floor, the shaman stirred uneasily from the wound in his head. One cannot stop an iron kettle hurled by a strong girl and not experience some slight effect. The shaman regained consciousness through no power or rite of his belief. Plain nature took her course in due time. He looked about and spoke in dialect. The man, woman, and young man pointed toward the schoolhouse. The shaman spoke again, and they nodded.

"And there must be no mark for the coast-guard men to see should the body be found in spring!"

Bobby Arnold had done all she could, and now she waited by the bedside, and felt a thrill as Mary's breathing became regular. Near by lay a report a former teacher had made. One paragraph read:

Shamanism is practiced by many Yukon tribes and stands in the way of advancement of the children, as they quickly revert to tribal customs when beyond the influence of schools. Richard Martin had almost stamped out the practice in one village, and but for his unfortunate death—he was found frozen on the trail—would have succeeded.

There was food for thought in this paragraph, but into her reflections came no thought of retreat from her position. She was merely a pioneer, as her mother and father had been—a scout beyond the advancing line of civilization. History told of soldiers, engineers, and missionaries, but was strangely silent in the matter of school teachers.

"Teacher!" Mary opened her eyes. "Where is he?"

"Never mind, dear; you are safe here with me! How were you burned?"

"The shaman——" She stopped suddenly, as if she had said too much.

"Willi God take care of you? The shaman says nothing can prevent the wrath of our fathers' gods."

Perhaps she was a bit delirious, but it was apparent there was much fact behind what she said. In the days that followed, and they were long and dreary, Bobby remained behind barred doors and windows. The rest she took was during the day when Mary's watchful eyes were open.

In the cabins below the schoolhouse natives whispered, watched the shaman, and waited. A strange silence hovered over the land, there was no wind, and the temperature dropped far below zero. Alone the shaman approached the building. He removed the snow from a cellar entrance and disappeared in darkness. His hands sensed a course to the stairway. When he hurled the trapdoor aside he was in the room before the crash had fairly died away. His moccasined feet left the floor in a mighty bound, and his hands gripped the girl's with the strength of steel.

"Each teacher has laughed at our gods and told of their God. Let's see Him free you from me; or keep you warm out there! My people are watching!"

Mary sat up in bed with frightened eyes. The shaman secured the teacher with a light line, and then ripped the bandages from the native girl's burns. The blackness of his rage filled the girl with terror; to each harsh statement she faltered an affirmative in dialect. Then he twisted a bit of line about Bobby Arnold's wrists and led her into the night. Here and there a head protruded from a darkened cabin; voices whispered excitedly in the gloom. Thus it was Richard Martin had died.

Ted Bartley stumbled through the snow like a man in a trance. His eyes were fixed on a star, cold and silent, yet spreading the warm light of hope. "Beneath the star is Akutoff!" he muttered. "Beneath the star is Akutoff;

beneath the star——” Over and over again his lips muttered the words, and as a man or beast responds to the lash of the whip, so Ted Bartley, hooded, unshaven, responded. He looked back, faltered, then returned. A figure sprawled out in the snow struggled to rise again, then gave it up. Bartley noticed the man was on his back.

“Arnold!” he said hoarsely. “I’m on my back, boy! You put me there with your pace. I’m old, though, I guess. You’re young and can go on! I had the strength, but not the endurance, the reserve.” Bartley lingered, as if in doubt. He could not leave him, and yet—— Arnold lifted a mittened hand. “Go, Ted! Every minute counts. Go! Go!” Ted Bartley set his teeth and obeyed. Jim Arnold slumped back. “It’s all right, it’s worth it, if Ted gets there in time. Bless the little girl, she’s her mother’s spirit!” The fighting instinct was strong. Arnold struggled to his knees, crawled a bit, then collapsed.

The swaying figure of Ted Bartley did not look back. He did not want to. The whole thing seemed like a nightmare. The voyage up the coast against storms; the flight by plane from Anchorage as far as the aviator dare go, then back to the primitive method of travel—afoot. “Beneath the star is Akutoff! Beneath the star is Akutoff!” Hour after hour until he paused for rest, brief, seemingly unrefreshing, then on once more.

Two hours or two days later—sense of time was lost—he rubbed his eyes and peered dazedly ahead. There should be no woman here, lashed to a tree. He pulled himself together and reeled onward, then paused for closer inspection. There was a movement, a lifting of hand. He leaped forward with a cry of gladness and threw back the parka hood. “Bobby!” he cried. “Bobby, old pal!”

“Ted! Am I dreaming?”

“Dreaming—little girl! I——”

Her warning cry stopped him. The shaman was coming down the slope. He was in no mood for interference at such a critical period in his leadership of the tribe. This reeling man was no match for him, and his knife gleamed in the pale moonlight; gleamed and flashed as it descended. Bartley hit him hard and low. The knife tore through his parka as the pair came together.

The girl cried out and struggled futilely as the befurred, struggling figures worked nearer and nearer a cliff. Below ice-choked waters were grinding against the rocks. She saw them part with sudden violence. One disappeared over the edge; the other lay there for a long time, and presently came toward her, knife in hand.

The knife slashed and her lashings dropped. “Oh, Ted! He asked me how I knew God would protect me, and before all the people I told him God would! He sent them back, then stood on the ridge and waited for me to freeze to death, like Richard Martin! Listen, Ted, you must stay here and let me go in alone, for the moral effect. I am not in danger—now!” He nodded. “Then when it is quiet, slip into the schoolhouse. For a few days you must hide.” She suddenly dropped her mittened hand on his shoulder.

“And dad?” she cried. She knew her father.

Bartley could not tell her now. She was too exhausted from her own experience. Later—— “Fine!” he said and averted his eyes.

“Ted! Is he back there?” Agony was upon her face! He nodded. “And I did this terrible thing!” She found a measure of comfort in his arms, and she listened to his words against her will. Later, when he had rested a bit, he would return to the place. He felt sure he could find it. It would be madness for her to even make an attempt to go.

Elders whispered and glanced over their shoulders with apprehension the next morning, for the school bell was ringing; the shaman had vanished. They saw the teacher making ready for the pupils as if nothing had happened. Something of which they knew little, but feared greatly had prevailed. They could not see her red eyes, nor know the iron will that enabled her to carry on. That, like all grief, was within and only sensed by those close. Mary was the first pupil to appear; then one by one, dark-skinned, curious-eyed little natives followed. In the back room an exhausted man alternately slept and cursed leg muscles that refused to respond to his bidding.

The third night the door opened and a heavy voice cried: "Bobby!" She was out of bed and into his arms heedless of the chill of his parka. For minutes they were silent, the most eloquent expression

of their happiness and affection. Bobby felt the great chest lift in a sigh, felt the huge hands tense. "Did Ted—make it?" he managed to say.

A rear door opened and Jim Arnold was answered. Ted stood in silence, his hands supporting his swaying body. Presently he managed to speak. "My leg muscles won't behave. Arnold—how?"

"Holed in until I could travel," Arnold replied. "I've done it before. Hated like the deuce to have a kid put me on my back, but—shake, son, it's a great old world, and things usually iron themselves out. We're all here for the winter." His eyes twinkled. "I know of a mushing parson—and one of the native boys with good, strong legs might go for him. Hey, Ted, where're you going?"

"Guess my legs will last long enough to find that native boy!" he answered.



ALASKANS WANT TO EXTERMINATE BEARS

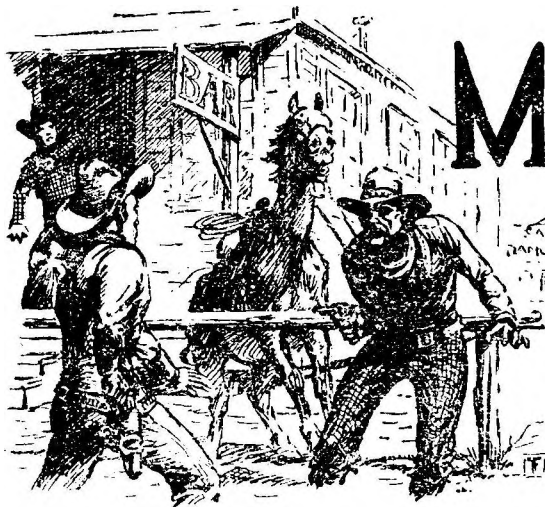
OWING to a number of killings by bears, the *Alaska Daily Empire*, published at Juneau, Alaska, recently made the following editorial plea for the complete extermination of bears in the Territory of Alaska:

"The *Empire* yesterday contained two accounts of bears attacking people in widely separated parts of Alaska, one of which resulted in the death of a lonely miner and in the other case very likely death would have come to a prospector if it had not been for his dog.

"John Newman, a miner doing assessment work for a woman who owns mining claims near Dan Creek in the Copper River Valley, was attacked by a bear near his cabin and so mangled that death followed after he had proceeded two miles along the trail while going for assistance.

"Near Hyder a bear crept upon James Locke, who was engaged with another man in staking mining claims, and knocked him senseless without his knowing what had happened to him. A little dog attacked the bear and prevented it from finishing the job. Locke's associate, W. S. Sullivan, hurried to his aid and brought the man to consciousness and aided him to reach home and attention.

"Better evidence of the need for the extermination of the ferocious, man-killing bears of Alaska could not be presented than the telling of these two incidents which occurred within a week or two of each other."



Moon Eye

By
George Gilbert

Author of "The Snake-blood
Clan," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

BECAUSE he wished his boy to gain culture and wisdom, and because he feared the great skill the boy showed in shooting down his father's enemy, Barnett, Sol Hargiss sends Ollie, heir to the Moon Eye Ranch and Hargiss wealth, for five years' study in the East.

Coincident with Ollie's departure is the arrival of Merve Glane, who has not been in Rangeland since he was suspected of being purposely hesitant about shooting Barnett, ostensibly his enemy, too. He works his way into the affections and confidences of Sol and Tommie Neylon, his friend.

Glane has got Kin Braille, who, unknown to any one else, is the son of Sol's dead, dissolute brother, Tom, and a half-breed. He resembles Ollie perfectly. Glane stakes him to five years of Eastern education, then he expects to produce him as Ollie. He skillfully legislates matters, due to Sol's great trust in him, so that Ollie is seen only once—and substitutes Kin, instead. He tampers with the mails successfully. He delicately arranges to be executor of Hargiss' estate.

Glane goes up to get Ollie when he graduates from college, lures him into a backwater in New Orleans, and with the aid of Kin, batters him senseless and throws his presumably dead body in the river.

Hargiss is murdered by Barnett's brother, who has been motivated by Glane. Barnett, in turn, is killed by Kin, now posing as the heir, who thus wins fame.

But the real Ollie is not killed. He is saved, and, after a protracted illness in which his memory is partially lost, he regains himself. When he gets back to Wyoming he learns Tommie Neylon has died, and his own changed appearance prevents recognition.

CHAPTER XV.

"WHO IS HE?"



SEVERAL weeks after the death of Tommie Neylon, Mervin Glane, now the recognized executor of the big Moon Eye estate, rode into Conejo Blanco. He went to the Branding Iron, and was treated most respectfully, as now being one of the region's big men.

More and more the affairs of the big ranch seemed to be slipping into Glane's eager fingers. Kin had turned toward loafing and pleasure, it seemed. He had formed the three young riders of his choice, Ike Wallinge, Three Finger Berne and Breeze Yarnall, into a sort

of bodyguard, and with Chet, had made a round of parties, letting the executor run the ranch. He had squired Millie West to a few parties, but had recently paid some attention to other girls, although not pointedly enough to cause much comment.

"There's Mr. Glane now," a man across the road from the hotel said to a stoop-shouldered, full-bearded man, who had ridden into town earlier that day and inquired as to the Moon Eye outfit. "He does the hirin' an' firin' for Moon Eye."

The man left the sad-eyed cayuse upon which he had entered town and strode across the road. He seemed to bend forward. A closer inspection showed his beard to be streaked with

gray. His nose was awry and his tone, as he addressed the big man of the region, was very husky:

"Want a hand?"

Glane looked the man over appraisingly. He did not want a hand, but it was part of his policy to sound out all strangers who came into the region:

"What would yuh expect a month?"

"The goin' wage, sir," he said, as one who curries favor.

"Oh, I've got a lot of youngsters that work for that or less. I guess not."

"Well, no harm in asking?"

"No, not any."

The stoop-shouldered, bearded man bought a very small drink and doled out chicken feed enough to pay for that and a sack of makin's. Evidently he was down to the last of his money. He walked out into the sunlight again, rolling one as he walked along, head bent low over his little task of self-gratification.

Down the street came five men, jogging along comfortably, taking the street, pretty much of it. They all wore gay neckcloths of silk. The leader was a square-shouldered, clean-shaven young fellow, who rode a smoke-hued horse; three were rollicky waddies out for fun and one was a very much time-worn veteran of the open range. He rode in the rear and seemed to be somewhat moody.

As the five passed the stoop-shouldered, bearded man watched them intently, hands on hips, puffing away grimly beside his nondescript cayuse. The young leader of the cavalcade caught, with his alert eye, this figure of dejection, drew in his smoke-hued horse and looked down derisively.

"I wonder what that is?" he jeered.

The three young men at his back made fun too, thoughtlessly, as youth will. The veteran behind said nothing, but sat, hands on the horn, waiting till youth had had its fling.

"Yuh're lookin' at a *man*," came the

husky reply from the man afoot. He puffed away unconcernedly.

The young leader swung down—*on the off side*.

The stoop-shouldered, bearded man merely folded his arms, and the right hand was below the left, a scant two inches from the butt of his left-hand gun that was riding there, within easy reach of his nervous, lean hand.

The veteran stared.

The young leader laughed, swung up again, jeered again at the man afoot and then lifted his horse to a lope, beckoning the others to follow him. They did, somewhat sobered down.

"No use t' start anything with a tarantula like that," their young leader said to them.

"We'd've sided yuh," said Ike Wallinge.

"I know, but there's no credit rowing with every drifter that comes through." He waved the man afoot aside as of no moment.

"Where's Chet?"

They looked back.

Chet was sitting on his well-mannered horse, looking down at the man afoot. The man afoot did not say anything.

Chet rode past him, looking back two or three times.

"What about him?" asked Wallinge, as Chet come up with them.

"I don't know; I wonder who he is?"

"Why?"

"Oh, I just wonder, that's all. He looks about middle age, wouldn't yuh say, boys?"

"I'd say he was past that, with that gray in his beard and his stooping shoulders."

"Oh, I've seen some pretty young men look old when they wasn't much past twenty," Chet objected. "Men that get piled up ridin' outlaws or bulldogging down steers and tailing ladinos and maybe riding into dawgholes on stampedes. It takes it out of a man that a way."

"Well, he doesn't mean anything in our young lives," their employer reminded them; "we're due down at Red Llano to that baile for to-night."

So they rode away, but the older man turned several times in his saddle and looked back where the stoop-shouldered, bearded man still stood, beside his ancient cayuse, smoking grimly and seemingly lost in thought.

"Now who can that be?" Chet wondered; "he knew that when a man gave him sass an' then got off on the off side, it was time t' get ready, and he got ready in due an' ancient form. Crossed his arms and his right hand was dangle' right under his left elbow, not two inches from that left-hand gun and that gun was turned to the front so that he could snap it out and over like a side-winder striking when his anger was up. Well, whoever he is, I'll keep him in mind. A man that is all ready t' throw down on yuh with the killer's draw that a way is a man t' be watched."

Across the street, Glane had watched this little byplay, as well. Nor had the significance of the lean rider's pose and act been lost on him. He came across the street now and addressed the man again:

"Hombre, I may have a place, a li'l bit later. Where can I find yuh if I need a man?"

The man held Glane's eyes for a moment, then motioned for him to bend over. Glane heard the husky voice rasp out, yet in tones too low to be heard by any one else:

"I'm usin' the old shack in the pear below town. Savvy?"

Glane started, but nodded. Then he turned away.

"I wonder who he is? One of the old gang that I've lost track of? Well, Dod Barnett went there, an' he's gone and Jersey Barnett went there, an' he's gone. I used them both, in my time, and this hombre doesn't seem to have as much brains as they had, both together. I

know where t' find him, if I should want him, and by the way he holds himself when crowded, I'd say he'd make a hand in a scrap."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAW'S NINE POINTS.

IN the tumble-down shack among the pear tangles, with his lean cayuse nipping at the scant herbage in the vicinity of the tiny spring that so few knew of, a haggard, stoop-shouldered man sat, pondering deeply. Suddenly he put his shoulders back squarely and combed at his streaked beard with his lean, nervous fingers. The black seemed to show more and the gray less as particles of whitish stuff rattled out of the hairs of the beard. With the habit of the rangeman, he talked aloud to himself:

"Possession is nine points of the law! They've got nine and about ten. Sol Hargiss is dead. An heir has been accepted with all legal forms. His own executor is in charge. The man who contests that possession must be able, first of all, to prove that the heir in power is not Sol Hargiss' son. I have seen him. He certainly looks just like Oliver Hargiss and he has everyone fooled into the belief that he is such. What chance would a poor man stand as a contestant, under the will? Little enough. Against him could be used all the resources of a huge estate. If I uncover myself, I will be hunted by gunmen—hired by them. I will have to kill or be killed, while the contest is on. If I could get a single line on this heir, who has appeared so mysteriously!"

He threw himself down on the floor, where his blanket was spread, with his saddle for his only pillow.

For days he had lurked about Conejo Blanco, picking up what of news he could. He had seen Glane pass to and fro and the heir of Moon Eye, as well.

"And then, the way my father was

killed! Jersey Barnett did it, but—who set him up to do it? I am better working in the dark for a time. And I musn't make a slip or they will triumph completely. As long as I am in the open, I can do as I like. We must be patient, old cayuse, patient and silent. My college course in business and law may yet serve me well in this important crisis."

A slight crackling sound; the old cayuse snorted!

The man in the shack rolled over and over, into a corner.

There was no other sound for a long time. Then came a low call:

"Ho, in there; can I come in?"

It was the voice of Merve Glane!

"Yes; with yuhr hands up."

He saw the executor of the big estate enter, caught him against the sky as he came in through the doorway, hands up, as ordered. He got up, flared a match, inspected the man and told him to sit down on an old box while he lighted a candle. Soon they faced each other with the flickering candle between them. Glane was forced to speak first:

"So this is where yuh hang out?"

The other did not speak.

"What's yuhr name?"

"James Oliver will do's well's anything, won't it?"

"Yes; yuh said yuh wanted a job?"

He nodded agreement.

"Ever know the Barnett's and their gang?"

The other man laughed, a laugh that had a chilly quality. Glane stared at him. Without seeming to move he had assumed that deadly pose. Glane looked away, cowed.

"What kind of a job yuh offering me?"

"Strayman for Moon Eye."

"Haven't yuh got enough hard-boiled hombres t' do that work?"

"I mean *my* strayman; under *my* own orders."

"Oh—ride an' report t' yuh——"

"An' do what I want done."

"Everything yuh want done?" with a trace of irony.

"Yes; a hundred a month and keep. Good horse and outfit——"

"That might be puttin' on too much dawg, make people talk; I mean the good hoss an' outfit. Let that come afterwards. At first I'll have my own outfit, such as it is, and ride whatever hoss comes handiest."

"Suit yourself. When can yuh report for duty?"

"Missin' much stock?"

"We'll talk of that later."

"O. K., Mr. Glane. When do yuh want me there?"

"Within a few days."

"Yuh've hired a hand."

"Most hands get forty dollars a month; yuh get one hundred dollars from me, private. Do yuh understand?"

For answer the right-hand gun of him snapped forth in his left hand and was snapped home, like lightning. He nodded and—grinned wolfishly:

"Yuh bet I understand yuh, Mr. Glane. I aim t' understand a whole lot."

Glane got up and went out hastily, looking back over his shoulder as at something that had alarmed him greatly.

The other man sat there, head forward, shoulders drooping, a figure sinister and menacing in the guttering light of the flickering candle.

The light puffed out.

Glane turned and all but fled up the twisty, thorn-beset path that led back to where he had left his own horse before venturing into the depths of the pear thickets to hire a gunman to walk at his side and be to him as a shield against a dread that was constantly growing in his mind as he watched more and more carefully the unfolding of the character of Kin Braile, now the heir of Moon Eye.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STRAYMAN.

THREE days later the stoop-shouldered man, with the touches of gray in his beard, rode up to the big house at Moon Eye and announced himself to Merve Glane, who was sitting, in the place where Sol Hargiss so often had sat, under the overhang of the east gallery, taking his ease.

"There's that li'le shack, off t' one side the bunk house; that's for yuh. It's better inside than it looks. I want yuh t' be able to get in an' out sometimes on the quiet."

"Yeah?"

"Yuh answer t' me an' report t' me. Understand?"

"I aim t' understand a lot, as I told yuh oncet."

"My foreman is Tris Conyard; he's down at the breaking pen. Make yuhself known t' him." He made a sign of dismissal.

The old cayuse ambled toward the breaking pen, which had several punchers atop the rails, watching a horse being ridden. The customary yells of encouragement or sarcasm were to be heard. A squat-set, square-faced, hard-browed man turned at the sound of shuffling hoofs in the dust and stared at the newcomer.

"Mr. Glane said for me t' make myself known t' Conyard, the *primero*." He picked him out with unerring judgment.

"Yuh've done so," he answered coldly.

"I'm the new strayman."

"All right; the boss seems t' know all about yuh, I don't. Put that crow bait in somewhere and be at home."

Then he turned back to watch the rider and horse through the corral gate.

"I wonder if that old coot will have nerve enough t' go get a bunch of strays if rustlers get them on the run, an' he hits their sign when he's out in the open alone?"

Chet, sitting on the fence, looked down and laughed.

"Don't stir up that tarantula; he looks bad-eyed t' me."

"Looks t' me too much like a papa's pet, holdin' his place by favor of the boss. We've got three-four now that hold themselves mighty choice because young Ollie Hargiss pays them too much attention, if yuh want t' know."

Chet glared down at the new foreman hostilely. "Well, all right; have it that way, but don't say too much about it," he answered.

Conyard turned away, his face red and his hands working. Chet was the only man on the place who had refused to accept the new foreman as leader. Conyard had laughed this off to the other men as of little moment.

"Let th' old-timer sputter; it does him a lot of good an' me no harm," was the way he put it to the other hands. "He's a boss' pet an' such are not to be disturbed around here, it seems."

Conyard had appeared at Moon Eye unheralded several days before, brought there by Mervin Glane. When Sol Hargiss lived, there had been no foreman, properly speaking. The work had been divided up as Hargiss saw fit, and by rough-and-ready methods he had kept everything going, with various hands appointed as straw bosses, as occasion required. Glane had tried that system, but he knew he was not the manager that Hargiss was—could not command that certain and tried loyalty that had enabled Hargiss to run the big estate in such an apparently slipshod fashion, but really with such efficiency. So Merve Glane, wishing to be more sure of his position and not liking the way the heir of Moon Eye was currying favor with the hands, especially the younger element, had brought in Tris Conyard as foreman. Conyard had proved to be efficient, but his character was cold, and the hands did not take to him with cordiality. This did not seem

to bother the ranch boss, who had at first adopted a hands-off policy, watching and observing. He had told Glane he would make any changes in management needed later, when he was more informed as to actual conditions on the big estate.

The heir of Moon Eye now appeared, coming from the big house, yawning and stretching himself. He had been out all the night before to some merry-making and this was his first appearance for the day.

The heir had not liked Conyard from the first—liked him less than ever as he strolled toward the breaking pen. He passed Conyard frowningly and came almost face to face with the new strayman who had just flipped his saddle onto a peg in the little shack beside the bunk house. The heir at once stopped and eyed the newcomer:

"Working here?" he asked curtly.

The strayman nodded.

"Who hired yuh?"

The strayman jerked a thumb toward Glane. Conyard was on his way to talk to Glane. The heir let his glance take him in, then turned back to the strayman. "You won't stay long, hombre."

The strayman did not reply. He simply turned his back and walked into his shack.

Soon the heir came back from the breaking pen. He went alone to the big house and presently came out, equipped for riding. Ike Wallinge brought up old Smoke for him and he rode away, alone.

The strayman came out of his shack to find Glane looking after the receding back of the heir with none too friendly an eye. He accosted the strayman:

"To-morrow take a horse that Conyard will give yuh and make up a pack of grub. He'll tell yuh where t' ride; not far this time, but so that yuh'll get yuhr landmarks and get t' know yuhr way around. We've been missin' some

yearlin' stock lately down on our south range. Not much; may be just drift or—something that needs looking after. See what yuh can find."

