

Western Story*

Every Week Magazine Mar. 30, 1929

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"Fire!" The cry went up from half a hundred throats.
from LOOPHOLE of SADDLEBACK by ROBERT J. HORTON

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

T BONE'S TREASURE

By Robert Ormond Case

The city dude not only struck a snag, he struck T Bone. Was T Bone hurt?

DAD SIMMS MAKES THE FUR FLY

By Frank Richardson Pierce

A sledding story of when beavers went sky high.

WILD FOES

By Kenneth Gilbert

With the coming of winter came the wolves, fierce, gaunt, hungry, looking for prey.

Also Features by

Robert J. Horton

Roland Krebs

Arthur Preston Hankins

And Others

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At All News Stands

In This Week's Issue of

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

SOFT MONEY

By Paul Deresco Augsburg

Jauntily, he wrote his own death warrant—all for the sake of a joke. By the author of "White Mercy," whose charm can hardly be forgotten.

THE DUMMY

By Bryan Irvine

This dummy was hired to kill on command, but, in a crisis, he took the bit in his own mouth.

SIMON TRAPP BUYS A VOICE

By Roy W. Hinds

This crook had a fancy voice and committed a fancy crime. Your old friend, Simon Trapp again, and his new ruse.

Also Features by

Austin J. Small

Agatha Christie

Herman Landon

And Others

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WESTERN STORY

MAGAZINE

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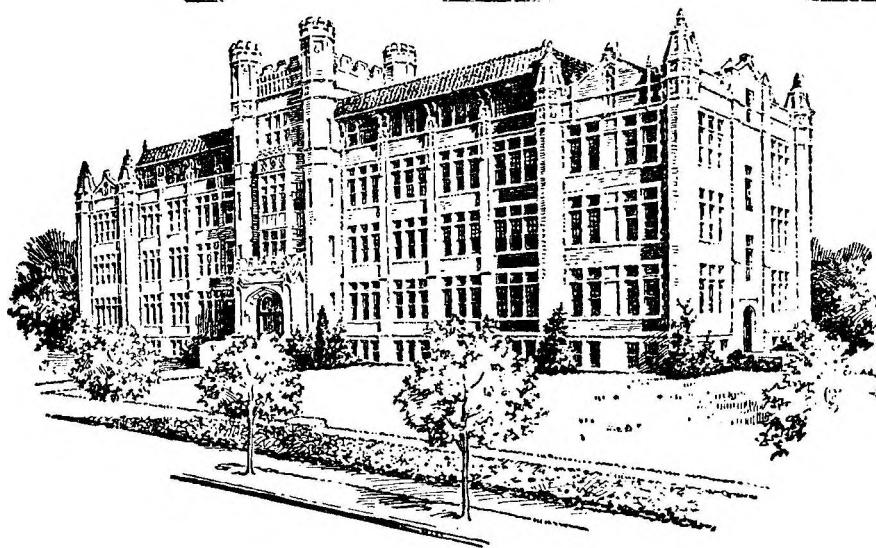
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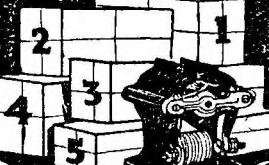
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If we were asking several dollars a copy for "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. So get your copy now. Learn the real facts about the selling profession, and about the tremendous demand for trained salesmen in every line, to fill city and traveling positions paying up to \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year. (Last year this association received calls for over 50,000 N. S. T. A. members from Wholesalers, Manufacturers and Jobbers.) A copy is yours for the asking, and your request entails no obligation. Simply fill out and mail the coupon above. Do it now!

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION

Dept. 581-C, N. S. T. A. Bldg.,
CHICAGO, ILL.

Your Income Multiplied or You Pay Nothing

N. S. T. A. is now offering, to every man who wants to increase his income, an amazing Double Money-Back bond that assures you a definite stipulated addition to your income, within three months after your training is completed—or the course costs you nothing. This daring offer is possible only because of the success of thousands of members. Send coupon immediately for full details.

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Salesmanship is just like any other profession. It has certain fundamental rules and laws—that you must learn as easily as you learned the alphabet. And through the NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION METHOD—an exclusive feature of the N. S. T. A. system of SALESMANSHIP training—you can acquire



Now Free

MAIL COUPON ABOVE

I Offer You \$15 a Day

Make \$15 a day selling this wonderful new household article that has taken the country by storm. It is CED-O-BAG, a moth-proof, damp-proof, dust-proof, germ-proof storage bag for clothes, blankets and furs. It is the greatest, fastest selling household article that has come on the market for years. Every housewife wants one, buys on sight.

CED-O-BAGS are made from rubberized fabric which has been chemically treated. They are patented. Nothing else like them. Instead of a small, easily torn paper bag or a clumsy, expensive cedar chest, a CED-O-BAG provides adequate space for two to four garments. And yet, with all of these distinctive advantages, CED-O-BAGS are priced for quick sale.

Ced-O-Bags Offer Big Profits

There is a chance for you to clean up a lot of money in your town at once just by taking orders for CED-O-BAGS. L. H. Green went out and made a clear profit of \$12 in one afternoon. J. V.

Davis took five orders in one evening and was \$5 richer. Edith Phillips made \$53 in one week's spare time (evenings). You can do as well or better.

No Experience Needed

You don't need experience or training. Every home in your town is a live prospect. All you have to do is show the housewife a CED-O-BAG and take her order. We deliver and collect. You



get your profits at once, and move on to the next house and take another order. Everyone buys.



George Jones took 22 orders in two days' spare time and had a clear profit of \$22. Twenty-one agents report an average profit of \$3 an hour.

How Much Money Do You Want?

Would you like to make an extra \$100 or \$200 a month, in your spare time? Would you like to gather a lump sum of \$500 or \$600 in a couple of months? If you would, here is your chance. Mail me the coupon and I will tell you all about this money-making proposition. I will show you how you can make \$15 a day or more in this easy, pleasant, engaging work. I will show you the way to quick profits—big profits. Mail the coupon now.

C.E. Comer, The Comer Mfg. Co.
Dept. 0-73 - - - - - Dayton, Ohio

Mail This Now

C. E. Comer, The Comer Mfg. Co.,
Dept. 0-73, Dayton, Ohio.

Dear Sir: Please send me full details of your money-making proposition by which I can make \$15 a day in cash. This does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

\$8000ⁱⁿ 4 Months as REAL ESTATE SPECIALIST!

That's what Anthony C. Maurell made after getting my free book. Knew nothing about real estate until he learned my successful system. Men and women—young and old are making big money my way. So can you.

FREE BOOK Tells How

Start at home in spare time. Build immensely profitable business of your own. No capital or experience needed. Send now for full details and positive proof of amazing money-making success. Address President American Business Builders, Inc., Dept. C-22, 18 East 18 St., New York



STOP TOBACCO



Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have. Make yourself free and happy with Tobacco Redeemer. Not a substitute, not habit forming. Write for free booklet telling of the deadly effect of tobacco and the positive, easy way to remove all craving in a few days.

Newell Pharmacal Co.
Dept. 892, Clayton Mo.

FREE
BOOK

WEAK, NERVOUS WOMEN

Rundown, miserable? If you suffer ovarian or bearing down pains, female troubles, irregular or painful periods, write Mrs. Ellen Lowell, social worker, 329 Mass., Kansas City, Mo., for a convenient home method whereby she and many others state they regained healthy, happy womanhood. This advice is free; she has nothing to sell.

Where do YOU want to Grow New Hair?

Decide NOW! Let me cover that spot with new hair in 30 days, or I'll mail you a check—I'll be the LOSER, not you!



WHEN approaching baldness threatens—when hair gets thinner and thinner on the temples, the forehead, the top of your head—that's the time to accept this no risk offer. I positively grow new hair—or you pay NOTHING!

New Hair in 30 Days—Or No Cost!

Thinning hair, falling hair, dandruff, dry scaly scalp—DANGER SIGNALS ALL! Stop delaying. Stop wasting time and money on ordinary salves, massages, tonics and oils, which you know from experience cannot possibly bring worth while results! Save yourself from baldness this quick, easy way—through my iron-clad contract—without risk! For I GUARANTEE to end dandruff—stop falling hair—grow new healthy hair in 30 days—or I don't want a penny of your money!

Why does baldness begin to appear? Why do ordinary tonics fail to help? In most cases of baldness the hair roots are dormant—sleeping through lack of nourishment. And tonics fail to help simply because they treat only the surface skin. To make a tree grow you don't rub "growing fluid" on the bark. You get to the roots. That's the simple secret of my scientific treatment. It goes *beneath* the surface—nourishes dormant roots directly—stimulates them to new activity—encourages quick and healthy growth of new, vigorous hair.

At the Merke Institute, 5th Avenue, New York, many people have paid as high as \$100 for results secured. Now you can secure equally beneficial results at home for only a few cents a day—AT MY RISK. You grow new hair where you need new hair—or I pay, not you!

Coupon Brings FREE BOOK Explaining Treatment Fully!

Some cases of baldness are hopeless. I admit it. But so many thousands have benefited through my remarkable treatment that the facts are certainly worth knowing. Mail coupon for vitally interesting FREE booklet, giving the complete story—and, in addition, telling all about my iron-clad contract, which enables you to take the treatment without a penny's risk. No obligation. Sign and mail the coupon NOW! Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 423, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Allied Merke Institutes, Inc.

Dept. 423, 512 Fifth Ave., New York City.

Please send me—without cost or obligation—in plain wrapper, a copy of your book, "The New Way to Grow Hair," describing the Merke System.

Name.....

(State whether Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Address.....

City.....State.....

(My age is.....)

FREE

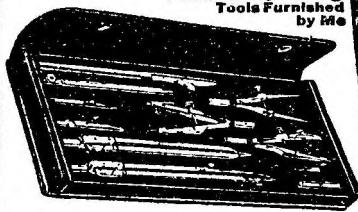
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you would be. If you are 16 years old or
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I will send you free and prepaid a Drafts-
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Write to me. I will send you my new book, Not a catalog. My Pay-Raising Plan and money-making advice. I can prove that men trained by me make \$3,000 to \$9,000 per year. A. H. Bernier makes \$7,000 to \$9,000 a year. In addition to sending you at once, free, my Pay-Raising Plan, I show you about the fine equipped drafting instruments you get as soon as you become a student. You get a compass, a drafting compass, a compass, a drafting table, included in my courses. I train you right for big pay jobs.

Employment Service

After training you I help you get a job without charging you a cent for this service. Employers come to me for men.

Earn While You Learn

I give you special work and tell you how to make money. You can start making extra money soon after begining my training.



**If you earn less than
\$70 a Week
Write to Me
for My Pay-Raising Plan**

Send sketch and get free Rule

ENGINEER DOBE

1951 Lawrence Ave. Div. 14-03 Chicago

*Here is sketch. Send free Pocket Rule, "Successful Drafts-
manship" and "My Pay-Raising Plan" also plan to earn money
while learning and proof of big money paying positions.*

Name..... Age.....

Address.....

Post Office..... State.....

\$351⁰⁰ CLEARED IN ONE DAY

So writes W. H. Adams of Ohio. Letter from California man reports \$11275 sales in three months; New Jersey \$4000 profits in two months; Pa. \$3060 profits in four months. Ira Shook \$365 sales in one day. Bram bought one outfit.

April 5 and 7 more by August. Iwata bought one outfit and 10 more within a year.

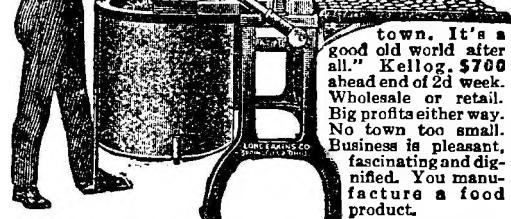
J. R. Bert says "only thing I ever bought

that equaled advertisement." John Culp says: "Everything go-

ing lovely. Crispette wrappers all over

town. It's a good old world after all." Kellogg \$700 ahead end of 2d week. Wholesale or retail. Big profits either way. No town too small. Business is pleasant, fascinating and dignified. You man-

ufacture a food product.



WE START YOU IN BUSINESS

Furnish secret formulas, raw material and equipment. Little capital required; no experience needed.

BUILD A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

No limit to the sale of Crispettes. Everybody likes them. It's a delicious food confection. Write for facts about a business that will make you independent. Start now, in your own town.

PROFITS \$1000 MONTH EASILY POSSIBLE

Send coupon at once for illustrated book of facts. It contains many enthusiastic letters from others — shows their places of business, tells how and when to start, and all information needed. Free. Clip coupon now.

**LONG-
EAKINS CO.,
340 High Street,
Springfield, Ohio**

Please send Book of Facts at once.

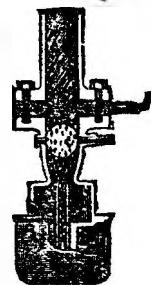
Name.....

Address.....

450 Miles on a Gallon of Gas!

*According to a recent article by the
president of the world's largest motor
research corporation, there is enough
energy in a gallon of gasoline if con-
verted 100% in mechanical energy to
run a four cylinder car 450 miles.*

NEW GAS SAVING INVENTION ASTONISHES CAR OWNERS



A marvelous device, already installed on thousands of cars, has accom-
plished wonders in utilizing a portion
of this waste energy and is producing
mileage tests that seem unbelievable.
Not only does it save gasoline,
but it also creates more power, gives
instant starting, quick pick-up, and
eliminates carbon.

FREE SAMPLE and \$100 a Week

To obtain national distribution quickly, men are being appointed everywhere to help supply the tremendous demand. Free samples furnished to workers. Write today to E. Oliver, Pres., for this free sample and big money making offer.

WHIRLWIND MFG. CO.
999-897 Third St. Milwaukee, Wisc.

I'll Pay Your Bills



and give you a steady income for the rest of your life if you will take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Pleasant easy work can be handled in spare or full time.

No Investment Needed

I furnish all capital—I set you up in business, advertise you, and do everything to make you my successful and respected partner in your locality.

Partner may be either man or woman.

All I ask is that you have ambition and can devote a few hours each day to distributing my famous products to friends and a list of established customers. High grade food products, teas, coffees, spiccs, extracts, things people must have to live.

Your Groceries at Wholesale

As my partner I furnish your groceries at wholesale. Big FREE supply contains over 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Quality backed by \$25.00 bond.

Iron-Clad Guarantee to YOU of \$15 a DAY Steady Income

I don't want you to take any chances. I guarantee your income. Send coupon at once for my signed guarantee of \$100.00 a week for full time or \$3.50 per hour for spare time work. I go 50-50 with my partners and give valuable premiums.

I Furnish You Chrysler Coach



This is part of my FREE outfit to you, Chrysler closed car to use in our business—it is yours to keep—no contest.

C. W. VAN DE MARK, Pres. & Gen. Mgr.

Health-O Quality Products Co.

Dept. 1093-CC

Health-O Bldg.

CINCINNATI, OHIO.

C. 1929 by C. W. V.D. M.

*Easy for you to make big money
I look out for welfare of my partners
\$42.13 in Six Hours*

Jack Foster reports \$42.13 in six hours; Ruth Haufman with no previous experience made \$101.25 her first week. A. Pelletier earned \$117.50 the first five days. Hundreds of other partners doing as well.

**SEND COUPON
AT ONCE for
APPLICATION**

FREE FOOD PRODUCTS COUPON

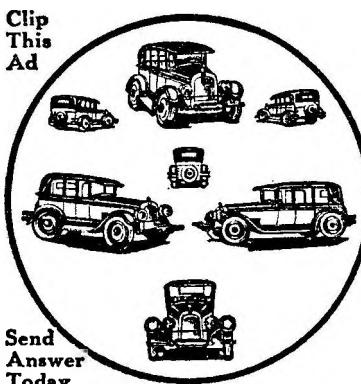
C. W.
Van de Mark
Health-O Quality
Products Co.,
Dept. 1093-CC

Health-O Bldg., Cincinnati, O.

Without obligation on my part, send at once, application for territory and details of partnership offer, free food products.

Name
Address
City State

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This
Ad



Send
Answer
Today

Win Nash Sedan Or \$2,750.00 in Cash

Someone who answers this ad will receive, absolutely free, a fully equipped 7-Passenger, Advanced Six Nash Sedan, or its full value in cash (\$2,000.00). We are also giving away a Dodge Sedan, a Brunswick Phonograph and many other valuable prizes—besides Hundreds of Dollars in Cash. This offer is open to anyone living in the U. S. A. outside of Chicago.

Solve This Puzzle

There are 7 cars in the circle. By drawing 3 straight lines you can put each one in a space by itself. When you do this send me your answer right away.

\$750.00 Extra for Promptness

In addition to the many valuable prizes and Hundreds of Dollars in Cash, we are also giving a Special Prize of \$750.00 in Cash for Promptness. First prize winner will receive \$2,750.00 in cash, or the Nash Sedan and \$750.00 in cash. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded each one tying. Solve the puzzle right away and send me your answer together with your name and address plainly written. \$4,500.00 in prizes—EVERYBODY REWARDED.

John T. Adams, Mgr. Dept. 1423 323 S. Peoria St., Chicago, Ill.

See the World FREE!



Taste Romance and Adventure In the Far Lands of the Earth

How often you've longed to see for yourself the awe of Egypt's pyramids—the beauties of the gorgeous Mediterranean sunset—the splendor of China's ancient cities!

Spend a few years, or the rest of your life, tasting high adventure on the seven seas and in all the world's great ports—roving the earth's highways and byways! You can do it **FREE**—all your expenses paid—and earn a good salary besides!

Only one profession will carry you around the world at will, travelling like a gentleman, but that's the most interesting and pleasant work there is—**Radio Operating!** Easily and quickly learned, there's no other profession like it for the man who wants the experiences and pleasures of world-travel. Radio operators are needed—all sea-going ships like the one shown here must carry from one to half a dozen or more.



Take a Look Beyond the Skyline Without a Penny's Expense

Radio operators aboard ocean liners live luxuriously—they rank as officers of the ship. Meals, a private cabin, all other living needs are furnished free, and besides the operator draws a good salary. You can learn quickly and easily at home in your spare time to be a Radio operator through our practical training methods. Take a look at the **FREE BOOK** which tells how—mail coupon below.

This U. S. Government-recognized school has been training successful operators since 1914. Our graduates are all over the world. We maintain an Employment Department to put you on your own ship. The famous NACOMETEK, patented home code teacher given our students is recognized as the best and easiest way to learn the Radio code at home. A few short months, with the aid of the famous Nacometer and our quick home training, and you too can be a fully qualified Radio operator, sitting in your cabin like the one shown above, bound out for Liverpool or Nagasaki!

Read the **Free Book** that tells all about this fascinating profession and our practical Government-recognized methods of training you for it. Send coupon **TODAY**—no obligation. Special tuition offer now on, includes the Nacometer, famous code teaching machine. Find out what Radio offers you. Act at once.

NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

SPECIAL OFFER COUPON

National Radio Institute,
Dept. 8-PX, Washington, D. C.

Gentlemen: Without obliging me in any way send me your free book and information about your Nacometer, the Home Code teaching machine given with your course.

Name.....

Address.....

Test your Ability to DRAW

You may have artistic ability that when properly trained, would insure your success as a commercial artist. Send for our Art Ability Questionnaire which tests your natural sense of design, proportion, color, perspective, etc. Learn if your talent is worth developing. Your Questionnaire will be graded by Federal instructors, and you will be frankly told what your score is.

Federal Students Make Good Incomes

This fascinating free test has been an eye opener to many Federal School students—girls as well as men—who are making \$2000, \$4000, \$5000 and \$8000 yearly. Learn at home in spare time. The Federal Course

contains lessons by leading artists, gives you *personal criticism*, and leads rapidly to practical work. By all means get this free test—send now for your Questionnaire. State age and occupation.

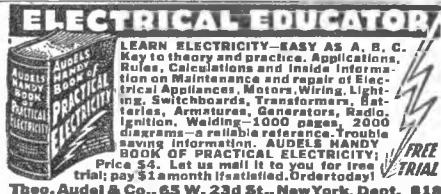
Federal School
of Commercial
Designing
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Your chance to get the education you want in spare time. Now, easy, fascinating questions and answer method. Endorsed by 12,000 High School Teachers. Equivalent to regular 4-year course. Certificate awarded. Write for **FREE Book, "New Way to Get a High School Education at Home," TODAY.** High School Home Study Bureau, Dept. 813, 31 Union Square, N. Y. C.

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LEARN ELECTRICITY EASY AS A, B, C. Learn to theory and practical applications, Rules, Calculations and Inside Information on Maintenance and repair of Electrical Appliances, Motors, Wiring, Lighting, Switchboards, Transformers, Batteries, Ignition, Welding—1000 pages, 2000 diagrams—a reliable reference. Trouble Saving Information. AUDELL HAND BOOK OF PRACTICAL ELECTRICITY. Price \$4. Let us mail it to you for free trial; pay \$1 a month if satisfied. Order today!

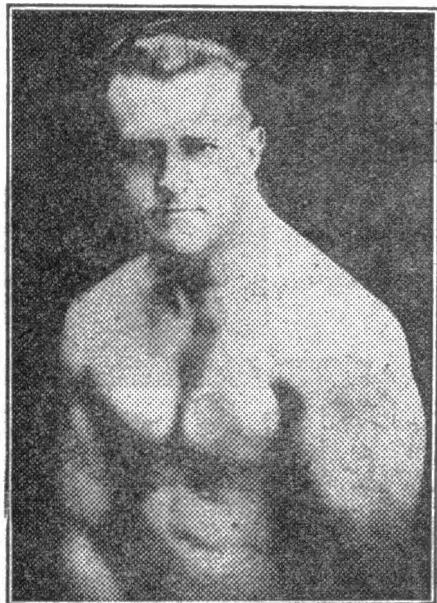
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Your opportunity will never be bigger than your preparation. Prepare now and reap the rewards of early success. Free 64-Page Books Tell How. Write NOW for book you want, or mail coupon with your name, present position and address in margin today.

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EARLE LIEDERMAN—The Muscle Builder
Author of "Muscle Building," "Science of Wrestling,"
"Secrets of Strength," "Hero's Health," "Endurance," Etc.

What Do Women Want Most?

Women want he-men for their husbands and sweethearts. None of this chorus-man stuff for the real girl. She wants to be proud of his physical make-up; proud of his figure in a bathing suit. She knows that it's the fellow that is full of pep and vitality that gets ahead in this world. He's got the physical backbone to back-up the mental decisions he makes. He'll win out every time.

Look Yourself Over!

How do you shape up? Are you giving yourself a square deal? Have you got those big rolling muscles that mean health and strength inside and out? The vitality that gives you the ambition to win out at everything you start? Make that girl admire you first and foremost for a real he-man, and the hardest part da winzing her is over.

I Can Give It to You in 30 Days

In 30 days I can give you over so that she will hardly know you. I'll put a whole inch of solid muscle on each arm in 30 days, and two whole inches of rippling strength across your chest. I've done it for over a hundred thousand others, and I can do it for you. I don't care how weak and puny you are. I like to get them weak and puny, because it's the hopeless cases that I work with best. It gives me a lot of real joy just to see them develop and the surprised look in their eyes when they step before the mirror at the end of 30 days and see what a miracle I have worked for them.

