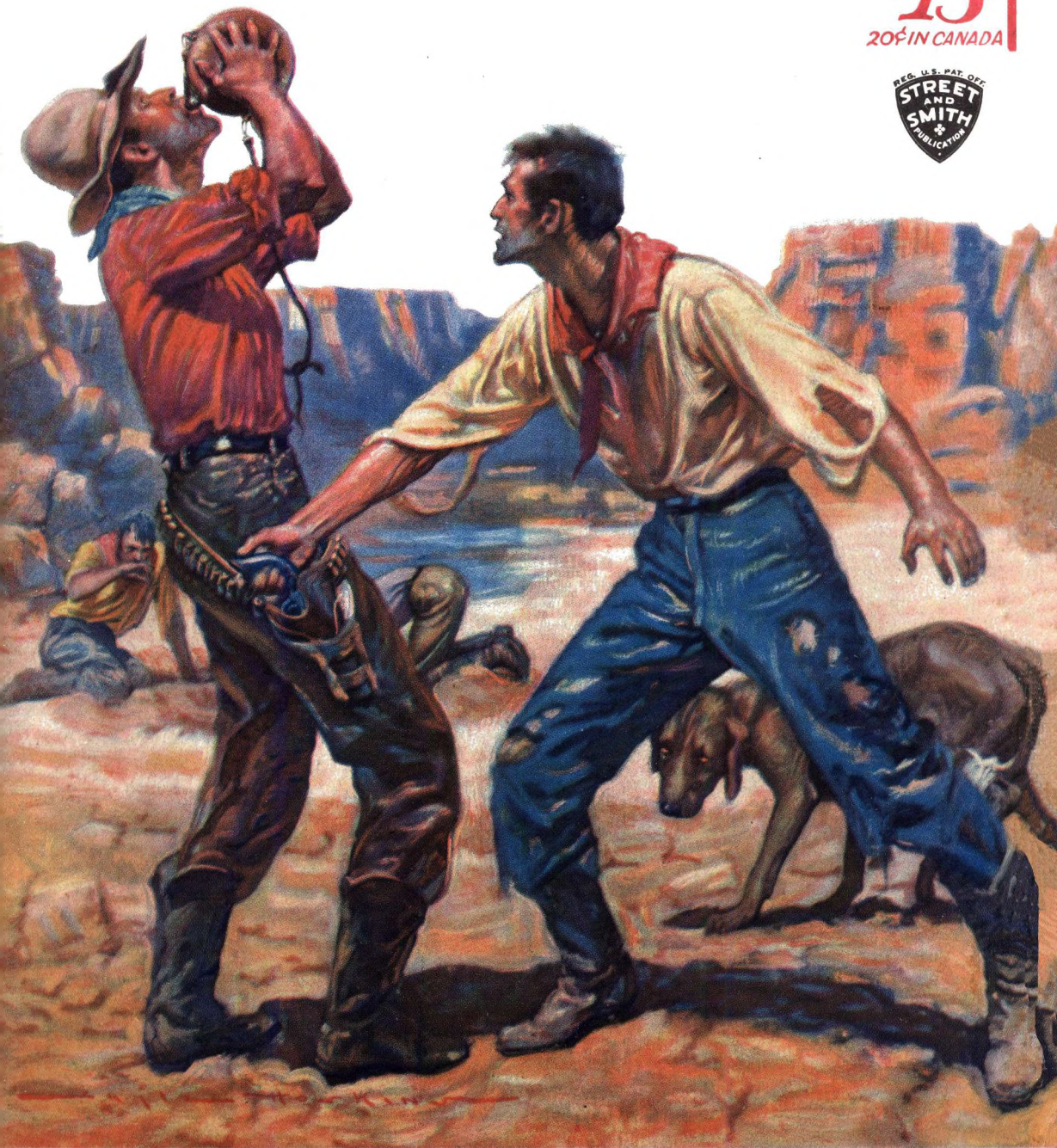


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Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1929, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$7.50. Foreign, \$8.50.

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"LOOK..... he's imitating a pianist!"

.....someone shouted
Then a queer thing happened

JACK had strummed some "Blues" for us on his uke and Nan had just finished her screamingly funny burlesque on the "Kinkajou." We were all set for dancing when—the radio refused to work!

No amount of giggling brought it to life, either. In spite of our best efforts, all we could get from that confounded radio was such desolate howls that the girls begged us to leave the poor old thing alone.

Someone made a half-hearted suggestion of bridge. But Tom had a better plan. Pulling Joe to his feet—good old "sit-in-the-corner" Joe, whom everyone liked to pick on—he cried in a loud voice:

"Just a minute, folks! The party is saved! Joe, here, has kindly offered to enliven the proceedings with a piano solo."

Loud cheering drowned out the rest. This promised to be good—for, as we all knew, Joe couldn't play a note. Naturally we expected him to clown.

Just as he sat down at the piano, Tom called out: "Play 'The Varsity Drag'—that's a hot dance number!"

I couldn't help smiling at the thought of Joe—who had always taken a back seat at our parties—playing "hot" music. Excited whispers came from all parts of the room. "Wonder what he's going to do!" "He doesn't know one note from another!" Suddenly someone shouted:

"Get this! Look—he's imitating a pianist!"

A Queer Thing Happens

Raising his hand melodramatically, Joe waited a moment to command silence.



Then, without any more preliminaries, and to the complete amazement of us all, he struck the first bars of—"The Varsity Drag!"

And how! With all the verve and expression of a professional! No wonder Tom's eyes almost popped out of his head! This wasn't the clowning he had expected Joe to do!

Unable to resist the tantalizing music, couple after couple glided around the floor. When Joe stopped playing, the applause could have been heard around the block—only to be instantly followed by requests for more numbers.

All evening they kept Joe busy at the piano—playing jazz, popular songs, sentimental ballads, even classical stuff—everything the crowd asked for, and they asked for plenty!

How that Joe could play! I was dumbfounded. Why, it was incredible! Joe had always seemed to be a "born wallflower"—he had never displayed any talent for entertaining—yet now... I determined to solve the puzzle. On the way home that night I drew Joe aside and demanded:

"How on earth did you do it?"

He laughed. "Why, it was very easy! I simply took that home-study course in music your cousin told us about..."

"You don't mean that course that was supposed to show you how to play without a teacher, do you?" I interrupted.

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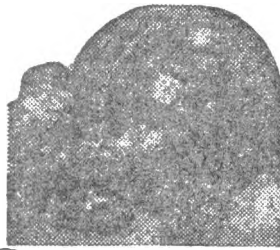
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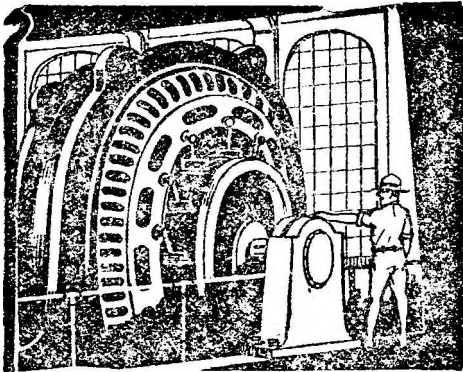
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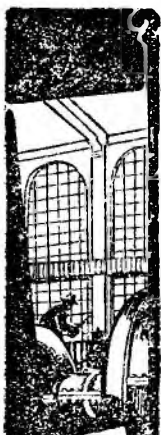
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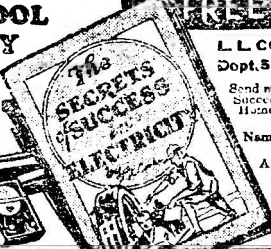


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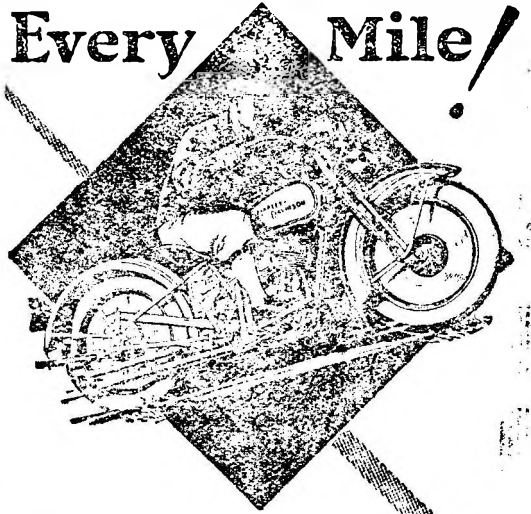
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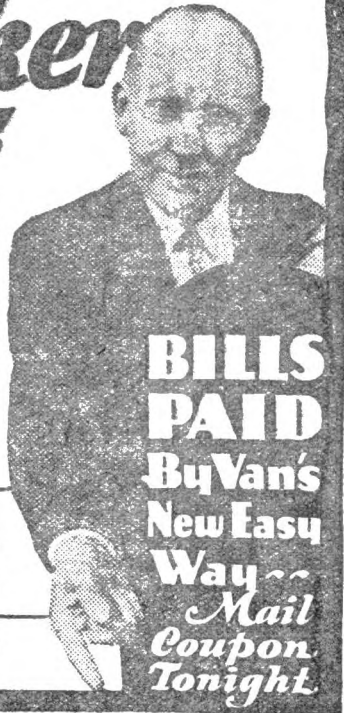
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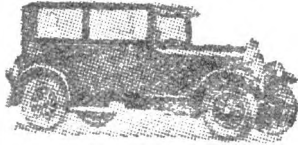
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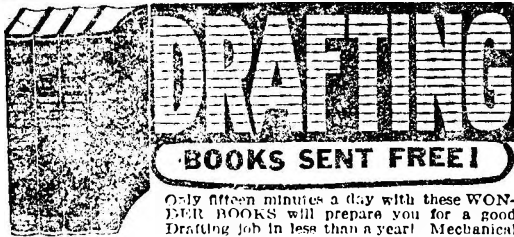
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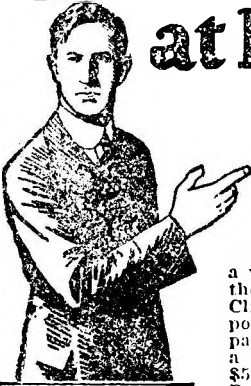
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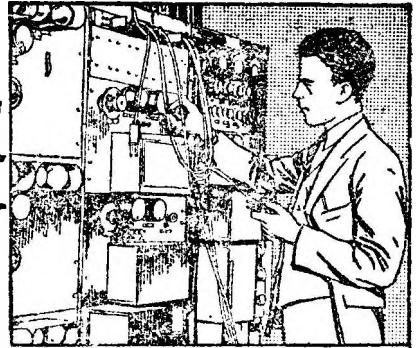
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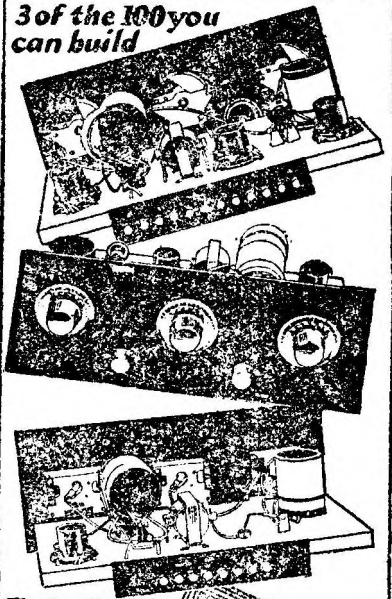
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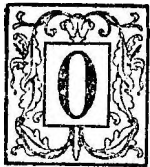
Dry Going

By Kenneth Perkins

Author of "The Pinto Freight," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"HELP ME, PARD!"



ON the outskirts of Pinto Saddle the drama of William Tell was being enacted with certain variations. The forest of the legend was lacking, for there are no trees in Pinto Saddle. The setting was supplied by the acre of tin can dumps, rusty barrel hoops, empty candle boxes, and rattleweed—a miniature sort of "bad lands" which is the not uncommon gateway to many a desert town.

The part of William Tell was taken by a half-breed Chulo boy supported by several saddle-colored brothers, his understudies, all armed with bows and arrows.

The part of the son was taken by a huge mongrel hound, all ribs and raw-boned haunches.

The part of the apple was portrayed by an empty tamale can. The can was tied to the dog's head between his ears, which were hitched up tightly so that he looked more like a giant sage-rabbit than a dog.

But this was no burlesque of the old romance. All the tragedy—if not the nobility—of the original plot was there. The big cur was the picture of utter resignation, patience, misery. Hitched by his neck to a broken-down wagon, he could not escape the pestering arrows. He had turned his back to the assault, tangling his elongated legs in the rope so that he was helplessly trussed up like a sack of wheat. His patchy hide had already been torn in several places by the arrows. Horseflies buzzed around the raw spots, adding to his agony.

The biggest boy of the gang came and yanked him around so that he would face the attack, and the dog looked up to him, his smooth long forehead wrinkling in

an expression of almost human misery. But cur that he was, he evidently abided by the law that a human hand must never be bitten, even though it yanked roughly at a torn ear.

The episode was not unusual in the life of this unhappy canine. Since his birth he had never learned any particularly good reason for existing. As a matter of fact, he had never learned anything very well. He was no good to his master, except as a pet for his boys. No one ever fed him. He had to shift for himself with the goats out in the sand acres where he could lick a sparse living out of can dumps. Once in a while he caught a rabbit. But he had no instinct for this sport. Sage rabbits were hard to catch unless the pursuer kept his mind on the subject. Two or three would pop out just as the dog was about to close in on the one being chased. And the old gangling raw-boned mongrel would start in on a new chase. It was a thankless job.

Then there was the trouble about water. They never gave him water at the tar-papered shack where his master lived. He could not enter corrals where there was a trough. A pelting of buckshot had taught him that. Finally he got the habit of making long journeys into the low mesas where he knew of water holes. Although he could never be used to trail a man or horse by scent, adversity taught him something about smelling out water in the hills. Finally after days of roaming alone in the sagebrush, eager for companionship, he would think of "home" once more. Generally his decision to return to the miseries of Pinto Saddle would be precipitated by a set-to with a coyote. Coyotes, as is well known, will run away from a dog until they get into the hills; then they will turn upon him—and generally lick him. When young, this yellow pariah had—to use a Pinto Saddle term—"been licked a whole lot." Now-

adays any coyote would scare him so that he would not stop running until he crawled panting under the floor of the feed shed in his master's outfit.

Once, goaded by starvation, too weak to chase rabbits, and somewhat bleary-eyed from age as well as lack of food, he had killed a chicken.

And that brought him to his present plight.

"I ain't goin' to waste no buckshot on him," the master said to his half-breed boys. "You kids go out and work him over. Learn him a lesson. Educate him. When he's an educated dog, then finish him with your bows and arrows. Give you good practice."

Their practice was rapidly approaching its grim finale when a stranger came into Pinto Saddle from the desert.

He was a ragged-looking young man with sun-faded eyes and features the color of tanned rawhide. He was leading four mules that were heavily laden with Indian pottery.

When he reached the outskirts of town he was checked by the sight of those four half-breed boys plaguing a dog. He did not seem surprised, for Chulos are not particularly famous for their kindness toward animals. Nevertheless, the sight of the dog tangled in his rope, pestered with flies, tortured from fresh lacerations, sent a shudder through him. His eyes narrowed, a fire began to burn in them. He dismounted from his shaggy, alkali-covered mount, and walked over to the wrecked wagon.

The dog looked up at him and whimpered.

Now most dogs object to a man clothed in rags. Even in a crowded city one may see a dog ignore hundreds of people, but bristle when a tramp passes on the other side of the street. This desert rat was just the sort of character to which nine dogs out of ten would take violent objection.

But the old mongrel looked up, displaying a wide expanse of red-veined,

yellow eyeballs. His forehead wrinkled piteously and he whimpered in the nearest simulation of a human voice that the desert wanderer had ever heard. What he said could not have been clearer, even if he had pronounced the words: "Can't you get me out of this, pard?"

The stranger yelled to the boys: "You varmints line out of here, if you don't want me to give you a good tanning!" He then untangled the mass of legs and bones and torn hide, freeing it from the spokes of the wagon wheel. He went back to his mules, got a can of vaseline which he packed for the sake of his guns, and smeared it over the cur's wounds. The touch of that grease must have been soothing, for the dog turned his grotesque head around, looked up under shaggy brows, and licked the stranger's hand.

But at this point a squat, evil-looking man came out of the shack, shaking his fists, growling oaths.

"What-all do you mean, threatenin' my kids?"

"They were torturing this dog," the stranger said quietly.

"What if they was! That's our business. I told 'em to. He killed a chicken, that cur did. And I'm goin' to shoot him."

"If you were a little younger, hombre, I'd work you over worse'n they worked this dog."

The squat little man was cowed at this. Then he mumbled sulkily: "Well, the dog ain't no good. I was tryin' to learn him somethin'. He eats me outh house and home. Drinks enough water for a mule—and water costs money in this town. Scart to death of coyotes. Lets 'em come right into my chicken yard, and crawls under a stoop and watches 'em. Never so much as barks. Can't learn him nothin'. Ain't got the savvy of a pup."

"Well, I'll take him off your hands," the ragged young man said. "He's a good dog. I like him."

"Oh no, you won't! Not unless you pay for him."

The desert man stared. "Pay for this kind of a dog? What you mean?"

"You can maybe make a watchdog out of him. Out in the desert he'd help you hunt rabbits. Lots of good p'int. See his ears? Hound's ears. His head? A bulldog's head. Kind of an Airedale. He'd fight like murder if any one attacked his master. I'll take three dollars for him."

"Here it is," the other said calmly.

A little later word spread around Pinto Saddle that a very strange character had arrived in town. A ragged young desert rat with a cargo of worthless Hopi jugs had bought Pedro Shanks' dog and paid for it in real money! What his business was they did not know. The nearest they could guess was that he was something of a junkman, a collector of discarded rubbish. Perhaps the desert sun had touched him.

At any rate, they turned out to see the strange cavalcade coming up the street. The ragged, grim youth riding a loop-eared cayuse, with a cargo of jugs, coated thick with white alkali, and that comical-looking excuse for a dog, or lobo, or whatever it was, dragging his lean, scarred legs in an eager attempt to keep up with his new-found master.

CHAPTER II.

PLUMB LOCO!

A TOWN of bad repute was Pinto Saddle. Its inhabitants consisted of Papagos, who raised goats and beans, and a floating population of gamblers, barkeepers, and renegades. Among the latter was a not inconsiderable proportion of rustlers and fugitives from justice who had wandered down from the cattle country to the north.

Prospectors would have avoided the place, except that it was well down in the desert—the last point either going in

or coming out where canned goods, grain, and water could be purchased. Yes, water itself had its price in Pinto Saddle.

Prospectors going through on their way to their diggings in the desert were not molested. But on their way out, when they stopped to outfit themselves for the ninety-mile journey over to the big mesas to the north and civilization, they had to be continually on their guard.

At the general store—the largest shack in town—four men of doubtful-looking respectability were gathered, sitting on barrels and candle boxes, protected from the noonday sun in a house that was more or less public. One was a grizzled little runt with two front teeth missing. His companions were a bad-looking trio: an unshaven, shifty-eyed coyote of a man; a loose-jointed, long-haired tramp, and finally a towering, bullet-headed breed, part Indian, part Spanish. They did not buy anything, for they had no money. They had asked for credit—and been refused. They were in ill humor. They were hungry. They were at outs with the world. But when they saw the new arrival at Pinto Saddle—that desert rat with his jugs and mules, his rat-tailed cayuse, and his unhappy cartoon of a dog—they burst into laughter.

Even the storekeeper, who ordinarily reserved judgment on his customers, laughed.

The stranger came in, smiling genially in answer to their laughter. "Howdy, folks! Glad to get to where there's human beings again. Been down in the desert a long time. Rackham is my name. Howdy." He purchased some canned beef, opened it, and gouged out a handful of meat for his dog.

"What-all do you call that animule?" the storekeeper chuckled.

"Just a dog."

"A what?"

"Bought him from a breed down the

street. Thought I'd like a watchdog on the way over the big mesas."

"What's he goin' to watch?" one of the loiterers—the toothless fellow—asked.

The desert man turned to the speaker and his companions. Then he scratched his head as if not knowing just how to answer.

But another one of the loiterers interrupted:

"You call heem a dog!" he said, grinning. "Santa Maria de Guadalupe!"

"Not much dog left to him, maybe," the desert man said. "His spirit's broken. But I reckon he's a good dog. Took to me right off."

"Kind of recognized each other as soul mates," a third loiterer remarked.

The stranger glanced over the four men seated around him. He seemed remotely to sense the possibility that he was being made fun of. They were comparing him to the dog. He and his dog were derelicts alike. But the fire in his eyes smoldered down after a moment.

"I want to buy some 'airtights'," he said pleasantly. "I'm trailin' out over the big mesas, and it'll take me three days, with the load my mules are toting."

"Just what are they totin'?" the toothless one inquired.

"A collection of Indian jugs."

"Is that the way you pack your water?" the storekeeper asked.

"I don't pack anything in them. They're empty."

"You mean you're crossin' the Big Mesas with a lot of plain, ordinary, empty jugs? Why, you can buy a carload of 'em at any station on the Santa Fe which they sell 'em to tourists that don't savvy no better."

"Not this kind of jugs," the collector said. "They're antiques. You can tell the whole history of the Navajos from the symbols on my pottery out there."

"From the which?"

"I'm writing a book about it," the

stranger went on enthusiastically. "Course to you men they aren't worth a whoop. But to me——"

One of the men laughed dryly. Another winked at the storekeeper. Another stared blandly at the strange species of human being standing before him. The toothless runt went out to the corral and examined the jugs, peered into them, thrust his hand into a few, twisted them so that the sunlight shone inside, and then he came back.

"Plumb empty, just like he said," was his report.

But the storekeeper would not believe it. He went out himself, examined the jugs, scratched his chin, shook his head in utter bewilderment, then returned and said:

"Yep. Just like he said. Only they ain't antiques. They're the same as any jugs made by the Indians right in this town, and painted on the inside with paraffin so's they'll hold water."

"I got some good empty tin cans I could sell you cheap," one of the four loiterers said seriously. "Ever write a book about tin cans?"

"Or maybe you can find a Injun story on this barrel of salt pork?" another suggested.

"If you'd get your mules to pack away the can dump behind my store. I'll buy the book you're writin'," said the proprietor.

The man guffawed. And encouraged by his audience, the storekeeper went to his kitchen and brought back an earthen jug. "All foolin' aside, here's an olla you can have—if you pay the price."

The stranger focused his bland, sun-faded eyes on the earthen olla a moment, and then his countenance seemed to light with a peculiar radiance. He stretched out his powerful, leathery hands, his fingers trembling eagerly like those of a miner who sees a promising bit of ore in a stream bed.

Taking the jug and turning it about,

he examined the crudely painted symbols on it. Then he exclaimed: "By grab! It's a Hopi ceremonial jug! These symbols explain what they call the 'Hopi Way.' This mark is the Thunder Bird and——"

He paused as a dry chuckle from the storekeeper interrupted him. "Go ahead and laugh," he said hotly. "But I'll buy this jug just the same."

"You can have it for three dollars."

"Here's your money. It's my last cent."

The storekeeper pocketed the three silver dollars and then burst out into a laugh that shook his sides. "Hopi jug!" he guffawed. "Symbols, you call 'em! Well, I reckon I know more about pottery than you do, stranger. They's an old squaw makes these right here in the village. And she gets her designs same as a whole lot of these Injuns do, by copyin' 'em off of tin can labels and flour sacks. Look here——" He pointed to the crudely painted marks. "It spells 'Pork and Beans'—see it? Letters all phony and wrote backwards, but it's 'pork and beans' just the same."

For a moment the stranger seemed bewildered by the laughter and jeers of the listeners. He stared at the circle of men about him, a blank, almost stupid, look in his eyes. It was as if he had been hit on the chin, knocked out, and was trying desperately to regain his scattered wits. Then slowly his lips curled in a smile:

"The jug's worth keeping, anyway," he said with fresh enthusiasm. "I'll write a chapter about how the modern Indians make their pottery!"

With this parting sally, he went out, packed his air-tights in his saddlebags, mounted, and then, leading his string of mules, took the trail for the mountains.

The group in the doorway of the general store watched him. Then they turned to each other. "Just plumb locoed," one of them said.

"Same as his dog," said the store-

keeper. "Dog and man don't measure two ounces of sense to the ton." He threw up his hands, shook his head laughing, and went back into his store.

The four other men watched the little outfit of broncho, four mules, man, and yellow dog winding up over the shoulder of the first small mesa.

"He's got some good air-tights there, anyway," one of them said.

Three unshaven faces turned toward the speaker. Three pairs of red-rimmed eyes stared.

"We could have one good meal."

"And he's got four mules," another commented. "I know a Mex horse dealer who'd pay us thirty pesos apiece for them mules—and maybe forty for the sawbuck saddles."

"But if that hombre took it into his head to fight—he could sure fight."

The others scoffed at his suggestion. "So could that dog," they laughed. "But neither one of 'em has any grit. Nor any savvy either. And the man's daft besides."

"Still and all, we'll be careful," the leader of the four said. "We'll make a detour, and get ahead of him. He'll trail slow account of them mules. We'll take our time, and when he camps to-night, why, we'll introduce ourselves."

They all agreed to this plan eagerly. A crazy man and a crazy dog would be easy pickings.

But there was a certain unknown quantity about both that man and that mongrel. The exact extent of their lunacy was hard to measure. As for the man, it must be said that he was wiser than any Indian, or Mexican, or renegade in Pinto Saddle. He had succeeded in passing through the town without arousing the slightest suspicion concerning the treasure he was carrying out of the desert.

Being more or less of an expert in his own line, he estimated that cargo to be worth between fifty and sixty thousand dollars.

CHAPTER III.

GENTLEMEN ALL!

TWO days later an exhausted and nerve-ridden man was trailing up the side of a steep mesa to the north of Pinto Saddle. As he rode, he was careful to keep his horse and his string of mules on the rock slabs on the trail, avoiding the sand where his animals might leave tracks. The precaution, however, was of little avail, for the wanderer was followed by a large yellow dog who trotted off into the side draws, and through the mesquite, or over the sand, at will. If any pursuers wanted to trail him, they could easily find the prints of the dog's feet wherever a stretch of sand bordered the rim rock.

"You don't seem good for much, old pup," Ned Rackham grumbled. "If you'd catch me a rabbit or two it might be worth letting you run. But the best thing for you is this lass rope. I'll lead you alongside of my horse, and you'll know how it feels to be a well-bred city dog on a leash."

He dabbed the noose over the cur's neck, took in the slack, and from then on kept the perplexed canine by the heels of his mount.

At sundown Rackham rested at the mouth of a high canyon where he unpacked the jugs from his mules, and tethered the animals out in some weeds to forage for themselves. He did not light a fire. He had enough canned stuff with which to make a cold supper. His dog once more enjoyed two full cans of boneless ham. Life was beginning to hold some promise of comfort for the old cur. He licked his chops and sat on his haunches at his master's side and with lordly complacency surveyed the bottom lands far below.

His master, however, was looking down into those purple depths in a different frame of mind. There was a feverish and haunted look in his eyes.

It would be three days of trailing through those bad lands before he would be out of danger. Out in the desert plain south of Pinto Saddle he had felt safer. There he could see for fifty miles in every direction. But now the rugged walls of the canyon, the side draws, the clumps of mesquite, shielded the approach of any possible enemy. Ned Rackham had developed something of the psychology of a horse. All horses prefer to roam in the open where they have a distant vista all about them. They avoid these narrow, hidden gulches, except when searching water or shelter from the sandstorms. But between the desert plain and the southernmost tip of the Santa Fe spur there was a ninety-mile belt of bad lands—a maze of deep arroyos, and washouts, and brush-filled gulches through which Rackham had to lead his mule train.

One fact consoled him somewhat as he spread out a poncho and a saddlebag for his night's rest. He had a dog with him. Although he was not much of a dog, and obviously had no intention of fighting anything, he at least had ears. He would hear the approach of any possible enemy long before Rackham could hear it.

Rackham filled his pipe, saw the sunset glow fade; watched the planets and stars that came wheeling up into the desert sky. Then, overcome from a day and a night's continuous trailing, he dropped off to a fitful, fear-ridden sleep.

He woke with a start at every sound, the rustle of a twig, the scurrying of a cactus rat through the brush, the sound of the wind coming in a sudden gust and whispering in the mesquite.

Once there came the snapping of a small twig. This made him sit up. The wind could not have done that. Perhaps it was a prowling coyote. Ned remembered that the original owner of the dog had said he would watch a coyote come into the chicken yard without voicing any objection whatever.

For some moments Ned sat up and gazed about him, then with a confident sigh of relief, he lay back again, pillow-ing his head on the saddlebag. Fatigue pressed upon him. A heavy drowsiness returned. But for a while he kept his drooping eyelids open. In the darkness at his side he could hear the sudden labored breathing of his mongrel. It was precisely like that of a dog struggling against the onslaught of a nightmare. Ned imagined that the dog's paws would be working convulsively as they do in the throes of a dream. He, according to his custom, whenever a pet of his was troubled in sleep, reached out to awaken the poor old pariah.

But his hand did not touch the bristling back. For at that moment a flash of light darted from the brush. A slug of lead zipped across the top of Rackham's head, singeing the hair, burning the scalp. The old dog made a dive into the brush in the opposite direction of that flash, tore through a wide belt of mesquite, and was gone.

Ned staggered up, his hand fumbling for his gun. It had never "fumbled" before. It was a hand that could be relied upon to snap at his holster, flip it open, and bring out a gun and fire in a single gesture. But something had happened to the coördination between Ned's brain and that gun hand. The slug of lead must have come closer than he had thought. For before he had the gun out he found himself standing, reeling, dizzy, staring dumbly at two tall figures which were like cactus trees that had sprouted up miraculously before him. Two others were behind him, of whose presence he was aware when one of them spoke:

"There's four of us around you, Mr. 'Jug Collector.' Better not draw your gun."

"Better just put up your hands," said another voice, from behind his shoulder.

Rackham was slow to react. He tried

desperately to weigh the possibilities of a fight. He might have killed those two men in front of him, even though in the dim starlight he was aware that they were pointing their guns at him. But it would take a miraculous draw to do the trick. And his brain, numbed by that shot, was not in the mood for working miracles. Besides, even if he killed the two in front of him, the two men behind would riddle him with bullets.

His hands went up slowly.

"We didn't mean to fire at you, hombre," one of the four shadows said. "But you moved your hand out to your dog, and that kind of scared us. We apologize."

"You're a nice, quiet hombre," another said in the same tone of banter. "And likewise harmless. We apologize. Wouldn't do you no hurt. Although I must say you've give us a pretty hard chase. We thought we'd catch up to you day before yesterday, and then we lost your trail in these lava beds. Took us two days to find you—but it's worth it. We liked your looks first time we saw you."

Rackham recognized the voices of the men who had made fun of him in the store at Pinto Saddle.

"Sure we apologize," the third said, gurgling through the aperture made by his missing teeth. "You're a nice hombre. We like you. Educated you are. So are we. Only we ain't educated in the ways of this here country. They called us tenderfoots last town we tried to work in. We can't make money the way these here folks do. Can't punch cows, or prospect, or raise goats. Can't seem to make any kind of living. What I mean is, we're hungry. Been hungry for two—three days."

The tone of the men struck Rackham as being anything but desperate. Was it possible that they were going to let him live? Was it possible that they had no inkling of the treasure he possessed?

"If you want food, men," he said,

slowly regaining his wits, "you're welcome to all I got. There a lot of air-tights I just unpacked from my saddlebag right here at my feet."

"That's the way a gentleman talks!" one of the men laughed. "Tie his hands up, Bill, so's he won't bother us while we eat."

Two of the men kept Ned covered, the third took his gun. The fourth tied his wrists behind his back. Part of the canned goods lay in a pile on the ground, for Rackham had emptied one of his saddlebags in order to use it as his pillow. The renegades fell upon these like a pack of ravenous wolves. They tore open every can in the pile, gouging out the food with their fingers, washing it down with swigs from Ned's canteen and water pack. The last man to drink threw his empty canteen back to him, then went over to the jugs on the chance of finding more water and food. But the jugs, as he ascertained after a very thorough examination, were still empty.

Meanwhile, another one of the renegades had picked up the second saddlebags, which was stuffed with more air-tights.

"We'll keep these for a meal later on," he said. "I'm too full now to walk."

"If you can't walk you might as well climb aboard one of these here mules," another said, "and we'll ride back to the gulch and get our horses again."

"Sure. We'll all ride the mules," said another. "And we'll take this here old cayuse likewise. Maybe we can get a few pesos for him on the border. He'll make good saddle soap."

Rackham stared in stupefaction at this dastardly trick. Not satisfied with rifling his food and water pack, they were taking away his means of trailing over those desert wastes. But he checked his fury completely and stood helpless and bound as they mounted his mules.

"Reckon we got everything," one of the rats said exuberantly.

"There's these sawbuck saddles," another said. "They're worth as much as mules in this here country."

"Sure we'll have to take the saddles," another went on. "He won't have much use for saddles without somethin' to pack 'em. Sorry, hombre, we got to take your saddles. But," he added laconically, "we're leavin' you your jugs."

This appealed to every one's humor. The other three laughed uproariously at the joke. "We won't be too hard with you!" one of them guffawed. "We're gentlemen. We'll leave you your jugs, which is what you come into the desert for in the first place. That's fair, ain't it now? We're fair. Them jugs are worth more'n some ole mules, ain't they now? Leastwise, you said they was worth a whole lot. So we're leavin' 'em for you. They're yours. You can start wakin' north—packin' 'em on your back. 'Tain't far. It'll only take a couple weeks."

Rackham was once more on the point of bursting into a fit of insane frenzy. But the laughter of the four exuberant rascals seemed to have a peculiar effect upon him. At the very point when Rackham felt that he could hold himself in no longer, the grim humor of the whole situation struck him. They were laughing about those jugs! And it was a good joke.

But the full significance of that joke was appreciated by only one man. And that was Ned Rackham himself.

As he saw the four renegades trooping off with his mules, his cayuse, and what was left of his water and food, he began to chuckle softly to himself. He was the last to laugh, and he was the one who laughed best.

"They took everything but my jugs!" he exclaimed. "If they only knew what they'd left!"

As a matter of fact, they had left

something besides those jugs. As Rackham was working eagerly in an attempt to cut his bonds on a sharp rock he realized that he was not alone.

His boon companion of the hound's ears and raw-boned haunches and gangling legs had returned. The old mongrel was now setting to with a fine appetite to clean out the cans which the renegades had cast away.

CHAPTER IV.

YOU CAN'T KEEP IT SECRET.

A DAY or so later a swarthy half-breed and three men who might have been called white, entered a gambling *posada* on the desert rim, changed their Mexican pesos for half the amount in American dollars, and put the money on the wheel.

They were not a very respectable-looking quartet, but in those desert towns a "b'iled" shirt" and a shave were not necessarily the marks of gentility. Honest men get to look like renegades down in that country, and if their business is prospecting they are called "desert rats"—which is not a term of opprobrium.

But these four men were in a class apart. Of course they attracted no particular attention at the lonely settlement of Sutler's Post and gaming shack down in that desert canyon. For all manner of men came there. Pocket hunters had their small bags of gold dust weighed on the scales of the bar, and gambled it away. Rustlers came there on the way to the border. And sometimes a few Chinese would be hidden there, in the process of being smuggled into America from Sonora County. And now came these four wanderers from somewhere in the big mesas to the north.

Just who they were no one knew or cared. It was apparent that they were not natives. Their horses were without the flint-hard hoofs of the desert

brons. One of the men had a high-horned saddle and two fingers missing, which suggested that he might have tried lassoing a cow in Nevada or Oregon where roping was done with dallies. An awkward turn of the dallies around the horn would account for his missing fingers. Another referred to cowboys as buckaroos. A third, evidently ignorant of the ways of the desert, had to be told to hang his holster and gun on his saddle before entering the *posada*. And the fourth stranger did not seem to know anything about the West at all, for he mounted his horse with left hand on pommel and the right on cante.

They put what little money they had on the wheel and promptly lost it. For a while, their eyes burning feverishly in their deep sockets, they watched a Chinaman working a system of his own. Finally they approached the Mexican barkeeper and asked for credit for some food. But the Mexican explained that he could not "onnerstand the Engleesh."

Evidently the four strangers were accustomed to being refused, for they said nothing. One showed his teeth as he muttered an oath. But the leader of the four, a leather-faced bushy-browed little man, said it was "jake" with him. They were gentlemen—not beggars. But they reckoned they'd stay out of the sun for a spell.

The four scarecrows sat on a bench near the roulette table, hungrily watching the Chinese immigrant piling up a small stack of silver dollars. Their mouths seemed to water as they watched. Just what he would do when that pile grew big enough they did not know. Just where he would go they did not know. His movements would probably be very secret. Nevertheless, they waited. They were something like four coyotes watching a calf feeding on the edge of a herd. Time might bring something. The calf might wander a little too far.

Now it was during this period of waiting that a white-haired traveler came down from the northern rim of the desert on his way to a new claim. He got into conversation with the half-breed Mexican proprietor of the *posada*, and with two other desert rats, who were hunting, like himself, for surface float.

Inasmuch as their talk was not of a confidential nature, the four renegades on the bench heard a good part of it; and as they got the general purport of it, they listened with a tense eagerness.

"Just how they found it all out I don't know," the old pocket-hunter was saying. "But things like that leak out. You can't keep it secret. I've heard of prospectors findin' rich lodes and not tellin' even their pards—or their own sons for that matter. But somehow it gets out. A look comes to their eyes which other men down here know means only one thing—gold!

"But this here kid you was talkin' about——" another man interrupted.

"Wait 'n' I'll tell you. He left Sluice Camp ten years ago and headed down here into these parts. Everybody forgot him—even his own brother. His brother got sick of the alkali country and went into the stock business. But after ten years this kid comes back, grown up to be a pretty good specimen of a man, maybe twenty-five, twenty-six years old. And he comes wanderin' into town with a burro. He meets up with a few old codgers who remembered him and tells them he'd wasted ten years.

"Didn't he have any specimens? Didn't he go to the district recorder's?" one of listeners asked.

"District recorder's! Why, he didn't even go to the assayer's! All he did was to sell his burro, buy a good meal and some new boots with the proceeds, then light out of town."

"Can't see how you figure he'd struck it rich then," the others objected.

"Listen. A couple days later some of the mill hands at a smelting house was talkin' about some gold that had been melted down into bricks and expressed to 'em from Sluice Camp. The kid gave a phony name, but he had it all worked out so's the bullion was sent to Santa Fe, and a couple weeks later he cashed checks in a bank."

"If he did any splurgin' that ought've given him away."

"Wait a minute! He didn't do no splurgin'. You see, this was only a small part of his gold—just enough to outfit himself again with four mules so's he could make the trip back into the desert and get all his ten years' panning out at once. Bein' he had to pass through Pinto Saddle, he was afraid some one down here in the desert would get wind of it, and he'd lose the whole wad."

"How long ago was this?" the proprietor of the resort asked.

"Oh, a month or so."

"Then he'd 've had time to get through Pinto Saddle without no one knowin' what he had."

"Generally always there's enough crooks in that town to watch out for prospectors comin' through with four mules," the narrator objected. "It's my guess that kid won't never get out."

"He could cut down across the border and back again beyond the Buzzard Mesas," another suggested, "thus avoidin' goin' through the bad lands north of Pinto Saddle, and likewise the town itself."

"It's more dangerous cuttin' across the border," the other objected. "Besides, they have to stock up with water at Pinto Saddle. And if they trail past anywheres near the town without goin' in, why, it gets every one suspicious. That kid's goin' to bump right into Pinto Saddle, which maybe he's done it already. And some one's goin' to come onto his fortune."

The leather-faced little man on the

bench began to hum through his missing teeth. One of his companions, a lean, hollow-eyed fellow—got up and sauntered out into the corral. A moment later, a shifty-eyed man with a black stubble of whiskers and a two-fingered hand followed him. The man who was humming peered from under his bushy brows at the Chinaman placing a few more bets on the wheel, then in company with the remaining member of the quartet, a tan-colored breed, he got up and drifted in an unconcerned manner toward the door. He was whistling and humming the tune: "Michael, row the boat ashore."

The four hungry and penniless renegades then saddled their mounts and went up the canyon at a slow walk.

"What do you make of it, chief?" one of the riders asked eagerly.

"Don't bunch together while we're ridin'," the bushy-browed little runt answered. "They'll know where we're goin'. Spread out in single file and we'll line out of here like we're headin' east. Then——"

When they trailed up the long reach of the canyon and rounded a bend, they reined in, and came together stirrup to stirrup.

"We can find him easy enough. He didn't have no horse," the chief began excitedly. "Most like he'll be headin' back to Pinto Saddle for more water. We'll find him soon as he gets out of them bad lands and starts hoofin' it across the plain."

"But if we do find him," one of the others objected, "what's it goin' to amount to? He didn't have no gold on him."

"He had those four mules we rustled, didn't he?" the leader said. "He was travelin' through Pinto Saddle, headin' for outside? What's the answer? He was totin' all his gold with him."

"We searched his pockets," another renegade said. "He didn't have any money. Spent his last cent for that jug.

And we got his saddles—and searched his saddlebags.”

“Speakin’ of the jug——” the leader began.

“The jugs was all empty. I took a look into them myself just afore we left. Thought he might have some more water or food in them. Plumb empty—every one of ’em.”

“He had his gold with him,” the canny little leader snapped. “There’s nary a doubt in my mind. Now, you three men quit this palaverin’ if you want to follow me. If you don’t, I’ll go alone. I’m goin’ to get that gold.”

“We’re with you, chief,” one of them answered readily. “Only I’d admire to have you tell me first, just how you goin’ to find out where he’s hid it?”

“I got ways,” the leader said grimly. “Just let me get my hooks on that bird. He’ll tell us all right—afore I get through with him.”

CHAPTER V.

FOUR RENEGADES RIDING.

IF any one had watched the actions of that lone desert rat during the past day or two there would have been little doubt left about his sanity.

In the first place he did not start walking back to Pinto Saddle for water, as the renegades had surmised. He wandered about in the bad lands engaged in a most inexplicable occupation.

First, he salvaged his empty canteen. Even though empty it was an important part of his outfit. He might find a water-hole before long, in which case the canteen would again be useful. Then he started packing his jugs, two at a time, into a secluded gulch. When he had the whole cargo piled up in the sand of a dry stream bed he built a fire. The four walls of the gulch were high enough to screen the slight smoke which his dry mesquite twigs made, so that, with little fear of detection, he built up a blaze of considerable heat.

Then he put one of his Hopi jugs in the center of the fire and watched it. To put what seemed to be an empty earthen jug in a fire—out there in a remote barranco of the bad lands—and leave it there as if it were a pot of beans, was a very curious pastime. Even the mongrel watched the performance curiously. At first his tail wagged in anticipation of smelling something cooking. His wagging tipped over one of the jugs which went rolling down a crack and broke to pieces against a rock.

His master swore. The dog did not know the exact words of that oath but he knew it was something very disagreeable. He skulked off. But then, famished with hunger, he crept back toward the fire and that stuff that his master must be cooking.

Then after waiting expectantly for the luscious smell of beans or beef, his nose quivered and his forehead wrinkled in utmost perplexity. There was no food over that fire after all! His master was a very strange man.

But finally the dog sniffed at the first indication of a new odor. It was the odor of melting wax. The old cur was hungry. He had cleaned out the last of the opened tin cans, and now, following his master back and forth from the gully to the camping place of the night before, had sharpened his hunger. But his master gave no indication of preparing another meal. All he did was to pack those jugs laboriously far down the trail, then put them on the fire one by one and sit on a boulder watching. It was a strange meal his master was cooking. It took a whole day to cook it, and then there was no whiff of boiling beans or frying flapjacks or sizzling bacon. There was just that waxy odor, made more unsavory by the acrid tang of metal.

And whatever it was his master was cooking, the old dog got no taste of it. For as soon as it was cooked his master poured something which had miracu-

lously appeared in the jug into one of his saddlebags.

The stuff that came out was like thick, yellowish, bean soup. And when it trickled out of the jug into the bag, the dog had another whiff of something disagreeable, something that he knew he could not eat—a whiff of scorched leather.

The morning passed. His master finished cooking that inedible meal in the last jug. Then all during the long hot afternoon, with the sun beating down murderously against the reflecting alkali and quartz, his master started out on a slow laborious journey into the heart of the bad lands. It was slow because there was no horse or mule to pack those heavy saddlebags. His master had to pack them, slung over his bent back, as he truded slowly down the gulch, across a small plain, up another gulch and over a divide. He climbed up the sides of barrancos; he dragged the bags down the sandy slopes of washouts, and one at a time dragged them up the other side. Then at sundown there came the first respite in that inferno of labor and heat.

The lone wanderer paused, set down his bags, and then began to draw a map of his surroundings. After this, he took a slab of slate rock and dug a deep hole. Perhaps he was digging for water. At least the famished and thirst-ridden old dog hoped so. But it was a vain hope.

After the hole was deep enough his master lowered the two saddlebags, then heaped them over with sand. Another crazy pastime! If he had been burying some bones there might have been some sense to the game!

All this foolishness over, his master did the first sensible thing the perplexed canine had seen him do that day. He cut out a deep hole in a barrel cactus, let the hole fill with sap and then turned the cactus over so that the sap dripped into his sombrero.

The dog drank from the sombrero.

Not much to still the hunger that was gnawing beneath his raw ribs, and not much of a drink for a salty hanging tongue, but it was worth that whole day of following dumbly at his master's heels. He had made no mistake in his resolve to stick to this crazy human being not matter what happened. He might be crazy, but after all, in the eyes of a dog, the human master is god.

"I hope you understand that this all happened because you didn't give the alarm," his master was saying to him. "As a watchdog you ought to have a blue ribbon tied around your neck—I mean till you choke."

The old mongrel wagged his long tail. His master had spoken no word to him that whole day except that oath when the jug was broken. Nor had he so much as noticed him except to bestow a lowering and almost murderous look at him every so often. It was certainly good to hear his voice again!

The long tail wagged vigorously, awkwardly as his master was now taking his own drink of the cactus sap. It was a wag which sent gyrations over the rawboned spine. It was almost a case of "the tail wagging the dog." Nevertheless, its meaning was quite clear.

"Now for a good snooze," Ned Rackham said. "Then in the morning we'll start hiking for Pinto Saddle. I'm going to get a gun and hunt up those varmints. When I meet 'em again I'm goin' to give 'em a little present."

But when he had his next interview with those "varmints" Ned Rackham was still without a gun. And he was still without food, water, or a horse. The fact is they found him very much as they had left him that tragic night with his cargo of Hopi jugs spread over the sand.

When he woke up the next morning he saw four riders coming across the plain—little black dots about the size of ants.

He waited on the lip of the mesa,

looking down at them until he ascertained that they were mounted on two paints, a sorrel, and a piebald—the quartet of bronchos that had borne the four renegades who had attacked him.

Upon making this discovery he was somewhat at a loss as to just what course to pursue. He knew he could not escape them. For they would hound him in and out of those bad land cracks and washouts until they ran him down. Staggering along as he was, faint with hunger and on foot, the chase would not last long.

Just what they wanted of him now he did not know. Perhaps they were not on his trail at all. At any rate, he had no fear of meeting them again, even though unarmed. His treasure was safe. His desire now was to actually meet them. He had a score to settle. It would be hard to settle it when he was one unarmed man against four with guns. But he had a very reasonable conviction that these four desperadoes were strangers to the desert. Ned Rackham was not.

He glanced over to the sun, which was peeping over the eastern mesas like the single flame of a volcano, pouring its glowing lava over splintered peak and granite tableland.

If they were searching for him, it was reasonable to suppose that they would go back to the point where they had raided his little outfit of mules and food pack and water, in order to pick up his trail. From there they could easily follow his tracks to the gulch where he had made his fire.

And that was the spot to which Rackham retreated.

It might have seemed just another one of his crazy tricks. But it was a move which would bear very rational analysis. He knew they could catch him anyway. And whatever was going to happen, he wanted it to happen while he still had his strength. That desert sun, rolling up over the mesas, was go-

ing to play a hand in the game. As Rackham looked at it he knew it was going to dry up the last ounce of energy of man and beast—of the four renegades and their mounts—and of Rackham himself, and of the complacent and faithful old mongrel jogging along at his heels.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET OUT!

WHEN the four renegades rode up into that desolation of giant boulders, deep crevices, and washouts, they headed directly—as Rackham had supposed—for the spot where they had held him up. Here they picked up some footprints made by a man and a dog. An hour or two of hunting through the cut-bank washes and draws and gulches and they arrived at the place where Rackham had built his fire.

And that was where they found him. He was sitting on a rock complacently making lists and drawings of the collection of ollas that surrounded him! So absorbed was he in this nonsensical business that he gave no evidence of having heard the hoofbeats of their horses coming up the gulch.

They reined in and watched him for a moment, then two of them spurred their mounts to a run and circled about to the upper side of the slope, so that all four approached from different points.

He put aside his drawing and stood up in the middle of the circle or jugs, glaring at them as they advanced. He said nothing until they drove up and dismounted.

"What you want of me now, you coyotes? Aren't you satisfied with taking my mules and horse and my food and water? You just about stripped me. What more do you want? Can't you leave me alone?"

"Sorry to trouble you again," the grizzled little leader said. "But we been thinkin' this thing all over, and we kind

of got the idea we ain't done right by you."

"We kind of thought we'd like to help you out of the fix which we left you in," another said, grinning.

"And we wanted to apologize," said a third.

Ned Rackham looked at his four persecutors, his finely chiseled, sun-scorched face assuming an expression of mild and gentle martyrdom. One of them had picked up the paper he had left on the rock. A list of the jugs with a rude sketch of the symbols and the shape of each was in the process of completion.

"He was makin' pictures of his jugs," the fellow chuckled. "Pretty slick at drawin' pictures. Sure thinks a lot of them jugs." He passed the paper to the man next to him and then picked up one of the ollas.

"What you doin' with that olla?" Rackham cried. "You don't understand anything about ollas. They're no good to you."

"We ain't so sure about that." It was the leader who made this remark. He joined his henchman in examining the olla, then the two others came over and peered at it. They were like four perplexed monkeys examining a cocoa-nut which they know must contain luscious milk, if they could only find the trick of getting it out.

"It's like I said," one of the men muttered. "Plumb empty."

They picked up more jugs, each man choosing one for himself and examining it with the minutest care. Rackham knew by now that the secret of his treasure had leaked out. They had come back for his hoard of gold dust. But as he saw their frantic attempts to unravel the mystery of those jugs a mild and triumphant amusement began to burn in his eyes.

"What you think you know about jugs, anyway?" he asked. "They ain't worth a hoop to you rats."

They turned upon him, baffled, furious, snarling oaths. Two days' ride over the alkaline plain and now the growing heat of the desert sun had worked upon their nerves. They had been so eager to catch their victim that they had started out with only a few canteens of water—another indication of their ignorance of the desert. And now it seemed they had made the journey in vain. They had been tricked out of the fortune which they had already gloated over for many hours.

"What was you totin' in these here jugs?" the leather-faced man asked, peering up through his bushy brows like a belligerent terrier.

"Totin'? Totin' somethin' in those jugs?" Rackham asked blandly. "Why, I wasn't goin' to risk breaking those jugs by using them to pack stuff in! They're worth a fortune to me, didn't I tell you? I'm writin' a book——"

"Sure you're writin' a book—on how to act like somethin' you ain't. You ain't no writer. You're a prospector. And you got some gold which you're tryin' to pack outn this country."

"If I had any gold why would I be packin' a lot of empty jugs?" Rackham asked.

"That's what we'd admire for you to explain."

"And what was you doin' with this here fire?" the two-fingered man put in. "Ask him to explain that, chief."

The chief looked at the fire. It had obviously been a large one, judging from the heap of charred sticks. "Yes, what was you doin' with this here fire—warmin' yourself maybe? Maybe this here sun ain't already scorchin' the brains out of every man jack of us! What's the idea of a fire down in this desert?"

"I was cookin' a supper," Rackham answered quickly.

"That's a good one! What was you cookin'?" they all asked. "You didn't have nothin' to cook——"

"No, I admit after you kind gentlemen got through with me I had nothing. But my dog here chased down a rabbit. And I pounded some mesquite beans. No objections to having your victims trying to eat mesquite beans after you've frisked them clean of their food and water?"

This had them stumped. The leader uttered an oath of impatience. One of the others growled that they were on a wild-goose chase. A third—the lean, hollow-eyed man—suggested finishing this fool coot with a few slugs of lead. But the leather-faced leader objected to this.

"If this coot has any gold, we ain't goin' to find it by shootin' him. If he ain't got any—and is just collectin' these jugs for to write a book—why, he's too much of a slabsided jackass to be worth shootin'. Might as well leave him here to pound beans and build fires."