The strayman nodded shortly.

"Loaf t'-day, get wise t' the place. If I need yuh I'll call."

The strayman sat down before the door of his shack and began to mend his bridle. Presently old Chet came strolling over from the breaking pen to watch him. He went away after a time, shaking his head. The strayman had not deigned to notice Chet in any way.

One by one Ike Wallinge, Three-finger Berne and Breeze Yarnall drifted over to where the strayman sat, using awl and wax-end handily. Each went away without getting any attention from the sour-acting man. The word spread among all the men about the place that he was grouchy and stand-offish and it was agreed among them all that he was to be severely let alone.

"Got the makin's of a mighty good stranger," Chet summed it up for them all.

Later the strayman strolled about, chewing a straw, and was made to feel that he did not belong.

Self-contained, silent, however, he saw all that went on, and particularly that Glane and Conyard held many whispered talks together on that east gallery, when no one was supposed to be observing them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"OLLIE, YOU'RE TOO ROUGH!"

THE heir of Moon Eye had a definite plan in view for that day. He did not want any company.

For some time he had been enjoying himself at distant bailes and parties. He had neglected Millie West.

And yet, she was the one girl among all the frontier beauties, who seemed to fill his mind when he was alone. The others he liked—when he was with

them. But shy, quiet, modest Millie had a charm about her that the others lacked. They were too forward, too open, in their efforts to make a match with the admitted heir of the great estate, to please him entirely. For an evening's pleasure, they might be all right, but they made no appeal to his deeper feelings, good to flirt with, but——

So now he rode the ridge trail and down the hogback toward the West place.

Millie came out to greet him as he rode up—came out with eagerness apparent in her every action. The sweet-natured girl had been puzzled at the neglect apparent to his behavior toward her. She had searched her innocent heart for a reason for it. She felt that she had met him with decent cordiality when he had returned, after five years of absence. She had kept away from other men to remain constant to her maidenly ideal all during the years he had been away. She had refused the most pressing invitations from other eligible young men, in order that she might be able to say to him, on his return:

"Ollie, I have been true to you."

Yet he had been avoiding her. Rumors had reached Millie that the heir of Moon Eye was making rather free with other girls, but she had put these by as mere gossip or at most as exaggerated reports, told by some anxious mother who hoped to marry the heir into her family and who would not be averse to starting a jealous quarrel between the lovers, as an opening wedge toward a newer alliance.

So now she came toward him gladly and let him see openly that she was glad to have him with her again.

"Where's Billy?" he said, hoping he would be absent.

"Rode to town, Ollie. Light down and we can have a real nice visit. I've got something nice cooking for dinner.

I—well, I hoped you'd be over today. You haven't been here much—lately."

"No; lots of work at home."

He put his arm about her shoulder a bit heavily, eying her hungrily. She was not in a mood to be too critical then. She glanced at him happily and then sat on the doorsill and watched while he put the old horse into the little corral and hung up saddle and bridle on a peg outside the gate. Just as he left there she saw him go to his saddle and take something out of one of the pockets. He came toward her with one hand closed over something. He put it in his pocket teasingly as he came closer still:

"I've got something pretty for you. I'll give it to you when I've had that nice dinner."

"What is it?" Her eyes were shining.

"I won't tell—not now."

He held himself to talk calmly while they waited for the meal to cook. She had to go in and out to the stove a few times. Then the dinner was ready and he sat across the trim little table, all set with nice china and whitest of linen in his honor. She was so good and so intent upon doing her best for him that his heart at times shrank from his own thoughts, and he wondered if a quiet, safe life with her would not be better than the wilder, more rapid life that he was planning to live—when the executor was discharged and he held Moon Eye in his own clear right. Yet that wilder, cross-bred strain that came from the Spanish-Indian mixture in his veins would assert itself and even now his thoughts leaped past the good, sweet little range girl to others who had made hours pass rapidly at merrymakings that he had attended too soon after the death of Sol Hargiss to win the best of the opinions of the heavier-weight pioneers of the district.

Now, the meal over, and Millie's little round of work done, she came to sit

with him in the little front room that was her pride. She took up her mandolin and began to play and sing.

She became wrapt up in her own music for the time. She felt a hand on her shoulder.

He was looking down into her eyes as she turned her face up. His eyes burned with a fire she had not seen in them heretofore.

"Ollie—what is it!"

"Only this—here is a present for you——"

He held out a bracelet of gold, chased and set with a small diamond. The look of fear went from her eyes and she smiled, reassured.

"Oh, how good of you! For me! You never have given me a real keepsake before this." She stretched out her hand to take it.

"Yes, it's for you, but what do I get?"

He held it back from her. She tried to take it, in mock eagerness. He held it farther and farther away.

Now the hand on her shoulder clutched and gripped and——

He threw the bracelet aside and dropped all pretense of gentlemanly wooing. He drew her upright and crushed her to him fiercely, pressing his lips to her own with a force that was savage. She cried out bravely:

"Ollie, don't—you hurt me: let me go——"

She fought against him, but the wild nature in him had boiled to the surface and he refused to heed her demands for return to that nicer wooing for which her innate goodness craved. Instead, he crushed her again and again against his big, strong chest.

Then the truth flashed on her!

This young man, whom she had all but idolized and to whom she had given affection of the purest sort, was not as he had been in their youth.

"Go away. Ollie; you're crazy today. You are a brute!"

Now he came to his senses with a jerk.

"All right, if you want to be so harsh, all right." He started to go out.

"Wait—take this, too." Millie flung the golden bracelet after him. He stooped and picked it up. He was truly angry now. He lost his temper:

"All right; I'll give it to some other girl."

"The next one you dance with; she may help you to forget your father only has been dead a little while," came her ringing answer.

He rode away, feeling that he had made a fool of himself.

She came out and watched him go, and sat on the doorsill, still and silent, till he was over the flat and up onto the lift of the hogback.

Then she went indoors and threw herself down onto the bed, sobbing in nervous reaction.

As for the man, he rode slowly back toward Moon Eye. Thrice he drew forth the golden bracelet and looked at it. He made as if to throw it away. But finally he put it back into his saddle pocket again:

"Some other girl will be glad to get it—and won't be so stingy about being kissed, either."

So he rode back to Moon Eye.

At first he thought he would tell Glane about what had happened, but then he reflected that Glane would blame him for it. He decided not to say a word on the subject.

He knew he had made a fool of himself, but he did not want others to know it. The girl was too well liked all up and down the ranges.

CHAPTER XIX.

"RED EAGLE, WYOMING!"

AS the heir of Moon Eye rode up to the big house he saw the red dot of a glowing cigar under the east gallery and knew that Glane was there. He

rode past the shack where the strayman was domiciled and let a ready Mexican lad who came on the run, take his horse. He walked toward the big house, intent upon some dark thoughts that would arise to hag-ride him at times.

"Come here!" He heard Glane's voice.

It was edged with a little more of authority than usual. He would have liked to have shown fight against the plotter, whose brain had placed him on such a lofty pinnacle, but he felt that the time was not yet. After the executor's work was done, after the time had arrived formally to turn the estate over to the heir—that would be time enough for a show-down.

He went in and sat down close to Glane, who spoke at once:

"I'd like it understood, that I want no fooling with the men I hire for this ranch."

"What do you mean?" he said sharply.

"I mean this: I fancied we needed a real foreman. I hired Tris Conyard, a stranger here, because I thought he'd be respected, not having been one of the ranch cliques here."

"Was that the real reason?"

"Yuh're not insinuatin' anything, are yuh?" Glane's voice was raising a bit now. Up till then it had been on the dead conversational level; the other's voice had been going up and up.

"Well—no." Then, in an even and winning tone, Kin said:

"Mr. Glane, you said you'd do what you did for me and put me here if I'd sign a certain paper; that would safeguard you. Well, I signed it. You have kept your part of the bargain; I have kept mine. Where is that paper? It ought to be passed back, hadn't it?"

"When I turn over the estate legally to you and when you give me that hundred thousand cash, yes."

There was a slight, scratching sound away up along under the gallery. The

heir lunged up into the darkness, came back clutching a cat.

"I thought I heard some one, but it was this cat of the Chinaman's at the milk pans at the end of the kitchen wall."

Glane breathed easier.

"That ought t' be a warning t' yuh not t' be sniveling all about such things in the open. Suppose we'd been overheard?"

"Oh, there's no one around this hour of the night, and if they was, they'd look a long time before they connected me with the town joke of Red Eagle, Wyoming," throwing the cat down violently.

"Shet your fool haid," in a low, tense whisper as the cat scampered away. They heard the cat spit and yowl up there at the turn of the wall, and then Chin Gow's voice calling softly:

"Kittie, clome, kittie!"

"It was just that fool chink, after the cat." Glane began to smoke again.

The heir left Glane then, going toward his own room, yawning.

The door of the strayman's shack yawned wide open. From inside came the sound of steady, even snoring—mayhap a shade too loud to be convincing.

The night darkened; the last light went out in the bunk houses. The last lilt of tenor voice had melted into a yawn.

Now from the strayman's shack, a dark figure stole, like a shadow. Across the open space toward the big house, it went, like a cloud's shadow moving across a flat.

A horse stamped in the corral now and then. Somewhere in the outlands a coyote yapped and whined. The heavier howl of a lobo wolf came from the farther distance. An owl called from a windmill vane. The stealing figure reached the big house and stole along the east gallery.

It was dark there and very still. Up

ahead a white thing floated out and then was gone. It was a curtain, blowing out of a window, and then being sucked back inside the room again with the change of air currents.

There was a little stir of wind under the overhang, and then the owl called out on the windmill vane. The prowler reached the open window where the white curtain had flapped out. It came again, whipping a bit, then sucked in again and was still.

The prowler flattened himself against the casement and listened. From within came heavy, regular breathing, natural and unforced. The prowler leaned inside, the window sill at his knees. He stilled the curtain's whipping, stepped over the sill and into the room.

The man in the bed did not stir. His breathing came, deep, full!

The prowler seemed to know where to search for what he wanted, for his hand felt along the wall, to a table, tugged at a drawer there and then worked it open. The drawer slid shut; the prowler edged along the wall, stepped over the window sill and out under the overhang again, slipping something into his coat pocket as he did so. Then he was gone.

When morning came Glane stepped outside before breakfast to find the strayman, on his old cayuse, before the door of the big house. His shoulders drooped and his graying beard was all in disarray, as if from much tugging and clawing at it.

"I thought yuh was t' ride one of our cayuses; where's yuhr war bag packed for the trail?"

"I ain't goin' t' ride for this outfit; I'm drifting!"

Their eyes clashed and held.

Glane took a step forward and his manner indicated growing anger:

"Yuh're durn short; hire out one day, quit the next."

"It's a man's privilege, ain't it?" His hands left the reins with a gliding mo-

tion and were folded across his chest. Now the shoulders were not stooped; the eyes held a menace.

"Why, yes," his lips curving in a forced smile.

"All right, then. But I'll tell yuh why I'm going. This bunch here is unfriendly. Yuhr foreman, he's hostile t' me. That young Hargiss I don't like, a-tall. Them waddies are all lookin' at me cat-wise."

"I thought yuh packed nerve."

"I do, when it's worth anything. But why should I get t' fight a ranch full of hombres that don't mean anything in my young life? I'll hunt strays an' bring them in an' get whoever tries t' steal cattle, but that's all. I'm ridin' now. So long."

And he rode away.

No one else was up then but the Chinaman whose pans and pots were rattling on the kitchen range.

Glane walked thoughtfully back into the house and sat down in the big room, under the wide-spread antlers and long-horns on which guns were racked, for use and ornament. He sat there when the heir of Moon Eye came in—came in rather hurriedly and with a look of anxiety in his eye, to say:

"Mr. Glane, have yuh seen that old picture of mine that I had—the one I had taken in Red Eagle with that first money you gave me, when I was first togged out. I had it taken at the Empire Photo Studio."

"No. Where did you keep it?" Glane said sharply.

"It was in a drawer in that big table in my bedroom."

"When did you see it last?"

"I looked at it last night. I was looking in the drawer for something else and it tumbled out of some odds and ends and I stood before the light looking at it a minute. Then I put it back. This morning I thought of it again—but it was gone."

"Why would I see it? I didn't even

know yuh'd kept it. I told yuh to get shet of everything that would connect yuh with yuhr past in Wyoming and that upper country."

"I don't know why I kept that picture. I suppose because it was the first one I'd ever had taken."

"I haven't seen it. How could I get it, unless I went into yuhr room during the night?"

"Some one was in there!"

"How do yuh know?"

"There was a footmark, the print of a foot in dust, on the carpet under the window. Not distinct so a man could tell what shoe made it, but plainly a footprint, marked out in dust."

"Who would want such a picture?"

The heir's eyes fell away. It was plain to Glane that for some reason he suspected the executor.

"No one would know of it, but you, Mr. Glane," he said with an unpleasant ring in his voice.

"Yuh said yuh looked at it before the window?"

"But who else but you would know but what it was the picture of Ollie Hargiss?"

Glane shrugged up his thin shoulders. "Yuh'll probably find the picture somewhere in yuhr drawer. I didn't see it, nor don't want it. My interest is t' keep yuh right here an' make our plan come out right."

They went to breakfast then at Chin Gow's call and the subject of the picture was dismissed for the time being.

Yet a distrust had sprung up between them again. As the meal ended the heir spoke suddenly, as if to take the other by surprise:

"How did you come to hire that stray-man?"

"Why?"

"Well, to get back to him, he acts like a gun fighter to me."

"Don't let him worry you; every one here was so unfriendly to him that he

quit. I saw him ride early this morning, before any one was up."

"Speak to him?" with growing suspicion.

"Why—yes; why not? I asked him where he was going and why, and he said he was quitting."

"No one else around?"

"No; why?"

"Oh, nothing much. You hire him, he stays a day, then goes away. You hire a foreman that's your own. Then you hire a gunman—and he says he is going away——"

"Says it? He did go away."

"I remember how you said Sol Hargiss——"

"Hush; that chink might hear."

"No; he's back in the kitchen—Jersey Barnett was in the hills once and Sol Hargiss was——"

"Do you mean that I'd have that gun fighter waylay yuh——"

The heir of Moon Eye laughed:

"No, not until yuh get that one hundred thousand dollars."

He got up and they separated, with mutual distrust growing between them.

CHAPTER XX.

"SPENDING MONEY!"

THE heir of Moon Eye sulked part of that morning, but in time came out of his moody state of mind with a jerk. He had thought of plans for pleasure for several days ahead. He had read the announcements of a big town baile down on the San Andreas. It would take two days to go and two more to come back, and there were several stopping places along the route that promised well for excitement. But excitement of the kind he craved cost money, and money he lacked then. He had used up all the spending money Glane had given him. The plotter had kept the heir just on the verge of having enough money to "swing the wide loop" he hoped to swing later. Glane

doled out a few hundreds at a time, pleading that while the big property was worth millions, ready cash was not just then to be had, unless they borrowed.

"When the beef herd's sold," he told the heir, "we'll have a lot of spare change; now it's all needed to have the pay roll and other expenses met."

The heir decided that he had best play humble again. He found Glane in his usual seat, smoking silently. He almost ran into the new foreman as he turned the corner of the house, going toward Glane's station. He rather had the impression that Conyard had started toward Glane, but had decided to keep away, when he saw another coming.

Glane was ready to meet his protégé halfway. He had been getting uneasy at the unfriendly air of the heir lately. He suspected that he wanted spending money—in fact had provided himself with some to meet the expected demand. There was no sign of this on his face as the heir approached and sat down. Glane let the other do the smiling and hinting for several moments before he deigned to wheel his chair about and face the other.

"All right; I ain't holdin' no gredges. But I want yuh t' remember that I slaved five years while yuh was living easy in school back East. I took all sorts of chances t' get the money."

"I ain't forgetting, Mr. Glane," the heir said—showing himself anxious to please.

"Well, don't, then. Now, what do yuh want?"

"I'd like some more spending money."

"All right; I've got a couple of hundred."

"I want a couple of thousand."

"Oh—that's pretty steep, isn't it?"

"No, I don't think so. I've got t' keep up an appearance."

"No, yuh've got t' keep up yuhr deviltry! Why can't yuh be reasonable? Is that wild Indian blood in yuh goin' t' make a fool of yuh?"

The heir turned a sulky face, black with anger, toward him.

"Now, don't scowl that a way," Glane said, his voice rising a bit from its habitual drawl. "Suppose I give yuh a couple of thousand, how long will it last?"

"I'll make it go a long ways."

"As far as th' first game of faro, *quien con* or monte? Well, all right; waste it, if yuh want t' do it that a way."

He slipped a big bill fold out of his inner pocket and opened it. Along with the yellow bills he sorted out, a folded bit of yellow paper came fluttering. The heir's body seemed to jerk as he saw that, but Glane slid it hack between the hills quickly, shoving the bill fold back into his inner coat pocket. He glanced at the heir, but he was looking away, as if he had not seen the slip of yellow paper. It was just like a single sheet of yellow legal cap.

"Count that—I think there's two thousand dollars in fifties an' centuries."

The heir's lean fingers closed over it, and he stuffed it into his pocket carelessly. He got up then and without a word of thanks, went away. Glane watched him go with an expression of deepest craft on his lean face:

"Glad he didn't mark where I keep that paper that proves who he is. That youngster is gettin' ideas of his own, an' it may be as well for me t' feather my own nest a bit so I'll have something of my own in case he gets on the rannie an' tries to play a lone hand. He's making too many friends around here t' suit me."

Hearing a cough, Glane got up and strolled to the corner of the big house. He signed to Conyard, waiting there, for attention. Conyard nodded and Glane, in strolling past, whispered:

"Be in the Branding Iron right after siesta time, to-day. We'd better not talk too much. Bernell will be in town to-day."

Conyard's face showed that the tid-

ings pleased him. He went without a word toward the breaking pen, where a number of riders were watching Chet take the kinks out of an ambitious pony. The heir was on the fence top, shouting encouragement to horse and man, as the occasion seemed to warrant. Chet finally got the mastery and then turned the horse over to Harry Crimpton, the outfit's seasoned bronc trimmer. Chet turned aside the good-natured comments of Ike Wallinge, Three-finger Berne and Breeze Yarnall, as the request of his young employer came to him.

"Let's ride; we're going down to that town baile in San Andreas. It'll take us four-five days to make it, down and back."

Conyard started to say: "I may want men to——"

But Glane, who had come up behind silently, cut him short:

"It's all right if Ollie wants t' take some riders for company. Let them go."

Conyard was about to turn angrily on Glane for interfering, when he caught the low whisper: "Part of the game with Bernell; let them go."

Conyard covered his resentment by making some surly remarks and then strode away. A half hour later Chet, Yarnall, Berne, and Wallinge rode out of Moon Eye with the heir in the lead.

"Now that they've gone, I'll get myself some spending money," Glane thought. "If he don't curb his tastes some, he'll put quite a crimp in Moon Eye's hank roll."

Glane, for once bestirring himself, had his rangy bay saddled. He rode off toward the north, alone. Conyard, racking away on his buckskin, gave it out that he would go to town that day, get the mail, and have whatever else might be needed freighted out.

In the midafternoon Glane, Conyard, and a sallow-faced, rat-eyed little man sat in the back room of the Branding Iron, hands atop the table, eyes locked

as they held a close watch on each other's features. They had all the appearance of men who were playing for high stakes; yet there were no cards or dice upon the table. Bernell spoke first:

"But won't that new heir of Moon Eye get hep?"

"He's hep to a good time, that's all," Glane replied.

"But he was range bred; yuh cain't fool him long this a way."

"I'm the executor and have full power under the court's orders, to handle everything. I've got t' account for it, of course. But that don't prevent you turning in accounts that will give Conyard and me a big shave on every head. And Conyard will do the counting, won't he?"

"I'm sure a good counter," said Conyard, puffing hard at his cigar.

"There ain't any holes in it, a-tall, not one, Bernell," Glane urged. "Conyard certifies to me that the cattle grade so an' so. I report, as executor, that such and such a number is sold. Conyard's say-so justifies me in taking so much a head. My say-so justifies yuh in buying them. I'll tell the estate's lawyers and the court that we were cleaning up a lot of poor stuff and so took a low price. I've been over the ranch accounts pretty carefully. Hargiss knew how much stuff he had of the different ages and grades, but he kept things pretty much in his head. His straw bosses reported to him what they saw and he had it in his noodle. The Moon Eye bunch will load the stuff at Barnard. The certified check from the Omaha packers will close the deal then. Is it all clear?"

Bernell nodded greedily. The crooked deal would be a big one; his share would be a handsome profit. Every one would do well—except Moon Eye—on the deal they were outlining.

There an objection occurred to the rat-eyed cattle buyer:

"Wouldn't we be better off having

everything pass through in cash? Then when I and Conyard take our cuts, there won't be any bank paper to show that."

"That will do, if yuh can manage it so that the pay comes through in cash money," Glane agreed. "It'll take about three weeks t' gather those beeves."

"I think's a right good idea," Conyard seconded. So it was settled that the payment for the herd should be made in cash, to Glane, who was to give each of the others his percentage of the "take-down."

They separated and went out into the main room of the Branding Iron to seal the pact with a drink. They talked there for a while and then started toward the door. At the hitch rack a horse was tied that had an appearance very familiar to Glane.

"That's the bronc of that one-day strayman I thought I'd hired," he said growlingly.

"Sure is," Conyard agreed.

Then they saw that same stoop-shouldered strayman come along the side of the Branding Iron, toward the street. He nodded curtly to Glane, scowled at Conyard, ignored the cattle buyer, strode to the ignobly shaped horse and was soon trotting away.

"I thought he was a long ways off by this time; quittin' so early an' leavin' Moon Eye in such a hurry," Glane commented.

"I'll look for that herd at Barnard in three weeks," Bernell told them, at parting, and they nodded.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I'LL HELP MYSELF!"

LITTLE MILLIE WEST sat on the doorsill of the little ranch house, looking toward the sunset. She was hoping that Billy would be home soon, for since she had driven the heir of Moon Eye away at gun's point, she had been very, very lonesome. Billy was riding his little circle that day to the south—would

be home about dusk. The long day was closing in glory, with lengthening shadows.

Millie's paint pony whickered in the corral, and she saw his ears cock forward toward the hogback ridge. Millie thought that it was her repentant lover coming back, but it was merely a stoop-shouldered man, on a racking cayuse whose gait was far different from that of a smooth-stepping Smoke. She was not apprehensive, for there were on that range no men known to be mean to women.

The racking cayuse came closer; the stoop-shouldered man on him dug away at his graying beard. Yet Millie felt a strange thrill as he alighted and, in a husky voice, asked her for a drink. She fetched the water pail and dipper and he drank deep. Then, without a word, he threw away the little water that remained and started toward the West spring, up behind the house, as if he knew just where it was. He came back, with the pail dripping at the edges, and handed it to her, sweeping his hat off courteously as his husky voice spoke a phrase of thanks. He seemed about to start back toward his cayuse again, but he turned and faced her as she sat down again on her own doorsill:

"Miss," the husky voice said, "do yuh know that young fellow that lately heired the Moon Eye?"

She started at this unusual question from a stranger. Her face was hot and red, she could feel, as she replied: "Yes, sir. Why?"

"Do yuh think he is really Oliver Hargiss?"

This was asked with a strange intentness of gaze on his part.

"There is no doubt about that, is there?" There was a queer break in her voice, usually so steady and even.

"I'm askin' yuh, ma'am."

"But why do you ask?" She leaned forward the better to catch his husky reply:

"Sometimes it doesn't seem as if he acted like young Hargiss might be expected t' act, that's all."

"What—what has he been doing?"

"Oh, just runnin' around. I heard that he came here——"

"A girl can receive the calls of a young man, can't she?"

"I reckon yes."

"Of course he's the real heir of Moon Eye. How ridiculous to ask such a question, even. His own father knew him at the cattle show, and the three punchers of Moon Eye met him there. Old Chet rides with him, and no one could fool old Chet about Ollie Hargiss," she said hotly now.

"Suppose another man came, claiming t' be the rightful heir?"

He threw back his shoulders a bit, and his voice was less husky. She stared at him. His shoulders stooped again as she replied:

"I'd not believe it——"

"Does he make love like Ollie Hargiss used t'——"

Her face flamed with anger as she said, "See here, stranger, why should I sit here and listen to your chatter? If you want to say something to Ollie Hargiss, go meet him, face to face, like a man. He'll tell you who he is." Getting up abruptly, she slammed the door.

"All right, old cayuse; I guess, as no one knows us, we'll have t' do something that will let us he'p ourse'ves; vamose, pronto."