You'll Be a He-Man from Now On!

And it's no temporary layer of muscle I put on you. It's there to stay! With those newly broadened shoulders; that perfect neck and great manly chest, you can maintain your self-respect in any society. Every woman will know that you are what every man should be—a forceful red-blooded he-man.

I Want You for 90 Days

If at the end of 30 days you think you have improved, wait till you see yourself at the end of 90 days. Then the friends you thought were strong will seem like children by comparison. I'm not called the Muscle Builder for nothing. My system scientifically builds real muscle faster than you ever imagined.

Watch Them Turn Around

Notice how every woman prefers the fellow who carries himself with head up. Notice how the broad-shouldered man always gets their eye. They want a dependable he-man when they make their choice—one who can protect them. And you can be that man.

Send for My New 64 Page Book

"Muscular Development"—It Is Free

And it's the peppiest piece of reading you ever laid your eyes on. And there's 48 full-page photos of myself and some of my prize-winning pupils. This is the finest art gallery of strong men ever assembled. Look them over. If you don't get a kick out of this book, you had better roll over—you're dead. Come on, then. Take out the old pen or pencil and sign your name and address to the coupon. If you haven't a stamp, a postal will do. But snap into it. Do it now.

EARLE LIEDERMAN, Dept. 3003, 305 Broadway, New York City

Earle Liederman, Dept. 3003 305 Broadway, New York City

Dear Sir: Please send me, absolutely FREE and without any obligation on my part whatever, a copy of your latest book, "Muscular Development."

Name.....Age.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

(Please write or print plainly)



Grocery Bills all Paid—and \$10 a Day besides

If you want plenty of money to pay all your grocery bills—and \$8 to \$10 in a day besides—just send me your name and I'll show you a new, easy way to get it. I'll give you the same chance I gave to Van Allen, of Illinois, who reports that he averages more than \$100 profit a week. You don't need any experience. G. Karnath, of Minnesota, writes, "Made \$20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. Hodges, of New York, says, "Never fail to make a profit of \$18 to \$20 a day." And right now I offer you the same opportunity I gave these people.

Big Profits for Easy Work

I am President of a million dollar Company. I distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. Last year my customers bought fifteen million packages of my products. This put nearly two million dollars in the pockets of my Representatives. Now I invite you to share in these profits. I'll give you exclusive territory—help you make big money from the very start.

No Capital or Experience Needed

All you have to do is call on your friends and my established customers and take care of their orders. It is easy. I never sell to stores. You alone get the profit on all orders from your territory. YOU DON'T RISK A CENT. Keep your present job and start in spare time if you want to. You have everything to gain—not a penny to lose.

Don't send me any money—just mail the coupon. I'll send you my amazing new plan that offers plenty of money to pay all your grocery bills and \$8 to \$10 in a single day besides. And I will tell you how to get a newest model Ford Tudor Sedan without cost. Don't miss this opportunity. Mail coupon TODAY SURE.

MAIL THIS TODAY

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
1203 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Tell me, without cost or obligation, about your wonderful new proposition that offers money to pay all my grocery bills and \$8 to \$10 in a day besides. Also explain your new Ford Offer.

Name

Address

.....@ A. P. Co. (Print or Write Plainly)

"What? Learn Music by Mail?" they laughed



"Yes," I cried, "and I'll bet money I can do it!"

ONE day after lunch the office crowd was in the recreation room, smoking and talking, while I thumbed through a magazine.

"Why so quiet, Joe," some one called to me. "Just reading an ad," I replied, "about a new way to learn music by mail. Says here any one can learn to play in a few months at home, without a teacher. Sounds easy."

"Ha, ha," laughed Fred Lawrence, "do you suppose they would say it was hard?"

"Perhaps not," I came back, a bit peeved, "but it sounds so reasonable, I thought I'd write them for their booklet."

Well, maybe I didn't get a razzing then! Fred Lawrence sneered: "The poor fellow really believes he can learn music by mail!"

"Yes, and I'll bet money I can do it!" I cried. But the crowd only laughed harder than ever.

During the few months that followed, Fred Lawrence never missed a chance to give me a sly dig about my bet. And the boys always got a good laugh too. But I never said a word. I was waiting patiently for a chance to get the last laugh myself.

My Chance Arrives

Then came the office outing at Pine Grove. After lunch it rained, and we had to sit around inside. Suddenly some one spied a piano in the corner. Fred Lawrence saw a fine chance to have some fun at my expense.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "our friend Joe, the music-master, has consented to give us a recital."

That gave the boys a good laugh. Some of them got on either side of me and with mock dignity started to escort me to the piano.

"Play 'The Varsity Drag,'" shouted Fred, thinking to embarrass me further. I heard a girl say, "Oh, let the poor fellow alone; can't you see he's mortified to death?"

The Last Laugh

I smiled to myself. This was certainly a wonderful setting for my little surprise party. Assuming a scared look, I began fingering the keys, and then . . . with a wonderful feeling of cool confidence . . . I broke right into the very selection Fred asked for. There was a sudden hush in the room as I made that old piano talk. But in a few minutes a fellow jumped to his feet and shouted, "Believe me, the boy is there! Let's dance!"

Tables and chairs were pushed aside, and soon the whole crowd was having a whale of a time. I played one peppy selection after another, until I finished with "Crazy Rhythms," and the room stopped dancing and singing to applaud me. As I turned around to thank them, there was Fred holding a temptat right under my nose.

"Folks," he said, "I want to apologize to Joe. I bet he couldn't learn to play by mail, and believe me, he sure deserves to win the money!"

"Learn to play by mail!" exclaimed a dozen people. "That sounds impossible! Tell us how you did it!"

I was only too glad to tell them how I'd always wanted to play but couldn't afford a teacher, and couldn't think of spending years in practice. I described how I had read the U. S. School of Music ad, and how Fred bet me I couldn't learn to play by mail.

"Folks," I continued, "it was the biggest surprise of my life when I got the first

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Loophole of Saddleback

By **Robert J. Horton**
Author of "Red and True," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CRAPS.

THE yellow light from hanging lamps glinted on the piles of gold and silver stacked about the crap table. It arched in an iridescent rainbow above the polished glasses on the back bar, gleamed in the long mirror, struggled bravely through the veils of smoke over the card tables, shone into the dusty streets of Saddleback that late arrivals might know The Mint was open in the wee hours of the morning, as well as night and day.

"C'mon, yere dice! I want a fruit farm, d'ye hear? I'm tired of chasin' dogies. I crave peace an' quiet, an' apples an' plums, in Wash-in'-ton!"

The speaker, young, tall and bronzed, hazel-eyed, rough-clad, rubbed the spotted cubes between his palms and against his chaps before he flipped them dexterously down the worn, green pathway. "Read 'em an' weep aplenty!"

The dice bounded against the foot-board of the table, jumped back, rolled, and settled with three mocking black dots showing the score.

"Craps!" came the chagrined cry of the shooter. "It maybe just ain't Loophole's night. An' now—an' now!"

The player gathered the ivories, rattled them in his left hand, while he put down a stack of gold pieces with his right, and waved his hand to complete the operation. "Double the bet!" he sang. "Shoot the chunk! Oh, sweet sarsaparilla! Pretty little dice, nice little dice, be good to the Loophole, dice. Here she goes, boys—all set? I'm a roarin' hyena when I start. Get down—all down? Whoopee!"

Again the flashing cubes shot from his hand, rattled on the table, smacked against the board, ricocheted to the center.

"Seven she is!" "Loophole" Adams swept off his hat in triumph. "Look 'em over, boys, while the man's paying. Seven she be, an' seven she is. Pass number one, the first, an' a few trees for the fruit farm. I quit workin' cows here an' now on this bright September evening. Let 'er ride! I'm just startin', gents; just shakin' my rope out to clean up. Obey the Loophole, dices. Let's have eleven for a change, honey birds. Show the boys. All set? They're off!"

The dice bounced on their way and the number asked for showed brilliantly black when they came to rest. The crowd laughed and the players at other tables frowned as turmoil greeted the feat.

"As they lay!" exulted Loophole. "Just as I called 'em, boys. All square an' away for Sunday. More trees! Who's fadin' for how much? I'm steppin', for it's my night to howl. The chunk goes. Wish I had more. Got to water the trees, boys. Here goes to water the trees. Obey the master, pretty dices. All set? Now read 'em—read 'em, boys—"

His voice was stilled as the dice tumbled and came to a stop with six points showing top-side.

"An easy point!" cried the irresponsible gambler, reaching out.

But the houseman halted his move.

"Try these," he said, tossing a fresh pair of dice on the table and retrieving the others.

"Lookit!" shouted gay Loophole. "He changes 'em on two passes, boys. He's scared. His feet are cold! Watch me freeze 'em. C'mon, dice! All four stacks on the throw! A five an' an ace—two treys—a four an' a deuce. Three ways, boys, an' watch the Loophole make 'em mind. Apples an' plums in Wash-in'-ton an' the wild dogs chew Montana! What do they say?"

He bent over the table again as the dice went spinning. Two treys came up and the resort rang with shouts of glee.

"What'd I say?" boomed Loophole. "Measure 'em out, banker; size 'em up. Eight stacks of sizzlin', yaller twenties. Water for the trees, and I'll never have to steal no hosses no more! Three passes is good for four. Now dice, o-bey yore lover-boy. Let's start all over with a natural. A natural for the fourth, dice; a natural for the fourth. Who's in, who's out—here goes!"

Spectators and players alike bent forward and craned their necks as Loophole shot. For the second time he rolled a seven and the crowd danced and cheered as he began pocketing the gold pieces.

"Four times an' out," he announced. "Next man's bones. I won't pinch an' I've got a hunch those new berries have a little craps cached in the hole. Fair winnings is fair keepings. The drinks'll be on my ticket for them as can walk to the counter. It looks like an open winter. So long, an' so be it. All ready—"

"Oh, shut up!"

This came from a player at one of the card tables, but when Loophole whirled about not a player was looking up. A stillness descended upon the large room. A man lounging against the bar spoke in a cool, steady, soothing voice.

"Take it easy, Loophole, you were

getting a bit boisterous, an' winners can afford to be charitable."

Loophole glared at the speaker. "You keep out of this, Raymond," he said coldly. "These ain't all my friends here, and I reckon I can pick out the skunk who pulled that raw remark." His eyes shifted to the tables where the players were taking notice of this new turn in events.

"I reckon it was you, Bemis," he said next, scowling with uncertainty. "It's yore style."

Most of those in the place looked at a man sitting near the stove in the middle of the room. He was evidently a spectator at a near-by game. His small, brown eyes seemed shot with a glimmer of yellow light; like a cat's eyes, they were. He was thin-faced, slender, his leathery skin much wrinkled. A mean smile parted his thin, bloodless lips. He looked at Loophole Adams with contempt, but he spoke to the man whom the dice player had called Raymond.

"You this fellow's guardian, Raymond?" he asked in a quiet tone. "If you are, you'd better sew up his mouth. He's going to bite his fresh tongue off one of these days, opening it to talk at the wrong time."

"I don't mind bein' joked or told to shut up," said Loophole hotly, "but it depends on the tone of the voice that says it."

"If I say it," said Bemis slowly, "it goes no matter what tone I use. Ask your friend at the bar there. Tell him, Raymond."

"Are you talking to Adams or spilling something for my benefit?" asked Raymond, looking at Bemis steadily.

Bemis moved nervously in his chair. "I'm talking for his benefit," he snapped out; "but he's too big a fool to see it."

A white-haired man of medium height and slender build had slipped along behind the bar from a room in the rear. He touched Raymond on the

sleeve, and the look in his eyes silenced Loophole. "I won't have any trouble in here, an' I can't have the play interfered with," he said meaningly to Raymond. Then to Adams: "Come in the office a minute, Loophole."

Apparently, he knew his command would be obeyed, for he turned back toward the rear room. He paused in the doorway. "Don't pack any chips on your shoulder in here, Bemis," he said sharply.

Loophole grumbled, wet his lips, caught a glance from Raymond, and started after the white-haired man, with a shrug of his shoulders.

In the small room which served as the office of The Mint, he found the older man seated at a roll-top desk. "Close the door," came the order. Loophole did as he was told and sat down scowling. He saw that the look in the eyes of the man at the desk had changed.

"Did it ever occur to you that I have enough trouble running this place without you coming in here, shooting off your mouth an' trying to start something?"

"Now, look here, Parker, it seems to me that the man you want to talk to is that danged Bemis," Loophole complained.

"But I'm talking to you, Adams," said Parker curtly. "You got that name of Loophole by being smart with a slick tongue an' then always finding a loophole to crawl through one way or the other when things got too hot for you. You can't side-step anything with me."

"I'm not tryin' to—"

"Oh, yes, you are," Parker broke in. "I can read you like a faro layout. You're wide open an' you've been that way all your life. You've started a hundred times but you've never finished. You're always glad to have somebody around to help you find a loophole. Tonight it was Raymond. You know it's bad medicine to get Raymond mixed up in anything."

"He didn't have to butt in," growled Adams.

"Maybe he thought the other way. But he did butt in, an' so did I. If it hadn't been for the two of us, Bemis would most likely have rode you out of town on pistol dust. You savvy? Bemis is bad. Raymond is worse. I'd be the goat. Loophole, you can't play cards, or shoot dice, or gamble at anything else in here any more. You're just about as bad as siwashed."

"Now, Dave Parker, that ain't fair."

"I've said it." Parker nodded with an air of finality. "I've said it, an' you heard me. An' what I say in my own place goes."

"To-night's the first time I've had a winning in a year," said Adams bitterly. "An' now it's craps again."

"Your winning hasn't a thing to do with it," said Parker. "What you've won wouldn't be a kernel in a cornfield compared to what I've got to lose—only I'm not aiming to lose much to speak of. It's here for those who can get it. If you'd lost, I'd have told you the same thing an' returned what you was out. I've had this in mind since the last time you broke out. That stunt nearly brought the law down on us. I've had complaints."

"No doubt," sneered Adams. "What man in yore business wouldn't have complaints. But you've never heard me crawfish."

"Because you've never had anything to crawfish about. You've been lucky. I expect complaints, but I don't propose to have any more rolling in on your account. Your dad an' your sister are half sore at me now, just because you come in here. I wouldn't shut you out of the place, but if you never should come in here again, you'd never hear a peep out of me. I'm putting it as nice as I can, Loophole."

"Which is the same thing," said Adams wryly, rising. "It's a dirty trick, an' you know it."

"There's a lot of people on this north range that'll tell you I never knowingly did a dirty trick to anybody they ever heard of," said Parker dryly. "Your dad is one of 'em."

"An' I suppose Raymond is another," Loophole blurted, with a dark look. "He's snugging up to the old man because of Bess. I'll toss a wrench into the machinery quick enough. I've had his number for a long time. He's been here since last summer, an' what does he do? Gamble an' spend money, an' let 'em hang a reputation on him for bein' a gun expert because he's beat a couple of toads to the draw. He's slick."

Parker was nodding patiently. "He is that, Loophole. But don't tangle with him. I'll tell you confidentially it might be a good thing to keep him on your side. Take a tip from me, Loophole."

Adams shifted uneasily on his feet. There was an honest look in Parker's blue eyes—mild, blue eyes that could flash cold as steel when he was aroused. It did not comfort the young man in his present frame of mind to remember that Dave Parker had been known as an honest gambler when the town of Saddleback had comprised a general store, one saloon, a livery, and half a dozen log houses. "Two-faced," he tried to tell himself, but when he looked at the old man again he realized the conviction would not stick.

"I'm goin' home," he said abruptly and turned to the door.

"Don't forget that I'm your friend, no matter how you feel about it," said Parker softly.

"I heard you say it," Loophole retorted, going out.

He stopped at the bar for a drink. Raymond was not there. He saw Bemis looking on at the game by the stove. Those in the place were again intent upon their own business. The bartender was affable. It was as if nothing had happened. Loophole

Adams downed his liquor, paid his score, and left by the front entrance, the weight of the gold in his pockets compensation somewhat for the feeling of humiliation in his heart.

CHAPTER II.

GUMBO AND GUNS.

IT was clear and cool, with a big moon hanging low in the sky in the west. The night wind had died, but there was a suggestion of the morning breeze which would freshen with dawn. The air was faintly perfumed with the scent of sere grasses and turning leaves, for it was the beginning of Indian summer.

But the soft beauty of the hour preceding the break of day was lost upon Loophole Adams. He was not merely angry and disgruntled; he was obsessed by a thought that he had put aside more than once. This vexing thought was nothing more or less than the realization that he was not sure of himself in an emergency. He could not depend upon his reactions to danger, to insult, to friendly nagging. Yet he could not curb the turbulent spirit which led him so often into difficulties. As he walked up the street in the dust to the livery barn, with the towering shadow of Saddleback Butte behind it, an entirely new thought-trend was born in his brain. It was such a startling diagnosis of his ailment that it gave him pause, and he stood, thinking, in the door of the barn.

A man came toward him from the shadowy interior, carrying a lantern.

"I want my hoss right away," Loophole ordered, thinking the man was the liveryman.

"Your horse is ready," said the man, hanging the lantern on a peg.

Loophole started and his brows puckered. "How'd you know I was goin' home, Raymond?" he demanded. "An it ain't necessary for you to look after my hoss."

"I had to saddle my own," said Ray-

mond, "an' thought I might as well saddle yours. I figured you'd be sloping out for the Half Circle A."

"Yeah? Where you goin'?" Loophole blurted.

"I'm trailing along with you," said Raymond patiently.

"Yes, you are! Think maybe I've forgot the way home? Mighty funny how you an' Parker want to look after me all of a sudden. Fact, there's lots of things funny 'bout you in particular. You're not ridin' any or a-tall with me an'—"

"Listen," Raymond interrupted, very quietly but forcibly. "You're packing a neat sum in gold in your pockets, Loophole, an' this town is famous for men who need money an' who have a way of getting it. It's better I went along. I've nothing else to do an' I'm going stale in this town this a way."

"Want to protect me," sneered Loophole. "That's one for the book. Want to tell the old man I made a winning an' you hoofed along to see nobody stopped me. That's one side of it. But I know why you want to trail along. You'll jump at any excuse to get out to the ranch to see Bess. I'll queer yore game, mister buckaroo with nuthin' to do. I'll see yore hide on a fence before I'll take any help from you."

"There's no use standing here talking," said Raymond, with a trace of irritation. "I don't have to have any excuse to go out to the Half Circle A any time. I'm always welcome, an' you know that as well as I do. It happens I hanker to go out this morning. You can't shake me off, so there's no use arguing. Get your horse."

Loophole hesitated, caught himself as he was yielding. There it was again. Always being easily led; always blustering around and taking orders from somebody; always taking the easiest way out. Indecision! Side-stepping! Twenty-four—going on twenty-five—years old and still a kid. How about

that idea that had come to him on the way to the barn? Why not try it out now? But, pshaw!—with what good reason? Raymond was bringing his horse from a stall and Loophole went after his own. He would think this thing over on the way to the ranch.

As he swung into the saddle he asked Raymond a single question. "Say, bodyguard, was it Beinis who called out when I quit the crap game?"

"No," Raymond answered shortly.

They rode out under the dimming stars and turned eastward. Loophole set the pace, a stiff lope, and they went on into the dawn, neither speaking a word. Loophole was turning his idea over and over in his mind. Dave Parker's statement that he had started a hundred times and had never finished once, rankled. Loophole knew it to be true. His face reddened with the thought and he stole a furtive look at Raymond. What did Raymond, an adventurer of the high trail, think of him? With a burning sense of shame Loophole realized that Raymond tolerated him, tried to help him, doubtless pitied him, because of his sister. The tall, lanky youth's teeth clicked shut. "I might as well get wised up to myself while I'm at it," he muttered. He saw Raymond looking at him, and he flushed despite himself. Then he drove in his spurs and led the way to the timbered banks of Muddy Creek, with Raymond thundering behind and the red rim of the sun swimming in the eastern haze.

Loophole had been about right in his conclusion as to what Raymond thought of him. Raymond felt sorry for him. He rather liked the strong, lanky Loophole, because the youth simply did not seem to understand how to get on. He would put his foot in it without intending to do so. He was too credulous. He trusted people too easily and depended altogether too much on his luck. It could be called nothing else. Raymond did not believe Loophole was stupid; he

did not think that the youth was actually a coward. It was just a reluctance to meet an issue squarely, decide a thing for all time, in other words, finish. But Raymond was compelled to admit to himself that if it were not for Bess Adams he would not have the slightest interest in her brother.

Meanwhile, Loophole's thoughts raced to the rhythm of his horse's hoofs. His idea was developing into a plan. He had got wise to himself, he thought. And, strange to say, he was considering things very much as Raymond was considering them. He knew fellows who were quiet but tough. They were dangerous at times. He knew others who were boisterous and tough, but they were apt to bluff or back down. He would have to cut out shooting off his mouth so much, he decided; but more than anything else, he would have to start something—anything—and for once he would have to finish. After that, finishing would become a habit.

With this conclusion arrived at, Loophole again became cheerful. He felt himself ready for anything that might happen, and it was a new feeling. It gave him confidence. He looked at Raymond with a scowl, although he secretly admired and envied him. Raymond was lightning with his gun. Well, he was not so slow himself; but he would have to improve. He needed practice. Being known as a gunman, even as a mild one, was an asset. The average man would steer clear of a pistol expert. And Raymond was a good gambler. Loophole remembered that at no time had he ever heard Raymond speak above an undertone when he was playing. He would follow this example. Then the youth remembered that Dave Parker had forbidden him to play in The Mint. His former feeling of humiliation and anger returned tenfold on the instant. The hazel eyes grew dark. He had it. He would start and finish at The Mint!

They rode out of the trees, and Loophole led Raymond at a fast clip over a long patch of baked gumbo mud. It was a short cut which could be used only in dry weather. He let his fast sorrel out for every bit of speed the animal could muster. He was a good rider, astride an excellent steed. He glanced back gleefully over his left shoulder and watched Raymond, saving his horse, drop behind. Then he again plunged into the trees on the trail along the creek. He preferred this to the open prairie trail because it was mostly used during the summer and fall as it offered shade. And it was packed hard.

He crossed a meadow, dashed again into the timber, thundered into an open space as a shadow darted over his head. His horse swerved as a noose struck its neck. Two horsemen rode out from the screen of trees, came alongside of him, crowded in. Loophole jerked out his gun. They had tried to rope him!

"Don't try to use it, kid!" came the sharp command.

The riders were masked. Loophole knew it was a holdup. But Raymond must be coming close behind. He could drop one of the bandits, take his chances with the other. Would they dare to kill him? His gun rested against his chaps. The rider on his right closed in and the gun was knocked from his grasp.

"Get down!"