"Sure, he's just plumb loco, chief. Harmless as a horned toad. Let's get back to Pinto Saddle. I got a powerful thirst comin' on."

"Me too, chief. This here sun's goin' to sizzle our ears off before the day's much older. Ain't touched water for nigh two days. Let's get goin'."

Three of the men had mounted their plugs, eager to get back to water and shade, convinced that they had covered a lot of alkaline trail and gained nothing except an exquisitely torturing thirst.

But the leader was taking one more look about the fire and those mysterious jugs. As his henchmen were wheeling their mounts and impatiently waiting for him, he stooped and picked up something from the debris of rocks and rattleweed at his feet.

"Wait a minute, men," he said softly.

There was no mistaking that voice. It was vibrant, gasping, a small almost whispering call of ultimate triumph. He had found it—there was no doubt about that!

They pressed their horses over to

him and looked down. In his hand was a small bit of broken earthenware—a part of that jug which the dog had broken. It was scarcely larger than a ten-dollar gold piece, and like a gold piece there was a twinkle of sunlight on the rim. The flat part of the piece was plain adobe mud, browned in the kiln. The upper part was painted with a coating of paraffin. But in between the layer of earthenware and paraffin there was a thin line of gold.

"What you have there, maestro?" the half-breed asked. "What you an-alyzin'?"

"I got the answer. That's what I got. He had his gold hidden in them jugs, just like I thought. Smeared the gold dust over the insides and then coated 'em with paraffin. And we was too dumb to find it out. Thought he was locoed! That's a good one. He's the trickiest rattler ever flipped himself out of sight in the sand. Look at this gold!"

The men had leaped to the ground and were eagerly examining the precious little key to the mystery.

"By grab, chief, you've hit it! Every jug he had was coated with dust!"

Each man reached for a jug, peered into it, found it empty, cracked it on the ground, and carefully examined the broken pieces.

"But there ain't no paraffin in these jugs, chief." Once more they were baffled, disillusioned on the very point of finding the treasure.

"That's once again where we're the long-sighted simpletons," the chief said. "Most like when we looked into these jugs last night they was coated with paraffin, and we forgot all about it."

"But there ain't no paraffin in nary a one of 'em now, chief," they said in utter bewilderment.

"And there ain't no linin' of gold dust either!"

"Nary a grain. Look at these here pieces."

"Which goes to show we're dealin' with a man who has more savvy than he seems," the chief answered. They all turned to look at Ned Rackham, who was sitting on his boulder watching them, his face bland and expressionless, except for a vacuous smile.

"What do you think this fire was for?" the chief asked his men. "Think he was cookin' a meal? Think he was warmin' himself? Think he was bilin' coffee when he didn't have a drop of water? Oh no! Meltin' paraffin—that's what he's been doin' ever since we left him that night grinnin' at us, and havin' the last laugh."

"Well, if that ain't the yellowest trick a man ever played, chief!" one of the renegades exclaimed. "He went and melted the stuff and toted it off somewhere and buried it!"

"That there is a right logical parcel of deductions, Bill," the chief said. "And I got to compliment you, which you've made the first sensible remark I ever heard from your lips." He turned to the complacent young prospector. The chief's eyes were red-rimmed, smarting with alkali dust, his lips were dry and chapped, his tongue thick with thirst. He was like a mad wolf cornering his prey. "Now then, Mr. Jug Collector," he said, with a deadly softness to his voice, "sorry to trouble you. But tell me just where did you hide that gold?"

The answer was enigmatic, but no longer a vacuous, smile. Rackham was wondering just how long it was since these desperadoes had had a drink. If they had come into the bad lands without bringing a three or four days' water pack, they were in for a new and desperate sort of conflict: Four men who were strangers to the alkali country, against one who knew the desert like a book. Four men with guns and horses against one unarmed man and a mongrel dog. These were the opponents in the conflict that was about to begin.

WS-2E

CHAPTER VII.

ONE AGAINST FOUR.

GUESS you coyotes have got me," Rackham said with a shrug of the shoulders. "I'm licked."

"Sorry," the chief said with a grin. "You're a nice young kid. We like you. You're smart. Never met a kid with such savvy. You've learned us somethin'. We respect you. But all compliments to one side, would you mind tellin' us where the gold is at?"

"Sure, I'd mind a whole lot," Rackham said readily.

"And if you don't tell us pronto," the chief said changing his tone, "you'll mind it a whole lot worse."

"You can't do anything to me," Rackham said. "If you killed me, there's not a man in the world would ever find out where I buried that stuff. It would be in the ground—same as when I first panned it. Only it's much safer. A prospector generally knows where to look for gold—accordin' to how it's been washed down out of a draw or maybe in a stream bed and such. But where this gold is, there's no minin' knowledge ever written could tell where to find it."

"But you can tell us where," the chief said with unmistakable assurance.

"If he don't tell us, we'll start up this fire again and bake his toes," the hollow-eyed one said.

"Maybe the splinters under the skin mak' you tell. I have a Hopi grandmother who savvys the trick," said the half-breed.

"Or we could kind of bury you in a hole and leave you there till you wanted to talk a whole lot," said the fourth renegade—the one with the shifty eyes and claw hand.

"I said we wasn't goin' to exchange any more compliments," the chief interrupted irascibly. "He's a nice young kid." He turned his blazing eyes on his victim. "We're thirsty, hombre, and we don't feel overly polite. Alkali's

worked on our nerves. Don't rile us. Just lead us in a straight line to where the gold is at."

"You can't get there in a straight line," Rackham said.

"Well, it ain't far from here—bein' you had to walk," said the two-fingered one.

"If you want to walk, you could get there in a couple hours," Ned replied. "But if you want to keep your horses, I'll take you over the divide—and into a couple canyons on a mule deer trail."

This suggestion caused some delay. There was a conference. The renegades considered the advisability of leaving their horses under guard, and following their guide on foot. But then the question arose, who was going to stay on guard? If there was buried treasure to be found, no one wanted to be left behind. Every one of the four had a clear enough opinion of the other three to realize that they would never come back to divide up the loot.

"We'll ride," the chief concluded. "And you'll get up in front of one of us. But first, if you don't mind, I'd admire to bind your hands."

Rackham did not mind. He knew the four men would not trust him to lead the way with hands free. They would have to watch him every second for fear he would leap for one of them and get a gun. They were in no mood for any delays of whatever nature. Biding his time, and having no other recourse at the moment, he submitted to their tying his hands. The big half-breed then hustled him onto a mount and swung up behind him.

Thus they started out, Rackham and the breed in the lead, the chief and his two other henchmen following in single file. Considerably behind the cavalcade came the mongrel dog, his tongue hanging, his head swinging low, froth about his mouth.

The poor old cur was leading his usual life of misery. At first there was

some faint promise of a better existence when he adopted this new master, but there had been little improvement thus far on his old life of starvation and torture. In former times he at least could find water somewhere. If not in town, then in the hills. But there was not the faintest sign or scent of water in this inferno. When they crossed the bad land cracks in the breast of the earth, where in some remote period of time there had probably been a stream, the old hound hung his drooping head still lower and sniffed frantically. There might be water far down there in the earth somewhere—but he could not smell it.

All that morning they zigzagged up and down the steep rocky trails. They went into one canyon and across the divide into the top of another. Then they wound back again. As the sun mounted it was impossible for the renegades to tell just which way they were heading—east or west. Finally the chief began to suspect a trick. His prisoner was surely leading them in a circle.

"You sure did hoof it a long ways, hombre," he said, riding up close behind the half-breed and the prisoner. "Which, if you say you went this far totin' a lot of gold, you're a liar."

"I'm takin' you a longer trail. Thought I explained that," was all that the prisoner would answer.

"He's sagebrushin' us good and proper, chief," the hollow-eyed man said. "He ain't takin' us nowheres, except to get us lost."

"I'm lost already," the fourth man said. "If I don't get a drink, I'll have to just lay me down and croak. I couldn't get out of here now with a nap." His moans and complaints were the only sound in that remote fastness except for the steady squeak of the saddles.

"My horse ain't sweatin', chief," the hollow-eyed man announced. "Ain't

seen any sweat on him since yesterday mornin'. He's kind of staggerin'."

There was no doubt in Rackham's mind that they were going to lose one of the four mounts. The horse lasted about half an hour more, and then foundered, sinking to the ground like a wrecked ship. Its rider scrambled up behind one of his companions.

Now there were five men and three horses. The chief was the only one who had a mount to himself. The cavalcade slowed up, shuffling along in the alkali, churning up a cloud of suffocating and salty dust. Their progress for the next hour was no faster than a man could walk.

"I'm warning you, hombre," the chief said when he could stand the torture of the ride no longer. "If you're double crossin' us——"

"No need to make your threats," Rackham answered quietly. "I know you can figure out something powerful unpleasant to do to me. But we're headin' straight back to the base of those cliffs. It's there I buried the stuff. I climbed down those cliffs from the gully where I built my fire. Didn't figure the trail for the horses would be so long."

"If you've lied to us," the hollow-eyed man warned, "I hate to think what the chief will do to you. He's got some pretty slick tricks to make a man talk. Really hate to think what's comin' to you."

As a matter of fact, Rackham was trying to conjecture at that very moment just what would happen to him. He had led his captors far afield. He was miles from the little barranco where he had buried his treasure. To take them back there now was impossible. They would immediately discover that he had been leading them on a wild-goose chase.

But what could he do? The time they had allowed him to lead them to the buried gold was up. Indeed it had

been up for an hour or more. It was ridiculous to suppose that he had carried any amount of gold for more than a few miles. The show-down was coming. His bluff was already too apparent.

But there was one hope which constantly buoyed his spirits. They would not kill him until they found his gold. Until he led them to its actual hiding place he was certain of his life. But there were some possibilities far more dreadful to contemplate than the loss of his life. Just what was that red-eyed little miscreant going to do with him when he found out that they had spent hours of fruitless trailing?

To kill time was Rackham's only hope. There was a remote possibility—perhaps one out of a hundred—that some lone rider might meet them. Every two or three months a prospector headed down through those bad lands for the sutler's store at Pinto Saddle and the desert beyond. If some such messenger of Heaven would only turn up now!

Finally the show-down came. Rackham saw it in the eyes of his captors as they rode up abreast of him. He did not see murder. They had no intention of such merciful move. He saw a fire burning in their alkali-tortured eyes—eyes that had the sulphurous gleam of gold-mad greed.

"It's over yonder," he said nodding his head to a line of cliffs.

Rackham knew the place. He knew just exactly where he was. He had done some pocket hunting up there by those cliffs many years before. There was a crack in the cliffs with an alluvial fan coming down out of the mouth of the crack—a plausible place to hunt for gold in the detritus that had come down out of the quartz mesa. One point about that desolate corner of the desert had always stuck in his memory: the quartz of the cliff walls, and of the walls of the crack itself, threw back the

heat as if a thousand suns were concentrating their rays upon that one spot.

That was why he had given up hunting for any surface float in that particular locality. But now he had the use for this natural caldron. It would be a good place to make these crazed and fever-ridden hombres dig! When they rode up to the spot, Rackham pointed out to a sand dune which might have been the mound of a newly filled-in grave.

"That's where I buried the stuff," he said.

He was left in charge of the weakest member of the quartet, the furtive-eyed unshaven man who had been moaning in his agony of thirst.

The half-breed, the tall, hollow-eyed scarecrow, and the grizzled little chief, began to dig. They went at the work like three hungry dogs pawing at the sand for a well-seasoned bone. They scuffed up handfuls of the salty sand, puffing and snorting in their frenzy. Finally, the tall lanky man sank exhausted.

"He sure picked out a hot place for us to work!" he groaned miserably.

"And he mak' ver' deep hole," the breed added.

"Untie his hands and make him come down here and dig the rest himself," the chief rasped hoarsely. "Tryin' to kill us off workin' in this here oven, that's what he's doin'!"

"If he's doin' that, there's some one goin' to be killed off long before me," another said, wiping the drops from his eyes, which glowed like little coals of fire.

"Don't worry about that," the chief said. His lips tightened across his teeth. "I don't reckon he's got nerve enough to tell us to dig, when there ain't anything here."

Rackham realized that his fortunes were taking a very bad turn. He was forced to swallow his own medicine. He started slowly to scuff the sand out

from the shallow depression the others had started. And as he worked he had the curious sensation that he was digging his own grave.

The cutting thwack of a rawhide thong on his back flattened him to the sand.

"Dig faster," he heard a voice say above him. "I'll show you if you can kill any more time!" Again the rawhide cut him.

Curiously enough, that lashing did not seem to pain. All the pain that a man could stand seemed to center in the myriads of fine nerves in Rackham's tongue and throat and mouth. A terrific thirst, sharpened by churned-up clouds of alkali, was gripping him by the throat, reaching down like a many-fingered hand into his chest, running like vitriol into his very vitals.

How long he kept up that futile digging he did not know. But he knew there was to be an end. The excavation gave no sign of freshly loosened sand or adobe. And before long his fingers rubbed on dry clay which obviously had not been scratched for many seasons.

He glanced up furtively, wondering just what his captors would say to this. The hollow-eyed man was sitting on a sand pile holding his head in his hands. The two-fingered one was lying off to the side of the canyon with the horses where there was a bit of life-giving shade. The breed was standing, legs spread out, looking down like a towering colossus and watching the digger out of red-rimmed eyes.

As for that canny old villain, the chief, he had already surmised the truth. His prisoner had double crossed them. There was no gold here. It was somewhere back there in those arroyos and gulches through which they had spent all morning trailing. And the prospects were that they would have to trail back again, back and forth, until this crafty, treacherous wretch made up his mind to give up.

The chief had wandered off—partly with the intention of getting away from that killing heat, and partly to think up some refined torture, some definite means whereby he could break his prisoner's spirit.

He found little surcease from the heat as he walked up further into the crevice of the cliffs. In fact, it got much hotter as he went. About a hundred yards inside the quartz gully he found himself in something very much like a furnace that was going full blast. White flames seemed to leap out from the crystalline walls and lick his face. There was a bowl near the inside end of the gully, filled with white powder. At one time, judging from the rims of encrusted sticks and stones that marked successive exaporation periods, this had been a water hole. But now it was a snow-white expanse, half an acre in size, of salt.

The chief came back.

There was no mistaking the look in his eyes. They burned with the suppressed, all-consuming fury of a madman. But his voice was different. Somehow there was a deadly calmness about it.

"You don't need to dig any more, hombre."

Rackham was peering up at him while his hands moved mechanically at their work of scooping up sand. He was tense, low crouched. He knew the show-down had come.

The hollow-eyed man who had been sitting with his face in his scrawny hands, looked up. What was this his chief was saying? No use digging? "You mean we been gypped into comin' here, chief? You mean they ain't no gold?" he asked.

"No gold here anyways," the grizzled little man said, riveting his eyes upon the upturned eyes of his victim. "Gypped is right. He's tryin' to lead us all over this desert till we drop. That's what he thinks he's goin' to do.

But he's mistaken. I'm workin' different from now on."

The gaunt, thirst-maddened scarecrow jumped to his feet with an oath. He drew his gun. But the chief thrust out a short, iron-sinewed arm and gripped his henchman's gun hand.

"Not that now, Bill," he said calmly. "It's goin' to be much worse for him than killin'."

The thought that had been uppermost in Rackham's mind—that he was immune from their guns—prompted him now to do what he did. He picked up a rock and hurled it with all his might at the man who had drawn the gun. It went straight and true, and although the desperado tried to dodge, it caught him on the side of the skull and he dropped.

Rackham leaped out of the hole and bounded off like a frightened deer for the nearest cover.

The two-fingered man, who had been lying moaning in the torture of his thirst, sat up and looked about him, dazed at what was happening.

The breed drew his gun, raised it to fire. But his slow-thinking brain was awlirl with conflicting thoughts—his master's order not to fire, the anticipation of seeing their victim tortured, and the ever-present conviction that to kill the prisoner would be to destroy all chance of finding his treasure. He stood there, a giant, bronze-colored statue, incapable of action.

And as for the little chief, that wily old desperado was actually grinning. He did not draw. He did not run in pursuit. He just stood there and watched and grinned. For he saw that his victim was heading directly for the two pillars of quartz which made the gateway to that caldron of heat beyond.

"It's just where I was goin' to send him," the old runt chuckled. "He won't last long in there."

"He's goin' to fight us off with stones, chief," one of them said. "If you don't let us plug him, he can hold

us off all night. Leave me shoot him in the legs, chief—that'll fix him."

But their prisoner had escaped into the rock bowl and leaped behind a rock where he was standing now facing them, a stone in each hand.

"Shoot him in the leg if you have the chance," the chief conceded. "But it won't be necessary. Just wastin' lead. We'll just set here in some shade and wait. If we wait all night—all right, we'll sleep. Ain't had any sleep for days. The show-down will come to-morrow. Don't have to fight him. From now on the sun will do our fightin' for us."

Thus the siege began. And it was the strangest of all the situations, of all the weird, tragic dramas that that grim desert had ever witnessed: A lone man, armed with pieces of sharp quartz, holding off four bandits armed with guns!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOG GOES LOCO.

THE renegades had returned to the shade of an outcropping strata of rock. The loose-jointed scarecrow, who had been unconscious from Rackham's blow with that sharp-edged stone, had come to, and without the aid of his companions he had crawled up, dazed and half delirious, toward the shade. It was a long time before he knew what was happening. He was lying on his back gazing at the arched roof of granite above him while his three companions were talking. What had happened to the prisoner he did not know. He was too weak to sit up and look into the crevice of rock to which Rackham had fled.

The latter was ensconced behind the boulder, at first standing so that he was exposed to their view from the chest up. He knew they would not kill him. On the other hand, nothing was to prevent them from shooting his legs. For that reason he never exposed himself

below the waist. Thus, still clutching his two rocks, he waited for them to try and pass those two pillars of quartz and get at him. After an hour he sat down, and they could see merely his peaked sombrero and his eyes, two pale dots of light, staring at them.

"Should've put the thumbscrews on him in the first place," one of the desperadoes said. "He knows we ain't goin' to plug him, and that gives him the trump card."

"Speakin' of thumbscrews," the chief said, casually puffing at a cigarette. "he's gettin' 'em right now. He won't last long in that oven. Look at that hound of his—crawled out of the place with his tail betwixt his legs, and got under the shade of some cactus. If his dog can't stand it, how long you think he'll hold out?"

"To light the fire and mak' frijoles of the toes ces quicker," said the breed.

"Maybe quicker, but you can't measure it right. I tried it once for to make a storekeeper tell where he hid his money. And the man croaked afore he could tell me. Another time I spent three weeks nursin' a man so's he wouldn't die on my hands. Torturin' ain't no good. They can stand just as much, then nature kind of helps 'em and they don't feel pain no more. But this here sun now——"

"The sun she go don pronto," the bronze giant said. "The walls she are straight. The hombre have shade at half past four-thirty."

"Wait till to-morrow," the chief said grimly.

"You mean we got to stay here all night?" It was the fever-stricken one with the shifty eyes who moaned these words. "I got to have a drink. I'm burnin' up."

"If you're burnin' up—you can figure what's happenin' to him in there."

"But night time will give him his strength back—and we'll be worse off than ever."

"We got to sleep afore hittin' the trail again anyways," the chief said. "We'll take turns watchin' the openin' to that draw—and the rest of us sleep. He'll have to stay awake all night."

"I want a drink of water," the wounded man groaned.

The breed gave vent to a deep, throaty laugh which was like a series of death rattles.

"What's happened?" the victim of the rock gasped. "Where are we? Did you get his gold yet? Ain't he finished diggin'? I got to get out of here. I got to get a drink."

"Go on and get out if you want," the chief snarled impatiently. "There's a horse. Get out. We'll divvy the gold three ways betwixt me, and Johnson, and Randy. Go on and get out."

"Where's the horses?"

"Tethered down there in that wash-out. One of 'em's lyin down. They's two left. On second thought, if you want to get out you'll have to walk."

"Me and the cayuse, we think plenty, maestro," the breed said. "If the cayuse don' like this, how you think us hombres like it?"

"If you want some gold you got to like it till to-morrow."

Darkness fell rapidly. It brought a relief from the blinding sun and its reflected glare, but the heat was stifling. There had been a slight, hot breeze in the afternoon, but this relief was now denied them. The wounded man raved all night that his skull was torturing him. The two-fingered one tossed and groaned with fever. The breed begged his master to give the order for an attack. "He no can throw stones in the dark, maestro, we Injun up on him, and mak' quick finish!"

"I ain't goin' to Injun up nowhere," said the wounded one. "I got to go back to town. I got to drink. My head's crackin' open."

The chief put a stop to the argument. "If you try Injunin' up on him now,

he'd jump you," he said. "He'd get your gun, then where'd we be at? Go to sleep—all three of you. I'll stay awake for a couple of hours, then Johnson takes my place. Watch that there draw careful, Johnson, and if he tries to get out plug him in the legs."

"He no get out. Too much savvy. He just set there, I think so, till we all go home—maybe mañana—maybe two-three days."

"Wait till to-morrow," the chief reiterated calmly. He took his post at the crevice which opened up into the rock-bounded bowl. No sound came from the darkness in there. Rackham, when they had last seen him, was sitting down, his back against a rock, peering over a larger rock at the opening to his grim little domain. What he was doing now the chief did not know. Nor was there any way of finding out.

The fact was that Rackham, completely overcome by the torture of that afternoon sun, bereft of all energy of mind or body, had dropped into a fitful sleep. There was no sound that night, except out there where the renegades changed posts. Occasionally, this was broken by the heavy panting of the old mongrel who had crawled once again into the bowl to join his hapless master.

The night passed. Rackham came to with a start, staring up at the first crimson flush of morning. He watched that light flaming across the rim of the high, smooth walls of his prison. He saw the first beams of the sun slant across to the western rim of the bowl so that the quartz began to flame, like the edge of a white sheet of paper catching fire. Long before he saw the sun, those western walls began to radiate a fierce and smothering heat.

What would this day bring? His captors had played their game well. Their own thirst had sharpened their cruelty. In fact, it was their thirst which had suggested the means whereby they could break their victim's spirit.

Then the sky took on a sudden semblance of teeming life. There were only two newcomers up there in that distant expanse of heat, but the scene changed with their coming. It changed from a scene of deathlike stillness and immobility to one of sinister movement.

One of the newcomers up there in the sky was the sun. The other was a buzzard.

The ball of white fire and the black wheeling speck came simultaneously. Rackham glanced up and a knifelike pain shot through his eyes into his brain. He crawled around to one side of his boulder, every nerve in his body yearning for the tiny strip of shade. Then this shade narrowed. The boulder itself seemed to vibrate with intense heat. The dog dragged himself to his feet. His eyes flamed as if he had gone mad, his tongue hung out, dry and seared as charcoal. Panting heavily, so heavily that he whined as he breathed, the old hound skulked out of the bowl once more, dragging his hind feet as if he were paralyzed.

With head hanging low to the ground, he shambled up to the cavelike depression in the gulch wall where the bandits were waiting in the shadow.

The breed threw a rock at him. The wounded man was too far gone to pay any attention. The two-fingered one was still tossing in a delirious fever. The chief was sitting gun in hand, peering through the rock gateway at his prisoner. He was like a doctor watching the last symptoms of a hopeless case. It was the breed who objected to the dog's sharing that shade with them.

The unhappy old pariah went off at a run, his tail under his legs. The yelp he had given at being hit with the stone awoke the dormant viciousness of the chief. He sent a slug of lead whining over the sand and rocks. The dog fell with the impact of the shot, then struggled up again, dragging a wounded leg.

What he had done to bring this new agony upon him, he did not know. It was a mad world, with mad men his only companions. He thought at first it would be best to crawl off somewhere in those dry washes, drag himself into a clump of cactus and die. But he had a fear of being left alone in such a desolate scene. If a coyote got after him, he could not fight. Perhaps coyotes were wise enough to stay away from this corner of the world. But that made it all the more terrifying. The miserable old fellow wanted company—even the company of those mad mortals.

He dragged himself back once more into the bowl to join his master. His master had helped him once before when he was wounded. Perhaps he would have some more of that soothing grease with which to assuage the throbbing pains in his leg.

He got to his master's boulder, and cringed to the sand. He was not so sure now but that his master was as mad as those men who had chased him out of the shade.

He felt a trembling, human hand rubbing his shaggy head. He felt something tied tightly about his leg, above the spot where the pains stabbed him. He thrust out his tongue to lick the hand, but his tongue was thick, unwieldy, sore, and the hand was rough and hot. Presently, he crawled off a little distance in the sand and lay down. But the sand scorched his stomach.

With his two front paws he scuffed away some of the heated sand until, with the upper layer of it out of the way he snuggled down into a cooler depression. When this got too hot he dragged himself a few yards off and scuffed away some more sand.

He repeated this several times, until the loss of blood from his wound began to tell on him. He gasped pitifully for life. He whined and begged for it. A drop of water might have soothed his tortured nerves. The pain in his leg

would have been nothing, if he could have lapped up a few drops of luke-warm muddy water.

Water!

Once more he dug a comparatively cool bed for himself, but this time he did not lie in it. His nostrils were quivering. His gasps turned to surprised snorts. He dug some more. His body became taut—his muscles stiffened, as if he had smelt a gopher underground.

He kept digging, as if digging for his life. Two of the renegades on watch outside the rock gateway saw this performance but thought nothing of it. The breed gave the matter a moment's notice, took off his sombrero, and scratched his head.

"The dog she are gone loco, maestro," the breed observed.

The "maestro" said nothing. There were enough vital matters worrying him that morning without talking about a mongrel dog.

"Ees better to kill the dog to death. Ees mad—that *perro*! Look at him mak' the holes! She got busted hind leg and yet mak's very much exercise. Jus' the same loco mad."

He took a pot shot through the two pillars of rock, aiming into the white, pulsating heat of the bowl canyon beyond. Some sand spurted up a few feet from the dog, and that was all.

The other two renegades were startled from their coma.

"What's happened!" the hollow-eyed man shouted wildly. "He started fightin'? Is he goin' to shoot us? Has he got a gun?"

The echoes of the shot reverberated back and forth among the rock battlements, and slowly died away.

"Juan Johnson's thrown a fit because of that there hound," the chief snorted. "Wastin' his precious shots because the dog's diggin' a cool place for himself to lie in. I seen dogs do that any hot day and in any town—any dog will do it.

Quit wastin' your ammunition. We may need it afore long."

The four men lapsed into the silence of misery and thirst and waiting once more. The one tossing in fever was grumbling incoherently about his thirst, swearing sulphureous oaths at the chief for his stupidity. "Keepin' us here till we croak! Why don't you shoot the hombre in the legs and drag him out? Afraid of him throwin' stones. Yellow dogs is what you-all are. Leave me go in there. I'll show him if a man can fight me with stones, when I got a gun. I'm goin' daft, I am. I'm burnin' up inside. Chief's daft. We could torture the truth out of that hombre."

The chief was on the point of taking the man's advice. For his plan, for some peculiar reason, was not working. That young desert rat was clinging with unbelievable stubbornness to life. He simply could not be broken. A fire, some simpler and quicker torture, might have been better, after all.

He got up, fingering his gun nervously, indecisively. It might be best to order his men—or what remained of them—to make the attack. If they were careful, they could shoot the prisoner in the arms. But then he checked himself as he walked out into the sun.

"He's goin' crazy, men," he cried suddenly. "He's diggin' in the sand, same as his dog. Thinks he's a dog gettin' a cool place in the sand to lie down. Another hour, men, and he'll be whimperin' for mercy!"

Yes, the prisoner was actually digging a hole in the sand! But his motives were peculiar—and definite. They were not the motives of a sun-struck, brain-fuddled man.

He had seen what his dog was doing. He had watched the process with little interest, until the old mongrel dug that last hole, and kept digging. Just what the dog was doing, Rackham could not guess. His first thought was the same as had struck the half-breed renegade,

that the poor old bundle of bones was going mad.

For a long time, the dog crouched down, lost in the hole he had dug. Finally, Rackham whistled to him. There was something queer about the whole performance. The dog did not respond to the call. He stayed there, flattened to the ground, his head and forepaws thrust in the hole, so that nothing remained to view except his hind quarters and the bandaged leg.

After a long time he struggled up and looked back at his master. He started to crawl toward him, but then changed his mind and went back to the hole again. It was precisely the manner in which a dog will vacillate between obedience to his master's call and the engrossing occupation of burying a bone.

He seemed to think the matter over, then decided to go back to the hole. Another span of time, and Rackham whistled once again. Then the dog came to him. He came slowly, almost staggering, as if he had eaten something that paralyzed his legs.

When he reached Rackham the latter noticed that the hair about the old cur's head was darkened and clotted. It looked as if he had been wounded in the head.

Rackham urged him to come closer.

The dog cringed. He was not so sure about these crazy human beings of the bad lands. Human beings had never given him a square deal anyway. But this man, he remembered on second thought, was different. He had healed his arrow wounds back there in town. And he had doctored the gun wound in his leg. Furthermore, he had done something else; he had brought him into this bowl canyon, which although at first, like the nethermost pit of torture, had turned into a little corner of heaven.

He crawled closer and Rackham took the shaggy head in his hands and examined it, expecting to find a gaping cut.

It was then that Rackam started to dig in the sand. The dog went back to his hole, but Rackham was wise enough not to follow him. If he did, the renegades would suspect what had happened. Instead, he dug away. Then he moved off and dug somewhere else. He gave the impression he wanted to give—that he was aping the dog in his attempt to get a cooler place to lie down. Then unconcernedly he went over to the dog's hole in an eager but well suppressed desire to find out what that wise old mongrel had discovered.

When he got there the renegades saw him go through a most peculiar series of movements. He lay on his stomach, his head half buried in the hole. Then he got up, tore off his shirt and took up handfuls of what appeared to be black alkali and poured it over his chest and back. Then he tied his shirt about his head.

The renegades, even in their misery, enjoyed this spectacle of a man going crazy under the murderous onslaught of the desert sun. The whole drama was most entertaining.

"We'll just set here and enjoy it," he chief said savagely. "If he wants to hold out any longer, why, it'll be worth it just watchin' him barbecue himself till he croaks!"

CHAPTER IX.

"DIG!"

THE chief and the breed were the only ones left who had any interest in this dramatic spectacle of a man dying of thirst.

"They always tear their shirts off—thinkin' they can get cooler," the chief said exultantly. "It's generally the last stage. See that their buzzard yonder? It knows what's happenin'. It knows when a man is givin' up and goin' daft. They fly up high that a way when they're waitin' for a man to die. If it was that there dog now dyin', why, the

buzzard would be wheelin' low. But with men, they wheel high."

"Maybe the bird she got wan eye on some ozzer hombre," the breed said. "Thees hombre myself don' feel ver' good." Then he added glumly: "Look --see, thees man Randy. He mak's big croak pretty soon I think so. He croak to death long before that hombre in barranca."

The fever-stricken Randy was lying in a coma, spread out on the edge of the shade at the feet of the other three. "He mak' warming pan for my feet," the breed said. "Jus' so hot lik' cook stove." He touched the man's forehead. "*Carramba!* Ees burn my hand!"

"Won't be long now," the chief said encouragingly, watching his prisoner in the bowl. "There he is tyin' his shirt around his head. What-all does he do that for, I'd like to know? Gone plumb loco. What's he tyin' a shirt around his head for?"

"Ees good headache for that hombre," the breed remarked.

There was an hour of silence and misery. The sun mounted. Although the four renegades were in the shade, the heat of the reflected light beat back into their faces from the canyon wall opposite. Not a breath of air stirred. The cavelike depression in which they were huddled had turned into a stifling oven.

"The hombre ees still hold out, maestro. How long you wait? We 'ave the guns for shoot his legs with?"

"He ain't lettin' us near his legs. He's too wise for that."

"You wait all day for him--and an-ozzer night?"

"No," the chief answered. "I let him stay there last night, because we was all plumb exhausted. If he don't come out and beg for a truce in another hour we'll go in and get him."

"Another hour!" a voice cried hoarsely. It was the hollow-eyed, gray-faced man with the wounded head who

had come to the end of his endurance. He jumped to his feet, infused with a sudden frenzy of life. "I ain't goin' to wait an hour. I'm goin' daft. I got to get water. I don't want no gold. I'm through!" He leaped out into the sun, brandishing his revolver like a reckless cowboy and shooting in the air.

The chief ran out in pursuit. His crazed henchman was staggering over the sand dunes like a scarecrow loosed from its stake and tossed before a wind. He was heading directly for the gateway to Rackham's retreat, evidently bent on killing the unlucky wretch who had caused all this misery.

Rackham saw him coming. He did something then which was as inexplicable as any of the crazy movements his captors had witnessed. Instead of running for the protection of the nearest boulder, he heaped up some sand with both arms, as if frantically trying to construct a barricade. But all he succeeded in doing was to fill up the hole by which he was sitting.

As the heat-crazed renegade staggered up through the gateway and came for him, Rackham found himself with practically no protection against the fusillade of shots. But the renegade was firing blindly. Puffs of sand spurted up in a circle wide of the mark, and before the gaunt man came up close enough to send a shot home, the chief had caught up with him and yanked him by the arm so that his last shot blazed upward into the air.

Rackham knew that the time for a show-down had come. There was no use now trying to hold them back by throwing rocks. He was in the open and he guessed rightly enough that they would shoot him in the legs if he tried to fight them. The third renegade--the breed--was shambling up over the dunes, like a giant gorilla, his head lolling rhythmically, stupidly, as he came.

Rackham was astounded at the sight of the three tramps. Almost three days

of the desert without water had worked havoc with them. The one who had run wild was not the only madman of the gang. His companions seemed to have been fired by his insane outburst. Three thirst-tortured wretches who were more like mad wolves than men were coming for Rackham. He saw the madness in their flaming eyes. They were not the kind of men to fight off with rocks. The day before, Rackham could count on their thinking twice before killing him. But that state of affairs had long since passed.

He sank to his knees—a gesture primarily calculated to protect his feet from their fire—and held up his hands.

"You got me, men. You've beat me. I'm through. Haven't got the strength left to throw a stone. The sun's killing me."

The three men approached cautiously, like cats circling suspiciously about a bowl of soup that is steaming hot. Their fear of this unarmed prisoner was only another indication to Rackham that he was dealing with nerve-ridden, broken men.

As for Rackham's condition, the renegades could not for the life of them understand it. He had been in this furnace of heat for thirty hours. When he went in he was as thirsty and exhausted as any of them. During that time they had scarcely once ventured out into the sun—and yet they were half crazed with thirst. How could this man be alive, lying there so long with the sun baking out all the moisture of his body?

"You may think you're through," the chief said in a husky snarl. "But you ain't. Not until you lead us to that gold and put it into our hands. We're the ones who are through. We've had enough of this waitin' for you to make up your mind while we're slowly fryin' in this heat. I'm givin' you another chance to take us to your cache. If the gold ain't there—then we'll go without.

You fooled us once and we let you live. But the next time——"

"I won't fool you again," Rackham interrupted. "This time I'll tell the truth." There was little doubt in his mind that the chief meant what he said. If the chief did not kill him, that lanky follower of his would do so—or if not he, then the half-breed, now gasping heavily for air, would. The gold was beginning to dwindle in importance. There was something they wanted far more than that.

"Tie his hands up again, Johnson, and put him on a horse," the chief was saying.

Rackham got up to his feet as the breed came shambling toward him.

"Wait," he said. "We don't need horses. The cache isn't that far."

He was thinking rapidly, frantically. To lie to them again would certainly mean death. But what if he did not lie to them? What if he told them where the gold actually was? He tried to picture what would happen. There were only three men to deal with. The fourth was still lying under the rock ledge as if dead. One of the three—the one Rackham had hit with a stone—was all but delirious. That left the breed and the chief. When these two should find the gold—Rackham pictured their triumph. They might for a few brief moments forget him in their exultation. And in those few moments there was a small, almost negligible, chance for something to happen.

But there was a flaw in this line of thought. Gold was no longer the uppermost desire of their lives. What they wanted was water. In the condition they were now in, their exultation at finding gold might be very inconsiderable. But if they found a water hole——

"Come on, hombre," Rackham heard the rasping, venomous voice of the chief announce. "don't stand there gibberin' at us! We're waitin'."

"All right, men," Rackham said. He spoke in the voice of a gambler making a show-down which has but one chance in a hundred of winning. "It's right here."

"What's right here?"

"The gold. My gold. A couple of saddlebags filled with it. As much as you can lift."

"What do you mean, right here? Talk sense. We ain't standin' for no more lies. We dug for it here—and found you'd lied."

"I don't mean over yonder where I said at first. I mean right here. It's where I was digging in the sand." He pointed a few yards away. "You saw me digging. Then you saw me fill the hole with sand just before you came for me."

"He is mak' fool of us to laugh!" the breed said. "Ees mak' sage-brush!"

The chief scratched his chin, his eyes snapped venomously. "If you're sage-brushin' us——"

"Go on and see if it's not the truth," Rackham said.

The chief turned to the breed. "Johnson, you watch him. Don't dast let him out of your reach. If he makes a break for those horses, he wins."

"Trust me, maestro. But what for we dig here. He try to kill us to death—we die when we dig so moch under thees sun. He tells beeg lie!"

"I ain't so sure," the chief said. "He lied once—but he ain't fool enough to lie again."

And that remark was not without an element of truth. But it was not the whole truth. The chief walked heavily, laboriously to the sand mound which Rackham had just been piling up. Then he called to the gaunt scarecrow.

"Come on, Bill, you help me dig," he said.

"Dig?" the man repeated. "Me dig? I can't dig. I got to lie down—only not in here. I got to get away from here. This sun's fryin' my brains. I don't

know where I'm at. What you want to dig for?"

"For gold, you poor hombre. If we don't find gold, then we'll do a little shootin' and line out for water somewheres."

The chief was already on his knees, slowly shoving away the sand.

"You mean, I can get water if I dig far enough?"

"Sure. Come on and dig. Gold or no gold, the game's over soon as we find out what's buried there."

The loose-jointed fellow folded up, sinking to the ground. His scrawny hands clawed listlessly, mechanically at the sand. The chief began to dig faster. His shoulders were hunched, his neck taut. His breath came heavily all of a sudden. He gave an exact imitation of the dog digging there, as if he smelled something very interesting under the sand.

But he did not make that extraordinary discovery—as the dog had done—with his sense of smell. It was the touch of something cool on his fingers that gave him the first intimation of what he was coming to. He began to work frantically, gouging out handfuls and throwing them back through his legs just as a dog will do. His sudden energy surprised his companion, who scarcely had strength or will enough to move his palms over the sand.

"You found any gold, chief?" the man asked tonelessly.

"No, but there's somethin' much better." He threw out two handfuls of wet sand. Then he thrust his hands down to their wrists in mud. He held the mud to his lips. He smeared it over his mouth. He sucked at it. He plastered it on his tongue. And as he did this the bottom of the hole, which was about the size of a cup, welled up with sandy water.

His thirst-maddened henchman saw it at the same moment. And the chief felt two talonlike fingers—now possessed of

superhuman strength—seize him by the shoulders and suddenly whirl him backward.

But he came back. Both men flattened themselves to the ground and tried frantically to thrust their heads down so as to reach that life-giving fluid at the same time!

CHAPTER X.

HIS DAY AT LAST.

BUT something else had happened before those two renegades made their glorious discovery.

The breed had gone to Rackham and ordered him to put up his hands.

Now the breed was a peculiar character. He had no fear of this disarmed man. He had none of the innate timidity and caution of his little chief. He had a complete and childlike faith in his own physical power, and in the greater power of the six-gun he held. As for the fine points of extracting the truth out of a man, he knew nothing and cared less. Gold was hard to get and when it entailed a series of plots and tricks and mental torture, the big fellow left those matters to his wiser and older master. The breed was concerned more with physical matters—the satisfaction of bodily desires, and at the present moment the vital and terrible thirst for water.

"You've mak' trouble enough, hombre," he said to his prisoner. "You've led us on the goose chase for to burn us up. We've run ourselves cockeye! And now, *por Dios*, I tie the hands up so they crack, savvy! Give me the hand, homber, turn the back pronto, and I mak' the knot!"

Rackham did not turn around. His coolness in the face of this thirst-maddened creature was astounding. But he gave the impression of obeying when he reached his hands behind him, and then instead of turning and letting the breed tie them, he calmly reached for his canteen and lifted it up to his lips.

"Just let me get a swig out of this first, hombre," he said.

The breed's jaw dropped. His huge lips trembled, then tightened as if in an incredulous grin.

"*Diablo!* What for you do that, hombre?" he gasped.

The answer was a gurgle.

"Ees no water in that canteen, hombre. You plumb loco like a jay bird. No can fool me thees way. Ees no drop of water——" He checked himself as he saw the drops tricking down over Rackham's chin.

With a gasp of astonishment, the big breed, whose whole life was centered in satisfying the desires of his ponderous body, lurched forward, arms outstretched, fingers spread like a predatory animal pouncing on its victim.

The fingers closed on the canteen, snatching it frantically from Rackham's hand. The nozzle was buried between massive, fevered lips.

And at the same moment—measured in the fraction of time—Rackham's hand darted to the breed's holster, and snatched out the gun.

It was all over.

Rackham leaped backward, and when out of the man's reach, he pointed at his chest.

"Drop that canteen and hands up!"

The breed gave a hoarse, terrified scream. But he obeyed.

The two men at the water hole jumped up, whirling about.

A single shot dropped the chief as he was reaching for his gun. The other man stared dumbly, his mouth dripping with muddy water, his eyes wide with astonishment. Slowly his purblind eyes saw the tall black shadow of their prisoner. He heard a voice which seemed to come from an infinite distance.

"Claw the air, there, hombre, or you'll follow your chief."

The scarecrow lifted two ungainly arms, with hands hanging forward, listless, disjointed.

Rackham took the two renegades prisoners, binding their arms behind their backs. The chief was dead. The fever-stricken man out there in the canyon was too far gone to know what had happened. But instead of leaving him for the coyotes, Rackham lifted him to a saddle and tied him there.

"The other two horses are for you and me, old pup!" Rackham said to the wounded dog. "The two prisoners will have to walk. It's a long walk to the desert rim and home, and you're goin' to ride in a hammock the whole way. And as soon as we reach the chow cart at Seven Wells, you're goin' to have a beefsteak. You're goin' to have tenderloin steak the rest of your life—every day, and all you want. You're going to have steak for your supper. And you're going to have a big corral for your own backyard to run around in and chase your tail. And you'll have a trough of running water to drink or lie in when it's hot."

He lifted the astonished but unprotesting hound to the sling he had made out of a poncho and lass rope which was hitched to the side of one of the nags.

"You aren't much of a dog, as dogs go," Rackham said. "But you've got a nose that can sure smell out something good when it's needed. You won this fight. If it hadn't been for that wet shirt around my head and that cool mud stuffed down my chest and back, the sun would have finished me. Yes, sir, old pup, you won the fight, and saved my gold, and from now on you're goin' to live like a blue-ribbon champion."

The old mongrel did not quite understand what it was all about, but he realized there was a different tone in his master's voice. He wagged his ungainly tail vigorously until it tangled itself in the hitch. Then as his master extricated it he licked his hand, looked up under shaggy brows, and bared his teeth in a sardonic and triumphant grin.



WILD TURKEYS ABUNDANT

THE turkey has always been a favorite subject for discussion, and it is well for admirers of the bird that it has also provided food for thought to the authorities. The chief gamekeeper of the Missouri game and fish department recently purchased five hundred bronze turkey hens for distribution to State parks and refuges which are already provided with the native wild gobblers and wish to propagate fine birds. We are told that the holiday turkey, of whatever variety, traces its ancestry back to one of the four species that once grew wild in America.

Gamekeeper Hunt announces an abundance of turkeys, especially of the wild variety, in some counties of Missouri, notably Southern Taney and Stone County. This is attributed to the fine spirit of coöperation which exists among the country folks, who find that sportsmen from other sections are willing to pay liberally guides who are able to locate flocks of wild turkeys. So remunerative has this industry proved that old hunters, who formerly filled their bags with young turkeys weeks before the season opened, have now turned guides and are zealous guardians of the flocks of native birds.

It might be interesting to add that another species of game which have been successively domesticated and tamed all over the United States are the guinea fowl. They are still found untamed in the West Indies, where they were introduced many years ago.



Shorty Plays Dummy

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty, Master of Hounds," etc.



IN Monte Vista jail was "Squinty" Morley, suspected of murdering Phil Grimes over at Kiowa. He was suspected, that was all. It was a plain case of circumstantial evidence, and nothing more, and Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista did not take much stock in circumstantial evidence. Squinty had fumed and fretted in a cell for three long days now, and had not "cracked" under the sheriff's continued quizzing—so the sheriff was worried half sick.

"Squinty did that job sure as yuh're knee-high to a grasshopper, Shorty," blurted the anxious sheriff to his youthful deputy, "Shorty" McKay. "We've got the right man, but he ain't admittin' a blamed, solitary thing. All I kin get out o' him is the fact that he's goin' to sue me an' the county fer false arrest an' defamation o' character the

minnit he gits out! He is as cocky as a banty rooster, knowin' full waal, I reckon, that we ain't got a case on him that'll stand in court."

Shorty, who had been reading a book, laid the volume aside with a sad sigh. He hated to be interrupted right in the middle of a chapter, but he could not read with the sheriff speaking to him.

"Yuh tol' him, I suppose, that we know that the hombre who kilt Phil Grimes answers his description, didn't yuh?" inquired Shorty, who was slightly angered because the sheriff had not permitted him to take a hand in the repeated questioning of the suspect. "Yuh enlightened him on the subject that his record is agin' him, that we know that he is a robber, an' a ex-convict, an' a few other things? Yuh told him that we know that Phil Grimes was shot durin' the course of a

robbery an' that when we scoured all the hill country we couldn't find nobody but Morley hisself hidin' in a cave?"

The sheriff glared at his pert deputy.

"What the heck do yuh think I told him ef I didn't tell him all that?" demanded the sheriff icily. "Think I told him how Columbus discovered America, or how the nasty ol' wolf got holt o' Little Red Ridin' Hood, who was a swell robber in Greenwood Forest in the days o' King Arthur o' the Supper Table? I let him know we had it on him, sure enough, but all he says to that is that a hundred cowboys dress like he does, an' ride pinto hosses like he does, an' is about his height an' build."

Shorty nodded his head.

"True enough."

"Sure, it's true enough," admitted the sheriff. "An' he says he was in that cave a-waitin' fer a scallywag friend o' his, who was to meet him thar an' hatch out a plan to rob the Brushwood State Bank next week. He admits that, realizin' full well that he kain't be tried for mischief he's plannin' to do. Oh, he's nobody's fool, Shorty, an' danged ef I don't figger that we'll have to admit we're licked unless he does comes through—an' that's about as likely as a robin turnin' up here in December! I was purty rough with him, too. I shot it inter him hot an' heavy, but he's too tough a bird to weaken under cusses, an' threats, an' bad names. I'm danged ef I know what to do now!"

The sheriff sat back in his chair and a slow smile crept over the deputy's bronzed face. His eyes narrowed.

"Yuh was plenty rough, boss?" he inquired.

"Plenty. I third-degreed him to the limit—an' I might jus' as waal have saved my time an' breath."

Shorty's smile widened. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Sheriff?"

"Yeh?"

"Kindness has charms to soothe the wild beasts, or something like that, as the poet said once," remarked Shorty slowly. "I been jus' thinkin' about how mebbe kindness would unlock this here Squinty Morley's lips, boss. A kind word or two, a friendly smile, a brotherly slap on the back, a good cigar, a quiet heart-to-heart talk about the old folks to home, the old farm whar the bees buzzed in the alfalfa field, an' the patient keows stood knee-deep in the bustlin' brook, whar mountain trout leaped after willer flies——"

"Say, Shorty, yuh got bees buzzin' in yuhr haid!"

"Lissen, sheriff, until I gets through," pleaded Shorty, waving his hands at his angry chief. "Ef yuh've experimented with roughness on him an' he ain't weakened, why not try kindness? I got a hunch it might work. Git him all unstrung about his ol' home down in Alabam', an' the peach-cheeked gal he left behind him when he kissed her farewell an' went forth in the big world to make a livin' holdin' folks up! An' the songs his mammy usta sing to him, down thar in dear ol' Georgia——"

"Alabamier, yuh said fust!"

"Waal, Alabam', then. Jus' git him cryin' once——"

"Say," growled the sheriff, "the only way yuh kin git Squinty Morley cryin', Shorty, is to hold a onion under his beak fer a hour. Squinty Morley cry? Bah!"

But the light of inspiration was burning in Shorty's eyes. He jumped from his chair and went over and put his hands on the sheriff's shoulders, holding his boss down securely, while he fired his closing argument—and fired it well.

"Boss, yuh know I'm fer yuh, fust, las', an' all the time. I think, like yuh do, that we got the right man in Squinty Morley. But ef he won't confess, we kain't prove nuthin'. Yuh've

tried yuhr way! It didn't work. Now try my way—kindness—an' let's see ef it pans out as I had hopes it will. We ain't got nuthin' to lose, sheriff, but we has everything to gain. What do yuh say?"

The sheriff struggled for words. He looked up into his deputy's earnest face. Perhaps it was what he saw there, maybe it was the sincerity of Shorty's words, or probably it was just because he realized that there was nothing left to try but Shorty's plan, that led him to nod his head slowly.

"Waal, Shorty, ef yuh insist—ef yuh really think that kindness might work on that tough ol' bird—we'll try it!"

"Whoopee!" howled Shorty in his best rodeo tone, and he started for the door. The sheriff called him back pronto.

"Whar yuh goin'?"

"I'm goin' after some cigars an' candy an' chewin' gum," said Shorty. "I'll be back in a minnit, sheriff, an' then we'll try out that idear. Meanwhile, yuh jus' set quiet an' relax, an' wait!"

Shorty was not back in a minute, however. It was fully twenty minutes before the deputy returned. He had several packages. He opened a couple of them. He placed two fat, black cigars and a package of cigarettes on the flat-topped table. He added a bag of peanuts, a sack of fruit drops, and a package of chewing gum. And then, while the sheriff stared, Shorty unbuckled his cartridge belt and put it on top of the safe. He withdrew his gun from the holster, however, and was fooling with it when the sheriff finally wound words.

"What's all this grocery-store stuff yuh're layin' out?"

"A kinda treat fer Squinty Morley," said Shorty softly. "I figger ef we're gonna try kindness on him we got to do it up right. I'm jus' lookin' over my gat to see that it is in good shape

fer a emergency, boss. I'm gonna put it in my pocket, however, whar he kaint' see it; we don't want no display o' roughness at all. We got to handle him jus' like in a play, whar the sweet heroine wins over this bad villain with honey words an' charmin' smiles. Yuh'll have to take yuhr rod off, too, boss. We want him to see that we ain't armed, that we trust him fully, that——"

"But we don't," said the sheriff shortly.

"No, but we'll make him think we does, boss! When I brings him in, I want yuh to walk back an' forth across the room a coupla times so he'll see that yuh ain't armed. That'll give him confidence that we ain't goin' to threaten an' bluster an' raise heck with him. He'll see I'm not armed, apparently. Yuh set with yuhr back to this windy, which we'll put up——"

The sheriff protested.

"It's cool enough in this room now, Shorty——"

"We want it cooler," declared Shorty, raising the window. "We're settin' the stage fer a drama, sheriff. Think how hot an' close it is in Squinty's cell back yonder in the jail! Waal, we want him to breathe the fine fresh air here, so he'll be carried back to the ol' farm o' his boyhood, whar the bees was buzzin'——"

Sheriff Cook grunted. "This lissens like hooley to me," he suggested.

"This is gonna be like in a play, as I said," explained Shorty, busily arranging things. He placed a chair in front of the open window for the sheriff. Across the flat-top desk, facing the window, he placed another chair. This was where Squinty Morley would be seated for the grand kindness quiz. The sheriff at another bidding from Shorty, reluctantly unbuckled his belt and allowed Shorty to drop belt, holster, and gun on the old hatrack that stood in the far corner of the office.

When the sheriff was seated, Shorty once more arranged the array of cigars, cigarettes, candy, and chewing gum on the desk, ready for Squinty.

Then he put his hands on his hips and surveyed the scene.

"The stage is all set, boss," said Shorty with a grin. "I'll go fetch Squinty from the jail; all yuh got to remember is that this is gonna be Kindness-to-Crooks Week as far as we are concerned. Yuh got to remember yuh're actin', boss, just like in a play. Pretend to be meek, an' humble, an' forgivin'. Be pleasant. Speak low, an' smile as yuh talk. An' I'll bet yuh will have Squinty drownin' in his own tears o' repentance afore we gits through. That's my idear!"

The sheriff fidgeted.

"Bring him in," he ordered gruffly. "I'll try to do as yuh say, Shorty, but it looks like hossplay to me. Yuh'll see that crook won't fall fer no foolishness like yuh think! Bring him in. I feel foolish settin' here waitin' to do something I figger ain't goin' to git to fust base. Bring him in!"