He swung up, and the cayuse vanished up the hogback ridge at a more rapid pace than his appearance might have warranted one in predicting he could travel.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FOURTH CUT.

THE days passed. The heir of Moon Eye returned, with Chet Aseldine, Three-finger, Breeze, and Ike. He had had a good time down on the San An-

dreas but—his money was all gone again. He had refused to heed Chet's advice as to his ability to tame the San Andreas tiger. Money had ceased to have its true value with the heir by now, though. He had dipped into the golden store of Moon Eye and yearned for the time when he could plunge his fists deep into the great treasury of the big land-grant's huge resources.

After a few days of waiting he wanted to be away again. Glane forbade him to take the three riders again.

"We'll be needin' them; it's all full-cocked folly for yuh to go ridin' 'round everywhere with a cavalcade at yuh'r back as if yuh were afraid to be seen alone."

The heir turned sulky again, as Glane knew that he would. He insisted that the three young riders were his friends. If he chose to pay them for just going around with him, that was all right, wasn't it?

Glane knew that his opposition to their going would make their staying with the heir positive—from very stubbornness, if from no other cause. Soon the three and the heir rode away together on another pleasure jaunt, and the old-time riders of Moon Eye commented with profane force on "papa's pets." Conyard led this chorus of execration. Old Chet did not go this time, seeming to take a sudden interest in home affairs—and his pistol practice. He rode out into the open spaces and began to make systematic use of his guns at rattlers, gophers, jack rabbits, and all vermin that afforded swift-moving targets. Chet refused to say why he did not go with the younger men, but really, after the first burst of seeming affection for Chet, the heir had begun to be a bit cold to him, perhaps without realizing that Chet could detect it so easily. Chet had frowned on a number of his more hectic quests after pleasure, and he was beginning to find Chet something of a joy-killer. What

especially irked Chet was the attention the heir paid to other girls, while at the same time he was supposed to be tacitly pledged to Millie West.

The days passed. The thousand head of heavy cattle for the herd that was to be sold through Bernell were gathered and started toward Barnard. Conyard and Glane were uneasy when Chet scouted along the flanks of the herd and noted the number and quality of the cattle. He did not ride to Barnard with them.

The drive was an easy one; they made it in three days, without putting the longhorns to undue discomfort on the way. Bernell was waiting, and the empty cars were ready at the chutes. The cattle went bawling in and departed, with Bernell's own men in charge. Then the Moon Eye outfit returned home, making it in a day, and going in charge of Harry Crimpton, temporarily made *primero*. Conyard and Glane remained, waiting. Four days afterwards Bernell dropped off the Sundown Limited, with a big roll of bills in a small leather grip, and met them at a hotel. They went into an upper room; there the money was turned over; papers passed, and receipts given. Bernell and Conyard were each given their shares. Glane set his own aside from the big pile that he referred to as "the ranch's money." Then he went to the Barnard National Bank and came back presently with the statement that he had deposited the ranch's money there. Bernell was to catch the next train East, that night; Conyard was to ride to Moon Eye and take charge. Glane gave out that he had business to attend to, and that if their employer returned in his absence, he was to be told to wait at Moon Eye till the executor returned.

Bernell went; Conyard left town. Glane remained. He had been for weeks chafing under the life of inaction he was compelled to live at Moon Eye

to play out his part. He wanted to taste of such amusement as the town afforded, and he now had plenty of money on hand. The ranch money he had prudently left in the bank, but he had the rich cut he had reserved for himself. He had figured out a way to doctor the ranch accounts, as executor, to make everything all straight, on the surface.

The darkness came; Glane went out for a stroll. He wanted to find the town's biggest game, for one thing. He knew where it was—up at the far end of the main business street. So he strolled along in that direction, leisurely and peacefully smoking a fat, black cigar.

His eye caught the drooping shoulders of—the strayman. The man was just ahead, walking with his head thrust forward. He turned and faced Glane, who started to go around the man. But he felt something hard touching him in the side, and the husky voice of the strayman came menacingly:

"Just step up between these buildings, Glane."

Glane went, as ordered.

"Is this a holdup?" he asked when he had been backed up against the wall of a building's rear.

"Yes—and no. I want—well, call it a loan. Yuh got plenty of money from the sale of the herd——"

"That was Moon Eye money."

"Yuh got a certain part for yuhself, Mr. Glane."

Glane started.

"What'd yuh mean?"

"Don't get proddy, a whole lot. I'd hate t' have this gun go off, because it would burn a hole in my coat pocket and that would make it necessary t' have the coat mended, an' it's my only coat. Glane, I heard the deal yuh an' Conyard and Bernell made in the Branding Iron. The cut was to be three ways. Well, I'll make it four ways. I want what money yuh've got on yuh an' I

want it pronto—no; I'll take it myself; I know just where yuh keep it——"

He started to reach for that inside pocket. Glane froze to immobility as he felt that lean hand draw out the bill fold. He heard the bills slip on the leather of the bill fold, then the bill fold was handed to him again by the strayman, who warned him:

"Now, raise a holler about this, if yuh care, but I'll tell, on the witness stand, whe'e yuh got this money an' I guess yuh don't want that part t' come out in court, do yuh?"

Glane had slid his thumb into the placket of the bill fold by now and could feel the familiar roughness of that folded bit of yellow legal cap that had aroused such interest in the mind of his protégé when he had accidentally displayed it at Moon Eye.

He did not reply to the question of the strayman, but turned about to go away. The other spoke again:

"I guess I'll keep yuh with me till I've got my hoss that's up the alley a ways and get a goin'. Yuh might set a sharpshooter onto me otherwise, and get by ambush what yuh daren't take openly, or have the law take for yuh. Glane, yuhr not only bad, but yuhr gettin' plumb foolish."

"Yuhr runnin' pretty close t' daylight."

"Maybe so, but yuh won't ever make it dawn for me. Glane, it's a whole lot of fun t' steal this a way—feels just like the money was mine all the time."

Five minutes later Glane was headed for bed, deprived of the wherewithal to indulge in his brand of pleasure and therefore compelled to be good. He thought hungrily of the big sum of ready cash in the bank and decided to wait over until the morrow. Then he remembered that Kin was due back at Moon Eye and he decided it would be better to put on a calm face, accept his loss to the strayman and go back to the big ranch.

CHAPTER XXIII

MADE OVER.

SOMEWHERE between Barnard and the next station on the Sunset, the strayman left the racking cayuse. He entered Bowlder afoot and took the next train out—at dawn of the following day. He changed trains several times, striking laterals and feeders of the big, through-northern route and came into Red Eagle on a horse a few days later.

Red Eagle was just as Kin Braile and Merve Glane had left it years before. Its tin-camp dumps were a bit larger; its dusty street about as deserted. The strayman made inquiries all about, showing a photograph that he took from his pocket from time to time. Sheriff Harvey Waite, chewing a straw and leaning his chair back against the wall of the jail, laughed when he saw the picture:

"That's Kin Braile. Funniest thing happened about him. He was the town joke. When along came a man that fancied him and hired him to go off on a ranch he was starting below somewhere. Man named—well, I caint just hop onto the trail of that name—lemme see——"

"Who was this Kin Braile?"

"Son of a breed squaw and a man from the lower country that lived up here a while. Le's see—Tom Hargiss was his name. What makes yuh start so?"

"Didn't know that I did. So this Kin Braile was the town joke, eh?"

"Yes, rampaged around, drank, got in jail, was lazy, ignorant, and plumb disresponsible. Every one said that Glane—that's his name—would give him his time in a few days an' he'd be back on the town again, but he never came back. I've often wondered what became of him. What yuh lookin' for him for? Got a warrant?"

"No, he's distant kin of mine, and I'm looking for him."

"Oh, that's it? Well, Kin was a corker. Listen——"

There followed a long account of Kin Braile's misdeeds that was listened to with keenest interest.

"And this Glane? Know where his ranch is at?"

"He never came back again. He was a queer cuss; always dodgin' in and out. I kept close watch on him, suspected he was a big-gun crook, but he never did anything in the open, so I never got a chance t' throw down on him. I reckon he made what he thought was his pile an' came off his perch an' lived innocent ever afterward like many another hoss thief or rustler has done before."

The strayman remained about town a few days and then departed. Red Eagle knew him no more.

A week later a well-dressed, black-bearded man called upon Dr. Anson Burman by appointment in his exclusive office in Denver and submitted to an

examination of his features and throat. The great specialist's verdict was:

"An operation will restore your facial expression. The broken cartilages in your nose can be raised and made to take on their former shape. Your throat is partly closed by a bunch caused when injuries to your neck made the vocal chords form out of shape. I can cure that by another operation. You will be in my hospital for three weeks."

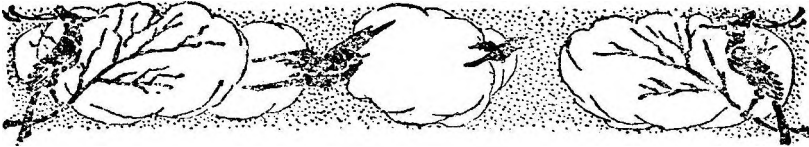
The patient nodded and agreed to be present on the morrow to submit to the operations necessary to make his face over.

"Will this operation be very dangerous?" he asked.

"That on your throat will be very critical."

"If I don't come through, send this packet to the address on it." The packet contained proofs of what he had found in Red Eagle as to Kin Braile and Mervin Glane. It was addressed to Chet Aseldine.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



PAWNEES AND SIOUX SMOKE PEACE PIPE

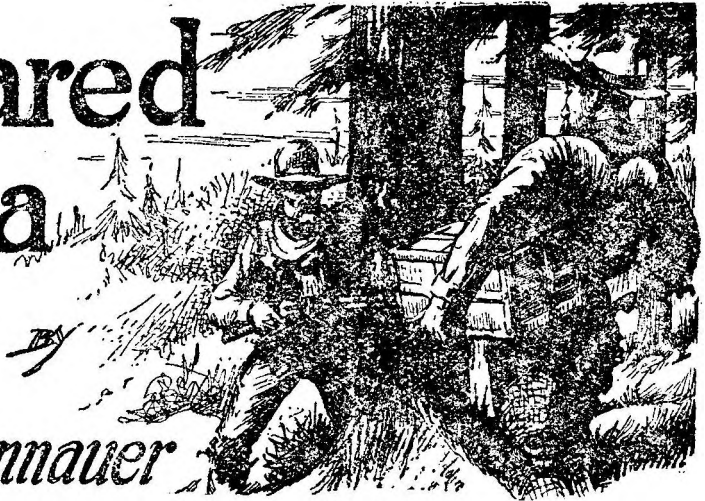
THE Pawnees and the Sioux, after fifty-two years of enmity, are now on friendly terms again. A meeting between representatives of the two tribes in Massacre Cañon, near Trenton, Nebraska, recently, placed the two peoples on a friendly footing once more. The pipe of peace was smoked and the Indians indulged in a three-day powwow. Ever since the famous Pawnee-Sioux massacre of 1873, in which the warlike Sioux killed 156 of the Pawnees, there has been enmity and distrust between the two bands of red men. Now this is all a thing of the past, of which the present generation will take no further cognizance.

The Pawnees came to the conference in Massacre Cañon from their reservation at Pawnee, Oklahoma, while the Sioux came from the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. The Sioux have commemorated the event every two years for a good many years past, but the Pawnee people have not hitherto been willing to join in the powwow and smoke the pipe of peace. Ten Pawnees and seven Sioux took part in the big smoke. Among the Pawnees were Chief Ruling Hissun, who is said to be one hundred and seven or one hundred and eight years old. A number of the paleface residents of Trenton also joined in the smoke, to show that the white man is still friendly to the Indians.

Squared by a Star

Adolph Bennauer

Author of "This Duty Business," etc.



It was at that hour of the day when Chuckwalla's streets were most deserted, the hour of twilight, when the business of the afternoon was completed, and the activities of the night had not yet begun. In the two-room shack that served as his office and residence Sheriff Jake Kirby sat at his desk, smoking innumerable cigarettes and working out some calculations on a scratch pad. This business had nothing to do with his position as an officer of the law. Yet, in a way, it was peculiarly dependent upon it.

He exhaled a lungful of tobacco smoke and glanced up with a meditative frown.

"One more term an' I'll be sittin' pretty," he mused. "Barrin' another drought or a drop in the price o' beef, I'll not only be able to clear off the whole o' the mortgage but have a neat little workin' capital piled up besides!"

Jake Kirby had just turned forty-five. At that age, if he possesses any foresight at all, it is high time a man is looking after his future. Kirby had awakened to that fact three years before when he entered upon his second term of office. The opposition he had encountered at the polls, together with

his knowledge of the difficulty that men of his age found in securing employment elsewhere, had shown him that the logical thing for him to do was to buy a ranch and go into business for himself.

He had bought such a ranch and stocked it with a hundred head of choice cattle. It had not all been plain sailing. To begin with, he had been compelled to give a mortgage on the place of three thousand dollars. At the end of the first year he had made just enough to pay off his help and meet the interest on the loan. The second year there had been a drought and, despite his salary as sheriff, he had lost a little. This last year he had made up the loss, doubled his stock and put a small sum in the bank. Now, if he could be reelected for a third term, he felt that his financial troubles would be over. In that case he intended to resign from office and immediately turn his entire attention and time to the ranch.

The staccato clip of approaching hoofs brought his reflections to an abrupt termination. Always watchful of those who entered or left Chuckwalla in haste, he turned quickly to inspect this rider as he went by. But the newcomer slowed his horse down, coming to a

stop directly in front of the sheriff's office.

"Sam Ludlow!" Kirby exclaimed, making him out easily in the dusk. "Wonder what he's in such a big hurry about?"

The president of the Cattlemen's Association dropped down off his horse and came briskly toward him. He was a broad-shouldered, middle-aged man with a face habitually as guileless and good-natured as a boy's. Just now there was a trace of concern in the clear blue eyes.

"How'd'ye, Jake! Glad to find you in," he declared heartily, extending one hand to the sheriff while with the other he closed the door behind him. "I'm on my way to Racon, an' I just dropped off to see if you wouldn't do me a favor."

His attitude and actions alike proclaimed that his business was not to be of a public nature, and the sheriff nodded understandingly.

"Granted before it's asked, Sam," he responded. "Just a minute till I light a lamp an' pull down the shade!"

When that had been done the two faced each other across the sheriff's desk.

"I got a white elephant on my hands here that I want to get rid of," the cattleman explained, reaching into an inner pocket and drawing forth a small, oblong packet. "Five thousand dollars in currency that I've been collectin' off the members of the association. I intended to take it into the bank to-morrow, but this afternoon I got word that there was trouble between our men an' Al Jensen, the snoozer, over at Racon, an' I was, wanted immediate to help iron it out. I didn't care to let the money lay out there at the ranch durin' my absence, an' it's too late for me to get into the bank now, so, knowin' that you've got a good safe here, I was wonderin' if you wouldn't hold it for me till I get back!"

As he concluded he opened the packet and laid the money on the desk. Kirby glanced at it and frowned slightly. He had not expected to assume any such responsibility as this. But his knowledge of Ludlow's predicament overcame his reluctance.

"A white elephant, is right," he said with a grin. "Dunno as I ever saw that much money in one pile before in my life! Secin' it's you, Sam, I'll take it over, but I'll feel a heap easier in mind when you *do* get back."

Ludlow assured him that he would return the next afternoon at the latest. Kirby counted the money, gave him a receipt for it and Ludlow hurriedly took his departure.

The sheriff did not immediately put the money in his safe. The hour and his mood being propitious, he could not resist the temptation to play with such a large sum, speculating upon what he should do with it, were it his. His first act, of course, would be to pay off that confounded mortgage! With the remaining two thousand dollars he would enlarge the barn, fence off a few lots and put up a neat dwelling house. The thought of the dwelling house suggested something else, another thing which had been preying on his mind for the last few years. It was not meant for man to live alone. With so much to offer he might persuade some woman to overlook his other shortcomings and make him a good wife!

Glancing casually at the clock on the wall, he noticed with a start that it was ten minutes of nine. He had been sitting there, musing, for over an hour! He rose abruptly, restored the bank notes to their original package and locked them in his safe. At the same time he reflected that the stage from Tucson was late. Ordinarily, it pulled into Chuckwalla at eight thirty, and the excitement attendant upon its arrival could not have failed to arouse him. It was his custom to meet it every eve-

ning, so now, after blowing out the lamp and locking his office, he made his way out into the street.

With the fall of night Chuckwalla had come to life again. The hitching rails along both sides of the street were lined with horses; a continuous stream of men jostled their way along the narrow plank sidewalks; the saloons and dance halls buzzed merrily. With a single glance into each of the latter to assure himself that the peace was not being violated, Kirby continued on to the stage depot. Here a little knot of men had gathered, with Hensley, the express agent, in their midst, discussing the lateness of the stage, for old "Pop" Peters was generally as infallible as a time-table. Hardly had the sheriff reached the group, however, than the pound of hoofs and rumble of wheels sounded out of the darkness ahead of him. A moment later the stage dashed up with all four horses foaming.

Pop scrambled down from the seat.

"Been held up! Where's the sheriff?" he gasped out, all in the same breath.

Kirby was at his side before the others had recovered from their astonishment. "Where?" was his single query as his fingers bit into the driver's arm.

"Twenty mile back, in Zion Gap," Peters explained breathlessly. "It was 'long about sunset! He rode out on me afore I had time to draw! His face was masked but I got his number the minute he opened his mouth! Them two gold teeth in his upper jaw would give him away anywheres! It was 'Blinky' Dorgan!"

A growl of surprise ran over the rapidly increasing crowd, and the gray eyes of Jake Kirby hardened. He had expected the highwayman to be any one but Blinky Dorgan. Several years before the latter had been apprehended by him for cattle rustling and sent to the State penitentiary. He recalled, now, that the man's sentence had been short-

ened for good behavior, and that he had been released only a month previous. That he should return to his former haunts and habits so soon seemed scarcely credible. Yet, as Pop Peters had said, the two gold teeth in his upper jaw practically established his identity.

Before the sheriff could put another question the express agent intervened. "But what did he get, Peters? I hope not the strong box!"

The driver had bethought himself of his passengers by then and opened the door to let out a badly frightened, elderly couple.

"That's the only thing he *did* get," he retorted with some spirit. "It was one o' them little ones, an' he throwed it over his saddle an' rode away with it. I reckon the company is gettin' off easy, at that, Hensley. He might have shot one o' my passengers for spite, see-in' that they didn't have anything worth takin'."

Kirby turned upon the express agent. "What was in the strong box?" he demanded.

Hensley's face had reddened a bit. "Five thousand dollars in currency! A consignment to the bank," he replied. "You're goin' right after him, aren't you, Kirby?"

The sheriff stared at him curiously. Even in the excitement of that moment he could not help recalling that this was the exact amount which Sam Ludlow had turned over to him for safekeeping. But, confident that it was merely a coincidence, he gave no further thought to the matter.

"I'm headin' for Zion Gap as soon as I can locate my two deputies," he replied grimly.

That took but a few moments as the men were already on hand, and, after questioning Pop Peters a little further regarding Blinky Dorgan and the direction he had ridden away in, his posse secured their own mounts and took up the trail.

Conditions for pursuit were ideal. The moon was already up and full, and the open range land was bared plainly to view. The road, itself, though it followed the contour of the hills, was hard and smooth. Putting their horses to their best, it was shortly before midnight when the posse reached Zion Gap. Here they were compelled to use a little headwork. Though Blinky Dorgan had ridden straight on through the gap after securing his plunder, there was no telling in which direction he had turned when he emerged from it. For at the other end the main road spread out, fanwise, into three distinct trails, running in as many different directions.

Kirby regarded his deputies thoughtfully. "Secin' that he might have taken any one o' them trails," he declared, "I reckon there's only one thing for us to do, boys, an' that's to cover 'em all. Your hoss is the best climber, Ed, so supposin' you take the north trail. An' you'd better take the south fork, Jim. When it comes to straight road work my Molly can run away from either of you, but she sort of drags herself out in the sand."

There was no comment from the deputies; with a nod of good luck all three were off again. With a good road and a down grade ahead of him Kirby soon lost sight of his companions. It had not been entirely on account of his horse that he had chosen this road for himself. While he could not afford to overlook the other two bets, he was almost certain that this was the road that would be taken by Dorgan, for it was the one which would get him most quickly out of that section of the country. And when it came to a showdown with the bandit he felt that he should be the one to take that risk, not his deputies.

Although he pressed the mare forward steadily hour after hour he failed to come in sight of the man he was after. As the night passed and dawn

began to make the east gray he was forced to the unwelcome conclusion that Dorgan either had as good a mount as his own or else had taken one of the other two trails. By that time the mare was stumbling, and a halt was rendered imperative in any case. Glimpsing a row of willows near by which marked the course of Black Rascal Creek, he headed for the place, intending to water and rest his horse while he figured whether to go on or turn back to Zion Gap. He had approached within a hundred yards of the creek when the mare suddenly lifted her head and whinnied. Almost like an echo, came an answering whinny from the willows!

Caught, though he was, off his guard, some instinctive prompting caused the sheriff to roll out of his saddle on the lee side of his mount. At the same instant a six-gun barked from the fringe of willow, and two slugs fanned the air above his head. He had scarcely time to draw his own gun when the willows parted, and a horse galloped out into the clear, the rider flattened out along his back. Pursuit was out of the question, owing to the condition of his mare, and Blinky Dorgan, himself, offered too uncertain a target, so Kirby threw down on the horse. At the second shot the animal pitched forward and fell, carrying the bandit with him. Before the latter could recover from that stunning blow the sheriff had reached his side and snapped a pair of handcuffs about his wrists.

"I reckon that's that," he advised his prisoner grimly. "Sorry to shoot a hoss that could hold his own with my Molly, but when a yeller skunk was ridin' him there wasn't no other way left. Get up, now, an' come on!"

Still too dazed to offer any comment, Dorgan arose and accompanied Kirby and his mare down to the creek. He was a young, undersized man with pinched cheeks and black, beady eyes. It was those eyes which had earned him

his nickname, for they blinked incessantly. As they reached the bank his lips curled above his two gold teeth in a snarl of hate, and he launched into the tirade of abuse that the sheriff had been expecting.

His words failed, however, to disturb the other's equanimity in the slightest. "Now that you've got that off your chest, we'll talk business," Kirby stated calmly. "First thing you have to account for is that five thousand dollars currency. Which pocket you carryin' it in? Or will I have to frisk you?"

The sullen frown on Dorgan's face faded slightly. His beady eyes took on an expression of unfeigned surprise, a surprise not untinged with dismay.

"Five thousand dollars," he said, groaning. "I've passed up a fortune! I'd have carted the cussed thing all the way into Tucson if I'd known it held that much!"

It was the sheriff's turn to betray surprise. "What do you mean, you've passed up a fortune?" he asked, frowning.

"I mean, I ain't got the money on me," the bandit replied with a whine. "I couldn't open that cussed strong box! The hinges an' lock is all on the inside an' I couldn't shoot 'em off, nohow. That was what held me up so long. At last I decided to cache the darned thing an' risk ridin' into Tucson to get some tools. I was on my way there when I heard you comin' an' hid in the willers."

The frown on Jake Kirby's face deepened. "You expect me to believe that?" he asked, watching Blinky's face closely as he said it.

"You don't have to believe it," the prisoner snapped out. "Go on an' search me!"

Which was exactly what the sheriff did. But though he explored every possible hiding place on Dorgan's person and the body of his horse, he could find no trace of the money.

"Well, then, where did you cache the strong box?" he demanded. "I can't fool around here all day."

Blinky Dorgan did not answer that question directly. During the sheriff's investigation he had been observing him intently, the light in his beady eyes attesting to the fact that he was doing some deep thinking.

"Looky here, Kirby," he suggested craftily. "S'posin' I did tell you where that strong box was, you'd only go an' turn it over to the express company, an' that wouldn't do me no good, nor you, either. But if we was to split the five thousand, fifty-fifty, it'd give me a chance to get out o' the country an' help you lift the plaster on that ranch you're tryin' so hard to pay for! Think it over, Kirby. There ain't nobody seen us together, an' you can take it from me I'd never turn up again to make things hot for you."

For a moment the sheriff could only stare at him, half inclined to believe that he was jesting. The passionate eagerness in those black eyes belied any deception. At the knowledge of that supreme insult Kirby's face whitened.

"Why, you skunk," he said, choking, too furious to express himself fittingly, "if it wasn't that the law forbids me to strike a prisoner I'd take them handcuffs off you an' beat you to a pulp!"