The horses had come to a stop. Loophole was looking into two guns. He slipped from his saddle, and in a moment one of the men had dismounted. Acting under curt instructions, Loophole allowed his coat, with its pockets laden with gold, to be removed. Swift, capable hands groped in his other pockets, bringing forth treasure. Loophole never spoke a word. He was fixing the voice of the leader in his mind.

Suddenly, there was a pound of hoofs behind them. The gun of the bandit

who sat his horse cracked sharply. Another gun spat a leaden messenger, and the outlaw's hat went sailing. He raked his horse's flanks with the steel and disappeared into the trees. Loophole's heart seemed in his throat. The second outlaw was standing, holding up his hands. Loophole went cold with the reaction as Raymond, his face calm, flung himself from his horse, sheathed his gun, and stripped the mask from the holdup's face.

"A third-grader," said Raymond contemptuously. "Knew it from the way you worked. A common bar-fly, an' a bum at that! On your way," he commanded sternly. "Go anywhere as long as it's a hundred miles from Saddleback. I can scent a skunk that far!"

He threw Loophole's coat on the ground, deliberately turning his back on the outlaw. "Leave your gun where it lays," he ordered. "Shell out your pockets into that coat." He took out tobacco and papers while the man complied. When the operation had been completed, Raymond spoke two words.

"Get going!"

Loophole had watched as if in a daze. He did not know the man. From Raymond's talk he surmised that he was a hanger-on from The Mint. But it had all been so commonplace, so easy. He laid it to Raymond's reputation. As the outlaw was riding away, Loophole stooped and picked up his own weapon.

His companion scowled at him.

"Why didn't you use it?" Raymond asked sharply.

"There were two of them," Loophole explained lamely, getting down on one knee to pick up the gold that was heaped on the coat. He thrust this in his trousers pockets, took up the heavy coat and donned it. When he looked at Raymond his face was burning. It had happened again. He had been beaten as usual at the show-down. The sight of Raymond, coolly lighting a cigarette, angered him.

"Why didn't you shoot that other one down?" he demanded.

"Why didn't you shoot yourself?" Raymond countered. "Why should I be bothered with making explanations?"

"An' you let one go," Loophole accused.

"Why not? What was I to do with him? Take him back to Saddleback an' say, 'This gent tried to hold that Loophole up?'" Raymond laughed scornfully. "Wouldn't I look sweet? An' what good would it do? As it is, he won't come back aroun' here."

"How do you know he won't?"

"Because he knows I meant business," Raymond replied quietly.

"I suppose you know who the other man was?" Loophole conjectured.

"Yes. That man was Bemis."

Loophole's eyes popped. "I knew it!" he cried. "Couldn't just place his voice. Wasn't lookin', what with thinkin' so hard. Sure, it was Bemis. You let Bemis get away with it. Think he's a high-order, I suppose."

"He had brains enough to stay on his horse," said Raymond dryly. "An' he didn't shoot again after I knocked his hat off. He let the other fellow be the goat, which is what he played him for from the start. You've got a lot to learn, Loophole."

"An' you've got some queer ways," barked Loophole savagely, turning to his horse. "The country would be well off to be rid of a couple of rats like that." He put his left foot in the stirrup and swung up. "You know what they say about a worm turning."

Raymond laughed and caught up his reins. "You calling yourself a worm, Loophole?" he taunted.

The lanky youth's face went white. "I reckon it's just because you naturally don't know the how of things," said Raymond as he mounted. "What you need is a good spanking!"

Loophole's blood seemed to freeze; then it boiled.

Raymond looked at him from under arched brows. "If you ever say anything about *me* aroun' the ranch, I'll give you what you're looking for!" he warned.

Loophole suddenly calmed. His eyes narrowed, and he smiled. The whole play was as plain as day to him now. It had started in The Mint. Raymond had framed it with Bemis and the other rider to hold him up. He had held back purposely on the ride out so that Bemis and the hanger-on could stage the robbery. Then he had appeared on the scene and acted as he had in order to humiliate and cow him, Loophole. Would Bemis have missed his shot or have fled so precipitantly if it had not all been arranged in advance? And the cowering of his assistant. The man had overplayed his part! It was a raw frame-up to try to scare him, Loophole, into putting in a good word, perhaps, for Raymond at the ranch. Why, it was crude! Probably everything Raymond had pulled around Saddleback had been framed. It was a scheme. Then Loophole had it! Raymond was an outlaw himself!

"Let's go," he said to Raymond in a queer voice.

Raymond fell in behind, puzzled by Loophole's manner, wondering at the look in his eyes. For once he could not conjecture what was going on in the lanky youth's mind.

From behind a clump of willows on the bank of the creek, Bemis watched them go.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD RANCHER.

THE Half Circle A ranch buildings were located in the fertile bottoms of a great bend in the river. They were substantially built and kept in excellent repair. The whole place bore an air of prosperity. The cottonwoods which formed the windbreak were tall and old

and held the ferocity of the blizzards in check. The barns and hay sheds were ample, the bunk house large. The big, rambling ranch house was as solid as Sherman Adams himself.

Something of all this occurred to Loophole as they rode down from the benchland. His mother was dead. He was co-heir to all this, and thousands of head of cattle as well as the broad acres, with his sister, Bess. Yet, somehow, he seemed to realize his place in the world more fully this cool, sunlit morning than ever before. The idea of the heir to the Half Circle A being siwashed in a gambling joint! What would his father say? For that matter, why say anything about it? And let Raymond break the news?

When they rode into the courtyard, he called curtly to a man in the barn to take their horses. "Reckon there'll be something to eat in the bunk house," he said carelessly to Raymond.

Raymond did not answer as he waved the barnman aside, saying he would look after the horses alone. The strange, new attitude on the part of the youth nonplused him, made him feel a rank outsider despite the fact that Sherman Adams had become his friend. For a few moments Raymond felt a hot surge of anger. Loophole Charley Adams was a fool! If there was anything Raymond could not stand, it was a nincompoop, and such he believed young Adams to be.

Sherman Adams, massive, white-haired, ruddy-cheeked, and gray-eyed, sat in a huge chair before the slumbering fire in his living room. He made no move as his son came into the house, though he heard him ordering breakfast in a gruff voice and grumbling at the salutation of his sister. The old stockman knocked the cold ashes out of his pipe, filled the bowl carefully from loose tobacco in a side coat pocket, and lighted it thoughtfully. Something had happened. It was perceptible

in the tone his son used. Two men had ridden down from the bench, and Adams, glancing out the window, had caught a glimpse of the second rider who he thought was Raymond. Strange that Raymond should come to the ranch with Charley, since there had always seemed to be a barrier of cool reserve between the two. Adams listened for Raymond's step upon the porch and when it did not come he became more thoughtful. He waited patiently while his son ate his breakfast.

Loophole entered the living room rolling a cigarette. He looked keenly at the stern face of his father, whose steady eyes put a question. He snapped a match into flame and touched the light to his cigarette.

"Dave Parker barred me from playin' in his dive this mornin'," he said in a belligerent voice, tossing the match into the fire.

Sherman Adams took his pipe from his mouth. "I was wondering what kind of a turn your fool visit would take," he said. "Dave don't bar men unless they're crooked, or drunk, or making a nuisance of themselves. Guess you must come under the last category."

"So he thought," said Loophole, his frown deepening. "Maybe I did talk too much. I'm not makin' any excuses, but I happened to win this mornin' Maybe I'd be more popular than I am with the old fossil if I lost more. I thought a rat named Bemis told me to shut up, an' I jumped him. This Raymond an' old Parker horned in an' I got the siwash news from Parker in his office afterwards."

"What did Bemis do when you lit into him?" asked the rancher, his gaze growing cold.

"Shot off his mouth," Loophole evaded. "An' then this Raymond an' Parker got busy. Didn't want any trouble in the place, Parker said. He told me flat that you an' Bess were sore

at him because I went in there." He waited, half expecting his father to deny this.

But Sherman Adams did not take the trouble to deny it. "I wouldn't give a hang where you went," the old man blurted, "if you only knew what to do when you got there."

Loophole was nodding, with a steely glint in his eyes. "On the way home, this Bemis an' another rat held me up," he said slowly. "Got me unawares when I was dodgin' a rope they threw first. Raymond was trailin' me an' when he showed up the pair took to the timber. I kept what gold I had. That's my side of the story. Your friend Raymond can tell you anything he wants. Tell him I said so." There was a sneer on Loophole's lips. "You seem to have taken him into the family."

The stockman's eyes flashed. "It isn't your part to criticize anybody I invite into my house as a guest," he said firmly. "An' he'll probably have more to tell me, if I ask him—which I will. You've never told me anything straight yet. There's something wrong with you, Charley, an' it's been cropping out pretty strong this late past. You don't seem to be gettin' along aroun' here."

"Then maybe I better get out!" the youth flashed.

His father shook his head. "No. You're my son, an' you're an Adams, even if you don't come up to scratch. But you're too busy finding fault with other people to realize you ain't perfect yourself by a long shot."

"Well, what do you know about this Raymond?" Loophole flared. "He's been hangin' aroun' here since last spring, ridin' aroun' nobody knows where or why, struttin' in Saddleback, thumbing the cards for steady winnings, loafing right here in the house, fresh as they make 'em, an' making sweet to Bess."

"That's enough!" Adams exclaimed

sharply. "Bess can handle any man an' judge him about right. I claim to be a pretty good judge of a man myself. An' Dave Parker says he's all right. That lets Raymond out."

"Of course, Parker would say he's all right," sneered the youth. "He's filled in as a houseman for Parker to that old gambler's advantage more'n once! He's no common gambler, either—that fellow. He's tricky an' a sneak!"

Sherman Adams' face had darkened. "All that bravely behind his back," he said scornfully. "Suppose I call him in an' let you say that to his face."

"Call him in!" cried Loophole. "You'd sit right here an' take a stranger's part against one of yore own family! You say I don't come up to scratch. Well, I've lived here all my life an' if something's wrong with my trainin' it's yore fault. I'm just looked on as bein' present aroun' here, anyway."

The stockman had slumped into his chair. There was a half-frightened look on his face. Could what the boy was saying be true? But he straightened in a few moments and his expression became hard. "If I've done anything wrong it was to let you have your own way ever since your mother died," he said sternly. "You've run wide an' open with a free hand an' if you'd had anything in you, you'd have made something of yourself. You're of voting age right now, an' every man on this ranch looks on you as being still a kid. I wouldn't care if you'd turned out to be something, even if it was a train robber! But you're a blank! What do you want me to do now? Go down an' tell Dave Parker he's got to let you play in The Mint?" Adams put the question in fine scorn.

To his surprise, his son merely laughed. But the laugh had a chill in it. "Glad you got that offn yore chest," said Loophole. "It sets me right. If

you want to tell Dave Parker anything, tell him I told you where he could go to an' that I said I didn't care a hang how soon he started. If you wasn't my old man I'd tell you the same thing!"

Loophole swung on his heel and strode out.

"Come here!" roared his father.

"I'll send your friend in an' you can tell him the rest of it," Loophole called from the dining room where his sister stood staring, with a startled, incredulous look in her dark eyes. "Here's sis been listening to the first part," was the youth's parting shot. "Tell her the rest, too."

"Charley!"

But Loophole merely laughed at her and went into the kitchen and out the back door. It was the first time he had experienced a cold, deliberate rage. He cooled down somewhat as he walked to the bunk house. At the door he hesitated, not that he feared facing the man he had taken a violent dislike to, but because he doubted his ability to hold his temper after the session with his father. Finally, he went in. Raymond was not in the room, nor was he in the eating room. The attendant said he had taken a bite and had gone out. Loophole sat down on a bunk to think.

At that precise moment, Raymond, having gone around to the porch entrance, was sitting down opposite Sherman Adams in the living room.

"The boy has been here telling me about something that happened in town an' afterwards," the stockman was saying. "Hinted you might tell me more. Let's hear about it."

"There isn't much to it," said Raymond. "Loophole—er—that is, Charley—"

"I don't care about the nickname," Adams interrupted irascibly. "I hope there are some things they can't call him, an' him stand for it."

Raymond passed this over, suspecting that Loophole and his father had

had some words. He was glad to learn that the youth had told his father something of the trouble, for he had no intention of mentioning it himself.

"Charley was talking some while he was shooting craps," Raymond went on lightly. "When he quit shooting some card players yelled to him to shut up. He thought it was a man named Bemis. They passed a few words—that's about all."

"You're more generous with Charley than he was with you," Adams commented. "Says you butted in between him an' Bemis an' that Dave siwashed him in the office."

"I merely let Bemis know he wasn't to carry the thing too far," said Raymond. "He's treacherous, an' I figured the boy wasn't prepared for a gun play."

"What about Parker?" Adams asked sharply.

"I don't know what passed between him an' Charley except what Charley told you."

"Yeah? And this holdup business? What about that?"

"I had an idea something like that might happen," Raymond confessed, frowning. "It's the dull season right now after the rodeo, an' that crowd aroun' Saddleback is looking for anything it can get. Bemis an' another stopped Charley on the way home. I was trailin' him an' happened along at the right time after they'd taken him by surprise."

"Surprise!" the old rancher snorted. "That boy was never anything but surprised all his life. It's a wonder somebody hasn't plugged him. But he seemed more'n usual het up this morning."

"He appeared mad at me," said Raymond dryly.

"He roasted you aplenty," said Adams. "Acted like he was plumb sore at you. Did you two tangle any ways?"

"Suppose you could call it that," re-

plied Raymond. "He lit into me with his tongue, an' I came back at him."

Adams' eyes widened. "By gad!" he exclaimed, thumping one knee with his fist. "The boy was mad! That's the very thing, Raymond. He needs to get mad the right way once. Go to him! Make him sore as the dickens, an' try to make him like it. Maybe he'll shake out of whatever is the matter with him. You know"—the old man's tone grew confidential—"the boy ain't right. He's never been right. He's too, too backward, or something. It's my fault, I reckon. I've just let him run an' haven't paid enough attention to him. But I'm getting along. Here I am inside the house to-day when I ought to be out an' doing. I'm leaving too much to others. An' Charley's the boy who ought to be learning to run the Half Circle A, that's what! But the men don't take him serious. Now you've been around. Knowing what your business is, an' from what Dave Parker told me, you're no dummy. Take hold of Charley an' make him or break him! By gad, that's the ticket! Drag him out of it any way you think best. I give you leave to go ahead an' do what you think is best, an' if you make something out of the boy, I'll lay five thousand iron men in your lap! Is it a deal?"

In the dining room, where she could hear but could not be seen, Bess Adams held her breath. She did not understand her brother, and did not know whether she understood Raymond or not. She was not even sure of her father when it came to always being right. She was only sure of herself. She had always had a motherly feeling for Charley. She liked Raymond. She loved her father. She was strong-willed and capable. Would whatever they projected be a good thing for her brother? The girl's pretty lips pressed tightly together. If she thought not, she would mighty soon take a hand.

"You've put a hard job up to me," Raymond said to the stockman. "I've got to think it over. It won't be so easy, an' you'll get mad as well as Charley. You think more of that boy than you realize. I'll take a day to mull over it."

"Go ahead," said Adams heartily. "Figure it out. Don't pay any attention to me if I do get mad. I'll stay neutral—so far as I can an' still be his dad. You understand, there's some things that wouldn't go. I'll put our deaf down in writin' if you want it."

"Wouldn't do any good," smiled Raymond. "It's the things that wouldn't go that would do the trick." He caught sight—just a fleeting glimpse—of Bess Adams' anxious face in the dining room. "Oh, shucks," he laughed. "It's a deal, Adams, only it's going to cost you more than five thousand!"

"Go to it!" boomed the stockman. "Bess—I saw you! If you let a word out of your head, I swear I'll spank you. Come here." He got up and stamped to the dining-room doorway. But the girl had fled. He turned just as Raymond went out the front door. He fumbled in his right vest pocket for a match.

Raymond went directly to the bunk house. There he found Loophole curled in a bunk, apparently asleep. He went out and strolled toward the big barn. Bess Adams came out into the courtyard and he walked toward her. She held up a hand.

"No, I'm not going to talk with you," she said severely. "Yes, I heard everything. I know what you were going to ask me. But I won't say anything till I see what turn events are going to take. An' I can't have anything to do with it, or you—now. It doesn't seem to me like such a big man's job!"

"Maybe it'll turn out to be more of a job than you think, Miss Bess," he said with a smile.

"Maybe it'll turn out the same way

for you," she said enigmatically. "You bet I'm not one to look on an' not take sides."

His eyes brimmed with admiration of the girl. She was a beautiful, wild thing, this girl of the waving grasses and tossing mane. It was she who had held him on the north range long past his intended stay.

"That's why I took the assignment," he said soberly.

"Oh!" She tossed her head. "You think I'll side with you in trying—in what you think you're going to do! I suppose you think you're going to make what you'd call a man out of Charley." There was fine scorn in her voice.

"I'm going to make him a brother-in-law I can be proud of," said Raymond grimly.

The girl's eyes widened. Then she laughed, almost hilariously. "Why, you—you conceited line-rider!" she exclaimed, sobering. "If I told dad that, he'd run you off the ranch!" Her voice was high now. As she started to speak again, she stopped, looking over his shoulder.

Raymond turned and saw Loophole striding toward them.

"What have you been tellin' my sister that she should say that?" the youth demanded, his face dark.

"Charley, you mind your own business," Bess flashed.

She turned back to the house, leaving Raymond and Loophole alone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING.

RAYMOND surveyed the irate youth coldly. "What your sister told you goes for me, also," he said, and turned on his heel.

Loophole leaped and his right hand shot out to clutch Raymond by the arm. The latter must have sensed the quick move, for he whirled, caught the youth by his out-flung forearm, and sent him

spinning. Loophole staggered to a stop and his gun hand dropped. It rested on the butt of his weapon, his eyes snapping fire.

"Why don't you draw?" Raymond jeered. "Go ahead. I'll give you that much of a start. You've got your hand on your gun. Isn't that enough?"

"I'm not a professional," Loophole breathed through his teeth. "But one of these days you an' I are goin' to fight it out, one way or the other. An' I could tell by the way sis talked that she's gettin' wise to you, you double-crossin' framer. You can start something now if you want."

Raymond's eyes had narrowed. Suddenly, his face cleared and he shook his head. "No, Loophole, you're not yellow," he said calmly. "I thought first you were making this play because you knew you were safe here in this place an' at this time. That would be cowardly, I reckon. But you half mean what you say. You mean it about as much as you can mean anything, I guess. You're just plain fool, an' needing it knocked out of you. It looks as if I'd have to be the hombre that does it. Now run along an' get some sleep. Your brain's foggy."

If Raymond had ever seen a man in a rage, it was Charley Adams at this minute. He realized that his course was dangerous. "Don't start anything, Loophole," he warned, "because if you do I'll have to finish it." He looked the youth steadily in the eyes and the boy saw that he was deadly serious. "That would spoil everything," he finished.

A peculiar, cunning glint came into Loophole's eyes. He nodded. Then he turned about and strode back to the bunk house. Raymond followed slowly, then turned off for the barn to have a look at his horse. The youth's manner disturbed him, but more than anything else, he was at a loss to figure out how he was to begin his task of bringing Loophole to himself. This was to be

settled for him, although he did not know it. When he had smoked a cigarette, he lay down on the couch in the little front room of the barn, used for saddles, and harness, and other stores. As he slept, Bess Adams sauntered past the door twice, looking in. He was not aroused for dinner and when he finally woke it was twilight. He hurried to the wash bench and then, before going in to see about supper, he took a look into the bunk house. Loophole was not there. He had eaten an early supper and had ridden away, the cook said. Raymond walked thoughtfully toward the house.

The last glow of the sunset was running red on the western peaks when Charley Adams rode out from the timber on the gumbo flat and galloped toward Saddleback. He was fresh in the saddle, on a rested horse, and his mind was functioning keenly. For the time being, he had eliminated Raymond. The fact that his sister now had the true measure of the man, as he supposed, was enough. It was the memory of what his father had said that stirred him. Wouldn't have cared if he had turned out to be something, even a train robber! Loophole's laugh was not pleasant. He shrugged his shoulders, tickled his horse's flanks with his spurs, raised his face to the wind, and whistled a range ditty. Loophole had shaken something off. He rode wild and free as if he had suddenly emerged from beneath a staggering weight to view a new world.

Saddleback was agleam when Loophole glimpsed it, huddled in its setting of tall cottonwoods. The boy circled to the north on the very slopes of the butte itself and rode down a deep gully until he was on the edge of town. Here he tied his horse and made his way through the trees to the rear of a questionable resort known, in range parlance, as "The Dirty Rat." It had another, and more dignified, name painted

on its front; but The Dirty Rat it was to those who knew the Northern prairie country.

The inside of the place appeared as unsavory as the common name sounded. Loophole met the grinning looks directed at him with cool disdain. He walked to the bar and gave the signal to another youth who was looking on at a game. "Have a drink," he invited as the man came to the bar. "How's tricks, Emmett?"

"Deuce in the hole, but I'm drawin'," said Emmett. He might have been a bit older than Loophole; at least, he looked older. He was dark, and about the same in build as Loophole, and his black eyes were sharp. He studied Loophole for a few moments as the bartender served them.

"You seem right set to go," he observed.

"I'm on my own to-night," said Loophole lightly. "May be for some time," he added as they drank. "Listen, Emmett, you're not tied up aroun' here anyways, are you?"

"Not a-tall," was the answer. "Just hangin' on where food an' shelter's handy." He frowned and favored Loophole with a shrewd glance.

"Let's go back an' sit down," Loophole suggested. Before they left the bar, he gave an order. They went to a small room in the rear, the bartender following them with two bottles of beer. The latter lighted the lamp and Loophole and his companion sat down at the table.

Loophole waved a hand at the bottles and glasses. "I don't go in for that stuff much," he said; "but it gives us an excuse to be in here alone. Emmett, I've seen you aroun' here a lot, but I don't ever see you runnin' with anybody. You're sort of a lone wolf."

Emmett nodded and filled his glass. "Haven't met up with anybody I wanted to trail along with, I reckon. Stranger here. Maybe I don't fit in.

You was born aroun' here an' know everybody."

Loophole imagined there was a wistful note in the other's voice. "Shucks!" he ejaculated. "I know everybody an' —nobody. That is, I don't know 'em in the right way. I don't belong, you might say; I just ain't one of the gang. An' I'm sick an' tired of it. They fool aroun' with me too much, an' I'm sick an' tired of that, too." His eyes glowed darkly.

A change had come over Emmett. He was studying Loophole carefully. His eyes were snapping. "I guess you've found out that they've been makin' a fool of you," he said in an insinuating voice, glancing down.

Loophole's eyes flashed. "That's because I've been fool enough on my own account to let 'em do it," he said angrily. "I've helped 'em along. I'm quittin' that. You must've been doin' quite some lookin' on."

"How could I help it?" asked Emmett blandly. "I'm sort of on the outside lookin' in. I've trailed aroun' on my own hook long enough to be able to put two an' two together. There's a lot of 'em aroun' here who make out to be your friends who ain't your friends a-tall."

"True enough," nodded Loophole. "I'm lookin' for a man to run with. I'm thinkin' of startin' something, Emmett!"