Shorty departed. In a minute or two he was back, escorting Squinty Morley, the suspected murderer. The first thing the sheriff noticed was that Shorty had taken the handcuffs off Squinty's wrists. That seemed hardly necessary to the hard-boiled sheriff. He was on the verge of saying so to Shorty when he remembered Shorty's warning to be kind, to smile, to speak softly—just as if he was playing a part in a drama. Well, he would! He smiled at the staring Squinty, and if the smile was a bit stiff and unnatural it was not the sheriff's fault. He was doing his best.

"Set here, Squinty," said Shorty, indicating the chair across from the sheriff. The prisoner took the seat sullenly. His ratlike eyes traveled from the sheriff's face to Shorty's face, and then to the array of candy and tobacco

carefully arranged on the desk in front of him.

"Have a cigar, Squinty?" suggested Shorty pleasantly.

"Ain't doped, is it?" suggested Squinty with a sneer.

"O' course not!" said Shorty, and his injured tone seemed to reassure the prisoner. He grunted, snatched up a cigar, bit the end off, and allowed Shorty to light it for him. He took one long puff.

"Waal, start yuhr funny business," said Squinty, with a fiery oath. "Yuh ain't givin' out cigars, an' candy, an' peanuts fer nuthin'. But yuh ain't got a thing on me, yuh two buzzards!"

The sheriff's face went scarlet, but Shorty, standing behind Squinty, signaled desperately. The sheriff swallowed his wrath.

"Squinty," said the sheriff in a strange, strained voice, "we ain't aimin' to be mean to yuh, son; not in a hundred years. We want to extend the right hand o' friendship to yuh, brother. Has yuh thought, as yuh has set thar in yuhr cell, o' yuhr own ol' home down in South Carolina, whar the lilac bushes bloom, an' the robins flit from one branch to another, chirpin'?"

"I never had no home in South Carolina," said Squinty with a cackle. "I was born in New Hampshire, yuh ol' loon!"

"Waal," said the sheriff desperately, as he fought to restrain himself, "in New Hampshire, then, Squinty, whar the robins——"

"Aw, to heck with them robins!" said Squinty darkly, "yuh make me sick with yuhr mush. I don't give a whoop fer all the robins in North America. Git that through yuhr thick skull! If yuh think yuh're gonna git me thinkin' about boids so I'll 'fess up what yuh think I oughter 'fess up, yuh're crazier'n yuh look!"

"Why, yuh——" began the sheriff, but Shorty's frantic signal interrupted

him. The sheriff swore beneath his breath and decided to make one more effort to be pleasant—and kind.

"Squinty, ol' boy, yuh're excited," said the sheriff in a voice he meant to be soothing; "but yuh mustn't worry none. Yuh're among friends here. All we want yuh to do——"

Squinty laughed uproariously.

"Among friends!" he echoed. "Why, yuh blankety blank, ol' turkey buzzard, yuh! I ain't an idjut, ef yuh are! All yuh want me to do is to 'fess up that I kilt Phil Grimes so yuh won't have to go out an' look fer the real murderer. Oh, yes—yuh're a swell friend o' mine! Yes, yuh are—not! Yuh're a liar, yuh ol' reprobate——"

The sheriff started out of his chair, but Shorty was beside him in one wild leap. The sheriff did not get up because Shorty forced him down in his chair again. But hot words were ready on the sheriff's lips, and Shorty realized that the boss was through playing any great part in the drama. Shorty wagged a finger at the glowering Squinty—and Squinty grinned evilly.

"Squinty," said Shorty, "yuh ain't playin' the game with us. We don't mean to be rough with yuh. We believe in kindness around here. We got yuh cigars, an' candy, an' peanuts, an' bring yuh in here to talk calmly to yuh, an' yuh up an' insult the sheriff with mean words. Let me paint a picter fer yuh, Squinty! Here we are, in this office, to git at the truth o' this murder charge as hangs over yuhr haid. We want yuh to talk to us like yuh would talk to yuhr own mother ef she was here."

Shorty paused dramatically. He made an eloquent gesture that embraced the whole room. He half closed his eyes.

"Ah, Squinty, I kin see yuh back yonder through the years when yuh was a little shaver. Thar yuh are, out in the sunny medder, playin' tag with

a bunch o' the neighbors' kids. Thar is a straw-colored gal thar—I mean, a little gal with straw-colored hair. She has big blue eyes. Lovely eyes. An' purty lips. Red, ruby lips. An' her voice is low——"

"That's Rover, the ol' family dawg, yuh see," said Squinty maliciously. "Yuh're as crazy as the ol' sheriff hisself."

The sheriff gripped the side of the desk.

"Say, yuh rat——" shouted the sheriff.

"Lissen, lissen now," pleaded Shorty with ringing voice. "I kin see yuh, Squinty, as a young man. Yuh're leavin' the old farm to go out in the world an' make yuhr mark. I see yuh shakin' hands with the old man, an' yuh kiss the little girl farewell, murmurin' that yuh'll come back fer her when yuh've made yuh fortune. The birds are singin' in the willers down by the ol' mill stream; the farm hosses look over the barnyard corral, sadness writ on their faces; Fido, the ol' family pooch, comes along——"

"Rover!" corrected Squinty with a laugh. "Yuh're gittin' mixed up, Mr. Deputy. Yuh should lay off that tequilla stuff!"

Shorty stiffened at the insult. The sheriff, starting up out of his chair, said thickly:

"Shorty, I'll lam him one on the nose——"

"Squinty, ol' man," said Shorty, pushing the sheriff back down in the chair. "don't get me wrong. All we're tryin' to do is to git yuh to trust us an' come clean with yuhr story. We know yuh kilt Grimes. Yuh might as well confess now. We'll give yuh a square deal, too. We want yuh to trust us, as we trust yuh——"

"Yuh trust me—ha!" snorted Squinty.

"Waal, we do," said Shorty. "Lookit the sheriff. He ain't got a gat on him.

Lookit me—I has got a rod, I'll admit, but, by gosh, Squinty, I'd gladly hand it to yuh ef——"

"Ef what?" asked Squinty.

"Ef yuh'd trust us as much an' talk to us man to man," said Shorty promptly. "We trust yuh, Squinty."

The suspect grinned. He stretched out a gnarled hand.

"Gimme the gun, Shorty," he purred. "I'm callin' yuhr bluff! I'll see how much yuh trust me! Gimme the rod an' I'll think yuhr offer over—mebbe ef yuh do trust me, I kin trust yuh."

Shorty handed over the gun.

"Gosh!" cried the sheriff, "don't do that, Shorty!"

But it was already done. Squinty Morley, with a queer expression on his face, was examining Shorty's gun. Perhaps he had expected to find the weapon unloaded. If so, he was agreeably surprised. The gun was loaded. He played with it while Shorty watched silently and the sheriff sat spellbound with horror, grimly aware that things had reached a pretty pass—a climax.

"Gents," said Squinty, glancing up through mere slits of narrowed eyes. "I see yuh does trust me. Waal, I kin say this—I never kilt Phil Grimes. Yuh ain't got no witnesses to prove I did. Yuh ain't got a thing, except the description o' the killer, which fits a lot o' hombres besides me. I had a Stetson right enough—so has every other cowhand around here. I had black leather chaps, yes—so has a hundred other boys. I had a pinto hoss—so has many another rider. I was in a cave, yes—but I was waitin' fer a friend, as I toid yuh. Yuh ain't got anything on me in that shootin', I tell yuh, so——"

Squinty Morley leaped to his feet suddenly. He leveled the gun at Shorty and the sheriff. Shorty had moved directly behind the sheriff's chair. Squinty spoke rapidly.

"I'm biddin' yuh two hombres adios," he said tersely. "I'm much

obliged fer the gat. Yuh birds put yuhr hands up right now! That's it. Now jus' keep 'em up. All I want to say is that ef I'm followed thar will be some killin'. I'm goin' away from here. Yuh two hombres tried to hood-wink me, but—but I'm jus' too danged smart fer yuh! I could shoot yuh both an' the world would be better off. Mebbe I'd better, at that, an'——"

Squinty grinned with malice. The sheriff, seated in the chair, with his hands up, felt utterly helpless. He heard Shorty's quiet voice come from behind him.

"Squinty, yuh ain't gone yet," said Shorty slowly. "An' yuh ain't gonna go, neither. I got a automatic in my shirt here. I'm gonna reach fer it now, an' plug yuh full o' holes——"

"Hey!" cried the agonized sheriff, visualizing the rain of lead he knew would come from Squinty's weapon. Too late! Squinty had fired—once, twice, three times—in the flicker of an eyelid. Shorty had evidently attempted to draw his automatic, the chump! He must surely have been hit by Squinty's fire, and yet the sheriff did not hear him fall. The sheriff longed to turn his head, but the menace of Squinty's gun was still on him.

Then the door from the street was flung wide. Joe McMeel, a gun in each hand, stood there. Mechanically, it appeared, McMeel brought his weapons up to cover Squinty. The sheriff, looking out of the corner of one eye, saw Shorty's lean brown arm extend from behind the chair, an automatic in his hand. Squinty dropped the gun in a clatter to the floor.

"Yuh missed me, then," said Shorty coldly.

"But he never missed pore 'Pappy' Stewart, who was goin' past the place on the walk," said McMeel accusingly, coming on into the office and slamming the door behind him. "Pappy was strollin' past, meanin' no harm to any

one, when some shots come out this windy here, an' he drops, shot through the haid."

Squinty wilted. The sheriff, hearing the news, shrunk down into the chair. Pappy Stewart killed! That was the price of kindness to this murdering Morley!

"Waal, Squinty, yuh got another murder to yuhr discredit," said Shorty calmly. There was a commotion at the door, as Shorty spoke to McMeel. "What's that, Joe?"

"Some o' the boys who saw the killin'," said McMeel quickly. "They're bent on comin' in here with a rope an' takin' matters inter their own hands and——"

Squinty Morley collapsed against the wall. Gone now the bravado, the sneers, the triumphant profanity.

Shorty looked at him.

"We don't want no hangin' in this town, Squinty," he said, "no matter how much yuh may deserve it. McMeel, lean hard agin' that door an' keep that mob out fer a minnit. Squinty, yuh got one chance in a thousand. I kin put yuh back in the cell an' claim this new shootin' was a accident when my gun went off, that is—ef yuh'll confess the Grimes killin'. That took place in Kiowa. No mob's after yuh fer that. Yuh'll git a fair trial thar. But here—waal, hurry up, what do yuh say? McMeel will stick with me ef I say this shootin' was a accident."

Squinty Morley barely whispered his reply.

"Sure, I kilt Phil Grimes in Kiowa! I confess it here an' now. Yuh guys had it on me, after all. But nobody seen me do it. I kain't git hanged fer it under the State law without no eye-witnesses. Save me! Yes, I kilt Grimes. Hold that door! Hide me! Do as yuh promised to do!"

Shorty nodded.

"Come on!" he ordered gruffly, as

McMeel fought to keep the outer door shut. Men were pounding on it.

Shorty and Squinty fled through another door into the adjoining jail. The sheriff heard a cell door click. Shorty came back, wiping his brow. McMeel stood aside and through the outer door came "Rabbit" Tarvin, Stuart Shaw, Max Hill, Harry Rubricam, Bill Brady, and Frank Jeffries. Each had a gun in hand. The sheriff, pulling himself up out of his chair, sought to make explanations.

"Gents, I reckon I'm to blame. I listened to a crazy suggestion, an' this is what comes o' it all——"

"Gents," broke in Shorty, smiling broadly, "I want to congratulate yuh all fer yuhr fine work. Everything came out swell. Joe McMeel, here, butted in at jus' the right minnit. Yuh all came poundin' at the door right on time. Morley confessed, as I knowed he would. He confessed before the sheriff, an' me, an' McMeel—three witnesses!—an' he's ready to put it in writin'. He was a purty smooth bird, but he fell fer the frame-up easy."

The sheriff blinked. "What frame-up?" he asked.

"Why," said Shorty, "yuh don't mean to tell me that yuh fell fer this play actin', too, did yuh, boss? I tol' yuh this was all a dramer. I figgered if Squinty saw a chance to escape he would, an' ef he was caught in a hoie he'd confess the Grimes murder. So I fixed up this little play. I wanted yuh to act sincere, so I didn't tell yuh the whole plot. O' course, I knew Squinty would never fall fer that kindness stuff, but I wanted him to think that we thought he would. I wanted him to git the idear that we was a couple o' blunderin' saps."

Shorty grinned at his astonished boss.

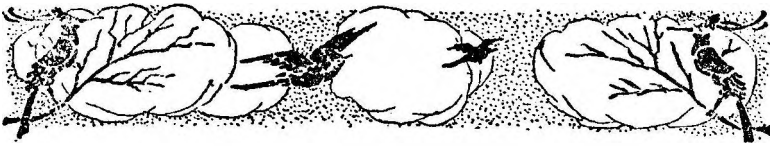
"I put some blanks in my gun. I handed it to him like a dumb-bell, jus' to pretend to show I trusted him. I

knew what he would do. He did it. He covered us. We was right in front o' the open winder. I made him fire at us. Then I told him he had missed me. McMeel, here, came runnin' in with two guns an' the story o' ol' Pappy Stewart gittin' kilt by the stray bullets coming through that winder. Squinty figgered he had jus' kilt Stewart, with us fer eyewitnesses. He's smart enough to know he'd swing fer that. Then he heard the mob rappin' at the door, or what we told him was a mob. Then I made him an offer, an' he ac-

cepted it. He'd rather be tried for the Grimes shootin' in Kiowa than get hanged by a mob here, an' in case he did try to bolt I had all these boys well armed outside, ready to pick him off ef necessary. Some little play, eh, sheriff?"

The sheriff sighed in relief.

"Yep, some play, Shorty," he admitted, "an' yuh're a swell actor, Shorty! An' as fer me, waal, I guess I ain't so bad myself when it comes to playin' the part o'—o'—a blanded dummy!"



THE RETURN OF THE MAGPIE

IT is a bad bird that can find no one to say a good word for it, and undoubtedly the magpie has long borne a sinister reputation for its thieving propensities; but even the magpie has a defender. The bureau of biological survey reveals this black bird in a new character as an insect destroyer of great economic value to the nation.

Curiously enough, or perhaps not so curiously, after all—for it was retreating before the onward march of intensive agriculture—the magpie took the path that so many pioneers have taken and withdrew to the West where he found a congenial atmosphere. It is said that the bird was once common in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Minnesota, and Idaho; now it is reported to be returning eastward.

Despite its usefulness as an insect destroyer, the return of the magpie will not be hailed with delight, for the farmer, the sportsman, the bird lover, and the housewife are at one in regarding him as an enemy. The farmer complains that the magpie attacks his live stock, especially freshly branded cattle and sheep that have been newly sheared. He cannot be blamed for his indignation, especially since it is a cruel trick of this bird to attack the eyes of the animals he molests. Wholesale raids on her poultry yards have aroused the housewife's wrath against him; and the bird lovers complain, and with truth, that this malicious bird turns upon his own kind and raids the nests of other birds, driving them from the neighborhood.

A still further black mark against the magpie is his habit of rendering aid to the enemy in the person of the coyote. The bird has a trick of stealing the meat baits put out for the coyotes and also springing the traps set for them, thus permitting the coyotes to escape.

It needs, therefore, all the good words of the bureau of biological survey to create any appreciation of the magpie. Destructive insects form more than a quarter of its annual diet; it partakes also of a limited number of small rodents, and as a scavenger it disposes of a considerable quantity of carrion.



Stormy Dorn

By Cherry Wilson

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

STORMY, runaway orphan, is flung off the train bearing the racer, Red Streak. Trinidad Dorn takes the lad to the Flying Star. Trinidad's brother, Deem, objects to his keeping land for wild-horse range, and Stormy's presence further angers him. The lad saves little Kerry Dorn from Sultan, and is given the stallion. Red Streak escapes and runs the range before breaking his neck. Stormy stays with Dad, and Deem's hatred of boy and mustangs grows.

The Flying Star deteriorates; men want more range. Trinidad, feeble now, refuses to sell the "wild boys." Bronc Craig, and daughter Cleo, champion rodeo rider, visit the Dorns. Stormy interests Cleo. Trinidad, wounded by Deem's cruelty, dies before he can adopt Stormy. The lad, forbidden to take Sultan, lives on the range to guard the mustangs, among whom he recognizes Red Streak's colt. Deem orders a round-up of the mustangs. Cleo overhears him tell Bronc to hide Sultan so Stormy will be accused of horse stealing. The boy defeats the round-up and the mustangs go free. He captures the red stallion, Rainbow. Cleo finds his hiding place and sees him training the horse.

CHAPTER X.

"I PROMISED HIM TO KERRY."



NOW, gazing spellbound at the red splendor of the wild stallion, Cleo almost hated Stormy Dorn. For that horse set her blood on fire. And he was Stormy's, by virtue of capture! No wonder they had not seen him in the round-up! Stormy must have had him all the time the riders were planning to catch him. For she saw that already—with the strange control for which he was famed, that God-given genius with horses—Stormy had made a friend of

the wild stallion! And envy burned fierce in Cleo's breast.

She knew a good horse every whit as well as Bronc. She had ever made it a practice to ride the best horse that could be obtained, cold-bloodedly forsaking a mount the instant a better crossed her vision. For she was not capable yet of loving a horse, her one feeling being the pride of possession. She would not have a horse of which she could not be proud. And now she knew that she could never be proud of any horse but the red stallion.

Even from the high brink where the entranced girl secretly watched, he showed the thoroughbred. In every

trim, clean limb, in the proud poise of his beautiful head, in his striking coloring, he looked the king he was, surpassing anything she had ever seen, and all she had heard of him—for his royal beauty was beyond words. And she resolved to have him at all costs.

Jealously, as though he were already hers, she watched Stormy work with him, marveled at how thoroughly, in that brief time, the boy had gentled him. She was amazed to see him leap on the stallion bareback, and ride him to the little stream sparkling through the hidden vale. And when the horse had drunk his fill, he rode him back to what she knew must be a corral, though its walls were entirely concealed by a grove of aspens, extending up to the opposite bluff.

Now, with his hunting knife, the boy quickly cut a great pile of the long grass, growing stirrup-deep about. A night's feed, Cleo surmised. Then, pausing to bestow a farewell pat on the red nose straining after him, Stormy turned and, crossing the creek, started up the trail directly toward her.

He had seen her! That was her first startled thought. But as he climbed on, never once lifting his head in her direction, she knew he had not. And she meant that he should not! For she was suddenly determined to hide until he was gone, then ride down for a nearer view of the wild horse.

Cautiously she reined behind the big boulder beside the trail, in a panic, as Stormy's steps neared, lest he discover her there. She would find it awkward to explain her position. But he went on. And, risking a glimpse after him, she was surprised to see that he had not continued up the trail, but had cut off to the right, and was climbing the bold face of the bluff, commanding the valley. Reaching a shelf, he stooped, and, parting the low branches of some stunted jack pines that had taken root in a crevice up there disappeared as

completely as though the rocks had opened for him. So that was it! Behind those rocks was a cave—Stormy's hide-out. Of all luck!

So she exulted—though the corral was in full view of the cave, and she could not go down without his seeing her. For Cleo had changed her mind about going down. She had again decided that it was Stormy she wanted to see. He had a way with horses, they said—looked one in the eye, and it ate out of his hand. Well, she had a way with men! She would look Stormy Dorn in the eye, tame him, and get that red stallion!

Glancing at her wrist watch, she saw that it was six o'clock. At least an hour before she need worry about meeting her father. A triumphant smile flitted across Cleo's red lips. An hour! She was a fast worker.

Drawing a gold compact from the pocket of her blouse, she held the tiny mirror up before her, and, sitting there in the saddle, calmly powdered her nose. She needed no color, for her lips and cheeks were glowing with the exercise and excitement. But she pulled her white sombrero to its most becoming angle arranging the black hair beneath it more to her liking. Then she took a last look at herself, smiled at the results, and rode boldly out from behind the rock and over to the foot of the bluff below the cave, announcing herself, in true wilderness style, by the merry hail:

"Hello—the house!"

She saw the pines part with violence up there, and Stormy's dark face staring down—as concerned at sight of her as though she had dropped from the skies. And when, after a full moment, he still stared, mute, she laughed up at him:

"Well, aren't you going to invite me to your wikipup?"

Slowly the boy found tongue—a blunt one. "No—I'm comin' down."

Carefully he came down the all but

perpendicular staircase of rocks, dropping the last few feet, and walked over to her, removing his hat, but never once taking his eyes from her. And in his eyes she saw distrust and open hostility. She would have to go slow—watch her step all the way.

Her heart quickened as she looked at him, standing beside her horse, lithe and young, his navy-blue shirt thrown back from his sun-bronzed throat, gun at his hip—as virile as this rock-bound land, and with something in the proud poise of his head, his grace and strength, that reminded her strangely of the wild stallion. And she thought it would be pleasurable, as well as profitable, employment to tame such a man. That her own heart might be crushed in the process never occurred to her. Like all who make a mock of sentiment, Cleo Craig was very sure of herself.

Very sure of herself now, she leaned toward him, holding out her hand, with a smile which, alone, had had a mesmerizing influence on many men, and gayly suggesting:

"You might say you're glad I came."

He said truthfully: "I'm not!" No need to be mealy mouthed with a girl who used a Spanish bit on a horse like that.

Cleo laughed. His downright manner had all the zest of novelty. There was no pretense about him. And if—when—he changed his mind about her, he would be thrillingly in earnest!

Softly she promised, with a look that was flame to him: "You will be, before I go."

Despising himself for this girl's power to stir him, he asked how she had known where to find him.

She hadn't, she owned. Luck had played into her hands. Into his, too! "I see you've caught the red marvel," she exclaimed. "How did you?"

"By an Indian trick." Stormy grinned, more at ease. "Made myself a suit of the tules down there, an'

planted myself beside the creek. Was there every time he brought his band to drink. Until they got used to seeing me—used to my scent, an' fed all around me. Finally, they didn't mind my movin' around a bit. Figured I was a new kind of tumbleweed, I guess. An', little by little, I shed the tules. Sugar helped too. I left sugar there for Rainbow——"

"Rainbow!" Oh, she liked that! She would keep it. She couldn't think of a better name herself!

"An' he sure has a sweet tooth. For it wasn't long before he'd take it out of my hands. An' at last he followed me to the corral, where he made friends easy."

While Stormy had told of his amazing achievement, in this matter-of-fact manner, as though it was all in the day's work with him, Cleo had dismounted. And they walked over to the brink, from where she had first seen him, from where now the admiring eyes of both went winging to Rainbow.

"It was great fun—tamin' him," Stormy confessed. "Gave me something to do."

She was quick to catch the wistful note in his voice. "Then you do get lonely up here? You aren't a hermit by choice?"

"I'll say not!" He grinned at the notion. "I like company better than most."

"But not my company!" she reproached him. And, gently, with her dark eyes full on his, she demanded: "What have you got against me, Stormy?"

To save his life he could not answer. Was it just that she was Bronc Craig's daughter? That he was at war with Bronc, had this day won a smashing victory over him, and was expecting retaliation in some form? That her coming here to-day, to his secret hiding place, was peculiar to say the least? Or the old prejudice? No, his distrust

of Cleo was as instinctive as the wild mustang's fear of man!

"You blame me for what my father is doing up here!" she accused him. "Why do you, Stormy? You don't blame Kerry for what her father does! I'm not responsible for any one's doings but my own. Why can't we be friends?"

Why not? There was no tangible reason, and there was the very tangible appeal of a beautiful, clever, and experienced woman. Flattered that she should want to be his friend, Stormy shook hands with her upon it. And, sitting down beside her on the flat bench of rock, he forgot that she was Bronco's daughter, forgot that she was really Cleo Craig, champion cowgirl of the world!

And drawn out by her adroit questioning, he talked and talked, told her of the lonely weeks past, in which he had been tortured by the fear that he could not keep his pledge to Trinidad; pleaded the mustangs' cause with her, explaining why he must stay up here, to guard against further attempts to drive them from that range. And with all he said, she agreed, sympathized, and encouraged him.

And, sitting on, ringed by the hills keeping their eternal watch, he told her more in detail of his capture of Rainbow.

He told her the story of Red Streak, of his famous record on many tracks, and how Rainbow had inherited all the red racer's speed. Unconsciously he fanned her hot desire until it broke from her:

"Stormy, I've got to have that horse! I'm crazy for him! I never wanted anything so badly!"

He saw her vivid face, ardent, rapt. He knew what it was to want a horse like that.

"I've got to have him, Stormy! The rodeos start in July. Can't you see me leading the grand march on that red

stallion? Oh, Stormy, what will you take for him?"

"I'm sorry, Cleo—but I can't sell him."

"Nonsense!" she cried, with the imperiousness of one who has never been denied anything, with the sanguine conviction inherited from Bronco that every man had his price, and in the knowledge that this boy was all but penniless, could not afford to keep so valuable a horse. "I'll pay more than any one. I've got to have him!"

He said coldly: "I promised him to Kerry."

But, seeing her beaten look—for that took all the wind out of Cleo's sails—he softened it: "I promised him to Kerry for takin' care of Sultan."

She lowered her eyes to mask their triumph. To-night, Sultan would be gone! It was conceivable that Stormy might change his mind. It was inconceivable that Rainbow should ever belong to Kerry Dorn!

"Sultan's a fine horse"—she looked up at Stormy—"and my old bet stands—remember?" she said, with that teasing laugh deep in her eyes that had stirred him then, and did again. "I'll ride him some day—with your consent! But you surely wouldn't trade Rainbow for Sultan?"

"I sure would!" said the boy eagerly. "I'd rather have Sultan than any horse on earth. I'm crazy lonesome for him. You see," he explained, "he's an old friend."

She bent to pick a sprig of the purple loco weed growing beside the rock. "Kerry," she said, with a wistfulness not altogether simulated, "is an old friend, too. An older friend than I can ever be—possibly."

Then, with one of her quick changes that dazzled him, she leaned close to thrust the purple flower through his buttonhole, and laughingly, springing up, held out both her hands to him.

"Let's not make time the essence of

our friendship, Stormy! Let's make up for lost time!"

And having, somehow, left the impression that his long friendship with Kerry was a dull and stodgy affair, she walked back to her horse and mounted. And now she was suddenly, honestly, serious. For she was about to step out on thin ice. A necessary step—for if Stormy were not on guard, they would catch him, and if they did, he would give the red horse to Kerry Dorn!

"Stormy," she said, and he was impressed by her gravity. "why do you suppose I came up here to-day?"

"To see Rainbow?" he guessed.

"No. To see you. To prove I'm your friend. To tell you that you must hide, for you're a hunted man! Tomorrow, Sheriff Gaines will be after you!"

"For what?" he searched her eyes.

"Don't ask me, Stormy! You understand—I can't tell you."

He understood that Bronc was back of it.

"Tell me, Cleo—is it for what I done to-day?"

She shook her head. "It's far more serious! It's for something you didn't do—but can't prove you didn't do! All you can do is keep out of sight—hide!"

She gazed about her, into the secret valley, up to the cave, as commanding, high, and hidden as an eagle's aerie.

"You'll be safe here," she said, noting landmarks to guide her on future trips.

He had thought it safe when, anticipating the need to hide, he had found that cave, but now—"You found me, Cleo!"

"By accident," she reminded him. "That wouldn't happen again in a million years. I just blundered up here. And you'll be on guard against this trail now. I'll say nothing about having seen you. You believe that, don't you?"

He saw her eyes, straight, and frank, and honest for once. And, tensely, in

his gratitude, in same for having doubted her, he cried:

"I'd be a coyote if I didn't! You're a real friend, Cleo."

Reckless, hard, mistress of herself as the rodeo girl was, that thrilled her to a blush. And she asked softly, with that little, teasing laugh:

"Now, aren't you glad I came?"

He laughed, too. "I sure am!"

She left him then, well satisfied with this beginning, counting the game as won, knowing she held the winning hand. She knew where Sultan would be kept—a trump card. She knew Stormy's hiding place—an ace to be played for or against him, as the game ran. She had won his confidence already. Now she had only to come back again and again, on the excuse of seeing Rainbow, or of keeping Stormy posted on the search for him, until proximity, his loneliness, and her own undeniable charm, made all excuse unnecessary. Kerry Dorn get that horse! Cleo laughed.

Down on the mustang trail at the base of the mountain, she met her father,, dog tired, grouchy, looking ahead with dread to the long night ride to Cache Valley to hide Sultan for Deem Dorn and get the law after the boy who had made a fool of him.

"Any luck?" he growled to the girl, waiting, fresh as a daisy, in the trail.

Cleo said: "No luck."

CHAPTER XI.

"TOO BAD I HAD TO DRILL HIM!"

FOXES have holes, the birds of the air have nests, and the young keeper of Bright Angel wilds had his cave high above the secret valley in Thunder Mountain. Here, before it, against the frowsy jack pines, Stormy sat after Cleo left, his brooding eyes journeying down the miles of green, terracing hills and dun prairies, until dusk leveled hill and plain, and night lit a billion tiny

fires in the sky that cupped like an inverted bowl over him.

Lonely? Until now he had not known the meaning of the word! But Cleo's visit brought back the world he had left, made him realize as never before to what he had pledged himself: To this wild life, this hate and persecution, this stillness unbroken by any human voice—this loneliness! And it would last—for years, perhaps.

Heretofore, it had not been so had. For there had been Rainbow to catch and tame, the mustangs to guard. But now the suspense was broken, and there was nothing to do but live like them—watch ceaselessly, and hide from the sight of man. More—for being a man, he must also think!

He must think thoughts as harrowing as the notes the owls were hooting, as hopeless as the song that moonstruck coyote was howling, as lonely as it was up here. He must think of what was down there! Men were bunched about yellow lamplight down there, happy with man talk, man fun, perhaps, even making fun of him—the crazy kid, who thought he could bluff out the whole range.

"I must be crazy!" he cried, in sudden rebellion, born of a boy's starving desire for companionship, a need as real as food. "I can't be right, an' every one be wrong about the mustangs!"

Then memory said—and it was as if "Dad's" spirit spoke to him with an audible voice, in trembling passion: "It's their country! Why don't we go—make room for them? There ain't no place left for the wild boys to go!"

Then black shame seared his soul. Was this the limit of his gratitude to Dad? This the size of his love for the wild boys? No! He would see it through! One defeat would not long stop Bronc and Deem. Even now they were planning to get rid of him, plotting to get the sheriff after him! Something more serious than the holdup to-

day. What? Cleo could not tell him—only that he must hide—a coyote's part!

And the boy felt shame, too, for having misjudged Cleo. She was rough on horses—just didn't realize, he guessed. For she was good at heart, good company, too; stirred a fellow up like—like—— His eyes fell on the wilted bloom in his buttonhole, and he smiled as, exactly, he defined it—like loco weed! And Cleo was pretty—if you liked the dark-eyed kind. He didn't! He liked the blue-eyed kind, the straight, steady, North-star kind—like Kerry was.

Funny, he reflected—his lips twitching in a way that was not funny—how you took for granted the things you had, never really appreciating them until you lost them. He had always appreciated Kerry, but it was not until he had lost her that he knew he loved her. And she was lost to him now—now that he did not have—would never have—a name to give her!

He would give her Rainbow, though. He would take a lot of pains training Red Streak's colt for her. It would give him something to do, while watching for Bronc's next move, and keep him from being so crazy homesick for Sultan. Gee, he couldn't stand to be away from him—they had shared everything, had always been together!

"But it's not for always," he whispered. "An' Kerry will take care of him. She can do anything with Deem. Some day I'll have Sultan again."

All the next day, Stormy watched the lonely trails, riding from one look-out to another, sighting several distant riders—punchers going about their work—but none that looked like a sheriff's posse hunting him. And all day his loneliness grew.

It drew him, at dark, to a lofty rim from where, far down the valley floor, he saw the lights of the Flying Star. How often that far, cheery glow had called him home! It called him now,

though it was Deem Dorn's home—for the Flying Star held all his memories of home, held Sultan, and the girl he loved. If only he could live one hour of the old days over!

"If I could just hear men talkin'!" he cried, in a wave of homesick longing. "If I could just see Sultan—touch him—make sure he's all right. Deem might not give him to Kerry. He's changed to her—the curse is working!"

With sudden, mad decision, he took the long, long trail down to the Flying Star.

It was about ten o'clock when he arrived there. And, tying Rainbow in the jungle of brush that bordered the deep, dry wash in the lower pasture, he warily approached the corral. Lamplight streamed from the bunk house, along with human voices that he had thirsted to hear. He wanted to go in—he a regular puncher again—but remembered that Dad Dorn was not more dead than the days that had been. Nothing could bring the old days back again! The men in there were Deem's men. They had never known Dad Dorn, Cherokee, or him. Looking toward the house, he saw several dark forms on the veranda—the glowing tips of several cigarettes, several horses tied at the hitching rail. As always on summer nights, he thought, neighbors had dropped in.

Feeling his exile as he never had before, he stole up to the corral. Sultan was not among the horses there, but he could not leave without seeing him—saying hello. And, making a wide detour, so he would not have to cross that moonlit stretch in plain view of the bunk house, he came up behind the barn, and, hugging its shadowy walls, slipped to the door, and in.

But his footsteps brought no eager whinny of recognition. He found Sultan's stall empty. Frantically he searched every stall. But the horse was not there. Then it occurred to him

that they would not keep Sultan up, having no use for him. Kerry would see that he was turned out. He would most likely be in the pasture where Rainbow was tied.

Feeling foolish for not having thought of this before taking the needless risk, he left the barn, freezing in his tracks as a puncher came to the bunk-house door, stood there a moment darkly limned against the yellow light, but finally went back inside.

Then Stormy hurried down to the pasture—the very one where long ago, he and Kerry, two happy kids, had put in weeks getting acquainted with each other and taming Sultan. Vividly it brought back memories of Kerry—things he had not thought of since—things he had better not have thought of now, since they were all of Kerry's unfaltering loyalty to him.

Stopping in the middle of the field, he looked about in the half light, seeing Sultan nowhere. But the pasture was large and held many low places. It would take hours to search them all. So, in his impatience, Stormy did what he had done a thousand times before—when he had a right to be here, when he was "Trin's boy"—he whistled for Sultan, a signal the big black had never ignored. And he listened eagerly, sure that it would bring him galloping. When it did not, he thought he had been too cautious and whistled louder. But the horse did not come, or answer!

In growing alarm, he walked down the swale, nearer the jungle where he had left the wild stallion, and whistled again and again.

Then, through the night, there came running, like that frightened deer in Papoose Valley, a girl who flung herself upon him, crying in despair and horror:

"Oh, Stormy, why did you come? Don't you know? Go—quick! The sheriff's here!"

Hungrily he stared at her, scarcely hearing.

She shook him, crying:

"Don't stand there, looking at me like that! Don't you hear—the sheriff's here! He wants you!"

"For what?" he was roused to ask.

"For stealing Sultan! Oh, you might have trusted me!"

Sultan stolen! She believed——

"Kerry," he cried, his hands gripping hers painfully, "I swear to God I didn't take him!"

She looked up at him in the starlight, her sweet face dazed. "No—of course you didn't! Else I wouldn't have heard you here, whistling for him. But some one did! Some one stole him out of his stall last night. Dad swore out a warrant for you to-day! And the sheriff just came—with two men. They are spending the night here—ready to hunt for you at daybreak!"

"So that's the scheme they hatched up to get rid of me!" With hot anger Stormy saw it all. "That's what Cleo meant——"

"Cleo!" cried Kerry strangely.

Earnestly he explained: "She rode up yesterday to warn me. Lucky she found my hidin' place——"

"Lucky!" cried Kerry, in that same strange tone. "She knows where you are—that girl!"

But the boy said quickly: "You've got her wrong, Kerry! I did too. But Cleo won't tell. You see, she's——"

"I see," laughed the Flying Star girl bitterly. "that she's got around you! You're a fool to trust her. Cleo——" She was suddenly swept off her feet, and swung into the black shade of the trees!

"Hush!" Stormy whispered. "Go on talkin'—just as you were! Don't look around! We're being watched! There's a man behind the pines over there. An' I see another in the brush by the fence—see the shine on his gun!"

She trembled with terror for him. "It's the posse! They heard you, too! Oh, Stormy, what will you do?"

He tried to allay her fear. "I'm all right, girl! I've got your horse—Red Streak's colt! Nothing can catch me. Say good night, Kerry—natural as you can—an' hurry home. I'll duck into that wash before they miss me. I've got all the advantage, for they don't know I know they're here!"

But she couldn't hear to leave him, knowing they were only waiting for that to close in. And, heedless of the prying eyes—of which one pair, Deem Dorn's, had a glowing furnace of madness in them—she clung to him.

"Go, Kerry!" Gently, Stormy disengaged her hands. "Say good night, an' hurry."

She lifted her arms. "Just to make it convincing," she whispered, piteously—"just because you're going into danger——" She drew his dark head down to her.

And, though death might lurk in ambush, Stormy was happy! Happy to die with that touch of Kerry's lips. For it had been no sister's kiss!

Shaken by it, he watched her hurry up the trail, as any romancing cowboy might. But his every nerve and muscle was tensed for flight, and, as she vanished, he ducked swiftly into the brush. He dropped on all fours, and wormed toward the spot where Rainbow was tied, hearing the brush crash behind him, as the men, taken completely by surprise, plunged after him. And still he was exultant. He knew where he was going, and they didn't. For he heard, behind him, the hoarse shouts of the pack:

"See him?"

"Yeah—snakin' along the fence!"

"No! Not that way; I heard brush crack over here——"

Then Stormy's heart stood still, as the stallion, excited by all this commotion, gave a wild snort, and a near voice yelled:

"This way—I heard a hoss!"

With his direction betrayed, the boy

was forced to leap up and run for it. For he had not only to reach Rainbow first, but untie him, mount, and be off. Smashing through the thicket, he heard them yelling for him to stop. And when he didn't, they shot. The bullets went wild, but their deafening crashes terrified the wild horse.

He was rearing and plunging against the rope, when Stormy ran up. Leaping to his back, too pressed for time to untie him, Stormy jerked his gun free and shot the rope in two. With a mighty bound, the crazed horse bolted. Shots ripped the night. But like a streak of lightning, Rainbow was making for the pasture gate. He was dashing through when two men, dispatched there for just such an emergency when the boy's presence should be discovered, swung their horses broadside.

"Halt!" they yelled.

But Stormy could not have halted had he tried. For Rainbow's blood was up, and he plunged straight for the men, all but running them down as he passed!

After him, at top speed, they came—Bronc Craig and Sheriff Gaines!

A bullet whined over Stormy's head. Hot on it—closer—came another pellet of death. They were getting his range. But Rainbow was running away from them as though they were standing still. In one moment more—

But in the first split-second of it something struck Stormy in the back with crashing impact, and the pain and force of it sent him reeling from the saddle. Some instinct that lived when all others were dead made him grasp the horn, cling to it as to life itself. Then, slowly, laboriously, as though he weighed a ton, he drew himself up on the horse again. But he was too heavy to hold himself, and he fell over the stallion's neck, hands locked in a death grip upon the pommel, instinctively holding there, while the son of the fastest horse ever brought into the West flattened out in

a wind-splitting stride for wild-horse country!

"He's hard hit!" yelled the sheriff, over the pound of hoofs. "Too bad I had to drill him! But I warned him. No wonder Deem Dorn wants that hoss!"

"That hoss!" raved Bronc insanely. "Think Sultan could run like that? Think any hoss could, but— Dang the luck, that kid's got the red stallion!"

The sheriff cried out in his surprise and understanding. "Thought it was funny he'd ride a stole hoss back to the Flyin' Star! Still, a hombre in love takes fool chances! Waal, we'll pick him up along here. He'll never make the hills!"

But Stormy made the hills. How? He never knew. It troubled him that he didn't know—always knew how he got to a place before! But he knew he was there—for there was the corral! Nobody could fool him on that corral—built it himself. Then—he was home. Better get off his horse then. But he could not seem to—forgot how to—

"Just—fall—off——" His gray lips quivered in a grin of awful wisdom.

But his hands seemed frozen on the saddle horn, and he could not let go. Must have, though—for the next he knew, Rainbow was standing over him in the dawn. And his hands were frozen over his breast—holding in pain. By great effort he lifted them—to let pain go. But it would not—only bit deeper into him. Blankly in the dawn, he looked at his hands—all red—red!

Then memory came! He had been with Kerry, and—just because he was going into danger—shots ripping the night—ripping through him—horses running—they were after him for stealing Sultan! He must get away before they came.

Somehow, he got to his knees, his face twisting in the torture of the movement. Somehow, he crawled to the gate and set the bars in place—resting long

between each one, panting from the mad effort. Then he looked up the steep bluff toward his cave. He must get up there—must not die here—must not let Deem Dorn know there was not any one to care what happened to the mustangs!

Fixing his wide, staring, pain-glazed eyes on the pines before that cave, he began slowly to crawl up the trail. He fell, after the first few steps, all power of motion gone, still gazing up—

"Sky-high!" he moaned, in agony. "Free ride—to heaven—if I wait——"

Then, remembering the wild boys, he set his teeth on pain, set his undaunted spirit on crawling there. And fainting, waking, he dragged himself, like a wounded animal, to his lair!

CHAPTER XII.

THE RED TRAIL.

THE first man to suspect Stormy's presence at the Flying Star had been Deem Dorn. While harping on his trumped-up charge to Sheriff Gaines, he had heard Stormy's whistle, and recognized it as his call for Sultan. Cunningly he had planned the capture. Planting the sheriff and Bronc Craig on fast horses in the gate to guard against any escape, he had himself led the men to the pasture, only to discover his daughter with Stormy. A discovery that held Deem Dorn in the paralysis of overpowering fury, a helpless witness to the scene between the lovers.

Never had he dreamed that such an outrage could befall him. Never had he even suspected the deep bond of affection that, since childhood, had been between them. Nor was this strange. For they—every one—had taken pains that he should not do so. Had any one dared to even hint at it, he would have denied it with all the violence of his violent nature. But he could not deny the evidence of his eyes. And it maddened him!

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His hate for Stormy—born of jealous greed, and dating from the boy's coming to the Flying Star, a homeless, pitiable waif—had long been a ruling passion. Not one old grudge was forgotten. All his fancied causes for hate had lain and multiplied in his breast. Now they were nothing—not even the boy's last act of defiance, in holding him up with a gun on his own land—compared to this—that Stormy had won the heart of his only child! The thought that the nameless tramp that Trinidad had foisted on him should qualify himself to share the inheritance he meant for her—thus setting at worse than naught all he had built and struggled for—drove him to frenzy and despair.

Frenzied there, spying on them in the night, knowing that the other secreted men were seeing what he was seeing—he wished he had killed Stormy that day he took the buggy whip to him! He would have—or brought him under his hand—had not Trinidad stopped him. Now he would kill him! It was the only way. The only way to be sure that kid would never cross his path again. He was to blame for the trouble over that range. He was to blame that he, Deem Dorn, was a haunted man!

Night after night—all night—his brother cried in that awful voice: "*Deem, you wouldn't—*" till he could not rest. By day—every day—he heard his brother crying that—and nothing else! And Trin lived on in this boy, on whom his stubborn heart had been set. If he killed him, Trin's spirit would be laid, and he could—rest!

But wild as he was to do it, a more fearful madness seized him when Kerry parted from the boy with that sudden, swift caress. For the thing one cherishes most is the object of deepest aversion when reason goes! And all Deem's idolatry of Kerry became blind, unreasoning hate.

Wholly in the grip of it, he did not follow the men plunging after Stormy,

who had just made his quick break into the brush. He ran after Kerry up the trail, a "stumbling, shambling, senseless hulk, mouthing words "as loose as sand, and scattered far from sense."

On the top of the veranda steps, he overtook her, terrifying her by the way he grabbed at her, by the look in his starting eyes as he mumbled:

"You—I saw you——"

White as a snowdrift, she faced him, drawing on all her courage, remembering that he was her father and she loved him, realizing that he was not responsible, saying, in a frightened whisper:

"Yes?"

Nothing she might have said could have affected him like that simple admission. He glared at her, snarling, as the beast in him leaped to ascendancy: "I saw you! Saw you kiss him—that horse thief!"

Nothing he might have said could have steeled her like that insult to Stormy. She seemed to grow before him, to gather strength. She was like a slim, strong sapling that any breeze can bend but even the worst gale leaves unbroken. And again steadily, questioningly, she said, "Yes?"

With jaw outthrust, he neared her. "What does it mean? Tell me that!"

"What does it mean?" she echoed, her face glowing in the starlight with a strange, white glory. "It means that I love Stormy!"

He threw up his hands and sprang for her, gasping: "You—you——"

But delaying his terrible epithet, delaying for days his final, frightful act of madness—down in the pasture a gun crashed! And his hands, raised over her, beat together in a ghastly clap of joy.

"They got him!"

The girl swayed, caught at a pillar, and, hanging there in horror—as there came the faint but furious sound of hoofs—heard her father cry: "Missed, by Heaven! But"—as sharp on the

night came a volley of shots—"they'll get him!"

Now the Flying Star was in an uproar. Men were pouring from the bunk house, shouting questions at comrades who had no more knowledge than themselves. Who was shooting? At whom? What? The while they raced toward the high point above the house, as sounds of flight, pursuit, and firing swept up the starlit road.

Running with the rest, Kerry Dorn was aware of another girl running with her—a girl with face as white as hers, with the same horror in her eyes.

"Oh, the fools! The fools! They'll hit him!" that girl raved.

And Deem Dorn spun on her with an oath. "They aim to! You're the fool—wastin' sympathy on a horse thief!"

In her exasperation, Cleo Craig screamed at him: "They'll hit the red stallion!"

And the truth flashed on Kerry. This was why Cleo had hunted Stormy out, won his trust—for that horse! She heard her father demanding of Cleo how she knew that horse wasn't Sultan, saw the long look Cleo gave him, heard her answer:

"By his running!"

More tensely all strained their hearing on those two sets of hoofbeats—one yet plain, the other fading, with miraculous swiftness, into the distance.

"She's right!" yelled a Flying Star man. "She's got to be! Listen to how he's outridin' them! If he gets to the hills, it will take an army to rout him!"

And Deem Dorn swore: "Then I'll git an army an' rout him! I'll find him—fix him!"

Behind them, Kerry whirled on Cleo, her blue eyes blazing with a fierce light. "If you show them his hiding place," she panted, "I'll kill you! Hear me, I'll——"

The rodeo girl clapped a hand over Kerry's mouth. "You little simpleton! Do you want them to know about it? I

don't want him to be caught, or killed, any more than you do!"

Nor did she! If Stormy were caught, he would give the horse to Kerry. If he were killed, it would go—to whom, she did not know, to Deem Dorn, most likely, since it had been captured on his land. Not to her, she knew, for she had not a shadow of a claim on it. So her prayers for Stormy's safety were scarcely less fervent than the Flying Star girl's.

Now that all sounds had died, she went back to the house to await the outcome. All waited—too excited to think of sleep. The punchers, grouped in the yard, filled the long wait with lurid speculations. Deem Dorn betrayed a restlessness that got on Cleo's nerves. Now he was sitting on the porch, muttering to himself, now pacing the yard, now in the house, now out again, but never still. Couldn't folks see that he was crazy? the girl thought. Dangerous? Why, he ought to be put in an asylum!

Only Cleo was calm—now that she knew Rainbow had outrun the posse's guns. Going into the house to get a cloak, she saw Kerry standing by the window, stony, white, staring straight through her, not seeing her. Cleo's lip curled. Catch her breaking her heart like that for the best man on earth! So she thought, making herself comfortable in the hammock to wait. She even dozed.

Awakened hours later by the posse's return, she was the last to join the clamoring mob about them.

"He's hard hit—but he got away," Gaines was reporting to Deem. "Can't do anything in the dark. Better all try an' catch some sleep, an' get out at daybreak."

Cleo was trying to catch her father's eye and question him further, when Kerry threw herself upon her, dragging her to one side.

"He's up there—hurt!" she cried in

agony. "Suffering for something he didn't do! Suffering—and alone! Tell me where he is, Cleo! Take me to him!" she pleaded.

But Cleo wrenched herself away, and ran to her room. She locked herself in, and sat down on the bed to think. If she were gone to-morrow, her father would be far too busy to inquire for her. No one would miss her but Kerry, who dared not tell. He was up there—shot! And he must not die—until he had given her the red horse!

Quickly she dressed in her riding outfit. And ruthlessly filching two sheets from the closet of the room she occupied as guest, and other articles she might need, she made a little bundle of them, and noiselessly shot back the bolt.

The house was still when she stepped into the hall. No one saw her leave. It was dark—the last black hour of night—but she had no trouble getting her bay out of the corral and saddling him. Then she rode quietly from the Flying Star.

But once out of earshot, she sank her wicked rowels deep, and the animal all but leaped from under her in a headlong gallop for the hills.

Daybreak found her in wild-horse country, and nearing Thunder Mountain, where she picked up Rainbow's tracks, noting how they were entirely lost for long stretches on rocky land, since his feet were unshod. Often they were lost for more long stretches on soft trails, for they were indistinguishable from the hundreds of other unshod prints.

But where they showed a horse running, showed a horse alone, showed direction, she got down and obliterated them, working as conscientiously as ever Kerry could have. And, reaching the point where she, by the millionth chance, had left the mustang trail to climb the mountain, and so blundered onto the hidden valley in the heart of it, she systematically wiped out every sign.

Then, confident that the hunt would go on, beat all about, and concentrate on the wilder wilds beyond, she rode up to the far brink from where she had first seen Rainbow, from where, with unquenched desire, she saw him now, corralled and weary, his beauty dimmed by the film of dust and foam. But, to her, he was more beautiful than any horse on earth.

And her eyes went up to the cave, perfectly concealed by natural foliage. Had an army stood where she stood they would have passed it up unheeding. She did not believe that Stormy had been badly hurt, else he could hardly have ridden Rainbow here, unsaddled him, and barred him in. But she thought it strange he did not come, since he must have heard her—could see her through that curtain of pines. And a strange chill came over her.

She got off her horse, and, leaving the reins dragging, walked with oddly reluctant steps to the foot of the bluff.

This day was brightening—just like any day, just like the day before yesterday, when she had stood here and called, and he had come down to her. Now she was going up to him.

Determinedly she took two steps—and stopped, her heart thumping, her eyes dilating, as if she saw a rattlesnake coiled on the rocks. But what she saw on the rocks was—red! Her wide eyes lifted—red all the way, a red trail leading to the cave.

Slowly she climbed it, dread mounting with her. She pulled herself over the ledge up there—so crimsoned where the boy had dragged his broken body over—that she was afraid—afraid to go on, afraid of what lay behind that screen of pines.

And she called, "Stormy!"

Her voice sounded thin, unlike a human voice, banded through the rocks. But he must have heard her, if he were in that cave. And he was—she shuddered, eyes on the red. Then why

didn't he answer? He would answer, if he was not—

Fighting down her dread, with that cold nerve that had made her queen of the rodeo, Cleo bent low, parting the coarse plumes of the grotesque pines to look inside, recoiling at what she saw in there.

Stormy lay huddled on the rock floor of the cave—dead, she thought! But, as she dropped over him, turning him on his back, he moaned, and she knew some spark of life was left.

She rushed from the cave, scrambled down the cliff, and ran down the trail to the little creek that rippled past Rainbow's corral. She dipped up water in her sombrero, and, hurrying back to her horse, took the bundle she had brought, clambered back to the cave, and went heroically to work to save a life—that she might win a horse!

CHAPTER XIII.

"HE GAVE ME THE RED STALLION!"

OF course, I'm no M. D., smiled Cleo, putting down the little basin of pheasant broth from which she had been feeding her patient, "but I'd say you were worth a dozen dead men. You've been shot through the chest, but many a man's lived to brag of that! You're faint—from loss of blood. But if you'll just lie still, you'll get well. I'll see to it!"

Faintly, but fervently, the wounded boy whispered: "Cleo, you're sure an angel of mercy!"

She—the Destroying Angel—laughed. "Forget it, Stormy!" And, giving his hand a little pat, she turned away, singing cheerfully: "You're here, and I'm here, so what do we care!"

She was here! Stormy had mighty good reason to be glad of that. She would have to go, of course. But she said she would be back. Next to Kerry, he would rather have Cleo here than any one else.

Prostrate on his rude cot, too weak to move hand or foot, his great, pain-stricken eyes followed her as she worked about the light, roomy cavern, with her sleeves rolled up and a song on her lips. And for the first time in the more than a month that he had lived here, the place wasn't lonesome.

Actually, to one in less physical torment, it was pleasant. With the sunbeams, sifting through the green jack pines at the entrance, playing over the rock walls and floor, and a fire crackling in the rear, routing the least suggestion of damp and chill, its smoke going up a crevice in the rocks—a natural chimney—that created a steady draft, making the fire burn bright, and not letting any smoke back.