Dorgan stepped back a pace, his own face paling, but sheer desperation lent him the courage to play his last card.

"If you ain't satisfied with half, then take it all," he proffered recklessly, "the whole five thousand dollars! You ain't fool enough to turn down a fortune like that, Kirby, just because——"

He paused abruptly, flinging his hands involuntarily upward, for the sheriff's six-gun had leaped from its holster and was staring him implacably in the eyes.

"Any more o' that talk an' I'll take the law into my own hands," Kirby said savagely. "The county ain't carin' much whether I bring you back, dead

or alive! Tell me where you cached that strong box, now, an' tell me quick!"

Even one as desperate as Blinky Dorgan could see that further argument was useless. But the revulsion of feeling that swept over him was not one of despair. His eyes blazed with a fury that no longer took any thought of the sheriff's gun.

"Try an' make me," he retorted scornfully. "Just try an' make me! I guess I'm holdin' the aces now! That box can lay there till it rots for all the information you'll get out o' me!"

Kirby realized instantly his error, but it was too late to dissemble now. "You'll only be addin' more years to your stretch if you don't tell," he warned.

His prisoner laughed derisively.

"Don't kid me, sheriff! They'll give me the limit this time, so a few years more or less wouldn't make much difference. Besides, I ain't aimin' to serve much o' that sentence. An' when I do break out I'll have that five thousand waitin' for me! I reckon that's all! If you're intendin' to start back to Chuckwalla let's be movin'."

Jake Kirby knew men and he knew that, for the present, at least, Blinky Dorgan would stick to his resolution. So, though he smarted at the thought of being thus worsted, he had sense enough to conceal his chagrin. He dropped his gun back into its holster with an indifferent shrug.

"You'll have plenty o' time to think it over before you face Judge Crockett, anyway," he said, and motioned for his prisoner to climb into the saddle.

There was no occasion for haste on the return trip. The mare carrying double, Kirby spared her by keeping her down to a canter. This gave him ample opportunity to reflect upon Blinky Dorgan's attitude, and to grow the more incensed as he thought of it. What rankled most was not the bandit's effort to bribe him, for that had been an act

of desperation; it was the latter's allusion to the mortgage on his ranch. Were his financial obligations such common property that they were known even to men of Blinky Dorgan's type?

Again he felt the burden of those who hold a public office, and again he longed for that time when he would be able to throw off the yoke and make his affairs the concern of no one. That would take four years yet, and in the meantime he must be prepared to perform his duty to the best of his ability and turn a deaf ear to all slanders, even when they came from such scum as Blinky Dorgan. A worthy resolution, truly, yet had the sheriff glimpsed his prisoner's face at that moment he might not have been able to achieve it so easily. For there was a leer on the bandit's lips and a light in his black, beady eyes which hinted that he was not yet through with his retaliation.

It was late afternoon when they entered Chuckwalla. Owing to the heat, most of the townspeople were indoors; which occasioned Kirby no little relief, for he felt that his return was not as triumphant as the citizens had a right to expect. The calaboose, a low, one-story adobe structure, stood in an isolated position at the edge of town. He reached it unobserved. As he ordered his prisoner to dismount and enter, he expected some show of resistance, was prepared for it. Beyond flashing him a grimace of defiance Blinky Dorgan made no demonstration. With a curt statement to the effect that he would send the marshal down with something to eat, the sheriff remounted his horse and rode up to the hotel, for he was badly in need of food himself.

The Palace Hotel was designed not only to accommodate chance wayfarers, but offered attractions to the citizens of Chuckwalla, as well. One side of the lobby was occupied by a bar and gambling hall, which, from the moment of opening to closing time, was never

quite free of patrons. It was the open forum of the town where all important issues were discussed and men of every social status gathered. So, as Jake Kirby entered he was not surprised to discover among those lined along the bar the figures of Judge Crockett; McTeague, the marshal; and Hensley, the express agent; nor to wonder at the subject under discussion. The group turned at his approach and broke out into a simultaneous exclamation:

"Get him?"

The sheriff remembered his resolution and strove hard to retain his composure.

"He's over at the calaboose, right now," he rejoined succinctly. "You wouldn't mind fetchin' him something to eat, McTeague? Nor havin' one o' the boys look after my hoss?"

The marshal nodded but lingered to hear the rest of the story.

"Well, that's a big load off *my* mind," the express agent declared, stepping expectantly forward. "Where did you leave the strong box, Kirby?"

The sheriff's eyes narrowed a trifle. "I'm sorry, Hensley," he stated evenly. "I haven't been able to locate the strong box—not yet."

There was an exclamation of chagrin from the agent, and the rest pricked up their ears and drew closer.

"What do you mean—you haven't been able to locate it?" Hensley demanded irritably.

The sheriff made an impatient gesture. "It's too long a story to tell on an empty stomach," he declared. "Come over into the dining room an' I'll give it to you while I'm eatin'."

A few moments later, surrounded by the entire group, he recounted the pursuit and subsequent capture of Blinky Dorgan in detail, keeping back only one thing—the latter's attempt to bribe him. While his refusal of that offer should have counted more in his favor than otherwise, he was not one given to

boasting, and he had a premonition that the least said about the matter the better. When he had concluded there were a few terse commentaries from the group, then all eyes turned as by common assent upon Judge Crockett.

"H'm," the latter frowned, tapping the table with his pudgy fingers, "so he's trying to pull that stunt, is he! While I'm no advocate of the third degree, I don't mind employing it in a mild form in a case like this. I think that before we are through with Mr. Dorgan he will be quite willing to inform us where he cached that strong box."

Kirby felt relieved of a great weight.

"Seein' that there ain't anything more I can do, boys," he declared, "I reckon I'll trot over to the office an' get a little sleep. An' if my deputies show up in the meantime tell them to do the same thing. They'll sure be needin' it."

At their answering nod he turned and strode toward the door. But out of the corner of his eye he noted that the express agent was staring after him with a speculative frown. What Hensley could mean by that frown and why he, himself, should be concerned about it, he could not for the life of him tell, yet he felt his cheeks grow suddenly hot. He was glad when he was out on the street again and faced nothing more suspicious than the open sky. Reaching his office, he repaired immediately to the rear room which served as his sleeping quarters and turned in, for he was dog tired.

It seemed that he had scarcely lain down when he was awakened by a repeated tapping on the door. On opening his eyes, however, he found the room in semidarkness and realized that he must have slept at least three hours. Wondering what could be the matter now, he called an answer to the summons, slipped on his boots and stepped out into his office. The lamp had been lighted in that room and for a moment

he stood there, blinking uncertainly at its glare. As his eyes became accustomed to the brightness he noted with surprise that his visitors numbered no less than a dozen, among them Judge Crockett, the marshal, Hensley and his two deputies.

It was Judge Crockett who broke the silence. "Sorry to disturb you, Kirby," he declared awkwardly, "but certain things have come up during the last few hours that made it necessary for us to call on you and get an explanation. You see, after you left the hotel we went down to the calaboose and had a little talk with Blinky Dorgan."

He paused suggestively, his eyes meeting the sheriff's squarely. But if he had expected to surprise Kirby into any sudden display of emotion he was disappointed. The latter merely nodded and said:

"Yeh? What of it?"

The judge's fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the desk.

"It seems there's a whole lot to it, Kirby, or else Blinky Dorgan is a bare-faced liar! You remember, you told us that he wasn't able to open that strong box and that he cached it somewhere, but wouldn't tell you just where. Well, when we tried to squeeze that information out of him he denied that he ever told you any such thing! He claims he shot the strong box open with his six-gun, that he had the five thousand dollars currency on him when you captured him, and that he turned it over to you!"

Again he paused and again his eyes and the eyes of every man present looked searchingly into those of the sheriff. And this time they were not disappointed in the matter of results. Kirby's face went white, his hands clenched. When he spoke his words were scarcely coherent.

"Why, the black-hearted hound! He didn't have a dollar o' that money on

him when I found him, an' I searched both him an' his hoss! Besides, he couldn't shoot open a strong box like that because the hinges an' lock are all on the inside! You know that, Hensley!"

But to his appealing glance the express agent merely shrugged indifferently. "I think it could be done, Kirby, if a man went at it real systematic," he countered.

The gray eyes of Jake Kirby flashed fire.

"You mean to insinuate that I'm a thief?" he demanded hoarsely. "That he *did* give me that money?"

The express agent retreated a step but his face lost none of its cynical expression. "It's his word against yours, Kirby," he protested, "an' a man in his fix'd be a fool to make a statement like that unless he was prepared to prove it in open court!"

Enraged though he was, the sheriff could not fail to see some logic in that. He could not blame these men too much. Blinky Dorgan was his real accuser. Like a flash he perceived the reason for this accusation.

"He *can't* prove it in open court," he broke out recklessly, "an' he don't intend to! He's just tryin' to make trouble for me in the meantime! An' I'll tell you why! He knew I was in debt on my ranch an' he tried to buy his freedom from me, offered me the whole five thousand dollars if I'd let him get away! When I told him what I thought of his offer he aimed to get even with me. An' this is his way o' doin' it!"

He had sacrificed his pride at last for the sake of truth and was confident that his words would carry conviction. But where was the evidence of it? The men before him merely exchanged quick glances. Judge Crockett cleared his throat impressively.

"Then he *did* offer you the money, Kirby?" he charged.

On the instant Kirby caught the in-

sinuation and realized that, instead of vindicating himself in the eyes of these men, he had only made his guilt seem the deeper. His patience could stand no more. He drew himself angrily erect.

"I reckon there's only one way to convince you gents," he returned scornfully, "an' that's to let you search me! Dorgan knows I wasn't out o' his sight once on the way to town an' the rest o' you know that I came straight to my office after leavin' the hotel an' that I've been here ever since, so if Dorgan gave me the money it's bound to be on my person or somewhere in these two rooms. Now, go ahead an' search!"

They took him at his word, though Judge Crockett and the two deputies could not help flushing uncomfortably as they set about the task. While two went through his pockets, the rest made a thorough search of his office and sleeping quarters, even lifting up the rug and turning over his bedding. In justice to most of them let it be said that they appeared rather relieved than otherwise when the search availed them nothing. Hensley was the exception. He had seemed confident of finding the stolen money here and his frown revealed his disappointment. Still sweeping the office for a possible hiding place, his eyes fell upon the steel safe that stood in the corner. Instantly his countenance brightened.

"If it's any place, it's in that safe," he cried eagerly. "But, of course, he's got that locked an'—"

The sheriff silenced him with a contemptuous gesture and, striding over to the safe, spun the dial a few times and swung the heavy door open.

"Help yourself," he invited sarcastically.

Hensley did so—with an alacrity that brought a frown of disgust to the faces of his companions. The next moment that frown became replaced by an expression of acute surprise. The agent had taken a flat, oblong package from

the safe and was excitedly tearing off the wrapper. An instant later his voice rang out shrilly:

"Here it is, boys! I knew he had it somewhere!" And to the astonishment of those about him he held out a thick sheaf of bank notes!

Of all those present none was as greatly astonished as Jake Kirby. During the excitement attendant upon the capture of Blinky Dorgan he had forgotten all about the visit of Sam Ludlow and the five thousand dollars in currency he had left behind him. As he remembered, he started forward, his face flushed with exasperation.

"Look here," he protested. "You're making a mistake! That money doesn't belong to me!"

But Judge Crockett had taken the bank notes from Hensley by then and was quickly running through them.

"No, I guess it doesn't belong to you, Kirby," he returned dryly. "It looks mighty like the five thousand dollars that was taken from the express company!"

Direct as that accusation was, the sheriff was now too thoroughly aroused to take any offense at it.

"It doesn't belong to the express company any more than it does to me," he retorted hotly. "It belongs to the Cattlemen's Association an' was turned over to me by Sam Ludlow yesterday evening! He was on his way to Racon, an' it was too late for him to get into the bank so he asked me to keep it for him till he got back! He was expectin' to return this afternoon, but I reckon he wasn't able to make it."

The sympathy which had appeared in the faces of his visitors a moment before, however, was gone now. Even the eyes of his own deputies had hardened. Judge Crockett was smiling ironically.

"You say Sam Ludlow turned this over to you yesterday evening?" he questioned. "About what time?"

The sheriff reflected a moment. "About half past seven!"

The judge raised one eyebrow and turned to scan the faces of his companions. "Any of you gentlemen see Sam Ludlow in town yesterday evening?" he queried.

There was a vigorous, universal shaking of head.

"You see, Kirby," the judge drawled, his eyes narrowing, "your story is a little too thin—as last-minute alibis are apt to be!"

Kirby was beside himself with exasperation. "Don't take my word for it," he cried. "Ask Sam Ludlow himself! Wouldn't I be a fool to lie about it when he's liable to show up any minute?"

Here was an argument as unanswerable as the one Hensley had launched at him a few moments before, and, despite the damning circumstantial evidence, Judge Crockett could not help being impressed.

"You certainly would be a fool, Kirby," he agreed, "but Sam Ludlow isn't here now, and we can't ask him. The only thing we can do is to withhold our verdict until he does show up. In the meantime, I guess we'd better take charge of this money, ourselves, and ask you to turn over your star and the keys to the calaboose. While we are not exactly placing you under arrest, we feel compelled to hold you under suspicion until this matter is cleared up and I'd advise you to stick around close where we can get hold of you in case we should want you."

There was no protesting that ultimatum. While it meant a disgrace as complete as if he had been placed behind the bars with Blinky Dorgan, Sheriff Kirby had no recourse but to swallow his outraged pride and hand over the articles in question. Yet he did both in a manner that, somehow, seemed to add less to his own humiliation than that of his accusers. They

appeared relieved when the ordeal was over and without another word turned and filed quickly out of the office.

It was not until the sound of their retreating steps had died away that Kirby's senses cleared, and he realized fully the nature of the predicament he was in. Only a month before election time and he had been virtually kicked out of office—he who had counted so strongly on winning another term! True, as soon as Sam Ludlow showed up, he would be vindicated in the matter of the five thousand dollars which had been found in his safe. But that would not clear him of the charge laid against him by Blinky Dorgan. Suppose the latter stood by his story to the end? He could not prove anything against Kirby, but he could bring a cloud of suspicion against him that would bar him from another election!

What had seemed like childish spite work to the sheriff before, now assumed the aspect of a diabolical revenge. Even should he reconcile himself to the loss of his office he would find no peace on his ranch, for suspicion would follow him even there. Not until that stigma was removed could he hope to regain the respect and good will of his fellow men. And the only one who could remove that stigma was Blinky Dorgan, himself! Yet, how to make him? Obviously, he would not respond to entreaties, and, seeing how little Judge Crockett's third-degree work had availed, it was almost equally certain that he could not be moved by threats.

That left only one other conclusion possible—he must exonerate the sheriff of his own free will! It seemed a ridiculous hope at first, but almost instantly Kirby perceived the solution. It came in the form of Dorgan's own words, "An' when I do break out I'll have that five thousand waitin' for me!"

It was a solution fraught with tremendous responsibility, yet Kirby did not hesitate. Was he not innocent and

did he not owe it to himself to prove that innocence? Besides, they had shorn him of his badge, and he no longer stood as the embodiment of the law. He need be careful only that it was not cheated. For the sake of all concerned he would make sure of that.

Before the impulse had time to cool he set about the accomplishment of his task. He took a few small articles from his desk, slipped them into his pocket, and, blowing out the light, stepped outside. The moon was just beginning to show at that hour, but the west side of the building was still in shadow, and, keeping in the shelter of this, he made his way quickly back to the corral. Here he always kept two or three horses in readiness, and, singling out his Molly mare and a pinto horse that was valued more for endurance than speed, he threw the saddles onto them. Then, mounting the mare and leading the pinto, he headed out around the back of the town toward the calaboose.

Ordinarily, he might have run across some stragglers at this hour who would not have failed to recognize him, but now they were all indoors discussing the sensational event of the evening. He reached the calaboose without apparent detection and drew up his horses beneath the barred window in the rear wall. This was set at a height that just permitted him to glance through it from the saddle. A single candle burning on a stool illuminated the interior faintly and showed him the figure of the prisoner stretched out upon a cot.

"Dorgan," he called guardedly, tapping the iron bars with the barrel of his gun.

The outlaw sat up quickly, evidently just awakened from a doze, his black, beady eyes blinking more industriously than usual as they turned questioningly up toward the window.

"Who is it?" he demanded cautiously, evidently aware that this was no official visit.

Kirby was confident that the other could not recognize his features and he was careful to disguise his voice.

"That'd be tellin'! I'm here to help you escape an' I ain't takin' any chances. Here's a couple o' files. If you'll draw that stool up under the window you ought to be able to cut your way out in fifteen minutes. You'll find a hoss tied to the bars outside. That's about all I can do for you. Good luck!"

As he spoke he tossed the files through the window onto the cot and turned the mare away. About half a mile east of the town and directly on the road to Zion Gap stood a small grove of eucalyptus trees. Toward these he headed. Once in their shelter he dismounted and took up a position where he, himself, would be safe from observation and could still watch developments at the calaboose. As he waited and watched, he prayed fervently that his plans would not miscarry, that Blinky Dorgan would not suspect a trap and refuse to accept the opportunity offered him, or that, availing himself of it, he would not be detected while making his escape and brought back again.

At the end of twenty minutes, however, the suspense was over. He saw a horse emerge from the shelter of the calaboose and come toward him, quickening his pace as he drew nearer. On the instant he was back at the mare's side, his fingers gripped about her nostrils. In that attitude he waited until Dorgan had passed him and was well on his way toward Zion Gap. Then, leisurely, he mounted the mare and followed. Knowing the relative speed of the two animals, he had no fear that Dorgan would outdistance him. His only concern was to keep the latter from knowing that he was being followed.

This was no easy task between Chuckwalla and Zion Gap, for here the country was open and he was compelled to let his man drop out of sight and follow at the same speed he estimated the

pinto was making. But beyond the gap, the country was more rugged and when he arrived there, he quickened his pace, prepared to dodge into hiding at an instant's notice. Ten minutes later, coming to the summit of a little knoll, he caught sight of Dorgan pounding along half a mile ahead of him. But, just as he was in the act of pulling the mare down, he saw the other swerve suddenly off the road and cut south across the sagebrush!

His first thought was that he had been discovered. The next moment he rejected this, for it was only an instant that he had stood upon the knoll and during that instant Dorgan had been going steadily forward. No, the latter's abrupt change of course meant something more than this. At the thought of it Kirby's pulse leaped violently. The moment for which he had waited so patiently and risked so much had come, at last! With his lips tightly compressed, his eyes glued upon that fleeting figure, he, too, turned off the road.

It was not more than a mile that Blinky Dorgan proceeded on his new course. At that distance further progress was barred him by a dense clump of manzanita bushes. Kirby had just time to swing the mare out of sight behind a similar clump when he saw Dorgan come to a halt and glance cautiously about him. Observing no one, he dismounted and stepped into the thicket. Instantly the sheriff spurred the mare forward again and gained a point within a hundred feet of the pinto. A moment later Dorgan reappeared, dragging the missing strong box behind him! As he did so Kirby stepped forward and leveled his gun.

"Stick 'em up—pronto!" was his sinister challenge.

The bandit let out a startled oath—but his hands did not go up. In that one fleeting instant he seemed to perceive the identity of his captor and to

divine the trick that had been played upon him.

"So it was you, all the time?" he said with a snarl. As he spoke he dropped the strong box and started to run.

Kirby's weapon spoke, and the bandit's arm dropped limply to his side.

"I could have got you through the heart just as easy," the sheriff advised grimly. "an' it'd be no more than you deserve, you blackmailin' hound! But I borrowed you from the law alive, an' I've got to return you in the same condition. Now, drop that gun an'—"

There was a rustle of bushes behind him.

"Oh, I don't know, sheriff," a voice cut in crisply. "The county wouldn't have held it much against you if you *had* plugged him in a vital spot! We were figuring on doing a little close shooting, ourselves, in case you missed!"

Kirby wheeled like a flash, his hostility turning to astonishment, for that voice could belong to none other than doughty Judge Crockett! Yet it was not only the judge whom he saw standing behind him, but the marshal, his two deputies and Sam Ludlow as well! With an effort he found his tongue.

"You—you saw us an' followed?" he stammered.

The deputies having stepped forward and claimed the prisoner, the judge sheathed his own weapon and turned upon the sheriff with a lugubrious smile.

"Don't give us that much credit, Kirby," he rejoined disparagingly. "We'd never have missed you if it hadn't been for Ludlow. He came into town about half an hour after we left you, corroborated your story about that five thousand dollars and we went over to your office to try to square ourselves. When we found you gone we didn't know what to make of it until we discovered that Blinky Dorgan had disappeared also. Then we figured that you had become aware of his escape

and gone after him again. It wasn't until we saw and overheard the two of you talking here that we understood your little game."

As he stared at that circle of half-apologetic, half-expectant faces, Jake Kirby felt his own antipathy departing.

"It was the only way I could see to clear myself, judge," he declared impulsively, "an' I had to take it! Mebbe I violated the law in doin' it, an' if so I'm willin' to take my medicine, but I couldn't let you all go on thinkin'——"

He stopped abruptly at Judge Crockett's gesture. "Hang it, man," the latter said peevishly, "what's this you talk about violating? Isn't the law of Chuckwalla County represented right here

among the six of us? And you don't hear any of us kicking, do you? What's worrying *us*, Kirby, is whether we ought to put our apology in writing, or whether the return of this star, together with the promise of a hundred per cent vote at the coming election, wouldn't be enough to completely square us!"

Kirby did not reply at once. It took him at least a minute to digest the full import of that amazing declaration. When he finally found his voice he was blushing like a schoolboy.

"Shucks, judge," he declared recklessly, "I reckon we all make mistakes! Sure, I'll take that star, an' it will square you all."



SARCEE INDIANS ENJOY TREATY PAYMENTS

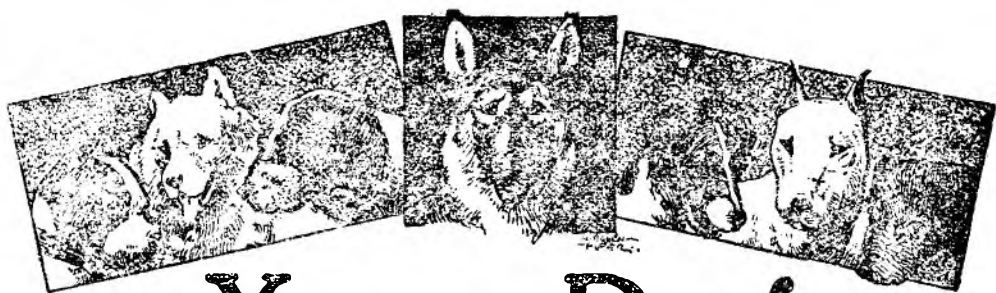
A FEW weeks ago the Sarcee Indians received their annual treaty payments of five dollars a head at the Indian agency on Fish Creek, Alberta. Wagons and rigs of all descriptions descended on the agency for the payment. Among them were old-timers who saw the treaty signed in 1877, as well as children, who had not the faintest idea why they were receiving money. On receiving their payments, the Indians proceeded to the near-by town to spend their money. A big all-Indian stampede was about to be given, and most of the tribesmen invested in some form of finery in which to bedeck themselves for the event. The squaws did their best to outclasp one another in splendor, and the stampede was one of the most imposing that could be desired.



TEXAS COWBOYS TAKE UP GOLF

THE plains region of northwestern Texas is ideally adapted to the game of golf owing to the level nature of the country. Most of the towns and villages now have their golf courses. The cowboys who come into town for recreation on Saturday afternoons delight in what they call "pasture pool," but their ideas would shock the golfing expert in the fine points of the famous game.

The cowboys' idea of good golf is the long-distance drive, and they knock the balls around recklessly; incidentally breaking a good many clubs in the process. Nor will the cowboy tolerate the knickers and other accouterments of the modern golfer. He wants none of these doo-dads and jeers at those who go in for them. The result is that the golfers in that part of Texas wear high boots with their trousers tucked into the tops.



Your Dog

By David Post

Author of "The Norwegian Elkhound," etc.

THE POINTER



HE pointer was originally a Spanish dog, heavier and coarser than the breed is to-day. About 1700 the Spanish pointer was taken into France, and somewhat later into England. Sportsmen of that country are responsible in large part for its modern prototype, which has some foxhound in its ancestry. Since 1870 the breed has gained great popularity in the United States; pointers in comparatively large numbers may be encountered in any of the States.