"Yeah?" Emmett's look was crafty. "Want to take me in?"

"I'm thinkin' you've got something in you," said Loophole.

"Goin' to start on The Mint?" Emmett inquired casually.

Loophole stared. "How'd you know about that deal?" he demanded.

"I was there last night," replied Emmett coolly. "I saw you go in the private office an' I knew by the look on your face the moment you came out that you'd been siwashed. I wouldn't take that from no man—or outfit. I

didn't figure you'd take it, either. Am I right?"

Loophole nodded grimly. "What do you know about this hombre, Bemis?" he asked.

"Just what I've made out from lookin' on. He's bad medicine. He's hangin' out here waitin' for some kind of a play, I don't just know what."

"Sure," said Loophole with a grimace. "Do you know anybody that's trailin' with him? Did you see where he went after I left last night?"

"He left right after you did," Emmett replied readily. "When he rode out of town on the east road, a fellow named Bushnel was with him. Bushnel was with your outfit this spring an' summer, I believe. I figured the two of 'em was goin' to try an' hold you up because you had that gold on you." The speaker's eyes were dancing with his conjecture.

"That's just what they tried to do!" Loophole exclaimed, looking at Emmett with respect.

"I reckon that fellow Raymond, who went along with you, queered the play," said Emmett dryly. "There's a boy who'll look out for number one."

"That's hittin' it pretty," Loophole agreed. "Suppose there's no use tellin' you he's tryin' to be sweet on my sister. She's got his number, though. I'm leavin' him out of it for the present. Do you want to trail with me, Emmett? It'll be takin' a chance."

Emmett seemed to be thinking deeply. "There must be money in it," he suggested. Again the shrewd look lingered in his eyes. It was as if he was deciding in his own mind just how far Loophole would go.

"That's hittin' it pretty," Loophole in an offhand way. "At that, we might make something besides pay." He was thinking of what Dave Parker had said about his winning being nothing to him. It suddenly occurred to him that he had not asked Raymond point-blank how he

knew Bemis was the other holdup. There was funny business on, some way. Well, he would find out a few things while he was changing his status in the locality.

"Drink that stuff up an' let's go," he said abruptly.

They walked out the rear and strode around to the back door of The Mint. At that moment, Raymond was putting up his horse at the livery.

Dave Parker was not in sight when Loophole and his companion entered. Loophole thought the bartender exhibited a certain coolness of manner, and he ordered curtly. There was just a moment of hesitation and then the man served them. But in the moment Loophole's eyes flashed and his mind leaped to daring decision. Emmett saw this change in manner and looked about furtively. The place was not a third filled, for the night was young.

When they had finished their preliminaries at the bar, Loophole led the way to the crap table in the rear. The player with the dice was about to roll as Loophole put down a gold piece. The houseman caught the dice as they bounced against the foot board.

"No roll," he said, looking at Loophole.

"Fair enough!" sang Loophole. "He must be scared of you, pardner. Just for that, I'll press the bet." He put a stack of gold on the piece already on the table.

The houseman shook his head. "Sorry," he said, continuing to look at Loophole. "I guess you understand."

The words had been spoken in a low voice and had not carried beyond the ears of the players at the table. There were no spectators, save Emmett, who stood at Loophole's left.

"Meanin' I can't play?" said Loophole in a strange voice.

"I'm merely working here," replied the houseman. "I have to obey orders."

"You're good at obeyin' orders, I take it?" said Loophole.

"My orders are not to argue," said the man firmly. He tossed the dice to the player who had the roll. "Your bet don't go," he said to Loophole.

"It goes if it stays on the table," said Loophole, his eyes narrowed. "This is a public place, an' I reckon I'm one of the public. That money is good as long as this game runs. If you're not takin' bets, stop the game!"

The houseman nodded to the man with the dice and the cubes rattled on the table. The player made his point. With meticulous care, the houseman paid the bets, ignoring Loophole's stack of gold. When he had finished, he again nodded to the player.

In a flash Loophole's gun was in his hand.

"Pay that bet!" he ordered.

Players on the houseman's side of the table backed away from him. The man looked into Loophole's gun and his lip curled. He made a move as if to remove a stack of gold pieces from the rack. But his hand darted under the table. Instantly, a shot rang out, and the houseman whirled to the right and staggered.

"The lights!" came a voice in Loophole's ear.

Then, at his left, another gun boomed and the lamp over the table rained splintered glass and burning oil. The place was in an uproar in a moment. Chairs were kicked back, tables overturned.

"Here's where we finish!" came the wild, exultant cry from Loophole. His gun barked and the lamp over the bar was shattered. The gun at his left was in action also. Then the room was plunged in darkness, save for the flickering flames of burning oil, licking at the tables, floor, and chairs.

A form sprawled across the crap table, coins clinked. Then Loophole was pushed toward the office door.

CHAPTER V.

WILD GEESE.

THE few moments of uproar and turmoil, before the lights were all shot out, had passed in a flash for Loophole Charley Adams. Now, in the very doorway of the little private office, with the long bar behind him and the opening to the room at his left, Loophole paused for what seemed an hour. It was impossible, unbelievable, that a man could think so much in such a short space of time. He had shot the houseman, hadn't he? And Emmett had backed his play by shooting out the lights. Who had got the gold on the table? Was the houseman dead? Pshaw! Loophole had shot him in the right arm; he was good enough shot for that. But Emmett had done his bidding, had put himself into this thing at his, Loophole's, suggestion. His thought-trend ended in one conviction: he had to go through with it and finish. He would have the name—

Dave Parker was at his desk. Or was he? There was a man in there; in the private office. A voice hissed something in Loophole's ear. Then the light went out. A weight struck Loophole from the left. He staggered back against the end of the back bar. Then he struck out. His gun barrel found a mark and a man went down. Now there seemed to be several men in the little space between the end of the bar and the door into the private office. A dim light filtered in through a window at the rear of the little room. Between this light and himself Loophole glimpsed forms.

Loophole tore ahead and swung at one of the forms with his left. He missed, and his fist crashed against the flimsy partition. He was thrown back as some one bumped into him coming out of the office. Then the dim light of the window was clear. Loophole felt that he was alone.

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All this had happened in a matter of moments, almost, for men still were squeezing through the front door. There was shouting in the street.

"It's a holdup!"

"Watch the back!"

"There's at least one dead man in there!"

Loophole's gun came up, although his hands were shaking with excitement. If this was more than he had bargained for, he did not think of it at the time. Escape was the next problem. He whirled and stared stupidly at the licking flames.

"Fire!"

The cry went up from half a hundred throats in the street.

"Loophole!" came a hoarse whisper, as a man slipped across the red glare close to the youth. "The window!"

It was Emmett, and he pushed past Loophole into the office. Loophole followed him. Emmett tried the window, and when it refused to give he grasped a chair and swung it, shattering the pane and braces into bits. The swivel chair was pulled across the floor with a shrill whistle of its casters. Then Emmett was up and looking out the window.

Loophole's mind galvanized into action. "This is on the east side," he hissed. "Get out an' make for the trees. They're startin' for the back now an' some're already there. Hurry up!"

Emmett was through the window in a twinkling. Loophole swung a leg over and went through after him, dropping lightly to the ground as Emmett darted for the trees. There was a shout along the side of the building toward the street. A gun blazed and a bullet whistled past Loophole's head. He fired once, bounded to the trees and plunged into the shadow. Emmett was there.

"Where's yore hoss?" Loophole asked.

"In the barn," Emmett answered excitedly. "Here, take some of this stuff!" He jammed something into Loophole's coat pocket.

"What—" began Loophole, but Emmett cut him short.

"We'll have to get our horses an' light out of this right pronto," he said. "The fire's got 'em busy enough, an' while its taking their attention we'd better slope. C'mon!"

Loophole followed, for there was truth in what Emmett said.

They circled around in the deep shadow at the edge of the timber until they were behind the barn.

"My hoss is up back of here," Loophole told his companion.

"All right," said Emmett. "I'll get mine. If there's anybody in that barn—but they'll all turn out to fight the fire." He ran to the rear entrance of the barn, and Loophole waited as a man in a trance.

The night air echoed with shouts from up the street where The Mint was located. But the shouting died away even as Loophole listened. The men were getting down to business, putting out the blaze in the resort. There were no leaping flames in the sky, showing that the fire had not gained great headway. Suddenly, Loophole started. High overhead came the honking of a flock of wild geese. This meant the first real storm of the coming winter. The geese were flying south. They were fleeing from the icy blast of the first young blizzard. The thought caused Loophole to think of his own predicament. He and Emmett would have to fly. It was serious business killing a man and setting fire to a place. There would be no buying him off on a murder charge, even if his father was powerful on the north range. How could he explain—

His hand encountered the package Emmett had stuffed in his pocket. He stepped a little out of the shadow of

the trees and drew it forth. Yellow bills! They seemed to burn in his hands, those gold notes. In a flash he remembered the form that had lurched across the table, the clink of coins. It had been Emmett, of course; and Emmett had been in the private office. Good heavens! Loophole's blood went cold. Emmett must have robbed the safe. And Dave Parker—and he had done something to Parker? Loophole's eyes gleamed savagely.

"The fool!" he cried aloud.

At that moment, Emmett came out of the barn leading his horse. Loophole ran to him.

"This money," he said harshly; "where did you get it?" He held out the thick wad of bills.

"Where do you suppose?" Emmett answered gruffly. "In that joint, of course. Didn't you say I'd be paid if I went into this with you? Didn't you say I'd have to take a chance?" He paused, looking at Loophole with wide eyes. "Say, bo, listen. You're not goin' to try an' tell me you didn't mean to grab off that joint, are you?"

"I didn't intend to rob it," Loophole snapped out.

"Why, you—you—" Emmett sputtered incoherently. "What was you goin' to do? Put on a little exhibition? Give 'em a show? An' why ask me in? Don't try to put anything over on me or you an' I'll just naturally shoot it out here an' now. We robbed that joint—you an' I—an' we'll go up for it if they get us. On top of that, you plugged a man for keeps. I'll be in on that, too, if they snare us. You led the way in, an' I followed, now it's up to you to show the way out. You know the country, an' if we hang aroun' here much longer, they'll have us salted before mornin'!"

He started on. "Where's your horse?" he demanded. "Put that stuff back in your pocket. Don't tell me you didn't know what it was. You'd better

shake a leg if you don't want to try a new trick with a rope!"

Loophole thrust the bills back in his pocket. There was nothing else to do; nothing to do now but get away. He resented Emmett's tone, as well as what he said, but even in that excited moment he sensed the reasoning that had prompted his companion to act as he had. After all, what had he expected? Now the thing was done! He—the two of them—had stepped outside the law.

Again Loophole heard the honking of the wild-goose flock high overhead. The birds had paused in their flight to circle curiously over the town where they heard strange noises. Loophole followed after Emmett and then forged ahead to lead the way to the arroyo where he had left his horse.

But they were not to leave so easily. Some of the older and wiser heads among the townsmen had realized that they would try to get away as soon as possible. They would have to have their horses. Consequently, a number of men ran for the livery barn. Loophole and Emmett had hardly reached the trees when the pursuers burst from the rear of the barn and guns blazed again. The bullets clipped the leaves about the fleeing youths and the horse. But another gun winked fireflies in the shadow to the right of them, just as they drew their own weapons.

The pursuit scattered. Loophole and Emmett were thunderstruck. Who could be helping them? But there was no time to ponder over this. They pushed on through the trees, with the shouting carrying to their ears on the breeze. Then a tall figure leaped out in front of them in a small clearing.

"Where's the other horse?" a stern voice demanded.

Loophole started to bring up his gun, but the weapon was held back by some instinct. "Who wants to know?" he called boldly.

"Oh, you've got one then!" came the voice of Raymond. "Well, get going as fast as you can. I'll turn 'em off if possible." He ran past them into the trees below.

Loophole merely gulped in mortification and surprise as Emmett shot a question at him.

"Oh, shut up!" he cried angrily. "You'd have done better to let me face things after I shot that feller than to start makin' it worse. That was Raymond. The whole town knows by now. You'd better think of yore own neck while you're about it."

He ran across the clearing. When Emmett, having mounted, caught up with him, Loophole was at the mouth of the coulee where he had left his horse. In a few moments he also was in the saddle. He rode into a clump of alders, and Emmett spurred on close after him.

"This seems safe," said Emmett sarcastically.

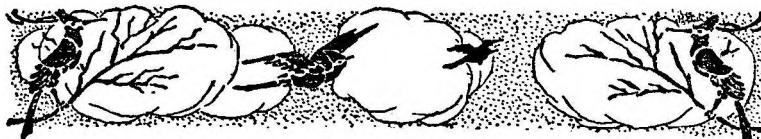
Loophole leaned toward him. "Listen, my boy, if you think you're havin' sport out of this thing, you've got another think comin'," he said, in an icy tone. "Hear it?" He paused as the honking of the wild geese came down to them out of the night sky. "I'm like that," he said grimly. "Wild, an' free, an' on my way. If you don't keep yore trap closed you'll be riding by yore lonesome an' they'll rope you in easy as a scared dogie. Keep still!"

Emmett caught the menacing significance of Loophole's words and voice. He held his tongue. Then they both stared through the bare branches as three riders broke into the clearing below the coulee and swung off to eastward. Loophole watched the leader as long as he could see him. "I know that man," he muttered to himself. The form in the saddle appeared as Bemis had appeared when he had fled after the attempted holdup the early morning before.

Finally, all was still. Loophole led the way slowly out of the clump of trees. He did not cross the arroyo, but guided his horse straight up its steep course. In time they climbed a steep ascent and came out on the bare, wind-swept shoulder of Saddleback Butte. Below them a few faint lights glowed

like pin points of yellow fire in the blanket of black shadow. Above them the stars danced and wisps of clouds whirled in the high wind eddies. Loophole drew a long breath and turned up the steep trail that led to the crossing of the butte—the depression in its crest that gave it its name.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Alaska Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus alasensis*)

THE Western variety of the Lapland longspur is the Alaska longspur, distinguished by its comparative paleness of color. It is west of the Mackenzie River that the Alaska longspur is abundant, flying over the tundra and on islands in the Bering Sea. From Kodiak Island to the Arctic Ocean along the coast it may be found breeding.

Early in April the males reach Dawson, on the upper Yukon, and later in the month arrive at St. Michael, on the coast of Bering Sea. At the mating season the males are beautifully dressed, the head and breast being jet-black, with white stripes behind the eyes, and the back of the neck a sort of vermillion shade of red. The back is streaked and spotted with black or brown.

The male birds are bright spots which relieve the drab surface of knoll tops or projecting rocks, where they perch and burst into song. Slowly, they rise into the air ten or fifteen yards as their song pours forth, much like the singer who unconsciously rises on his tiptoes when reaching a high note. Pausing in mid-air, the longspur singer sinks gradually back to his post, still uttering notes which fall upon the ear like tinkling bells. His song is compared to that of the bobolink.

By the end of May the cheery songster has found himself a mate and the cares of homebuilding and family raising do not permit him to spend his time vocalizing. Each assisting in the work, the male and female choose a spot on the ground which is cleverly hidden from the casual observer. The nests vary in size, but are usually less than three inches deep and about five inches across the top. They are made of grasses, and feathers, and moss.

The eggs are usually four to seven in number and are covered with brown spots and lines, the background being greenish-white, only slightly visible because of the profuse markings. Just before the eggs are ready to hatch, the mother bird becomes very solicitous; she is also attentive to her young, frantically protecting them from strangers.

It is not long before the young are flying about the trading posts and native villages, unafraid of mankind. The last of August finds them going south and wintering among the foothills of the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains from Oregon to southern Colorado.



Mountain Vengeance

by **Kenneth Gilbert**

Author of "The Black Assassin," etc.



HE sewellel, or showtl' Rufa, made hay while the moon shone. By day, the little moist glade where tall ferns grew rankly was bathed in warm sunshine, so that insect life awoke; it teemed with so-called "June bugs," who flitted here and there, the metallic sheen of their bodies glistening in the strong light, while now and then a great hawk moth flickered across the open space. A devil's darning needle, ever alert for mosquitoes, darted here and there, or hovered stationary in air, while his large, clear eyes searched the forest of ferns for his victims. A black-and-tan hornet, his wings humming lazily, circled the spot, and then vanished; and immediately a large bluebottle fly, who may have been keenly aware that he was fair prey for the hornet, if the latter saw him, dived down among the vegetation.

All these things were occurrences of the daylight hours, however, and Rufa

saw none of them, being engaged in sound slumber at the farthest end of his crooked tunnel. But now that the glade was awash with moonlight, and the bluebottle fly, the hornet, the moth, and the darning needle were torpid with the chill that comes to the mountains after sundown, Rufa was abroad, industriously storing up a food supply against the time when the snow would drift deeply over the mouth of his tunnel. Down into the sandy mouth of the burrow he would drag a pile of the vegetation he had accumulated outside, and during the winter he would feast when many other wild creatures of these hills would know famine.

Rufa's haymaking job was simple enough. He had previously cut off a goodly number of stalks from a thick clump of bunch grass growing near by, and to these he added the stems of several ferns which he deftly stripped. The stuff was piled neatly, yet not too deeply so that the sun rays, in curing it for winter use, would penetrate to the

lower stalks. As Rufa kept busily at his work, silent and watchful as ever—for it was at night that his enemies were abroad—he seemed to be in a state of nervous tension. There was a strong reason for this, for Man himself had come to share the solitude of this high meadow with the mountain beaver, as Rufa's kind is generally termed.

Of proud lineage was Rufa; there was not another species such as his on the face of the globe. Thousands of years ago, perhaps hundreds of thousands, there were creatures on earth who might have claimed kinship with him. Their kind shared the earth with the dawn-men, the saber-tooth tiger, and the mammoth, but Nature, in her eternal experimenting had finished with them, and they had vanished, leaving only the clan of Rufa as a holdover. But Rufa endured, although his clan may be found in only one region of the earth, the Pacific Northwest. Nevertheless, so long as the high meadows bloom among the rocky fastnesses of the Cascades, Rufa's kind will survive, for theirs is a hardy breed.

In looks, however, the mountain beaver, or sewellel, was not prepossessing. He was scarcely more than twelve inches in length, but this dimension covered his body alone, for nature had given him no tail. Withal, he was a stout-bodied rodent resembling a prairie dog, although his rich, chestnut-brown coat was much handsomer. His head was broad and blunt, his ears all but hidden in fur, while his eyes were beady with intelligence. His legs were short, but the claws were long, especially those of the front feet, for he was a great digger. In fact, the many-forked tunnel burrowed out in the moist earth among the ferns testified to his ability as an excavator. His mate had helped in that work, but mostly her time was occupied in caring for her children, of which there were three at this time. When they grew old enough to fend for

themselves, Rufa would drive them from his domain, for if there was one thing which he craved, it was seclusion, lack of company. He could tolerate only the presence of his mate.

His nearest neighbor, a sewellel as large as himself, was fully a mile distant, and any attempt at sociability on the part of one would have been resented to the death by the other. It was not that Rufa was morose or surly; he simply loved isolation with his mate, that the supply of ferns and grasses in the neighborhood might not be diminished.

And that is why the coming of Bill Treen had disturbed the mountain beaver's peace of mind. Darkness and solitude were prized above else by Rufa. Still, if Treen had not declared warfare upon him, it is probable that Rufa could have accustomed himself to the man's presence. But because of Treen's murderous act—for the man was a wanton destroyer at heart—Rufa, despite his small size, struck back more effectively than if he had been a great, shaggy grizzly, instead of a shy little animal who never appeared until the sun dipped behind the western hills.

Rufa, like all his kind, was a fighter. Still, it may have been merely Fate herself who smote Treen, using the mountain beaver as a humble, unwitting tool. In any event, the thing was accomplished.

In one way, it was sheer chance that Treen should have built his cabin so close to the mouth of the sewellel's burrow. Yet Treen had a purpose, for close to the site of the cabin, a clear little stream came down out of the rocky heights and emptied itself into the marsh at the edge of which Rufa had dug his home. Treen selected this location with care; it was wilderness country, yet easily accessible to civilization, which was necessary to the nefarious business in which he was engaged.

Once, the sheriff had made what was intended to be an unexpected call, but Treen met him with a cool smile, unafraid; and the official went away, puzzled. It was strange how Treen made his living up here in the mountains, alone and without any apparent means of support. The sheriff had a theory, backed up by information received from government agents, but there was nothing incriminating to be found in Treen's cabin. Just a two-room affair, the home of a mountaineer. And so the officer was baffled.

But if Rufa could have used human speech, he might have explained much which the sheriff did not understand. It was at night, when Rufa was out gathering his hay, or feeding among the ferns, that he would observe the mysterious pilgrimages which Treen made to a rock wall about three hundred yards from the cabin. There, Treen would roll away a stone which neatly fitted into the mouth of a small cave. What Treen did within the cave, the swellel could not see, much less understand; but it was always noticed that Treen carefully fitted the stone back into place upon leaving. These departures would occur shortly before dawn, for Treen never went near the cave until darkness was upon the land. Nor did the man always take the same trail in reaching the cave, for this would have worn down a well-marked path, and thus betrayed the existence of the cavern.

Sometimes, Treen went away from the cabin for days, after putting in many nights' work at the cave. When he returned, his appearance indicated that he had been on a debauch. So, week after week, the thing continued, and Treen guarded closely in the cave the manner in which he made his livelihood.

This particular night, of all others, Rufa was happy, even though he had not yet brought himself to accepting

the man as a neighbor. Yet this work of making hay while the moon shone was always a pleasing task for Rufa. Each blade of grass, each frond of fern meant food for himself and his mate when cold winter gripped the land. Throughout the night, Rufa had worked, and it seemed that he had forgotten the man entirely, although the latter was busy at the cave. It was just before the false dawn, that hint of coming day, when Rufa stopped to strip the stems from a particularly tempting sword fern that he observed the man approaching.

The night was cloudy, and the gloom of it had not been lifted. Treen seemed to be in a hurry to reach his cabin, however. He swung about in a more circuitous route than usual, and Rufa, watching at the mouth of the tunnel, made ready to dive into it, if the man came too close. In fact, with a muffled, *chirring* sound, he did disappear into the burrow, just as the hurrying man stumbled and fell heavily.

For an instant, Treen lay there; and, curiously enough, one leg seemed to be shorter than the other. But he lifted the shortened leg, and it was to be seen that he had stepped into some kind of hole, or that the ground had sunk under him. Treen groaned, and then swore, as he got to his feet.

"Nearly dislocated my ankle," he grumbled aloud. "Cussed mountain-beaver hole! I should have got rid of the critter before. I will now, anyway!"

Trembling with unusual anxiety, as they huddled down in the farthest end of their tunnel, for they heard the heavy stamping of the man's feet, Rufa and his family waited. Rufa did not know what had happened, of course; he could hardly understand just then that his clever tunneling close to the cabin had resulted in a trap which had come within an ace of breaking Treen's ankle. Rufa was aware, however, that the tunnel

was caved in, between its mouth and the room which the little sewellel family now occupied.