But there was a troubled light in the boy's eyes as they returned, at last, to the basin of broth. He had shot that pheasant yesterday. When it was gone he—

"Don't worry," laughed Cleo, reading his mind. "I'll bring home the bacon!"

Weakly he confessed: "I am worried, Cleo—most to death!"

She saw he was, and it worried her. For she was not nearly as optimistic about him as she had made out. His wound was bad. His face was hot. A fever was raging in his eyes. It was a toss-up whether he lived or died. If he was to pull through, they would both have to fight.

Sitting down on the edge of his bunk, she took his hot hands in her cool ones, quietly asking: "Now, what's worrying you, Stormy? Tell mother all about it."

"Sultan," the sick boy groaned. "Where he is, an'—"

"He's in clover—having a grand time, playing at being a colt again. You'll get him back some day. I'll even guarantee that."

Thankful tears filled Stormy's eyes. "Cleo, you're a friend all right! How can I ever pay you back?"

Oh, easily! But she was not thinking of payment yet, not until she had made his debt so great—

"Well," her dark eyes smiled into his, "that's one worry less. Come on—get it off your chest. What next?"

"The wild boys!" he whispered, in bitter anxiety. "While I lie here flat on my back, Deem—"

"Will be much too busy hunting for you to think about them! And he will be for some time. So will every one. Believe me, there's going to be a hunt!"

"An' that worries me, Cleo! Rainbow ain't branded. They'll find him—an' he's Kerry's! I've got to get up out of this an' brand him!"

For the first time since he had awakened to find her here, Cleo's eyes did not laugh. They were hard and cold as an enemy's eyes. And she said, as an enemy might: "If you move off this bunk, I'll quit you flat!"

"But he's got to be branded!" wildly the boy protested. "If some one rode up—"

"There's not a chance in a million of that!"

"It's that chance I'm worryin' about!" cried Stormy, trying to raise himself, and falling back with a cry of pain and rage at his helplessness. "I can't rest, Cleo, thinkin' any minute some one might—"

"Oh, heavens—I'll brand him myself, if you'll be quiet!"

His fevered hands clutched hers, his fevered eyes implored. "Would you, Cleo?"

Hadn't she said she would?

"Can you?" He doubted a girl's ability to handle the wild horse. But he was coldly reminded by this girl:

"I didn't win my title putting flower horseshoes on Derby winners!"

Champion cowgirl of the world! Of course she could! He had forgotten. And he entreated, "Cleo, will you do it now?"

Compelled by his burning touch, by

the hint of delirium in his voice, the girl picked up her hat.

"Don't burn him, Cleo—just a hair brand, to last till I get out of here."

And—as she gazed through the pines, down that illimitable sweep of hill and plain, to make sure that none of the searchers were in the vicinity—feverishly, Stormy instructed:

"Cleo, brand him for Kerry."

"For Kerry?" She whirled.

"Yeah—I caught him for Kerry. Brand him with her initials—K. D. Savvy, Cleo?"

Oh, perfectly! That was what was making her so mad that she was sick—all but delirious herself! She was being forced to brand that horse for another girl! But, if Stormy lived, she could prevail on him to change the brand. While, if she let him work himself into a fever and die—

Cleo's black eyes fairly blazed as she went down the trail.

And, in a fever, she worked, with a skill and dispatch which even Bronc Craig could not have excelled. She roped Rainbow, and noosed his forefeet, threw and hog tied him, in a way that showed why she was the champion cowgirl of them all. Then she rose panting, not so much from the effort, as from her soul's fierce rebellion, which took her breath, fought her back at every step, as though she were running against a wind.

Building a small fire, she knelt by it, unstrapped a spur and flung it into the blaze. And when the rowel glowed red, she drew it out with a handle made of two clamped sticks, and bent over the horse, who was as helpless against this rough treatment as Sultan had been against the father of this same girl.

A hair brand—K. D.—easy—

No! For strangely, she could not begin. She found it physically impossible to start those initials. This horse was hers! She could not give him to Kerry Dorn. And vividly as she poised over

him, the red-hot steel in her hand, there flashed through her mind the tempting picture of what would be if she owned Rainbow herself! She saw herself riding him in a crowded arena, the cynosure of cheering thousands! If Stormy died, he would never know. If he lived, he would owe her too much, think too much of her, to blame her. A moment she worked, finding it fatally easy!

Then she threw the spur aside, and freed the horse, who sprang up, snorting his outrage. And on the sleek, red hip of the son of the famous Red Streak was no impermanent hair brand, no K. D., but—burned deep for all time—a bold, flaunting symbol of ownership, C. C.!

But the girl's exultance died fast. For suddenly, as she looked at the brand that marked him hers, she was afraid—afraid that Stormy would read the truth in her eyes, afraid he could read that brand from the cave, terribly afraid he would die, and folks would say she had robbed the dead—make a ghoul of her—ruin her!

Suppose some one rode up to that brink! How could she explain how the wild stallion of Bright Angel Hills came to be wearing her brand. They would find Stormy, and she would be involved. Cleo, who had had no fears before, was now beset by a thousand fears. And she was seized by the natural, mad impulse to hide her guilt—hide Rainbow—quick!

Leaping on her bay, she rode up the creek, hunting a place out of sight of the cave. She explored that valley, thrust like a finger deep into the heart of the mountain, finding it wilder, narrower, as she progressed. At last she could see the end ahead and was about to turn back, when she noticed that the creek did not end, but went on somewhere. And, following it up to a great jumble of rocks, she saw a natural opening, completely covered by brush, through which the stream—a mere

trickle here—came tumbling forth. With fast-beating heart, she splashed through, finding in there a deep depression, acre-wide and rock-bound, with walls towering three hundred feet to the crest of Thunder Mountain. An ancient crater—with grass and water. Safe as a tomb! Made to order!

Excited by her discovery, she returned for Rainbow. It was no easy task to transfer the wild stallion. But, after a half hour of strenuous effort, Rainbow was picketed in the old crater.

Then Cleo rode back to destroy Stormy's corral! For she meant to make a clean sweep, leave nothing to show what the valley had been used for. The corral was a dead give-away, and, if found, it would concentrate the search on this valley. She would explain that to Stormy, tell him she had hidden Rainbow—done everything—to insure his safety.

Guilt-driven, she tore down what Stormy had built, scattered the logs, tore the brush he had woven into its several parts, casting them far and wide, strewed dead grass and leaves over the earth trampled by Rainbow's hoofs, and brushed out his tracks at the creek where he had watered. She brushed all tracks from the trail to the cave, after taking her own horse up, and when she was done, it would have needed a keen eye, indeed, to finding anything suspicious there.

Weary, but jubilant, she returned to the cave, and was vastly relieved to find Stormy asleep, a deep, heavy sleep, not unlike the one he had been in when she came. It would probably last through the night. And she decided to go back to the Flying Star. They would be wondering about her. Kerry would be sure to suspect. And she had to put the plan she had formed into effect—a plan that would make it possible for her to come up here every day, and bring the drugs, food, and comforts essential to Stormy's recovery.

Luck was with her, in that she met no one on the way, though she saw frequent signs of the posse. Nearing the ranch, she stopped beside Rainbow River, and rubbed down her steaming horse with damp grass, also freshening herself. A needless precaution. For the only man at the Flying Star was the waddy who took her horse, and he was effectually blinded by the smile she gave him.

She got to her room without even Kerry seeing her, and there, soon after, she heard Deem, Sheriff Gaines, and her father ride in. They were at table when she appeared, cool and fresh in a deep yellow, organdie dress, in strange contrast to Kerry, who was as haggard and weary as though she had been nursing a sick man, ripping down a corral, and branding a wild horse!

Approvingly, Bronc looked her over. "Lazybones!" he teased her. "I'll bet you slept all day."

"I did," she daintily yawned, passing up Deem's red glance for the frank admiration in Sheriff Gaines'.

But she saw, by the light in Kerry's heavily shadowed eyes, that the girl knew better. And when she rose from the table, seeing Kerry start around to her, Cleo forestalled her by putting an arm through Bronc's, and drawing him out to a far corner of the piazza. There, idly twisting off a spray of the honey-suckle, she said:

"I'm leaving this ranch."

"Huh? What's that?" Bronc was startled. "You're leavin'? Why?"

"I'm fed up." She shrugged. "Kerry's as jolly as a crutch."

Bronc nodded. "I see that. She's sweet on that kid. Tough on her—knowin' her dad's out for his pelt! But it would look a sight better if you stuck. Can't you cheer her up?"

"That's not my line—being a merry sunbeam," Cleo laughed shortly, ripping the pink petals apart. Then petulantly, as though he were to blame for it: "A

fine vacation you've let me in for! Do you realize it's only three weeks before the Red Falls rodeo? I've got to be in shape to work. My nerves are frayed. I want some fun."

Well, that was fair enough. She had a hard season ahead. But Bronc smiled at the idea that Cleo had nerves.

"So, I'm going over to the Buckhorn, to stay with the Hoyt girls," she coolly informed him. "Then I can ride into town for a dance now and then."

Bronc was agreeable. "Suit yourself. I'm fed up, too—with Deem Dorn! But I'm anchored here till that boy's jailed, an' I trap them mustangs. I don't believe we'll find the kid. I believe he kept right on goin' last night! An' I'm about of a mind to start another corral right off. For I want to be in Red Falls myself."

That night Cleo went over to the Buckhorn. This ranch was ten miles from the Flying Star, but even a little nearer to Stormy's lair. And she would have greater freedom there. Lark Hoyt's girls were old friends of hers, and—unlike Kerry Dorn—were much in awe of her. She could easily pull the wool over their eyes, and make excuses for the long and frequent absences necessary if she was to care for Stormy.

But, before leaving, Cleo did an unpardonably treacherous thing. From Bronc she went straight in to Kerry, whom she luckily found alone, and announced her departure.

"You can't go!" Kerry clung to her, crying, for worry and suspense had wholly unnerved her. "I won't let you—not till you tell me where Stormy is! You've seen him—I know! You were gone all day!"

"I saw him," said Cleo.

"How was he?" Kerry was too wild for news to feel jealousy. "Is he hurt, Cleo? Tell me?"

"Slightly," was the careless retort. "A flesh wound, I guess. I didn't see that it inconvenienced him much."

Kerry was radiant. "Honest?" she begged. "You wouldn't tell me that just to be kind, Cleo?"

"Me?" Quite honestly Cleo rejected the thought. "Why should I?" Then, as if swayed by a sudden impulse to confide, she bent her head.

"Listen," she whispered. "Something happened up there to-day. You won't tell, Kerry?"

As if Kerry would tell anything on Stormy!

"He gave me a present," lied the rodeo girl. "A real present, Kerry." Swiftly, as the other girl drew back, she said: "He gave me that red stallion!"

She saw the Flying Star girl, mute and stricken, staring at her. Then she saw, what she wanted to see, pride coming to Kerry's rescue—pride that shone through the pain, as she tore Stormy from her heart and her mind, pride that lifted her head, and froze a cold, little smile on her lips.

"I congratulate you!" said Kerry Dorn.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HE'S DYING—COME!"

THUS Cleo Craig began her duel existence. She was alternately Stormy's attentive nurse and the Buckhorn's guest. That she was able to carry it through proved her capacity for deception, her amazing physical stamina and cold grit. But the strain taxed her mind and body, forcing her to draw recklessly on her reserve, which she needed to defend her title through the strenuous season ahead.

As she had foreseen, she had complete liberty at the Buckhorn Ranch. Nobody questioned her goings and comings, and her explanations, when she deigned to offer any, were accepted without comment.

Because of her fame, the Hoyt girls were glad to have her on any terms. They made excuses for her, and hu-

mored her every whim. That she found it necessary to spend half her time in Red Coulee was entirely comprehensible to them. Naturally, she would have many things to attend to in town, he much fêted there, with her vacation so near an end. That she went without them, insisted on doing so—well, that was temperament. And a rodeo star is as much entitled to that as any star in the firmament. For them, her moods and cold reserve only added to her luster.

But they gave Lark Hoyt a pain. A "gadabout," he dubbed Bronc Craig's daughter, thought her "stuck-up," and on very good grounds. For Cleo made it plain that all talk of the man hunt—which had passed by Thunder Mountain, beat the wilder wilds behind, and was now on the verge of being abandoned—was boresome to her; also, the endless discussion about the red stallion, and the exciting odds as to whether Stormy was dead, or had fled the country. If the latter, had he taken the red colt, as well as the big black he'd stolen? Or was he hiding up there, ready to make a dramatic appearance, and stop the mustang round-up to take place soon under the protection of Sheriff Gaines? To this gossip, of absorbing interest to Bright Angel Range, Cleo listened avidly, while yawning openly.

But when tending the grievously wounded boy in his remote mountain cavern, she was another person. She took the best of care of Stormy, no matter how unworthy her motive. No one could have been more faithful. Many a time when folks thought she was dancing the night out in town, many a day when they thought she was lazing the hours away in her room, she was making tedious trips to Red Coulee for Stormy, or was already up there with him. She had smuggled up comforts to him until the cave was really a home. And when he needed anything, and his condition was too grave to spare time on the road

to town, she cheerfully raided the Buckhorn storeroom!

Service, a thing new to her, was all she lived for. And it left an indelible stamp on her character.

All her life, Cleo had been petted and spoiled. Always people had done for her, till she had come to expect it, exact it, and to be angry if any failed to pay instant homage to her. Now, for the first time in her life, things were reversed. She was forced to do for some one else. A human being was utterly dependent on her. A man's life was utterly in her hands. And, as she accepted the responsibility, met it squarely, instincts she would have scorned to possess quickened within her, and her transformation began.

There were days when Stormy knew not when she came, nor when she went. Nor did he ever know the long nights she sat through, changing cooling cloths on his head. Long, weird, lonely, terrible nights she spent by his bed, listening to his delirious babbling of Kerry, and Sultan, and Dad Dorn's mustangs, with emotions known only to her God and herself.

In these grim watches, she came to know him as she never could have known him in health. For his every reserve was down, and every secret of his heart was given away by his uncensored tongue. She learned what his childhood had been—saw him, an orphaned lad with a gallant spirit, which could not be crushed, even by institutional life, nor by the privation and cruelty he had known in the year he had "looked out for himself." She saw that spirit being molded through his growing years by Trinidad Dorn for the purpose that haunted him on his sick bed. She saw its unquenched flame burn in his eyes, as he promised the dead man that he would keep his word, pay his debt—for he talked to Dad by the hour, as though he were living yet.

And she learned of the long-standing

romance between him and the Flying Star girl, his "North Star," whom he called on to guide him—now that he had "lost his bearin's, didn't know which way to turn"—guide him home! And if she felt a pang of regret at having destroyed Kerry's faith in him, why, that, too, was between Cleo's God and herself.

Never had she known such pain. And strangely, never had she known such joy. Full as her days were, there was time each day to care for Rainbow in the old crater. There were times when she forgot that he was not hers—forgot that that black brand was not the sign and symbol of legitimate ownership. And in caring for him, she came to know and love him. Aye, though he should suddenly become to all others undesirable, unbeautiful, she wanted him. For they were friends! And the day when he first nickered, and came the length of his stake rope to meet her, was a red-letter day for Cleo. And sore her punishment that she could not share this conquest with any one.

Bitter-sweet, too, were her times with Stormy. She cherished the little talks they had, in his intervals of consciousness and comparative freedom from pain. But his broken protestations of gratitude made her soul smart with shame.

One day, kneeling over the camp fire, preparing some delicacy for him, after a fashion as crude as that of any primitive cave woman, she surprised his dark eyes on her, and asked what was on his mind.

He said weakly, "You've changed, Cleo."

"How?" she wondered, going to him, honestly curious.

"Oh—I don't know. You're quieter. You don't laugh."

"Seeing you sick, Stormy," she smiled wanly, "doesn't make me very gay. You get well, and see how quick I change back."

And she felt her cheeks burning with pleasure as he said, in his downright manner: "I hope not, Cleo! I like you better this way."

One day her cheeks burned from another cause, when he suddenly asked: "Did you tell Kerry yet that you branded her horse?"

She shook her head, thinking of what she had told Kerry! Stormy did not know that she had left the Flying Star a week ago.

He was silent for a while, but his mind was not hard to read—not with that intense yearning in his feverish gaze. So she was prepared, when he whispered:

"I wish you'd tell Kerry I'm sick. I'm crazy to see her!"

"I've told her," she lied, lacking the courage to meet his eyes.

"Then why don't she come?" the boy cried.

She did not know, she said. But, seeing how upset he was, how he kept dwelling on it, she suggested: "Maybe Deem won't let her."

Stormy knew better. "Deem couldn't stop her! He tried to keep her from being friends with me, but she did just the same. Kerry does what she thinks is right! Funny she don't come to see me."

He turned his face to the wall—worrying about it, Cleo knew. And his thin features were bitterly anxious, when he looked back.

"Cleo, is Kerry sick?"

She told him that she was not.

And his face went white as a sheet with awful fear.

"She's dead!" he moaned. "That's what's keepin' her!"

Cleo was still trying to convince him that this was not true when delirium overtook him again. And, in this spell, he thought Kerry was in mortal danger, and wildly entreated Cleo to save her—from Sultan; plunging for her, from Deem—mad with the curse of Cain!

But this was not as unnerving to Cleo as the next fancy of his feverish brain. For he thought she was Kerry, and poured out his heart to her. He told her how much he loved her, but could not even try to win her, for he had not a name to give her. But, if she would do what she had done that night—because he was going into danger——

To quiet him, Cleo bent her lips to his. And then she rushed outside, stood on the ledge, one hand fast to a wisted pine, one hard on her tortured heart, and cried, to the stars, to the hooting owls, to the complaining coyote:

"The—joke's on—me! Oh, Heaven, help me!"

For she who had laughed at love was vanquished by it. She had not known she had a heart, until it was mangled and torn in her breast. And she prayed she might die before Stormy got well and learned of her treachery. Prayed he would die——

No! For the next day, when she thought he was going to, she begged God on her knees that he might live, though it was only to hate her!

Soon after she came to Stormy's retreat, late in the afternoon of a day late in June, he roused, with a start, from his stupor.

"What's that?" he panted, clutching her hand.

"What's what, Stormy?"

"That—noise?" he gasped.

She listened, but heard only the wind that swished through the pines and howled down the crags.

"It's the fever, Stormy—you're hearing things."

But he would not take her word for it, and struggled up with a strength she did not dream he possessed.

"It's nothing," the girl insisted. "Just the wind—tapping a branch—or something."

"It's pounding!" he cried, scaring her by the look in his eyes. "They're building another corral!"

They were! She knew they had begun it this day. Yet it seemed impossible that the sound could carry so far. But he insisted that he heard pounding in Spirit Gorge, and it drove him into a frenzy.

"Help me up!" he raved, writhing on his cot. "Lift me up, Cleo!"

"Lie still!" She put her hands on his shoulders to hold him back.

But he struck them off, shouting: "I've got to get up—stop that——"

It was all she could do to hold him down. And that night she dared not leave him. For he had taken a sharp turn for the worse. She was sure it was his last night on earth. And it was, for both of them, terrible beyond words. For he kept hearing the pounding, though every hammer had been long laid aside. And he kept crying for Kerry, wearing himself out, pleading in agony with Cleo to go for her. Kerry had loved Dad Dorn and the mustangs. She could handle Deem. Why didn't she come?

Until Cleo could stand it no longer!

Though it was past midnight, Kerry Dorn wasn't sleeping, but wondering why she couldn't sleep any more, when she heard that cautious, desperate tap at her door. And, with the strange conviction that it was waiting for this tap that had kept her awake for so many nights, she sprang up, lit the lamp, threw a robe over her gown, and admitted her visitor. A white, haggard, sorrowing girl staggered into the room, with the wild whisper:

"I've lied to you, first and last. Stormy's bad—he's dying! I've come to take you!"

So, while the Flying Star slept, Kerry left her father's roof, never to return until tragedy struck another deathblow to the house of Dorn. And so she was brought, over awful miles of suspense, to the far, wild heights, and the high, wild den.

Cleo let her enter the cave alone, and paced the narrow ledge, trying not to hear the Flying Star girl crooning to the boy in there, like a mother to the child on her breast:

"It's all right, Stormy! Everything's all right now. Just get well—and trust Kerry. Some way I'll save the wild boys! I swear it, by Uncle Trin's memory!"

Then, in the bitter tumult of her heart, Cleo heard no more, until after a while a step fell on the rocks beside her, and she looked up to see Kerry standing there.

"He's quiet—too quiet!" Kerry said, in a frightened whisper. "Cleo, I'm going to town."

"Home," Cleo corrected dully. "Yes, you'd better be——"

"No—to town!" The small voice gathered strength. "I'm going to see about having Stormy moved to Red Coulee—where he'll have a chance."

"What chance?" cried Cleo, staring at

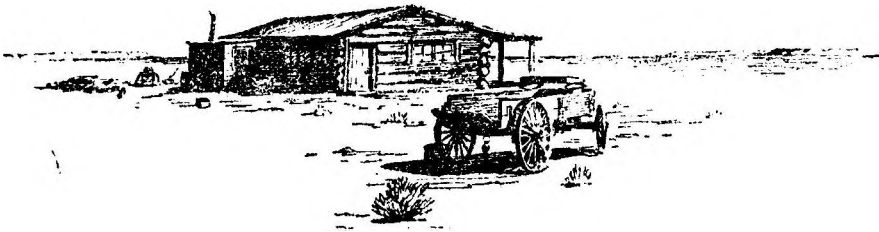
her in the dark, thinking all this had made her forget. "You know they'll arrest him."

"A chance to live!" said the brave girl, who had taken upon her own slight shoulders the bitter range quarrel. "We've got to get him where he can have proper care. Oh, I know it means jail! But I'd rather have him live, and be locked up for years, than he put away—forever—dead!"

Words that Cleo Craig took terribly to heart. Why had she not thought of that? Had she deliberately lessened Stormy's chances by keeping him here, because of Rainbow? Wildly a voice within her was crying: "Not that—not after the first few days. No! No!"

"Maybe it can be done in secret," Kerry hoped. "Anyhow, we've got to risk it. I'm going straight to Doc Christy. I've known him all my life. He knows Stormy. He'll help me, if he can. Cleo, please stay here until I come."

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



THE USEFUL GOAT

THE goat, which has been for so long the butt of the humorists—or would-be humorists—is really a most useful member of society and should be held in greater reverence than is accorded him.

It is believed that goats are practically immune to tuberculosis and for this reason their milk is considered to be entirely free from the germs of the disease. In British Columbia, about twelve thousand goats are kept for milk production, and the tendency is toward further increase. In Vancouver a daily house-to-house delivery of goats' milk is made by goat farmers. This milk is much sought for the diet of children and of anæmic and tubercular persons of all ages.

For most people, however, goats' milk is an acquired taste and it is one of those things to which it is well to become accustomed early, for it takes a very long time to learn to like it.



Sinister Coils

By Clinton Dangerfield

Author of "This—Great Snakes!" etc.



OLDLY, Norman Lamb's edged, contemptuous voice cut at his companion:

"It's the old story, Gerson, you never push anything far enough. You're like a man starting to cross a river and dropping his oars halfway, then wondering why he didn't get to the part he aimed at!"

Jim Gerson turned a sullen, handsome face toward his critic, and growled:

"How far did you expect me to go?"

"Certainly farther," retorted Lamb scornfully, "than merely landing Bob Morrow in jail on cooked-up evidence that any jury would sneer at. You've only inconvenienced him; you've not done him a bit of real harm. You've been clever in concealing your hand in the matter—but your cleverness, *that* doesn't go far enough. As a human chess player, you're too petty, Gerson."

"S'pose you stop riding me," Jim Gerson snapped, with a slight lifting of his lip, "and tell me how I'm to go to the end of this business without incriminating myself. I've no idea of getting hanged in order to hang Bob Morrow!"

Lamb shrugged his shoulders and flickered a speck of dust from the sleeve of his well-cut coat. He was a bit of a dandy, Norman Lamb, he even affected a monocle in a forthright town unaccustomed to such decorations, therefore, he was considered harmless, a "sissy." And only Jim Gerson knew the chill and dangerous foe which lay under that foppish exterior.

Lamb did not answer now, but sat silent, and in that silence he was listening keenly. He had almost imagined a noise in the hall outside. He sprang up, moved quickly to the door, looked out, found no one, and returned. He stopped at the mantelpiece to take up another box

of matches, that on his desk, being empty.

The den in which the two men were talking was furnished in the excellent taste which marked everything belonging to Lamb. But even in this den the town found evidences of a sissified streak in Lamb's nature, for he was fond of pictures of flowers, which adorned his walls instead of the more masculine subjects one would expect there.

He lit another cigarette; returned to Jim, dropped again into a chair, drew it closer to Gerson, and said, in a low, precise tone:

"Your weak streak, Gerson, is in working individually, where you ought to work collectively."

"I don't get you."

"Then get this. That, as corporations have no souls, so, mobs have no crimes."

A pause followed in which Jim Gerson stared with puzzled intensity at Lamb. Through the open windows a scent of roses blew in on the warm, sunshine-laden wind. On the nearest window sill two sparrows dropped and piped at each other amorously; on the street below them the decorous crowd of the city's quiet life flowed by. Beyond the residence section crouched like an unpacified monster under the summer sun, the jail held Bob Morrow in its stone claws. It was an old jail, and the hinges of the formidable-looking main door were very rusty. A picture of that jail at night with torches aflame and men beating at the door began forming itself in Gerson's mind, under the hypnotic gaze of his companion.

As if Lamb had spoken, Gerson said sharply:

"Bob Morrow could never be lynched. All the influential people in this fool town are crazy about him!"

"A little lower, please," Norman Lamb warned coolly, then added smoothly: "All the influential people here belong to the religious set, and to-night that new Evangelist preaches in

his tent half a mile outside town. The friends of Bob Morrow will be piling out there, every man jack of them. The scum left behind thought a whole lot of that gambler that Morrow is supposed to have killed. Now when the pious folk are out of the way, anybody with enough loose money to furnish plenty of drinks, carrying the crowd from one blind tiger to another, could work up a storm of feeling against Morrow that would easily—finish matters!"

Gerson tossed on emotional waves. Hate of Bob Morrow shook every fiber in his body. Morrow had walked over him financially. Morrow was engaged to the girl that Gerson so wildly wanted. If Morrow were only out of the way——

Then Gerson said aloud:

"But, Lamb, you know very well that a mob has to have leaders. Just working them up isn't all there is to it. We'd have to be along. Somebody'd see our faces!"

"What a baby you are!" said Norman Lamb contemptuously. "There are such things as masks. There wouldn't be a ghost of a chance of any one recognizing who was who in a masked mob."

"Masks? I hadn't thought of that."

"Well, think of it now," Lamb sneered, "and another thing needs thinking of—that if I go in on this and help you manage it, you'll give me your check now for that strip of land I've been trying to sell. It's worth about five thousand, as you and I know. But you'll give me ten for it to-night. Even though Bob Morrow bested you in that last deal, you've still plenty of money, Gerson. And you know you can trust me. If I promise to do a thing—I do it."

Jim Gerson nodded.

"Yes, that's true," he said, "you always keep your word. If we—if they—get him out—I wonder where——"

"We'll run him down to old Les

Haney's wagon yard and hang him there. Partly because the wagon yard's over the State line, and partly because I'd like to even scores with old Haney for some insolence he gave me not long ago."

Morning slipped into noon before Lamb and Gerson had finished their little conference. As the great clock bravely clanged out its twelve strokes, the business section of the town turned joyfully from offices to refreshment at lunch counters or in the domestic seclusion of their own near-by homes.

Down at the wagon yard, Les Haney hurried through his sandwiches and milk in his rough little office and then rushed out to meet No. 19, just pulling in with a consignment of Western horses.

When these animals began to pour from the shipping cars through the chute which led down into the big pen where Haney kept his horses, the old man feasted his eyes upon their wild and violent beauty.

These were not the cayuses of the old West. These were half or quarter-breeds from stock in the Northwest which had been built up into a superior class of horses. From these Les Haney hoped to cull at least half a dozen good polo ponies—ponies so-called, but really animals of fifteen hands and over, now that the polo grounds were taking much larger mounts.

Some of the horses were far too large for anything but draft work. These would go to the surrounding farmers and would be bought because they were cheaper than mules. For the prices on horses had fallen woefully, while those of mules kept up very well.

Not a few of the animals would go to the mountaineers, who had apple farms high up on the surrounding plateaus, and who through the late summer and fall were continually driving in and putting up for the night in old Les' wagon yard ready to sell out their mixed

consignments of apples and garden "sass," or perhaps a jug or two of pure moonshine, early in the morning.

When the last horse was safely in the pen and the train had gone roaring its way along the track again, Les Haney leaned on his corral fence and looked affectionately at the snorting, nervous animals inside. They were all unbroken range stock. A picturesque mixture they were as they milled around, all colors and all sizes. It would take them several days to quiet down, to get over the surprise and the horror of that thundering journey from the West.

Les Haney gave them one last glance and then turned back to his big, cool wagon yard. It was really not a yard at all, but a huge, barnlike affair with a feed room and harness room near the entrance. The rest of it was taken up by a long row of stalls on the right and another on the left against the wall, and in the center a big space for the mountain wagons which would remain there overnight.

Warm with the heat of late summer, the afternoon drowsed by. No forewarning of any fresh and immediate evil against the young fellow whom he loved troubled the mind of old Les Haney. He snoozed most of the afternoon, for business was slack. He would hold no auction of the new horse shipment until the animals had had time to gentle down somewhat.

No mountain teams came in that afternoon, but when the sun sank in a pool of sullen red behind the western horizon and the shadows began to weave the web of night, nearly half a dozen mountain wagons straggled in.

Their owners stabled and fed their tired teams in Les Haynes' stalls and left their covered wagons in the big space under the wagon yard's roof.

To these men, bringing their produce from plateaus still too rough to use cars, the machinery of civilization was a thing

apart and fantastic. To them the wagon and its team was still the only reality; they always sighed with pleasure when they got into Les Haney's homelike place, full of associations connected with other trips when Haney was always the cordial host, as well as yardmaster.

The mountain men went off into the little town. Most of them were heading for the revival tent; some, perhaps, for less beneficial pleasures.

Les Haney figured that there would be no more of them that night, but he was wrong.

About eight o'clock, an old mountain patriarch with a fine, fierce face drove into the wagon yard. Perched beside him on the spring seat was his granddaughter. She had made the trip through no particular will of her own.

The patriarch explained that he had brought Viola in with him for the good of her soul. He was aiming, he said, to take her to the big revival to-night. He allowed it was a good time to let her know what one of these here lowland preachers sounded like.

"I'll go to no revival," she declared furiously, her great black eyes scintillant with anger. "You drug me in here with you jest to keep Lee Dodd from gettin' a word with me. I won't stir a step from this yere wagon. Jest let me tell you, gran'pappy, when you git inside that tent, you better go up on the mourners' bench an' mourn for that feud that you're keepin' up there at home. That's the kinda religion you need—to stop hatin'."

"Girls is goin' plumb to destruction nowadays," declared the disgusted patriarch, "but I kain't have her makin' a scene in the tent. Les, will you keep her here with you? She'll stay quiet enough in the wagon, the vixen!"

Les Haney nodded. "She ain't no vixen," he said kindly, "an' you know I'll take good care of her—same like I would o' my own granddaughter. You go 'long to the revival."

Quiet settled down over the wagon yard when the old man had duly departed. The little night noises left behind him were harmonious; the jingle of a halter chain, the stamp of a mule or horse's foot, the munching of grain by some contented animal, or the queer little sound made by the fowl in a wagon coop.

Les Haney and the mountain girl sat together in his little office. He shared his late cup of coffee with her and entertained her by telling her the story of his friend, Bob Morrow, of Morrow's engagement to a very pretty girl, of his arrest on what Les Haney declared to be a mess of trumped-up evidence."

"You see," said the old man kindly, at the end, "the course o' true love don't run no smother here in the city than it does with you and Lee Dodd up there in the mountains. So don't you git discouraged, it'll all come out right in the end."

"Will it come out right for this yere Bob Morrow, too?" inquired the girl with interest, for her heart beat warmly for all true lovers.

"Sure it will," said Les Haney emphatically. "They ain't a jury in the State but what would turn him loose tomorrow. An' what this here fool stunt was ever pulled for, I don't understand. But you're gittin' sleepy, honey."

"I'll go and lay me down inside the wagon," the girl said, yawning; "we got some quilts in there."

The old horseman leaned back in his chair and dozed. He dreamed of a long-dead stallion; of breaking the horse in the first glory of its wild youth. It snapped at him. It bit his shoulder.

He woke to find a man's fingers digging into that same shoulder and a hoarse voice crying in his ear, "Wake up!"

Les Haney started to his feet, confronting the man whom he knew to be Norman Lamb's chauffeur and cook.

The man breathed hard, evidently he had been running. Les Haney's steel-blue eyes searched him.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the old horseman.

"Mr. Haney, sir," gasped the other, his voice still thick with his recent run, "you're a friend o' Bob Morrow's, ain't you?"

"Yep. Snap it out. What's wrong?"

"You won't tell on me?"

"No. Out with it!"

The chauffeur-cook of Norman Lamb's bachelor establishment obeyed, and when he had finished his brief but pungent recital, Les Haney had the whole initial conversation between Norman Lamb and Jim Gerson in which the plans for the lynching had been laid out and agreed upon. And then Les Haney learned how well the plan had worked and that the mob was now driving down toward his own place, dragging the prisoner with them, resolved to string him to the high crosspiece on the auction-yard gate, not only because it was across the State line, but out of spite to Lee Haney himself.

"Whyn't you tell me all this before?" roared Haney, his eyes blazing with fury.

"I wouldn't have told you now," retorted the other, "if it hadn't been that that danged Norman Lamb fired me this afternoon for nothin'. He said I wrecked his car. What happened couldn't ha' been helped."

"What the heck do I care for his car," raged Les Haney, "help me to plan some way that we can save Morrow."

"Not me," said the ex-chauffeur, "it's up to you now. I'm goin'!"

And with this he vanished as suddenly as he had come, unmoved by the stormy words which the angry horseman flung after him.

Old Haney rushed out into the wagon yard. As he listened with tense nerves, he could hear in the dim distance the

menacing, throaty growl of the mob roaring like a living tide which yet bore death upon its waves. Just as the discharged chauffeur had said, they were coming directly down on Les Haney's own place. It was scarcely two minutes before, drunk with poor whisky and fomented hate, the masked mob on foot, poured into the auction yard. In their midst they swept with them the figure of Bob Morrow.

Bob knew from the shouted information given him that it was intended he should hang here in Haney's wagon yard. Morrow was tall enough to catch a glimpse of the yardmaster and he cried out in an agony of despair to Les Haney:

"Make them listen to you, Haney! Tell them I'm innocent!"

At this half a dozen men charged at old Les, seized him and hustled him toward his own feed room inside the wagon yard. They barred him in, in spite of his angry kicks and the abuse he lavishly bestowed on them. There was no window to the room, so they felt sure he could not escape.

Gerson hurriedly inspected the wagons. He saw no one, though in Viola's wagon his eyes passed over a bumpy pile of quilts.

With the vanishing of Les Haney went Bob Morrow's last hope. Cold drops stood out on the prisoner's forehead, and in his brown eyes the bitter anticipation of death gleamed in an anguish more heart-shaking than death itself. Morrow knew well enough that it was not so much the mob which was about to murder him as two circulating, industrious figures that in spite of their disguise, he recognized clearly as Norman Lamb and Jim Gerson.

Those two were everywhere. They drove on the mob in the same manner that an experienced rider spurs on a horse which does not want to take the leap ahead—— A jab in the flank here, a flick of the whip there.

Then Bob Morrow caught a new note in the mob. Through its barbaric and bitter snarling rose, high and shrill, a woman's voice. Young and piercing, it broke through the deeper masculine threats and clamor, as the mountain girl, Viola, burst through the rear of the crowd, clawing and fighting her way toward Bob Morrow. She shouted:

"Got that villain, Bob Morrow, have you? Jest let me git my claws on him. I gotta score t' settle with him, too."

Her long black hair, loosed from her struggles through the mob, flew like a witch's over her thin, young shoulders. Her black eyes gleamed madly with excitement. Her color flamed. Several of the men grabbed her. They did not want a woman in this business, but they turned her loose with a howl, for she bit and scratched through the crowd as one of her own mountain lynxes might have done. She screamed:

"Minute I seen that face o' hisn, I knowed I'd ketch'd up with him at last. He come up into the mountains, callin' hisself Smith, the cowardly wolf! Afore ever any rope ketches him, I'm aimin' to tell him what I think o' his doin's up thar in the hills."

She had almost reached the forward edge of the crowd now. Meantime, Bob Morrow found himself standing in the center of the auction yard. The mob had flung itself into a half circle around him. One of the riffraff, a huge, red-headed man with a hamlike fist, burst out of the mass and demanded of the prisoner with owlish solemnity:

"Bob Morrow, have you got anything to say before you die for the murder you done?"

Bob Morrow stared around him in anguish. His hands were bound together in front of him. He was helpless and frantic. He said to himself that this, then, was really the end of it all. He was going to die, to be strangled like a dog at the end of a rope—for a deed he had never done.

The red-headed man reiterated:

"Prish'ner, have you got anything to shay?"

He and Morrow were the only ones in the center of the auction yard, for the members of the mob were, for the moment, content to leave the prisoner in that open space where they might observe him with something of the cruel satisfaction of a tiger watching crippled prey which it knows cannot possibly escape.

Viola burst through the front line of the mob and hurled herself toward Bob Morrow. The red-headed man was in her way and she gave him a push that sent him staggering aside as she screamed.

"Let me git at him!"

The mob stared at her. Her violent young beauty seemed strangely out of place in that angry crowd of men. She turned on the red-headed leader and shouted at him:

"Git back thar t' the crowd, you! An' lemme stay here an' leave me alone with this fella, so's I can tell him jest one time what I think of him."

"All right. Ladies firsht," hiccoughed the bewildered man. He fell back to the front line, amused at the situation. His sense of humor was shared by the other lynchers—except for Lamb and Gerson. The mob watched the girl and the captive with lively interest.

Viola, her small fingers clawing in and out like the talons of a mountain hawk, darted toward the unlucky Morrow, who stood with his hands bound before him, staring in sickened astonishment into the cruel face of this bitter young beauty.

She was on him in a bound, and when the flaunt of her open hand struck his cheek, the noise of the slap made the mob howl with laughter.

It was through their laughter that her whisper cut into his ear:

"Ask five minutes for prayer, and get against the wall, left."

She slapped him again and shook him roughly.

"Understand?" the whisper came.

He gasped out an affirmative. Again she managed a word, "Cuss me. Quick!"

He did so.

She screamed a retort at him, snatched at his shirt and tore it half from his shoulder.

The crowd howled and jeered, yelping like a pack of haying hounds, but Norman Lamb and Jim Gerson, fearful of the delay, rushed through the van and came toward her.

Before they had reached her she had time for another whisper, only a couple of words before Gerson was upon her, tearing her away, and dragging her back to the mob. He was fearful of the delay.

"Back!" he snarled, "back here with you! You can call him all the names you like after he's dead."

Morrow turned swiftly to the man who had first questioned him. "I demand," he said, in a clear, loud voice, "five minutes for prayer. You wouldn't deny that?"

No, they wouldn't deny it. There was a general drunken agreement. They were gentlemen. They did things right. He should have his five minutes.

To this Jim Gerson and Norman Lamb were forced to assent. It was too old a custom, too well fixed in even drunken minds for them to combat it.

Some one had found the electric switch controlling the two big lights of the square. A flood of sheer white illumination poured down upon the yard, upon the prisoner and the watching mob. Over the horse pens there was no light and the high fence inclosing the animals cut them off from the view of the mob, although the horses were still evident by their restless and nervous movements in the pen. Anger and terror kept them fretting to and fro.

The mountain girl fell back farther

and farther into the mob, then slipped like a shadow through the rear rank and was gone.

No one missed her, for the crowd's whole attention was on Bob Morrow. The prisoner had moved over to the wall and was standing there with his forehead pressed against his uplifted and bound hands, the hands themselves clenched on an upright in the wall.

It seemed that he wanted his emotion hidden from his killers.

The prisoner's alert ear caught the click of a gate latch from the north end of the stock pen. Instantly, he began to pray aloud in a strong, clear voice that rolled above the heads of the crowd:

"May these drunken dolts understand that Jim Gerson is playing them for his own private ends."

A voice in the crowd sharply ordered:

"If you're goin' to pray, pray. Don't start no personalities."

Lamb's edged and malicious voice thrust at the captive:

"You pray to yourself, Morrow, or we'll gag you!"

But at this a voice cried in stentorian tones that a man had a right to say what he pleased in his last five minutes, and a sudden clamor of altercation arose over this.

In the midst of it, back there in the shadows of the horse pen, the mountain girl, her hand on the great sliding gate which opened into the auction yard, was watching two black horses which had come like shadows of death into the pen from the north gate.

The moment Gerson and his men left the wagons, Viola had wriggled from under the quilt pile and had softly released old Haney.

Les, on one of those black horses, now closed the north stock gate behind them. Maybe, thought the old horseman, he and Viola would save Bob yet!

Viola, young as she was, had lived through two feud battles. She was an

apt lieutenant, full of warm sympathy for this oppressed lover who looked not unlike her own Lee Dodd, back on the mountain at home.

She was glad now that she had come, was Viola! It was an old superstition among the women of her clan that it "was luck to save a lover." It brought you good fortune with your own sweetheart! But she kept control of her excitement and waited for the low whistle which would tell her to slide back the gate.

Now she heard it, faint but clear.

Instantly, under the girl's brown, muscular hands, the long sliding gate leading into the auction yard shot back, leaving an exit into the square wide enough for a dozen horses to pass through abreast.

The instant the gate shot back, a stock whip lashed out in the rear of the wild horses, cracked like a pistol, and then cut again and again at the horses nearest to Les Haney.

Panic seized the herd. Those in the van bolted like one horse for the wide-open gateway. Behind them surged the crowding mass, anxious to get through with the leaders; and last of all came old Les Haney mounted on one saddled horse and leading another, his own two favorites, blacks.

In spite of the led horse, he kept his right hand free for the stock whip. Again and again it cracked as the living tide poured out of the pen, rushing down the widening runway to the base of the fan of earth spread before them.

As the living tide of horses sprang through the gate and reached the auction yard beyond, they spread out fanwise, imperiled by the charging mass behind. They spread until that crested front did not seem to offer an open inch to right or left.

Rearing and plunging, they came, fighting for room in the ranks. The flowing manes, the flashing contours were like varicolored waves. Blue roan

or bright sorrel they came. Now a chestnut flashed by, a white head against his hind quarters. Here a paint. There a couple of blood bays. All with quivering nostrils, heads held high and free. They were a resistless river, a flowing vehemence, a violence of strength in their tidal and terrible beauty.

Under their drumming hoofs the earth was palpitant, rippling with menacing vibrations. For the front rank saw freedom beyond. The mob had left open the street gates. For these the horses raced, while they heard, in increasing panic, the cracking of the great stock whip. To this pistollike report, Les Haney now added his yells; the black horse he rode and the black he led crowding against the rear of the escaping herd.

Before the charging van of that irresistible mass, the lynchers scattered in ignominious dismay. Their prisoner was forgotten in their wild efforts to save themselves. The horses would have swerved aside from the men had there been any chance to do so. It is not the nature of the horse to beat down live creatures, he has a genuine aversion for this. But the narrow confines of the auction yard left the animals no chance to rush around the mob. There was no halting for the horses. Louder than ever in their rear came the cracking of Les Haney's black whip, his great yells and shouts.

Terror of him, panic created by him, and their own passionate instinct for escape back into the freedom they had lost, sent the wild horses rushing down upon the mob before half of the frantic human beings could escape.

Over the lynchers rode the tremendous tide of the wild horses. Like surf came the drumming roll and thunder of the hoofs. Piercing this rose yelps of pain and agonized fright from the lynchers. Oaths and vain screams for help mingled together.

As the living river rushed by him, Bob

Morrow, prepared by Viola for this, flattened himself against the plank wall. But he turned as he did so, facing the herd. Then, as he expected, a riderless, saddled, black horse appeared close beside him, led by Les Haney, who had slipped the reins over his left elbow, leaving his hand free.

As the two saddled, black horses came parallel with Bob Morrow, Haney caught up the lead horse's rein and jerked it sharply. The gelding reared wildly, riding up on the quarters of the horse in front.

In that second, Bob Morrow, not needing the help which Haney bent to offer, leaped into the saddle. Then, with the rushing tides of the horses, the two riders were swept onward.

Bending over, Les Haney thrust the reins of the black gelding into the bound hands of Bob Morrow. As Morrow's supple fingers tightened on the leather, he turned on Haney a look of such heartfelt gratitude and exultation that the vision remained ineradicably stamped on the old man's mind. He smiled back in response.

In another second they were clarging through the gates, with the last of the herd, and went rushing with them through the flanks of the town and far, far out into the freedom and safety which lay beyond.

As the restless beating of the hoofs died away, the mountain girl passed once more into the auction yard and stood there with folded arms, her slim figure etched clearly in the moonlight as she

watched one after another of the lynch-ers who were able to do so pick himself up and crawl, or stagger, away.

Tied to the earth by a broken leg, Jim Gerson did not rise, but he sat up and hurled invectives of the deepest sincerity at Norman Lamb, who, much the worse for wear, had staggered to his feet.

"Here's what I get," shouted Gerson, "for following your crazy advice. I paid you ten thousand dollars to get me into this!"

Lamb, for once in his life, considerably disheveled and flurried, rushed to his indiscreet companion's aid. Bending over him, Lamb snarled:

"Shut your mouth, that girl there is listening."

Viola laughed, shrill, elfin laughter that seemed to carry an echo of her own mountain freedom.

"I don't need to hear nuthin', snake in the grass!" she countered. "Mr. Haney, he done tole me everythin'—that he figured you two was back o' this whole business.

"There's a phone back there in Mr. Haney's little office. Ef you want to call up one o' them amberslances to pick up the pieces——"

Norman Lamb cast at her a look of helpless rage, but he followed her advice.

Viola, smiling to herself in the moonlight, softly sang:

"I reckon they'll tell you the wide world over.
It means good luck for to save a lover."





Trail of the Buzzard

By Robert J. Horton

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

TO capture "The Buzzard," robber and killer, Sheriff Mack enlists Alex Lamont, outlaw, with whom he has a truce. Their conference is interrupted by a Mexican, José, who says that Lamont's hostesses, the girl Dolores, and Señora Guerra, are his cousin and aunt. The sheriff is kidnaped. The Buzzard arrives and José, on his behalf, tries to arrange a truce similar to Lamont's. Mack temporizes. Lamont aids him to escape, and kills The Buzzard, José's father. Lamont, refusing reward, ends the truce. Mack accuses him of treachery, and is reminded that Lamont saved his life. The sheriff returns to Bayneville.

Lamont holds up The Green Parrot at Kerrville and forces "Big Mike" to disgorge. Escaping, his love of adventure revives. Big Mike and "Blackie" trail him. José guides him to Dolores at Running Wells. He also loves Dolores, but is only her servant, he tells Lamont. She is a daughter of the dead Don Juan Martinez. José leaves Lamont with Dolores.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNWELCOME VISITOR.



FOR some little space of time, Lamont held the girl in his arms, but it was long enough for him to be swept by a tremendous emotion. Forgotten was all thought of Dolores' ancestry and breeding and experiences, gone was that feeling of doubt which had assailed him;

in the moments while she was in his arms, his lips pressed to hers, came the revelation that he loved her and wanted her—she was his girl!

The aroma of the pepper trees and the scent of burning mesquite came in the window on an idling breeze. Somewhere outside, a Mexican was strumming a guitar and crooning a Spanish love song. The sound of riders walking their horses in the dust, speaking to each other in low tones, did not carry to the

room at the rear of the long adobe. Lamont had forgotten them in the joy and wonder and exultation which attended his discovery of his love for Dolores.

When he released her, he led her to the sofa, where they sat down. He put an arm about the bandaged shoulder.

"How's the hurt, little sweetheart?" he asked solicitously.

She looked up at him quickly. It was the first time he had called her that; and he spoke in a new voice—a voice that thrilled her, just as the look in his eyes caused her to look away quickly.

"It's almost well," she said.

"Dolores, you needn't have come all the way down here to see me. You could have sent the message an' I would have come to Seymore. An' as for the message, I didn't know—well, you understand, don't you, 'Jackie'?"

"Yes." Her voice was almost a whisper. "I should have told you before, I guess; but Señora Guerra thought it best to wait. Then, after what happened up there—when her brother-in-law was killed—I knew I had to tell you. I didn't want—didn't want—" She faltered.

"Didn't want it to make any difference to us," he supplied. "It wouldn't have made any difference, Dolores, I hope."

"Even if I had been a Guerra I would have thought it good riddance of bad rubbish," said the girl with spirit. "But I didn't want you to come up there, Alex."

"No?" he said in surprise. "Why not?"

"Because I wanted to see you somewhere else besides there. That's an outlaw town. It's in the very air—the kind of a town it is and the kind of people who are there. The wind sings about it. The stream murmurs about it. The grasses and leaves and even the flowers whisper about it. When the sunset is red, I always think of blood. There is

no one there I can be friendly with, except Señora Guerra." A catch had come into her voice.

Lamont stroked her hair. "Why do you stay there, Dolores?" No sooner was the question out of his mouth than he regretted it. It would bring back the memory of the flight from Mexico. And where could she go? Did he want her to go to a town where perhaps he could not go? He resented this selfish thought. "I didn't mean just that, Jackie," he amended. "I know it's mighty hard on you."

"Perhaps we can go somewhere else," said Dolores hopefully. "That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I'm too young to be tied up in a place like that. And it's no place for you to visit us now that you've given up that other. You have really given it up, haven't you, Alex?"

He was silent. He knew this was one of the reasons why she wanted to see him; perhaps it was the chief reason. She wanted to dissuade him if she thought he intended to go back to the old life. It was fine and noble of her, and it thrilled him to learn that she had so much interest in him. And José had as much as said he was not good enough for her—was beneath her. He had said that, had he not? Well, both his mother and father had come from sturdy pioneer stock. It was grief over his mother's death that had caused his father to try to drown it in the excitement of the gaming places and the wild towns. He had died a good man at heart.

"You haven't answered me, Alex," she said softly.

"Yes, I have given it up," he declared. "Here an' now I give you my promise. Do you know why, Dolores?"

She looked up at him with eyes brimming with happiness. "I don't care why," she answered. "I'm only glad—glad!"

"I'm giving it up because I love you,"

he said slowly. "Now—do you care, Dolores?"

She looked straight ahead and he could feel her tremble. When her eyes finally met his, they were brimming with something more than happiness. "Yes," she whispered.

Again he took her in his arms—his girl. "Sweetheart, don't think it's because I know who you are," he said tenderly. "I didn't know it until I came into this room to-night; didn't know it until I took you in my arms. Then it came upon me sudden like. I've thought of you a great deal since I left Seymore, but I didn't know why, for sure, until to-night. I've been pretty wild an'—yes, worse than that. Why, I robbed the keeper of a gambling house since I saw you last. He said he was stealing from his customers in plain sight, but that they couldn't see how it was done. He was bragging about it. When I had my guns on him I told him I was taking his money in plain sight, but he could see just how it was done. I couldn't see anything wrong in that—at the time. It was my last job." He paused as though contemplating the significance of this last statement.

"I guess I'm not good enough for you, Dolores," he continued; "but I want you." His arms tightened about her. "I have nothing but loyalty and love in my thoughts of you. There's at least that much good in me. Maybe I can't have you, but I'm asking, Dolores."

There was a mist over her glorious eyes as she looked at him. "It isn't what you've been, Alex," she said softly; "it's what you'll be when you're mine. And I have your promise. I love you, Alex." She kissed him and buried her face in his shoulder.

Lamont held her close and looked straight ahead at the wall. The soft look in his eyes became cold and hard. They were looking for him. There were scores who would gladly prevent his getting this girl. With the obstacle of his

past removed, there remained the obstacle of the law. Marry her and fly, came the thought. He spurned it. He would have to set himself straight some way. Then he brightened with an idea and smiled. He believed he had hit upon a plan.

"Dolores," he said in a strong voice, "look at me." Then, "Will you marry me?"

"Why—yes," she answered, her eyes widening in surprise. It had been as much as settled, she had thought.

"That's the little sweetheart!" he exclaimed boyishly. "An' I'll have the dearest little wife in the world. But there are some things I must do, some things I must set right, before we can marry. You'll have to go back to Seymore an' wait until I can attend to these things."

"Will it be long, Alex?"

"No longer than I can help," he said grimly. "Listen, sweetheart—" He was interrupted by a rap on the door.