With training they are easily among the best of bird dogs, obedient and fast. When a pointer scents a covey of birds, he stands still and "points," his nose toward the birds and his tail extended and rigid. Often one of the front paws is lifted at the same time. The hunter, following him, knows then where to look for the birds to rise, and fires as the grouse or partridge leaves the ground. Of course, a good pointer must not be gun shy, must not flinch or break when a shot is fired.

For summer shooting on the prairies the pointer is in great demand. His short coat protects him from burrs, which distress a long-haired dog.

Field trials are held in various parts of the country each year. The most important takes place at Grand Junction,

Tennessee, where the national championship for the year is decided. Mary Montrose was the first bird dog to win the championship three times in succession, and thereby gain for her owner the coveted Edward Dexter cup.

While not responsive to strangers, the pointer can be relied upon to be affectionate and faithful to his master's family. He is a well-proportioned animal, with endurance, speed, determination, and beauty.

A good pointer should have a moderately large head, wide from ear to ear, and long and sloping from the top of the skull to the base of the nose. The cheek bones should be prominent, and there should be some chiseling below the eyes. Broad at the base, the nose should be long, cut off square at the end, with wide-open nostrils. The ears should be moderately long, soft and velvety, and thin in leather; they should lie close to the head. The large, brown eyes of the pointer should appear very intelligent and full of spirit. A large mouth, with level jaws having no tendency to flews, is a requisite of a good pointer.

With length and roundness, the neck should have great strength and a slight arch. It should meet the long, slanting shoulders in a graceful curve. The chest should be rather narrow, but deep; the back ribs, deep; and the back, straight.

The hindquarters are very important. They must have long thighs, strong, well-bent stifles, and muscular second thighs. So that the dog may travel easily and fast, the stifles are carried widely apart. The forelegs are like those of the foxhound, straight, and with plenty of bone. Preference is given to round feet, with toes that are close together and well arched.

Of fair length, the stern should be strong in bone at the root, but should taper rapidly to a fine point. It should be set on just below the level of the back and should be carried a little above it; it must not be curled over the back.

The coat should be short and soft, but

not silky. Perhaps the color combination most favored now is black and white, although lemon and white, and liver and white are entirely correct, and there are a few all black pointers in this country.

Large dogs of this breed should weigh sixty pounds, bitches fifty-six pounds; small dogs, fifty-six pounds; bitches, forty-eight pounds. A big pointer will be usually from twenty-four and a half to twenty-five inches in height at the shoulder.

Another gun dog, the beautiful English setter, will bid for your favor in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

GOVERNMENT OFFERS BUFFALO TROPHIES

IT is the opinion of Doctor E. W. Nelson, chief of the biological survey of the United States department of agriculture, that the future of the buffalo is now fully assured and the herds are productive.

A few years ago these big game animals were so much hunted that they were fast approaching extinction, but now, under the care of the biological survey at the game refuge in South Dakota, and the national bison range in western Montana, the animals are increasing in numbers to an extent which justifies a practical utilization of the herds. This is particularly the case when the number of buffalo increases beyond the available area and food supply of the game reservations on which they are maintained.

The biological survey calls attention to the fact that in perpetuating this noble species of American big game, it now becomes possible to use an annual surplus, including heads and hides as by-products.

Proper wild-life administration includes calling the matter of the surplus to the attention of sportsmen and others who might be interested, to the end that persons wishing buffalo trophies or meat or even live animals may know where they may be had.

Many of the surplus buffalo are used alive by transporting them to other suitable areas for restocking purposes or for exhibition in public parks, and in similar ways. A limited number not suited to or required for these purposes will be slaughtered each year and used as meat.

The by-products are available for those desiring buffalo trophies and are offered for sale by the biological survey at thirty-five to sixty dollars each for heads; and forty to eighty dollars each for robes suitable for rugs or coats. Live buffalo, well-developed young animals, suitable for exhibition and breeding purposes, are offered at one hundred and fifteen dollars each, crated and loaded on the cars at Hot Springs, South Dakota, and Moiese, Montana. Further information will be supplied to those requesting it, by the warden, national bison range, Moiese, Montana, or the warden, wind cave national park game preserve, Hot Springs, South Dakota.



Paul Ellsworth Triem

Author of "Pipe the Perique," etc.

QLD "Buck" Gunderson drove with skillful strokes toward the spot where he had last seen his friend's gray head appear above the seething waters of Grizzly Creek. Buck's mind was paralyzed by the calamity, but his body, through sheer force of habit, reacted to the emergency.

Grizzly Creek was at its mightiest, following a chinook which had melted the snows on the summits of the foothills as if a great flame had been turned upon them. Buck felt the tug and surge of the water—the chill of it gave him a sensation of scalding. In the old days, however, he had been the best swimmer in the country; and even now, with old age beginning to slow him down, he instinctively took advantage of every eddy and backwash, as he swam high.

The gray head appeared no more, and presently Buck turned with the current and let himself drift toward a willow-covered island where he fancied the body might lodge. For the next half hour he crouched, shivering and desolate, watching with frowning intentness the boiling waters. Uprooted trees, large and small, came rolling and tumbling down, together with an occasional

saw log missed in the last drive; but of the body of his old friend, Buck Gunderson caught not a glimpse.

"Guess there ain't nothing for me to do but go back to camp and get dried up and a bit of a warm," the old man mumbled, conscious for the first time of the chill that was searching out the marrow of his bones. "When the water goes down——"

Salty tears were in his throat, and he wagged his head slowly as he struck across the narrow gap between the island and the nearer shore. Five minutes later he was in camp and had scraped together the embers of the fire. Huddled over it, he rubbed his numbed hands and stared into vacancy.

It had been coming for some time, he realized now. He should have known from Anson's altered demeanor, from his moodiness and silence, that something was badly wrong. But Anson had always been the leader, and Buck the follower; so that he had never considered catechizing his friend as the latter undoubtedly would have questioned him if the situation had been reversed. Buck sat huddled over the fire, feeling the warmth come slowly back into his thoroughly chilled body; and added detail to detail, in the picture he was constructing.

"It wa'n't no accident!" the old man told himself at last, with conviction. "He had it in mind to do just what he done—that's what he was driving at when he said he felt like his work was finished, and there wa'n't nothing more for him to do. Kind of felt like he was getting in the way of younger men——"

Gunderson paused suddenly, his glance arrested by a glint of fire light on something white. He stood up, circled the fire, and stooped. His friend's canvas coat, used principally as a depository for mineral samples, lay on the ground; the end of a folded paper projected into the gathering darkness from an inside pocket. Buck hesitated, then reached down and possessed himself of it. Kneeling beside the fire, he opened the document and let his eyes travel slowly over the words. It was in Anson Randall's bold, scraggy hand, unmistakably; as the old man by the fire read on, he understood that it was a holographic will.

The paper dropped from his fingers as he reached the signature, and he crouched for a time without being able to crystallize the turbid thoughts that were forming in his mind. His lips began to move.

"Everything he died possessed of to his adopted son, Burt Doyle—and he left it to Burt to provide a home for me, as long as I live, and to see to his old mule Dave—God help us!"

There was nothing irreverent in the invocation. It was rather a prayer, welling up from the old man's heart. Burt Doyle had been the cause of much contention between the two old friends, for many a day. Anson had found the city youth in the desert on one of his trips alone, and had brought him, hardly able to hold to the broad back of old Dave.

Afterward Anson had developed an unaccountable fondness for the beady-eyed, thin-lipped youngster—possibly because of that first act of mercy in

saving him from death by thirst. He had nursed him back to health, and gradually had taken him into his heart with the steady cordiality of a strong nature. Nor had Anson Randall ever been able to see any of the obvious blemishes in his protégé's character—his streak of treachery, dishonesty, cruelty. With the tolerance of strength for weakness, he had made excuses for the instances of peevishness and jealousy he had not been able entirely to overlook.

Gunderson stood up, after a time. He looked, at first vaguely, then with increasing decision, around the little clearing. Presently he began to gather together the articles of his own and his friend's equipment which he could do without on his return journey to the ranch. These he hid in a safe place, and afterward he made up his pack and shouldered it. The paper in his friend's writing he put carefully into an inner pocket. There had been a single instant when he had looked longingly at the fire—with this scrap of paper reduced to ashes, the ranch and Anson Randall's other property would by local custom undoubtedly go to him. But he put this thought behind him. Indeed, it had flashed into his troubled mind only when he thought of Dave, the faithful mule behind whose clattering hoofs he and Randall had tramped many a weary mile.

The old prospector trekked steadily all that night and till morning of the following day. If the case had been different—if he himself had inherited the property—he would have taken his time. Instinctively he felt that here was a case where his honor was concerned, and where the utmost dispatch was none too speedy. So he swung on, hour after hour, with the waning moon swinging on in its mighty orbit above him. Dawn came, and sunrise. Heat began to radiate from the cañon walls between which

he passed. And at last he descended from a ridge through a rocky draw and struck across a field of close-clipped alfalfa toward the hewn log cabin which his gnarled hands had helped to build.

Involuntarily his eyes wandered over the portion of the ranch spread out on each side—other alfalfa fields, and one of ripening blue-stem wheat; the orchard, which had been the pride of Anson's later years; and in the distance a sweep of virgin timber, worth many thousands of dollars. All this Anson Randall had wrested from the wilderness—with the help of Buck Gunderson. Buck had never thought of asking pay for his work, and indeed would have been insulted if any had been offered.

He raised his voice presently and hailed the cabin. The door was open. In it, after a slight delay, appeared the slim, alert figure of Burt Doyle. The young fellow was nattily dressed, in white flannel trousers, white buckskin sport shoes, a negligee shirt and fancy coat sweater. He shaded his eyes from the merciless glare of the morning sun, and studied without enthusiasm the approaching, dust-daubed figure.

"Well?" he demanded, as Buck came within easy speaking distance of the house.

"No, Burt, it ain't well, and never will be again!" the old man moaned, shaking his head and shifting the pack from his shoulders to the ground. "Anson got killed—drowned in Grizzly Creek. I put in a couple of hours lookin' for his body, but I reckon he washed considerable down stream afore he came to the top. I knowed you'd want to go back thar yourself—oh, why couldn't it have been me?"

Burt Doyle's narrow face paled, then began slowly to flush. He moistened his lips, and stood looking with a sort of angry curiosity at the old prospector. Buck, interpreting the glance, reached fumblingly into his pocket and drew out

the paper he had found in Anson Randall's coat.

"He lef' everything to you," he mumbled. "But that don't make no difference—nothing'll bring him back——"

The younger man's eyes were sparkling with capidity. His lips parted, as if he were panting. He read hastily through the simple testament, then turned his back on Gunderson and stood facing into the cabin. It seemed as if he feared to let the old-timer see the expression of avarice that had kindled in that moment in his close-set eyes and about his thin, cruel mouth.

Buck Gunderson, having finished the only definite thing he had had in mind since he saw his friend's gray head disappear under the swirling yellow waters of Grizzly Creek, stood looking vacantly around. There was no anger in his heart at the turn events had taken—only an infinite sorrow at the emptiness he suddenly felt in the world. Everything was drab, silent, worthless.

At a brisk question from Burt Doyle, however, he turned and looked with an expression of bewilderment at the young man in the doorway.

"What be I a-going to do next, Burt? Why, I guess I'll stick around and rest up a bit—you and me won't be able to find Anson's body till the flood water let's up, mos' likely. An' it'll be hard—yes, I guess I'll bide here and get sort of ready. We can take a sizable outfit across into Grizzly Valley—old Dave'll carry what we need. And the two of us——"

"Count me out!" Doyle interrupted curtly. "I'm no woodsman. As to your hanging around here for a while, I haven't any objection. You can sleep in the barn, if you're careful about matches. I suppose you can cook your meals in the yard, just as well as you cook them when you're away from here. But don't let me catch you lighting that pipe of yours around the barn!"

Gunderson blinked. Then he turned,

picked up his pack, and shuffled off in the direction of the stable. Still there was no bitterness in his heart. He had always known that Burt was a bad egg—and Anson had been welcome to do with the ranch and with his other property whatever he wanted to do. More than welcome.

Left to himself, Burt Doyle went back into the cabin and sat down beside a window. There was a crooked smile about his mouth, and his eyes glowed with awakening rapaciousness. Everything was his—suddenly he had become master of the ranch, and of everything else.

There was something in this latter idea that brought him to his feet. Now, at last, he could really search the cabin as he had long wanted to. During Anson Randall's absences, Burt had pried into every hiding place he could think of, but he had had to be cautious. The old prospector's eyes were keen, and he habitually saw things. So Burt had had to do his snooping in a guarded manner.

"And he was tight as the bark on a hickory tree!" the young fellow snarled, half aloud, as he thought over his relations with the old hill man. "Never could get enough money out of him to amount to anything. If I could have found his cache——"

But he could find it now. Moreover, whatever he found would be legally his. Everything belonged to him, unprovisionally. Of course, there was the mention of old Buck and the mule, but that meant nothing. Burt, without giving the matter a thought, had decided to get rid of all the encumbrances the ranch was now burdened with. But first, he must find the cache of money which he had always believed Anson Randall had somewhere about.

Standing with his back to the door, the legatee let his close-set eyes wander sneeringly over the fittings of the little cabin. There were two ancient chairs

beside the broad window on the west—it was there that the master of the house and old Buck Gunderson had been accustomed to sit, while they reviewed the rambling adventures of the years that were gone, or argued over future activities. Burt had always hated those chairs. They symbolized the two garrulous old men; had even come to bear a distorted resemblance to them, in his grudging vision. Now he braced the door open and proceeded to haul both pieces of furniture into the yard in front of the cabin, where he unceremoniously dumped one on the other.

He returned to the little house and continued the work thus begun. There were a dozen old relics—tables, a catchall filled with specimens of mineral and arrow heads, and some framed pictures, all of which had aroused his ire. They stood for the former régime, and now he jerked them out into the yard and piled them upon the two chairs. His motive in this task was not entirely a revengeful one; he wanted to clear the cabin in order to pursue his exploring activities.

And at the work of finding the money he went next.

"The old fool—why couldn't he have said in the will where he had the coin hidden?" he grumbled, as he returned from the woodshed with a short crowbar with a flat, prying end. "Now let's see—chances are the stuff is here in this room somewhere. Under the floor? Back of the walls? I'll find it if I have to rip the place down!"

The cabin was built of hewn logs, cleverly fitted together. The building of it had been a labor of love on the part of the two old prospectors; erecting this little shelter from the heat of summer and from the icy winds of winter. Now Burt Doyle went about the work of ripping and prying with his thin lips compressed, his close-set eyes snapping with anger. The cabin also partook of the personality of its builders.

He resolved that as soon as possible he would have another house built.

"I'll burn this shack down—it'll be in shape for it by the time I'm through!" he told himself surlily. "But first I must find his money. I haven't tried the roof room yet, nor the fire place. Why couldn't that old numskull have told me where it was?"

The work of demolition and search went fiercely forward. The shack was full of choking dust, but the young fellow with the crow bar drove energetically on. He cursed himself for a blunderer because he had not watched his patron more closely—in that way he might have discovered—but reason told him that he had done all the spying possible. Anson Randall had been a close-lipped man; and although he had apparently trusted Burt to the full, he had managed to keep the details of his private business to himself.

Along toward the middle of the afternoon the vandal looked through the shattered window—he had thrown a hook through it, to improve the ventilation—and saw old Buck Gunderson squatted over a diminutive cooking fire, at the other end of the ranch yard. At his left was the log stable—the finest in this part of the country; and beyond that, stretching up a gentle slope with a tree-clad ridge at its summit, was the pasture where Dave, the mule, was spending his last years. Some of the best land in the ranch was given over to this purpose; mellow loam, subirrigated from springs on the ridge. Burt Doyle paused just long enough to promise himself that before long this luxuriant pasturage would be put to some use that would add to his income. Then, reminded by the sight of the old prospector's cooking fire of the fact that he himself had eaten nothing since morning, he grudgingly desisted from his work long enough to prepare and consume a hasty meal.

He had nearly finished eating when

there came to him a disturbing idea. He had been grumbling to himself because Randall had not mentioned the whereabouts of his ready money. Probably the old man had mentioned it—had told old Buck Gunderson just where it was! And Gunderson had kept the information to himself.

That idea was as tormenting as the sting of a white-faced hornet. He stood up abruptly and crossed to the door. The old man was sitting in the shade of the barn, his bowed back against the hewn log wall, his ancient pipe in his mouth. Burt strode from the cabin, and across the ranch yard to where Gunderson was sitting.

"Look here, he said ominously, "what's the idea of your trying to hold out on me? Randall must have told you more than you told me—he didn't just hand you this will——"

"He didn't hand it to me," Buck interrupted pacifically. "I found it in his coat, arter I had seen him go down!"

"You mean to say then that he didn't give you any other information?"

"What information would there be, Burt?"

Burt Doyle's face was twisted with covetousness, suspicion, and hatred. He tried to subdue the turbulent emotions—he felt that they were working against him.

"His will states that he leaves me everything he died possessed of. But it doesn't mention anything—nothing like ready money, for instance. I'll bet he told you all about that—where it was, how much——"

Buck Gunderson shook his head.

"He didn't say nary a word about money, Burt! An' I don't know as Anson had much of any—he wa'n't a town person, you know. He managed to raise most everything he needed hyar on the ranch, and he didn't have no use——"

"Nonsense!" the younger man broke in with a sneer. "He had money hid-

den somewhere. He sold a carload of apples and pears every fall, and got the top market price for them. And there was something more for cattle and sheep!"

Buck Gunderson's faded blue eyes widened.

"By gum, I hadn't thought of that!" he admitted. "Anson must have had some money about, unless he kep' it in the bank in town——"

"He didn't. He didn't believe in banks, and you know it!"

Buck met the young fellow's angry glance without wavering. "Waal, Burt," he commented, "I guess I can't help you none. Looks to me like you was right about his having money somewheres, and I reckon he wouldn't have kep' it in the bank. Anson liked to have things whar he could put his hands on 'em. But I ain't got no idee——"

Young Doyle's lips twitched, and his face had become pasty. His small eyes glowed. "Don't think you're kidding me, old man!" he said, snarling as he turned back toward the cabin. "You know, all right. And I'm going to have what belongs to me if I have to wreck this accursed ranch!"

He finished wrecking the cabin—for that was about what it amounted to, by the time he had searched walls, ceiling, floor and chimney. The little place looked as if a cyclone had twisted and kneaded it. Burt Doyle threw down his crow bar and got a spade and pick ax. He had just remembered the old orchard, and Anson Randall's fanatical fondness for it. To the city-bred youth, born in a charity ward and raised in an alley, there could be but one reason for any man's really loving trees—money must be buried beneath them.

So he strode out into the clean, tilled orchard and began again. The trees had long been sprayed, pruned and cultivated with the most exact care, their smooth, clean trunks and limbs and glossy foliage would have told an inter-

esting story to one with senses attuned to such things. The fruit—apples, pears and prunes in various stages of maturity—was smooth and heavy. Burt Doyle's angry eyes rested on it almost with hate; here was wealth of a sort, but his fingers were burning for gold. His three years in the foothills had but strengthened his hunger for the dissipations of the worst side of city living. *Gold!*

There was a fanatical glitter in Burt Doyle's eyes as he attacked the first tree. It was a sleek limbed *Buerre de Anjou*, one of a considerable plantation, but the finest of them all. Doyle had remembered suddenly the special fondness of Anson Randall for this tree. Surely that meant that his money was hidden under it—what else *could* it mean? He began digging close to the trunk, working slowly in an enlarging circle. He went back to the tool shed for an ax, so that he could chop off the exposed roots and so get at the fine-grained volcanic ash beneath; deeper and deeper, wider and wider, till he had a veritable pit dug about the pear tree, which balanced now on a single pedestal of compact earth.

There was no sign of a cache of any kind, however, and as the treasure seeker realized this, he suddenly caught up the ax and attacked the tree as if it had been a sentient thing. Puffing and snarling, he hacked at the smooth trunk till the fruit-laden branches began to sag and quiver. They came down with a crash, and Burt Doyle stood glaring at them, his face twitching, his eyes hot. "I'll show him—I'll have his gold——"

The word had become an actual torture to him. He sprang out of the pit, seized his tools, and hurried across to a spitzenburgh apple tree some distance to the east of the pear plantation. This tree also had been one of old Anson's favorites. Burt Doyle went about his task of digging, with murder in his heart.

Evening came, mellow and peaceful. Above the distant, wire-edged ridges of the foothills, the sky quivered, radiant as white-hot metal. Somewhere on the summit beyond old Dave's pasture, a quail was whistling. Burt Doyle stood with sagging arms and blistered hands, looking heavily about. He had left his mark on the orchard—many a tree that had been years in the making was now hacked and uprooted. But the protean resistance of the old ranch had put aside his flabby efforts. Its strength was the strength of inertia; it simply rested and waited. He was as far from possessing its secret as he had been at the beginning of the day—a beginning which seemed to belong to a different lifetime, so far away and unreal was it. He had been beaten, by an old ranch, an old man, and a mule!

In the act of starting back for the cabin, Burt Doyle suddenly paused, a new idea forming itself rapidly in his seething brain. He was convinced that Gunderson was holding back the truth from him. Undoubtedly the old prospector knew where Anson Randall had kept his money. But he was keeping this information to himself—why? The answer was obvious, to the city youth's crooked imagination. What would he himself do in such a case? Possess himself of the gold, of course! And that was what Gunderson contemplated.

His mind steadied at this thought. His movements now must be directed with patience and craft, rather than by violence and ferocity. He walked slowly back to the cabin and prepared supper. His eyes were dull, his thoughts introverted. Occasionally he glanced out the window, to where Buck Gunderson was cooking something in a frying pan above a diminutive fire.

Midnight had come before Burt Doyle, hidden in a tangle of lilacs near the tool shed, saw old Buck Gunderson move stealthily out of the log barn.

Rifle in hand, the younger man crouched and waited. The prospector came to the edge of the shadow cast by the waning moon and seemed to hesitate. Doyle could see him peering intently toward the cabin, and his heart beat fiercely. Here was evidence of the old fool's perfidy! But Gunderson was too stupid to realize that his antagonist might have taken up his station in a safe place earlier in the night. He evidently thought that all he had to do was to keep track of the little shack.

Gunderson moved out into the silvery moonlight presently, and betook himself across the ranch yard. He approached the door of the tool shed, paused to look over his shoulder toward the cabin, and then abruptly entered. When he came out, he carried a shovel over his shoulder. He started briskly in the direction of the orchard. Burt Doyle followed, at a discreet distance.

The old man went straight toward the pear plantation, turned into a cultivated strip between the trees, and trudged on till he came to the *Buerre de Anjou* the younger man had demolished. There he stopped, and for a time stood apparently inspecting the neighborhood.

Doyle crept closer. He saw old Buck draw a deep breath, grip the shovel with renewed determination—and then set to work filling in the pit which surrounded the stump of the pear tree. Occasionally he paused, stooped, and adjusted one of the crippled roots. He worked methodically, trampling in the earth firmly and working round and round the tree without ever raising his head. The vandal, hiding in the shadow close at hand, gritted his teeth. Apparently the old fool was trying to patch up this remnant of a tree, perhaps with the idea of top-grafting it.

Doyle possessed his soul in such patience as he could command. He saw Buck Gunderson complete his task and move on to another of the despoiled fruit trees. His own anger mounted,

and he felt his hands tingling. What business was it of Gunderson's if he chose to destroy his own property? But the prospector finished his work after a time, and the rat-eyed young fellow who was watching him held his breath. Now old Buck would go about his task of finding the gold.

Gunderson returned the spade to the tool shed, came out into the moonlight and again stood hesitating. He looked toward the cabin and shook his head. Doyle, watching him, wondered if the money was hidden inside the shack, after all, and if Gunderson feared to seek for it there. After a time the old man turned and crossed to the log stable, inside which he disappeared.

While the spy was trying to think of a way of getting close enough to see what he was doing without himself being seen, the old man reappeared, with an indistinct something in his hands, and moved across toward the pasture. At the gate he paused, stooped, and picked up a bulky object—a pack, Doyle decided next moment.

Then he entered the pasture and moved slowly up the sloping green-sward. There was something of finality in his motions, and he had ceased to look back toward the cabin.

Burt Doyle watched for a time, to be sure the old man would not turn. Then he, too, struck into the path.

The moonlit pasture was softly luminous. Clumps of alders, scattered here and there upon it, cast shadows that were sootily black. Buck Gunderson seemed to be observing these little islands of darkness with particular interest, and again his unseen follower's eyes began to glow. Undoubtedly the gold was hidden under one of these clumps of alder.