But, after a moment, they heard Treen moving away. Rufa's fear gone, the sewellel set out to investigate the broken tunnel. He found that the man had stepped squarely into it, where the shaft turned aside until it neared the house. As a matter of fact, Rufa had been working on this particular fork of the burrow for a week past, and had unintentionally driven it to a point quite close to the cabin. Treen had walked over that same ground before, and nothing had happened; now, however, he had found the thing treacherous.

Moreover, the man was determined to be revenged. He went to the cabin, got a spade, and then started up the creek, stopping at a point where the ground was lowest. Here he began to dig a shallow ditch leading toward Rufa's tunnel. When this was completed, Treen began damming the creek with driftwood and dirt, so that presently the rising water overflowed into the ditch, and went moving swiftly toward the burrow of the mountain beaver.

"I'll drown him out," Treen told himself. Higher and higher rose the water in the ditch, until at last it went pouring into the tunnel. Rufa and his family, his works, too, for that matter, seemed doomed!

But for the fact that the mountain beaver was out inspecting the broken tunnel where Treen had stepped through the soft earth, he would have been trapped. At the first hint of danger, he went hurrying back to the tunnel, but found the water rising there. Nevertheless, instinct bade him hide, for not only was daylight near, but he observed the man approaching. He splashed into the flooded tunnel, and went charging toward the chamber where he had left his mate and three youngsters. Water was not to his lik-

ing, despite his name of mountain beaver, but he was not afraid of the element. He reached the place at last, only to find his family gone.

Evidently, his disappearance had worried the mother, and she, with her youngsters, had set out in search of him, instead of remaining in the chamber, which was high enough to be above the water level of the flooded tunnel. Once more Rufa turned back to the tunnel, now anxiously seeking his family. He came out at last to the point where Treen had broken through, in time to see a tragedy being enacted.

The mother and three young ones had penetrated through the broken section of the tunnel, into the part of the burrow which led to the main entrance. Out of the entrance they now came, splashing and gasping, for they were nearly drowned. And, waiting for them, was the gloating Treen.

As they appeared, one by one, the man struck swiftly with the spade, a blow for each of them; and then he contemptuously flung their bodies aside, as he went back to the creek and tore out the dam.

"Reckon you won't dig any more holes for me to step in," he said aloud. It never occurred to Treen that there might be another mountain beaver, Rufa himself, in the tunnel; the man believed that the massacre had been complete. Once more the creek flowed in its natural channel, and the water-level dropped in the tunnel, as the flood seeped off through the ground. Rufa was safe, but he was bereaved.

The man went into his cabin, where Rufa could hear him moving about. But the mountain beaver still sat at his vantage point, from which he could see without being seen. Nor was he minded to return to the darkness of the burrow, even though the growing sunlight hurt his eyes. Indeed, when there was silence at last in the cabin, for Treen had sought slumber after the

night's labors, Rufa waddled slowly forward until he reached the main entrance of the burrow, about which lay the bodies of his loved ones.

These he sniffed at curiously, as though loath to believe that they were dead. The small bodies of the youngsters—each a soft ball of fur—it was hard to understand why the man had killed them. But Rufa was convinced at last that they were really dead. Moreover, the sun was now shining strongly down into the glade; and Rufa, after one more look at the still forms of his mate and her babies, returned to his tunnel.

He seemed to have a purpose in mind, as he did so, for instead of seeking slumber, he immediately set to work extending the burrow. It was chance alone that the direction in which Rufa kept boring would pass under one corner of Treen's cabin. The mountain beaver's purpose was defensive. He would drive the tunnel to higher ground, so that the catastrophe of the flood which had wiped out his family would never be repeated. It was the working of fate which decided that the tunnel would eventually pass under a corner of the cabin.

Save for brief naps, Rufa kept steadily at his work all day. Now and then he came to the mouth of the tunnel for a breath of fresh air, but he did not expose himself so long as the sun was shining. In utter darkness, he kept on delving, the darkness that he loved. Philosopher though he was, as are all wild things, for they quickly forget the loss of loved ones, it may be presumed that Rufa still remembered those still, bedraggled forms at the mouth of his burrow. Never would such a thing happen again in just that way.

By and by, Rufa heard Treen moving about in the cabin, and by that the mountain beaver surmised that darkness had come. Rufa left off work then, and waited, until at last he heard

the heavy feet of the man clumping over the ground, as Treen set out for the mysterious cave back at the foot of the rock wall. Rufa knew then that the coast was clear, but he waited before he came out of the burrow and looked around.

He was hungry now, and he spent some time sampling the lush, green ferns near by. Then, listening, Rufa heard Treen returning hastily. Once more the mountain beaver dived back into the burrow and resumed his work of driving the shaft farther and farther toward higher ground. Indeed, the tunnel was now under the very corner of the cabin, and as Rufa worked, he suddenly felt the ground settle slightly, felt the pinch of it as the weight of the cabin made itself felt. All but held fast by the squeeze of the earth, he dug free madly; and as he did so, the cabin settled slightly once more.

He paused then, as he heard Treen give an exclamation and come swiftly out. Treen examined the sagging corner of the cabin, and swore as he guessed the reason. Evidently one mountain beaver had escaped the flood, and was now undermining the shack.

Treen saw that he would have to brace the undermined corner, or the whole structure would collapse, for the point beneath which the tunnel passed had rested upon a large rock, which had now all but fallen through the roof of the shaft. Treen was a strong man. Stooping, he got himself under the corner, braced hard, and lifted, at the same time moving the cornerstone to a new position.

But something went wrong. Treen's foot slipped, and his leg sank to the knee under the corner of the building. With an ominous creaking, the cabin settled. Treen cried out with sudden pain—for the lower log had pinned his leg fast to the supporting rock!

His first thought was that his leg was broken; but an examination re-

vealed that the ankle was merely held fast, so tightly indeed that he could already feel it throb as the circulation of blood was shut off. Frantically, the man sought to dig himself free, meanwhile cursing all mountain beavers, and particularly Rufa. Never did it occur to Treen, of course, that if he had not drowned out the sewellel family, thereby putting into Rufa's mind the determination to drive the shaft to higher ground, this accident would not have happened. Treen took the occurrence merely as the working of an unkind fate.

After five minutes of work, Treen felt real fear stealing over him. Had his ankle merely been pinched in the soft earth, he could have dug out easily enough. But it was squeezed against the rock, which he could not move; nor could he budge the foundation log of the cabin. He was trapped, as surely as any bear is trapped in a deadfall of man's contriving.

An instant's reflection of what the situation meant intensified his horror. Caught thus, he might remain here until he starved, or died of thirst. In sudden despair, he raised his voice, and cried for help several times; but only echoes came back from the gloomy woods to mock him. In a burst of frenzy, he fell to once more endeavoring to free himself, but only succeeded in breaking his nails and wearing the tips of his fingers raw, for the rock was adamant, and so was the foundation log. Moreover, his wrenching gave his ankle a sharp twinge of pain, which made him all but faint. Knowing that his situation could scarcely be more serious, he lay back on the ground, and tried to collect his thoughts.

And, as he lay there, his eyes detected a movement at the mouth of the tunnel not far away. Rufa was there, watching in curiosity the man who was acting so strangely. At sight of the sewellel, Treen broke into a furious cursing.

Groping about in the darkness until his fingers closed on a small rock, he hurled the missile with all his strength at the little creature who seemed to be mocking him. But the rock went wide of its mark, and Rufa, although he flinched, was not sufficiently alarmed to dodge back into the burrow.

Treen sought for more rocks, determined to be revenged upon the animal which had trapped him. But none could be found. He did, however, throw twigs, handfuls of grass, lumps of dirt—anything in the shape of a missile. But his aim was poor, and Rufa appeared not to be alarmed at all. The sewellel continued to sit there at the mouth of the burrow, contentedly chewing on a fern stem, while the man hurled blistering remarks at the tormentor.

Time passed. The moon was now high above the trees—a fine moon for haymaking. But Rufa seemed to have put the task aside. He was content to sit there in silence and watch the man. And, by and by, the man found a weird sort of fascination in giving back stare for stare. Likewise, Treen's mind, under the torture of the pinched ankle, began to play him tricks. His fancy clothed the sewellel with human intelligence; the creature had planned all this, he imagined, and was now sitting there and gloating. Treen cursed when he thought of the fact that he had no gun. He was going to die—a slow, horrible death—and dearly would he love to have seen the sewellel die with him. But Rufa was free; he could go and come as he pleased, while Treen, a man, gifted with man's intelligence and resourcefulness, was held prisoner here like some trapped animal. The bitter thought of it made Treen almost scream. Yet he managed to keep control of himself, knowing that his mind might break under the uncertainty of waiting.

He could not yet bring himself to give up hope. Some twist of fate must give him release. Nevertheless, he

could not foresee how it would be brought about. Meanwhile, he must sit here and endure the agony of being watched by the beady eyes of the little creature at the mouth of the burrow. Treen almost wept from pain and chagrin.

The moon climbed higher, sailed serenely across the zenith, and slipped down toward the hills. Treen guessed that he must have been here for at least six hours. Daylight would not be long in coming now. The thought of it made the man more uneasy than ever. To lie helpless out here in the sun, scorched and gasping, without even a drink of water—it was too much to contemplate. He was ravenously hungry now, but worry kept his mind off the demands of his appetite. By and by, convinced that it was useless to struggle, that he could only wait and hope, the man pillow'd his head on his arm, and slept.

His dreams, which began instantly, were terrifying. He seemed to be pursued by some monster which resembled the sewel'l; no, there were several of them, and they all looked alike—they were, in fact, the little creatures which he had drowned out and killed the previous day. But these dream phantoms were vastly bigger, and they seemed to be hunting him deep beneath the ground, where he had taken refuge in a burrow. Twist and turn as he would, he could not shake them off. Yet it seemed at last as though he were about to escape them, when one appeared from nowhere, seized him by the ankle, and gripped him fast. Treen sought to tear away from the creature's hold, but only succeeded in bringing himself to wakefulness, with a cry on his lips. His pinched ankle was swollen painfully, and throbbing more cruelly than ever.

Likewise, dawn was at hand. Not long now until the sun would be up, to turn its rays full into his face as he lay there helplessly.

Again his attention was attracted to the mouth of the tunnel near by. The sewel'l was still there, although the little creature was betraying signs of uneasiness, as though understanding that with the coming of day, it must vanish into the cool darkness of its burrow. Treen turned his head away. Once more he tried to sleep, but gave it up. His nerves were too much on edge for slumber. He must wait—and hope.

The sun came up, and very quickly the air grew warm. At first, Treen was protected from the rays by the corner of the cabin, but the sun swung higher, and searched him out. Not alone now was he desperately hungry, but he was also thirsty. All day he must endure this, without water, without food. There would come another night, and then another day. And still another night. And more days and nights, if he did not die in the meantime.

Summoning his strength, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Help! Help! Help!"

The effort left him momentarily exhausted, and he lay back with closed eyes to listen. But no answer came to him.

The sun grew hotter. Treen ran his tongue over his lips, and found that they were already dry and cracked. He was hungry, too, but first of all, he wanted a drink of water. Although he could not see it, he could hear the musical brawling of the little mountain stream near by, a maddening sound. He would have given anything, just to be able to crawl to the edge of the stream and wet his lips in the cool water.

Water! He recalled how he had diverted this stream, in order to drown out the sewel'l's. He considered all the water that had been wasted thus. But still he could not know that it was this single act of attempting to wipe out the family of Rufa which had resulted in his own present predicament.

By and by, Treen fell asleep again, the slumber of exhaustion. Also, with the sun beating strongly on him in the glade, he was in imminent danger of a stroke. But there was nothing he could do. Death moved closer to him, and stared in his face; and still Treen could do nothing more than to hope that the end would come quickly.

But it did not come, throughout the long hours of that day. By nightfall, Treen knew that he was on the verge of insanity, and he tried to keep a grip on himself, tried to take his mind off the grim realization of the situation, tried to think of other things. But it was of no use. He fell to shouting again, calling for help, although knowing full well that nobody was there to hear. And then he fell into troubled sleep once more.

At last he awakened, his brain a little clearer than it had been before. Sundown was near; already the coolness which comes when the shadows grow long was at hand. The blessed night would lessen his sufferings, even though it would not end them. Gathering himself for one more effort, Treen cried as loudly as his parched, dry throat would permit:

"Help! Help!"

A pause, and then Treen knew that he was indeed insane. For an answer had come! The voice of a man, answering him!

Too weak to sit up, Treen could only lie there, with his ear close to earth, and hear the sound of footfalls rapidly approaching. Now they were very close. Men were crowding about him, with expressions of wonder. Over him he saw the face of a man he had seen before—the same sheriff who had once searched the cabin without result! And then, realizing that he was saved, Treen fainted.

When he came to, Treen realized that the dread weight on his ankle had been removed. He tried to move his hands, but found them fastened together. Handcuffs! Shining steel bracelets!

"What's this?" Treen forced himself to say. "You've got nothing on me."

Then the voice of the sheriff:

"But we have, Treen. Plenty of it. We found that cave back in the rock wall—you forgot to close the door to it before you got trapped. And we found your plant. Federal officials kept telling me that a counterfeiter was in these parts, and I suspected you. But you were wise enough to have your plant hidden in that cave, and to leave nothing about your cabin which would indicate your guilt. If you hadn't got caught under that foundation log, we might never have got the goods on you." Then, after a pause, the sheriff added:

"Get up, Treen. The boys will help you walk." But they had to lift him; and then the party moved off through the twilight-filled woods.

Presently, silence settled over the glade, which seemed utterly deserted. Yet there was a watcher. At the mouth of the tunnel sat Rufa, the sewel, no doubt marveling greatly at the strange happenings which he could not understand.

Treen never understood how his own downfall came about as the result of a wanton act. Nor did Rufa understand that Fate had stepped in and used him as a pawn in the game of retribution she played against the man. Rufa did understand, however, that the tunnel which he had dug in the cool darkness was now completed, and never again would a flood bereave him. Later that night he would set out in search of a new mate and, finding her, life would resume the even tenor of its way in the fern-filled glade.



Roped! *by Kenneth Perkins*

Author of "Sagebrushed!" etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST MOVE.



ABRUPTLY, Simpson came upon the scene. He had had no warning of what he was about to see. His mount gave no signal of approaching danger by upturned ears or snorting nostrils. No sound broke the stillness of the hot, desert air.

Riding to the edge of the cliff, Neal looked far down into the radiating heat of a deep gorge. And there the whole grim drama was revealed to him.

A man was lying down there stretched out between two boulders. His legs were spread out, one thrust stiffly across a sand dune, the other crooked awkwardly at the knee. One elbow was propped in the sand, giving a slight elevation to his massive shoulders and bare, gray-maned head.

Not twenty yards away, on a giant boulder, a puma lioness was sitting on its hunkers, its tawny shoulders bulg-

ing with taut muscles, its small head lowered threateningly.

It looked to Neal as if the man were trying to out-stare that crouching beast, and that the latter returned his gaze, waiting tensely, fearfully, for him to make the first move.

Presently, the puma slouched off behind a red rock, then silently leaped up to the flat top. It crouched there, its neck thrust far downward below the rock's edge, while its head was tilted upward, poised, cautious, deadly.

Neal had drawn his six-gun. The distance was too far for an accurate aim, but he blazed away, nevertheless, sending a fusillade of shots down into the depths of the gorge.

At the first crack, the puma glanced up, then abruptly whisked about and went off down the stream bed at a fast slouch.

It did not go far. The acoustics of that gorge were peculiar. If those shots had been fired from a point somewhere in the rocky bed, they would have sounded like a machine gun. But fired

from the rim of the cliff, there was no echo. They were muffled, swallowed up in the maze of deep ravines and draws. They might have been a mile away.

The man lying down there squirmed slowly and looked toward the cliffs. Then raising a limp, gaunt arm, he waved.

It was merely the one frantic gesture, then the arm dropped, and lay inert, palm upward. The man was a pitiful bundle of rags—with scarcely any semblance of a human being—more like a scarecrow that had been tossed there by the desert wind.

A moment later, the puma, evidently concluding that that faint barking of a gun had come from too great a distance to cause alarm, came prowling up the stream bed again.

It was then that Neal saw why this mountain lioness—one of the wariest of all desert animals—was so persistently courageous: A cub lion was watching the whole performance from the mouth of a cave. The lioness must have had some dread about that human being reclining there. Perhaps he was lying in wait.

Neal Simpson fired six shots more. Again the beast scurried off at a galloping slouch, got to cover, and a moment later prowled out again. Neal came to the conclusion that he would have to find some other way of rescuing that man. Another fusillade of shots, and that hungry cat down there would get used to the sound and realize that it meant nothing more than, for example, the yapping of a hungry coyote, waiting for the remains of the feast.

Neal looked about for a means of descent into the stream bed. The cliffs fell down sheer for a hundred feet, shelled off on a strata of flat granite, and then dropped again in a series of steps, sloping finally to the dry wash of the bottom.

Higher up in the gorge, the walls sloped to a V-shaped gully, on the sides

of which there were evidences of mule-deer trails. Neal headed off, following the rim for a mile until he found a trail which his horse could negotiate.

It was a wise little cow pony he was riding. Neal had been riding it for two days now in search of a parcel of stray cows which he was rounding up for the Bar M Bar outfit. Both horse and rider knew this kind of ground well. Neal picked out the first mule-deer trail he came to, and zigzagged down across the steep sides of the gully to the boulder-strewn bottom.

In the meantime, the man lying in the stream bed was watching the puma crawl up from boulder to boulder toward him.

He was a gaunt giant of a man with hair that fell in scraggly gray strands over his massive shoulders. His clothes were torn from the jagged rocks and mesquite and thorny cactus, and the back of his woolen shirt was crimson-stained.

He lay there between two high rocks, where he had crawled an hour before. He could crawl no farther. He knew that he was reclining in the last berth he would ever find in this world. Tortured by the merciless rays of the desert sun, he waited for the inevitable end. That sinister stain on the back of his shirt was the result of a gun-wound.

But, cornered as he was, this gaunt desert rat still clung frantically to his last moments of agony. Although it was agony, it was life.

He thrust his long, ungainly arm outward, like a blind man groping. He was groping for a stone. A space of sand for a semicircle around him was stripped clear of sticks and stones and pebbles, for he had already picked up everything that he could reach.

This time he had to roll over, groaning, dragging himself a few inches across the ground until his hand clutched a rock. He tossed it weakly, the breath coming from him in a gasp,

as if he were trying to hurl a great weight.

The rock clattered noisily against the great boulder on which the puma was waiting.

The beast, like a long, brown shadow, darted off down the stream bed and slunk behind an overhanging rock. Here she waited until her cub scrambled clumsily through the brush and joined her. The mother lion was still watching her dreaded enemy—the man. She seemed to be obsessed with the fact that he was plotting to steal her beloved cub. She lay crouched low in a clump of sage, her powerful neck moving back and forth in slow, sinuous curves, her thick tail stiffened and flipping slightly at the end, like an angry cat's.

This relief lasted for but a moment. From the hollow caverns of the man's eyes, two dull-red fires smoldered. He was gazing intently at the nearest rock. And there was the puma again—her head lowered, her rough tongue licking her chops, her eyes gleaming like green phosphorescence.

Thus they faced each other—these two denizens of the desert. Although one was a wild beast, the other a man, there seemed to be a certain kinship between them. Both were gaunt, rangy, hungry-looking animals, both ridden with fear, both lean-sinewed, powerfully built, except that one was in the prime of life, the other on the threshold of death.

As the man sank down, with his scrawny hand clutching futilely at the sand, the puma's eyes burned. Green flames danced there like the sheen on a desert mirage. She must have known what that pitiable gesture meant. Her prey was no more to be feared than the carcass of a deer. It was not like that terrifying enemy that walks upright on its legs—a man.

A movement went through her muscles, sending a ripple across the long slim back of patchy hair. Her tail lay

stiff and straight except for that venomous little flip at the end.

The man knew she was about to spring. His neck stiffened, and for a moment the lolling head was raised as if with a last ounce of strength. He did not close his eyes as the cat sprang. He stared, fascinated, his mouth agape, his eyes bulging, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth as he tried like one in a nightmare to utter a scream.

He saw the slim brown body hurtling through the air, blotting out the sun.

He did not know what had happened. He had seen that bundle of sleek sinews, and unsheathed claws, and gleaming teeth descending upon him. But it landed a yard to the right, "sun-fishing" in the air like a bucking horse and disappearing down the stream bed in a yellowish streak.

At the same instant the sound of hoofbeats rang loudly through the narrow gorge.

The man sank back heavily to the sand. He lay there a moment hovering between the world of nightmare and reality. Then he was aware of the soul-satisfying balm of water trickling over his swollen tongue.

Some one was bending over him, holding a canteen to his lips.

A mile away, a hungry lioness and her cub were trailing off at a fast slouch toward the open desert.

CHAPTER II.

"QUICK, HOMBRE! WHERE IS IT?"

THE peculiar effect the water had upon the man was strangely puzzling to Neal Simpson. A light came back into the blood-drained eyes, but it was not the light of a rejuvenated strength. It was a strange, savage glint, a faint yellowish flame that flickered far back in the depths of hollow caverns.

The loose lips tightened, revealing a row of broken teeth. It was like a grin of malignant triumph.

"Think you've got me, do you?" the man said huskily. "Oh, no! I'm way beyond your law, hombre. Whoever you are, you've come too late."

Neal let the grizzled old head down so that it was pillow'd on the sand. Then, purely for the sake of assuaging the dying man's fears, he said gently:

"Reckon you don't know what's been happening, old man. There was a lioness here, protectin' her young. Just as I rode around the bend in the canyon, I saw the critter leap toward you. But she saw me coming and scurried off and lit out for the horizon."

"Sure. I know. She was tryin' to get me. Been crouchin' on every rock in this wash tryin' to make up her mind to spring. She thought she had me easy. And the sun thought he had me! Been broilin' me and fryin' me, tryin' to make me daft. And then you come, thinkin' you got me. But you come too late, hombre. I'm free of you and all your palm-singin', lynchin' crew!"

"I ain't here to lynch you, and palm-singin' ain't the kind of game I ordinarily roll," Neal said. "I'm stray man for the Bar M Bar. Been combing this timber for mavericks and strays. Then I bumped into this racket. I ain't goin' to pester you with questions concernin' your occupation or your present circumstances. But what I would like to know is, who plugged you in the back, and left you here to roast in this gully without gun, or horse, or water?"

The gray face hardened. The deep wrinkles were like lines chiseled in granite.

"My own gang—that's who done it!" snarled the wounded man. "My own men, which I've led for years in and out this desert and across the border and back again. My own pards, which they're a bunch of crawlin', p'isonous reptiles. They done it. But—" He looked up at the stranger who had come to help him. Neal was not sure whether the rage in those fevered eyes was di-

rected upon him, or upon the "gang" he was reviling. "But none of you could do it. You been tryin' to get me for the last five years—and you never could find hair nor hide nor hoofprint of me for all your rewards!"