He put the girl aside gently and got to his feet, his hands dropping instinctively to his guns. "Come in," he said.

It was José who opened the door. He looked from one to the other of them and Lamont imagined he saw a crest-fallen expression on the youth's face for a few moments. Then José spoke.

"Those men are belong to the old outfit," he said to Lamont. "They are in the canteen, but I guess they no mean the trouble. If you should need, the horses are tied behind the house. The señorita, she mus' not stay here if—" He nodded significantly.

Lamont had started and now he was frowning. In the thrill of his new adventure, he had completely forgotten the riders who had followed them. The old outfit? Former members of "The Buzzard's" band, José must mean

"How many are there?" he asked, while Dolores looked on apprehensively.

"Seven," replied José.

And the posse Lamont had seen num-

bered seven. Everything seemed to be running to seven, but that was one of his lucky numbers.

"Keep your eye on them an' don't let them get the start on you," he told the youth. "Do they know I am here?"

"They ask who is with me an' I say a fren' of mine," José replied. "I watch 'em so they no bother you an' when they go to sleep you better go." He was looking at both of them. "There is one white man," he added.

"What does he look like?" Lamont inquired.

"Big man, great, bushy face," said José.

Lamont nodded grimly. "Well, you know 'em, eh? I thought so. They ought to listen to you. You go up there an' see that they stay there. Hold 'em some way, an' Dolores an' I will get on our way. I'll take her back to Seymore."

José nodded gravely. "We have fren' here, too, as will watch," he said. "Maybe you better not go till they are sleep. There is one man who lookout. I tell you." He slipped silently out the door and closed it noiselessly.

Lamont turned, to see Dolores' dark eyes snapping defiantly. "They wouldn't dare!" she exclaimed. "And I can shoot, too." She lifted her coat from the chair and there lay an ivory-handled gun of medium caliber.

There was a slight sound at the window, and Lamont leaped to jerk down the curtain. Where had his natural caution been all this time? he upbraided himself. "I guess José can handle them," he said in a low tone, "although I don't like the idea of that white man being here. If he's the man I've got a hunch he is, he's mean—mean as they make 'em. If I'm any judge, he'll try to get The Buz—Guerra's gang together again, with himself as leader. We mustn't talk loud enough to be heard outside that window."

"They wouldn't dare," Dolores re-

peated in a whisper; but he could see that she was worried.

Lamont paced the room thoughtfully. Were it not for the girl, he would not wait for the ruffians to start something. He would start it himself, if necessary, in order to make a break for it in the confusion, and he would begin with the white man. He believed this to be the man whom The Buzzard had struck with his gun in the cabin in the rendezvous. John Mack had recounted the affair, and from the sheriff's description and recital of events in the draw, Lamont believed the white man to be the logical contender for the former chief's place as leader of the band. These surmises he did not tell to Dolores.

Already he was finding that certain restrictions were attached to his responsibility as Dolores' betrothed. It would hardly be fair for him to take too great a risk. If he were killed the girl would be left virtually alone.

She came up to him and put an arm about his neck. "Don't be worried, Alex," she said. "I still believe these men would listen to me even if they wouldn't listen to José."

Lamont laughed softly and kissed her. "Worry isn't in my book of words," he told her. "An' you're not going to have to do any talking to anybody, unless it's me. Maybe things won't be as easy for us as we think, but I'll manage the trouble department. You're a brave, sweet girl an'——"

From the front of the house came the sound of voices. Lamont motioned to Dolores to sit down and then opened the door a trifle.

"An' I'm tellin' you we want to take a look at this friend of yours," said a loud, somewhat husky voice. "He's in here, an' I know it. If you know what's good for you, trot him out. We ain't none too sure of you, either, if you want to know it. You acted plumb queer after the rumpus up in Seymore."

"You have too much of drink," came

the voice of José. "You mus' not make the trouble here, for this is my fren' house an' people sleep. You can see my fren' in the morning. Now we go to the canteen, where we no bother people, an' talk."

"Yeah?" There was a sneer in the harsh voice. "An' what was you doin' down here? I don't reckon everybody is asleep. You're actin' queer, an' I'm a bear cat at readin' sign."

"I live here," said José stoutly. "An' you can read all sign you want, but you no make trouble here now. My father's men will say so, too."

"You mean, they were your father's men," was the reply. "Now they're my men, an' we're not goin' to make any more fool mistakes. Get that? We're not takin' any chances. An' that fellow ridin' in with you sat the saddle a whole lot like the man who protected that sheriff up there an' killed your dad in the bargain. We'll take a look at your friend, anyway, just to make sure. The girl's here, too. Don't play us for such fools. We have ways of knowing everything that's goin' on, remember that."

Lamont closed the door and put a finger to his lips. "Put on your coat," he whispered to the girl, "an' stand at the side of the window."

When she had complied, he blew out the light. Then he raised the curtain noiselessly and felt the fastenings of the screen outside the window. It was secured by two catches and lifted outward. He touched the girl on the arm. "I will go first an' you follow when I give you the word," he whispered.

He lifted the screen and went out the window with the swiftness, silence, and suppleness of a cat. But even as he struck the ground he saw a form come hurtling toward him in the faint light of the stars. He leaped aside and struck out. The blow landed and then he and his attacker went to the ground as the murmur of voices in the front of the house grew louder.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FIGHT AND FLIGHT.

EVEN as Lamont and his assailant locked in a struggle on the ground, the former realized that he had not been wrong when he had thought some one was listening at the window. The man had been eavesdropping, but whether or not he was a member of the Buzzard gang he could not tell. He did not believe so because the man did not cry out at once. He could have shot Lamont through the window, had he so desired.

Over and over they rolled, trying for telling holds, grasping for each other's throat. This was a large man that Lamont was fighting there under the trees and stars; not a mean antagonist in any way. Meanwhile, loud voices were coming from the house.

"If you don't call him out here, I'll go in an' drag him out!" shouted the rough voice of the white man.

"You no go in," shrilled José. "I will go mysel' an' when he is dress, he will come to you. But you are making the enemy of José."

"What do you think I care?" came the boast. "You were never on the level, any how. Hustle him out. I'll give you five minutes. An' don't forget I've got this place watched."

"I no care for your watch!" cried José scornfully. "Now you stay here."

It was evident to Lamont, who heard snatches of this, that José was playing for time. The wily little Mexican wanted to give him and the girl the opportunity to escape by the rear. The voices were suddenly almost stilled. And now Lamont's interest in what was being said betrayed him.

The big man with whom he was wrestling got a hammer lock on him, twisting so that Lamont could not get at his throat. They made practically no noise in the dust and grass. All that could be heard was their heavy breathing.

With his right arm doubled up behind him, Lamont squirmed and twisted to no avail. The man was deliberately breaking his gun arm when suddenly he sank back with a gasp and the hold quickly loosened.

Lamont broke free and leaped to his feet, to find Dolores standing there with her shiny little revolver firmly clenched in her hand.

"I hit him on the head as hard as I could," she breathed. "We must hurry for the horses."

Lamont made sure his guns were buttoned in their holsters and then grasped her by the arm. They sped around the rear of the house, from which loud voices were again heard in heated debate, and saw the shadows of the horses. In a trice Lamont had freed them and he and Dolores were in the saddle. They heard the man on the ground by the rear window groaning. Then a shout went up.

The pair filed noiselessly through the trees, but as they crossed the little creek to the open plain, there was a red burst of fire in the trees to the left of them. Lamont fired twice at the flaming signal and they put the spurs to their horses, crashing through trees and underbrush to the sloping desert.

They turned north as the men from the house came running out the trail, firing as they ran. But the speed of Lamont's and Dolores' horses was too great, and the light too poor, for accurate shooting. They were soon mere bobbing shadows among the mesquite and sage. Then they were out of sight.

Meanwhile, José had slipped from the house like a cat while the men searched the rooms, breaking locks when the occupants did not respond to their sharp knocking, and compelling them to come into the light of the hall for inspection. There were screams from women and girls, and the proprietor protested in vain.

Then came the sharp report of the

lookout's first shot. The men were out of the house in a twinkling and the man who had been eavesdropping on Lamont and the girl staggered into the street. Blood was running down his face; he was holding his head with both hands, for the little gun, wielded with all Dolores' strength, had cut deeply. Curses were flowing in a steady stream from his cruel lips.

It was "Big Black" Evans!

As José flitted past Evans, he recognized the man. But he did not stop. He dodged behind the adobes. He knew where he could hide and how he could get safely out of town when the gang had left in belated pursuit of Lamont and his companion, or had succumbed to the fumes of the tremendous quantities of liquor they had consumed before making the attack on the big adobe. The big white man might lay claim to leadership of the Buzzard band, but he could not win over The Buzzard's warm friends, who would protect the son as they had the father.

Blackie Evans staggered into the canteen and demanded liquor before he went to the rear to bathe his wound in cold water and have one of the Mexican bartenders, skilled in such work, bandage it properly. He offered no explanation of his injury and those in the place assumed he had been in the fight down the street. He took a position at the bar and drank cold beer copiously.

Angry voices outside in the street were debating huskily the wisdom of taking up the pursuit. But the effects of what they had drunk began to wear off and they decided to wait until daylight and trooped into the canteen.

First every one had a drink while they still were discussing angrily the flight of Lamont and Dolores, and the treachery of the polished José. "Find José an' we'll find trace of this Lamont, who protects sheriffs an' such," said the big leader.

"You're right, Morgan," said another;

"an' these Mexicans can find him, if anybody can. Send 'em out to comb the town. Runnin' Wells ain't so big a place to hide in."

"By snakes, you're right!" boomed the big man called Morgan. "Listen, you boys, take a sneak an' dig this José out of his hole, an' I'll give the man who brings him in a hundred dollars in gold out of my own pocket. As long as you run with me, you'll have steady work an' always be in the money. With Guerra, you only work part time. Go out an' find this José, but don't hurt him. I want to talk to him."

There was a hum of approval in Spanish at this. It was evident that Morgan was making himself solid with the former followers of The Buzzard. When he ordered tequila for the house, there were smiles and low cheers. Morgan was crafty. He was also worried over Lamont, though he did not show it, for he could not know what move the man might make. He had learned that late in the afternoon Dolores Guerra had arrived from Seymore. Now the two of them—he was certain the rider with José was Lamont—had fled. Therefore, Dolores had come to Running Wells to meet Lamont, and now the two were riding back to Seymore. It might be hard to get to Lamont there. And what message had the girl brought? It was just as significant as it was puzzling, and Morgan's mind was not at ease.

The Mexicans who were with the band left the place in pairs soon afterward, and Morgan's spirits rose. He was about of the same size and stamp as Blackie Evans, dark-bearded, with black eyes somewhat slanted and very mean. But they did not hold the treacherous cunning of The Buzzard's; they were merely cruel.

Morgan felt sure that the Mexicans would easily find José, and he wanted very much to talk to the flashy young Mexican. José was smarter than he

had thought, but he would find a way to get him to talk. Morgan's eyes snapped. He did not know that the youth had given in to him after he had been sure Lamont and the girl had escaped. For José was not the least bit afraid of him, nor of the loyalty of the Mexicans to him in some great emergency.

Meantime, Morgan had taken more than casual notice of Blackie Evans, who had been listening with intense interest to what had been said. Evans was in no pleasant frame of mind, for he had had Lamont virtually in his grasp and had lost him through interest in what he and Dolores were saying. Now he was the only one in the desert country in possession of the pair's secret, and he was beginning to wonder how he could take advantage of it when Morgan approached.

"Stranger?" said Morgan agreeably. "Looks like you'd had a bad fall or something."

It was not proper nor safe to make such a remark in that country, and Blackie looked at him coldly.

"Reckon you've had a misfire lately yourself," he retorted, none too cordially.

Morgan scowled, then managed a mean grin. "You've got good ears, I take it. Don't let your information set you thinking too much."

Blackie Evans did not like this man from his first sight of him. Now he liked him less because he was also after the quarry he sought himself. "Funny thing," mused Blackie; "but I started thinking about the time you was finding out how to do it."

Morgan's face darkened. A hot fighting word was on his tongue, but he held it. This new customer looked formidable. He had turned so that his gun hand hung on the edge of the bar over his weapon. And the man he had accosted was not afraid of him. Moreover, Morgan, with much on his hands

and more in his mind, did not relish the thought of a shooting affair just at this particular time. He would wait and find out more about this newcomer. He might even be material for his band.

At this moment some of the Mexicans who had gone out in search of José returned. This gave Morgan his opportunity to turn his attention to other things without losing caste.

"Did you find anything out about José?" he demanded of one of the Mexicans.

"No, señor," was the reply. "He is not in town, but he may hide out in the desert an' we find heem in the morning."

"We've got to do that," snarled Morgan, calling for a drink. He now ignored Blackie Evans.

Others of the searchers returned until they all were back. There was no word. Morgan was in a rage. It was just possible that these Mexicans were protecting their countryman. He would not put it past them. And, after all, José was the son of the dead Buzzard. For this very reason he realized he could not go too far. Then, as the first gray light of dawn stole over the desert, the unexpected happened. The door suddenly opened and in walked the debonair José!

He walked jauntily to the bar as Morgan stared and wet his thick lips in astonishment. He was for the moment nonplused, and he realized that the young Mexican had the advantage over him. This enraged him and he strode up to José.

"Where have you been?" he demanded in harsh tones of authority.

José raised his fine black brows. His right hand toyed with the fringe on the breast of his elaborate vest. "Ah," he said in soft tones. "The señor would like to know? Did you see my fren'? I leave when you start the trouble."

"You know I didn't see him," Morgan thundered. "An' now that you

helped him get away with that girl of his, maybe——"

"The señor will be careful," José interrupted, in a voice that was knife-edged.

"Careful——" Morgan exploded into cursing, while the dark-faced youth remained calm, toying constantly with the fringe of his vest. When the other had subsided in his profane tirade, José spoke quietly in his musical voice.

"I do not have to show my fren' to the señor," he said.

"Well, you know where he's gone, an' I know who he is," raged Morgan. "He's that Lamont from up in Seymore. He brought that sheriff in there, got him away when we captured him, killing one of our men in the bargain, an' then he killed your own father. An' you protect him, eh? What kind of double crossing is that?"

"Eet is not double cross for I no do that to my fren's, an' to me you are like that!" José deliberately snapped the thumb and finger of his left hand in the bully's face. His right hand still toyed with the fringe of his vest. The look in his eyes had changed.

"You've double crossed all of us, you little liar!" shouted the excited Morgan. "You——"

He staggered back as José's left hand struck him in the mouth. In another two seconds he went for his gun. But José leaped aside, his right hand darted within his vest; there was a flash of silver, and Morgan's hand was stayed. He gulped once and sank to his knees with the knife in his heart. Then he plunged forward upon its hilt.

"Now who is leader of my father's men!" sang José, his eyes like fire, his head thrown back. "Those men who follow me can stay; the others go." His gun leaped into his hand. No one moved.

"You stay, too, señor?" purred José to Blackie Evans.

"I reckon so," drawled Evans, who

was still thrilling with the excitement of the swift drama he had just seen enacted.

"Eet is good," said José, bowing gracefully. "I no want to keel more men to-day, señor."

Then he gave the signal for all hands to drink to the dawn.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOSE IS LOYAL.

WHEN Lamont and Dolores raced away from Running Wells, they did not long maintain their furious pace. Lamont knew they had a big start on the gang in the little town, for the men would have to saddle their horses and it was a foregone conclusion that they would stop for a drink or two because of their condition. In fact, Lamont rightly assumed that they would not attempt pursuit until morning.

They rode steadily northward but kept close to the foothills. Both rode in silence, for they were full of the new wonder which had fallen upon them. When they looked at each other, they smiled in mutual understanding. Dolores asked no questions; she was content to let her lover lead the way. Lamont nourished a deep resentment against Morgan, whose name he did not know. Had it not been for Dolores' presence he would have faced the bully and driven him to cover in the adobe house.

The desert dawn came in a burst of crimson-and-golden glory. Giant saguaros marched away like mileposts in that land of brilliant desolation. Rabbits scurried for food in the short interval before the heat would descend with the force of a blast from a furnace. The sun began its climb, blood-red on the horizon's rim, then a golden disk; soon it would be a ball of fire, hanging merciless over the inferno it created.

But these were sights and conditions which Lamont and the girl loved. They

reined in their horses and watched the sunrise. Lamont also kept a keen outlook on all sides, for, in addition to the band in Running Wells, posses from Kerrville were searching.

"We'll head up toward Seymore," Lamont told the girl.

"Any way you say, Alex," she responded.

He edged his horse in and they leaned from the saddle to kiss. "You're a game little sport," said Lamont admiringly. "If you hadn't got in that crack on that fellow's head when you did last night, he'd have broken my gun arm—maybe killed me."

Dolores smiled happily. "It would be a poor sort of girl who wouldn't try to help her man when he was in trouble," she said soberly.

Her man! Just one pang of doubt, of a feeling that he was no longer free, and then Lamont forgot everything, except that he was proud. For she was his girl, just as he was her man. And what a girl! Never had Dolores looked so beautiful as now, with the glory of the desert sunrise upon her.

Lamont suddenly became alert. "We'll have to be beating it, an' beating it fast," he told her, with a swift survey of the desert. "You must know, girlie, that there are posses looking for me because of my last job. An' it was the last; for I'll keep my promise made to you. An' I'll try to fix the thing up. I guess I can do it."

Her eyes glowed like stars, but she merely nodded without speaking.

They started at a smart gallop for the foothills. Although Lamont's horse had had but little rest after the ride across the desert, the animal's powers of endurance asserted themselves. Dolores rode a splendid mount. They made good time and within two hours were on the trail to Seymore. Lamont was fearful of but one thing; that the posse which had ridden westward might have gone to the mountain town. But

even if they had, they would be gone by now, not having found him there. He looked at the saddlebag which contained a fortune. If José had only reached him before the holdup! Now—well, Lamont thought he saw a way to solve his problem. But it would be a daring move.

When they reached the trail leading off to the north—the trail Lamont had taken the night he rescued John Mack—they turned off. He led Dolores along a dim path for an hour before they halted in a sequestered meadow, flower-splashed, through which flowed a cold mountain stream.

Here they dismounted, watered their horses and refreshed themselves. Lamont opened his slicker pack, built a fire and insisted on preparing a meal. They were like children, these two, laughing and loving there in the fragrant meadow. But frequently a shadow came over Lamont's eyes.

When Dolores saw it she said: "Don't worry, Alex, everything will come out all right." She put her arm about his neck.

But Lamont was worried. "I've got one chance," he said, as if to himself. "But I've got to make good for that holdup, sweetheart. There's a fortune, an' a big one, in my saddlebag that isn't rightly mine. I won't even count it now that we—belong to each other. But I've got a chance."

"Of course, you've got a chance," she told him, ruffling his hair and pressing her cheek against his. "Anybody who wants to do right has a chance. Can't you send the money back?"

Lamont shook his head slowly. "Who is there aroun' here I could trust to take it back, an' even if they got it back they might still look for me." Just a pang of bitterness shot through him—if it were not for the girl, would he have to worry? The thought shamed him, and he clasped Dolores tightly in his arms and kissed her.

"Why couldn't I take it back?" she whispered in his ear.

"I wouldn't let you take the risk," he answered. "An' it's a long way, over the worst part of the desert. You would never find it. But you're a loyal little sweetheart——"

He released her suddenly, thrust her aside, and leaped to his feet. Hoofbeats were on the air. Both his guns flashed out.

"Run into the timber!" he commanded. "Hurry!"

Dolores was thunderstruck and frightened by the look in his face. His eyes were flaming through narrowed lids; his whole body tensed as if for a spring; his lips were set in a thin, straight line. For Lamont thought his liberty—his love of life—his chance for happiness was at stake, and he would send a rain of bullets straight to their mark to protect these things.

Then from the lower end of the meadow, sweet and clear above the hoofbeats, came the notes of a Spanish love song.

"It is José!" cried Dolores.

Lamont lowered his guns as the resplendent Mexican youth rode into the meadow and walked his horse toward them; then he slowly put up his weapons.

José looked down upon the two, his smile flashing. "The señor, he is look like a tiger there with the guns," he observed in soft, rich accents. "Maybe it was good I sing as I come."

"If it had been anybody else, I would have started shooting on sight," growled Lamont. "You come from Running Wells, of course. Have they started after me?"

José swung down from his ornate saddle, flinging the reins over his horse's head.

"But, no, señor," he said sweetly. "I tell them not to bother. Then I come out this morning an' I have idea you come this way. I take the chance an',

sure 'nough, I pick up the tracks an' follow the signs to here."

"You told them not to bother?" Lamont was incredulous. "How about that big white man? How'd you soft-soap that big-mouthed bully?"

José smiled beautifully at both of them. "I no use the soap," he purred. "The soap, eet is soft, but"—his eyes darkened and narrowed—"the steel, eet is hard." He laughed softly. "The Señor Morgan, he is with—the angels, señor."

Lamont started, and something of a look of awe came into his eyes. "You—you knifed him, José?" he managed to get out.

"In the heart, señor," replied the youth. "He was pulling the gun after we have quarrel. An' now I lead my father's men."

Lamont looked astounded. He turned to see Dolores standing with her hands crossed upon her breast.

"Well," said Lamont, "I wouldn't lead them as they've been led before, if I were you or you probably won't live long. You better quit that bunch, José."

"That is for me to say," returned the youth in a convincing voice. "I have more news. The black one who you have the trouble with over there, an' who follow you alone—he is in Running Wells with a rag aroun' his head."

Lamont was startled again. This must be the man who was eavesdropping and whom Dolores had struck on the head with her revolver. "Was the rag around his head, José?" he asked.

"Just there," replied the youth, with a gesture about his sombrero crown.

Lamont grinned. "Dolores gave him that," he said, with a look of pride at the girl. "She cracked him with her gun when he had a hammer lock on me an' was breaking my arm. He was listening at the window, José, an' he knows the señorita an' I will marry. He must be watched—remember."

José had winced at the word "marry,"

but now he nodded amiably. "He will be watched; but I theenk he start back for Kerrville this morning. Now there is 'nother thing. I have brought the pack of food for you, señor, an' mebbe you hide in the mountains for some time. There are some men below who are from a posse. I theenk they are gone to Seymore. It might be better you no go to Seymore."

"I had no intention of going to Seymore," said Lamont. "You bet it wouldn't be safe—oh, I could get away, but——" He looked at Dolores, who had taken hold of his arm. "You see, José, things are different now. You understand?"

The youth nodded. "I am understand," he said quietly.

"But it would be all right for the señorita to go back to Seymore," Lamont continued. "An' I have a piece of work to do—no, nothing like you are thinking, José. That is all over. But I must try to get out of this trouble—you know? Good. Will you take Dolores back to Seymore, José?"

The youth's eyes glowed happily. "Eet is the great pleasure of my life to be of service to the señorita," he declared with a bow.

"Good! Then you take her back to Seymore, an' I will start at once on my way. An' remember, José, you haven't seen me, of course."

"I no tell nothing," said José stoutly.

The work of combining the pack José had brought with the slim pack Lamont possessed, and its adjustment to Lamont's saddle, was quickly accomplished.

"I will ride into the timber to a place I know where I can rest my horse an' get a nap," said Lamont. "So you can start, José."

With a little cry, Dolores threw her arms about her lover's neck, and he held and kissed her. "Oh, Alex, you will sure come back?" she sobbed in his ear.

"You bet I will," he said tenderly; "an' it won't be long. I'm going to

make the way clear for our happiness, Dolores. You must not worry—you just must wait."

José turned away at the farewell and then he and Dolores mounted. Lamont stood exactly in the center of the meadow as they rode away. Dolores threw him a kiss as they quickly vanished in the dense timber on the up trail.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SHERIFF ACTS.

NEWs of the sensational robbery of The Green Parrot in Kerrville spread like magic through the desert country. The fact that "Big Mike," the proprietor, had offered a reward of five thousand dollars for the apprehension of the outlaw, spread like wildfire, too. But the return of Lamont to the long-rider trail was the report that caused the greatest sensation of all.

The sheriffs of half a dozen counties were immediately on the outlook for the fugitive, with their ears tuned for any iota of information concerning his whereabouts. Banks and mining companies, and resorts of chance put on extra guards and asked for more protection from the authorities. Even politics were affected by the news that Lamont—unjustly called a murderer, train robber, bank bandit, and two-gun killer—was again on the high road.

The reports of his newest outbreak, after more than a year of idleness, became more and more exaggerated, until the facts were so viciously distorted as to cause general excitement, and peaceful people shuddered at the mention of his name. It looked very much as if there would be no attempt to capture him, were he seen—"shoot on sight" became a veritable slogan. It had an extraordinary effect upon the forces of law and order; so much so that many men were stopped at the point of the gun and even temporarily imprisoned

because of an imaginary likeness to the fugitive.

The excitement came during the hottest and dullest period of the year and thus was greatly intensified.

The news reached Sheriff John Mack in Bayneville in identically the same manner as he had received The Buzzard's memorable message that he was about to rob the bank at Pinola.

The heat bore down almost to the point of suffocation at noonday; the sheriff was asleep in his swivel chair, with his feet on his desk, his hat over his eyes, and an unlighted cigar in his lap, where it had fallen from his mouth when he had dozed off. It appeared there was but little work for his office these days.

The telephone bell tinkled and the sheriff stirred. It tinkled again, and he dropped his feet to the floor and languidly approached the old-fashioned instrument on the wall.

He answered the call, listened some moments, and then, "What!" he exclaimed. "Lamont!" Gone was the languor now. "Are you sure it was Lamont?" Another interval. "Fifty thousand?" There was more talk from the other end of the wire. "All right, I'll be on the lookout. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and stood for some little time staring unseeing out the window into the shimmering desert haze of heat. But he was no longer cognizant of the heat, or of the dust that drifted in from the street. Worn lines appeared in his face and he looked much older than his sixty years.

He began to pace the small office with slow, measured steps. His brow wrinkled with worry. John Mack's conscience was bothering him, although that need not have been the case. Finally he stopped abruptly by his flat-topped desk.

"It's all my fault!" he exclaimed aloud, bringing his fist down on the surface of the desk. "I put that boy to the

bad again. The trail of The Buzzard hasn't ended."

He sat down in his swivel chair and leaned his forearms on the desk. Where would it end—this trail of tragedy?

Chief Deputy Merrill came in and noted with concern the look on the sheriff's face.

"What's wrong, chief?" he asked. "I know there's something up by the way you look."

John Mack nodded. "Lamont," he replied laconically.

"Lamont? What's wrong with him?"

"All wrong," was the listless reply.

"All wrong again, an' it's my fault."

"Chief, I wish you could get that notion out of your head," said the deputy with some irritation. "You've been brooding over that ever since you came back from that trip. If he's broken out again, it certainly isn't your fault. He was due, anyway. Has he stepped off the line?"

"Clear off," said the sheriff with a frown. "Knocked off Big Mike's joint, The Green Parrot, in Kerrville, for fifty thousand odd. I guess that's off the line, or over it, whichever way one wants to look at it."

Merrill whistled softly. "Well, he could have picked a place where the loss would have been felt more," he observed.

"I knew it was coming," said Mack. "Knew it just as well as I knew my own name. He as much as told me that his part in getting rid of The Buzzard released him from all promises. I could see it in his eyes the morning I left up there. The only consolation, if it can be called that, is that he didn't do a job in my territory. They telephoned me to-day from down the line to be on the watch for him. Well, I hope he comes. I want to see him. Merrill, you can say what you want, I started this thing. But I meant all right," he concluded in extenuation.

"Honestly, chief, if you don't stop

blaming yourself——" The deputy paused. He saw something in the sheriff's eyes—a mist! He shifted on his feet uneasily. But, after all, John Mack was an old man. He was reaching the first sentimental stages of senility. That must be it.

But that was not it. "Merrill," said the sheriff in a strong voice that rang convincingly, "I like that fellow! There's something to him. I'm old enough to be a pretty good judge of men. There was something behind this break which he couldn't control. Maybe he was egged on in some way. Big Mike is a nasty sort, an' he might have invited this. Now the thing I want to do is to bring about a meeting with him."

"Well, if you did meet him, you'd have to bring him in—if you could," said Merrill.

"If I met him, I bet I could bring him in—if I wanted to," said the sheriff tartly. "But I might not want to. Anyway, I'm going to try an' see him." He nodded his head convincingly.

When John Mack spoke in that tone of voice, Merrill knew by experience that he more than meant what he said. It meant he would see Lamont if it was humanly possible.

"I'm afraid it would be a hard job this time," he said. "You know, sheriff, there's a heap of difference between meeting a man of his stamp when he's sitting pretty an' not cutting any capers, an' when he's packing fifty thousand dollars' worth of loot—cash loot, at that!"

"I'm banking that it's according to who wants to see him," the sheriff returned calmly. "I reckon we'll have to fall back on The Weasel."

"I don't believe The Weasel could find him this time," said Merrill thoughtfully. "The other time it was noised aroun' among that gentry as to where Lamont was hanging out. That was because Lamont was camping in one

place an' wasn't wanted much by anybody so long as he wasn't working. But this time he's moving; an' don't forget, chief, that he's packing a hunk of plunder that will excuse a lot of gun inducing—to move on."

"I know it," Mack nodded. "But these fellows have certain routes an' hangouts under certain conditions. I know, because I've chased outlaws—an' bad ones with the poor ones—for quite a number of years. There's a chance The Weasel could locate him. It's a chance worth taking an' paying for, anyway. Do you know where he is?"

"Oh, he's hanging aroun' some of the dumps, I guess. I don't think he's left town. That five hundred he drew down for the last tip he gave us would last him quite a spell. He'd have to ride out this time, you know. It'd be better if he was broke, for if he's holding anything much he couldn't be pulled out of town with a rope."

John Mack's jaw clamped shut and he smiled grimly. "There's other ways of getting The Weasel out of town than by offering him money," he snapped out. "But money an' the promise of more is the best way, because then he'll go an' he'll come back, even if he comes back only with some news. It's a little early in the day for him to be showing. Do you know where he hangs out?"

Merrill shook his head. "I never bothered to find out," he confessed.

"Well, suppose you go an' find out now," Mack suggested in quiet tones of authority.

"Reckon that won't be hard," grunted the deputy as he went out.

The sheriff lighted a cigar and took a book from a drawer. He opened it at a certain page and scanned what was written thereon. Then he replaced it. "Reckon I've been about the most liberal sheriff this county ever had," he mused. "Maybe it pays, maybe it don't. I'm bettin' it does in this case." He puffed easily at his cigar, examined the

ashes critically, flecked them lightly to the floor. Sometimes it wasn't so bad to be a sheriff, after all. He had scarcely made this mental observation when Merrill returned.

John Mack eyed him questioningly.

"He lives alone in a little shack behind the Cream City café," said Merrill. "It's a one-room affair with a new door painted green. He's most likely there now."

The sheriff picked up his hat, which he had placed on the desk so he could run his fingers through his hair. He always said he could think better that way. "Reckon I'll take a little run down there," he said. "Hadn't ought to be too early to wake him up."

"What if it is?" grinned Merrill. "Maybe it'll scare him into listening harder."

The sheriff strolled down the hot, dusty street to the Cream City and went through the space between the buildings to the rear of the café. He had no difficulty in locating the shack, for its new green door stared him in the eye. He rapped sharply on the door. There was no answer. He tried again and this time the summons was imperative. There was a stir within and presently the key was turned in the lock and it opened about four inches. Two snapping black eyes peered out.

"'Lo, Weasel," said the sheriff pleasantly. "Too early for visitors?"

"'Lo, sheriff," said The Weasel suspiciously. "Not too early for law visitors, I guess."

He opened the door and the sheriff entered. There was a bed, a small deal table, stove, four chairs, cupboard, clothes rack, and an antiquated phonograph.

John Mack sat down by the table while Weasel Warden pulled on his coat, took a stiff drink of liquor, and rolled a cigarette. Then he, too, sat down and eyed the sheriff in a shifty, speculative manner.

"You know, Weasel," began the sheriff, "in some ways you're a useful citizen."

"Yeah? Well, I don't do any harm, sheriff," said The Weasel, with a worried note in his voice.

"An' you don't do any work, either," returned the sheriff in a sterner voice. "Ever think of that, Weasel?"

"I'm not the only one," The Weasel defended. "Why pick on me?"

"Because most of the others haven't really done anything that would put them in jail over an extended period, Weasel. I was looking up your record with me this noon an' I see where I've been pretty good to you, Weasel. Maybe I had my reasons for being so generous."

"You're not goin' back on your word, are you, sheriff?" asked the other in alarm.

John Mack smiled. "You know better than to ask that question," he said severely. "You know my word is good an' I've never gone back on it. I'm not going back on it with you. I'm merely reminding you, Weasel, that I've been good to you."

The little man sighed with relief. "Well, I sure appreciate it, sheriff," he said earnestly.

"I'm glad to hear that. Weasel, how much of that five hundred I gave you have you got left, counting what you've lost an' won? I mean, how much cash money have you got?"

"About ninety dollars," was the answer.

The sheriff shook his head sadly. "That isn't enough money for you, Weasel," he said. "You can't play very high stakes, an' so you haven't got a chance in the world to pull down much. You're afraid all the time of going broke. When you're down to less than a hundred you're worried all the time, isn't that so, Weasel?"

"Why, yes," The Weasel confessed, surprised that the sheriff should show

such solicitude. His suspicions grew instantly.

"That five hundred I gave you for directing me to where I could find Lamont came just at the right time, didn't it, Weasel?" the sheriff asked.

The little man nodded and grinned.

"An' you noticed that no harm of any kind came to Lamont through it, didn't you?"

The Weasel nodded again.

The sheriff took out a cigar and lighted it. He puffed on it with evident satisfaction, made sure it was burning properly, then eyed The Weasel speculatively.

"Big Mike's place, The Green Parrot, in Kerrville, has been held up an' robbed of fifty thousand dollars," he said slowly. "Big Mike was caught in his office an' compelled to open the safe an' stuff yellowbacks of big denomination into a saddlebag. It was a one-man job an' the man made a neat get-away. A beautiful piece of work, eh, Weasel?"

The little man's eyes sparkled. "Who pulled it?" he asked.

"Lamont," replied the sheriff casually.

The Weasel started in the chair and grasped the edge of the table. "You don't say!" he ejaculated. "I might have known it. He's the only one I know of who could pull a sweet job like that. He's back on the money trail!"

"Yes," said the sheriff, "he's back on the money trail, as you call it. But it's another kind of a trail, too, Weasel, don't forget that. He's on a trail that has only one certain ending—prison or death. They all come to it, Weasel, unless they kick out of it—in the right way. Weasel, I like Lamont. I look on him as a friend. Do you believe that?"

The little man could see the truth shining in the other's eyes. "Yes," he replied.

The sheriff leaned on the table. "All right," he said. "Now we can get down

to business. As I said before, in some ways you're a useful citizen. You helped me find Lamont that time, as an instance. Weasel, how could you do with a thousand?"

The Weasel's eyes flashed. "I could use it," he said.

"I'll deposit five hundred dollars in the bank for you an' give you expense money," said the sheriff. "Go find Lamont an' tell him I want to see him. That's the message; it's all you have to tell him. I want to see him. When you come back, I'll deposit five hundred dollars more in the bank to your credit. But you cannot have any of this money, except the expense money, until you have found Lamont an' delivered my message an' I have proof of the fact."

The Weasel was staring at the sheriff as if he had never seen him before. Suddenly he gulped and said: "But how'm I goin' to find him when he's hidin' out with fifty thousand in swag?"

John Mack smiled. "Weasel, you were in the big game once yourself. You know the ins an' outs. You can figure the situation all right after you've got some information. Go get the information you need. Go to Kerrville—anywhere. You can judge by the routes an' country covered by posses an' all that. It's certain he wouldn't go back to Seymore—we all know that. They're up there by now, anyway. But you know a whole lot of hiding places; you know a lot of shady trails. If any one around here can find him, it's you. It's too good a proposition to pass up, Weasel."

"But he'd shoot me on sight, carrying all that money," The Weasel protested.

Sheriff Mack laughed. "You know better than that. You know Lamont wouldn't shoot anybody on sight without giving him a chance, much less somebody he knew. He knows you. He did you a little favor in the matter of a get-away once, didn't he?"

The little man flushed. "How much expense money do I get?" he inquired.

"Not enough for you to beat it with, Weasel. You've got ninety for an emergency; I'll give you a hundred. If you get caught you can use the wire—if you can convince me you're telling the truth. I'm not going to promote you for any tour, Weasel."

For some time The Weasel was silent, while the sheriff smoked contentedly.

"But look here, sheriff——" The Weasel paused and stared thoughtfully at the official.

"Yes—what is it?" asked Mack cheerfully.

"Suppose I should get word to Lamont an' he actually should agree to meet you. Are you goin' to grab him for this job?"

"Nope. I'd grab him quick enough if I could an' it had been in my territory. Tell him that. He knows my word is good."

"Gimme the hundred," growled The Weasel. "An' don't forget about that bank deposit."

"I've got a good memory," said Mack, taking out his wallet. He tossed a hundred-dollar bill on the table. "I'll be going," he said. "I'll stop at the bank on my way to the office."

"It's a heck of an hour to be gettin' up," The Weasel grumbled, as Mack went out smiling.

At five o'clock that afternoon, The Weasel rode out of town and headed south with a sizable pack tied behind his saddle. Sheriff John Mack watched him go with a grim smile of satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MISSION.

THE personality of Weasel Warden was a peculiar one. The workings of his mind were even more peculiar. He always lacked the courage of his convictions, for one thing, and he never was quite sure of himself. He was not quick-minded, so to say. He made quick decisions, to be sure, and after-

ward was assailed by doubts as to their wisdom. It was the lack of alert faculties which had driven him from a career of outlawry and brigandage. He was a notable gun expert, a peerless rider, and, when forced to the wall, courageous. But stability was missing in his make-up.

These general characteristics came into play as he rode southward in the late afternoon. He had felt no doubts as to the sheriff's squareness and the integrity of his word when facing him in the little shack in town. But now, away from the influence of John Mack's personality, he could not help wondering if this might not be a ruse to take Lamont into custody. True, Mack had kept his word before, but now Lamont had broken out again. The Weasel solved this problem by deciding it was up to Lamont to do as he pleased, provided he could find him and give him the sheriff's message.

But could he find Lamont? The Weasel possessed considerable knowledge of the manner of get-aways in such circumstances as this. He knew what the sheriff termed "the routes," and some of the hiding places. But there was a good chance of this being Lamont's last job and of his getting out of the county altogether with a comfortable fortune. He must have other money also. But why had he turned down the ten-thousand-dollar reward for killing The Buzzard? The Weasel's mind simply refused to function when he asked himself these questions.

Thus he wearied his brains with "ifs" and "whys" until after sunset, when, with the coming of the short desert twilight, he became more alert to things material. He was heading due south in the direction of the Wizards, riding at a moderate pace. But with the coming of night, he changed his course. He turned southwest toward the Antelopes. It was some five days or so since the holdup had occurred, he understood.

The telephone wire had been down, but evidently the Kerrville sheriff had not known it, as The Weasel had been told. Anyway, there had been a mistake or a mix-up somewhere and the news had been late in reaching Bayneville. There was a chance he might run into something by riding closer to the mountains, until morning anyway.

The Weasel, as yet had no definite plans. It was a habit of his, perhaps not a bad one, to let events shape themselves and his method of procedure map itself as he went along. He never exercised his mental faculties until it was absolutely necessary. This may seem incongruous, but it constituted a system all The Weasel's own, and for him it worked perfectly.

The white desert moon came up amid a shower of stars. The giant cacti stood out like ghosts, holding up their arms in grotesque gestures. The shadows made by sage and mesquite and occasional paloverde seemed alive and scampered away or slipped past stealthily as The Weasel jogged along.

Now The Weasel had been brought up in the desert and knew its moods, its whims, its dangers, and its eternal beauty. As an instance: He knew at some distance the shadow of a horse and rider, as distinguished from the shadow of a plant. And now he saw a lone horseman approaching directly ahead.

The Weasel's heart jumped and he instinctively reined in his horse. Could it be Lamont? But would the fugitive ride directly toward a town like this? Lamont might do it. He was equal to almost any sensational play. He might be short of provisions and be on his way to Bayneville to replenish his supply, trusting to the sheriff to turn his back. The Weasel's heart took another flop. If it was Lamont, his thousand was earned with no further trouble.

He rode forward almost eagerly. The rider ahead came on, making no effort

to avoid him, and as they neared each other, The Weasel's spirits sank. This man was much too large for the lithe Lamont. Well, The Weasel was not afraid to meet anybody. The rider held up a hand, and The Weasel did likewise. As they reined in their horses near each other, the big man was first to speak.

"Well, paint me red, if it ain't that bow-legged little runt, The Weasel, himself!" he boomed.

The Weasel recognized both the voice and the face. "Black Evans!" he exclaimed. "It's a long twist since I seen you last."

"That goes for both of us," breezed Blackie Evans. "Where you been hidin' out, Weasel?"

"Bayneville. You had a regular address?"

"Kerrville, an' she's good. All orders filled. How's the pickin's in Bayneville?"

"Nothin' but the bones left," The Weasel complained. "You headin' for there?"

"Well, I was headin' for there, but maybe you can give me some information that'll turn me round. You'd probably tell an old pal you used to run with, eh?"

"Sure. What you want to know, Black?" said the little man readily.

"Weasel, has Lamont been seen up aroun' there?" asked Evans.

The Weasel started. Now what? Perhaps it would be best to angle for a little information first. "Black, I got to ask you why you want to know that before I answer," he said. "Honest, I have."

"Why, that's easy. Haven't you heard about the big holdup he pulled in Big Mike's place down in Kerrville? Got away with a real chunk. There's a reward out, an' I'm lookin' for him. Got a personal reason also. Thought he might have possibly headed up this far."

The Weasel shook his head. "Ain't been seen up there. I'm lookin' for him, too." There it was! Dog-gone, he shouldn't have said that!

"Yeah? You lookin' for him, too. An' all out by yourself. I wouldn't think you'd be after him, Weasel. He certainly did you a good turn once, didn't he?"

The Weasel squirmed in his saddle. "Oh, I ain't exactly wantin' to turn him in," he said. "I got a message for him—that is——" There it was again! He shouldn't have said that.

"Oh, you're out to steer him, eh? Goin' to grease the way north, I suppose." Evans was speaking in a sneering tone. "Look here, Weasel"—his voice took on an ominous note—"you an' I have run together, haven't we? Tell me what's up. I can't spoil any lay that's fixed for him. If one's fixed, I don't even want to know what it is, for I wouldn't want to double cross a friend."

"The sheriff wants to see him," The Weasel blurted.

"The sheriff——" Evans broke into a laugh. "Why, you little shrimp, every sheriff aroun' here wants to see him! They've all raised their sights, hopin' they will see him. Does he think Lamont will ride in like a lamb an' give himself up?"

"I dunno," The Weasel replied angrily. "No, I know he doesn't expect that. They're sort of friends, them two. An' it's none of my business, nor yours. My job's simply to deliver my message, if I can, an' beat it back. You knew where Lamont was last?"

"Sure," replied Evans. "He was at Running Wells with that girl of his from Seymore. They beat it together. I wouldn't keep anything I know from you, Weasel, only I can't see through this message business."

"An' I can't either," The Weasel confessed. "So we're even on that."

"Mighty strange," Evans ruminated.

"Mighty strange. Somehow, I feel there's something in this thing for us two. Weasel—something big. You know there's nobody aroun' Kerrville I could trust in a thing like this. In fact, I don't know where many of the old gang are; an' those I do know where they are, are a long way off."

The Weasel had pricked up his ears. Something in it for them? Something big? What was Black Evans getting at? What——

"How much that sheriff promise you for this job, Weasel?" Evans asked suddenly.

The Weasel seemed to hesitate a bit. Then: "A thousand an' expenses," he said.

"Humph!" Evans snorted. "So you're down to working for wages! That's about what it amounts to. Now, look here, Weasel, I've got a real idea. It means big money. I know you, an' I can trust you. Why shouldn't we grab a chunk of money an' beat it out of this country? I'm sick of it, an' I'd bet my last white chip you're sick of it, too. Lamont wasn't too good to steal, an' there was a time you wasn't. I'm not too good right now. A thousand dollars! Why, suppose you got the thousand; where's the next one coming from?"

This was a poser. The Weasel wrinkled his nose trying to think up a reply. Where was the next one coming from, to be sure? He was interested in what Blackie Evans had said.

"Weasel, you've gone stale," said Evans scornfully. "You said things were on the down grade in Bayneville, an' the fact that you're hangin' aroun' burnt-out diggin's shows you're on the down grade, too. You——"

"I'm just summering there," the small man protested. "I've got things pretty soft, an'——"

"That's just it!" Evans exclaimed. "You're lookin' for a soft spot to finish in. That'd be all right if you had plenty

of jack an' didn't have to worry none. But you're washed out. If you got that thousand it wouldn't last long, an' sooner or later you'll have to fall into bein' a house booster in the games for worse'n wages. You got something better'n that comin' to you. You used to be able to step, an' you can yet, if you make up your mind to. What have those people done for you? Nothing! You got to mortgage your life an' die in the poor-house for this sheriff?"

"I hadn't thought much about it," returned The Weasel lamely.

"Well, it's sure time you began to think something about it. Now I'm turnin' back, an' I've got an idea. I'll let you in on it. I really need a man I can trust to help. We'll go an' find this Lamont. We can do it. He'll be back to that girl sooner or later that's a cinch. She's back in Seymour. We'll head up that way. We may even meet him."

"But that'll only mean a thousand to me unless—you mean to turn him in, Black, an' cop the reward?"

"Not by a long shot!" Black Evans swore. "He's packin' a big lump, ain't he? Something like fifty thousand, they say. We'll cop that! Now do you begin to get my drift? Wouldn't be bad, boy—twenty-five thousand apiece an' maybe more? Of course, we won't turn him in. We'll get the kale; that's all we'll get."

"But——" The Weasel's eyes were sparkling. "He'd kill the both of us before we got within fifty feet of him, if he suspected anything, an' within ten feet before we could get away."

"We're not goin' to get within ten feet of him, nor twenty, nor a mile! Oh, I know it sounds spooky! An' now that I think of it, he needn't know you're in on the deal at all. It's a plan I've worked out, an' I'll tell you more when we hit our first camp in the mornin'. I'm ridin' for the Antelopes: want to come?"

"I was goin' to head that way, too," replied The Weasel weakly.

As they spurred their horses into a gallop, something inside The Weasel seemed to come to life. He had no need to wonder what it was. He knew!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ARREST.

IN his hidden retreat in the foothills of the Antelopes, Lamont dozed and slept until late afternoon, following the departure of José and Dolores for Seymore. The sun was sinking behind the peaks when he prepared and ate a mild repast. Then he saddled, affixed his slicker pack, and rode back to the main Seymore trail. He had to be alert now, for members of one or more posses might be coming up or down that trail.

He rode down some two miles and then turned off to the north on a dry gully. He was not far above the floor of the desert now and he rode slowly, waiting for darkness. When it came, he emerged from the sparsely timbered lower hills and struck north on the desert. He set a pace which his horse could maintain for hours and kept within the shadow of the hills. He proposed to make in four days the distance John Mack had made in nearly ten. But, then, Mack had not known the country down there and had had to proceed by directions from point to point, whereas Lamont was taking a short cut.

All that night he rode, and until the sun was well up in the morning; then he again sought the shelter of the hills and made camp for the day. It was the same the next night, and the next, and then he had to quit the vicinity of the hills and head northeastward straight across the desert. The Weasel and Blackie Evans had passed him far out on the desert. And they had passed half a dozen men of a posse working northward.

Lamont had taken an early start on

this last lap of his ride. He had made splendid time and he proposed to make Bayneville early in the morning.

Lamont was on his way to see John Mack!

It was in the hour before dawn that he glimpsed the riders to the east of him. It did not require much mental effort to identify these horsemen as a posse. Numbers of men were not riding aimlessly about the desert at that time of year at that hour of the morning, or at any time for that matter. José had disposed of Morgan, assumed charge of the Buzzard band, and they were at Running Wells.

Lamont rode directly west until he could not see the riders to the east of him. Then he veered directly north and let out his horse. Twisting in the saddle, he untied his slicker pack and discarded it and its load of provisions and a few surplus articles of wearing apparel. His horse must not carry any more weight than was absolutely necessary. For Lamont knew it was going to be a race for Bayneville. He knew, too, that he was taking a long chance; but he was willing to take that chance. He was placing his last bet—his *one* bet—on John Mack.

After a long, stiff gallop to northward he swung slightly to the east, heading directly for Bayneville. His horse still possessed a reserve power which could be depended upon. The gray in the east brightened and then the horizon was a sea of crimson, portending the advent of the sun. When the great golden ball was well started on its climb up the eastern sky, Lamont saw the riders southeast of him. Even at that distance, his practical eye told him they were coming at high speed. The race was on!

Far ahead there was a blot on the desert and behind it the lava hills reared their black hulks. The blot was Bayneville.

Lamont had not the slightest fear of

not making the town ahead of the pursuing horsemen, or of being caught by them; the thing was to make town with enough time to spare in which to see John Mack and quickly explain the situation. For that matter, the posse—if it were a posse—could not be sure of his identity at that distance. But the fact that he was running from them was against him.

Lamont patted his horse on the neck and called for the best the splendid animal could give him. The horse had been so called upon many times before. It was as if it had learned when its master was in danger; when they had to slope and slope fast. Lamont did not have to use his spurs. He leaned low, turning in the saddle to see the pursuing riders slowly but surely being out-distanced.

The blot ahead grew plainer. It seemed to march toward him as it took form. Soon the tall pepper trees and the outlines of the buildings were visible. Lamont checked his pace a bit. The horsemen behind were now not to be seen. Nor were they to be seen when Lamont finally slowed his pace and trotted into the upper end of Bayneville's main street.

The jail was at this end of the street and he rode straight for it. When he reached it, he dismounted, threw the reins over his horse's head, and bounded up the short flight of steps. He burst into the sheriff's office just as John Mack was lighting a cigar. He had just reached the office. The cigar dropped from his fingers when he saw Lamont.

"Did The Weasel find you this quick?" he said in surprise.

Lamont did not know what he was talking about, but there was no time in which to ask questions.

"Listen, Mack," he said crisply, "I rode here to see you. 'A bunch of men are following me in, an' I think they're the law. On that Kerrville business, you know? I don't care so much who

they are, but I want a chance to talk to you about this business, an' I've got to hide——"

"Where's your horse?" Mack interrupted sharply.

"Outside," replied Lamont. "I didn't have time——"

The sheriff was paying no attention to him, for he was calling for Merrill. When the deputy came quickly to the door, Mack gave a curt order:

"Get outside there an' take Lamont's horse away as fast as you can shake your legs!" Then, as Merrill was obeying the order, Mack called to him from the window: "Just forget anybody's here, an' beat it back fast as you can."

The sheriff turned to Lamont. "Come on," he said tersely. In the outside room he took some keys from the jailer. He led the way into the cell block, pushed Lamont into a cell, and the door clanged shut.

"Here—don't lock me in!" Lamont cried, pulling his guns in his excitement and covering the sheriff.

The sheriff laughed. "So far's I'm concerned, those guns are loaded with blanks," he said.

Then Lamont remembered. The guns shot back into their holsters. "Listen, Mack, send somebody or shoot Merrill back for my saddlebag. I forgot to bring it in. It's got all the loot in it!"

"Leave it to me," said John Mack. "Leave everything to me, an' keep your mouth shut!" He hurried out, giving a crisp order to the jailer.

Lamont sat down on the bench in the cell with a wan smile of satisfaction on his face. He knew by what John Mack had said, and by his actions, that he had not been mistaken when he had assumed he could put his faith in the sheriff. Far more important was his errand than that which had sent John Mack to the Antelope. At least, so Lamont thought. Next his thoughts raced across desert and mountains to the rendezvous among the peaks and the cabin on the creek

where José had taken Dolores. He cupped his hands, leaned his elbows on his knees. The more he thought of what Dolores Martinez had gone through, the more he loved her.

He rose and paced the cell. The very thought of being taken from her—of losing her!—caused his hands to drop to his guns and his lips to tighten. Had he made a mistake? Should he not have fled with her? She would have gone readily. José would have helped them. Had he made a fool of himself? He would gladly have shot his way to freedom through a dozen posses to make sure of her! He would do it yet, if need be. It was a good thing Lamont did not know that The Weasel and Blackie Evans were then in Seymore, their minds dark with evil.

His thoughts were interrupted by the return of the sheriff. "I've got the saddlebag in my safe," he said. "I took a peep into it, an' it's the right one, so don't worry."

"Sheriff, listen," said Lamont tremulously, gripping the bars until his knuckles were white, "I——"

"Not now," the sheriff interrupted sharply. "I want to find out something about this bunch you say was chasing you. There'll be plenty of time to talk later. I'm telling you again, Lamont, to leave this thing to me."