Presently Gunderson turned at right angles and strode off toward a little grove, perhaps a hundred yards distant. Doyle dropped to the ground and waited. Perceiving that the old man

was still interested only in his objective, he again started in pursuit.

Old Buck reached the fringe of alders and passed into it. The younger man began to run. His footfalls were cushioned by the thick turf. He reached the edge of the grove and paused, staring for a moment unseeingly into the shadow.

A snarling oath came tremblingly from his lips—Buck Gunderson was within twenty feet of him now. And the old man was adjusting a halter to the head of an ancient and venerable mule.

Old Buck turned, at the sound of that imprecation. His arms dropped to his sides, and he stood silently inspecting the figure of the newcomer.

"Waal, Burt," he said at last, uneasy friendliness in his voice. "I just got to thinking maybe it would be a good idee for me to go back and look for Anson's body. I reckon you are going to be perty busy, lookin' for the money, and kind of fixing things up to suit you—and old Dave and me can do all that can be done, anyhow. I kind of reckoned you wouldn't miss us——"

Doyle caught his breath with a choking sound. It seemed to burn his throat. His eyeballs throbbed, and the gun in his hand was swung menacingly forward and up.

"You can't fool me, you old fox!" he cried. "You and all this infernal hill country—you know where the money is hid! You were going to saddle up and he all ready to sneak away, before you dug it up! Listen to me—you don't stir foot off this place till you come across. And as for the mule, well you had better——"

He swung the rifle up against his cheek. With surprising speed, Buck Gunderson was upon him and had knocked the barrel aside, as the gun roared.

"You ain't going to shoot old Dave?" the prospector quavered incredulously.

"Dave—why. Anson said in his will that he——"

But Doyle jerked free. Stepping back, he again leveled the rifle.

"I'll give you till I count three, old man!" he grated. "I'll make a dicker with you—tell me where the gold is hid, and I'll give you the mule. You two can hit the trail together. Otherwise—*I'm counting!*"

He paused for an instant, during which there was silence in the little grove. Then came a snarling monosyllable.

"One!"

Buck Gunderson looked swiftly about, as if for a weapon. He edged closer to the man with the gun.

"Two!"

"You ain't got the heart to shoot Dave, boy!" the old man pleaded. "He was Anson's pal—over these hills they roamed——"

Burr Doyle steadied the rifle and pressed his cheek firmly against the stock. His close-set eyes seemed to glow like bits of live coal in the shadow of the ablers. His lips moved——

A rumbling voice sounded from behind.

"What you doing with my rifle? An' my mule? Fer two cents——"

Doyle turned a pallid face in the direction of the unexpected questions, then precipitately dropped the rifle and started for the moonlit pasture.

Old Buck Gunderson staggered limply back against an alder trunk.

"Anson!" he quavered. "An——"

"Sure it's Anson! Who else should it be, I should like to know? Say, Buck, what was that young roofer going to do to my mule? Didn't you give him that wringing that was in my coat? Didn't I tell him in it——"

Buck Gunderson waved all this aside. He laid a faltering hand on his old friend's massive arm. Reassured by the substantial contact, he shook the returned dead man energetically.

"Where in Tophet did you come from? I seen you go down twicet——"

"Twicet? I went down twenty times, off and on! I swollered so much water that I splash every time I take a step! I reckon I swollered about half of Grizzly Creek——"

"Then you didn't go for to drown yourself?" Buck broke in, in an awed tone.

His friend turned and stared retrospectively toward old Dave, the mouse-colored mule. Dave stared back at him, his long ears pointed accusingly forward.

"Waal, Buck, if the truth was knowed, I expect I did have some such fool idee in my head!" Randall admitted. "I kind of got to thinkin' they wasn't nothing more for me to do—and I was in Burt's way——"

He paused and looked angrily toward the edge of the grove.

"You was right abouten him, Buck!" he declared energetically. "He's pizen, that kid is! An' I'm goin' to give him such a larrupin'——"

"But you ain't drowned!" Buck broke in. "How come——"

"How come I changed my mind? Waal, you try it yourself! I heard a hombre say oncet that drowning was a pleasant death. He said that after the first gulp you didn't mind nothing—just kind of lay back in the water, like it was a armchair. An' speaking of chairs, Buck, what's all my furniture doin' out in the yard? And what hit the house to make——"

"You was tellin' abouten drowning!" Buck reminded him.

Anson Randall shook his head fractionally.

"Well, the feller that said it was pleasant better try it hisself!" he grumbled. "I remembered abouten that first gulp, an' I made it a good one. Expect I lowered the water a foot for a mile up an' down the creek. But it didn't make me feel comfortable—not so's you

could notice it. I got some of it into my lungs, an' then I tried to hold my breath. I had got caught in an undertow, an' was being bumped and scraped and twisted till I wanted to screech.

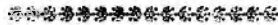
"I come up an' got a breath, an' then down I went again. I held onto that breath as long as I could. I had an idee it would be the las' one I got this side of the pearly gates, an' all of a sudden livin' in this world had got to seem mighty pleasant.

"Well, I let out that breath when my lungs was busting, and swollered another barr'l of water, and then I went Emp. I come to lodged in some willers, a mile down from our camp. I was half froze, an' so sick I thought fer a time I was dying. I crawled out on the bank,

like a water snake, and after a while the sun dried me. Then I made shift to get back to our camp, but you was gone. So I come home. Now, *what's them tables and cheers doin' out in the ranch yard?*"

"Burt was tired of seein' us sitting around in 'em, I expect. Looks like he was goin' to burn 'em!"

Old Anson's eyes bulged with amazement and wrath. "He was? Why, he wrecked my place for gold. Say, Buck, they is close to five thousands dollars hid in the padding of that old rocker of yours—an' I got anyhow that much more stuffed into the pillar of mine! I kind of thought Burt would tumble, me always being so fond of both of them chairs!"



VAMPIRE BATS IN ARIZONA

A STRANGE variety of bat has recently been observed in the vicinity of Phoenix, Arizona. It is thought to be the South American vampire bat, and if this is the case, the little creatures have probably been brought up on some Mexican ship, making their way overland from the Mexican port at which the ship landed. The vampire bat is said to attack persons in their sleep, and some residents of Phoenix and the adjacent country are alarmed, so that steps are being taken to have the newcomers exterminated as quickly as possible.



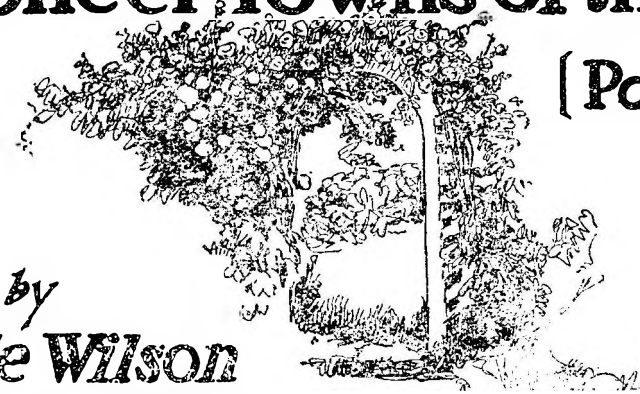
YUKON MAY HAVE PACIFIC PORT

RECENT observations by J. P. Forde, a Dominion government engineer, indicate the possibility of connecting the Yukon Territory with the Pacific by a direct waterway, thus obviating the necessity of passing over United States territory. Mr. Forde is quoted as making the following statement with regard to this matter:

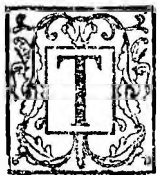
"When the boundary between Canada and Alaska was delimited, it ran east and west several miles north of open water in Glacier Bay, but crossed a field of solid ice or glacier connected with the waters of the bay. Changing climate, unusually warm weather or some unnatural upheaval of the ice bed caused the ice to disintegrate this summer, with the result that the open waters of Glacier Bay extended past the boundary line into Canadian territory. This would make Glacier Bay an international waterway and a Canadian port, it is assumed. It would therefore be feasible during the summer months to give the Yukon a direct outlet to the Pacific, provided a route can be found to connect with the Yukon River and other streams of the interior.

Pioneer Towns of the West

[Portland]



by
Erle Wilson
Author of "Fort Smith," etc.



WO ambitious real-estate men from New England were the original settlers of Portland, Oregon. These hustling Yankees founded this pioneer town of the Northwest in the year 1845, naming it for Portland, Maine. Soon afterward gold was discovered in California, and the varied demands of the forty-miners traveling the old Oregon Trail promoted the growth of the frontier settlement. In 1873 a devastating fire swept over the town. It soon recovered and continued to thrive. Even before the westward stretching rails of the Northern Pacific reached it in 1883, its population had climbed to twenty thousand.

To-day, Portland, with a population of three hundred and sixty thousand, is the metropolis of Oregon and the chief city of the Columbia River Basin. Situated on the Willamette River, just above its confluence with the Columbia, this Western port possesses one of the finest fresh-water harbors in the world. It is one hundred miles from the sea, with which it is connected by a forty-foot channel. Ships from all nations come into this port, and an immense volume of trade is carried on. More than thirteen hundred ships clear with car-

goes for the seven seas each year. Its twenty-nine miles of water front offer ample moorage space, while the city has provided an ambitious system of docks, terminals, and harbor improvements.

Adjacent to the tremendous forests that clothe Oregon's huge mountain chains, Portland is the chief lumber manufacturing city in the world, with immense furniture factories. Nor does its glory end here, for it has the distinction of being the principal wheat port of the Pacific coast, as well as a great wool and meat-packing point. This city is also the leading banking center of the Pacific Northwest.

Portland is famous for civic beauty, which is enhanced by the magnificent background of the Cascade Range, with the peaks of Mount Hood, Mount Adams, and St. Helena in the distance. In fact, within the wide scope of its vision is a wonderful panorama of forest, stream, and towering mountain. The Willamette River, picturesquely dotted with tree-decked islands, sweeps through the heart of the city, which rises at some points to an elevation of over twelve hundred feet.

This Northwestern metropolis is known far and wide as the Rose City, because from spring until autumn this flower blooms in every yard and garden.

as well as along the public parkways. The soil and climate here are so well suited to the growing of this particular flower that the American Rose Society has made it headquarters for its test gardens. Portland's annual Rose Festival, held the first week in June, has become an event of national renown.

This city has handsome public buildings, churches, hotels, theaters, and business blocks, fine schools, and a number of colleges. Almost all of its streets are tree-shaded, and the citizens find recreation in the numerous parks and playgrounds. Scores of excursions may also be made from Portland to attractive beaches, mountains, and valleys, streams, waterfalls, or snowfalls, in which this scenic section of the great West abounds. The climate is celebrated for the coolness of the summers and the mildness of the winters.

The sportsman finds within easy reach of Portland wonderful fishing, golfing, and hunting. The myriad streams and lakes furnish trout, while the rivers and bays offer salmon fishing. Big game is plentiful. Trails carry the hunter into the deep recesses of the forest where are found bear, deer, and cougar. Along the ridges and in cañon are grouse, and in the lowlands are pheasants by the thousands.

One of the finest gun clubs in America is almost adjoining the city limits of Portland on the Powell Valley Road. Here there is a well-appointed club house, surrounded by twenty acres of ground, and with an excellent equipment for the trapshooter. Among the

members are so many nationally known shots that it would not be difficult to get up a team to compete with the Olympic team. And the sportsman who prefers golf will find within a radius of a few miles of the center of Portland no less than eleven courses.

Five transcontinental railway systems have their terminus at Portland, and the city is served by ten railroads, which connect with every important transportation system in the United States. The city is also served by several leading steamship lines, via the Columbia River Route.

This Northwestern metropolis has the commission form of government, the present mayor being the Honorable George L. Baker. There is an excellent street-car and interurban-railway system. The water supply is one of the purest in the world, coming from Bull Run Lake, which is fed by springs whose sources are the snowfields of Mount Hood. Portland also has unlimited supplies of cheap electric light and power generated at great hydro-electric plants situated on her mountain streams.

The stranger within this Oregon metropolis, America's twenty-fourth largest city, is sure of a cordial welcome, for Portland's citizens are noted not only for their Western enterprise, but also for their spirit of warm hospitality. Prominent among the outstanding men of the community are Simon Benson, J. B. Yeon, J. A. Ainsworth, A. L. Mills, E. B. MacNaughton, and Doctor Henry Waldo Coe.

In the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, will be described.

COYOTE BAND IN SISKIYOU

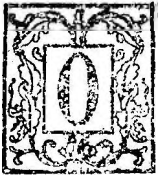
DURING the heavy snowstorms of this winter, reports came from the Siskiyou Hills in California of a band of ravaging coyotes that were roving through the hills killing deer. The scarcity of food is believed to have driven the coyotes to their depredations, in the opinion of trappers working in that part of the country.



Hot Work for Rex

By
Austin Hall

Author of "Silvertip—Beast of Burden," etc.



"O, LA LA," spoke Jean la Jennette grandly. "Zat dog she's spek six languidge for sure. *Oui, oui!* So!"

Jean la Jennette, sheep herder by choice and Iberian through the accident of birth, held up his hand to the racing shepherd. A cloud of gray dust settled on the great flock, and through its mist disappeared the fleeting form of the old dog. There was a scurry of the flock, then a milling, and a minute later the bell burro Napoleon came out of the whirling dust to lead the pack on the first leg of its long journey.

Four men stood by the road—all of them interested in the dog's work. They were city men of the prominent type—business men to whom the working of a sheep dog was more or less of a novelty. Three of them were very much impressed, but one took in the spectacle with more or less intolerance. He was a real estate man, and he had been having a hot argument with his companions. The tone of the debate seemed to be the measure of a dog's intelligence. They had stopped by the roadside to watch Jean and his dog.

Jean, always proud to display the

merits of his shepherd, had been putting the old dog through his paces. First he had started out in English, shouting his commands in the tongue of his companions, then he had shifted to Spanish, after that to southern French, and last of all to his own Basque. No matter what the language, the dog appeared to know. He ran the flock, turned the flanks, rede it, and sifted it out in a long, thin line. There was nothing about herding sheep that the dog did not know, and Jean had spoken rightly when he had said that the dog understood six languages—at least he knew them when spoken by Jean la Jennette.

The man was not convinced; a dog hater seldom is. T. H. Perkins had a particular aversion for all dogs. He had always held that they were first-class incubators for fleas and vermin and a source of rabies. Outside of that, he just could not see them.

"That sheep herder, of course, knows his dog," he said, "and the dog can understand his voice, but I would hardly venture to say that he understood a language. A dog is only a dog, and when it comes to driving sheep—well, a dog is the only animal that is fool enough to associate with them, any way."

"Rats!" answered one of his companions. "You just simply haven't any argument. Your words prove it. You're a dog hater and that lets you out. I'll bet you couldn't buy that dog for five hundred dollars."

The real estate man laughed. He was a well-kept man with a goatee and a little mustache under his thin nose. His eyes were cynical.

"No?" he asked. "Well, outside of the fool sentiment that every idiot has for his dog, I'd hate to offer that fellow fifty cents."

Jean la Jennette had stopped beside the watchers to pick up the little scraps of praise that were pretty sure to follow whenever he put old Rex through his work—the said praise being about the dearest reward that he could get. He had heard the remark about the fifty cents. Fifty cents for Rex! *Ou la!* That was more than he could bear. He took off his Tam o' Shanter and mopped the perspiration from his face.

"For ze fifty cent, eh!" He held his cap in his hand and made a flourish. "Whiiiiiiist!" he whistled to the dog. Immediately there was a flash of color as the dog rounded the flock to the side of the road. The bell burro stopped and began to graze on the dry grass. The dog looked toward his master. One minute later he was back and in the arms of Jean la Jennette, lolling his tongue and looking up into the old man's face. Jean held the dog's head up so the men could see under his chin. The men watched, but the real estate man was still cynical.

"See," said Jean in all his simplicity, "ze hair under ze chin. One hair under chin zat dog no good for anyting. Two hair preety fair dog. Three hair zat dog she worth one tousand dollar. *Oui, oui!* For sure! See. Rex she's got seven dem hair. Five tousand dollar. So! Ees she not so?"

The three men were impressed. It was a new way to come at the valuation

of a dog, and they took it that the sheep herder knew his business. The other laughed; it hurt the old man.

"You no believe what I say?" asked Jean.

The big fellow bit his cigar. "Oh, sure!" he said. "I'd believe anything if you said it. Only that's rather a high price for a hair, my man. And a dog hair at that!"

Jean la Jennette had no use for a dog hater, but when a cynic was added onto the dog hater, it was more than he could stand. He lost his temper and went after real proof. He bared the dog's collar.

"See!" he exclaimed. "Ze mark on ze collar, and she's marked in Engleesh which ze man can read. So, you see? Rex, she's champeen. She's win zat cup in Colorado, and zat cup ze Monsieur he keep in ze big house. You ask ze Monsieur. See. You read wat she say. Jean's eye she bad to-day."

He had displayed three silver plates on the dog's collar—all of them engraved. The men stooped over, the one called the doctor reading for the benefit of his doubling friend.

\$5,000.00 REX \$5,000.00

Owner Bob Arnold
Mendota, California

In case of trouble tie a note to his collar and tell him to get me.

That's his trick.

REX
WARD OF THE WESTERN SHEEP
GROWERS ASSOCIATION
Notify George Cluff, Balboa Bldg. S. F.

REX
THE NATIONAL SHEEP DOG
CHAMPION

Winner of the Grilly sweepstakes
Grilly.

The doctor looked up at his friend. He smiled. The others nodded.

"According to the evidence it looks to me as though he has won his argument, Tom," he said. "The dog's worth the money or he wouldn't be packing that. I know George Cluff, personally.

His name on that collar is as good as a bond."

But the dog hater was still himself. He fell back on his futile assertion.

"Anyway, my price still stands. I'd hate to give more than fifty cents for any dog on earth."

It was the month of June. Jean was just starting for the heights. He had left the ranch the day before and had driven the sheep to the San Joaquin. There he had camped all night and in the morning had prepared to make his real start for the mountains. Coming out of camp he had run across the men. The four men were on their way from San Francisco—business men all—for a long outing. For three days they had been camped beside the river, catching salmon and enjoying life generally. On the morrow they had planned to roll camp and hit for the cool life of the high Sierras. Jean had been glad to show off his dog. To three of them, at least, the sight was well worth while. Just now they were watching the sheep packed against the fence—three thousand head—and petting the wise old dog. To the west of them as far as they could see stretched the level space of the gray desert with the dim outline of hills in the distance and the pale sky of summer overhead.

"You take the sheep where?" asked the doctor. "And who is this Monsieur?"

Jean pointed to the east. He waved his hand.

"Jean, she's go to ze mountain. Way up. To ze lake of ze squirrel. Down in ze valley ze sun get hot; ze water she go, and ze feed she's dry. Too hot for sheep. So ze Monsieur she's send Jean wiz zat sheep to ze high mountain. You savvy Monsieur? No? She's Jean's boss. Good man. Rich, got million sheep. Also he's boss zat dog Rex. You no lak pay too much for zat Rex you go to Monsieur and say you want one leetle puppy from

zat dog. And you pay five hundred dollar for zat pup. So! You no pay, eh? Mebbe no, but if you sheepman you pay queeck, and you wait for long time for zat pup. Now Jean and zat dog and zat donk' mus' take ze Monsieur's sheep to ze top of zat mountain. *Ou la!* Jean she's poor man, and she mus' take care dem sheep. *Au revoir, monsieur!*" Then to the pessimist, "Fifty cents! You go back to ze Monsieur and say you will pay him jus' fifty centime for zat Rex. *Ou la!* Zat will be one joke. Ze Monsieur will kick over ze corral for sure!"

That was all. Jean whistled and the dog circled the flock. The dust cloud rose, and the gray carpet of wool took up its annual trip to the high Sierras. That afternoon the four men stacked their camp and set out on their own journey. They were still debating about dogs.

Two months has passed. Jean had driven the flock to the high summits and had forgotten all about the incident by the roadside. What interested him now was the grand feeling of the air and the lassitude of the summer's day. It was good to stretch out on his back and watch the eagle soaring over the snow caps. Always something—the trill of the birds, the play of the squirrels, or the soft breeze sighing through the tree tops. He was in the land of the forest—far stretching—where a man was nothing. Down below him were the great cañons, miles upon miles, furred from bottom to top with firs and spruce trees. Rivers in the bottoms—and tumbling waters. On the summits were the great meadows; for miles about grew the tender birch brush. Bob Arnold, Jean's boss, owned his share of the meadows, a lake or two, and had access to all the mountains. Every summer Jean would come up with the flock and loaf around while the dog did the work. It was a great life—one that would last till autumn,

when he would return to the harder life in the valley. But that was six weeks ahead. Just now he was lying under a sugar pine, dreaming a daydream of his youth. When Jean was daydreaming he was usually humming.

She's far away, zat bonne maid,
She's live upon zat mountain,
W'en Jean she's come, she's kiss zat gal,
He's love her by zat fountain.

"*Ou la,*" he spoke to himself. "Jean, she's sing song for sure. Ver' good. So! An' zat dog she's listen also."

The broad flat stretched out below the tree, dotted with thousands of grazing sheep. Here and there a full-bellied ewe had lain down to drowse in the warm sunshine. The old dog Rex, black and tan, was stretched out on a little nob, watching the flock and gazing now and then toward some mystery in the far cañon. Just now his ears were up. There was something down below that required attention. Jean had seen his ears go up and had thought that it was his singing, but it was not so—it was something farther down the mountain. Jean might have taken warning because all the world was at peace. It is usually so before a storm. Suddenly the dog stood up and looked about. He looked over at Jean la Jennette and then down at the great gulch. Jean was too interested in his own contentment to notice anything; he had gone to sleep. The daydream had given way to a real one. Still the dog watched, his eyes set on a thin wisp of blue that arose from the green woods far below. Being a dog, he had keen ears and the added value of instinct. Those ears were pricking up the most ominous sound of the high forest—fire!

The dog got the soft undertone—in-audible to his master, but plain to him—creeping blanket of flame, the soft crackling, and then a louder snapping where a pitch stick had popped and had

begun to sizzle. The fire was just starting but it was large enough to be a real one. The dog caught the warning and read the message. The smoke grew larger, rolled about, and then there was a flash where the flame had caught a sugar pine. That flame went up out of the carpet of green like a yellow dagger. The dog barked.

And there was no mistaking that bark. It was a warning. Instantly every ewe and wether had leaped to its feet and was darting into the pack. Jean la Jennette came out of his dream with a bang and was on his feet. The dog was still barking. Jean was coming on a run, but it was not until he had come out of the shelter of the trees that he saw what was the matter. The fire had passed out of the camp fire stage and was coming up the mountain like a race horse. There was a roar now, a zoom and the fire reached the trees—where it caught the evergreens and leaped into the air. Jean took in the situation at once.

"*Ou la la la!*" he exclaimed. "Zat *diablo* she's loose again. Zat fire she's burn lak anything already. And she's jus' start. Up ze mountain, up ze gulch, and all over. Pretty soon she's catch zat sheep. And ze Monsieur Bob she's say to Jean to look out for zat fire."

There was no time to lose. The Sierras in August are like tinder, and a lone match will start an inferno. Jean was in a perilous position. He had driven the sheep to a little plateau that hung like a point directly in the range of the fire. The flames had leaped to the top of the ridge and were traveling like a locomotive. Now the fire was ranging down on the other side. Jean knew how it could go; he knew that a fire in the pines can travel down hill as well as up, that the pine cones, catching fire, roll down the hills and act as tinder all the way to the bottom of the cañons. Streams might hold it, but a good wind

bearing a burning ember would take it to the other side and send it tearing up a new mountain. And Jean had three thousand sheep! The smoke and the stifling heat would come in a few minutes.

He did not delay. One wave of his arm and he had sent the old dog after the sheep; then he raced after the bell burro, caught him and threw on the pack. In three minutes he was working the flock up the ridge to get away from the perilous exposure on the plateau. Already the wind, drawn by the suction of the fire, was sweeping up the cañon. That meant a race ahead. The flock could go only so fast. Jean whistled gayly and came behind, leaving the dog to work the flanks alone.

It was Jean's first forest fire. He had often figured what he would do in just such a case, but like many others he was not ready when the time came. He would rather have been in almost any place than that cul-de-sac between the two gulches. Now he would have to run for it. He knew that the fire had gone around to the opposite gulch and was climbing. He could hear the roar of it. And he had his sheep on the top of the ridge.