Neal did not question him any further. Whatever the man's past had been, whatever the cause of his coming death, or the justice of it, there was no point in whipping up that insensate anger any further.

"I'll help you over to the shade, stranger," Neal said.

"No! Don't touch me. Don't move me. 'Tain't any use. Don't dast lay a finger on me."

Neal saw that the old fellow had spoken the truth. There was no use. He had no need of any further ministrations from the hand of man. He lay there for a moment gasping, trying to regain breath enough to give a last half-choked vent to his hatred.

"They'll pay for it, though! Let 'em bank on that. Thought they could get rid of me this easy, did they! And all because they wasn't satisfied with the way I divvied the last swag. A few pesos for some mavericks. Enough to get souised on—and they kill their chief because they wanted more!" He tried to sneer. Then, looking up with a sudden surge of energy and fury, he said: "Look here! You can ride and shoot. You go after 'em!" He was pleading now, excitedly, grasping in the frenzy of a hoped-for revenge. He thrust a violently trembling hand into his shirt, fumbled there a moment, and then drew out a crumpled, half-torn bit of paper.

"Read that!" he commanded. He tried to throw it at Neal, but it fell from his hand, and fluttered to the ground.

Neal picked it up, and read to himself rapidly:

Wanted: "Bull" Caruthers, road agent and killer, for murders in Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada. Aged sixty-four years. Thick, gray hair, lean face. Narrow-set

black eyes. Height, six feet two. Operates with a gang estimated at about twelve men—whites, except for three half-breeds and one Apache. Reward: \$1,000 for each member of the gang caught, dead or alive.

"You get a thousand for my carcass, see?" the old bandit said. Neal looked at him. It was quite obvious that this was Bull Caruthers himself. "But you didn't get me alive—oh, no! What happens to me after I croak, I don't care. You get a thousand—in payment for this swig of water, and for scarin' off that there cat. *Bueno!* If you want more, go and get the whole gang."

"Where are they?" Neal asked quickly. He realized that if death would spare this old villain for a few more moments some very valuable information would issue from those pale, slack lips.

"Our cache is on a rock mesa down yonder on the desert rim. There's a gulch leads up to the top where there's a granite bowl like a fort."

The bandit's voice trailed off in a series of guttural groans.

Neal clutched at him. "All right, hombre—go on—your gang. You want me to round 'em up. Keep on talkin', hombre. Where'll I find 'em?"

The man struggled and sank back to the sand again, grasping loudly. Then his lips formed the scarcely audible words:

"To-night you'll find 'em all ridin' the sheep country. Raidin' a sheep ranch. Planned it myself. No one there to-night exceptin' an old duffer and a gal—"

Again the voice was muffled in groans. Neal leaned down so that his face was a few inches above the grim, deathlike mask.

"Go on, old man," he said in feverish excitement. "Go on! Where's this ranch? You hear me? Tell me quick! The sheepmen you were talkin' about—tell me, hombre!"

"My gang never fights men. I taught

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'em that. A man could lick 'em single-handed, what with their greasy guns! They only take bleary-eyed old coots, or womenfolks."

"The ranch! Where is it—the ranch they're raidin' to-night?" Neal asked frantically.

"This time they're goin' to rustle the girl off for ransom. I told 'em she—"

Neal thrust his arm under the massive and inert shoulders, lifting them, and holding the lolling head so that they were face to face.

"You hear me, hombre?" he cried. "Keep your mind on it! Here, take a swig of this. Easy now. Don't let your mind wander, old man. The sheep ranch—where is it! Tell me!"

"The Fernando Basin—only ranch twenty miles south of—"

Neal knew where the Fernando Basin was—and he estimated that it would be a long twelve-hours' ride on a rocky desert trail by the shortest route.

"If they get the girl," he interrupted, in a frenzy of doubt "where will they hide her?"

"In the mesa—ride there and get 'em. Get every snivelin' varmint you can dump! Lynch 'em! Make 'em pay what they owe me. Get my revenge for me— Every snivelin'—"

"But this mesa, hombre, where is it?" Neal cried in despair. He held the man tightly, as he saw the gaunt, bony frame go limp. "Tell me, hombre! You only told me about the ranch. But where's the mesa?"

The gray-haired outlaw was hanging like a dead weight. His head lolled back so that the face was turned upward to the intense, burning rays of the sun.

"The mesa—the cache! Where they're takin' the girl!" Neal fairly shouted in his anxiety.

There was a slight flicker of the waxen lids, a sagging of the bristly jaw.

Neal dropped the inert weight. A baffled cry was on his own lips. The

lips of the dead bandit were tight and gray.

And the secret of that mesa was sealed behind them.

CHAPTER III.

A GRANDFATHER FOR GUARDIAN.

THE Buckley sheep ranch was in a broad valley surrounded by sierras. It was the kind of high country preferred by sheep. There was not enough grass to carry cows, and what little there was grew patchy and coarse on the hillsides. The Buckley stock, in fact, found their main sustenance in the filaree that grew on the rocky foot-hills.

The three Buckley brothers were aliens in the country. They used the center-fire rig in their saddles instead of the double cinch; they broke their horses with a hackamore followed by a snaffle bit, using double reins; they built fences around their ranch, for they thought in terms of the fence country of Nevada and Idaho; and they used rawhide reins tied together with a quirt at the end, instead of the split reins of the Arizona stockmen. And knowing themselves to be outcasts in the cattle country, they drank alone when they paid their weekly Saturday night visit to Jimson's Switch.

Nature as well as mankind had dealt harshly with the Buckleys. Their bands of range-fed sheep brought scarcely six pounds to the fleece, instead of the twenty pounds brought by farm-bred animals. The ewes had a habit of dropping their lambs on the desert where coyotes and loboes picked them off. Sheep pox and sheep tick made further inroads. The Buckley ranch, in short, was not the kind of outfit that would attract a band of rustlers, for there was never any money hidden under the puncheon floor of the hut, nor were there any blooded horses to steal, nor a larder of beef, or eggs, or "air-

tights" upon which to make a feast. But there was a girl.

If the three Buckley brothers had taken her to Jimson's Switch on their carousing expeditions, they would have found themselves as important as the sheriff, the alcalde, and the owner of the Jackpot Mine combined. But they always kept her at home. Occasionally, a desert wanderer might stop at the ranch for water. If it happened to be an old prospector, Sal Buckley would minister to his needs. If it was a young one, the old grandfather would order the girl back to the kitchen and pump the water himself.

Tales of a strangely beautiful girl living in the Fernando Basin sifted into Jimson's Switch once in a while, but when it was learned that the girl was the sister of the Buckley brothers, and hence a sheep girl, interest lagged. Besides, one had to see Sal Buckley close to realize that she had any beauty at all. A stranger might catch sight of her off there behind the bleak ranch house, painting the brand on the wool of a sheep, smearing a salting trough with tar to cure the ewes of botflies, or tending a sick lamb in the cote. All that could be seen was a girl in a gingham dress, barefooted, and with a shock of sun-faded hair bound carelessly about her head.

But two outlaws had stopped here once. The brothers were out on the sheep run rounding up their bands. The old grandfather was laid up with lumbago. Thus the renegades had a close view of the woman who was filling their canteens. They saw her gray eyes, the perfect contour of a deeply tanned face, and a frank, boyish smile that gave a glimpse of teeth as white and evenly matched as a string of pearls. They estimated that she was worth approximately fifteen thousand dollars.

Then came Saturday night. Old Grandpa Buckley was in his

split-bottom chair, fixing a gopher trap. Sal was in the back of the room cleaning a circular hardwood board and a thin-bladed knife; later, she would cut squares of muslin in preparation for the next day's butter molding. She was singing a song her grandfather had taught her, and presently the old man, stirred by the words and her sweet contralto voice, took down his banjo and plunked an accompaniment. It was a good curt for lumbago, and his stiff right leg began to tap thunderously on the puncheon floor.

I soon shall be in Frisco,
And then I'll look around!
And when I see the gold lumps there,
I'll pick 'em off the ground!

The silvery-haired, leather-faced old man and the brown-haired young girl were enjoying their own Saturday night far off there in the desolate reaches of the Fernando Basin, while all the human denizens of the cattle country, the sheep range, and the desert were carousing in the resorts of Jimson's Switch, twenty miles away.

Old Grandpa Buckley waxed so enthusiastic in his accompaniment that neither he nor the girl heard the distant echo of hoofbeats drifting down the valley.

Perhaps they might not have detected that ominous and thrilling sound, anyway. For the band of horsemen were picking out the sandy stream bed so that their mounts would make a minimum of sound as they advanced.

It was not until they were within a furlong of the bleak ranch house that one of their horses crossed a slab of granite, making a sharp metallic *clipclop* before again finding the soft ground.

The riders immediately deployed, one group heading off into some timber on the right, another branching to the left, and three horsemen kicking their mounts to a run and heading straight for the warped, gray shack.

"Did you hear that, grandpops?" the girl asked suddenly.

"Hear what?"

"Horses." She was at the window now.

"How many?" the old man asked.

She peered out across the starlit floor of the valley. "I can see three of them," she said.

"Reckon the boys are comin' back. Must've forgot somethin'. Maybe their money. Crazy young coots!"

"Don't look like our horses, grandpops."

"Reckon not!" Grandpa Buckley grumbled as he got up from his chair and hobbled to the window. "The boys don't generally forget their money. Never knowed 'em to leave a cent here. They always leave it on the faro table in town."

"It's three strangers, grandpops!"

The old man scowled from under his bushy gray brows.

"Can't quite make 'em out. You sure it ain't the boys?"

"Sure, grandpops—and there's three men over yonder, coming out of the piñons."

"What-all are you handin' me!" Grandpa Buckley was alarmed. "You mean six altogether?"

"There's nine!" the girl said excitedly. Her excitement was the reaction of a child who anticipates a welcome break in a deadly routine.

But old Buckley took a very different view of the matter. He gripped the girl's arm.

"Look here, child. I don't like this here racket. Looks like a bunch of cattlemen or breeds or such like hostiles. Don't dast let 'em see you."

"They only want some water, grandpops, or maybe some food. I'll bake 'em some biscuits."

"You won't do nothin'—except keep out of this. Look here—" He pulled her back from the window in a sudden fit of alarm. "You sneak out

back and hide yourself in the feed shack. Pert now. They ain't no time to palaver. I'll tell 'em they ain't no one here but me."

"Maybe they know us, dad, and they'll he expectin' to see me," she said, in a childish but well-founded conviction of her own importance in the sight of men.

"I'll tell 'em you went up to town with the menfolk," said her grandfather.

He hustled her out through the back door, and petulantly she obeyed his orders. She had obeyed this particular order many times before. Her grandfather was vitally suspicious of all strangers, always fearful for the safety of his most precious possession—this girl. Many times he had ordered her to hide. And she was used to obeying the order.

When she was gone, old Buckley peered through the window across the fences of the round corral, the dipping vat, the shearing corral, and the water trough.

Yes, there were nine men. Despite the dim light and the dark background of red earth, and despite the fading eyes of the excited old man, he could see nine riders. And they were approaching not in a troop, but deployed, three coming up through the gate of the front corral, three riding single file to the west of the house, and the other three to the east.

A complete realization of the coming disaster gripped old Buckley. If they were here as friends they would have entered that front gate—all nine in a bunch. They would not have deployed like a troop of fighters about to make a siege.

His heart thumping loudly in his sunken old chest, Buckley staggered back into the room, put out the kerosene lamp, then fumbled against the wall for a shotgun. It was his old sawed-off shotgun which many years before he

had used as a deputy sheriff in Nevada. A bunch of shells hung in a snake-skin next to the gun. With a hand that trembled violently, the old man loaded up. He had not fired a gun for many years—a circumstance due mainly to his eyesight. He prayed fervently for some miracle from heaven to clear his dim eyes and steady his palsied hand. Uttering the prayer so that the stuffy, silent little room echoed with mumbling whispers, he shuffled hurriedly to the one window which opened upon the front corral.

He pointed the gun out and, sighting on the foremost rider, blazed away.

The range might have been possible with a rifle, but with a shotgun the gesture amounted to little else than a warning. The shot scattered uselessly in a wide pattern, spraying the ground and ten yards on the near side of the gate.

The three attackers in front of the house dropped from their mounts. They had expected that shot when they saw the light snuffed out inside the shack.

The group to the east followed suit. The riders on the west separated, one of them circling around to the back of the house, another dismounting and dropping to cover, the third riding back at a far range, and gathering the horses of the men who had dismounted.

Old Buckley staggered back to the side window, which looked out on a potato patch, beyond which was the feed shack. The girl had got to safety—that much was certain. And luckily she could not betray her hiding place by firing a gun. In the excitement of that first dreadful moment old Buckley had not thought of the expediency of giving the girl a gun with which to protect herself. He was glad of it now. She could stay there while he fought off the gang.

The old man did not stop to consider the pitiable odds of that fight. His one

intent now was to blaze away with his crazy old shotgun while eight or nine men returned his challenge with revolvers.

They were getting their positions now, crawling up to a closer range, hiding behind the water trough, a rain barrel, a buggy, the high black fence of the dipping vat.

Now they were ready.

It was at this moment that a new fighter arrived upon the scene. He came without announcing himself, prowling like a thief in the night, armed with a six-gun, armed with the power of keen, steel-blue eyes, a steel-like hand—a hand that was steady with the coolness of youth, of health, of unlimited courage.

Neal Simpson had reached the Fernando Basin half an hour before. He had seen the coming of the troop of horsemen, and instead of riding out into the open stretches of grass clumps and filarce, he had tethered his horse in a side draw, and worked his way down, now walking, now running, now crawling on his hands and knees, until he reached the outermost corral of the Buckley outfit.

There was a warped little barn out there, filled with odds and ends of harness, bottles of liniment, carbolic lotions, wooden gags, sacks of salt.

He got inside, and left the door open so that he could command a very good view of the corrals and the deployed men.

He waited for their first fusillade before he fired.

It was a wise move, for the flash of his gun was only partially hidden by the shack. When the outlaws fired their first fusillade, Neal Simpson blazed away.

The bandits thought that one of their own men had climbed into that shack. They were totally unaware of the dangerous enemy who had arrived upon the scene.

CHAPTER IV.

INTO THE OPEN.

THE flash of guns coming from every direction dismayed old Grandpa Buckley. He staggered back from the window as the slugs whistled past his head, splintered the window sill, dug into the wall behind him.

In a fever of desperation, he ran shuffling about the room in a circle, like a rat caught in a wire cage. He barred both doors, shoved tables, and chairs, and barrels against them. He yanked the stove from the wall and dragged it across the floor to the front window, then crouched behind it, using it as a shield. From this little barricade he sent out another charge of buckshot.

It was a wild shot, uttered with a frantic prayer that it would reach at least one of his enemies.

And, sure enough, one renegade fell—plunging out from behind the water trough!

Old Man Buckley was flabbergasted at his miraculous success. The water trough was a good way off, and at that range the buckshot must have scattered in a wide pattern. Nevertheless, there was the man, lying out on the open ground, clutching at his shoulder, groaning loudly.

"Pick yourself up, 'Texas,'" one of the renegades called. "You ain't hurt. The old coot's firin' with a shotgun, I heard the buckshot spatterin' again this pan."

"I'll be a Mohave if it's buckshot!" the wounded man cried furiously. "Feels like a dum dum bullet squashed agin' my shoulder blade."

Another fusillade blazed out from the ring of crouching men. Old Buckley saw the flash of guns from behind barrels, mounds of adobe, the buckboard, the feed shack. The lead zipped in through the window ahead of him, the window on the east side, the window on the west. One shot splintered the front

door. Another struck with a loud *ping* against the overturned stove.

Again the old man, in a frenzy of zeal, confident that Heaven was on his side, loaded his ancient shotgun, thrust it across the stove, and blazed away.

The fight was waxing hot now. The renegades, using their six-guns, poured their shots into the cabin, each man firing four or five times to Buckley's one. But the old man was undaunted by the terrific odds. He was loading and firing as fast as his palsied old hands would work. He blazed away, seeing nothing but the flashes of the guns, the tips of sombreros. If he had remembered from his experiences of old how close he had to be to get a man with that weapon, he would have realized that he was merely wasting his ammunition at that range. But he did not remember. He knew that a second man had fallen to the ground, and was crawling off like a wounded snake toward the horse *cavvy*.

"Two of 'em!" he cried exultantly. "Well, I ain't so bad! I'm just nacherly goin' to rectify them murderers afore I pokes my ole haid from behind this stove!"

He watched the flash of guns carefully. The three attackers in front of the house had dropped back. Through the east window, he had seen a white tongue of fire leap from the door of an outhouse like a snake's tongue.

He aimed his next charge into that door.

This was the door from behind which Neal Simpson was doing his firing. The buckshot had spread, and at that range it could have done little except perhaps bring down a few quail in a covey. But Neal felt that charge. Most of it had spattered against the wall of the shack to one side of the door, but a few buckshots ripped into his arm, and he felt the blood cooling against his flesh as it trickled down.

He kept on firing. And the renegades kept on firing. And at rarer intervals

the old man, cornered in his shack, and shielded by the iron stove, sent out a loud, hoarse bark from his rusty weapon.

"The old coot's fightin' like a madman!" some one cried. "And the girl's helpin'. One of 'em's pumpin' at us with a shotgun. And Rupple got creased with a slug!"

"Then crawl up closer, you cowards," one of the renegades cried, "and finish the ole man afore any more of us is hit!" He raised his voice, calling across the corral. "Hey you, 'Pack Rat,' get out from behind that shack!"

"Pack Rat's inside the shack, firin' hot and heavy," one of the renegades posted in that direction called back.

But Pack Rat, a chunky breed with his sombrero tipped back and resting on his massive shoulders, crawled out into the open. The rest of the gang were doing the same, advancing from barrel to trough, to sand mound, to rock.

Pack Rat never had a chance to explain that he had not been actually inside that shack. When he got out in front of it, crouched low and prowling along on all fours like a grizzly, a slug stung him under the shoulder and he fell to his face. The firing was at its height, so no one noticed the streak of light spurting out from the very shack where they had supposed Pack Rat had been entrenched.

Neal Simpson, having fired this strategic shot, sank to his knees. He was beginning to feel the loss of blood. He heard the rattling crack of gunfire all about him, but it seemed softened, muffled, merged together in a long, singing roar. The ranch house and the feed shack beyond seemed to rock with the deafening vibrations of sound. The starlight was dimmed.

"Reckon I better tie up this crease," he said to himself, "afore I finish the rest of 'em."

His head swam, his eyes tried vainly to focus upon those prowling figures,

and his hand reached out to keep himself from falling. "Yep, it's got to be done! Can't lose any more blood, or I'll be staggerin' around like I'm drunk."

He ripped a strip from his shirt, and with one hand and his teeth tied a tight knot above the torn flesh of his arm. The forced ride up from the desert had exhausted him. It had been twelve long, torturing hours under the desert sun, using up time in which he had intended to catch some much-needed sleep. He had not stopped for either food or drink. He had been without food, drink, or sleep for upward of thirty-six hours. And now came this miserable little flesh wound in his arm to drain him of his last ounce of energy.

The rattle of gunfire had stopped, leaving a silence that for the moment seemed more deafening. Neal was in a daze, his head swollen and light, his eyes trying vainly to catch the rapid movement of that scene. He was like a man trying to catch the separate figures of a merry-go-round which whirls past him.

Meanwhile, something had happened to put an abrupt end to that battle.

Sal Buckley had obeyed her grandfather's order and hidden in the feed shack at the back of the house. She had had no inkling that a raid was taking place until she heard the first crack of those guns.

For a moment, she crouched against the closed door of the shack, too dazed at the suddenness of the tragedy to know what to do. She had never witnessed a gun fight before. It was something that belonged to a world apart—a world of men—the world from which her brothers and grandfather had sedulously protected her since she was a child. But here she found herself for the first time in the thick of a battle, deafened by the bark of guns, cringing there in the jet-blackness of the shack among the boxes and barrels and har-

ness like a trapped sage hen listening to the snarling of a pack of hounds.

Two fusillades rang out before she came to herself. She peeped through a crack in the walls of the shed, and saw the ring of men circling the main ranch house. She saw the streaks of light leaping from every direction—the flash of a gun spurting out of the window of the ranch house where her poor old grandfather was hiding. She saw two of the attackers fall. Then she realized what it was all about.

Her grandfather was putting up a desperate fight for his life—and for hers. It was many men against that one crazed old fighter. Already, the bandits were crawling up to him from every direction. Two of them were prowling toward a window that faced upon the girl's side. A third had reached the back of the house and was low crouched, hiding under the window sill.

As soon as this dreadful truth dawned upon the dazed girl, she decided to act. Without pausing to weigh the consequences, she stepped out of the shack and stood, a slim, straight figure, in full view of the whole gang.

The renegades were so taken by surprise at this radical turn of events that they stared, gaping, not a man among them making a sound.

It was the girl who spoke first.

"What do you coyotes want?" she asked coolly.

The men nearest to her heard the question, and they answered in triumphant jeers:

"Reckon the fight's over, men!" one of them cried.

"She wants to know what we-all want!" another laughed mockingly.

"You're all we want, little lady," a third announced.

"Where's your gun at?" the man nearest to her asked, popping up from behind the buckboard, and walking toward her.

"I haven't got a gun!" she answered calmly.

"Reckon she's tellin' the truth," another man said, coming nearer. "There wasn't no one hit on this side of the house. The old coot in there was trimmin' us with a shotgun and a revolver. A two-gun man, so help me!"

Old Buckley had seen his granddaughter step out from her hiding place. He knew well enough not to fire in her direction with that old shotgun. And it is to be doubted whether he would have fired, anyway. He was more flabbergasted than the renegades themselves at the girl's rash move. She had come out into the open and given herself up at the very point when Old Buckley was sure he was turning the tide of battle toward victory!

And at that moment, when he was staring through that window dazed by the completeness of this disaster, one of the renegades peered into the house. He saw the bent form of the old man silhouetted against the light of the window on the opposite side of the room. Buckley had risen from the floor and was standing there revealed above the stove, totally unmindful now of his own danger.

The renegade raised his six-gun and was about to send a slug between those hunched shoulder blades, when he heard the girl's voice:

"If I'm all you want, take me. I'll go with you. But don't harm that old man in there, I'm begging you-all on my knees."

The man at the window put down his gun. It was no revulsion of feeling that gripped him as he was about to shoot down this old man like a dog. Quite the contrary. It was the girl's statement that gave him pause, for it had the effect of calling a truce.

The renegade thought quickly. This ransom game was a ticklish business. They would have to bargain with the three Buckley brothers for the ransom

money. To start the game by murdering the old grandfather did not promise a very good basis for negotiations. Wisely enough, the renegade did not fire his gun.

Instead, he leapt over the windowsill and landed upon the old man like a wolf upon the back of a helpless steer.

"All right, men," a voice came from the shack a moment later. "I've got the old duffer hog tied. Get to your horses with that girl. We'll light out for the mesa without no more palaver."

Neal Simpson found himself lying peacefully in a heap of sacks and bottles. The rhythm of horses' hoofs, the sound that had brought him out of his faint, drifted to him in slowly diminishing echoes.