Both heard the stamp of boots on the steps outside, and the sheriff left hastily. He found a man in the outer office, dust-covered and showing every evidence of having just come off a hard ride.

"Lo, sheriff," said the man, who seemed to be a Scandinavian.

"Howdy," greeted Mack. "Can I do anything for you?" He could see other men and horses in the street outside.

"Why—ah—did you see a man come ridin' in here a while back?" came the question.

The sheriff shook his head slowly. "No." This was the truth, for he had

not seen Lamont come in. "Men do come riding in here—an' sometimes they go riding out faster'n what they came in. Was you looking for anybody in particular?" He had seen the gleam of a deputy's star on his visitor's shirt as his vest opened a trifle.

"Oh, we was followin' a fellow in," was the casual reply. "I guess he must've gone down the street. I'll see you later after I get something to eat." With that the deputy went out.

Mack stepped to where Lamont could hear, and addressed Merrill. "That fellow's an amateur or a fool, one of the two," he said. "It was plain as day he was a deputy—I'd have known it, even if I hadn't caught a glimpse of his star. He didn't want to tell me who he was looking for because he thinks he can round-up Lamont in town. He's afraid I'd maybe get him first an' grab the reward money. Come into the office, Merrill."

The sheriff and deputy were closeted for some few minutes in the former's office. Then Merrill came out, leaving the door open.

Lamont heard Merrill move a chair, say something to the jailer, and sit down with a loud "Ho-hum!" Then the office was quiet. He knew the signs. They were waiting for the deputy to return. And they did not have long to wait, for soon there came the stamping of several pairs of heavy boots on the steps and men entered the outer office.

"Where's the sheriff?" came the voice of the deputy.

"Here I am," said John Mack, passing into the outer office.

"Sheriff, he's here!" said the deputy excitedly. "We saw his horse in the barn, at least it's his if descriptions are correct."

"Whose horse?" the sheriff demanded irritably. "Who're you talking about, anyway?"

"Lamont!" said the deputy. "We fol-

lowed him in, but can't locate him. We thought maybe you——"

"Well, why didn't you say something in the first place!" the sheriff exclaimed in apparent disgust. "I could have told you he was here. I didn't see him ride in, but I've got him here in jail."

The deputy stared, then whipped off his hat and slapped it across his knee. "You've got him, then!" he cried. "Under arrest an' in jail?"

"That's where I usually put men when I arrest 'em," said the sheriff dryly. "Want to see him?"

"Sure thing—an' it'll be the pleasantest sight I've seen in many a long day an' more nights. I'm Anderson, deputy from Kerrville. We've had a hundred men out looking for that fellow. I guess he's your prize. Well, I don't care, since I'll have the proud duty of taking him in. Where is he?"

"Right this way," said the sheriff cheerfully.

He led the Kerrville deputy and half a dozen of his men to Lamont's cell. "That's him," he announced with a gesture.

Lamont was sitting on the bench at the rear of the cell, facing them, and coolly smoking a cigarette.

Anderson and his men crowded against the bars. None had seen Lamont before. "Why, look!" Anderson exclaimed. "He's wearing both his guns!"

The sheriff peered over the heads of the others. "Why, so he is!" he ejaculated. "Lamont, what're you doing with those guns in there?"

"I'm oiling 'em in case I should meet up with some of that bunch somewhere," Lamont replied, flicking the ash from his cigarette.

Anderson whirled on the sheriff. "What kind of a joke is this?" he demanded angrily.

"If it's a joke, it's sure a good one," replied John Mack.

"That isn't Lamont at all," declared

Anderson hotly. "Just because I'm a little new at this game is no excuse for you springing a joke on me. You represent the law as well as me, an' you ought to try to help me instead of pulling fool jokes."

"Yes, we both represent the law," the sheriff observed.

There was a muttering among Anderson's men. The deputy turned for another look at Lamont. "That's not Lamont, that's a double-riveted cinch," he said with a dark look on his face.

"What makes you think it isn't?" asked the sheriff. "I arrested him for Lamont."

"Rats!" snorted Anderson. "If that's Lamont, why's he in there with his guns on him?"

"He obliged me by going in of his own accord," said the sheriff, a stern note coming into his voice. "I got him single-handed. You don't suppose I'm going to try to take guns away from a man like that, do you? You say you're new in this game. Well, I've been sheriff of this county for thirty years. Yes, sirree; they elected me when I was thirty an' there wasn't much sherifing to be done. I've been here ever since. You can cover Lamont, and he'll dodge, draw, an' put a bullet through your heart before you can pull a trigger. Here, you young whippersnapper, you're so smart!"

John Mack called the jailer. "Unlock that cell!" The jailer turned the key in the lock and swung open the door.

"There you are, Anderson!" The sheriff's voice rang in the cell block. "Now you go in an' get his guns!"

Lamont had thrown away his cigarette and his eyes had narrowed. Both hands gripped the bench on either side. Anderson looked at him, and then at the sheriff, and hesitated. He looked at Lamont again and wet his lips with his tongue. He looked about in indecision, and saw Chief Deputy Merrill standing

behind them with a broad grin on his face. That settled it.

"There!" he cried hoarsely. "There's one of your deputies laughing in my face! It's a rotten trick, that's what it is, an' I'll get you for it! I don't care if you've been sheriff of this county for sixty years, I'll bet you won't be sheriff for one more year! Playin' a trick like this in a serious matter, when you should be helpin' me! It shows you're gettin' so old you're gettin' silly. I'll report it 'way up, even if I have to go to Phoenix!"

With this outburst he thrust his way through his men to the outer room. Sheriff John Mack's laugh followed him and he heard the sheriff say: "Come on out, Alex."

Anderson whirled and shook his fist at the sheriff, his face red with anger.

"You see what the State says when they hear this!" he yelled. "The whole State looking for an outlaw an' a robber an' a murderer, an' you laughing an' playin' jokes! I'll——" His voice died in a gurgle and he became inarticulate with rage. Then he stamped out, followed by his men.

Sheriff John Mack, his eyes twinkling merrily, led Lamont into his private office and closed the door. He sat down in his swivel chair and took out a cigar, while Lamont leaned on his hands on the desk and looked at him.

"You danged old innocent fox!" said Lamont slowly. "You smooth old sheriff! But when that boy finds out—when he finds out—it'll take the militia to keep us from having to bury you!"

"Sit down, Alex," said the sheriff cheerfully. "Have a cigar?"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



INDIANS WAITING FOR FISH

THERE is a curious fish called the oolachan, which is greatly prized by the Indians of the Northwest as a food. During four or five weeks of the summer, these fish run from numerous rivers into the waters of Puget Sound. And always before the heavy run occurs, hundreds of Indians—men, women, and children—gather at the mouths of these rivers and anxiously await the arrival of their winter's food supply.

From the fish the natives make oolachan grease, which takes the place of butter and lard. Oolachans are also cooked in various ways for the table and pickled in salt for winter use by Indians and many white ranchers. In some instances, the fish is even found to be an adequate substitute for a candle—the method of preparation for this function being the insertion of a cotton cord into the fish's body. The oolachan, which is also known as candlefish, is so filled with fat that oil may actually be squeezed from its body.



Follow The Leader

By Austin Hall

Author of "What the Herder Heard," etc.



HEY called him "Slivers" Magee—a wee wisp of a man who sat upon the driver's seat like a manikin, but who could handle the reins better than any man in the country. And there were many who called him the best stage driver that ever lived.

Be that as it may, Sheriff Tim Conden had this day come to old Slivers Magee. Three stage holdups and as many murders were about the limit of his endurance, and something had to be done; the other stage drivers had quit, and there was none to do the work but old Slivers. The only trouble lay in the fact that Slivers had retired and was not open for the job. Stage driving was getting to be a lost art; and Slivers Magee had passed his prime. And on top of that, when a man starts raising chickens and becomes interested in the offspring of a flock of broody hens, he

is pretty hard to approach. This morning Slivers was that sort of a man.

Sheriff Tim Conden had entered the yard carefully, holding his hat in his hand. Slivers, propping himself against a box, was feeding a Plymouth Rock; apparently he had not heard of the latest holdup.

"Yuh see, Slivers," said the sheriff, in his most ingratiating manner, "it's like this. These here drivers is all right, only they ain't no good when it comes tuh facing trouble. And even if they was good, they couldn't do nothing now because they've all quit. Scared tuh death, I should say. This here 'Black Bart' has got their goats fer fair. Honest! And me being the sheriff. I've got enough tuh do tuh keep after them bandits. I can't drive stage and everything. If I had a man like you, I'd deputize him and catch Black Bart. Yep. But you ain't willing tuh do nothing but raise these durn chickens. Now——"

And that was the beginning of a shrewd bargain. Slivers Magee was little, but he could crawl on the inside of a good agreement better than any other man on earth. Not for nothing had he driven stage between Red Rock and the railroad for thirty long years. And they had been years when men were real, and when a little thing like a stick-up was a common occurrence. During that time Slivers had had his wits sharpened to an infinite degree; and he had not lost them even yet. But now he was raising chickens, and a little thing like laughing down the barrel of a gaping .45 was a pleasure long forgotten. That is, until the sheriff began springing his argument.

"Yuh see, Slivers," he was saying, "this here Black Bart ain't a young 'un. He's one of the old school. From up Montany way. Regular old hold-up man. Done time and everything; but now he's loose again and he's come down tuh Red Rock tuh raise all the trouble he kin. Seems like he's heard of you and Red Rock, and come here tuh compare his merits. Thinks himself the best stage robber that ever lived, and wants tuh prove it by sticking up Slivers Magee. But when he gets here, yuh ain't driving the stage no more; yuh've gone tuh raising chickens. And he's sore all over. When he pulled that last hold-up a week ago he left a note, and we didn't find it until yesterday. Here it is. And seeing yuh ain't got your spectacles with yuh, I'm agoing tuh read it. Now listen:

"DEAR SHERIFF: Robbing this stage is like taking money from a baby. Nothing tuh do but ride up with a six gun, and take the box. And it ain't no fun at all. Why don't yuh make it interesting and put on old Slivers Magee? Him and me has got an argument tuh settle; I ain't never failed on no stage holdup in my life; and they told me, up at the pen, that this here Slivers ain't never lost a cent yet. That would be just my size. I'm just about fed up on taking money without fighting fer it. So get me Slivers and

I'll show yuh that they's one bandit what kin make him eat dirt. I'll hold him up and turn his leaders loose just tuh make it fancy. Yeh! And he'll know me when he hears about me, 'cause I'm the toughest stage robber what ever lived.

"Yours,

"BLACK BART."

But Slivers Magee did not bat an eye. Five foot one in his socks in his prime, he had shriveled into a mere knot, and added to that, a score and a half of years with his right foot on the brake had given him a hobbling gait; yet his voice was steady and his eyes were clear.

"Yeh," he said studiously, as if thinking back, "I've heard of Bart. Black Bart of Montany, they used tuh call him. And every word he says is true. He's held up more stages than any man in kingdom come. But he ain't held up mine. Howsomever, I've gone tuh raising chickens and I ain't interested."

Sheriff Conden scratched his head.

"Well, Slivers," he said in a last attempt to make the old man relent, "they's a reward of two thousand dollars. And the mining company has added three thousand more. After all, it's their money that Black Bart has been stealing."

"Serves 'em right," said Slivers Magee contemptuously. "That's what they get fer paying their men with paper money. Now when I was driving stage it was gold, real yellow stuff, and we had bad bandits and honest-to-gosh men. I'd look nice aluggin' several thousand dollars in paper money fer their pay roll! And besides, the mine ain't only a zinc mine at that. If it was gold, now——"

"Five thousand dollars is a lot of money," said the sheriff. "Ain't tuh be sneezed at. And I've got tuh get a real man on that stage. The way it is this crook just rides up with that gang of his, takes the box from the stage, and rides off tuh the mountains. I've rode my horses ragged, but I haven't found him. And it's coming on election,

Slivers, and I need the votes. This here thing of holding up stages is a real business on both sides; and I want you on that driver's seat. Election——"

And that was the argument that won Slivers over; he had known Sheriff Conden for years; and besides, as the officer had said, five thousand dollars was not to be laughed at. That amount of money would set up a whale of a chicken plant. For two whole minutes he thought it over, and then he spoke.

"Yeh! Well, I see your point, sheriff, and I kin sure use the money. But it's kinda hard fer an old cuss like me tuh be diggin' intuh the business ag'in. Still—I allus did feel kinda slighted over this Black Bart business. He held up stages all over the country and he never even give me a call. And then after I had been waiting fer him a coupla years I heard that he'd been sent tuh the pen fer some little thing like stealing a coat off a storekeeper. So now you say he's come back. Hey? Well, I'm athinkin'. And paper money too. Huh! And old Black Bart his own real self. By golly! Sheriff, I'm athinkin' I'll take the job. I think I got something thought out. It ought tuh be just like nothing."

And that was how Slivers Magee, famous stage driver of the old days, happened to come out of his retirement. The next morning the citizens of Red Rock received a pleasant surprise. Just as the sun rose over the horizon the old stage, drawn by four horses—two bays, and a pair of dapple-gray leaders—drew up in front of the post office. On the driver's seat was Slivers Magee, wee and alert for all his years, his foot on the brake, and the lines arranged through the fingers of his gloved left hand. The same old "Whoa!" and the same old stop. A visit to the post office, a stop at the express station, and a call to the men on the sidewalk. Next minute the swirl of dust trailed into the distance. As Top Peters said:

"Dog-gone! She's like old times. Old Slivers Magee? Yuh bet! And his same old team. They ain't nothin' kin get the best of that combination. He's been feedin' that team fer years—just out of love. That old dapple-gray leader—— Well, all I gotta say is they's agoin' tuh be some fun. This here Black Bart is the worst stage robber that ever lived, they say. And now Sheriff Conden has given him something tuh shoot at. Looks like we're going tuh have some action."

But right there he was mistaken—for the first day at least. It was thirty miles to the railroad, and another thirty back again. The stage went one day and came home the next. And when the time drew around for his arrival, Slivers Magee drove into the main street as peacefully as could be wished. He stopped at the post office and at the store.

"Nope," he said. "Nothing happened. Not yet. The same old road it allus was. Kinda restful, though. Yeh. Like old times. Made me feel like I was young again."

But had they followed Slivers to the stable they would have discovered that he was figuring on anything but a continued truce. When the horses had been unharnessed and fed, the veteran stage-driver went to work on the floor of the coach, ripping it up and building a contraption along the bottom—a narrow box some forty inches in length. When he had finished, he tapped the boards and made a final inspection; no one would have suspected its existence.

"By Golly!" he said slowly. "Just the thing. We're taking chances; but that don't need tuh worry anybody like us. Now we kin work on them leaders' collars."

A needle and coarse thread were next brought into action; for an hour Slivers worked on a collar for his off leader, ripping leather, and sewing, and repeating the performance again. That done,

he strolled over to make his report. The sheriff was seated at a mass of papers; but on the old man's arrival he swung around.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, before the other had a chance to speak. "Well, you're here. Say, I got news tuh tell yuh, Slivers. Yeh. The mining company has been raising heck because you're on that stage. At least, the assistant superintendent is kicking. He says yuh've got no business there. Too old, Slivers. Too old. He don't like your size. Says yuh'd fall off under a stiff breeze. And he wants me tuh have the stage people put on one of these young sprouts again. I told him tuh go hang. Johnson, the head superintendent, has gone to the city; and they ain't no one in authority here but this Sloan. That fellow gets my nanny. Too smooth."

Slivers Magee blinked and made his report. No. Nothing had happened. But he had seen a rider watching him from the Slate Ridge to the North—one of Black Bart's men. No doubt, Black Bart knew by this time that Slivers Magee was on the stage. Also, as usual, he would pull off his hold-up somewhere around the Blue Gap. "But let him come." Slivers grinned. "But how in tarnation did Black Bart get the low-down on the pay roll?"

That was something that the sheriff could not answer. However, the next few days began to bring results. Every day the same rider appeared on the Slate Ridge to the north of the stage road, and each day Slivers Magee became more convinced that the fellow was a look-out. But neither Slivers nor the sheriff made a move to head him off. A week went by, and then one day Slivers Magee drove his four horses and the rumbling old coach into the town of Acme, put up for the night, and made ready to go forth in the morning. Something told him a shipment was due.

And this time Slivers Magee was right.

The morning train came, stopped for a few puffing moments, and then disappeared down the track. The express agent called to Slivers Magee, and next minute the old man was looking at a shipment of money, properly consigned and perfectly legal—a goodly sized bundle of paper, all neatly wrapped and disguised. Immediately, Slivers had the money in the treasure box, locked and guarded. Only, as he tucked it in he could not help thinking that the shipment was not due for several days. Apparently, the bank and the mining company were in perfect accord, but for some reason they had failed to notify Tim Conden. No doubt, they were trying to slip the stuff through off schedule. Well, that would help some!

"Huh!" he muttered, as he climbed into the high seat. "I think I see now. Yep! Fine scheme, and all worked out. And that lookout on the hill? With that much money in the box I kin look fer trouble. Yuh bet! Well, old Black Bart and me will get acquainted. Yeh! Fer about twelve thousand dollars worth—or thereabouts. But she's good stakes fer both of us; and one or t'other is bound tuh come out a winner."

He cracked his whip and the leaders jumped; Slivers Magee put his foot on the brake and held up the lines; the old stage rattled out of town. Soon he was out in the desert, heading for the low range of hills to the eastward, driving along easily, and congratulating himself because he had no passengers. Presently, he was climbing the long slope toward the plateau region alongside the gap—a country cut with gullies and dry washes, and spotted here and there with scrub pine and clumps of mesquite. The Blue Gap lay just beyond—a narrow gorge with ravines cutting its sides here and there—just the place for a holdup. But on the first hilltop Slivers Magee dismounted and opened the treasure box.

He wanted to look at it.

Twelve thousand dollars—more than he had seen for many a moon! Paper money, done up in rolls of different denominations—tens, twenties, fives, and ones! It was the largest amount of currency he had ever looked at. And to satisfy his curiosity, he began cutting the bundles and dumping it all in one pile. For a full five minutes he fumbled with it and looked it over. Then he shut the treasure box and put it back in place; and then he picked up the horse collar in the bottom of the stage and turned it over. For five minutes he worked with the leather underneath, and then he patted it softly. His off leader began to paw the ground impatiently.

"Yeh!" he said to her. "Well, Julia, old girl, we'll soon be agoing. But first I'll look at that neck of yours. That's why I brought this here collar, on account of that tender spot on your shoulder. There! Now let me take a look at it. That collar ain't just the fit it should be. Uh-huh," he muttered, looking at the neck under the upraised leather. "Kinda warm. If yuh'll wait until I loosen these hame straps, I'll give yuh another necktie. So! Now I guess we kin go on our way. Hey? This is our big day. And most like we'll have a heap of company. Yep! None other than the worst stage robber that ever lived. Old Black Bart himself. Dog-gone! And he's come all the way down from Montany tuh play with me. I'll bet he's laughing up his sleeve. But we'll see about that."

The sun rose in the sky as Slivers drove along, the horses kicking up the dust and swinging around the bends. For a man who was about to be robbed, he was in rather cheerful spirits. But then, Slivers Magee was an old-timer, and he had not seen any real action for a long, long time. The stage rumbled, and its creaking was like music to Slivers Magee. Finally, the Blue Gap loomed not far ahead. Beyond the gap was an-

other plateau, with the Slate Ridge bordering it on the north, and still another gap cutting through the hills on the other side, but this second gap was long and narrow, and not especially suited to a holdup. Slivers had a six-gun, but it was lying on the seat. Just now his little form was hunched over his lines; and his foot was ready with the brake. Altogether, he looked like the easiest thing in the world to handle.

"Yeh!" he was mumbling as he swung his leaders. "So he's agoing tuh make me eat dirt, eh? Dog-gone! Going tuh take the treasure box and turn loose my leaders. Yep, that ud be an insult, kinda rubbin' it in. But then, I suppose Black Bart wants tuh do this job fancy. Don't blame him. No sir, not a bit."

The gap loomed ahead; a big cut between two flintlike cliffs. The road ran along the bottom. Slivers drove his team through the opening, bounding along and bumping over the rocky roadway. Here and there the sides of the gap were cut by jagged crevices, with now and then a ravine that ran off at a tangent. Around and about the team raced, while Slivers reined his leaders. Then, just as he swung around a bend, the off lead horse reared up. A tangle of brush lay across the road. At the same instant, a warning shot *zinged* across the head of Slivers Magee. Instantly, the rocks about seemed to echo with shouting. The rough voice of a man was heard ordering:

"Hands up, Slivers Magee! Hands up! We've got yuh dead tuh rights. One move fer your gun and you're a dead man."

And Slivers knew that every word was true. The voice was exultant and full of triumph. No doubt it belonged to Black Bart. The old stage driver was reaching for the sky with both fists. Some one began laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the voice was saying. "So this is Slivers Magee? He's a

sliver, all right. Hey, Bart! Yuh make me laugh. Why, I thought yuh said he was a bad 'un. I could break this grasshopper between my thumb and little finger."

The bandit began climbing the seat; when he had possessed himself of Sliver's shooting irons, he jumped down. Four more bandits came off the rocks, and last of all a huge villain of black and vicious countenance; he, too, was laughing and gibing, only there was an entirely different tone to his bold taunts.

"So this is Slivers Magee!" he exclaimed. "Hey? Greatest stage driver that ever lived, they tell me. Ha, ha! And I'm Black Bart, the only surviving member of a lost school. The only stage robber that never failed in a holdup! That's me. Us two is old champions; and this is a show-down. Hey? And that gives me the belt. Shake!"

After all, this old bandit was not so bad; but Slivers knew, only too well, that it was because he was the apparent winner. He could not refuse to accept the villain's hand; and he had to say something.

"Yeh." He spoke for all the world as though he had lost his senses. "I—I guess it does. But—but I was never held up before, Bart—never. I guess I'm agettin' old. Kinda outa practice, yuh see. And—and I wasn't expectin' yuh to-day. Yuh see——"

"Sure," cut in the boasting voice. "Yuh didn't think I knew the money was here, did yuh? Eh?" with another laugh. "But yuh don't know me, Slivers. Old Black Bart kin smell money like a pawnbroker. Hurry up, yuh fellers in there. Get that treasure box. Fine. Now——"

But just then Slivers Magee set up a wail; he was still holding up his hands in front of Black Bart.

"Please, Bart—I mean Mr. Bart—yuh've got the money; now let me go?

Yuh ain't agoin' tuh take my leaders. Yuh——"

"Oh, that's so!" came the answer suddenly. "I done made that promise in my note, didn't I? And I sure gottuh live up tuh my word. Hey you, Bill. Cut off them two front hosses and turn 'em loose. That's it. Whew! Watch those grays run! Now—well, Slivers, good-by. We'll take that money over back of the ridge and look it over. This is my last job. One of us is agoin' tuh retire with a lot of money. Looks like me, eh? So long, yuh old skinner. Give my regards tuh the sheriff."

It had taken only a few minutes; there was a clatter of hoofs as the renegades scattered up a side draw. Far ahead, Slivers Magee watched his leaders loping along at a wild gallop, heading straight for home. The off leader was neighing wildly, head up and tail lifted. The remaining horses were pawing the ground to get away with their companions. Slivers pulled off the brake. Next minute he had hit the down grade and was taking the road at a gallop.

"Yeh," he was saying, "we've gottuh get there, old hosses. Simply got tuh! Over this level stretch and into that next cut. We might have tuh meet up with his bandit nibs again."

And when he struck the floor of the second plateau he began playing with his whip; fortunately, the stage was empty and the pull was not difficult. The two wheelers began running wildly, and finally lost their heads altogether. To all appearances it was a regular run-away, with the little driver unable to control them. Five minutes, ten, fifteen; and then he gained the second gap. But just as he entered the cut, a rider came dashing out on the plain behind him.

None other than Black Bart!

But now it was Slivers who was doing the laughing. One glance behind, and then he plunged ahead, straight into

the second gap, around the bends, and over the rocks. A six-gun cracked behind him; but the gunman was far out of range. Slivers Magee played with the ribbons.

"Get up!" he shouted wildly. "Get up! Hey, yuh, Buck! Jim! Get up!"

Then suddenly when he was halfway through, he pulled the team to the right side of the road where a huge overhanging rock projected over a cave-like pocket at the foot of the wall, with a good-size boulder out in front. Next instant the old stage was wobbling off balance, reeling on two wheels. Then, with a sudden yank on the line, he pulled the team at an acute angle and upset it. The stage rolled over on its side in front of the pocket cove.

This time Slivers Magee was all action; with one leap he was at the horses' heads, holding his knife in his hands. He knew he had no time to handle the traces. One slash, and he had cut the hame straps, freeing the horses with their collars on. A slap over the rump, and the wheelers had followed the leaders in their wild flight toward home! Then with another jump, he had torn open the compartment in the bottom of the stage, yanked out a rifle and a brace of six-guns. That done, he waited for his friends.

And he did not have to wait long. Soon there was a clatter of hoofs, and a six-gun rang out; a bullet crashed through the upturned stage, cutting a hole at either end. But Slivers was safely ensconced in the rocky pocket. They could not reach him from above and the boulder protected him from the front; while a bullet from the side could scarcely reach him. Very calmly he pulled his rifle and took aim at the approaching bandit.

Bang!

It was a pretty shot; a groove along the top of the fellow's head; he slumped in the saddle and slid to the ground.

"Well, well," said Slivers Magee

coolly, "that's number one! I don't want tuh kill 'em. Just hurt 'em a bit. They'll all come in mighty handy fer exhibits. Wonder how my polite bandit friend feels now, eh? How about that championship?"

But apparently he was not going to bag any more specimens; there was a shout from beyond the bend, and a sound of angry cursing. Black Bart's voice! The air seemed to fairly shake with his blasphemy.

"The little runt!" he was growling. "Fooled me, he did? Me? Black Bart! No wonder he was so quiet. Didn't hardly say a word. Just sat there and whined. And all the while he was playing me fer a sucker. But yuh just watch me now! I'll cut off his ears and slit his skinny throat. See if I don't. Just watch me!"

More blasphemy; and then no sounds at all. Slivers Magee knew that for the present, at least, he held the best of the situation; no doubt they had sized up the stage and had guessed at the boulder behind which he was hiding. Fifteen minutes went by, half an hour, and not a man showed up. Then, suddenly, a bullet crashed down into the bottom of the stage, ripping open the floor. Slivers Magee peeped out to see the fleck of a hat along the opposite hillside. His rifle rang out, and the sombrero suddenly disappeared.

"There! Dang ye!" he exclaimed. "I hope that's another specimen. I suppose they've all got intuh position by this time. Well, all right, boys, blaze away."

And that was just what they appeared to be doing; another gun cracked, and still another; and these last ones were in such a position that Slivers could not locate them without crawling out of his nest. But neither could they get him, for, shooting sideways, their slugs passed along in front. But the stage was getting riddled. More shots! And a few more returns from Slivers Magee; but

most of the time he waited. So far he had not touched his six-guns. After a while the firing ceased entirely. Then, a voice sounded from above his head.

"Hey, you little runt! Yuh ready tuh give up?"

Black Bart was speaking; apparently he was standing above the rock that overhung the pocket. He could not see Slivers, and the stage driver could not see him, although they were not fifty feet apart. But the man in the nook was ready to parley. Anything to gain time!

"Who? Me?" asked Slivers Magee tauntingly. "Oh, hello, Bart! That you? Pleasant day, ain't it? What's got intuh yuh anyways? Yuh seem peeved about something."

"Shut up!" came the answer. "Yuh know perfectly well what it is, yuh poor little shrimp. We want that money, and we want it almighty quick. Either that, or we'll blow yuh intuh kingdom come right now!"

"Go ahead and blow," said Slivers. "I don't know what you're talking about. What money? I ain't seen any."

"No?" came the answer. "Yuh don't know a thing about it, do yuh? Well, I'll teach yuh something!"

Simultaneously a slight rattle sounded along the cut, and Slivers beheld two men rushing along the side wall. Here was a place to use his six-guns! *Bang!* One of the men bowled over, and the man behind him swung around in full flight. Slivers turned just in time to groove the fellow coming at him from the other side.

"Holy Moses!" came a shout from the opposite hill. "He kin shoot just like they said he could. But we've got tuh get him out somehow. He's got that money."

The whole transaction had taken but a few minutes; but it seemed enough for the bandits just at present. Time began flying by, while they made new plans. No doubt they were in consultation.

Slivers Magee chuckled, and he kept looking at his watch.

"Yep!" he said seriously. "Every minute counts now. I wonder—— I kin hold out till night; but after that I'll simply be outta luck. Still——"

Then once again some one started shooting; this time the bullet struck the side wall of his hiding place, crashing a mass of shale rock above his head. Things began to get uncomfortable. Another bullet came, and still another! But where they were coming from Slivers Magee could not make out. Finally, he located the firing at an acute angle from his cave. The bandit had secreted himself between some boulders and was shooting through a natural loophole. This time the stage driver thought it wise to withhold his fire until he had a better shot. His silence gave his adversaries a measure of confidence.

"I think we've got him," said some one on the rock. "Yeah. Bill must have plugged him. What yuh say if we go down?"

"Not by a danged sight!" came Black Bart's voice. "Not yet. That's Slivers Magee down there, and I've seen enough of him to-day tuh make me take no chances. He'd simply kill us both. We've gotta wait. Night will be on before many hours, and I'm sure going tuh get that money. I can't fail with this here holdup. Not if it takes my life! But what gets me is where he put them greenbacks. He took 'em, that's a cinch. Yuh say yuh looked all over in that stage?"

"All over," came the answer. "I'll say I did. Hello! What's that over there? Listen, chief, I ain't feeling well at all. I thought I heard something. It might be—— And we've wasted the best part of several hours. We——"

But just then a gun cracked. A yell went up! And a call sounded down the gap. Slivers Magee, hiding behind the rock, ventured to peek out. The ban-

dit on the opposite side was running away among the boulders, streaking it toward his horse tethered in the canyon. And so Slivers got another shot. The man sank to the ground.

"Dog-gone!" exclaimed Slivers Magee. "I ain't had so much practice in years. That's another specimen. Grooved him pretty. This must be my lucky day. Yeh! I'm abagging 'em right and left. Yessir! And I'll bet all that fuss is being caused by Sheriff Conden. Yuh bet it is! Holy mackerel! Now we'll see some fun!"

Gun play and shouts! Yells of terror! Then a rider on a hill, a man with a rifle. One of the posse! He was aiming at something on Slivers' side of the gap.

Then somebody rushed down. None other than Black Bart himself!

"Slivers Magee," he was shouting, "I give up! The country is raining deputies. I don't know how yuh done it; but yuh've got me cornered. Yuh tricky little rooster! But I ain't agiving up tuh no durn sheriff. I'm surrendering tuh a real honest-tu-gosh stage driver. Come get my guns quick! You can bet your life I don't want tuh be plugged."

Ten minutes later, Slivers Magee was overseeing the raising of the old coach; the bandits were arranged inside the little cove, and the sheriff was speaking.

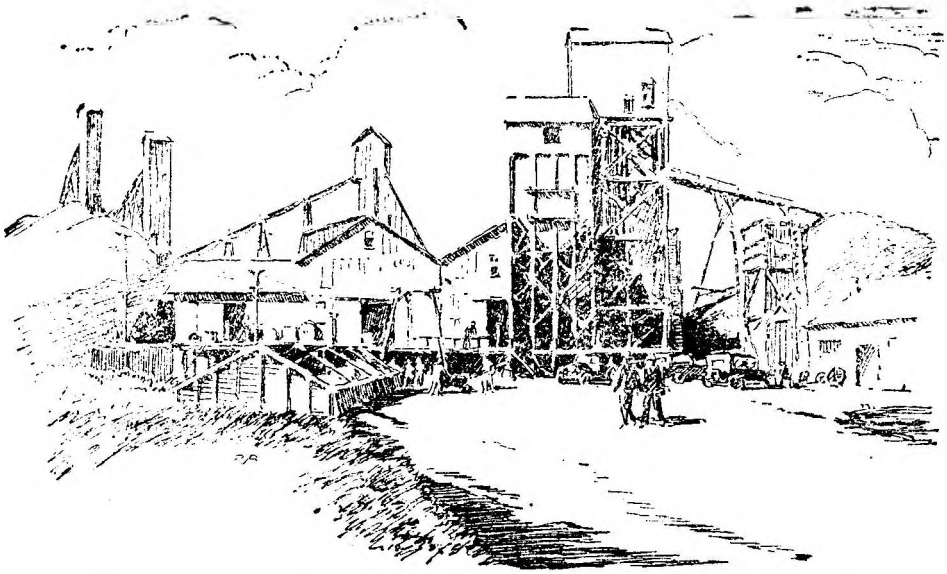
"Yuh see," he was saying, "Black Bart wasn't quite wise enough; and so Slivers fooled him. And he had him beaten from the day he received that note. How? Well, yuh see, Old Bart had made his brags as how he would rob Slivers and turn his leaders loose tuh rub it in. That's how! If yuh remember, the shipment was paper money. Slivers is an almighty fast thinker. All he had tuh do, was tuh carry that extra horse-collar, take out the wadding, and have it ready tuh stuff with money. Then, when Black Bart turned loose the leaders, he was simply

sending the money ahead tuh me. He got the treasure box; but they wasn't nothin' in it. And the horses—well, they come right home tuh the barn, and I picked 'em up. That leader had his collar on; he couldn't lose it, in fact, because Slivers had fastened it to the crupper with a back strap. It was just like we had it fixed up between us. When I found that stuff, I knew what was up. So I simply brought out the posse and closed both ends of the gap. All Slivers had tuh do, was tuh hold 'em until I got here. Pretty good work. And I've brought some stage horses tuh haul the old boat home. How about it, Slivers Magee?"

And so Slivers received his greatest triumph; the citizens of Red Rock looked out to behold a strange sight—none other than the greatest of all stage drivers coming into town with the greatest of all holdup men handcuffed on the seat behind him. The bandit's whole gang, in fact.

But there was something else that Slivers Magee had to tell the sheriff on his arrival. The horses were being unhitched and the big crook was being led away when Slivers spoke.

"Say, chief," said Slivers, "they's something else. Black Bart spilled the beans tuh me just now as we was driving in. It's about that durn money. You remember we couldn't figure out how Bart was getting his information. Well, it was from this young assistant superintendent over tuh the mine. Young Sloan, I mean. He's as big a crook as the stage robber. He's been giving the high sign on the shipments right along. And they've been whacking up on the pickin's. That's why he objected to my being on that stage. Afraid we'd beat him. Yuh better hop over and take him too. And I guess that's about all. It worked out like I said it would—just like nothing. And, say, how long do yuh suppose I'll have tuh wait fer that five thousand?"



Pioneer Towns of the West

By Duane Clark
(Joplin, Missouri)

ONCE a mining camp, Joplin is now a fast-moving city of forty-three-thousand inhabitants. When, in 1849, lead was discovered by some fortunate prospector, Joplin began to grow. Even earlier than this date, there are indications that some crude mining had been done, probably by Indians or Spaniards.

When the plants which had been set up in 1849 were destroyed during the Civil War, development ceased until 1870. At that time, two men came from the eastern part of Jasper County, and were joined by two more, all of them miners, and settled in the mining camp of Joplin. Interest began to be renewed. The following year a town was laid out by John C. Cox, on the east side of what is now known as Joplin Creek.

Two of the miners who were respon-

sible for reviving interest in the mining camp decided to also build a town. This western settlement was called Murphysburg, after one of its founders. Because of rivalry between the two towns, the county court issued an order incorporating the two townsites into one village, to be known as Union City. Later, this incorporation was considered illegal, and a meeting was held to ascertain the wishes of the citizens. The result was that the legislature formally enacted a law by which the two towns were incorporated under the name of Joplin.

Joplin was the name of a Methodist Home Missionary who settled there in 1839.

Several years ago the city of Joplin changed its type of government from the aldermanic to the commission form.

Many and colorful tales are told today by the old miners who have never forgotten the time when life was lived in the raw. A man who took his family to see a show, often paid his admission with a wheelbarrow of ore. Dogs and bears fought in the street, fortunes were won and lost over the gaming tables, and short tempers were the cause of fast gun play and loss of life.

Joplin now has a trade population of three hundred and forty thousand persons, who live in one of the richest areas of the United States. Six railroads traverse all parts of this area, bringing thousands of visitors to the city.

There are many retail stores and industrial establishments, twenty-four hotels, and several theaters. A progressive chamber of commerce is constantly fostering new trade alliances and building up a wholesome community spirit.

Joplin is in the center of the world's largest zinc and lead ore district. It is situated in the foothills of the Ozarks. It is sufficiently far from large cities to leave a wide margin for expansion. Many of the small towns and villages are entirely supplied by Joplin over two electric lines which carry both passengers and freight. On all sides stretch beautiful concrete roads, over which a vast amount of commercial trade is carried.

The shopping center of Joplin is so well lighted at night that it is called "The White Way" and merchants are given excellent scope for attractive and drawing window displays.

Style shows, food, and industrial exhibits are held in the city annually and do much toward advertising the products of Joplin and bringing buyers to her markets.

Joplin is growing fast. More houses are being built, more business buildings are being erected, and the residents are looking forward with happy anticipation to a brilliant future. There are

civic clubs which are doing their part in bringing trade to the city. Visits to towns of the district do much to promote trade relationships, and meetings held with rural residents accomplish much along that line. A unique feature is Joplin's trade tours, which are conducted by the chamber of commerce in cooperation with the various firms of the city.

Joplin, not content to bask in its lead ore and zinc mines, recently determined to branch out and increase its opportunities. Manufacturing has leaped into the front ranks of the city's industrial life.

One factor that helps to make Joplin a manufacturing center is its closeness to the coal fields of Kansas and Missouri. Thus, coal is available in unlimited quantities at the lowest prices, and good electric power is provided at low rates.

Natural gas is available to those factory owners who prefer that kind of fuel, for the gas fields are not far away. A late census shows that Joplin has one hundred and forty-one manufacturing institutions. Most of the machinery used in the mines is made in Joplin and shipped by truck or rail throughout the district.

The largest lead works in the world is located at Joplin and employs seven hundred people. From this plant is produced soft Missouri pig lead; corroded white lead, both dry and ground in pure linseed oil; sublimed white, red, and blue lead; litharge of various kinds; orange mineral, metals, solders, zinc oxide, sulphuric acid, etc.

There are also many foundries in Joplin, more or less connected with the mining industry, for the making of mining supplies. A large oil refinery has a capacity of two thousand barrels a day. Among Joplin's activities are factories for the making of tooth powder, cigars, candy, and a bakery and cracker factory.

Besides there are two creameries, a meat packing plant, an iron foundry, an oil refinery, a steam drill rig and shovel works, and a large flour mill.

One of Joplin's greatest sources of pride is its good roads, which in a measure are responsible for the success of its manufacturing industries. Eight concrete roads extend out of Joplin. One Federal Highway extends from St. Louis to Tulsa, Oklahoma, passing through many of the large connecting cities. Another Federal Highway extends from Winnipeg, Canada, to New Orleans, Louisiana.

There are several beautiful tracts in the city of Joplin, which provide amusement and recreation for citizens and visitors. The city is known as the "Gateway to the Ozarks," a marvelous mountain region which is rapidly gaining fame as a playground.

Two miles west of the business district is Schifferdecker Park, bequeathed by a wealthy resident of that name. It contains a swimming pool, a playground, modernly equipped; a golf course, two tennis courts, a band stand and a free motion-picture theater. Also, this park has a dancing pavilion, a baseball diamond, and a zoo. A hundred acres of the park are devoted to an eighteen-hole municipal golf course. A

tourist camp is located within the limits of this park.

Then there is McClelland Park, through a part of which traverses a beautiful Ozark stream. McIndoe, Witmer, Mineral, and Cunningham Parks are all especially attractive places. The Negroes of Joplin have the exclusive use of Ewert Park.

From an agricultural standpoint, Joplin ranks high. Rapid progress is being made in the development of the farming industry. The most important crops are: fruit, dairy products, poultry and eggs, live stock, wool, wood, hides, honey, and nuts. There are nine different types of soil in southwest Missouri, all of them suitable for certain crops.

The climate of Joplin is advantageous for agricultural pursuits. Cattle can graze a large part of the year and do not suffer from severe cold in winter.

Nor has Joplin neglected its home and community expansion. There are many beautiful homes, churches of all denominations, hospitals, and high schools. Many of the fraternal orders have their own buildings. A beautiful Carnegie Library holds over fifty-one thousand volumes. There is also a million-dollar metropolitan hotel, besides many other hostelries. Thirty-nine thousand tourists are registered annually at Joplin.

THIRSTY LAND

"HUNGRY land" is well known to all readers of stories and articles about the West, and its significance is easily understood. But "thirsty land" is perhaps a little misleading, for as it happens it is land that will not drink that is going to be made to drink, if the United States department of agriculture has its way.

In the Western States there are some irrigated fields, known as "hard land," which do not absorb water readily. Experiments have shown that soft water makes hard land and hard water makes soft land. Taking advantage of this peculiarity, the experts of the department are going to evolve a means for making the unwilling land drink. It appears that gypsum dissolved in the irrigation ditches increases the ability of the hard spots to absorb water, and the experts of the department of agriculture have devised an apparatus for adding the gypsum to irrigation water. There is an old saying that you could bring a horse to water, but you couldn't make him drink. It is probable that the horse wouldn't have a chance in the world against the persuasive scientists if they decided the other way!



The Great Tenderfoot Sweepstakes

By Howard E. Morgan
Author of "Catch 'Em Alive," etc.



It was, on the face of it, scarcely conceivable that Wolf—who, due to his size and natural beauty, could have had his choice of masters—should have chosen Henry Luther from among the hundreds of bewildered gold-seekers who daily detrained at Nassville on the last leg of their weary journey to Stranger's Camp, Arizona's latest gold-boom town. Choose him he did, however, and, before Stranger's Camp drifted into historic oblivion, the big wolf dog's choice of a master was justified even in the eyes of those superior humans, who, according to their own lights, at any rate, are far better equipped than their lesser brethren of the wilderness to judge human values.

Luther was a tenderfoot, as were ninety-nine per cent of Nassville's floating population. He was a little man verging on middle age. His hair was prematurely gray and there was a

beaten, weary look about his pale-blue eyes.

True it was that the world had used Henry Luther harshly. But he was not beaten. Not yet, that is. He was on his last legs, though. He had left a wife and three small children back in Kansas. In a worn leather wallet in his hip pocket was two hundred dollars in bills of small denomination, the sum total of his worldly wealth. He had slaved as a farmhand in the Kansas cornfields for five years in order to save that two hundred dollars. This, his first entrance into the realm of uncertain adventure, was a final attempt on the part of himself and his wife to attain at least a semblance of that financial independence of which both had dreamed for the past twenty years.

Like most of his fellows, Henry Luther was bewildered by his strange surroundings. He knew nothing of the West. He knew less about the business of mining. Despite his frail physique

and retreating manner, however, there was a certain steadfastness of purpose deep in the little man's heart which is more commonly known as courage. There was a certain caution inherent in him, too. This latter became evident the first day he landed at Nassville. Instead of following the crowd and investing his scanty store of money as the others did, he hung about the outskirts of the crowd, his pale-blue eyes keenly alert, prying here, poking there, everlastingly asking questions. That two hundred dollars might have to last him a long time. With it, he must buy mining equipment and food. Prices were, of course, sky high. A short-handled spade sold for fifty dollars. Steak was five dollars a pound. Bacon was three dollars a pound. Beans were two dollars a can.

It was toward the end of the second day, when Henry Luther had just about reached the point where he was ready to invest his small capital, that Wolf put in an appearance. The big dog eased its way in and out among a hundred pair of legs on Nassville's main street, unhesitatingly choosing Henry Luther's short legs as the object of his sniffing attentions.

Luther was scared at first. Never in his life had he seen such a big dog. And Wolf surely was a big fellow. The top of his bushy tail brushed the little man's mid ribs. He weighed close to one hundred pounds. When Luther turned around, Wolf wagged his bushy tail and reached with his tongue toward the man's hand.

Luther grinned. He liked dogs, but had never owned one. "Hello, pup," he greeted. His calloused fingers nuzzled the big dog behind the ears. Wolf wriggled with delight. Luther looked suspiciously about. "Where's your master?" he asked. It hardly seemed possible that such a handsome dog as this should have no owner. Such, indeed, was the case, however, as Luther

soon discovered. When he started away, Wolf followed ever so close at his heels.

When he reached his little camp on the outskirts of the town, Wolf was still with him. That night the big dog slept curled tightly about its new master's feet. He was squatting on his haunches a rod away, grinning a red-tongued greeting, when Luther awoke early next morning.

"Son of a gun," the little man exclaimed, "looks like I've got myself a dog!" He did not smile when he said it, however. Much as he would have enjoyed owning the shaggy-haired fellow who squatted there grinning at him, he realized all too well that the state of his finances would not permit him to do so. A big dog like that would eat a lot. Luther would be lucky if he himself did not starve before he left Stranger's Camp.

"Guess it can't be did, pup," he finally said. "You'll have to vamoze."

Wolf did not know what the man said, but he did know that something was wrong. His bushy tail drooped, and with ears flat to his head, he moved slowly away.

"Dog-gone!" the little man muttered. "You'd almost think he understood what I said! Kinda wish he wouldn't go, at that."

And Wolf did not go far. After an exciting chase he captured a rabbit in the near-by thicket, and made a satisfying meal. He returned just as Luther was making ready to go to the village to purchase supplies and equipment for his projected journey into the hills in search of gold.

All day Wolf followed close at his adopted master's heels, so close, in fact, that his bobbing snout brushed the little man's upflung heels as he walked.

It was mid-afternoon when Luther, emerging from the general store with the last of his purchases under one arm, was accosted by a red-bearded stranger.

"That your dog, pard?" the big man asked.

Henry Luther shook his head. "No," he said, "he's just kind of attaching himself to me. Why?"

"Good-lookin' dog," the big man said; "figured I might buy him."

Luther shrugged. "Don't belong to me," he said; "he's as much yours as he is mine."

The instant the words were spoken, the little man regretted them. The red-bearded one considered for a moment, then taking a piece of rope from his pocket, snapping his fingers enticingly and calling, he approached the dog. Wolf showed his teeth and backed away. The big man swore. "Don't show your teeth at me, you ugly mutt," he growled, "or I'll paste you one."

Luther scowled as the big man reached for a splintered slab of wood which had once been part of the porch of the dilapidated store. "Hey!" he said. "What you goin' t' do?"

"What's it to you?" the big man growled. "You said he wasn't your dog. If he ain't yours, then he may as well be mine. No dog that I own ever growls at me an' gits away with it. I——"

Stick in hand, the red-bearded man advanced purposefully toward Wolf. The dog stood its ground as he drew near.

Just for a moment Luther hesitated, then he took a quick step forward, placing himself between the man and the dog. "No, you don't," he said evenly. "He's jest as much my dog as he is yourn. Which same bein' the case, you ain't gonna use that club on him."

The big man glared down at Henry Luther, wondering amazement written large on his red face. "Why, you——" he stammered. With an almost imperceptible motion, he brushed the little man aside. Wolf growled and came slowly near. Ears flat against his head, he crouched low, belly hugging

the ground. This posture meant but one thing to the red-bearded man—submission. He took two quick steps forward, club upraised in his hand.

Then Luther dropped his bundles and sprang forward. He caught the big hand holding the club with both of his, and clung desperately.

"You—leave that—dog—alone!" he panted.

The red-bearded man swore savagely. He sought once again to push Henry Luther away. But the little man clung like a leech to his arm. The red-bearded face became purple with rage. Despairing of loosening Luther's grip, the big fellow turned and struck at the little man with his clubbed fist.

If that smashing blow had landed fairly, Luther would have been out of the argument once and for all, and the close-packed circle of interested on-lookers would have missed an exceedingly dramatic portion of the show. As it was, however, just as the big man—whose name, according to the encouraging shouts of his friends, was "Red" Joyce—bunched his thick shoulders for the blow, Wolf went into action. Without a sound, the big dog sprang straight into the air at the red-bearded man's throat. At the last instant, Joyce deflected the blow initially aimed at Luther's face, and struck at the shaggy form that leaped with a flash of white teeth upon him.

Wolf did not reach the man's throat; but his slashing fangs ripped an ugly gash along his arm from elbow to wrist. With a hoarse cry, Joyce stumbled backward. Luther, sensing what had happened, relinquished his grip. Half supported by many hands, Joyce fumbled in his coat pocket with his uninjured hand and produced a pistol. Wolf stood, bristling, a dozen feet away. The instant the pistol appeared in Joyce's hand, Luther stepped in front of the dog. He locked his fingers about the beast's up-standing hair.

"Put that gun up," he said, "or I'll sick him on you! You won't be able to stop him—not with that pea-shooter. Put it up!"

Joyce hesitated, cursing under his breath. His friends counseled him to forget it. He cast a downward glance at his torn arm, then, with a shrug, he turned away into the crowd.

Unmindful of those who circled about slapping his back and making much of the dog, Luther picked up his bundles and plodded away. As he went, he talked to Wolf, who, padding along close at his heels, listened attentively.

"When a man will fight for a thing, Wolf," he said, "he must want that thing. I like you, right enough, an' I want you to stay with me. But I don't know how in heck we're goin' to manage. Already, they're callin' Stranger's Camp, 'Starvation Camp.' Food there is worth its weight in gold. You're a big dog. You'll eat a lot. Don't see how we're gonna git along. But if you wanta come with me, I ain't gonna stop you."

So Wolf went to Stranger's Camp with Henry Luther.

Although approximately eighty miles of desert intervened between Nassville and Stranger's Camp, on the outward trip even the veriest tenderfoot did not particularly mind the trip. With each group of gold-seekers there was at least one old-timer, who led the way. Of course, this really was not necessary; the beaten trail formed by the passage of many feet showed clear even on the desert. There seemed to be plenty of water. As a matter of fact, by the time Luther reached Stranger's Camp, he had formed an entirely different opinion of the oft-mentioned hazards of desert travel.

Wolf was the only dog in the group to which Luther had attached himself. From the first it was evident that the big dog—due, no doubt, to his familiarity with this desert country, in which

he had been born and raised—possessed a sort of sixth sense which enabled him to locate water. Each time, on that long, dusty tramp, it was Wolf who located the various springs of bitter, tepid water, long before the old desert rat, who led the party, knew that water was near at hand.

Luther thought nothing of this at the time. Curiously enough, however, this single circumstance was destined to serve as the turning point in his fortunes; it was destined, too, that Wolf, the masterless dog, should play an important part in the great tenderfoot sweepstakes, which has now been written large into the history of Arizona.

At Stranger's Camp, conditions were worse even than rumor had painted them. In the first place, long before Luther arrived, every available bit of ground which, by the longest stretch of imagination, might hide gold under its surface had been staked. Various hopeful men had even staked ground out on the desert beyond the camp.

As is true of most gold discoveries, the only paying ground at Stranger's Camp was restricted to an area something less than half a mile in length. This strip had long since been staked. The entire region for miles about looked like a shell-pocked field after a battle. Men who had never done a hard day's work in their life worked their fingers to the bone digging huge holes in the stubborn ground, where, even they—greenhorns though they were—were sure no gold could be found. But they had started out with the idea of playing a long chance. Many of them—like Henry Luther—had gambled their all on this venture. There are many foolish ones in the world who will invariably play the bet that gives them the longest odds. At Stranger's Camp it seemed that a congress of the world's most stupid and hopelessly optimistic gamblers had gathered.

Although Luther might, superficially

at any rate, have been classed as one of these, his longing for gold and the things gold would buy did not lead him to the folly of registering upon a palpably worthless plot of ground. As soon as he saw that there was not a chance in the world of his being able to satisfy his longing to dig gold from the ground, he set about looking for other ways and means of making a living. Unskilled labor was worth ten dollars an hour; but Luther, due to his frail physique, found difficulty in securing employment. Those who were able to pay for labor wanted strong, big men.

Almost from the first, Luther and Wolf were on starvation rations. Although a skillful hunter, Wolf was unable to find game of any kind. Stranger's Camp was located at the base of what was little more than a rock pile in the middle of the desert. Wild life had never abounded there; and when that rockpile developed into a human beehive, the few wild things that had called that particular spot home departed for less hectic climes. Of course, Wolf fared better than did his master; Wolf was able to steal occasionally odds and ends which served to supplement the slender fare which he always shared with the man.

Luther would not have stayed overnight at Stranger's Camp if he could have helped it. But there was no alternative. His money was gone. He could not return home without money. So he pitched his little tent on the far outskirts of the camp and there he and his canine partner in misery lived, after a fashion, for several weeks.

In August, Paddy Rine died. Paddy—an old sour-dough miner—had been one of those few fortunate ones who had staked a valuable claim. It was estimated that Paddy Rine's prospect was worth nearly a million dollars.