His plans crisscrossed and ran through his mind in a tangle of incoherence. He wanted speed, speed, and more speed to get off that point. After that he would have more time and be able to work out his salvation. There were several plans that he could follow. One was to drive the flock straight on and race with the fire until he came to the snow. The other was to maneuver the flock, study the fire and take advantage of its eccentricity—a plan that depended upon luck and much back firing. Back firing requires a great amount of work, and in a forest fire is almost too much for one man. Already the smoke was closing in, and he was far from the end of the point. For

the first time in his life, he was cursing the slowness of his sheep.

Ahead of him was a long ridge from which the plateau spurred out between the two cañons. If he could reach that, he could swing off and make headway between the two fires. He had not gone a mile when he looked behind him and saw where the fire had reached the top of the plateau. He was just in time. Had he delayed five minutes longer he would have been caught. Thanks to old Rex. When he had reached a place where he could see he looked down into the other cañon. The fire was coming in slantwise; it had reached the top behind him, but beside him and below him it was still climbing. The whole world seemed to be roaring, popping like cannon and going up in an agony of flame. To top it all the wind was coming up and setting in toward the heights. Jean had no way of telling that a storm was blowing over the whole State and that now it was striking the Sierras. He saw a tree half way up the opposite ridge bend under the impact of the gale and explode like so much powder. In ten seconds' time a new fire was started and had spread in a dozen directions. Jean shouted at his helplessness and picked up a stick to thump the rear of the flock. The dog caught his frenzy and began nipping the wayward ones, while the bell burro flattened his ears and drooped his tail between his legs to flee from the impending terror. Man, sheep, dog and donkey, with the wind bending the treetops and death stalking behind!

They made the long ridge. Here Jean got his bearings. He looked back and laid his plans. The two fires had met on the plateau and become one. Below him was a lake of flame with the burning trees sticking up like living cones from the crimson bottom. The conflagration had spread to the north and south and was coming behind him.

Only the wind could turn it or keep it off, and Jean knew that he could not figure on the wind. There was no getting around it or putting it between him and the fire. He would have to keep straight up the ridge, climb it, and make for a rocky barren some miles away. Fortunately the ridge was bare on top for a hundred feet, and free from brush. He would have a lee-way of a hundred feet before he struck the timber. But just then he ran into a new problem—and that was smoke, smoke and the danger of suffocation. The wind drove the smoke in a blanket, sweeping it over the ground and obscuring everything about it. In a minute the air had become a murky blue, and he could scarcely see the flock. Then he felt something soft on his hand, the air became thick as if snow were falling—ashes—the residue of the forest blown by the wind—filigree flakes, each the tracery of the leaf of which it had once been the substance. The flakes came with the wind, scurried about and then rose with the rising whirlwind. Behind him and below him the zoom and boom of new explosions. Never had Jean worked more valiantly and with more need for haste. The old dog was racing along, urging the sheep and filling the air with his barking. Jean had faith in his dog, but he had not the same faith in the flock. A sheep is a tender animal and a foolish one; there was danger that they would succumb to the heat and refuse to go on. But Jean was not driving sheep alone.

The wind shifted suddenly and the sun shot through the smoke. Right before his eyes were three bucks and a dozen does traveling with the pack. At the same instant the gray form of a lynx shot out of the brush, stopped to gaze back at the terror behind it. Foxes, lynxes, rabbits, deer—all a-running, and all fellow comrades in the face of the great peril. Jean was staggering on, hoping to gain the rocky

barren before the fire overtook him. Then came the smoke again, smoke so thick that he could see neither buck nor dog nor bell burro. He only knew that he was moving and that he had not succumbed. Rex was doing the work now—all of it. Jean was following, faltering along with his stick and talking incoherently. After that all was a blur—a nightmare of smoke, burning eyes, and near suffocation.

Then the wind shifted again; the sun shone through and the air cleared; and with the supply of untainted oxygen to replenish his lungs Jean came to himself. He looked back and ahead of him to get his bearings. He was on a new ridge—one that he did not know and he could not understand just how he had got there. The dog was still driving the flock and he still had the same assortment. As far as he could see behind him, the world was a roaring inferno. The fire had not reached him, but it was coming on with the same speed as before. It was the wind that had saved him by giving him a respite from the torture of smoke. The flock was covered with ashes, moving along over the gray ground. Jean had the terror to thank for that, because it had kept the flock moving. The dog was driving the strangest combination that ever was seen, but Rex had no grudge even for the wild cat. They were heading up a long ridge that led toward the snow, but Jean knew that they could not reach it. The snow was thirty miles away and that was too far. He could not go back; and he could not stand still. And so he moved along.

It was late afternoon now, the sun was shining above the fire like a great crimson disk. Soon night would come, but even night would bring no relief. He was getting thirsty and he knew that the flock could not stand the heat and the thirst much longer. They must have water, and water was a thing that was not to be had. Jean began thinking

about Squirrel Lake and the welcome shelter on its banks. Anyway there would be water there. If he only had a lake. A lake! A lake! If he only had a lake!

Suddenly he let up a shout. He whistled and began yelling at the dog. He noticed that the ridge that he was on had come to the base of a barren peak, and that there was another ridge that sprang off at another angle and was born of the same mountain. He remembered being on that peak several years before; it was not his own territory but he knew enough of it to take encouragement. If it was the peak that he had in mind, there would be a lake—Deer Lake—up on the summit. The lake was six miles long and there was a narrow peninsula—everything that he wished all made to order. The old man turned his eyes to the sky and breathed a prayer to *le bon Dieu*.

"Always it is so!" he said. "When Jean gets in trouble and don't know w'at to do, *le bon Dieu* he makes him fool, and does it for him. Jean knows nothing, and *le bon Dieu* leads him to ze place. And zat dog she do ze work. *Ou la la*. Now we climb ze mountain."

But there was something that Jean had not seen. Just as he came to the base of the peak, another form shot out of the brush on the other ridge. Like Jean and the flock, the form was hitting for the mountain. It was a man, staggering, weary, bloody, and torn. He was in the last stages of his flight. Twice he fell and then stood up again. A pine tree behind him had exploded and was flashing to the sky. The roar seemed to stun him. He wheeled about and threw up his hands; then he started running. But that run was the last thing that he had left. He reeled drunkenly, went limp, and fell. Still Jean did not see.

The dog did. And old Rex had been taught above all things to save a man. Jean was shouting orders, and waving

his hands; but the dog had stopped, straightened, and was looking back at Jean la Jennette. Then he looked at the man. The man was not two hundred feet away. Between the dog and Jean la Jennette there was the bond of sympathy. The dog barked sharply. Then with a dozen bounds he was beside the stranger.

"Now w'at? Zat dog, she's sees someth'ing for sure. She's—*Ou la la!*"—and he came a-running.

Jean had watched the dog and saw him stop. The man was lying face down on a rocky point. The dog was lapping his face. Then he barked again and as Jean came up began to whirl his stub tail.

All in a moment Jean knew what had happened and knew just what to do. The man was burned, torn, and disfigured. Jean was a small man with sinews of iron. Without a word he stooped and shifted the limp form to his shoulders. He was just in time. The fire had struck the narrow summit of the ridge and was sweeping across. Jean staggered under his heavy burden and ran for it, his knees wobbling and every muscle straining under the load.

"*Ou la,*" he shouted to the dog as he ran. "*Ou la*. Whillist!"

And the dog was before him, rounding the flock. Up the steep, barren hillsides they went—the dog working the pack and the man grunting with his load. The fire had hit both ridges and had added to the inferno, but on that barren peak they were safe. Only a question of minutes and speed! Up they went—men—flock—dog—and donkey and animals of the wild. Half-way up Jean stopped to rest and to look at what they had left behind them. He had had the closest escape of his life and once again *le bon Dieu* had led him to safety. Jean did not forget to give his prayer of thanks.

From then on the work was easier. He called the burro back and placed

the man over the canvas pack. While Rex ran the flock, he walked beside the burro to guide him up the mountain. A half hour later Jean la Jennette was looking down into the clear waters of Deer Lake. The flock was going along easily and the dog was bringing up the rear. Jean stopped just long enough for water; and then he headed straight for that peninsula. If the worst came to the worst, he knew that he could back fire, and there was room enough on that neck of land for ten thousand sheep.

Next day Jean set his back fire. This time he had a man to help him. During the night the fire had swung around the bald peak and come on toward the lake, but as the lake was three miles wide and the neck held ample room, there was nothing to fear. The man was still telling about his escape.

"I don't know how you found me or anything about it," he said, "but as you say, I guess I'll have to thank that dog. That fire came on me before I knew a thing. I just heard a pop, and all the world was blazing. Then I ran, and ran, and ran. Sometimes it caught me and hemmed me in, but each time I

made the gantlet and got away. The last I remember was seeing that bald point. But I did not see you. There was an explosion behind me when that tree went up, and that was all. You say the dog found me. Well, we've got to thank the dog. I didn't know a thing until I came to on that donkey. Funny, isn't it? Looks just as though God had brought me straight to that dog as a lesson for not caring for dumb animals."

"*Oui, oui*, Mr. Perkins," said Jean la Jennette. "*Le bon Dieu* takes care of ze animal and he takes care of ze fool. Mebbe that's why he takes care of Jean la Jennette.

Two weeks later searching parties came through looking for the real estate man and Jean la Jennette. The rest of the Perkins' party had been on the leeward side of the fire and made their escape, but they were not so sure of their comrade. They found the city man and Jean fast friends. And Perkins was petting the dog.

"Say," he said to Bob Arnold, when he told his story. "I guess he's worth fifty cents, anyway."

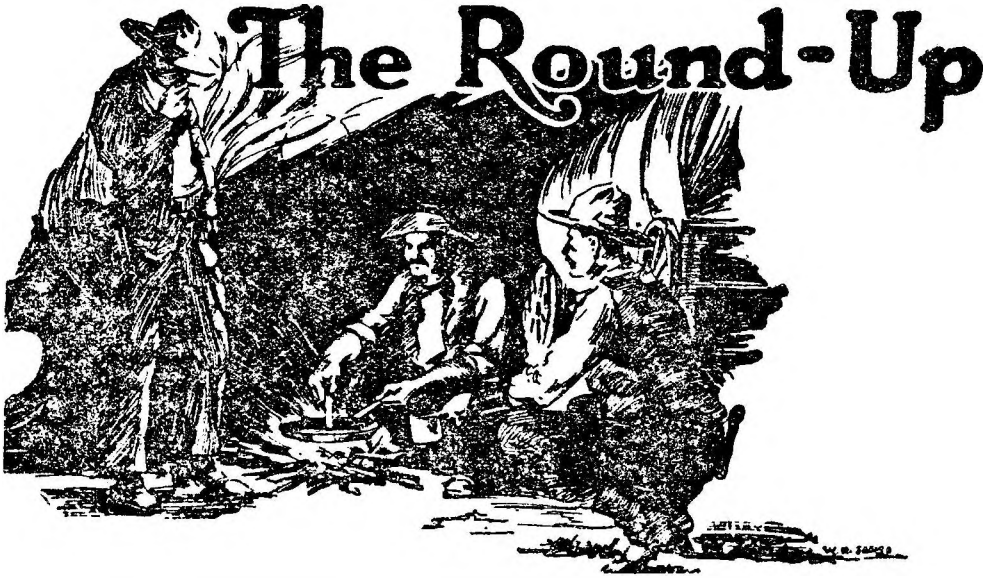
And he winked his eye.



NEVADA CLOUDBURSTS ENDANGER MOTORISTS

DURING the summer vacation season, tourists traveling through Nevada by motor car, have found the frequent cloudbursts a serious menace. These cloudbursts wrought considerable damage to the highways throughout Nevada, washing out long sections of dirt and graveled roads.

Warnings were issued to tourists by the Nevada Automobile Association, advising them of the precautions that should be taken when traveling regions subject to cloudbursts. They were advised to avoid cañons and low-lying sections of the desert and to seek high ground at the first indications of rain. To persons unfamiliar with the desert, the fury of a real cloudburst is a revelation. The heavy clouds seemingly dissolve into vast waterspouts, pouring floods of water on hills and into cañons. Dry gulches turn to foaming torrents in a few moments, while the arid desert waste becomes a marsh of clogging mud. A motorist fairly caught in a cañon by a real cloudburst is almost certain to lose his car, and possibly his life. Many narrow escapes were reported during the summer, on the part of motor tourists, and scores of cars were badly damaged.



COME two folks as is seekin' information. First we listen to Forest Brenton, Missoula. Was Forest "secin' things" or did he *see* something. Ask 'em, Forest.

"**BOSS AND FOLKS:** Is there any of you old cow hands or prospectors who has ever seen a prairie dog lion? If there is, I wish you would tell about it, as it would relieve me of much anxiety as to whether or not I was seeing things once.

"I was over in the eastern part of Montana, visiting a cousin last year, and we had both attended a dance in town about three miles from the ranch. My cousin got lit up and couldn't ride home, so I got his horse taken care of, and put him to bed at a hotel, and came on home alone, as there were cows to milk.

"It was just turning daylight in the east when I was passing through a prairie dog town. I was about half asleep and the horse was pokin' along kind of dejected like, when all at once he stopped short and snorted, and showed signs of getting panicky. I looks around to see what disturbed him,

and there not fifty yards away stood a midget African lion. It was about the size of a bulldog and very heavy limbed. When it saw me turned around, it loped off and got hid somewhere in the sagebrush. I tried to find it, but never saw hide nor hair of it again, though I hunted for an hour. I told about it next day, but no one believed me. They said I was probably under the influence of moonshine likker. I wasn't though, for I hadn't touched a drop all night. Even at that it worries me considerable when I think about it.

"Can any of you ease my mind any?"

Now, here's one, we guess, that can only be answered by old-timers of the section spoken of by F. Andrew Proctor, 707 Munroe Avenue, Asbury Park, New Jersey. Then hark ye, then, old uns, and kindly speak up a little. F. Andrew, as some of us grays and balds be a mite hard of hearin'.

"**BOSS AND FOLKS:** I wonder if you can give me any information on this matter. Many years back, there was a stage line—Butterfield Stages—between Yuma, Arizona, and San Bernardino,

California. Was this line ever held up near a place then called Dos Palmas—now Palm Springs—and robbed of sixty-five thousand dollars in gold?

"If you can tell me of any way of finding out about this, I will be greatly obliged to you."

Here is a kind word for the author of many of our short stories and for a famous character of his creation. S. Joyce, Katonah, New York, will do the praisin':

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I'm so interested in R. O. Case's story, 'Lonesome and Windy,' that I make sure not to miss it one time. Your writers are all good, but 'Lonesome and Windy' can't be beat."

This reader, Thomas Blackshere, St. Albans, West Virginia, wants more about Peg Leg. He says:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I am a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and I want to know what is the matter with F. R. Buckley that he doesn't write any Peg Leg Garfield stories any more. Just you tell that gent if he don't kick in with some more stories, I am going gunning for him. I don't see why some folks don't like those stories. That is no reason why he can't write any more. Now, I like them, and I would sure like to see some more right away. You tell that man I will love him like a brother if he will write another story like 'The Sage Hen' or 'Vast Jack.' I hope to see this is in the Round-up soon. Some

of those guys that have been talking about my pet author can get an earful."

Jest bought a short Peg Leg from Buckley the other day. You all will be readin' it soon. Think we've got the young man started writin' about the old one again. He has promised to get right busy, and keep at it.

Here's some more information, and it's interestin', too. Jimmy Cline, him as hails from Vancouver, Washington, is goin' to give it to us:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: I'm on a new range here, seeing as this is the first time that I've written my little say-so to the Round-up. I was just reading what one of the gang had to say about snakes. I like to study reptiles, especially the rattler. They have several peculiarities. First, when a rattlesnake is first born, it contains as much poison as it will any time in its life. Second, they can live comfortably by feeding once in three months. Third, the average life of one in captivity is only about six months, while if they are left alone they will sometimes live to be fifteen or sixteen years old. It's hard to tell the age of a rattler. It is usually thought that you can tell by the number of rattlers, but this is not so, because they get a new rattler every time they shed their skin. And a snake will sometimes shed its skin as many as three or four times a year, according to how hot it is. Well, gang, I'd better ring off and give somebody else a chance.

"So long. See you come grass."

BIG LUMBER DEAL IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

A RECENT report from Vancouver, British Columbia, records the outright purchase by the Campbell River Company of all the holdings and equipment of the James Logging Company of Vancouver. The Campbell River Company is also said to be negotiating for the purchase of the Empire Lumber Company on Vancouver Island. The James Logging Company deal is said to involve more than five million dollars.



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*.

MOST time to be counting up our blessings so's to give thanks for 'em when the great day arrives. In fact, the Owl and I have already been taking stock of ours and have unanimously decided that we've an awful lot to be thankful for, he being adviser-in-chief and I being post-mistress to such a fine Gang. We hope all of you are able to include among your blessings a lot of good pen friends. Come to think of it, wouldn't it be a mighty good idea to surprise each one of those correspondents of yours with a real cheery Thanksgiving letter? I know it would be appreciated.

And now to our duties.

DEAR GANG ALL: Would like to say a few words for the benefit of those with small means who wish to come West. It sure can be did, as we did it, my wife and I and two kiddies, in our little flivver. It is uphill going, though; you must look for discomforts and have the courage to overcome them.

We left Lansing, Michigan, on the 4th of August, 1924, with our car heavily loaded, and about eighty-five dollars; we landed here in Hamilton, Montana, on the 20th of the same month with less than five dollars. They told us we could not find any work here, but I did. I worked in the hay fields, threshing,

then got a job in a sawmill and lumber camp. We pulled through the winter; now I am working on a ranch and milking from nine to eleven cows twice a day. We are saving a little road stake to carry us further south, where we expect to find more work and a drier climate.

If any one wants to know more about our trip and the country we came through I will be glad to hear from him. R. H. COOK.

Care of *The Tree*.

LADY OF THE HOLLOW TREE: Your department in the good old WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE I have enjoyed so much that I am tempted to horn in with a few lines.

If any one would care for information about the ranch life, lumber industries, or mining projects of this wonderful State of Montana, I would be only too glad to furnish what information I have gained by first-hand experience.

I would particularly like to exchange letters or post cards with World War vets. I served with the Ninetieth Division in France and took a post-graduate course of one year with the A. E. F. in Siberia, so naturally letters from veterans of either A. E. F. would be warmly welcomed. I am prepared to answer all letters, however.

BERT EVAN SMITH.

819 South Fourth Street, West, Missoula, Mont.

GREETINGS: I am a Southern girl, twenty years of age. The boys and girls of my

acquaintance say I am cold and indifferent and accuse me of taking life too seriously. They are wrong, for I am a fun-loving girl and have had my share of good times, such as they are to-day—dances, parties, swimming, theaters, and motoring. Still they don't satisfy. I am lonely and unhappy and yearn for the West and the great outdoors where one can make friendships with people such as only the West can produce.

COLLEEN.

Care of The Tree

A Missouri Gangster wants to tell us a bit about his State.

DEAR FELLOW: Missouri is one of the most varied of all the Western States as to soil, products, climate, and surface. It is two hundred and sixty-five miles long and one hundred and forty-five miles broad. The part north of the Missouri River is either level or gently rolling, except in the vicinity of the hills along the smaller streams. In the southern part the State is broken and rugged; there are a number of detached elevations from five hundred to one thousand feet high and two mountain ranges: the Iron Mountains and the Ozarks. Along the Mississippi River, which forms the eastern boundary of the State, are wide bottom lands, lakes, lagoons, islands, and cypress swamps. The Missouri River forms the western boundary of Missouri for about two hundred miles, then crosses the State to the Mississippi.

There are some lovely caverns and underground lakes and streams in Missouri, also valuable salines, sulphur, and other springs. About one third of the State is covered by coal fields, and soil in the other parts is very fertile.

Sunflowers are very numerous in Missouri. There is a legend to the effect that when the leaders of the Mormons went from this State to find another place to settle they sowed sunflower seeds along their path, so that when the people followed them the next year they found a Sunflower Trail marked out for them.

THE MISSOURIAN.

Care of The Tree.

Sylvia Immel, 807 Van Buren Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is eighteen and very much interested in aviation. Will girls who share her interest write her?

Two Scotch Gangsters, John Condon, 8 Grace Drive, Linthouse, Glasgow, and Angus McFarlane, 203 Lang-

lands Road, Govan, Glasgow, want American pen friends. Both are eighteen, enthusiastic about outdoor sports, and have views of their country to exchange for some of the U. S. A.

I guess I'm a bit different from the rest of the bunch, inasmuch as I never rode a horse, never shot a gun other than a .22 rifle, and never expect to go in the cowpunching business. I'm just a Southerner with a fund of knowledge about the South and its customs from the Civil War to date.

Address A. B. Wyndham, 301 Jackson Bldg., Birmingham, Alabama, brothers.

"I am a gob in the United States Navy, but when my time is up I am thinking of starting a home of my own. Will somebody give me information about homesteading?" asks H. E. G., in care of The Tree.



"I am only sorry that I did not send for a badge before. Am so glad to know that now I belong to one of the finest, cleanest Gangs in the world," says Aubrey V. Holder, Cristobal, Canal Zone.

Are you known as one of us?

Twenty-five cents in stamps or coin sent to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, will bring you either the button style for your coat lapel, or a pin. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

If you want to know about hunting and trapping in the foothills of the Adirondacks, write John M. Shattuck, Hill Brook Farm, Hague, New York.

"I am looking for a jolly buddy, a real pal who would stick through thick and thin, to travel all over this grand country of ours," says Walter Etter, 1555 Baymiller Street, Cincinnati, Ohio. "I am twenty years old, love

to travel, am also fond of music; I play the clarinet."

All about Utah, folks. Just listen:

HELLO, GANG: Haven't seen much in The Tree about my State, so here goes. It was named for the Ute or Utah tribe of Indians, and the word means "highlander." Agriculture is the chief industry, and principal farming sections are in the Salt Lake Valley and Cache Valley in the north central part of the State. Hay, wheat, oats, and potatoes are raised, also large quantities of sugar beets are grown on irrigated soil. In the southern counties, figs, lemons, almonds, and raisin grapes are found.

The Great Salt Lake in Utah is the largest lake of salt water in the United States; it is eighty miles long and thirty miles wide and has no outlet. Four barrels of its water will yield almost a barrel of salt. This lake was discovered by Jim Bridger, the famous scout, in 1824.

Utah has a healthful and invigorating climate. It's pretty hot in the southwest in summer, but in the mountains it freezes almost every night in the year.

There are extensive coal deposits in the State; copper and lead, though, are the chief metals. There is an important rock-salt district at Salsduro, beyond the Oquirrh Mountains. Here there is an immense salt bed sixty miles long which is cut into squares by grooving machines hauled by six-ton motor trucks. After the blocks have been cut out they are sawed into a marketable size.

The State has lots of beautiful scenery, cañons, cliffs, waterfalls, and deserts. In the White or Bridge Cañon are three wonderful natural bridges: the Nonnezoshi, the Edwin,

and the Augusta Sandstone. Well, I guess that's all for this time.

UTAH GIRL.

Care of The Tree.

Van V. Vanhlerlin, R. D. 3, Pleasantville, Pennsylvania, says his mail box will hold a lot of letters and all will be answered.

"May a lonesome farm girl drop a note in The Tree? I live on a hundred acre place and do love the life, but get a bit lonesome sometimes. Will girls about fourteen write Aline Linville, Utica, Oklahoma?"

Wencel L. Strouf, Jr., likes hunting, fishing and camping. He's a moving picture operator and wants letters from others who follow this work. His address is P. O. Box 364, Hopewell, Virginia.

"I would like to hear from some of the Gang. I was born in eastern South Dakota and when I was twenty-one took a homestead in the western part of the State; I am forty years old now," says P. O. Torkildson, Lake City, South Dakota.

Rodolph Gilmore, 176 West Madison Avenue, Dumont, New Jersey, will supply information about New York City or northeastern New Jersey. He's seventeen, interested in hunting, fishing, boating, horseback riding, and outdoor life in general.