He got to his feet and stood swaying, confused, gazing out across the dim, starlit scene.

The ranch was deserted. The old plugs were munching weeds in a corral. Somewhere there was the plaintive bleating of a lamb. The canyon bed lay a desolate waste devoid of animal or human life, eaten down by the Buckley flocks, an undulating sea of bare brown knolls. Across one of these knolls half a mile away a band of riders was passing, closely bunched, moving over the round crest, dipping into a hog wallow, climbing the next hillock, heading south.

Neal Simpson uttered an exclamation as he came to himself. He did not stand there gazing at those retreating riders. He ran out into the open corral to get a horse. He could find no saddle on the rack, or anywhere about. The Buckley brothers had evidently taken the only saddles of the outfit. But he took a hackamore from the rack near the trough, swung it over the head of the first horse he could reach, and leaped on, bareback.

His own horse was still in a side draw where he had hidden it. But Neal wanted a fresh mount. His own little

cow pony had carried him nearly two days without a rest.

As soon as he mounted that sheepman's plug he hurried back to his own horse for saddle and bridle. He set the tuckered-out little cayuse free to graze and then headed off at a fast gallop toward the desert.

He had not stopped for water at the ranch. Time was more precious than water at this juncture. But it actually did not occur to him to stop and take a drink. He was obsessed with the task that had been assigned to him by a capricious fate. "Capricious" was scarcely a strong enough term to describe the force that was toying with these unlucky mortals. Neal Simpson was swearing at his luck, his destiny, and himself:

"There I was with the whole fight in my hands," he growled as he kicked his horse into a fast gallop, "and what do I do but just naturally lie down and take a snooze!"

CHAPTER V. SIX-HIGH SAVVIES.

THE band of renegades, with their two prisoners, headed across a rugged stretch of desert land, now dipping into a narrow gulch, now climbing to the flat top of a mesa, now zigzagging down again toward the alkaline plains.

They knew how to travel the country, they knew each short cut. They knew just which trails could be negotiated by their desert-bred broncs; and just which ones were safe only for burros or mules. Besides this, the route which they ordinarily took to reach their secret mesa led across beds of gypsum or through stream beds, or up lava-strewn canyons where their horses left no clear tracks. There was only one possibility of their ever being trailed: and that was by a pursuer who could follow within ten miles so that he could catch sight of

them each time they crossed the open stretches of starlit sand dunes.

They had no reason in the world to believe that any such pursuer was following them now. Nevertheless, they kept on at their fastest gait. They wanted to make the trip to their mesa before sunrise. There might have been a possibility during the daytime of some desert wanderer catching sight of them.

The troop of riders presented a rather strange-looking spectacle. Two of them were wounded, hunched in their saddles, clinging to the pommels. There was an old man riding with his hands bound behind his back. And finally there was a girl, with her reins held by another rider.

Thus they pressed on, crossing the wide plain of alkaline silt, and heading south into a range of low sierras. When they came finally to a massive table of granite that rose eight hundred feet above the floor of the desert, the sky was flaming with the first light of dawn.

The unkempt and exhausted crew trailed up through the crevice on foot. The top of the mesa was covered with a thick matting of mesquite, except in certain spots of denuded rock. The strata of quartz and granite had been through a violent process of upheaval so that the top was a veritable maze of outcropping rock, dislodged boulders, and narrow, brush-filled draws. In one of these draws they corralled all their horses, leaving them under guard of an old Apache.

On the southern edge of the tableland there was a granite bowl twenty yards in diameter with walls as high as a man's breast. It made a perfect fortress, as well as a hiding place. A fire could be built there, sheltered, except for its smoke, from the view of the plains below.

Immediately upon arriving, the renegades ordered the old man to collect mesquite twigs and piñon branches for a fire. Provisions were brought out

from a shallow well in the center of the bowl. The girl was given a bucket and ordered to carry the water. There was a water pocket in the narrow ravine where the horses were kept. The most arduous work that the outlaws had to do was to tote the water from this pocket to the bowl a furlong away. The girl was sent on two trips, while one of the guards, a half-breed Papago, sat on a rock at the mouth of the ravine and watched her struggling over the rugged boulder.

When she had completed this task, she was ordered to water the horses.

Meanwhile, old Grandpa Buckley was helping one of the breeds with breakfast. The men who had been wounded in the raid the night before prodded the old prisoner with growls and threats, warning him that if the "chow weren't to their likin' they'd sure crawl his hump some. They'd shoot him up if he so much as burned a biscuit."

The rest sat around on the edge of the bowl, chewing tobacco, and discussing the final moves of their game.

"We got to send a man to Jimson's Switch with a message," one of them said. He had been acting in the capacity of gang leader since the death of their old chief, Bull Caruthers. He claimed this dignity on account of the fact that he himself had put the bullet into the chief's back. His name was "Slug" Hagey, a large, pudgy, thick-necked hombre with pale-blue eyes.

"Which the message will stipulate," this man Slug Hagey went on, "that fifteen thousand will have to be turned over, afore we let the two prisoners go."

"If they come through with the money, what then?" one of the gang objected. "How do we know they won't trail the messenger and find out where we're hidin'?"

"Further and more," another added, "just which one of us is goin' to offer to go to Jimson's Switch and palaver

with the sheriff. Not me! Count me out. I'll stay guard over the girl here—and the ole coot. But I ain't hankerin' to negotiate with no sheriff."

"Nor me either," said another. And this sentiment was enthusiastically seconded by every one of the bandits.

"And another thing: What man is there in this gang which we can trust him with fifteen thousand?"

The first speaker was stumped at this question, and ruminated for a moment.

"That there point seems like good, common hoss-savvy," he said finally. "We got to send a man who don't know just how much can be bought with the amount of jack specified."

The rest stared. It seemed like a far-fetched solution. But Slug Hagey glanced over at the old Indian who had been stationed as horse guard.

"Six-high' over yonder—he could do it."

"Six-high don't know a mirage from a water hole!" some one snorted.

"I know he don't, because he never has no use for water. But he's done us a lot of favors for a quart of nose paint, and he'll do this."

"Why, I seen him last Saturday over to Pedro's Cantina," another renegade grunted scornfully, "and he was rollin' a cigarette with a dollar bill!"

"That's just it," Slug Hagey pointed out. "He don't know what a dollar bill means. It's the same to him as a post card advertisin' hoss liniment. He's the man we can trust to get that fifteen thousand without crawlin' off across the border with same."

Six-high Buffalo was an old Apache inebrate whose wisdom was confined to the relative power of *cuelo* or *redeye*. He did not know what dollar bills meant. He had a vague idea that a silver peso could accomplish a certain end, although he rarely had one in his own hand. He never worked, and he never had anything to sell, and he had never found a lucky strike in the desert. His

peculiar cognomen signified that he could not even play poker. A man cannot have a hand designated as "six-high." If a six-spot were his highest card, he would be bound to have a combination with much more power than "six-high." But it takes a poker player to figure that out.

The Caruthers' band of outlaws recognized the significance of Six-high's name, when they used him as their cat's-paw. They never took him on raids, for his talents fitted him more for a hard drinker than a hard rider.

"This here is the message Six-high will take," Slug Hagey said. He had spent the last few moments laboriously scrawling out the ransom note, which he read forthwith:

"This is to introduce 6-high. He don't know the value of a card, nor of paper money. Give him 15000 in bills as ransom for old Buckley and the Buckley girl. If 6-high brings this dinero to the spot he's been instructed previous, we'll free the prisoners. If he runs off with the money, that's yore lookout and you'll have to round up another 15000 bucks. Don't try to worm outn him as to where the prisoners are at, because he don't know. He don't know nothin'. In fact, when it comes to Geographik directions he's just plumb non compass!"

"'Pears like just you've specified everythin' right clear, Slug!" they all admitted.

They then summoned the horse guard, Six-high, to the bowl and apprised him of the honor which they were conferring upon him.

Six-high was used to being made a cat's-paw during the régime of the late Bull Caruthers. But since the old bandit's death, he had noticed a general confusion in the minds of the band as to just who was to give orders and who was to take them. He seized upon this state of affairs to further a certain end of his own.

"How much you pay-'im Six-high to mak this journey?"

"We pay you when you get back," Slug Hagey answered.

"How much?"

Slug Hagey held up a gold nugget. It was a dull brown, rugged, uninviting.

"Huh! Heap small pay for Six-high. Heap danger to palaver with sheriff. Lou give-'im Six-high other pay."

One of the bandits held up a glittering little rock which sent out succinct, yellow rays. It was iron pyrites, but it looked much more like gold than the real nugget.

Six-high studied it grimly. "Hy-oo-skukum!" he grunted, which was his manner of saying. "Pretty fair!" But he added. "Six-high like-'im more."

A third renegade held out a flask of *cuelo*. "You can pour this down your neck when you get back," he offered.

The old Indian licked his lips. He seemed about to accept, when his eye fell upon a snake-skin of cartridges tied to Slug Hagey's belt. "You give-'im that Jesako cord, and Six-high will go."

The snake skin was tied to the top with a braided horsehair cord, and it was this charm—which in the Apache's mind held peculiar properties—that old Six-high wanted in payment.

Slug Hagey laughed. It was worth no more than a shoestring to him. "You'll get it, old buck!" he said. "You go to town first, see? You give the sheriff or the leadin' citizens of the town this here piece of paper. They'll give you a lot of paper back for it—savvy? Then you tell 'em that if they don't trail you down here into the desert, why, we'll let that there girl and the old coot go free."

Six-high frowned, as his clumsy wits tried to digest these directions. Then he looked over to the girl and her grandfather, who were at the fire cooking breakfast.

"Hy-oo-skukum!" he grunted. "Six-high tell-'im whole pale-face down. But you will free this white squaw—I no think so! By'm bye when I come hack

you kill old hombre—and you keep squaw!"

With that, he went over to the ravine to saddle up.

"He don't think we'll free the prisoner's squaw," Slug Hagey laughed; "not even after we get the fifteen thousand dollars!" He looked around at the circle of grinning faces. "Well, I must say, men, that that ole Injun don't ordinarily have much savvy, but that last mouthful he spoke sure did ring truthful-like!"

CHAPTER VI.

NEAL ARRIVES.

DURING the entire night, Neal had followed the trail of the bandits. The horse that he had picked up at the sheep ranch was as slow as a hocked cow. It was an old plug which the Buckley brothers had contemplated selling for mucilage and saddle soap. Nevertheless, it was used to desert trail, and the bandits had been traveling with two wounded men and two prisoners. For these reasons, Neal gained on them until he realized that he was in danger of being seen.

He trailed through the narrow arroyos as fast as the old plug would carry him, and then when about to cross the open stretches of sand plain, he rested, waiting for the riders to enter the canyon beyond. At all times Neal rode his horse over the sage patches and lava, so that he could not be detected against the dark background.

Just before sunup, he reached the edge of a cliff, and saw the riders heading across a plain of black alkali toward the square table of solid granite two miles away. They swung off to the eastern end of this table-land and disappeared in what looked like a thin black crack in the rock façade.

Neal cut over toward the west, and as the sky turned red he approached the mesa under its own shadow.

There were plenty of brush-filled

draws at the base of the cliffs, and in one of these he tethered his horse. A single glance at the steep walls assured him that there was no trail which his horse could possibly negotiate at this point.

As the light increased, he searched about for some means of ascent. It was a ticklish proposition. From where he stood among the boulders and brush and mounds of alluvial sand at the base, it looked as if he would have to scale eight hundred feet of solid wall.

He climbed to the end of the draw in which he had hidden his horse, and scrambled up a washout on his hands and knees. At the upper end he found himself at an empasse. A circle of granite pillars loomed into the sky, worn smooth and slippery in ages past by sand storms.

Returning to the plain, he got his lass rope, and studied the walls of the mesa. A little to the south, he picked out another draw, above which the cliffs were carved into grotesque shapes, pillars, protuberances, terminating at intervals in groups of rock needles. He climbed this arroyo to the top, where he found the same kind of an empasse, except that twenty feet above him there was a pinnacle of rock thrust out over a ledge.

Climbing as high as he could toward that rock pinnacle, he swung his loop into the air, dabbing it over the needle-like boulder.

He had to do his climbing with two feet and one hand. His left forearm, which had been peppered with buckshot, was useless at this juncture. But with the help of the rope, he was able to reach a ledge of rock twenty feet above. The ledge was a strata of quartz which at one time had been topped by a softer sandstone. He followed this, circling the cliff on a pathway which was scarcely a foot and a half in width. A hundred yards of this precipitous scaling brought him to

another washout, which was filled with pebbles and sand.

He climbed this trail cautiously, knowing that if the loose pebbles started to slide, he would slide with them, plunging over the steep cliff to the floor of the desert below.

Again with the use of his lass-rope he reached another outcrop of hard ground. And thus in four long stages of climbing the defiles, crawling along narrow shelves of granite or quartz, shinning up the perpendicular walls with the help of his rope attached to those needlelike rocks, he came out finally on the flat top of the mesa.

The sun was up and it shone squarely into his face, as he peeped over the rim of a giant boulder and studied the lay of the land. Half a mile away, he saw the granite bowl which was set on the flat plain of the mesa top like the turret of a castle.

He saw the sombrero tips of the men sitting inside the granite bowl, looking like a row of brown owls silhouetted against the red sun. And likewise he saw the slim, dark figure of a girl lug-
ging a heavy pail up the steep side of the bowl, and swinging it over the rim.

At first sight the situation looked promising. There he was in the heart of the bandits' own territory—actually in their very lair, and they did not know it. As he crouched there, casting about in his mind for some plan, he reflected that his first step was to attract the attention of that girl. If she and her grandfather knew that a rescuer was hidden off there on the western rim of the mesa, they might find a chance to make a break. The bandits, of course, would give chase, but Neal could take care of them.

"I could hold 'em off easy, till the girl and the old man climbed down those cliffs," muttered Neal. But his roseate plans burst right there. There was no possibility of climbing down those cliffs, except one at a time by

the same slow and difficult process by which Neal had climbed up. They would have to use the lass rope to accomplish the feat.

Neal searched frantically for another plan. He knew that nothing was to be gained by just waiting there behind that boulder. The bandits were most certainly negotiating for the ransom, and if they received it, Neal had a very well-founded fear concerning the fate of the prisoners. This gang of cut-throats would gain nothing by keeping their word and freeing their prisoners when the ransom money came. The time to act was now.

He decided upon a desperate plan.

He knew beyond any doubt that there was a trail up the eastern side of the mesa—the side where the bandits had left their horses. It was probably the only trail which the girl and her father could climb. If Neal could draw the gang from that side, the two prisoners might have a chance to escape by means of that trail. It all depended upon how well those ragged scarecrows could shoot.

Neal realized that he was playing a game attended with many perils. The stakes were high, and the cards were stacked against him. He knew that luck was against him ever since he had received that charge of buckshot in the arm the night before. If it had not been for that—

"Well, there ain't much sense cryin' about it," he said to himself. "Reckon there's only one thing to do—and that is to bull my luck hot and heavy."

He crawled through a patch of mesquite which blanketed the western end of the mesa-top. Then running low-crouched through the boulders and sand hollows, he came within a long six-gun range of the granite bowl. He might have approached closer, but it was not his game. For the time being it was of paramount importance that he stay out of the bandits' range.

He sighted carefully on one of those sombrero tips—and fired.

It was a good shot, for the sombrero gave a slight kick on its owner's forehead, and then dropped from sight.

At the same instant, a crowd of startled men popped up like so many jacks-in-the-box, and shot bewildered, panic-stricken glances across the boulder-strewn ground.

Five of the men had their six-guns drawn and raised.

Then, a moment later, they caught sight of a tall, slim figure standing waist-deep in a patch of mesquite out there on the center of the mesa-top.

Immediately they sent a broadside of shots at him, and Neal dropped back, firing as he ran.

CHAPTER VII.

JIMSON SWITCH DOES ITSELF PROUD.

THAT day a loose-jointed, wild-eyed Indian visited the cow town which is called Jimson's Switch.

He came down the main street riding his broken-down old paint, his white-maned head lifted proudly, his wrinkled lips pursed in a grim smile of self-assurance. But despite his regal mien, no one paid any attention to him except a mongrel dog, who appeared to be somewhat discriminating when it came to mankind. He barked lustily and skulked behind a water trough, his tail under his legs.

Six-high Buffalo dismounted and walked into the first of the row of ten saloons which lined the single street of the town. Here he asked for a drink. It was the first and most important task of the day—to get the alkali washed out of his throat.

"We don't serve breeds at this here fountain," the barkeeper said.

Six-high nodded grimly. He was thinking You'll serve me somethin' else after I get the Jesako's cord. For I will turn you into a mole! But he merely

said: "Bueno. Which way is shotgun sheriff? Six-high want to make palaver."

"The sheriff is up to Tucson for the week-end."

"Which way is Big Chief of this town?"

"They ain't no such dignitary," the barkeeper said.

"Bueno. Then Six-high Buffalo will make palaver with whole plum cultus town."

"If you're callin' this town plum cultus, I reckon you're projectin' for trouble. Which I advise you to open your war talk with the Vigilantes' Committee. And you'll find same over to the Jimson House makin' laws or gamblin' or drinkin', or all three."

Six-high went over to the Jimson House. As yet no one had noticed his entrance into town.

"Which way is Vigilantes?" he asked at one of the gaming tables. The gamblers showed a passing interest only. A renegade Indian asking to see the Vigilantes might mean something exciting. Then again it might mean merely a dead Indian.

"Over yonder, bettin' on which way a red ant will peregrinate across the table."

Four rugged old frontiersmen, all stockmen, were grouped about one of the tables, the green baize of which was bared of everything except rolls of bills and a black ant. The four law-givers of Jimson Switch were leaning anxiously over the table laying huge wagers concerning the mental attitude of that ant. Would he crawl toward the bar, or would he make a break for the edge of the table in the direction of the front door, or would he just curl up and die? At the moment that Six-high interrupted the proceedings, the ant seemed to be considering the latter course of action. Although all four men were prodding him with a cork, a match, the point of a bowie knife, and a toothpick,

respectively, the ant refused to settle their bets.

"Six-high went to make palaver with this town," the big Indian said, standing behind the chair of one of the gamblers.

"Don't bother us now, Injun. We're in consultation."

"Last night heap big band of rustlers make-'im velly bad raid on Buckley ranch."

The four cowmen looked up. "You mean Buckley's sheep farm?" one of them asked.

"Heap big fight. Shoot-'im up farm house."

"Well, that's sure a powerful lot of hard luck for them sheep men!" another cattleman said. "Hey, Jo," he called the barkeeper. "Buy this here Injun a good drink."

"The Buckley ranch was raided last night, men!" a third deputy called out to the assembled players in the room. "Let's have a drink—the whole house. Mention my name, Jo, when servin' same."

"The Buckley sheep ate our range out last winter," one of the cowmen said, addressing the bandit emissary as well as the whole room. "And the ground was cut up so bad that the grass is ashamed to ever show itself again! The Buckley ranch raided! Well, that's sure powerful unhappy news—for somebody!"

"The three Buckley brother was here last night. Reckon that's when it happened, eh, Mr. Injun? Well, it's got a good chanct of bein' raided ag'in, bein' I locked the Buckley brothers up last night for gettin' into a brawl with three of my cowhands."

The oldest rancher of the quartet looked up from the table, and studied the gaunt, white-maned figure, who during the last few moments had been entirely preoccupied with that promised drink. The cowman churned the stub of a cigar between his lips, and then

after a moment's rumination addressed the Indian:

"Look here, hombre. What-all is your hand in this game?"

The other three dignitaries at the ant table, as well as the rest of the players in the room, looked up. They had no thought that this point was of any great importance. If a cattle ranch had been raided, then there would be necessity for immediate action—the first step of which would be the lynching of this Indian.

"My name is Six-high Buffalo," the emissary replied. "I trail like peaceful hombre in the desert. I see-'im band of riders who give me message to bring to Shotgun Sheriff. Who is this band of plum cultus rustlers? Six-high never see-'im before."

The oldest cowman churned his cigar again and looked Six-high straight in his keen, black, eagle eyes. But he saw at a glance that he could get just as much information out of the old aborigine as the latter chose to give—no more.

"It appears to me," one of the other deputies said, "that we better let the Buckleys out'n the hoosegow, so's they can trail the rustlers mentioned by this here hostile."

The sentiment was acclaimed by the rest of the crowd in Jimson's House. Let the Buckleys settle their own fights. They were not, properly speaking, Jimson Switch citizens at all. Jimson's Switch was a cow town. The Buckleys came here to drink alone—and they had no dealings whatsoever with any man except in transactions that involved fists or guns.

"Sure! We'll liberate these here cantankerous sheep gentlemen and leave 'em go after the rustlers and get their sheep back."

"All right, Jo," one of the deputies announced, as if dismissing the whole case, "bring out the jig-quice quick and plenteous."

"And bring us another ant, Jo. We been ridin' this one too hard."

The general atmosphere of the room suggested that the Buckleys' little mishap was now an item of Jimson's Switch history. The three brothers, locked in the adobe jail for being impolite to cow folks the previous night, could now be free to trail the gang that had robbed them.

But the old Apache complicated this happy solution of affairs by a most disconcerting announcement:

"The rustlers tak' no sheep. Plumb cultus rustlers—they play heap big stakes. Sheep no good—"

"We-all agree with you there, hombre," a cowman called out. "But if they didn't take no sheep, we'd admire to know what else is there worth rustlin' in the Buckley outfit?"

The oldest cowman was chewing his cigar excitedly. While the rest of those in the room were exuberantly discussing the news of a sheep ranch tragedy, this old deputy was thinking hard.

"Look here, men," he said suddenly, "it kind of occurs to me that there was at one time or another a woman livin' in that there rancho."

"Yep, I've heard tell of her once or twict," another man said. "But if she was at the ranch, she's there yet. These here rustlers never dast touch a woman."

"But these here was sheep rustlers," another said. "And a sheep rustler bears the same relation to a regular rustler as a sheepman does to a gentleman."

The deputy with the cigar disregarded these observations. He stood up and faced the Apache.

"Look here, Mr. Skunk. What are you here for, anyways? If you just met this gang of desperadoes on the road, as you say you did, then what's your business?"

"They give 'Six-high message for sheriff."

"Well, the sheriff ain't here. We're

actin' as his deputies. So, out with the message."

The Apache fumbled in his ragged black shirt for the letter that had been given into his keeping.

The old deputy read it, and his leathery countenance turned grim. The wrinkles deepened. The cigar stub wagged up and down as if it was twisted viciously between grinding teeth.

"I'll be caterwopously durned, men!" he exclaimed finally. "They've rustled a gal!"

The announcement was like a thunderbolt. Every player in the room jumped to his feet. The news spread to the street, and the four vigilantes in the Jimson House found themselves surrounded by an excited and furious crowd of townsfolk.

Sheep could be rustled, and Jimson Switch took no notice. But a woman was another matter. That she was a sheep woman made no difference. Cattlemen, miners, gamblers, barkeepers—the whole population of Jimson Switch was up in arms.