In the majority of gold stampedes, the death of the holder of a valuable claim would have resulted in a battle

of prospective claim-jumpers. But Stranger's, from the first, had been under control of the law, aided by a corps of mining men appointed by the State. There had been no claim-jumping. And when Paddy Rine died there was no attempt made by even the wildest of the wild element in Stranger's Camp to gain illegal possession of the old sour-dough's valuable property.

Investigation on the part of the mining commissioners soon proved, however, that Paddy Rine apparently had no living relatives. The problem then arose as to what to do with that valuable prospect. The answer finally arrived at by the mining commission resulted in the great tenderfoot sweepstakes, which is now written indelibly in history.

In brief, the great tenderfoot sweepstakes was a foot race, with Paddy Rine's claim as a prize. Only tenderfeet were permitted to enter that race. The rules governing the tenderfoot sweepstakes provided that all entries should start from Stranger's Camp at five o'clock sharp, on the morning of August tenth. The first man to arrive at Nassville and present a metal tag stamped with a number which identified him to a representative of the mining commission located at the assayer's office would be permitted to register upon Paddy Rine's million-dollar claim.

Much sympathetic foresight was evidenced by the mining commission in developing and promoting the great tenderfoot sweepstakes. There were at Stranger's Camp upward of two hundred men, who, like Henry Luther, had been disappointed in locating claims, and who, being without money, were faced with actual starvation. These men presented a problem. Without food or money they could not be expected to leave the camp. If they stayed, they would starve. This could not be permitted in a civilized country. What then, was to be done with them?

The great tenderfoot sweepstakes answered this question. Contributions were taken up from those who were able to contribute. With the money thus secured, each entrant in the sweepstakes was presented with some money and a stock of food sufficient to last one week. These provisions were to be distributed on the morning of the race.

Some one of the two hundred entrants would win the prize. The remainder would have food sufficient to get them to Nassville, where there was a railroad. In Nassville, the problem of some two hundred men without money could be much more easily handled than at Stranger's Camp.

It is doubtful if more than one out of ten of those weary, disillusioned men who entered the great tenderfoot sweepstakes seriously considered the valuable prize offered; the majority of them were beaten; the only thing they thought about was that precious supply of food which it had been announced would be distributed half an hour before the race started. That food would get them to Nassville. Arriving at Nassville, they would be just that much nearer home.

But Henry Luther did not belong to that hopeless ninety per cent. He had entered the race determined to win. Just how this might be accomplished he did not really know. Physically, he was no match for the majority of his competitors. There was, however, one thing in his favor: He had a knack for remembering places and things. He judged, shrewdly enough, that the majority of his opponents would follow some leader across the trackless desert. There was, of course, little danger of these becoming lost, in as much as the main trail was now a beaten roadway. But Luther did not intend following this way; he had learned from some of the old-timers of a shorter route. There was no stipulation in the sweepstake rules specifying the route to be

followed. There was, of course, a reservation to the effect that no horses or mules or other means of locomotion should be used. Every man must travel on his own feet.

As the entrants in the great tenderfoot sweepstakes lined up for the start of the race on the morning of August tenth, Luther found Red Joyce at his side. He was surprised because he had thought that Joyce was a native of the West, and by profession a miner. The rules had made it very clear that only tenderfeet could be entered. Joyce had, apparently, qualified as a tenderfoot. He wore a tin badge with a number on it like all the rest.

Although the race had been due to start at five thirty, it was delayed half an hour while the authorities talked among themselves. The reason behind this conference finally appeared in the form of several burros heavily laden with water bags and driven by old sour doughs who knew the desert. Although there had, superficially, appeared to be no likelihood of the racers becoming lost en route to Nassville, the mining commission had decided to take no chances. If there were stragglers who missed the frequent water holes, these old fellows with their water-laden donkeys would come along and lend assistance.

When the starting guns finally roared, over two hundred men raced madly away across the yellow sands. Henry Luther and Wolf followed at the heels of the sky-high dust cloud formed by the runners.

"No sense in gettin' all steamed up so early in the game, Wolf," the little man said, "we'll be moochin' along after half of 'em has quit."

And Wolf, *pad-padding* along at his master's heels as always, whined his agreement.

At six o'clock that bright August morning when the race started the sky was blue and clear as a limpid pool of

water. In that huge dome even the hoariest old-timer could have detected no hint of a storm. Yet, long before midday, the sun had disappeared behind yellow-tinted clouds. By noon, the entire sky was a blinding saffron. A vast, whispering stillness hung oppressively upon the yellow wastelands.

Due to his unfamiliarity with the desert, Henry Luther had no way of guessing what that silence, and the opaque mustard-colored sky, portended. Wolf knew, though. At frequent intervals the big dog whined dolefully. Twice he barked sharply and snapped viciously at the air as though attempting to frighten away some unseen enemy. Luther was disturbed by the dog's actions.

"What the heck is the matter with you, Wolf?" he asked. "Fleas botherin' you?"

The dog left the man and circled widely, head in air, nostrils twitchingly sniffing the still, hot air.

Luther did not dare pay too much attention to the dog; for the past couple of hours he and Wolf had been traveling alone; it was imperative that he keep in sight the landmarks identifying that shorter route to Nassville which he had decided to follow.

It began to blow shortly after midday, and in a few minutes, the yellow desert was in the grip of a stifling, blinding sand storm. Afterward, it was agreed that no such storm as this one had ever before visited that land of wind and sand. The storm continued for three days and three nights.

Luther's knowledge of sand storms had been gained from such reading as he had been able to do in his few spare moments. As he remembered, these storms seldom lasted long. He recalled, too, that experienced travelers caught in such storms usually found a sheltered spot and waited until they had passed. This was all very well and good under ordinary circumstances; but this

was no ordinary circumstance. Henry Luther was engaged in a race for a million dollars. He had no intention of stopping until forced to do so. So, holding direction by means of a little compass, he plodded on, head down into the wind-driven sand.

At first, the hot sand pierced his clothes and stung his body; it was as though a thousand red-hot needle points were being thrust into his flesh. These stabbing hurts gave way to an all-encompassing burning sensation. This, in turn, degenerated into a numbness which affected his whole body like a partial paralysis. His legs felt like wooden things that slipped and slid erratically before him over the moving sand. No conscious thoughts crossed his mind. He was aware only of a persistent roaring in his ears. Of course, he was always thirsty, but he had, as he thought, plenty of water, so whenever he felt like it, he drank from the heavy water bag on his back.

With the coming of night, he promised himself that, when they came to water, he would stop. According to those who had directed him along this shorter route, there were plenty of water holes.

When it grew dark, the little man fell more and more often. But he clambered to his feet, usually pulling himself erect along the dog's body. With that stubborn persistence which had carried him through a lifetime replete with troubles and difficulties, Luther squintingly inspected his little compass in the half light, and stumbled on.

It was not until he found, much to his surprise, that his water bag was empty that he stopped. His numbed senses cleared then. No water! Here was danger. He could not understand it. That huge water bag had been full when he started out. It held four quarters. Had he drunk a gallon of water since morning? Evidently. And he was again thirsty, torturingly so.

And Wolf—— He had, perhaps half a dozen times during the day, filled his cupped hands with water for the dog. Wolf was suffering now, too. And for the first time the little man realized that, in the storm, he had discovered no signs of a water hole. Usually there were trees—a mesquite shrub at any rate—where there was water. For several hours past he had seen not the slightest sign of any growing thing.

As the little man crouched there on his knees, one arm thrown about the big dog's neck, a man loomed out of the half darkness, and dropped on his hands and knees a few feet away.

Red Joyce!

Unreasoning anger came, then, to Henry Luther. He did not know why he was angry. "You've been following me—us!" he shouted.

Joyce struggled up on his knees. "Water!" he gasped.

Henry Luther swore. "You been following me," he repeated.

"Well, what if I have?" the big man gasped. "Have you got any water? I'm dyin' fer a drink."

"No!" Luther answered.

The little man turned suddenly to find that Wolf had gone. "Wolf!" he cried, but his shrill voice was whisked away by the screeching wind. For an instant, then, Henry Luther knew fear. He was alone! Alone in the desert! That red-bearded man, whom he hated with an unreasoning hate, did not count. But Luther had come to love Wolf with a love second only to that which he bore his wife and children. And now Wolf was gone!

With something very like a sob, the little man sprawled upon the sand and buried his face in his arms.

It may have been a minute or an hour that he lay thus. He was aroused by a cold, wet muzzle nudging his hot face.

"Wolf!" he croaked. "Water! You found it?"

In the half darkness the big dog

wriggled strenuously, and, red tongue lolling, started away.

Luther rose uncertainly to his feet. Joyce lay where he had fallen, face down on the yellow sand. For an instant Luther considered going on alone; then his sympathetic heart got the better of his evil impulse. With considerable effort he roused the big man.

"C'mon!" he shouted. "Water!"

With the fingers of his right hand holding fast to the dog's tail, Henry Luther stumbled through the night. Half a dozen paces in the rear, Red Joyce followed.

At the end of half an hour the dog stopped and began to dig. Five minutes later, Luther buried his hot face in a pool of warm water which the dog's flying forefeet had uncovered.

Vastly strengthened by the health-giving liquid, and with a full water bag, the little man continued on—pointing always toward the south—until dawn brightened the yellow wastes.

But, with the new day, the storm showed no sign of letting up. The wind had increased in velocity, and it was hotter. Luther found it impossible to sleep. Although wrapped in the little tent which he had brought with him, the furious battering of the wind-blown sand disturbed him. Weary as he was, he finally scrambled to his feet and moved on. Always Red Joyce followed.

That night Wolf again saved the day by leading the two exhausted men to water.

After that second night, all conscious motivation left Henry Luther. It was Wolf who led the way and the man who followed, the fingers of his right hand grasping the dog's bushy tail.

Luther did not know when the storm ceased. It was not until Wolf pulled free of his desperate grip and moved away that he came suddenly out of his half stupor, to find the yellow sun shining brightly down out of a normal blue

sky. Even the fact that the storm was over did not impress him at first as much as did Wolf's absence. He attempted to cry out, to call the dog's name, but only mumbled gaspingly. Although his eyes were swollen almost shut, a pinpoint of light gave him vision of a sort. He saw the dog circle over the desert. Then he saw the town. Like a toy village, it lay there, nestling cozily in a green oasis, seemingly almost within arm's reach. Henry Luther knew better, however. The town was Nassville, he was sure of that; but, it was not so close as it seemed to be. A mile, two miles—maybe ten miles. He did not know.

The object of this nightmare journey occurred to him, then, like something resurrected out of the dim past. As far as his limited vision reached, there was no living thing. Was it possible that he was the first to reach Nassville? But—why not? During the first part of the race he had followed that shorter route which had been pointed out to him by two old desert rats. Then, Wolf had led the way. The dog had been heading for Nassville, which had been its home. It is a well-known fact that an animal, if given its head, will cover less ground between any two given points—in other words, take the shortest route—than will a man.

Hope flared in Luther's breast. He took a hesitating step forward, then stopped as a gasping cry came to him on the still air. He turned and saw—Red Joyce! The big man was a sight horrible to look upon. He was crawling, literally crawling, on hands and knees over the yellow sand. Luther touched the water bag on his back and shook it. There was some water there; about one good drink. All night long he had husbanded that water. Now, that one drink would suffice to keep him going until he reached Nassville. Being in his own mind certain that he was the first to win through, that he

was the winner of the great tenderfoot sweepstakes, the liquid in that water bag was worth a million dollars! Without it, he would be unable to reach the town. But, there was a man probably dying of thirst! Red Joyce! If he gave him the water, thus saving the wretch's life, it would be Joyce who would reach Nassville first. If he divided the water with Joyce, the latter would almost certainly reach the assayer's office in Nassville before him. For, despite his present condition, Joyce was a big man and a strong one. Luther knew, now, what wonders a single swallow of water might accomplish.

As Luther hesitated, Joyce drew near. "Water!" he gasped. "For Heaven's sake, Luther, jest—a swallow——"

Henry Luther brushed the back of one hand across his cracked lips. "No," he croaked.

Joyce's eyes became fixed with a horrible intensity on the water bag in Luther's hand. "Give me—" he gasped, "—jest a swallow——"

Henry Luther turned weary eyes toward the little green-edged town resting there so peacefully on the blue horizon. His lips formed the word "No" but he did not say it. Instead, he slowly removed the cap from the water bag. "We'll split it, Joyce, he said, "there's enough here for both. Then, we'll make a line—right here. We'll start, side by side, when I holler 'Go.' And we——"

But, with a sudden motion, Joyce snatched the water bag from Luther's hand. Yelling, cursing, the little man threw himself headlong upon the thief. But Joyce was still strong. With one hand he held Luther off while he tilted the bag upward and drank in noisy gulps.

Never in his life had Henry Luther so keenly regretted his lack of physical strength. Now, he would have sold his soul for the momentary strength which would have enabled him to kill Red Joyce with his hands.

The precious water acted on Joyce like strong wine on a starving man. In a breath, strength and vitality returned to him. He relinquished his grip at Henry Luther's throat and struck out savagely with his clubbed fist. The blow caught the little man under his ear and sent him sprawling, flat upon his back, a dozen feet away.

Red Joyce laughed harshly, and, with eyes fixed on Nassville, hurried on toward his golden goal.

Henry Luther returned to consciousness to find Wolf standing over him. As usual, following one of his lonesome pilgrimages, the dog's snout was cold and wet. And he had evidently found game. There was a suspicion of red about his muzzle.

"It's all over, pup," Luther said as he scrambled to his feet. "That Joyce—beat us to it."

Half an hour later Luther drank his fill from a spring which Wolf uncovered.

Shortly after midday, the little man plodded wearily into Nassville. To his astonishment, he was almost immediately surrounded by a multitude of shouting people. Still in a half daze,

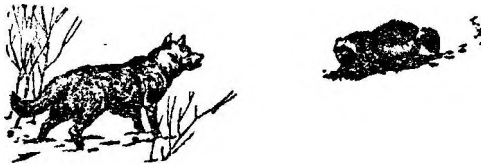
he was carried on the shoulders of yelling men to the assayer's office. Here, upon presenting his badge, he was duly pronounced the winner of the great tenderfoot sweepstakes.

In the days that followed, various other entrants in the sweepstakes straggled in. The old-timers who had started out with their water-laden burros, were, without doubt, responsible for the fortunate outcome of the sweepstakes. The instant the storm had become severe these old desert rats had herded the unwilling tenderfeet in groups and had watched over them all during the storm, doling out water as the occasion demanded.

So, despite the sand storm which had, for a time, placed the great tenderfoot sweepstakes in the light of a possible and terrible tragedy, only one man lost his life.

This man was Red Joyce.

They found him two days later, out on the desert less than a mile from Nassville. His death had been caused by the fangs of a coyote or a wolf. Opinion was divided as to which of the two was guilty. Henry Luther knew that neither was guilty. He knew that Wolf had killed Red Joyce.



WILD ANIMALS APPROPRIATE MEN'S TRAILS

WHEN winter sets in in the cold fastnesses of the Canadian Rockies, park wardens are about the only human frequenters of tourist trails. From Jasper Park, Alberta, however, comes word that such denizens of the wild as moose, caribou, deer, wolverine, and lynx avail themselves of the opportunity presented by winter solitude to wander about the well-traveled summer trails. This is particularly true of the trails leading to the Tonquin Valley and Maligne Lake, the largest glacial-fed lake in the Rockies, according to Warden John Macklin and some of his friends, who make frequent winter trips into these regions.

The deep snow provides excellent skiing conditions, the sportsmen say, while the chalets at Maligne, built for tourist use in the summer, afford pleasant headquarters from which to start runs into various parts of the country.



Comrade

By William Henry Doidge

Comrade, you have won this heart of mine,
With your doleful eyes and lowly whine.

As you lie there, suffering, on the floor,
I can see your goodness, more and more.

You have never smirked before my door,
Though you haven't much to thank me for.

In my loneliness you've helped me so,
For I watched your soul and spirit grow.

I'll be far more lonely now, I know—
Comrade, how I hate to see you go!

I remember things we liked to do,
And I think that you remember, too;

I'll bet all the visions that we prize
Are reflected in your dying eyes.

Oft your heart with pride and love has swelled
Oft nigh burst with grief, so closely held,

Till it grew too large for earthly rest
At confinement in that gallant breast.

Maybe that is why you have to die—
Pardon me, dear comrade, if I cry.

I feel sure that there's a place for you
Up in heaven above the skies of blue;

One so loyal, kind, so brave and true
Cannot live but this life and then be through.

Those blessed eyes have never spied
On the wrong, but good has held their pride.

Do you hear me? You don't even stir!
Yes, the soul has left that bunch of fur—

Well I know, dear comrade, though you've
died.

You'll be waiting on the other side.





Slow But Square

By Seth Ranger

Author of "Reel Sports," etc.



HEY! Young feller! Hold them long legs o' yourn higher or thet burro will walk right out from under you!" Mike Porep bellowed the words as

"Bud" Tuttle rode into Salt Hole at the head of a three-burro pack train.

Bud grinned, for Mike spoke the truth. Bud could sit on the burro and at the same time touch the ground with his toes. It was difficult for Mike to imagine that the bronzed young giant on the small burro was the same awkward, pale-faced youth who had arrived from "Back East" four months before and promptly proved his greenness by buying a salted claim. And who had as promptly proved his resourcefulness by selling that claim back to the Dresden gang from whom he had bought it!

"Whoa!" Bud came to a stop, dropped his feet to the ground, and permitted the burro to walk out from under him.

"Some time you'll get kicked doing that trick," Mike warned.

"Listen, Mike," Bud said, "I believe I've struck it. Come take a look at this!" Bud led the way to a quiet spot and displayed the contents of an ounce bottle. "There's a lot of it where this came from, Mike."

"Ain't surprised that there is," Mike said after a quick glance. "It's fool's gold—iron pyrites."

"Had a hunch it might be. I'm sure green. I almost run a fever when I struck that stuff in some black sand."

"Sure you're green," Mike said frankly, "but the beauty of it is you're learnin' fast. How long you been out?"

"Three weeks!"

"Well, there's been three gold strikes since you've been gone. The Agua Malo strike that fizzled out brought a lot of people into the country. They've scattered and are prospectin' all over. Somebody's bound to strike somethin' sooner or later. The latest is at War Paint. A lot of the boys are outfittin' here."

"Yeah," Bud agreed, "it looks that way. But not me!" He shot a glance

at the trader's store across the street. This trader had outfitted Bud on the Agua Malo stampede and taken advantage of his greenness. As a result Bud had thrown away a hundred dollars' worth of stuff after packing it on his back across fifty miles of desert. "I'm outfitted already. How long's this stampede been on?"

"Two weeks now."

"Suppose the whole country is staked?"

"Probably," Mike admitted, "but you know how it is, gold is where you find it. The first man on the ground don't always strike it." Before Bud could answer, Mike gripped his arm. "Look! There's 'Dangerous Dude' Dresden. Keep out of sight!"

"Why should I keep out of sight?" Bud growled.

"Because you made him a laughin'-stock by sellin' that salted ground back to him and making a profit. A man can stand most anything except bein' laughed at. And he's sure been laughed at."

A grim old judge in Gilman Center had sentenced Bud to remain at Agua Malo two months, to be sure the youth did not turn back the first time he was tested. And Bud had remained long after the others had departed, and by remaining and working the salted ground had convinced the Dresden crowd that there must be something in the ground they had sold him. Of course, they wanted it back, and Bud saw that they got it. Then to prevent the gang from unloading it on somebody else he had told the whole story. Naturally, a tenderfoot outguessing the Dresden gang was a juicy bit of gossip that the desert rats repeated with relish.

"Dresden knows the only way to save his face is to square accounts," Mike warned Bud, "and he's out to do it. He's the best gun fighter in these parts and you wouldn't have a chance with him. He knows that, too."

"Maybe so," Bud admitted seriously,

"but I can't bring myself to beat it. It looks like he's spotted us."

Dresden, dressed in the latest style, clean-shaven and brushed, swung briskly toward them. He smiled and thrust his hand at Bud. "Well, kid, you put one over on us, didn't you? No hard feelings. I can laugh as loud as the next one at a joke on myself."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," Bud answered. "We're square all around now."

"Square all around," Dresden agreed. "Hittin' for the War Paint country?"

"Thinkin' about it," Bud admitted.

"So am I." Then Dude Dresden hurried away. A score of miners who knew the story had watched the incident. Tongues began to wag.

Bud turned to Mike. "Pretty decent of Dresden, eh?"

"When Dresden smiles like that," Mike said quietly, "he's out to get you. His idea is to take you off your guard."

"That's hard to believe, Mike. He seemed so square about it!"

"Yeah," Mike laconically agreed, "seemed is the right word, but you keep your powder dry and your eyes open. And it might be well to look back when you've passed a clump of brush on a dark night."

"Thanks, Mike. When are you leaving?"

"To-day. Better come along with me."

"I'd like to, but I've got to write some letters home. And I'd like to pick up some mail before hitting the trail."

Bud Tuttle had heard men curse the Agua Malo stampede, and to him, a tenderfoot, the hardships had seemed terrible. But with the experience gained from his first stampede behind him the present one seemed worse. They moved slowly through a country barren of vegetation, except for scrubby, desert shrubs. Alkali flats gleamed like snow fields in the blinding light and an occa-

sional sandstorm, stirred up by the hot blast that swept across the desert, added to the hardship. On the Agua Malo stampede Bud had seen two or three men turn back. Now he saw dozens of them. "What's the sense," one muttered between parched lips, "there won't be any ground left any way."

Bud agreed with the speaker, but kept on going. As yet he had not struck gold. He could not turn back until he had. He split his water with an exhausted desert rat, then traveled all night to the next water hole. It was filled with dead bees and other insects. He filled his canteens and boiled the water later when he found sufficient brush to make a fire.

The country changed abruptly. The mountains became less drab and more colorful. Splashes of red and yellow showed on the cliffs—the war paint of the Indians. Bud slept in the shelter of a ledge, and late that afternoon began the final drive to War Paint.

A half hour before dawn he drove his burros up a ridge and looked down upon the lights of the boom camp. Gaunt men were moving like shadows in the gray light. The goal was within reach, the test of the trail lay behind them. The burros were quickening their pace, and Bud knew there must be water ahead. It had been several hours since man or beast had tasted water. Canteens were empty, but War Paint and water awaited below.

In his eagerness to reach the end of the trail, Bud almost passed by tragedy. A man lay gasping on blankets spread in the shelter of a mesquite thicket. "Boy! Don't pass me——" he cried.

Even as Bud stopped it occurred to him that a moment's delay might rob him of a chance to stake some ground. He rejected the thought with resentment. "Gold don't mean that much to me yet," he growled. "Anything I can do?"

The face of the sick man had once

been a deep, weathered tan. Now it was that sickly ashen that comes with death to a tanned face. The hair and beard, snow-white, formed a curious halo.

"Anything I can do?" repeated Bud.

"Nothing, son, but stay a moment. A man hates to die—alone. Kinda give me the strength o' your hand a minute. There! I don't feel like I was slippin' so much. Better." He was silent, while his dim eyes studied the youthful face lighted by a pink dawn. "You're the kid that slicked Dresden at Agua Malo. 'Six-gun' Tuttle's cub. Listen, son. Profit by my life and turn before it's too late. If you can make a success of this life, you can make a bigger success in the city. Quit before the gold fever gets into your blood. Fifty years chasin' rainbows for the pot o' gold at the end; fifty years and nary a pay streak. Alone I pushed ahead; alone I take the last trail. Turn—back—before it gets you."

The voice trailed into a whisper that Bud could not understand. Then with an effort the dying man marshaled his remaining strength.

"Closer, son. It must be foggy. I can't see your face. One favor, the last I'll ask. Bury me deep, and roll plenty o' stones over my grave on account of the coyotes. Turn my face toward the West. It always turned that way. I never looked back but to see the sun rise. I will you my estate—my six-gun; my pots an' pans; my empty grub bag and empty canteens. All empty but the gun. She's a good gun an' true, son. My blankets? Wrap me in 'em. Heed my end, lad! Turn back. Ah! The sun's up. I'll begin another—day." A smile passed over his face, then something else—the shadow that is death.

"And I didn't even learn his name," Bud muttered. "Well, he's commenced his new day." Bud was thoughtful. Was this desert rat placed in his path by Providence to turn him back? After all, was it worth it? "I guess I'm queer," the youth mused, "but I don't

want to turn back. No, not even after seeing this. People fail and succeed in every life. Mine's pioneering, and I'll succeed or fail in it."

Bud wrapped the slight, wasted figure in a blanket, then looked for a suitable place to dig a grave. The ground was like flint; as hard and unyielding. But there was dirt ahead. He hailed a passing man. "Give me a hand here, please!" The other continued without answering. He was too near the goal to stop now. Bud loaded the body onto a burro and cached the camping equipment in the brush. Lastly he buckled the worm holster and belt around his waist.

The sag of the gun gave him a comfortable feeling. He drew the weapon from the holster and examined it. Thus far he had not found a gun that suited him. This weapon was clean and well oiled. The butt plates were made of a silver and lead alloy that gave the weapon weight and steadiness. On either side, just above the plates, was mounted a small gold nugget. "Just the right weight," Bud announced, "and it just fits my hand. The old man said it was a good gun—said it in a way that meant a lot."

A quarter of a mile farther, he drove his pick into the ground. An instant later a bullet droned overhead. Bud dropped the pick and raised his hands. His heart was pounding wildly. The first bullet aimed at him had caught him off guard, and he was surprised. A burly individual heaved his bulk from behind a pile of rocks and advanced with cocked rifle covering Bud. "Get offn my ground," he rasped.

"Didn't know it was your claim," Bud answered. "Thought it was free ground. I'm not trying to jump it. Just want enough ground to bury this old-timer."

"You can't bury him on my ground," the man said with decision. "This whole country's shot with gold. It's poor

man's ground, and every foot is worth something."

Bud regarded the blanketed form. Fifty years blazing the way on the frontier; fifty years of unrewarded toil. In death denied sufficient ground for a grave. No, it wasn't worth it. Yet Bud knew he would go ahead.

"Where's the nearest unstaked ground?" he asked.

"Up agin' them black rocks. That's too high for dry placer. It ain't staked."

"How about giving me a hand?" Bud suggested. "Now that you've got your ground."

"I'm afraid to leave it. Dude Dresden's gang's here tryin' to get their tricky fingers on honest men's ground. Dude's a dead shot. That's why I was hidin' in them rocks. An ordinary man can't take a chance with Dude."

Bud continued his way over the rough ground up to the black rocks. There was not a chance to dig a grave without the use of steel and powder. He worked his way slowly along, seeking a pocket of earth for the old stamper's last camp. Twice he was roughly ordered off good ground and driven back to the rocks. It was an hour before he sighted a brown patch on the mountain side. He made his way to it and rested.

"Badger hole!" he muttered.

Far below lay the new camp—a disorderly array of tent and frame buildings, with here and there a weathered cabin hauled from a long-dead mining camp thirty miles away. Tents and smoldering camp fires in irregular plots of ground marked the different claims. As at Agua Malo, the country was staked as far as he could see. Many were doomed to disappointment, but many would make wages and some would become rich. "Too late," Bud mused. "I was late at Agua Malo and bought salted ground. I suppose there're a lot of ways of hooking me here, but it won't be with salted ground. Badger hole, eh? H'm! Let's find out

what's down below while I'm resting from the climb."

He dropped down to the dump left by the badgers when the hole was made. The heaviest dirt and small stones had rolled the greatest distance. He caught up various stones and examined them. His experience was not sufficient to identify the various metals, but a dull object, the size of a bean, lodged against a clump of brush caught his eye. He dived for it. The next instant his blood seemed to turn to ice. Despite the heat, he felt a chill. "Gold!" he muttered in an awed tone. "I've found gold on un-staked ground. I've struck it!" Frantically he began scratching the dump with a stick. He found two more nuggets. Lifting his arms to the sky he yelled at the top of his lungs. "I've struck it! Who'd expect to find gold up here?"

Then he remembered Chechahco Hill in Dawson where miners in jest had told a tenderfoot, or chechahco, to seek gold. And the chechahco had found it.

Bud drove the pick deep into the badger's hole and shoveled out the dirt, hoping to locate the bed rock from which the badger had removed the nuggets. As he worked, he remembered he should erect monuments and file a location notice before somebody else discovered the spot and beat him to it. However, a more important duty remained. He must first bury the old stamper. As Bud straightened up to rid himself of the kinks acquired in the hole, he noticed three horsemen galloping toward him. Bud concealed his nuggets, then tossed several shovels of earth down to cover up his prospecting of the badger's dump.

He pretended not to observe the riders' approach as they reached his claim. "Diggin' yourself a gold mine?" a familiar voice inquired.

Bud looked up into Dangerous Dude Dresden's cold gaze. As Dresden recognized Bud, a quick flash came into his

eyes. Brief as was the flash, Bud saw enough to convince him that Mike Porrep had spoken the truth when he said Dresden was most dangerous when he smiled. The affair at Agua Malo had not been forgotten. He almost purred as he glanced around. "'Stuffy'!" he snapped.

One of the men came on the run.

"This kid fooled us once," explained Dude, "but he won't again. I think he's got a gold mine here from the way he's been diggin' into the ground. But he's forgot to stake his ground. Just put up a few monuments and ride down to War Paint and have the claim recorded."

Bud's first impulse was to fight it out on the spot, then a measure of self-control returned in time to stop a violent outburst. By strategy he had beaten this man once; by strategy he must beat him again. He would have little chance in a gun fight with Dresden, though some strange fate seemed bent on throwing him into such a conflict.

Bud looked the gunman in the eye and grinned. "To save myself, Dresden," he said easily, "I had to put one over on you at Agua Malo. I'm not looking for trouble. All I want is to be let alone. Go ahead and stake this ground if you want to, but figure what a laugh they'll give you when they learn you've staked a cemetery. I came up here to dig a grave because I couldn't find ground down below."

Dresden sneered. "You'll have to think up a faster one than that to throw me off."

"Then go to it, brother," Bud snapped. "There's the body down in the shade by my burros. But don't say I didn't warn you."

Dresden worked his way down the steep slope and briefly examined the body. "Old Ben Buckley, eh?" Then he turned to Stuffy. "Never mind staking the ground. Let's be moving. We've got a lot to do."

Bud watched them ride away. "That was a close shave!" he exclaimed. "But won't he be wild when he learns the truth?" The youth climbed among the rocks above the gold-bearing gravel and located a natural tomb. In past ages a great river had flowed among the rocks and had ground out potholes in solid granite where the mighty eddies had rolled small boulders about. Bud cleared the dirt from one of these and lowered the body to the bottom. As he turned the old man's face toward the West, his eyes caught the dull glint of fine gold in the sand remaining on the rock. "Fate's queer!" he muttered. "For fifty years Ben Buckly hunted gold and didn't find it. And now he's resting on gold-bearing sand and in a few minutes I'll be covering him with it."

Bud muttered a prayer he had once heard at a funeral in Gilman Center, then he began covering the body with earth. On the brink of the grave he paused thoughtfully. It occurred to him that all soldiers are not in the army. He drew the old .44 and fired six times, then returned the weapon to the worn holster. "Rest in peace, old-timer," Bud said softly. "you've come a long way to find it."

War Paint was Agua Malo all over again. Bud Tuttle was to learn that gold camps look pretty much alike and are populated by the same kind of people and that each camp goes through the same experience. The miners arrive first, and hard on their heels comes the element looking for easy money. The members of this element begin with petty graft and gambling; crooked games and robbery follow. Busy with bedrocking some claim, the average miner endures it all. Then of a sudden a claim is jumped; the wrong man killed or even a smaller incident fans the spark of indignation. A miners' court deals out justice swiftly, and a few days later the law manages to arrive. But in

nearly every instance comes the test between the miners and those who prey off them.

There was something in the air as Bud Tuttle arrived in War Paint. He could not see it, but he could feel it. At Agua Malo no one had money, but scores of claims about War Paint were yielding pay, and that pay was being spent. Saloons and dance halls were running day and night; competition was keen, and the miners were complaining against trickery and robbery. Several claims had been jumped, and the storm was due to break. Back in the shadows, controlling it all, was Dangerous Dude Dresden, giving orders, taking a big share of the profits and little of the risk. His very name protected him against individual attack.

Here and there men called to Bud as he drove his burros down the main street. "Hyah, Bud!" Or, "Hello, Tuttle! Remember me, I saw you at Agua Malo? Pretty slick one you put over on Dresden, but watch your step, son. They're riding him pretty hard and he won't forget." As he passed, he could hear those who knew him explaining to strangers. "Remember old 'Six-gun' Tuttle? Well, that's his son. Likely cub, too. Chip offn the old block."

Such comments thrilled Bud after his years spent in Gilman Center, where his father and he were looked upon as worthless. What a satisfaction it was to be appraised as a chip off such a block by these men who weigh carefully.

He entered the tent recording office and duly filed his claim. Stuffy, riding in the distance, noticed the incident and came to a sudden stop. The moment Bud departed, Stuffy hurried to the tent. "Where's that claim located?" he demanded. "The one that kid just filed on."

The clerk spread out a map. "Right here," he announced.

Stuffy squinted briefly, then swore. He ran from the tent and leaped to his horse's back. Five minutes later he was at Dresden's cabin. "That Tuttle kid slipped one over on you, Dude!" he announced. "He just filed on that ground. If it ain't pay dirt, why'd he file on it?"

"Light out as fast as you can and see what's there. But, listen! Don't try jumping the ground. I ain't none too sure these miners will stand for it. That last claim our men jumped riled 'em up."

Accompanied by a half dozen men, Stuffy galloped away. Bud Tuttle watched them with growing unrest. When he was dead certain they were bound for his ground, he headed for Dude Dresden's cabin. Dresden met him at the door, but Bud beat him to the conversational draw.

"This morning you and your men were riding around looking over the likely claims in the hopes of getting hold of them," began Bud. "You saw me up there digging and investigated. I told you I was digging a grave. I was. Knowing you'd jump the ground, I didn't tell you I'd struck it. I've filed on it. You can take your choice. Call your men off, or I'll tell the camp just exactly what happened. If they don't laugh you and your gang out of War Paint, they'll at least see that I get a square deal. And you'll notice I'm keeping my hands clasped behind my neck as I talk so you won't have any excuse to say I was going for a gun and you had to shoot me in self-defense. Also you'll notice there's plenty of eyes and ears pointed this way. The eyes can see, but the ears can't hear."

Dresden did not answer. He merely closed the door in Bud's face. It was the last move the youth had expected.

"All right," Bud shouted, "if your men are on that claim at sundown tonight I'll tell the camp a tenderfoot kid put it over on you again."

"If you tell that story," Dresden

snarled in a low tone, "I'll kill you. If you're wise, you'll get out of camp while you're all together. I've had about enough of your freshness."

Bud Tuttle was genuinely relieved when he saw the Dresden crowd ride down from his claim a half hour before sundown. He was willing to do anything within reason to avoid trouble. But he did not propose to leave a good claim and slink from camp. Something in his make-up convinced him that anything, even death, would be better than that.

Night came suddenly and shortly after sundown the world was inky black. Here and there a light flashed on as some eager miner continued his bed-rocking by the light of candle or brush fire. The dance halls and saloons were ablaze as night life began. Fantastic shadows moved along canvas walls; fiddles wailed; cornets spilled sour notes, and drums rolled in the creation of an artificial happiness. Bud made his way cautiously to the Dresden cabin and crouched in the gloom. As he caught the mention of his own name he squirmed closer.

"Unless that's a pocket," Stuffy was reporting, "Tuttle's struck it rich. I don't think it is a pocket. What do you want us to do, jump it?"

Bud slowly stood up and through a crack he could see the light of several candles play on Dresden's face. The man was considering murder in the same dispassionate manner in which a miner would consider a fork in the trail. Presently he spoke. "Nobody, not even Tuttle, knows what's in that ground. Jumping the claim is likely to make the miners organize. That's the last thing we want. Once they get started they don't know when to stop. A better way is to keep still and make Tuttle leave camp, then quietly restake the ground."

Silence, then Stuffy spoke. "How will you make him leave camp?"

Bud was interested in the answer also. "I think," Dresden drawled, "that if I gave him twenty-four hours to leave War Paint, he'd leave. There's no doubt the kid is resourceful, but his fighting courage hasn't been tested. And I don't think he'll care to test it out on me." The man roared with laughter.

Again came Stuffy's voice. "Haw! Haw! Haaaaw! No, he ain't that curious to find out how brave he is." Then the conversation changed to other subjects and Bud Tuttle slowly withdrew.

"So I'm rich?" Bud mused, as he worked his way through the crowds milling about in the dusty street. "Rich, eh? And the fastest gun fighter in these parts wants the ground. The only thing to do is for me to get on my ground and stay there—make Dude Dresden come to me." He suddenly quickened his pace. "That's the thing to do. It'll make the play tougher for him. It'll almost amount to claim jumping if he comes up there and gets tough."

Bud pushed his way through the mob, glancing at all faces, seeking one man he knew he could trust. He felt certain he would find him, and he did. "Hey! Mike Porep! Just a minute."

"I've been lookin' for you," Mike shouted. "No ground here worth stakin'. Suppose we become pardners and light out to a new diggin's in the mornin' before sunup."

A Dresden man almost knocked down three men to get close enough to hear Bud's reply. "I've got some ground, Mike, I'd like to bedrock first. I'm sure there's something in it. Suppose you come along with me and we'll hole in."

"Time ain't nuthin' to me," Mike answered, "I've got plenty of it." Then he nailed a passing desert rat. "Hey, Pete, shake hands with Six-gun Tuttle's cub. Reg'lar chip offn the old block."

Pete gave Bud a searching glance. "Glad t'metcha!" he said. "Yuh favor yore ol' pap a lot. The ol' gold-digger left a mighty big name fer yuh t'live up

to. People will be expectin' more from Six-gun's cub than they would from the av'rage boy. It's like bein' the president's son. It ain't fair, but hooman nature's thet way."

The Dresden man had now cleared the mob and was hurrying down a back street, leaping tent ropes to make time. "Dude," he panted, "Tuttle's just met Porep! They're going to hole in on that claim for a while. Mike Porep is actin' like a press agent, introducin' Tuttle to all the old rats and tellin' 'em he's Six-gun's son. First thing you know he'll have an army ready to fight for him. You'd better act quick."

"Since when have you been qualified to tell me how to act?" Dresden rasped, by way of putting the man in his place. Nevertheless, as Dude leaped to his feet, the other knew he was ready to act.

Men gave way as Dude Dresden pushed his way down the half-lit street. And there were others who fawned and went out of their way to speak to him; and grim old desert rats who cursed under their breath and wished they were younger and quicker on the draw. To the fawners Dude tossed a word of recognition, and to the desert rats he growled phrases of defiance.

He saw Mike Porep and knew that Bud Tuttle was not far away. Then he saw Bud, emerging from a trading post where he had paid several prices for some extra canteens. He waited until Bud was in the full glare of a dance-hall entrance, then caught him by the shoulder.

"Listen to me, Tuttle," he said. "Because you're a kid and because I'm a good sport I laughed off that fast play you pulled at Agua Malo. But I'm getting sick of these remarks that are being passed. They've got you all swelled up until you're a conceited young pup. To-day you lied to me——"

"Hold on," cut in Bud, wisely hanging onto his canteens so that Dresden would have no excuse to go for his guns.

"I didn't lie. You know it! I was willing to keep still, but as long as you brought up the play, the crowd's going to hear it."

"Never mind the song and dance," Dresden snapped, quick to head off the story. "The fact remains that you're a liar."

Bud's whole being cried out to resent this insult in the only way Dresden would understand. He could see in the gleaming eyes before him the white fire that demands a kill, and he could sense and see the confidence Dresden felt that he could lash him into action. "Wonder if I could do it?" Bud muttered. "The old man said the gun was a good one. Yet, what do I know about gun fighting? Still——" Anger choked him.

"Six-gun Tuttle's son is yellow," taunted Dresden.

"Steady!"

The warning came from Mike Porep. Men were beginning to shift for cover. The words cleared the rage from Bud's head.

"Leave the kid alone," Porep snapped.

"He's not a kid. He's a man, and he can't get by pulling the kid stuff. Tuttle, you're yellow," Dresden charged, turning to Bud again. "The camp's not big enough to hold us both. You've got until sundown to-morrow night to get out. To-morrow night at sundown I'll walk down the street, and I don't want to see you. Understand?"

"I understand," Bud answered. "I'll probably be walking up the street about that time." Dresden laughed lightly, turned and walked away.

Silence fell between Mike and Bud as they headed for Bud's camp. "I'm tryin' to figger some way you can get out of this with honor," Mike said at length; "but that's the trouble with my kind of a brain—it won't work when it's needed worst." There was another period of silence, then Mike spoke again. "Bud, you haven't a chance with Dres-

den," he said. "Why don't you clear out? Why risk being killed or crippled for life? You haven't the experience to go up against Dresden, and no man will blame you."

"True," Bud said thoughtfully, "but I can't bring myself to do it. No, I don't see how Six-gun Tuttle's son can clear out. Besides, I couldn't run from myself. I'd always know I'd failed on my first test. I wouldn't meet the second and third with confidence. Mike, I'd sooner be dead than face a lifetime of regret. And—well—it looks as if I have a chance with Dresden if I used strategy. It's worked twice. And if I could get him to hurry his fire he might miss. Then I could get in a shot before he got in his second."

"Dresden don't need a second shot."

"But if he had something on his mind he might. Now, listen, Mike. Send word to Dresden that I've used strategy twice on him and it worked, and that I'm figuring on using it to-morrow night at sundown." Bud rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Dresden gave me plenty of time."

"Sure," Mike snorted. "He always does. The other fellow worries about it for twenty-four hours, then breaks and clears out, or goes into the fight pretty well shot to pieces."

"I think I'd better get some sleep, considering everything," Bud suggested. Then he turned in.

Mike loafed about for ten minutes, then he looked at Bud and chuckled. "He's really sleepin' sound. Cool cuss! Old Six-gun Tuttle was that way." But toward morning, when Mike dropped in for another look, Bud was tossing and muttering. "Kid wouldn't be human if he didn't have moments of doubt," admitted Mike. "Huh! Listen to that."

Bud was muttering: "I'm going to find out if I'm yellow. I don't know. Maybe I only think I've got courage. I don't want to die. I want to live. I'm just beginning to see things; just begin-

ning to live. I told old Judge Moore back home I was going to keep going until I stepped into the Arctic Ocean. Got to make good on that. So much to see. They say a bullet knocks you down. So much for a kid to see. The rest of the desert, then Alaska." He sighed and Mike Porep understood, for he was young once himself. "Shooting white water in a canoe; hunting bear, sheep, and moose; fishing for trout; trapping in winter, mushing a dog team; watching the ice come and go. The break-up on the Yukon must be great. Yeah, and there's the salmon. And the Eskimos!" He groaned. "Don't want to die yet. I won't die. Make him hurry his first shot. Use strategy—gun strategy." He rolled over on his side and renewed his steady, peaceful breathing.

Mike looked toward the eastern sky. The faint pink streaks indicated that Bud Tuttle's great day was dawning.

"Tuttle will never stay," Dresden announced to his men the following day. A half hour later Mike Porep appeared with Bud's message. Dresden shrugged his shoulders with indifference, and when Mike had gone he called Stuffy. That burly brute leaped to obey. "Tuttle's using strategy again, Stuffy," said Dresden. "Keep an eye on him and see what his game is."

Stuffy watched Bud leisurely eat breakfast, then head for his claim. A quarter of a mile from the claim he turned toward a pile of boulders. A flat rock was covered with rattlesnakes. Bud dismounted, drew his gun in a lazy manner, dropped it toward the head of a coiled snake. As the weapon leaped, the head vanished. The rock became a squirming mass of heads drawn ready to strike. Six times the gun roared and five heads were neatly clipped. Bud reloaded the weapon and moved on to the claim.

Stuffy slid into the nearest draw,

mounted his horse, and galloped to Dresden. "Hev, Dude," he announced, "that Tuttle kid's a shootin' fool. His old man musta learned him how to shoot. You'll have to get him quick when the time comes. And if he uses strategy—well——" If Stuffy had known anything of popular slang he would have added, "It'll be just too bad."

Outwardly, Dresden was as calm as ever, but inwardly he was disturbed. Twice, now, Tuttle had beaten him by strategy. And he had sent warning he would use strategy in this instance. Either plain or fancy shooting did not worry the gunman. He could hold his own with the best. "But strategy——" he muttered.

Bud Tuttle cleaned and oiled the old .44. As Ben Buckly had said, it was a good gun. The silver and lead butt plates, yes, even the small nuggets mounted on either side, gave it just the right weight and steadiness. When he dropped it down, it covered the target. His marksmanship was good as long as he moved slowly. When he tried for speed, he missed. On the face of a cliff he had traced the figure of a man and this had been his target during the day. Each bullet had left a mark that enabled him to correct his faults, but he was far from perfect. He could not even be called proficient. "Whatever I do," he decided, "I must remember to shoot slowly. No matter what happens, I've got to take my time. And I must concentrate on the business at hand." He shot a glance toward the sun. It was time to go. He felt curiously detached as he neared the camp. It was as if he, Bud Tuttle, were watching some one else go through this test.

The sun had just dropped below the horizon and the flaming sky was changing to gold and pink. Sounds of afternoon revelry dwindled and died. A hush came over the camp. Men deserted the streets, but watched from bullet-proof

cover. Somewhere a woman laughed hysterically. A man growled, "Shut up!" Then somebody said, "There comes the kid!" Others repeated it. It sounded like a mighty sigh sweeping through the camp. A poke of gold, thudding from bar to floor, caused several men to start violently.

Bud's face was white and drawn, but his hands were steady and his eyes never left the street. One block; two; three, up the dust-filled street. Each block an eternity. Dresden knew that uncertainty breaks a man, and Bud struggled to keep from breaking. Abruptly, Dresden stepped into view two blocks away, and a woman screamed, "Oh, somebody stop it!" The words were suddenly muffled as though a hand had been clapped over her mouth in order to quiet her.

Bud could see the trace of a smile on Dresden's face. The man's play was to trick Bud into going for his gun first, then Dude could fire in self-defense. He recalled Stuffy's words. "He's a shoot-in' fool." Also, Bud was using strategy. What was it? Never was Dresden more tense and alert. Well, the time had come. And not even a floor board squeaked in camp, for men did not move. Dude's hand dropped as though going for his gun, stopped, then flashed. During the brief interval, Bud had been tricked into drawing first. Men saw it. Abruptly, Dude's smile was replaced by a tense, drawn expression, and those watching knew that Dude Dresden was not entirely confident of the outcome.

"Dude beat him to the draw," a man cried, "and got in the first shot!" They saw Bud instinctively flinch as the bullet droned over his shoulder. Dresden had hurried his fire.

Mike Porep's nerves were unequal to the strain. "Why don't Bud hurry?" he groaned. It seemed to the watchers that an eternity elapsed as Bud dropped his gun and fired. As he fired, Dres-

den's gun leaped, and both men went to the ground.

Bud got to his knees, brought the weapon down on his enemy's chest, then held his fire. Dude Dresden's gun lay in the dust, and Dude was clutching his arm. "I'm hit!" he yelled. "I'm hit!"

"So's Tuttle," rasped Mike Porep, "but he ain't hollerin' about it." He tore Bud's shirt off. "Let me fix that wound!" he exclaimed.

"Only a flesh wound," Bud answered. He raised his voice. "Come on, boys, let's round up the Dresden gang and start 'em on the way. A couple of you fellows pack Dude into that building and see that he's fixed up."

All the old-timers needed was some one to lead off. Schooled in human nature, the Dresden crowd realized they were through at War Paint. They kept their hands in the air and their mouths shut as War Paint hazed them and their belongings down the trail.

Bud Tuttle, bandaged and somewhat weak from loss of blood, peered down at Dude Dresden. Dude's shooting arm was badly shattered, but the man was still defiant. "Some day, somewhere, I'll square this account, Tuttle," he gasped.

"Sorry you feel that way," Bud answered, "I'm glad I didn't kill you. I'd like to go through the life I've mapped out without killing another man even in self-defense."

"I hurried my fire," Dresden growled more to himself than to Bud. "Never hurried it before." He shot a glance of hate at the younger man. "Where was your strategy?"

"That was it," Bud answered. "My only chance of getting out alive was to make you hurry your first shot. And to make you hurry I had to make you think I was good. I'm not good."

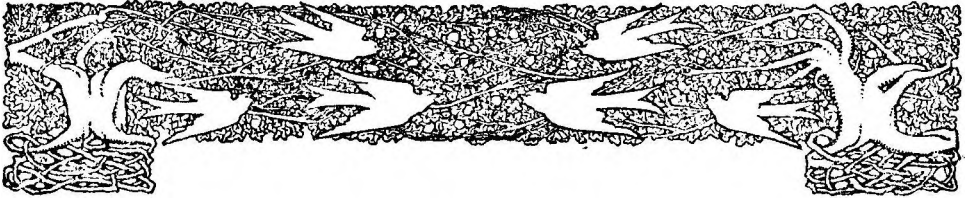
"Stuffy saw you shooting the heads off snakes."

"Yeah," Bud drawled, "I knew Stuffy was watching to get a line on me. That's

why I turned off to the snake rocks. If a man takes his time, it's easy to shoot off a snake's head. The snake squares off to strike the muzzle of the gun, and that's when you let him have

it. It was the snake and not me that did the aiming that time. For once, it paid to be slow on the draw."

"And that," chuckled Mike Porep, "is what I call strategy."



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Turkey Vulture

(*Cathartes Aura Septentrionalis*)

THE turkey vultures are commonly known as turkey buzzards. Throughout the Eastern and Southern States, high up in the sky, they may be seen flying majestically about, soaring with scarcely a wingbeat. They are not so abundant as many are led to believe, it doubtless being their great size which makes them noticeable.

They are most useful to nature and mankind as scavengers, quickly sighting and consuming dead animals of all species. In some of the Southern cities the vultures constitute an effective street cleaning department, demolishing garbage piles on the city's dump heap.

It is believed by some that the buzzards can foretell the death of an animal several hours in advance, and in the case of a dying cow or horse, they will group about the animal at varying distances awaiting the end, when their banquet will commence.

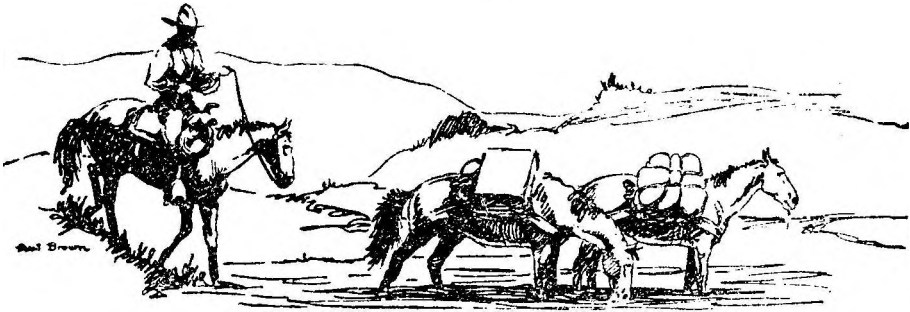
They will hover around pens where hogs are fed, getting what scraps they can. They feed almost entirely on the ground, as their feet are not well adapted to holding their food while perched on a limb.

As a rule the buzzards limit their diet to dead animal matter, but in some places they will kill newly born pigs, herons, and ibises. Whether the turkey buzzard is directed to his prey by smell or sight is a subject much discussed, but the majority are of the opinion that it is guided by sight alone.

One of their peculiarities is their custom of congregating in flocks nightly at certain places known as buzzard roosts. Usually these roosts are located in some dense swamp.

A hollow log usually serves as a nest for the vultures situated in the woods or swamp. Here the eggs are deposited, with no attempt at lining or building a nest. The eggs are two in number and about two inches long. They vary in shade and are of pale yellow, pink, and dull white spotted with brown. The young birds are covered with a white down and not until they are four weeks old do the black feathers begin to appear. Not until they are over two months old are they able to fly.

The adult buzzard is about two and a half feet from bill tip to tail tip, and the expanse of wings is six feet. The bird weighs about six and a half pounds.



Highways Old and New

By Edna Erle Wilson

(The Okanogan-Cariboo Trail)

THE story of the Okanogan-Cariboo Trail is a picturesque and stirring saga of the Northwest. Over this old route, which winds for seven hundred miles from Vancouver, British Columbia, to Wenatchee, Washington, have passed in turn all the epic figures of pioneer history, from Indian brave to reckless cow-puncher. And worn broad by the traffic of the years this thoroughfare, which started as a narrow wilderness path, has been transformed, in recent years, into a thoroughly modern highway.