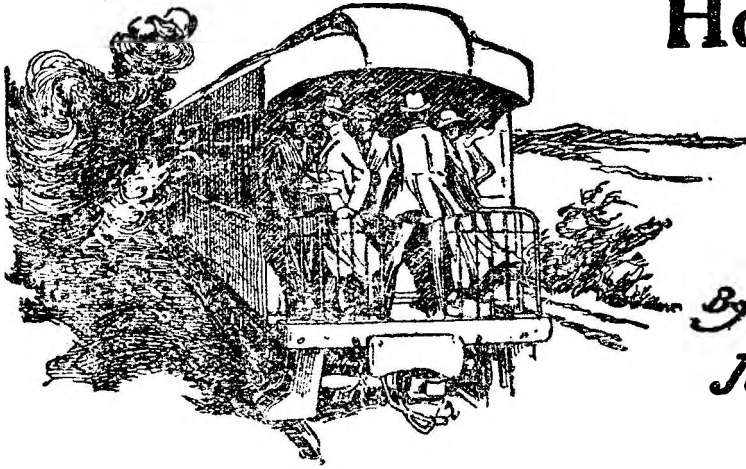
TRIES HUNTING BIG GAME BY AUTO

AN unusual encounter with a bear was the experience some weeks ago of L. D. Gaines, driver of an oil truck, as he was going along the Rimrock Road in the Cascade Mountains, east of Yakima, Washington.

When Gaines first saw the bear, it was limping along the highway ahead of his truck. Gaines speeded up and, overtaking the bear, forced it toward the rocks at one edge of the road. This apparently annoyed the huge animal, for he turned suddenly and sprang onto the hood of the truck. He could not keep his foothold, however, and skidded off, falling under the wheels.

After its fall the bear lay still, and Gaines, thinking it dead, descended from his driving seat and, approaching, seized the animal by the ear. Mr. Bear was only dazed and, on being touched, immediately sprang up with an angry growl. Gaines decided to let the animal alone and made a mad dash for his truck again, somewhat lowered in dignity and torn of trouser-leg, but otherwise uninjured. The bear disappeared up a cañon. Gaines is cured of wanting to hunt big game with his motor truck. He will leave that kind of sport to others hereafter.

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.

WORKING IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS

MANY letters come to me from readers who have followed up the articles in this department on the national forests, asking all sorts of questions regarding jobs in the forests, how to get them, what they are, how to become a forester, or a ranger, or a tree planter, or simply a helper of any kind, anything, in fact, that will land them within the boundaries of one of our national forests.

From some of these letters I glean that the writers think a life in the forest must be just one round of vacation, that the forest worker spends his days walking around enjoying the magnificent scenery, or sitting in the shade of thickly growing trees, or skimming over the waterways in a light canoe, mingling with this employment occasional chats with the campers and motorists who pass through his domain, answering their questions courteously, and making a "hit" with everybody.

Quite a number of my correspondents are young fellow who are tired of the confinement of city offices, or shops,

or factories, some of them have developed lung trouble and have been advised to get out into the open, and think that an easy job in a forest would be just the thing to help them along. For the benefit of these I will say right now that the forest is no place for the weakling. It needs strong men with clear heads and healthy bodies, for the work is strenuous and continuous, hardships and dangers are not uncommon, and mental and physical qualities of a high order are necessary for the successful accomplishment of this work.

With the increasing development of the national forests as playgrounds and recreation centers of the people, more trails and telephone lines have to be built, camping sites laid out, motor roads kept in repair, and many other improvements made, all of which give employment to men who are familiar with the kind of work required. This also adds to the worries of the ranger, as visitors are apt to be careless with cigarettes and matches, and sometimes forget to put out their fires when they

leave. He has to keep a constant watch for that great enemy of the forest—fire!

One anxious young man writes to me, "How do the men who work in Uncle Sam's forests land their jobs? Please tell me as I would like to join the forest forces."

In the first place it must be borne in mind that our Uncle Sam is a hard guy to please. He is not by any means the easy mark that some people depict him, and he insists that all permanent positions in the forest service be filled through selections from eligible applicants who have been certified by the civil service commission, and by promotion in rank.

Each national forest is in charge of a forest supervisor, who plans the work on his forest under the instructions of the district officer, and supervises its execution. When the amount of business warrants it, he is assisted by a deputy supervisor.

These men have to be experienced in woods work, in road and trail building, the stock business, and in all other lines of work carried on in the national forests; so the positions are always filled by the promotion or transfer of experienced men from classified positions in the forest service.

It is not easy to get temporary positions as there is a big demand for them, the supply of applicants usually being far in excess of the demand. These should be applied for personally, well in advance of the summer season, the necessity at this time being for forest guards who are appointed temporarily during the time of greatest fire danger. Preference for these jobs is given to the men on the ground who know the country in which they are to work, the routes of travel along the forest trails, and the rudiments of fire fighting. There is always a chance here, however, for the tenderfoot, as many hands are necessary when fire breaks out.

The more technical jobs of the forest begin with the grades of junior forester and junior range examiner. A college course in forestry is essential in order to make oneself eligible for these positions. It is almost impossible for a man to acquire the necessary technical knowledge without this.

An important point about the position of forest ranger is that the law requires that rangers be selected, when practicable, from qualified citizens of the State in which the work lies. On this account the Civil Service commission holds the examination only in those States in which national forests are situated, and usually at the forest headquarters, where forest officers are available to act as examiners.

Those who become rangers are generally men who have had experience in similar lines of work, such as timber estimating, managing live stock on the range, surveying, and an extensive knowledge of the woods. Most of these men depend on the knowledge they have acquired from experience when entering for the ranger examination, rather than on any special preparation, as it is one in which experience counts most, being a thoroughly practical test that brings out all that the applicant knows about the sort of work a ranger is expected to do. This examination is held late in October of each year, and the certificates of eligibles are furnished by the civil service commission early in spring for use in filling vacancies during the field season.

I hope that these facts will answer a number of letters asking information on the subject, some of which give no address and are too numerous to answer through the department, especially as most of them ask practically the same question as the one I have quoted at the beginning of this article: "How do the men who work in Uncle Sam's forests land their jobs?"

MISSING

This department is conducted in both WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE and DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, it 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.

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.

KAGNS, L. D.—Things have developed as a I predicted, Larry, and I need you now. Please write to Your Little Kentucky Girl, care of this magazine.

WILKEY, R. J. (deceased).—Any one knowing any relatives or intimate acquaintances of this man please write to his son, Ben Wilkey, 1605 River St., Waco, Tex., as he is anxious to learn about his mother, whom he has not seen in many years.

McMAHON, J. G.—I understand and forgive all. Freddie is sick, and F. J. refuses to help me. Please come back to your wife, Peckie.

JORDON, A. L., was in Harlan, Ky., in 1920, and has not been heard from since. He is five feet eleven inches tall, weighs about one hundred and ninety pounds, has brown hair, blue eyes, and is thirty-one years old. Any one knowing his present address please write to his stepdaughter, Mrs. E. M. Barnes, Rt. 3, Quinton, Ala.

COOPER, JAMES M., left Cordova, Ala., with his father in 1898, and has never communicated with his friends or relatives since. His mother is dead. Any news about him will be gratefully received by his sister, Mrs. E. M. Barnes, Rt. 3, Quinton, Ala.

FULLER, C. B.—Please write to Mrs. J. M. Stroud, 72 Haywood St., Asheville, N. C., as she has some news for you.

HILL, ROBT., joined the navy two years ago, but was released because of being under age, and went to Tampa, Fla., with a man supposedly his uncle. He is fifteen years old now, five feet eleven inches tall, weighs one hundred and forty pounds, has red hair, and a freckled complexion. Any one knowing him please write to R. H. T., care of this magazine.

JIM or BUD.—We are all waiting for you to come back. You will learn some very good news, by writing to Annette, 263 E. 4th St., Pomona, Calif.

BATES, HERCHELL, of Rushville, Ind., has not been heard from since he started out to Nevada. Walter Harris, 230 W. Abriendo Ave., Pueblo, Colo., will be grateful for any information.

HOOKER, ERNEST, when last heard of was working for the Rainier Bottling Works, San Francisco, Calif. He is thirty years old. O. J. Noble, White Swan, Wash., wants to hear from or about him.

HORNICK, ALBERT J., formerly of the medical corps, stationed at Schofield Bks., Hawaii. Any one knowing his address at this time please write to "Sis," care of this magazine.

REED, JIM.—Born in Springfield, Ky. He left there, with his wife and three children, twenty-three years ago. A half brother, Earl Reed, Springfield, Ky., would like very much to hear from him.

ASHWOOD, CHARLES.—Your son will join you, if you will write to your wife, Mrs. C. A., 1912 South Ave., Syracuse, N. Y.

PARKER.—The parents of Frederick Parker are thought to be living in Morgantown, W. Va. He was placed in an orphan's home in Charleston, W. Va., when very young, and was adopted from there. His name was then changed to Fred McLaughlin. Any one knowing the present address of his parents please write to him at 197 Davis St., Huntington, W. Va.

RICE, JACK.—Fifteen years ago he worked as telegraph operator for the C. & E. Railroad Company, at Cridersville, Ohio, but his friends have heard nothing from him since that time. Clyde Ransbottom, Lawrenceville, Ill., will be thankful for any news about him.

BIRD, GEORGE WESLEY.—Please write. I am sick and Elza needs you. Cora.

WILSON, GEORGE., was living in Columbus, Ga., when last heard from. His pal, "Snappy," would like him to write, care of this magazine.

BISHOP, JOHN K., left Pawnee, Okla., about twenty years ago. Edwin Bishop, Bartlesville, Okla., will consider it a favor if any of the present acquaintances of his dad will please write.

QUATZER.—We are all well. Living at the same address. Know when you see this, you will understand. Lila.

BROPHY, Mr. and Mrs. BERNARD. are thought to have settled in St. Paul, Minn., after having left Fort Arthur, Can., about two years ago. Any information from or about them will be welcomed by Mrs. Verne Wilson, 109 Penfold St., Port Arthur, Ont., Can.

LANE, HARRY E., was discharged from the 58th Balloon Co., at Riverside, Calif., on March 31, 1920. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please notify Jos. P. Brown, Box 292, Napa, Calif.

KUHNE, ANNA or JOHN.—One of the relatives of Mr. Kuhne is very anxious for some word from him or from his wife, whose name was Miller. Please write to J. K., care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, HORACE KELLY.—He is seventeen, though his appearance is older, is five feet five inches tall, weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds, has brown eyes, black hair, and dark complexion. On April 24, 1925, he received his army discharge at Ft. Bliss, Tex., but no one has heard from him since. His grandmother, Mrs. E. F. Camp, Rt. 1, Baultie, Ark., will be grateful for any information.

A. R. P.—Please write to Stanley, at Clark, S. D., or address me at La Lima, Honduras. C. L. P.

GODMARE, NOAH or JIM. has been missing from his home for fourteen years, and his daughter, Mrs. Frank Anstett, 210 N. 5th Ave., W., Duluth, Minn., is very anxious to find him. He is five feet seven inches tall, of florid complexion, seventy years old, and has curly black hair, marked with gray.

BILL.—Eleanor is better. Please communicate with me at once. Joe Emmeno, 320 Hollis St., Framingham, Mass.

GEORGE, VIOLA, LOTTIE, DORIS, and DELBERT.—Their last-known address was Newton, N. H. Their sister, Mrs. Verda S. Hyder, 37 Green Hill Pkway, Worcester, Mass., wants to hear from them.

PICKARD, ROBERT V., was last heard of in Pittsfield, Mass. He is nineteen years old, six feet tall, has red hair, and his right arm is deformed. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated by Joe Kitchen, 228 Cliff St., Battle Creek, Mich.

CRACKER.—Important that I hear from you immediately. Jim, Box 643, Rock Springs, Wyo.

WARD, JOHN.—It is thought that when he left his home in El Paso, Tex., he moved to Arizona, although the name of the city in this State is unknown. Any one knowing his present address please write to Linville Howard, 809 S. Lee St., Oklahoma City, Okla.

SANFORD, H. B.—Patsy was sick one month, and died July 2, 1925. G. W. St., Gen. Del., St. Louis, Mo.

STOFFEL, MARY, formerly of Ratton, N. M., was last heard from when in Denver, Colo. Any one knowing her present address please write to Ed. John M. Wood, Co. H, 10th Inf., Camp Knox, Ky.

CROCKER, TIMOTHY SAMUEL, of Doaktown, N. B., Can.—He is sixty-three years old, over five feet tall, has gray hair, and was of rather heavy build when he left his wife and family twenty-one years ago. They have had no word from him since, although it is thought he lives in Boston, Mass. His wife, Mrs. Christie A. Crocker, Doaktown, N. B., Can., still seeks information about him, and will be grateful for any assistance.

C. R. D.—Am anxious, for Babe's sake, to know what is wrong. Want you to write before it is too late. Your friend, P. C. Y., will give you my address. Baby Gen.

LAMB, CLYDE L., is known to have been located in Houston, Tex., in 1921, but has not been heard from since. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write to his sister, Mrs. Olie Marshall, 1718 Towson Ave., Ft. Smith, Ark.

MEADE, B. B., known as "BRACK," was heard from last, when he was located at Enid, Okla. Any information regarding him or his family will be appreciated by a nephew, Malcolm Taylor, Normal, Ky.

LAFFERTY, OSCAR DAVID, has been gone from home for eight years. He is twenty-six years old, five feet five inches tall, has black hair, brown eyes, and only three fingers on left hand. His mother, Mrs. Emma Reams, Sunfield, Mich., is very homesick and yearns for some news from or about him.

FREEMAN, EMMA, EVA, and WILLIAM FREEMAN COLOR. are thought to be living in Atlanta or Macon, Ga. Any one knowing their address please write to Otis Freeman, care of this magazine.

LAIRD, CARL E., was stationed, in 1918, at Fort Sill, Okla. He is thirty years old, has light hair, blue eyes, and light complexion. His home, originally, was in Colorado, but his family has since moved to Iowa. Any one who can give any information regarding his present whereabouts please write to Mrs. A. S., care of this magazine.

CARSTEN, H. C.—Please write to Harold Dungey, Rt. 3, Box 127, Glendon, Neb.

HOLDER, ALBERT L., left Louisiana, Mo., in June, 1924, and is thought, at this time, to be in Denver, Colo., or Wichita, Kan. He is five feet tall, of light complexion, has blue eyes, brown hair, mixed with gray, and both arms are stumped to the elbows, with tattoo designs. His daughter, Clara Mae Holder Burke, with Gas Co., M. C. E. P., Quantico, Va., will be very glad to receive any information.

GRAY, H. M., has not been heard from since June, 1924, when he was living in Chicago, Ill. Any one knowing where he is now located please write to Mrs. W. O. C., care of this magazine.

DARLING, JACK.—Please write to Alta, 1028 Milwaukee Ave., Bend, Ore.

GALLAGHER, JAMES, left his wife and family, May 22, 1925, and has not communicated with them since. He is thirty years old, five feet nine inches tall, weighs one hundred and fifty-five pounds, has red hair, blue eyes, freckled skin, and his feet are slightly crippled. If he will write to his wife, Mrs. J. G., Gen. Del., Mishawaka, Ind., she agrees to forgive and forget, because she still cares for him and wants him back.

LIGHTCAP, WM. H.—Please come back. Baby has been very sick. We both miss you and need you. Virginia and Junior.

BOYINGTON, SUSIE, when last heard of was living in Quinton, Okla., with her sister, Mrs. John Harp. She is twenty-one years old, and has bobbed black hair. Any one knowing her present address please write to Mrs. Beulah Seton, Jankin, Okla.

KEOWN, CHARLIE P., was stationed at Presidio, Calif., until last July, when he was transferred to the Letterman General Hospital, at San Francisco, Calif. Mrs. W. E. Field, 10 S. Mayson Ave., Atlanta, Ga., will be very thankful for any information offered to help find her brother.

DOLLY.—Please write to your sister, Peg, Newton Hospital, Newton Lower Falls, Mass.

ATTENTION.—I have been told that my only living relation, an orphan, but as I doubt how their names connect, advise directly. I can explain, and I will be very grateful for any information which may bring me closer to some of my own people. Allen Britton, Station A, W. Nashville, Tenn.

CLARENCE.—Please come home or write to me at the same address. Mother.

HARLIN, OLIVER F.—Age thirty-two, light complexion, five feet seven inches tall, blue eyes, weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. He served in the marines during the World War, and when last heard of was living on West 85th St., New York City. Any one knowing his present whereabouts please write to his mother, Mrs. Margaret Harlin, Tulsa, Okla.

PATTERSON, CARL.—Mother and I often wonder where you are. Won't you please write to Letha, care of Druggan's Business College, Wichita Falls, Tex.?

COUMAN, Mrs. LAURA MESSER.—She was divorced from John Couman, in Gladstone, Mich., several years ago, giving up guardianship of her two daughters, Ethel and Abigail, at that time, and they have never heard from her since. Any information will be appreciated by her eldest daughter, Mrs. Ethel Couman, Box 31, Strong, Mich.

BOH, Mrs. LEDFORD.—Our baby is wonderful and the replica of you. If you don't want to come back please write once in a while. Betty, Box 161, Billings, Mont.

ESTES, WM. R., left N. Adams, Mass., twelve years ago to go to Middlefield, Conn., but has never written to his people there. His sister, Mrs. Mary J. Burdick, Box 202, N. Adams, Mass., is very anxious to learn his present whereabouts, and will be grateful for any information.

EUGENE.—Letter addressed to you at Columbus, was returned unclaimed. Everything is forgiven. Please come back to your wife and children. Grace, care of Northern State Hospital, Oshkosh, Wis.

TOKAMP, JOHN. Box 481, Cassland, Alta., Can., has not seen his parents since he was a year old and is anxious to find them now. Any one knowing these people please write to the given address.

BURRIS, JAMES WALTER.—He is forty-two years old, five feet eight inches tall, weighs one hundred and sixty pounds, has brown eyes and a dark complexion. He has been away from home a year, and is being sought by his wife. Please write to F. W. Burris, Camden, Tenn.

FREAS, MAURICE.—Have never forgotten you. Have been trying to find you for the past eight years. Please write to Mollie, care of this magazine.

POWER, GRAM.—In October, 1923, he was employed at Camp 17, Fruit Growers' Supply, for the Yosemite Lumber Co., Bilta, Calif., but has not been heard from since. Any information will be heartily welcomed by his mother, Lorena Power, Redwoodville, Tex.

ATTENTION.—The author of "The Years We Waste," published in the May, 1925, issue of the "American World Magazine," is asked to write to M. S., Box 1962, Atlanta, Ga.

WHITMORE, CARL BENNY or WILLIAM. was last seen in Pueblo, Colo. He is eighteen years old, has blond hair, and blue eyes. His mother is brooded over his absence from home and will be thankful for any news from or about him. Mrs. J. A. Chippin, Big Sandy, Wyo.

BEURINGS, A. W.—I am worried about you. Please write to Mabel.

COOPER or DUNCAN, BESSIE.—She is twenty-one years old, five feet seven inches tall, has brown hair and weighs about one hundred and twenty pounds. She was last seen by C. O. Carter, of Minden, La., who is now trying to find her, in Chicago, Ill., in 1922. Any one having information about her, please write to above address.

RUTH B.—Dad and mother promise there will be no trouble if you will come home, or at least write. Address Box 626, Elmhardt, Ia.

ROSECRANS, LESLIE B., or any member of the 358th Aero Squadron, please write to "Buck" Weaver, 38 N. E. 13th St., Miami, Fla.

FRAZIER, HARRY, formerly with Bernice Allen Shows. —He is short, of medium build, and has dark hair. Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please write to B. Willard Colbert, Box N-Radio, U.S.S. Arizona, care of Postmaster, San Francisco, California.

ROGERS, HOWARD B., has been away for seven years, and was last heard from on December 15th, 1923, when he was in Chicago. His sister, Mrs. H. Wapler, Sutter Fort, W. Va., will be glad to receive any news from or about him.

ALKEN, WILLIAM JONES, was last heard of in 1916, from Fort McDowell, California, while serving with Battery A, 2nd Field Artillery. Any one knowing him, or having known him, please communicate with his sister, Mrs. Philip S. Allen, 22 Beach Street, Bristol, Conn.

NILES.—Wherever you are, please write to 101 West Water Street, Okla. N. Y., and you will get my address. Want to see you. Mrs. A. J. T.

McMAHAN, J. G.—I understand and forgive M. Freddie is sick, and I'll refuse to help me. Please get back to your wife. Freddie.

LITTLEWILL, G.B., formerly of Fort Smith, Arkansas, and Keokuk, Indiana. Tall, 4' 10", has blue hair, brown eyes, and dark complexion. During the summer of 1924, he lived in Colorado, but has not been heard from since. His cousin, Mrs. Margaret Stinson, 2720 North 11th Street, Fort Smith, Arkansas, will appreciate any information regarding his present whereabouts.

ROBBINS, MAGGIE, Fred in Quinton, Oklahoma, in August, 1923, her daughter, Nora Birna, of Midland, Tex., wants to hear from her.

VOYLES, GEO. W.—When he was living in Evansville, Indiana, he was a member of the Baptist ministry. Mrs. Retta Roland, Lovington, Illinois, would like news about him.

WRIGHT, JOHN W.—Your father is dead, and your step-mother has returned to Illinois. Please write to your uncle, Wm. Roland, Lovington, Illinois.

DICKS, MARTHA ROGERS, mother of John, Mabel, Maudie, Dickie and Jessie Wright, was last heard of in Denison, Texas, about thirty years ago. Any one knowing the present whereabouts of Mrs. Dicks or her children, please communicate with Mrs. Floyd Thayer, Abilene, Tex.

HOLLINGSWORTH, JOE, of Chicago, Ill.—If this notice should be seen by Joe, or any one knowing his address, please write to D. E. R., care of this magazine, at once.

McLALIN, ANDREW C., was born in the state of Ohio, and had six sisters and six brothers. His daughter, Mrs. Melbaizer, Box 471, Rogers City, Michigan, would like to hear from any member of the family.

MARTIN, EDWARD E.—Your wife has good news for you. Please write to A. Martin, care of this magazine.

WELLS, MARYILDA RAINWATER, has not been heard from since 1914, when she left Greenfield, Illinois, to go to Stanford, Kansas. She is forty-eight years old, light complexioned, has dark gray eyes, dark hair, and weighed about one hundred and forty pounds. Joe L. Wells, Science Hill, Kentucky, will appreciate any information helpful in finding his brother.



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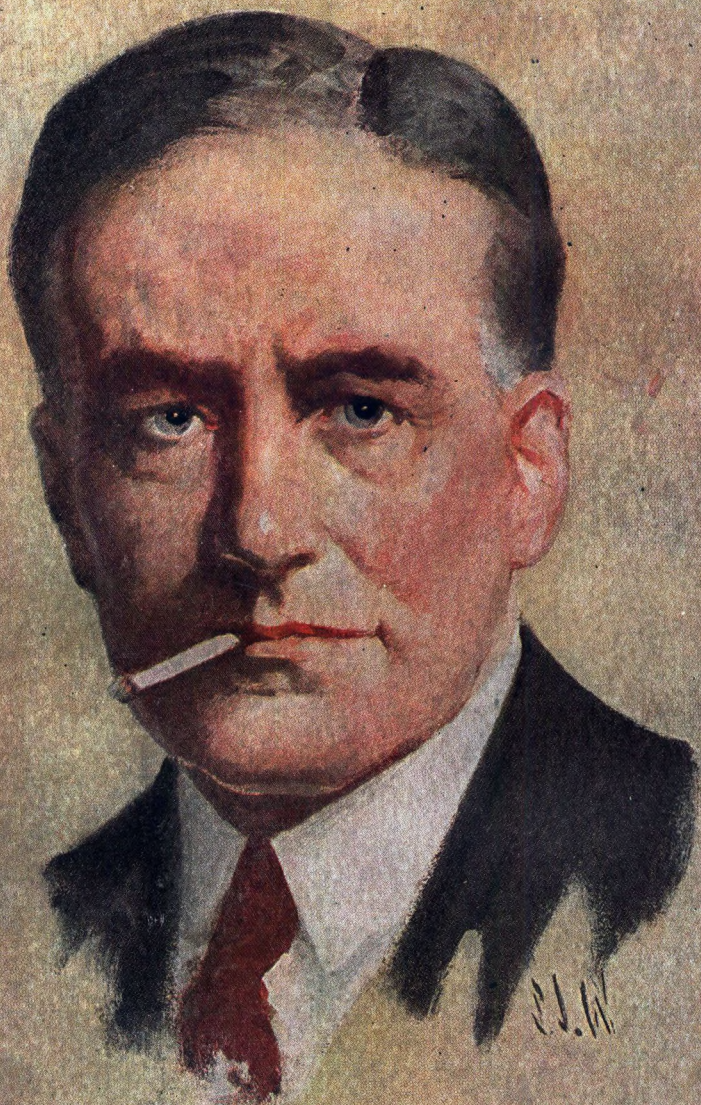
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