It was back in the fur-trading era that the old Okanogan Trail was first used by white men, when in 1811 David Stuart and his companions, with a few pack horses loaded with goods, trekked from the State of Washington to British Columbia, then called New Caledonia. Prior to this date, the path had known for countless years only the moccasined feet of the redskins in their migrations between the Thompson and Columbia Rivers. From this time on, however, it was regularly used by the heavily laden pack trains of the Hudson's Bay Co., which took the trading goods north in the late summer or fall of each year and brought the fur down from the Northern trading posts in the spring.

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In fact, this pioneer route was often referred to as the "Brigade Road" for, in the vernacular of the frontier, every pack train or flotilla of boats or canoes laden with merchandise or furs was a "brigade." In their trips over this old trail a regular program was followed by the traders. Every spring the furs from the many trading posts scattered over New Caledonia were collected at Fort Alexandria on the Fraser River. Pack horses then transferred the pelts to Fort Okanogan across the border. Here the New Caledonia brigade was joined by the Colville brigade, and together they journeyed by boat down the mighty Columbia to the mouth of the Snake River, where the Snake River brigade awaited them.

The joined forces of all these brigades, known as the "Interior Brigade," went as a unit to the grand headquarters at Fort Vancouver, Washington. Late in the summer the Interior Brigade left again in a body, separating at the points where they had met and joined forces. At Fort Okanogan the New Caledonia Brigade left its boats, and the march over the Okanogan Trail was resumed with the pack horses.

When the fur trade was at its peak, around 1830, the New Caledonia Brigade often consisted of four or five

hundred horses and frequently carried to market pelts valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The outbreak of war between the Americans and the Cayuse Indians put an end to travel on this route, the last of the great brigades journeying over the Okanogan Trail in 1847.

The old thoroughfare did not remain unused for long, however, for in the fall of '57 gold was discovered on the bars of the Thompson and Fraser Rivers, and in the spring of '58 a wild stampede to the new diggings in the Cariboo country began, some of the prospectors pushing north over the Okanogan Trail. Later, it was over this route that the ranchers began to trek into the country to settle in the Okanogan Valley, where the fertile bottom lands and the bunch grass on the hillsides furnished rich feed for cattle.

At the time of the gold stampede of '58 there was no Cariboo Road. The only route through the perilous Fraser Canyon was a narrow and hazardous path made by the redskins and trappers. It was a mere ribbon of a way, the deep gulfs spanned here and there by rude bridges of poles and willows made by the redskins, with no hand holds on either side. And though these bridges could be negotiated with safety by the moccasined Indian and trapper, it made perilous going for the hobnailed boots of the miners. It is not surprising that many prospectors and pack horses lost their lives on the jagged rocks or in the swift and deadly whirlpools hundreds of feet beneath.

But the lure of gold is a strong one, and, despite the manifold hardships, prospectors pushed on through the almost inaccessible canyon and beyond to the richer creeks and bars of the Cariboo country. Discoveries continued to be made, one of the greatest being that at Antler Creek in '60. This marked the beginning of the wildest rush into the Cariboo country, a steady stream of

men, ranging from the hardened '49ers to pink-cheeked tenderfeet, plodding wearily over the crude trail through the canyon. Pay dirt was found in startling quantities, fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold being washed from a four-hundred-foot stretch of gravel bar in one creek in the space of six weeks, while claims in William's Creek yielded as high as forty pounds of gold a day.

Although this gold-crazed army continued to crowd into the camps of the Cariboo, the difficulties of packing supplies along this dizzy trail made the cost of food in the diggings almost prohibitive. It must have been in these days of lean rations that the miners found in the great herds of caribou which roamed the valley their chief means of sustenance. The men in the gold camps spelled this name "cariboo," and so the trail is called to-day.

To remedy famine conditions in the diggings the construction of the original Cariboo Road through the Fraser Canyon was commenced in 1862 by the Royal Engineers. The building of this highway, without the aid of modern machinery and giant powder, was one of the most remarkable engineering achievements of the day. In some places the trail hugged the mountainside, clinging to a narrow shelf of rock suspended over the wildest waters of the river, while at others it climbed seemingly perpendicular walls and descended precipitous cliffs in a most miraculous way. The Cariboo Road was completed into the heart of the gold country by 1865 and over it most of the twenty-five million dollars' worth of yellow nuggets taken from the gravel bars of the Fraser were conveyed to the outside world.

In the '60s a familiar sight along this old trail were the six-horse stagecoaches, the passenger de luxe service of those days. Another characteristic scene was that of the reckless cow-punchers of the Yakima country driving their great

herds of beef cattle to the Cariboo gold diggings. For a period, traffic was heavy along the thoroughfare, but with the waning of the gold excitement the road was allowed to fall into disrepair. Some time later two transcontinental railways were built through the canyon, during the construction of which whole sections of the original trail were destroyed, and for a number of years there was no road between the coast and the interior of British Columbia.

Now, however, that an excellent new highway has been constructed by the government of British Columbia through the Fraser Canyon, the old Cariboo Road is again the scene of travel activity, although the modern automobile has replaced the pack trains and stages of former days. While perhaps not so spectacular a feat as the building of the original Cariboo Road in the '60s, the construction of this missing link in the present Okanogan-Cariboo Trail is a tribute to the skill of the modern engineer. Not only was he faced with the proposition of constructing a thoroughfare through a maze of mountains, cliffs, and huge rock slides, but he was also confronted with the task of finding a place to put it. The result is a credit to his cleverness, for the new Cariboo Road is a broad highway of easy grades, with safety secured by a rock wall which guards its outer edge.

Those present-day adventurers who journey over this international route will pass through a territory which is practically new to the touring public. The scenery along the way is of every type, for the grandeur of towering mountain peaks; deep, yawning canyons; roaring river, and spray-veiled waterfalls, is varied by placid lakes, peaceful pastoral scenes, orchards fragrant with blossoms or rich with ripening fruit, sleepy hamlets and bustling cities.

The starting point of the Okanogan-Cariboo Trail is the active seaport of Vancouver, British Columbia. From

this western terminus the thoroughfare wends its way to New Westminster, and through the fertile agricultural lands of the lower Fraser Valley by way of Langley Prairie, Aldergrove, Abbotsford, and Chilliwack, to Hope. This town is the site of a historic landmark, for it was at Fort Hope and at Fort Yale, some fourteen miles to the north, that digging for gold in the sand and gravel bars of the river first commenced, ushering in the stampede of '58.

At Hope the trail enters the rugged Fraser Canyon, and as the traveler traverses the new Cariboo Road he views scenery of a majestic grandeur. Above tower frowning precipices and tree-covered mountains, while below the waters of the Fraser rush headlong through their rockbound course. In some places the highway follows the river's edge, and at others it climbs high up the mountainside.

Looking down from this vantage point it does not require a particularly lively imagination to picture the six-horse stagecoach of the early '60s dashing along through this canyon, conveying not only a motley assortment of passengers but a strong box full of golden nuggets to the "outside." One can hardly suppress a shiver when he remembers that the prospectors often attempted to run the rapids of this mighty river in frail canoes or on crazy rafts. Nor is it to be wondered at that the miners who had struck it rich in the Cariboo diggings and were taking their wealth out strapped to their backs or in stout carpet bags often met their fate in the whirlpools of this stream.

Passing through the towns of Yale, Spuzzum, and Boston Bar, the trail reaches Lytton, and thence makes its way on to Lillooet. In this section the tourist will find many relics connected with gold-mining days, and, if he has time to spare, a visit to scenic Seton Lake will prove well worth while. By

way of Marble Canyon, which with its wonderful natural colorings never fails to surprise and delight the journeyer, the route continues through the Thompson River country to Salmon Arm. This town, located on the shore of Shuswap Lake, is noted for its fine fishing and hunting.

The traveler can now avail himself of one of the wonder trips of the Rockies by following a road which branches off the main route a few miles north of Enderby and, passing through Sicomous and Revelstoke, climbs nineteen miles up the face of Mount Revelstoke to the summit of this lofty peak. It is a unique experience for the tourist to be able to drive to a mountain summit of so great an altitude as this over a hard-surfaced road which is wide enough to permit two cars to pass with ease.

The ascent can be made in two hours or less, during all of which time the traveler is treated to a changing panorama of unsurpassed beauty as the road winds up the mountainside, facing alternately east and west. The top of the mountain is wooded like a park, with rolling hills clad in heather and in spring and summer gay with a bright carpet of wild flowers. A short distance from the road is a huge glacier, while snow-covered peaks stretch away in all directions.

Around Enderby and Armstrong, the next towns encountered on this trail, are fertile farming districts, and the tourist who explores the country back of them in the hills will find beautiful hidden lakes and mountain streams. Although the height of land is scarcely perceptible, Armstrong actually stands on the divide between the area which drains into the Fraser system and that which drains into the Columbia system. On the east of the highway the water flows northward, then west, while on the west it drains south.

The trail now winds onward to Ver-

non, which is only a short distance from the northern ends of both Lake Okanagan and Kalamalka Lake. The former sheet of water is ninety miles in length and of an average width of from three to four miles, while the latter is particularly noted for its beautiful colorings.

Instead of following the shores of Lake Okanagan, the highway now swings to the east and passes for some thirty-eight miles through a small valley which parallels the larger one, therein passing along the shores of Kalamalka, Woods and Duck Lakes, en route to Kelowna, situated about half-way down Lake Okanagan. Here and at Penticton, located at the southern end of the lake, the tourist will be glad to pause, for these towns boast safe, sandy bathing beaches, bordered with shade trees.

If the traveler is of an adventurous nature he will find that from each of the towns along this section of the highway trips can be made to points of interest. When Summerland is reached, a visit should be paid to the Dominion Experimental Farm, where accurate data on fruit growing and such topics is available. Another noteworthy spot is the Southern Okanagan Irrigation Project, of which Oliver is the business center.

Before long now the international line is passed, and here the highway changes the spelling of its name, the Canadian Okanagan becoming Okanogan in the United States. From Oroville to Wenatchee the Okanogan-Cariboo Trail follows the general course of the Okanogan River until its confluence with the larger stream of the Columbus River at Brewster. Here, at the junction of the rivers, is the site of old Fort Okanogan, the first white settlement in what is now the State of Washington.

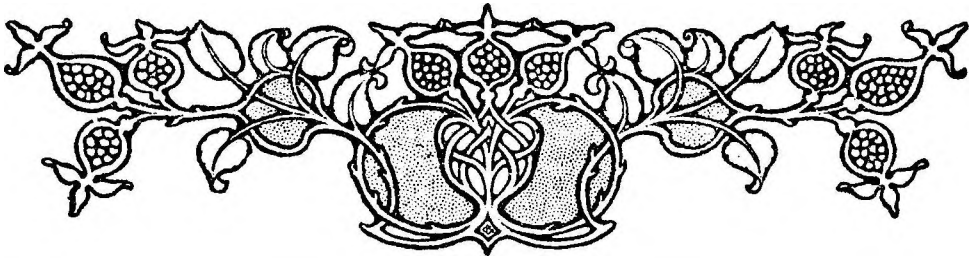
Each one of the towns located in this valley offers some interesting feature to

the visitor. Oroville has rich mineral deposits, and from this center trips can be made to the Similkameen Gorge, the Epsom salt mines, and Wannacut Lake, the waters of which are of medicinal value. At Riverside one comes into contact again with pioneer history, for this town was the head of navigation on the Okanogan River before the coming of the railroad.

The lumber industry plays an important rôle in the life of Omak, while Okanogan is the county seat of Okanogan County and does an extensive business throughout the territory. From Brewster the highway leads south along the Columbia River to Pateros, where the opportunity to make a trip up the beautiful Methos Valley should not be missed. At Chelan the Okanogan-Cariboo Trail winds along the shore of the lake called by that name, a sheet of water which stretches forty miles to the

Northwest, right into the heart of the Cascade Range. Here an exciting trip may be made by motor cruiser back into the land of great glaciers. A short distance from the town lies the gorge of the Chelan River, where an artistic concrete bridge arches the chasm chiseled by the racing waters in their escape from the mountain-locked lake to the Columbia River, six hundred feet below.

At Entiat, located at the junction of the Entiat and Columbia River Valleys, an attractive side trip can be made through a portion of the Wenatchee National Forest to Cottonwood Corrals. The Ribbon Cliffs and the Lincoln Rock, both seen from the highway in this vicinity, are points not to be overlooked. The end of the journey is now in sight, for at Wenatchee, the metropolis of a vast apple-growing district, the Okanogan-Cariboo Trail reaches its southern terminus.



THE ANNOYING JACK RABBIT

ONE of the new problems that orchardists in the Northwest are now having to face is menace from the jack rabbit. In comparing the jack rabbit with other predatory animals, one is apt to be impressed by his seeming harmlessness. And yet it is said, among those who knew, that not even the coyote has anything on him in the way of being a nuisance.

In the region of Yakima, Washington, for instance, the offensive jack rabbit has of late increased enormously in numbers and is to be found everywhere. The cold weather and deep snows have favored these animals and have, at the same time, outwitted the regular hunters.

Now, however, farmers, under the direction of the biological bureau, are making a concerted attempt to get rid of some of the tenacious little creatures. Poisoned bait is the most popular means employed. Community round-ups, although they often result in the killing of thousands, do not exterminate quickly enough. And, meanwhile, the jack rabbit does on gnawing the bark from apple tree trunks, destroying haystacks, sprouting alfalfa fields, and new vegetable crops. No form of vegetable life, it seems, is immune from his greedy little ways.



OLD stuff!" is what some of you folks may yell when you hear what Wilber Edwin Angier, Plaquemine, Louisiana, is going to tell us. But to many of you, we're sure it will sure enough be news. Good news, too. Frankly, we're some surprised, ourselves.

"**BOSS AND FOLKS:** Contrary to popular belief and also to an article appearing recently in our magazine, entitled 'American Furs to the Fore,' the fur crop of the United States does not entirely depend upon the Northern climes for its catch, by a long shot.

"While it is true that in many cases the pelt is much thicker on a skin taken in the Far North than one from a warmer section, it does not necessarily follow that the Southern article does not exist.

"In point of fact, Louisiana is the greatest fur-producing State in the Union. Her output as tabulated by the Department of Conservation for the year of 1927-1928—the season for taking being less than three months—was eight and one half million dollars. This amount was actually paid out to trappers for their catch during that time.

"Much fur is also taken and shipped direct to Northern dealers. This does not show in the records of the department, but an estimate of two million dollars more would be conservative.

"More than thirty thousand men are engaged in the business of trapping fur-bearing animals within the confines of Louisiana, and many of these men take their families with them during the season to the haunt of the raccoon, mink, otter, opossum, muskrat, and skunk. Many of the children of these folk run short trap lines, also.

"It is not uncommon for a good trapper to make as much as eight or ten thousand dollars during the season. A portion of this goes as percentage to the land owner. I, personally, have visited trapper camps at Christmas time that were furnished with a radio, player piano, and an electric-light plant, to say nothing of the other luxuries enjoyed by the family."

"The greater portion of this large army of fur gatherers are direct descendants of the original Acadians who were exiled from Canada by the British in the days of Evangeline.

"As to my own fur land holdings, I have over two hundred thousand acres

of fur-bearing land ranging through six parishes of the State; all of it heavily wooded, of a swampy nature, and in places almost impassable.

"Giant cypress trees, hoary with Spanish moss hanging to the earth; make much of this land a paradise for the little fur bearers. Of course, there are deer and bear in abundance, but the pelt of the Louisiana bear is worthless."

We'll now listen to Bill Hubbard, who knows his stuff, and who'll talk on broncs that are hard to bust:

"Most people sittin' in the grand stand at a rodeo never stop to think where the broncs they're watchin' come from, or why and how they got there.

"The bronc, to most observers, means only one of two things. If the rider sticks, the bronc is trained to buck and the rider knows just what he's goin' to do at each jump; or, the rider's no good if he gets thrown. I can't see it that way, 'cause I know the reason why and how some of them ponies wound up in a rodeo grounds. What I know about ponies is just a little bit. When I say little bit I mean just that, for everything I've learned about ponies, cows, and the cow business in general there are two or three things I found out I didn't know, and had to look up. I only mention this 'cause I want you to know that I don't think any one can truthfully say he knows everything about a certain subject, especially one that takes in as big a territory as the cow business does.

"I've taken part in quite a few rodeos during the eighteen years I've been in the cow business and know a little somethin' as to how they're pulled off.

"I've seen raw broncs run in off the range and taken direct to the rodeo grounds, where they're ridden in the contests by the contest riders. Some of them broncs never'd seen a human close up before, and if they did you can

bet your boots they didn't stick around long to look him over. One look was aplenty. Then there's the broncs that come from different cow outfits around the country. They're the outlaw horses of the outfits. Most, but not all of them, are spoiled by bad ridin' in the beginnin'.

"If a raw bronc sees he's got away with somethin' once, he'll try it again, and pretty soon he's doin' it all the time. That is, if it's not took out of him in the beginnin'. No cowboy wants to see a bronc go wrong, and he'll do his level best to keep him from it. Then they're the natural-born, mean, man-hatin' broncs. There are broncs that will buck no matter how many times they're ridden, and each time their dislike for man grows just that much more. This story is about one that was spoiled by bad ridin' in the beginnin'.

"A feller named Joe Lance and me was breakin' horses at one of the line camps of the Arrow River Outfit in south central Idaho. Joe was bronc fighter and in charge of the camp. The boss had sent me along to help Joe. At that time I was nineteen years old, just learnin', and a-doin' fine. Joe's ridin' the rough ones, me a few easy ones, and finishin' up what Joe's started.

"Then one day come one of them broncs that wouldn't bust. Next to the breakin' corral we've got a smaller one where we're holdin' the raw broncs. I steps into the corral and drops my loop on one we'd just named Dirty Face. As I led him out into the breakin' corral, Joe says, 'You better let me take him, Bill.'

"'Why?' I asked.

"'I don't like his actions,' says Joe. 'He don't look any too lovin', and to me he ain't actin' natural. But,' he adds, 'I guess you might as well start in now.'

"At that time, and many times thereafter for a long time to come, it struck me funny that Joe picked him for a bad number. With Joe, like many other

bronc fighters I've met since, it's a sixth sense or somethin' that tells 'em. At the time Dirty Face didn't look any meaner than the rest to me.

"Joe come into the corral and together we slipped a blind over the bronc's eyes. I starts to saddle up, and right then it come to me somethin's wrong. Like Joe says, he wasn't actin' natural. Too quiet. He had his head down like he's thinkin' of somethin', or sulkin'. From what little I'd learned, and what I know now, them's bad signs. Most brones have to be hobbled, tied down, pulled up to a snubbin' post, or run into a chute, before bein' saddled. But not so with Dirty Face. He just stood there, hind feet wide apart and head down. When I eases the blanket and saddle on his back, he quivered a little, but that was all. Since I've found out a little about handlin' brones I like them best when they fight back, and try, if they don't succeed in doin' it, to give you as much or more than you can possibly give them.

"After saddlin', I climbed on. Joe jerks off the blind and rope, and the fight's on. The bronc's ears come back, he quivers all over for a second, then takes a couple of quick jumps and starts up to greet Saint Peter. That was the highest jump I ever took on a bronc and one of the worst. When he come down he lands stiff-legged. I got four straight jolts. Left front, rear right, right front, and rear left. All the time the bronc's bellerin' his head off. After the first jump, I was loose from my seat and ridin' the air. When he straightens out at the last jump I'm in the saddle again, but it wasn't for long. The bronc bogs his head again and after two more hard-hittin' jumps he goes into the air. When he comes down, he's all alone. I'm sittin' on the ground with my two hands full of corral dust. Joe tells me afterward things went so fast he couldn't keep up with 'em. That wasn't the first time I've been throwed,

but it's the first real wicked, hard-hittin', bellerin' bronc I ever tried.

"Joe climbed him that afternoon. Everythin's fine till all of a sudden the bronc sees he's losin' the fight and starts for the side of the corral. Joe pulls on the hackamore rope, but the bronc don't turn worth a nickel. When he hits the corral there was a crash of splinterin' timber, and the bronc kept on a-goin' high, wide, and handsome into the corral full of other brones.

"For the next two weeks Joe rode him once a day regular. Every time he took the loser's end and the bronc gets meaner and meaner, till we finally put him in the rough string.

"Then one day the superintendent of the ranch rode up to where we was hard at work. We tells him about Dirty Face. When he leaves, Dirty Face was followin' him and his pony at the end of a rope, headed for the main ranch. A few weeks later he was sold to a travelin' Wild West Show. The superintendent knowed if Joe couldn't make him be good it wasn't likely any one could. Joe's just a born bronc fighter.

"At the Cheyenne Frontier Days Celebration a year later I saw Dirty Face again. He was mean as ever. He had buckin' down to a science.

"I don't mean to say Dirty Face was never ridden to a finish, 'cause he was. I saw Bob Concannon—a well-known Wyoming bronc fighter around 1920—ride him to a standstill at Blackfoot, Idaho, a year later.

"Although some brones, and I include Dirty Face as one, may be natural continual buckers, ones that will buck at every settin', and just as hard as they did the first time they ever felt a saddle and man on their back, and will take the winner's end on near all the riders that straddle them, there's always some rider who can and will ride them the limit. For there's no man that can't be throwed and no horse that can't be rode."



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.

THE Sybelle Creek country out of Wheatland is one of the sheep ranges of southeastern Wyoming. South of the Laramie Range is the old stamping ground of the herders and of the Cheyenne riders.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have lived on ranches for many years. Several Wyoming ranches have been home to me, and the one I was most fond of was a large sheep ranch on Sybelle Creek, out of Wheatland, Wyoming, about fifteen miles. My husband was foreman, and we had from six to eight sheepherders all winter, feeding two herds of sheep of about two thousand each. A regular Western ranch house was our quarters. The cottonwood trees were thick around the house, and there were willows along the creek. The boys who were hired were more often cowboys, and some of them were regular bronc twisters who could ride the meanest outlaw. We folks of the West sure see a lot of tenderfeet from the East, but most of them are out to learn, and they make very fair hands. You must remember that cowboys and cowgirls are just regular folks who do not dress in their angora chaps, silver spurs, and silk neckerchiefs and shirts for range riding. The average cowboy is lucky to have his own saddle. We had one waddy who lost his boots in a card

game, and we had to stake him to a new pair.

Folks out here are real Westerners. And the towns are real Western towns. Frontier Days at Cheyenne, held every year in July, is the biggest of the rodeos of the West. Amateurs as well as professional riders are allowed to compete for the prizes. The Indians are always at Cheyenne a week or so before the rodeo, very busy putting up their tepees and drying the meat that is to last them through the celebration. During the rodeo, if a steer or cow is injured, it goes to the Indians, who very industriously get busy at cutting the meat and hanging it in the sun to dry. Every night the Indians dance on the downtown streets.

Cheyenne was my home for eight years. I have spent most of my life in Wyoming and always intend to make this old cow State my home stamping ground. We are now in Bairoil, in southwestern Wyoming. Well, folks, I hope the old Owl will hoot once for me, for I figure I'm as lonesome for letters as any one else. I'm twenty-three, and would like to hear from the Gang Sisters all over the world.

MRS. C. E. HAYS.

Bairoil, Wyoming.

Trekking the wilderness trails.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: It has been some time since I have come to the Old Hollow Tree

for advice and a partner. I returned from my trip into southern Mexico two weeks ago, after spending eleven months down there, but I find I cannot stay put. The trails that have led me to the far corners of the earth are calling me again. I would like to find a real pal to trek into the wilderness of Canada and maybe Alaska, too, or if any one has a better plan I would be glad to hear from him. I am twenty-two and Irish, folks, so come forward.

I have circled about half of the globe and would be glad to hear from every one from everywhere. I can promise every letter will be answered, so come forth, you restless globe-trotters, cowboys, sailors, or what have you?

Answer pronto, pals, for I am raring to get started. Fill my mail box with ideas, comrades!

A TROTTER OF THE GLOBE.

Care of The Tree.

Range riding in Montana.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am another Westerner. I was born and raised in Washington, and know Idaho, Montana, and Oregon, as well as my home State.

I rode the range in Montana and have seen it forty-five degrees below zero and have been in real Montana blizzards. In Idaho I have hunted and fished in many lakes, and in Washington know the wheat country and lumbering sections.

I enjoy all kinds of sports—especially baseball, basket ball, tennis, and swimming.

Mesa, Washington. L. L. LATHAM.

Looking for a Pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: As a reader of WESTERN STORY, I wonder if you could put me in touch with a young trapper who wants a partner. I want some one who is quiet and steady and who would share fifty-fifty. I should like to trap in Alberta or British Columbia or any country where the weather is not too hard. My age is twenty-three. I have no previous experience in trapping. I hope this will catch the eye of some one who is in need of a pal.

T. PHELPS.

Higher Metherrill Street, Dominick
Cornwall, England.

Montana waddy.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am on a ranch not so far from the Big Horn country. Have been here since '25. Sure is some country. Will be glad to write to any of the folks.

Care of The Tree. A. C. PATISON.

Looking for a home ranch.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a lonesome young girl who has no home. Are there some ranchers who have no children and would like a real daughter whom they could be proud of? Would love a real home on a real ranch where there are lots of horses and cattle, some place in Arizona, Wyoming, Nevada, or Oklahoma. Preferably these places, but I would be willing to go elsewhere if there was a real home waiting for me. Hoping there are some kind people who need an extra and willing hand. So lonesome and tired of the city.

YVONNE HATHAWAY.

3017 Pacific Avenue, Everett, Wisconsin.



Riders of the Sybelle Creek country will yarn with you-all about the Wyoming southeast. Wear the friend-maker badge and speak up to the cowboys and the sheep-herders.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style, or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

The Smoky Mountain Country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am located in eastern Tennessee, near Knoxville and the Great Smoky Mountain. My job is to stay in a first-aid station office from 6 a. m. to 4:30 p. m., to treat slight injuries among the workmen of the plant. Serious injuries are sent to the hospital, but they are few. We have had some electric shocks. My home is in the Middle West. Good fishing in the mountains. Would like a good buddy who is a good outdoor and sightseeing man not over thirty-five years old.

CHARLES A. ELDER.

Box 26, Alcoa, Tennessee.

Montana pioneer town.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I was born in Laurel, Montana, but moved to New York State when I was about four years old. I know next to nothing about my birthplace as it

is to-day. Of course, my parents have told me a great many things about it, but even they know it only as a promising pioneer town. And, too, I have some views of the town, but I am sure that pictures taken in the year 1908 and pictures taken in the present year must be a whole lot different. Will any one who knows anything at all about Laurel, no matter how little, write me? I shall anxiously and hopefully await a reply.

A WESTERN-BORN EASTERNER.

Care of The Tree.

This hombre is looking for a trapper pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have been rambling through Nevada, Oregon, California, looking for a location in the mountains where game is plentiful. I found three hundred acres of land with two creeks on it, so expect to start trapping this fall and winter, in the meantime developing the ranch for farming. Am wanting a pardner.

I have five good hounds. I am strictly an outdoor man—that is, I love to hunt, fish, camp out. Come on, you hunters, trappers, outdoor folks, I sure want to hear from you all.

CHARLES D. FAY.

Care of The Tree.

Foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I've been a silent member a long time. But I never see anybody from Georgia writing for Pen Pals. So I'm going to ask you and the Gang if you won't let a Georgia girl join you. My home is in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Not far from my home is one of Uncle Sam's national forests. And now, Gang, let some letters fly my way and I'll see they don't go unanswered.

ESTELLE WATERS.

Box 486, Gainesville, Georgia.

Mining and cattle country of Australia.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: The country round here is very mountainous and at times one gets some very pretty views. "Cinnabar" was named after a mineral which used to

be mined here. The old mine is about two miles away, in a gully. It has been closed for years now. The shaft and tunnels are still standing, but the tunnels are unsafe.

FRANCES HUNTER.

Mount View, Cinnabar, Nanango Line, Queensland, Australia.

Would-be trapper.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a young city boy—nearly twenty years old—and I would like to get a position on a ranch or at a trapping station starting about the middle of January, as I finish college then. You see, I love the outdoors and horses. There is nothing better that I can conceive than riding on a ranch or trekking the trap line with an old-timer.

MELVIN GOLDMAN.

14516 Larchmere Boulevard, Shaker Heights, Cleveland, Ohio.

Canadian homesteaders.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a new resident of this little town of Hollister, in San Benito County, in central California, having only lived here a year as yet. I don't know many persons in this glorious Sunshine State. My husband and three boys came from western Canada in March, 1928, so you see we are quite strangers in this country. I am an old reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, and I have always longed to come to the American Southwest. We homesteaded a one-hundred-and-sixty acre farm in Canada, and lived there for eighteen years. Canada is a young and splendid country and we made our living there, but the winters are very severe. My health gave way and I begged my husband to sell the farm and come to California.

My one remaining wish is to see a real cattle ranch. Not a "dude ranch," but a real, honest-to-goodness ranch. My husband has worked as a railroader, lumberjack, and farmhand, but has lived on a farm since our marriage. I love this pretty little place with orchards everywhere around. Hollister is called the "home of the apricots," but many other kinds of fruit grow here.

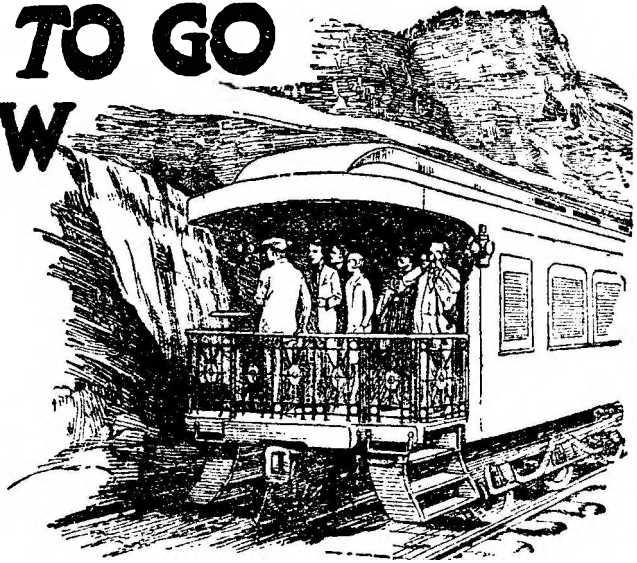
MRS. A. A. OF HOLLISTER.

Care of the Tree.



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.

THESE sunshiny autumnal days, with a crisp tang in the air, just naturally make all red-blooded hombres long for the great outdoors. One's thoughts speed like lightning to a little log cabin tucked away somewhere in the hills, where one's daily game may be earned by the trusty old shooting iron. In other words, the time has arrived to make plans for the big fall hunt, and Bill J., of Boston, Massachusetts, is among the first of our readers to signify his intention of hitting the trail to tall timber.

"I've heard so much about the joys of a hunting trip in the prairie provinces of Canada, Mr. North, that I've made up my mind to do a little shooting up there myself this fall," writes this Yankee. "Now what can you tell me about the possibilities? I'm especially interested in water fowl. And, of course, I'm not averse to some big-game hunting, too. From what points does one start for the big-game country?

And to whom does one apply for game licenses?"

Bill surely has a big time in store for him, for the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have much to offer the sportsman. Although they are called the "prairie provinces," these regions are not all prairie by a long shot. With the eastern slope of the Canadian Rockies located in Alberta, game is abundant. Another thing which makes this region a happy hunting ground is the fact that the great national parks lie along the eastern slope of the Rockies, and the overflow of game from this protected section naturally keeps the surrounding country well stocked.

Bill will be glad to hear that the outstanding feature of the prairies is water fowl, about which he says he is mighty enthusiastic. Here, in fact, is the heart of the water fowl breeding ground of North America, and the duck or goose shooter could not find a better spot to indulge in this pastime. No decoys are

the rule, in Saskatchewan, live ones are taboo, and often as not none are needed. Flight shooting, stubble shooting, shooting at geese from pits in the stubble, wandering at will over lovely countryside, make fall shooting in the prairie provinces a joy never to be forgotten.

And when Bill wants to give the ducks a rest, there are sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chicken at which to take a few shots. Then, too, the Hungarian Partridge has been introduced in southern Alberta and has spread north and east, and is now found in Saskatchewan.

As for big game, the mule deer ranges eastward wherever there is cover, to Manitoba, and the whitetail is found across these three provinces to the coast. Fully three quarters of Manitoba and at least the northern two thirds of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan are wooded, poplars predominating to the south, and conifers northward. In all three provinces Bill will find moose, caribou, and deer.

Prince Albert, Edmonton, The Pas, and Winnipeg are all used as starting points for reaching the big-game country. For game licenses, applications should be made to the following agencies: For Alberta, address the chief game commissioner, Edmonton; for Saskatchewan, the chief game commissioner, Regina; and for Manitoba, the deputy minister of agriculture, Winnipeg.

Well, the prairie provinces are hard to beat for a hunting trip, and they attract many sportsmen every year. This region also draws a number of home seekers, among whom is Frank H., of Chicago, Illinois. "You've had considerable to say from time to time about the Peace River Country of Canada, Mr. North. I wonder if you'd be good enough to talk a little more about that section for an old reader of *WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE*? I'm interested in the Hudson Hope District and would surely appreciate any and all informa-

tion which you could see your way clear to hand out to me. How is that section reached? What about land for agriculture?"

We are mighty glad to oblige Frank by telling him all that we know about the Hudson Hope District. The little town of Hudson Hope is located on the north bank of the Peace River on the westerly limit of the Peace River Block. It is the gateway from the great plains to the mountain regions, being at the foot of Rocky Mountain Canyon, and on the easterly base of the foothills. In pioneer days, a trading post, sometimes called Rocky Mountain House, and sometimes known as Custs' House, stood at the upper end of the canyon. This old landmark was replaced by a post at the foot of the canyon about which other posts and a few scattered buildings have grown up to constitute the present hamlet of Hudson Hope.

During the summer months this little settlement is reached by steamboats which ply up and down the river from the town of Peace River, giving on the average a fortnightly service. There is also considerable travel to and from Prince George by canoe. This route, by water and portage, is about three hundred miles. A wagon road some fourteen miles in length leads past the canyon to the upper waters of the Peace, which are navigable for steamboats. Another road gives connection with Fort St. John. From a point on the opposite side of the river still another road leads to Pine River and the Pouce Coupe District and a trail runs some eighteen miles south to Moberly Lake. Various other trails lead out to the haunts of the trapper and the prospector, for this district is rich in furs and possesses wonderful mineral possibilities.

There is very little agricultural land in the immediate vicinity of Hudson Hope, on either side of the river. On the whole, Frank will find this region rather hilly, rough, and stony. The soil

is not of the best and most of the surface is wooded. There are a few choice sections, but they are not extensive. If, however, Frank will journey a few miles downstream on the north side of the river, adjacent to the Halfway River, he will discover a much larger area of gently rolling country, wooded with small poplar, willow, and alder, and having good soil.

A few homesteads have been located about Hudson Hope, here and there on the flats along the river below and near the mouth of Halfway River where there is a little community called Halfway. Excellent crops of grain and vegetables are produced on these farms. About Moberly Lake there is some good land, but the best falls within the limits of Indian reserves. Wild hay and pea vine grow profusely in this district. It appears well adapted to mixed farming and stock raising.

Hudson Hope is provided with telegraph service, being the terminus of the Edmonton-Peace River government line. It holds a very strategic position, being in the direct path of any railroad line that might be projected through the mountains by the low pass of the Peace River Valley. If Frank settles there he can be sure that this section will at some future date be the scene of important developments.

And it's always cheerful to have something nice to look forward to whether a chap is settling in the Peace River Country of Canada, or in Greenlee County, sometimes called the wonderland of Arizona. The latter region is interesting Carl O., of Akron, Ohio, these days. "What can you tell me about Greenlee County, Mr. North?

I'm seriously thinking of trekking out to Arizona to settle. From all I've heard I believe that region would suit me to a T. Now what I'd like to know is what the principal industries are. I'd also like some facts about the town of Clifton."

Carl has picked a plumb fascinating part of the Southwest, and we are glad of this chance to air our knowledge of Greenlee County, which is one of the richest sections of Arizona. The principal industries out that way are mining, farming, and cattle raising. Of these, mining comes first. Farming is second, with some of the richest farms in the State found in the irrigated area known as the Duncan Valley, of which the town of Duncan, in the extreme southern end of the county, is the center. The total irrigated land area of the county is more than five thousand five hundred acres and is steadily increasing. The third industry is cattle raising, which is also on the increase. One of the largest cattle ranges left in the West is the celebrated Double Circle in the Eagle River country west of the Coronado Trail.

Clifton, the county seat of Greenlee County, located between towering cliffs on the San Francisco River, is a most picturesque city, and enjoys one of the most even and attractive climates in the country. It is the oldest continuous producing copper camp in the Southwest.

Much to our sorrow, we haven't space to say more on this subject. We are telling Carl, however, where he can procure additional information, and shall be glad to forward the same address to any other hombres who are interested in Greenlee County.



MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

New readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," or others, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

J. R. O. JACKIE.—Important. Something you will want to know. Please write to D. J. O., Muehle, care of this magazine.

KEANE, DAN, and CONROY, MART.—My foster father and uncle. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. I was born February 26, 1908, and adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Keane. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. T., care of this magazine.

CHAMBERS, FLORENCE and LONZO.—Mother and son. Lived in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with Lonzo's grandmother, Deloria Chambers. Left there twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by his aunt, Jessie Uemiller, 1700 South Kelly Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

MURPHY, TOMMY.—Thirty-three years old. Last seen in 1905. Last heard from in Kansas City, in 1917. Information appreciated by his brother, William Murphy, Kenton Hotel, 53 Bowery, New York City.

HESTER, R. F.—Forty-eight years old. Six feet tall, dark-brown hair and eyes. In 1910 was in Fort Worth, Texas. Sometimes worked as a locomotive fireman. Last heard from in 1911, at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Please write to Jackie M., care of this magazine.

LAUER, A. H.—Last heard from in Philadelphia, in 1918. Information appreciated by Hezard T. Newcomb, 381 Cumberland Street, Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

DEFFENBAUGH, CLIFFORD TROUPE.—Have always felt that there was a mistake in the report of your accidental death. If you are living, please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

GOODE, JOE TEXAS.—I have good news for you. Please write to the girl you love, Dale, care of this magazine.

CARLTON, A. P.—Was discharged from the navy June 4, 1920, at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Please write to Jimmie Turf, First Ambulance Troop, Fort Bliss, Texas.

GALLAGHER, MARY ANN.—Born at 150 Leonard Street, New York City, in 1866. Last heard from in Grand Rapids, Michigan, when she was fourteen years old. Information appreciated by her sister, Maggie Gallagher Rude, 1121 West Tenth Street, Marion, Indiana.

BARKHOUSE, INGLIS.—Thirty-two years old. Five feet eight inches tall. Played baseball in Courtney, British Columbia, in 1922 and 1923. Last heard from in Honolulu, Hawaii. Information appreciated by Gerald Barkhouse, Box 167, Puywash, Nova Scotia, Canada.

NOTICE.—When I was a few hours old, I was taken from my mother, by Doctor C. Reed, of Trenton, New Jersey, to the home of Mrs. D. Steep, in Trenton. I would like to find my parents. I am now twenty-five years old. Please write to Mrs. Myrtle Suter, R. D. 1, Polk, Pennsylvania.

CLUTE, VELMA BEATRICE.—Was born July 3, 1912, and left with Mr. and Mrs. Jones, of Hornell, New York, when she was five months old. Information appreciated by her broken-hearted mother, Mrs. E. L. Irish, care of Mrs. D. Ingraham, 31 Caledonia Street, N. E., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

ESCH, OLIVE.—Your silence is causing many tears. Please send for letters held at this office for you, and write to Mother, care of this magazine.

CAVE, MRS. THOMAS, nee MAUDE SLADE.—Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Forty-two years old. Last heard from in Calgary, Manitoba, Canada. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Florence Slado Verge, 51 Church Street, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

DADDY TOM.—Please write to Madge and Babies, 64 Salisbury Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

ST. JOHN, HARRY.—Last heard from in 1923, in Wisconsin. Father is dead, and I am very ill and need you. Please write to your sister, Mrs. John Rupert, R. R. 3, Box 183, Auburn, Washington.

C. R. C.—Mamma is dead, and John needs your help. B. married H. Please come home or write to D. M. C., Greenvew, Illinois.

LINVILLE, ERNEST.—Last heard from in Lyons, Illinois, three years ago. Information appreciated by his father, D. L. Linville, 211 South Lesley Street, Knoxville, Tennessee.

CLARK, CYRIL.—We are worried about you. Please write to Mrs. L. E. C., care of this magazine.

CUMMINGS, RALPH.—Believed to be in California. Please write to Herbert E. Jerrilla, Box 173, Oakdale, California.

WIRTH.—Information concerning any one of this name appreciated by K. K., care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—A two-week-old baby girl was placed in the Indianapolis Orphans' Home, some time during the month of January, 1888. Any information concerning her people will be appreciated by Mrs. Hazel Stegall, 3922 West Seventh Street, Fort Worth, Texas.

MILLER, SLIM, and MRS. CECIL BELLE.—Did you receive my letter? Please write to Mrs. E. M. Hart, Box 312, Sawtelle, California.

FLOOD, JERRY A.—I am worried about you. Please write to Betty, care of this magazine.

JONES, CHARLES, and wife, ISABELLA BAUER.—My father and mother. I was born in Yonkers, New York, June 19, 1910, and was left at the New York Foundling Hospital, July 13, 1910. Information appreciated by Mrs. Alger Kirkhorn, 326 Avon Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

LEE, HARRY.—Worked during 1901 as a railroad brakeman, at New Urm, Minnesota. Has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by A. P. Wells, Halloway, Minnesota.

RICHARDSON, E., and son H.—Please write to Mrs. Alice Fitzgerald, Box 3221, Honolulu, Hawaii.

JACQUOT, PETER.—Left Paulsner, Kansas, for William Valley, Oregon, in 1908. Please write to your cousin, Sarah Jacquot Thorpe, Box 25, Ceres, California.

GARSEN, CHARLES N.—When last seen was with his wife and baby girl, driving a Durant touring car. Information appreciated by Route 2, Box 209, Porterville, California.

BROTHERS, JOSEPH I.—Fifty-eight years old. Six feet tall, blue eyes, and light complexion. Last heard from in Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1918. Information appreciated by his son, C. H. Brothers, Route 2, Grimes, Oklahoma.

DRAKE, ALFRED.—Last heard from in April, 1923. Please write to your aunt, Mrs. E. A. Boyd, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, ALICE.—Married "Smoky," a rodeo rider. Please write to your old buddy, Alta, care of this magazine.

LAMBERT, HARRISON.—Please write to your daughter, L. Lambert, care of R. A. Gilbreth, Route 1, Rush Springs, Oklahoma.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from any one who served in Troop J, Seventh U. S. Cavalry, from November, 1917, to June, 1919. Address: Hughes Willey, Headquarters Battery, Third Field Artillery, Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

BAIRD, MILDRED.—Lived in Morning Sun, Iowa, and worked for the G. F. Construction Co., in Elira, Iowa, during the summer of 1920. Information appreciated by Bert H. Marsh, Box 44988, San Quentin, California.

BROOKE, WILLIAM.—Mother is ill. We have searched everywhere for you. Please come home or write to your sister, Dot, care of this magazine.

CORA.—I am sorry for what I did. I have news for you. Please write to Bill, at the same address or care of this magazine.

SIMLEY, JOHN W.—Last heard from in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1907. Information appreciated by his son, J. Glen Simley, care of this magazine.

EUGENE, VIRGIL.—Last heard from in Dallas, Texas, three years ago. Please write to Maybelle Dixon, of Phoenix, care of this magazine.

MARADAS, JACK and MARION.—Formerly of Orlando, Florida. Last heard from in Atlanta, Georgia, in February, 1929. Information appreciated by Mother, care of this magazine.

BARRON, GEORGE.—Son of the late Charles Barron. Tall, fair, and has blue eyes. Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Selma Fritchard, 405 Alden Place, Bronx, New York.

HUBBARD, EARL and IRENE.—Lived in Buffalo, Oklahoma. Please write to your old friend, Jennie Ford, Route A, Johnson, Kansas.

BISHOP, WILLIAM H.—Seventy-two years old. Left home on Kettle River, Minnesota, in October, 1899. Five feet six inches tall and weighed about one hundred and fifty-five pounds. His wife, Alice, and daughter, Wilma, went to Renton, Washington, before he left Kettle River. William was heard from in Washington shortly after he left Minnesota. Information appreciated by his brother, J. D. Bishop, 1131 Glenwood Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

WILHELM, FRANK EDWARD and BENJAMIN JOSEPH.—Frank was born at Sioux City, Iowa, August 26, 1894. Benjamin was born at Detroit, Michigan, June 13, 1898. Frank served on the U. S. S. "Albatross" during the war, and Benjamin on the U. S. S. "North Dakota." They have not been heard from since. Information appreciated by their mother, Mrs. Rose Schmidt, 621 East Fourteenth Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

TEVIE.—Billie was badly burned. Mamma is in the hospital. Please wire or write to Dad, care of this magazine.

DAN.—I am leaving here October 1st. Will keep your whereabouts secret if you will write to Norma, care of this magazine.

HOLMES, EARL.—Twenty-five years old. Blue eyes, brown hair, five feet eleven inches tall, and weighs one hundred and sixty pounds. Was in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in 1928. Information appreciated by Stanley Holmes, Marked Tree, Arkansas.

GARCIA, CARMEN.—Twenty years old. Spanish, dark hair and eyes. Worked for Captain William Houston Hunter, M. A. C., at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in May and June of 1925. Believed to have married a soldier by the name of Munoz. Information appreciated by J. H. Horn, R. R. 1, Laywell, Indiana.

ATTENTION.—Do you remember Chicken or Johnnie, of Bakery Co. 1, Q. M. C., at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, from January to August, 1925? Please write to John H. Horn, Bucklin, Kansas.

STARBUCK, JOHN, HENRY, WILLIAM, THOMAS, and URRAN.—Formerly of Schuylkill county, Pennsylvania. Please news for you. Please write to Charles Towner, Bennetts Crossing, Elmira, New York.

HANCOCK, JAMES.—Am anxious to hear from you. Please write to your brother, Oliver M. Hancock, 464 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, California.

SPEEDY.—All difficulties adjusted, on job and otherwise, by your cousin, Frank. You can help yourself and me most by returning or writing to Ruth, care of this magazine.

WOODY, PERLE S.—Last heard from on route to Detroit, Michigan. I still love you. Please write to your wife, May Woody, 1531 Sycamore Street, Quincy, Illinois.

ALESHIRE, JOHN W.—My father. Born in Stanley, Virginia. My mother's name was Sarah, and I had a sister, Sallie. Information appreciated by A. B. Aleshire, Box 4, Shenandoah, Virginia.

WISE, ROBERT, or GORDON, JAMES.—Forty-seven years old. Five feet eight inches tall, weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Left Virginia, Minnesota, in December, 1912. Last heard from in Ada, Montana, in 1918. Information appreciated by Mrs. Frances Wise, 353 Eleventh Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

KELLER, RUDOLPH.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1912. Was employed in railroad construction work. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. A. F., care of this magazine.

KELLER.—Children of Ernest Hugo and Maud Shoup Keller. Lived in Memphis, Tennessee, during 1903-05. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. A. F., care of this magazine.

HUTTON, MRS. LILLIE and children.—Lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1914. Information appreciated by Mrs. J. A. F., care of this magazine.

W. A. S.—News from Pennsylvania worries us. We won't tell. Please write to your sisters, Mary and Alice, same address or care of this magazine.

FRASE, ETHEL.—Twenty-two years old. Formerly of Canandaigua, New York. Her mother married a Mr. Baker, of Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by her old friend, Mary Jones Fitzpatrick, 8 Elm Street, Seneca Falls, New York.

JONES, H. S.—Seventy years old. A carpenter. Information appreciated by Mrs. V. N. MacCoon, 8 Elm Street, Seneca Falls, New York.

SEITZE, JIMMY.—Twenty-nine years old. Information appreciated by Mrs. V. N. MacCoon, 8 Elm Street, Seneca Falls, New York.

SMITH, LEONA.—Left Fort Smith, Arkansas, in February, 1928. Information appreciated by Walter Hamer, 3900 North Rockwell Street, Chicago, Illinois.

WATERS, LEO, or SHARER, OSCAR.—Your wife and son miss you. Last heard from in San Francisco, California. Please write to Pauline Sharer, 620 Loran Street, Toledo, Ohio.

DIXON, THOMAS.—Last heard from in Indiana. Father has been very ill and needs you. Please write to his sister, Pauline Sharer, 530 Logan Street, Toledo, Ohio.

GAFFORD, WILLIAM, or JACK CONEY.—Thirty-three years old. Tall and slender. Last heard from in San Diego, California, in 1918. Information appreciated by his cousin, Russell Dye, 1038 West Therman Street, Springfield, Missouri.

TRACY, LELAND.—Fourteen years old. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in Kansas City, in October, 1928. Information appreciated by Russell Dye, 1038 West Therman Street, Springfield, Missouri.

HARWOOD, STANLEY C.—Whoever told you we did not care for you and never wished to see or hear from you again was wrong. We will always stand by you. There have been many changes. F has been ill for some time. You can always find us through Uncle John. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

KIRK, MAXINE.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, in 1928. Please write to Mrs. Arthur McCann, care of Summit Hotel, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

ANDERSON, WILLIAM BURTON.—Forty-five years old. Five feet ten inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Left Clinton, Indiana, in October, 1928. Alice Alleen is very sick. Please write to your wife, Mrs. W. B. Anderson, 1465 Spruce Street, Terre Haute, Indiana.

ANDERSON.—Would like to hear from any one of this name living near Hayville, North Carolina. Address Mrs. W. B. Anderson, 1493 Spruce Street, Terre Haute, Indiana.

LANSFORD, SIDNEY.—Last heard from in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1923. Information appreciated by his daughter, Nellie Lansing, 721 Edmund Street, St. Joseph, Missouri.

ESTES, LAVERNE A.—My mother. Forty-six years old. Medium height, fair complexion, dark hair and eyes. Lived in Detroit, Michigan, from 1903 to 1922. I saw her in Detroit, for the first and last time, in 1922. Believed to be in Chicago, Illinois. Information appreciated by E. E. T., care of this magazine.

ZILINGER and BROOKS.—My mother's name was Lydia Zilinger. She was born in Des Moines, Iowa, and married E. O. Brooks. She died in 1911. I would like to hear from any of my relatives. Address Mrs. Fred M. Symonds, 301 Marine Bank Building, Long Beach, California.

MILES, W. R.—I still love you. Everything is forgiven. The children miss you, and I need you. Please write to Bessie, care of this magazine.

LUNT, JOHN and ADA.—Formerly of Boston, Massachusetts. Believed to have moved to Florida. Information appreciated by Mrs. Bertha M. Buckley, 331 1/2 Gertrude Street, Los Angeles, California.

RANEY, LELAND L.—Twenty-eight years old. Six feet two inches tall, weighs about one hundred and forty-eight pounds, dark-brown hair and eyes. Left home, in Merwin, Missouri, seven years ago. When last heard from, in May, 1924, was on route for Salt Lake City, Utah. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Julia Raney, care of this magazine.

MENABD, or WHITE, BOB.—Twenty-six years old. Five feet seven inches tall, weighs one hundred and forty pounds, dark-brown hair, and blue eyes. Last seen in St. Louis, Michigan, in April, 1929. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. R. McNabb, 60 Sheridan Street, Pontiac, Michigan.

F. H. G.—Am sending letter to General Delivery, Albany. Please call for it. Think of the future, and come back. M and A., care of this magazine.

DOCKTER, EUGENE.—Fifteen years old. We last saw him in 1925, when he left Washington, D. C., for Indianapolis, Indiana. Information appreciated by John A. Quinn, 1411 Allison Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

THE DUSTER

By Max Brand

This Duster moved so quietly that he raised no dust, but he cleaned up everything very carefully. This is one of those Brand stories that every one likes. You'll want to read more about him.

THE CUT CINCH

By E. C. Lincoln

"He's a-comin' out, chute three, folks. The Chuckwalla Kid! Let 'er buck!"

THE BLOW OF A COUGAR

By George Cory Franklin

The miner was happy, content to live in the forest, make friends of the wild things, work when the weather was good, sit snug in his cabin when the storm raged.

Also Features by

Cherry Wilson

Robert J. Horton

Seth Ranger

And Others

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At All News Stands

In This Week's Issue of

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

JOHN DOE'S PLANT

By Paul Ellsworth Triem

Hopelessly bound, facing the drug fiend's relentless gun, John Doe felt that only a miracle could help him out of this predicament.

THREE OAKS

By Roy W. Hinds

She was good, humble, just "cheap help" to him, but in a moment of frenzy she showed her mettle.

FANCY STEALING

By Arthur Mallory

He was all dolled up in a 'funny get-up, but his little game was not so funny.

Also Features by

J. S. Fletcher

Leslie Gordon Barnard

Mel Watt

And Others

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