"We'll put up a posse!" they cried. "We'll make this Injun take us to where he last seen those outlaws! We'll round the whole gang up and lynch 'em to the last man!"

"Hold on now, boys!" the oldest cowman said, putting up his hand and waving the ransom letter. "This here missive was wrote by a master hand. We can't follow the Injun. If we do, the girl and her ole grandad are lost! This here letter has us all treed and out on a limb!"

Shouting in a hoarse, excited voice above the maddened crowd, the rugged old stockman read the contents of the note.

"We got the Injun anyways!" some one yelled. "He's one of the gang. We can least give him the tight rope."

"That'll help our feelin's some," others agreed.

"It may help you folks," the leading vigilante said, "but it ain't goin' to help that gal. We dassent touch this Injun. We got to ask him to take the money—as a favor!"

"Treed and out on a limb don't half express it," the barkeeper opined.

"We dassent hold this Injun prisoner. We dassent even follow him. All as we dassent do is to raise the fifteen thousand!"

The population of Jimson's Switch was dazed. They stared at the Indian messenger in baffled rage. Old Six-high Buffalo was standing at the bar, his arms folded, his lips still pursed in that tight grin. He was aloof, proud, conscious of his sudden importance—an outcast with a whip-hand held over civilization.

"All right, Tim," some one called out finally, addressing the leading vigilante. "Let's give this skunk the money."

The announcement seemed to relieve the crowd. It gave them a vent for their pent-up rage. The four old cowmen who served as a Vigilante Committee when the sheriff was out of town doffed their tall-peaked sombreros and started to take up a collection. One stayed in the Jimson House to receive the contributions of the gamblers and the stockmen who had been present at the scene. Another went through the resorts across street. A third went to the States Hotel, the chow cart, the veterinary store, and the harness shop. The fourth visited the assay shops and the stamp mill, which, even though it was Sunday, were running full blast.

They were running, that is to say, until the news of what had happened struck them. Then the town took on the appearance of a definite holiday. It was a strange sight to see this old cow town and mining camp going crazy over the news of a raided sheep ranch!

The stamps of the nail ceased to pound out their steady and deafening rhythm. The town was left in an ominous silence. The assay office was

closed. The stage for Sluice Fork remained long past its starting hour—a break in its schedule which had not happened since the Navaho raid of '81.

The whole town—cowmen gamblers, ranch wives, cantina girls, muckers, and prospectors—lined the board sidewalks, while a proud, ragged old Indian rode down the street on a patchy, lop-eared, sore-backed, Mexican plug.

Six-high was carrying a carpet bag in which there was a roll of bills amounting to fifteen thousand dollars.

Jimson Switch had been called upon to save a sheep girl and they had over-subscribed the ransom in exactly half an hour.

CHAPTER VIII.

FORWARD!

A RUNNING fight was in progress on top of the bandits' mesa. Neal Simpson had retreated, heading for the western edge of the mesa, firing as he ran.

As soon as they caught sight of this rash enemy who had actually come and offered to fight them on their own ground, the renegades leaped over the rim of the bowl and gave chase. They deployed in a wide line, darting from boulder to brush and sand mound, those at the extremities of the line advancing at a run. Those in the center held their ground, dropping behind the protection of boulders at a distance of fifty yards from each other. Thus they stretched their skirmish line in a wide semicircle, which now started to close in upon the lone enemy.

Neal Simpson did not retreat as far as the western cliffs. If he was going to fight with his back against a wall, he preferred to chose the wall himself. A cliff dropping away in a sheer fall of eight hundred feet did not appear to him as a strategic place to make his last stand.

He retreated as far as a crevice in be-

tween two granite boulders. Here he waited until the foremost of the attackers came within range. Then he fired.

The range of that shot and its accuracy seemed to impress his enemies, for they scurried to the nearest cover. Here they decided to try a few shots of their own at the same range. The lead scuffed up the sand in front of Neal or cracked against the boulders on each side of him, not a single shot of the fusillade coming within ten feet of a hit.

It was quite apparent to the renegades that their enemy could shoot better than they could. He had dropped one of their number before any one of them had got close enough to fire back.

Meanwhile, one of the renegades had crawled up to his companion who had been drilled. The wounded man must have had a flash of intuition; or it might have been that in times past he had received many wounds in gun fights and knew what a .44 felt like. The gang had ascertained that it was a .44 that had worked havoc in their midst during that raid at the Buckley ranch.

At any rate, the wounded man cried out, choking with rage:

"That hombre is the one who was fightin' us last night! He wounded Texas and Pedro and dumped Pack Rat—and now he's got me!"

"He ain't got you!" the other said. "Lie where you're at, and we'll pack you back to the bowl after we kill that bimbo. Here! Take a swig of this."

"Go ahead. Close in on him!" the wounded man cried. "You cain't get him at this range. Crawl up on him—and finish him afore he picks us all off one by one!"

These words had a rather ominous purport. The whole ring was so close to that sharpshooter that he could pick off any man who showed himself, whereas he was ensconced in the safety of those two boulders, just beyond their range.

Instead of closing in upon him, the line dropped back. The men on the flank circled at a good distance, coming around to the west of him, and completing the ring. Neal noticed that although they did not dare to approach too close to him, he was surrounded on all sides.

He knew that this sort of fight could have only one ending. If they did not choose to duel with him, they could just sit there, and see how long he could hold out without food, water, or sleep, under the fierce, beating rays of the sun.

Nevertheless, he had won the first trick in the desperate game he had chosen to play. The renegades had left the two prisoners in the bowl, and were scattered all over the mesa top. The two prisoners were watching the fight from the ridge of granite which surrounded the little bowl. Now was the chance for them to make a break for the plain. Neal was gripped with an insensate desire to yell out to them to wake up and take their chance when they had it. But there they stood, evidently oblivious of their own troubles, in the thrilling excitement of watching this desperate fight of one man against seven.

With the sole purpose now of getting closer to those two prisoners, Neal came out from his entrenchment.

The renegades did not seem to like the look of this move. That first long-range shot had inspired a definite respect in their hearts for this lone enemy, and not a man among them was going to take another chance. The men in front of Neal and on each side dropped back to a safer distance. The two men who were behind him, seeing that he was crawling in the opposite direction, stuck their guns across the tops of their boulders and blazed away.

Neal paid no attention to their shots. They were too far away to offer any real threat. He was watching those

men who were between him and the granite bowl.

He left the protection of his two boulders and ran low-crouched to a hummock of adobe ten yards away. The men behind him began to close in. Those in front dropped farther back.

The whole gang was firing as they ran, their shots striking all about Neal, spouting in the sand five yards in front of him, pinging against the rocks five yards behind, ricocheting across the granite slabs.

The mound of adobe which he had reached was a protection only against the three men in front of him—and these men had dropped well out of range. Neal hurdled over the mound, firing before him, dropping into a crevice of rock to reload, then leaping up again, firing, racing, hurdling over brush and rock.

One of the men in front of him fell to the sand, clutching at his chest. The men on each side quartered off in opposite directions. It gave Neal a clear way to that granite bowl where the two prisoners were standing.

He sped across the intervening ground, bent low, so low that he gave the impression of running on all fours. The renegades, realizing what his game was, yelled frantically at each other, gave chase, and closed in behind him, hurling a fusillade of lead as they ran.

A slug stung Neal in the shoulder; he staggered forward from the impact as if he had been crushed by a weight from behind. His fingers gripped the rim of the granite bowl. Then he found himself lifted upward by four eager, outstretched hands.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE SHOTS LEFT.

THE renegades stared in baffled rage at the disastrous turn events were taking. They knew perfectly well that they could not dislodge that sharp-

shooter from the bowl. The bowl was an impregnable little fortress which could have withstood a battery of machine guns. They stopped in their tracks, dropping behind a row of boulders. They confidently expected that, if they showed their heads, the gunman, who had outgeneraled them, would fire across the rim of the bowl, picking them off at his pleasure.

But they had no idea what was happening in that bowl. If they had, they would not have taken such a lugubrious view of the matter.

The girl was holding a canteen of water to Neal's lips. Old Buckley was studying him anxiously.

"You're hit, kid!" the old-timer exclaimed.

Neal nodded, his lips moist with the deliciously cool water. "Reckon it's just another crease," he said. "Here in my shoulder. Wasn't doing much fighting with my left arm, anyway. Another swig. I'll be all right."

"We got to go on with the fight, kid," the old man said eagerly. "We can lick 'em. Can't nary a one of 'em shoot straight. Just a bunch of *cuevo*-drugged tramps." And he added proudly: "I drilled three of 'em last night myself!"

Neal dragged himself to the rim and studied the layout. He stood there a long time, until he came to the conclusion that those bandits had no intention of making an immediate attack. It looked much more like a siege.

"They won't come any closer," he said to the girl. "We've got to wait."

"Then let me tend to your wound," she said. "Granddad, you stay on watch."

Neal ripped the shirt from his shoulder and she went to the fire for hot water. The wounded youth watched her. Being a cowboy, he knew of the esteem in which these "sheep folks" were held in the ranches about Jimson Switch. His first impression was one of utter astonishment that a sheep girl

could be so much more beautiful than any woman he had ever seen in the cow country. He looked up into her face as she was anxiously, tenderly, cleaning his wound. The bandits had certainly made a good catch. She was worth more ransom than they could dream of!

While she was at her work, her grandfather peered fearfully over the rim of the bowl.

"They're stayin' under cover," he said. "They dassent come too close to us. You sure can draw a bead neat, kid, as neat as I ever seen it done in these parts! I ain't so bleary-eyed myself—even though I do look it. Did some right pert gun-play last night, I did!" He remained on watch until the girl had finished dressing Neal's wound. Then he said, his wrinkled old lips trembling with excitement, "How is it, kid? Think you can finish the fight?"

"Reckon those outlaws don't want any more just yet," Neal answered. "We're safe right here in this bowl."

"Safe, nothin'!" the old fellow cried in dismay. "They's two more of them rats in yonder draw with the hoss cavvy. They'll be comin' out and helpin'. Thay's seven men left altogether. You got a gun! Let's finish the job right!"

Neal knew better. Two of the gang had circled around the bowl and were guarding the trail which led down the mesa side. Two more, as old Buckley had just said, were watching the horses. If the prisoners tried to make a break now, the rest of the gang would close in and start firing. There was no chance of running that gamut without paying dearly.

"It's better to wait and see what their next move is," Neal said in a tone of finality.

Old Buckley threw up his hands in despair. "Wait and see!" he snorted. "With my little gal here—and seven hungry coyotes surroundin' us! If you don't want to go on with the fight, give

me your gun. I'll show you how to fight!"

"Give me your gun!" the old fellow repeated eagerly. "I'll show you what I kin do. Picked three of 'em off last night, I did! You're wounded, kid. Maybe you got to rest—maybe that's why you want to just set here. But leave me show you some sharpshootin'!"

"What he says is right, grandpops!" the girl interrupted. "We've got food and water here. And the gang out yonder is afraid to come any closer. Let the boy rest."

"Maybe," the old man grumbled. "The poor kid's done some pretty good work. How did you happen to horn in on this racket anyway, kid? Who are you? Where you from?"

In a few words, Neal told them that he had seen that fight at the sheep ranch and had trailed them down into the desert. He did not, however, disillusion old Buckley concerning what had actually happened at that raid. The old fellow still basked in the glorious conviction that he himself had picked off those three bandits.

"Reckon you sure need a rest then, kid," Buckley admitted. "Better lay down over here in the shade. I'll stay on watch. And, Sal, you get him some chow. Treat him right. He's a good kid. Fights like a wild cat. Picked off two bandits as neat as ever I did see. I picked three off last night myself."

It was long since Neal had eaten. The breakfast which the girl hurriedly prepared brought back his waning strength. But it also had another effect: Neal had not slept a wink for many hours. He had covered a lot of desert trail since his meeting with the bandit leader, Bull Caruthers, down there in the puma's canyon. In fact, he had been riding all day before that, hunting stray cows through the timber. The two flesh wounds he had received and the consequent loss of blood had drained his strength. When he finished

the flapjacks and bacon which the girl cooked for him, he was seized by an irresistible drowsiness.

As the girl was talking to him in a low voice, relating the adventures which she and her grandfather had had, Neal's eyelids drooped heavily. Then, abruptly, he caught himself and looked up.

"Have they gone for the ransom?" he asked.

She described how they had sent an old Apache to Jimson's Switch early that morning.

"Then we've got to hold out till he gets back," Neal said.

This, in fact, was their only hope of ever getting out of the granite bowl alive. If the bandits received the stipulated ransom, Neal believed that they would hit the trail for Mexico. They had nothing to gain by continuing the siege.

Neal encouraged the girl by imparting these ideas to her. "Tell your grandfather to keep careful watch," he said. "I've got to get a few winks of sleep. You stay on watch, too. If these rattlers out there crawl any closer, you wake me up good and pronto."

"They won't come any closer," the girl said, encouraged by the new turn of events. The whole dreadful game had an entirely different aspect now that this sharpshooter had come to save them. "They won't dare fight you," she affirmed, with absolute assurance. "And they can keep up the siege as long as they want, because we've got enough food and water to last us a week."

Neal did not tell her the truth which he had been hiding ever since he landed in that bowl:

He had only three shots left in his revolver.

His only hope now was that that ransom would come before the bandits offered to fight.

He nodded, then caught himself coming to with a start.

"Where are they now?" he asked.

"They've made a ring all around us. Another man has joined them."

"With the ransom?"

"No. He was one of the *mosos* left to guard the cavvy."

"They comin' any closer?"

"No. They're just waiting—hiding behind boulders and sand mounds."

Again Neal nodded, and again his head came up with a start.

"Go on and sleep," the girl said. "My granddad and I will call you if they come a step nearer."

Neal loosened his six-gun in the holster, leaving the flap unbuttoned. He leaned back against the sloping rock wall of the bowl, and pulled his holster around so that it was over his left thigh, ready for an instantaneous draw.

If he could only catch ten minutes of sleep!

CHAPTER X.

SIX-HIGH* IN POWER.

OLD BUCKLEY kept pacing up and down the bowl, his shock of grizzled hair revealed just above the rim, his small, red-rimmed eyes peering from underneath the strands like the eyes of a watchful titmouse.

The old man was in a frenzy of suspense at this waiting. There he was with his precious granddaughter surrounded by a ring of desert loboes who were biding their time. The thrill of the gun fight of the previous night was still in his veins. He was young again. He wanted action. He wanted to blaze away at these scarecrows and see them flop in the sand.

He glanced down at Neal.

Sleep had overcome the exhausted youth. But it was a troubled, fitful sleep. Dreams were wrinkling his pallid brow. His lips were moving; his breath was coming in unsteady gasps; the trigger finger of his right hand was twitching.

"Thinks he's firin' that gat!" Buckley said to himself. He looked across the

bowl to where the girl was on guard on the western end. She had her back turned to her grandfather, and was peering over the rim at the renegades who were intrenched behind sand mounds.

On Buckley's side, the renegades were closer. He measured the distance, estimating it at about the same range at which Neal had picked off his last victim.

An irresistible desire gripped the old man to try that range himself. He saw a half-breed sitting there, complacently rolling a cigarette. It was the half-breed who had ordered the girl to tote water from the spring. The young sharpshooter who had come to save Old Buckley and his daughter could have the pleasure of picking off all the rest, but Buckley wanted to get this particular man.

He tiptoed toward Neal, keeping his eye constantly focused on that black-haired, saddle-colored breed who was now puffing at his cigarette, and stretching out lazily with his feet in the rattleweed, his head pillow'd on the sand.

Buckley cast a quick glance at Neal. The sleeper's trigger finger was still twitching, his lips moving. He looked as if the sound of a lizard scurrying would have awakened him.

Neal's holster was unflapped, with the butt loosened and pointing across his thigh toward his twitching right hand.

Buckley reached down and cautiously slid the gun out.

Neal's hand jerked over spasmodically and in his sleep he clutched at his holster. Then he awoke. It might have been his fingers clutching an empty holster that awakened him. Or it might have been the old man's step, as he jumped back and turned to the rim of the bowl.

Neal leaped to his feet, his eyes bulging, his mouth agape. He stared aghast at the stocky, stoop-shouldered figure of

Old Buckley who was hurling a rapid streak of fire across the granite rim.

Three shots banged out and then as the trigger snicked on an empty shell, Neal grabbed the old fellow by the scruff of the neck and hurled him back into the center of the bowl.

The girl had turned at the sound of those shots and had seen the farcical conclusion. She understood on the instant that her grandfather had frisked Neal of his gun, but she could not for the life of her understand the latter's insensate rage.

"What in the world's happened, grandpops?" she cried to him as he lay sprawled upon the ground.

Neal stifled the oath that was on his lips. Then he said quietly: "A lot's happened, ma'am. That half-witted old idiot just used up my last three shots!"

"It's my opinion that he's too badly creased to fight!"

That was what Slug Hagey said to the two men whom he had called from their posts for a conference. "He was hit just afore he climbed into that bowl, and we ain't seen hair nor hide of him since!"

"That's my opinion too, Slug," one of the other renegades assented. "In fact, it's plumb certain. If he ain't too far gone to fight, then how come the old jackass stuck his head up and started pumpin' away at us?"

"We been just sittin' here for hours," Hagey went on. "And all because we're afraid to have another set-to with that gunman. Well, the gunman is out of the fight, or I'm a liar!"

"Which is my sentiment," said the third confrère.

"What-all do you figure we better be doin' then?" asked the second.

"Pass the word along the line that we're goin' to attack all at once. That ole coot will most like try to fight us off. But he can't shoot the side of an adobe barn. We'll pick him off. He

didn't hit nary a one of us last night—because it's plumb certain he was the one firin' a shotgun. Come on! We'll pick him off easy."

One of the renegades crawled off into the mesquite, made the rounds, and came back twenty minutes later with his report.

"The men don't dast attack until they find out whether that sharpshooter is really out of the game or not," he said.

Slug Hagey, who had not yet attained complete authority with the band, had to think this over.

"Well, we'll settle that little point," he said finally. "All we have to do is to send one man crawlin' up toward the bowl, and then we'll find out just who we've got to fight."

"That there's a right simple way outta the trouble, Slug. But who-all will we send?"

"I'll designate a man myself," Slug Hagey said, "if it's agreeable to you-all."

"It's agreeable," said one of his companions, "so long as you don't designate me."

"I agree to the deal, on the same specifications," said the third renegade.

"Then, Spike, you shag over yonder to 'Mush' Withers' rock and tell him he's e-elected. Tell him we've all took a vote and he's got to crawl up as close as he dast to that bowl, while we cover his advance by firin' hot and heavy."

The man called Spike crawled off once more into the mesquite, reached the nearest sentry, palavered with him a while, and then returned.

"Mush Withers says he didn't know they was any e-election goin' on, and that if so, he ain't cast his own vote yet, which is to the effeck that he declines the nomination."

Slug Hagey reflected that times had changed since the preceding day when they bumped off their chief, Bull Caruthers. Old Caruthers would have ordered a man to jump over a cliff, and

the command would be obeyed at once. But the old Bull had been dehorned, and, as yet, no one had been appointed in his stead.

"Then try Miguel," Slug Hagey suggested.

"Tain't no use, Slug. Miguel's as yeller as a sick coyote. Which I might remark you better roll a different game. The whole gang's scairt stiff of that sharpshooter. And we ain't got proof enough yet that he's cashed in his chips."

Just how Slug Hagey is going to get out of this ticklish difficulty no one ever knew. For something happened at that moment which put a very abrupt termination to their palaver.

The ransom arrived from Jimson Switch!

They saw old Six-high Buffalo, the Apache, riding up the trail from the plain. A thick coating of alkali covered his straw sombrero, his bony shoulders, his ragged clothes, and the bulging carpet bag which he carried. And it powdered the lathered neck, withers, and croup of his tuckered cayuse, which came limping along, heaving in lugubrious sighs. Evidently Six-high had ridden that horse hard in anticipation of the reward which he was to receive at the end of his dangerous quest.

The men darted out from behind their boulders and hiding places and ran toward the approaching horseman. The whole gang gathered about Six-high, shouting their excited questions: Did he get the ransom? Did they chase him? Was he sure no one trailed him? What-all was in that carpet bag?

Preserving the aloof mien which he had donned from the moment he was first entrusted with this great mission, Six-high looked down upon the anxious, upturned faces.

"Six-high like-'im reward first. The Jesako cord—give-'im cord first."

"Show us what you got in that satchel!" Slug Hagey commanded.

"I take-'im message. Hy-oo-skukum! I bring back ransom."

"How do we know it's the ransom?" the men cried. "You can't read. Leave us count it first!"

Three of them reached for the bag, but the giant Indian snatched it from them and held it above his head.

"Hootch-la! You play tricks on Six-high—eh? *Bueno!* I throw-'im this carpet bag over cliff. By'm-bye you find it—when you climb down cliff and mak' long search! Maybe posse find you before you find this bag—eh?"

He held the carpet bag with one long, scrawny arm and with the other he held his gun pointing at the three men who had reached for it. Evidently old Six-high had had some experience with the manner in which his fellow outlaws did business.

Slug Hagey was standing on the off side of the Indian's horse, and the delay seemed to irritate him. He put his hand to his holster and was about to draw, when the crafty old buzzard turned toward him.

This old Apache was a peculiar character. He did not know how to read, nor did he know the difference between a dollar bill and a laundry ticket. He had never possessed either. But he had a peculiar wisdom along other lines. He could see what was happening behind his back—or at least he could hear it or feel it. Slug Hagey was afraid of him. Slug did not draw.

"You mak'-im promise to Six-high," the Indian said. "Give-'im witch cord first."

Hagey had no objection to giving him the witch cord which he had promised—for it was worth nothing, except as a convenient string which Hagey used to tie up a stocking of cartridges.

At the present moment, however, it was possessed of a certain latent power: If it had no supernatural quality wherewith to charm evil spirits, it at least could be used to charm this Indian.

"Let's quit this palaver, men," Hagey said in an astonishing meek voice. He had at last decided which man was to go to that bowl. "Give the old Injun his due. The Jesako cord is yourn, Six-high, and far be it from me to deny you. I left the cord over yonder in the bowl, packed away in my saddlebags. Ride over there and get it."

The old buzzard stared incredulously "You give-'im Jesako cord to Six-high?"

"Sure I do. Think I'm sagebrushin' you? Go and get it!"

"*Bueno!*" the old fellow concluded, after another moment of perplexed and suspicious rumination. "I go ketch-'im cord first. By'm-bye I give you carpet bag."

He kicked the flanks of his mount and rode off to the bowl. The two prisoners were standing there, peeping over the rim watching this scene in a terrified and nerve-racking suspense. There was another man with them. The peak of his sombrero was visible just above the edge of the rim. Six-high did not consider this particular point. He could not see the man's face. He thought it was one of the gang posted there on guard over the prisoners.

"Look here, Slug!" one of the renegades objected. "How come you're sendin' ole Six-high with that ransom right into their hands!"

"He won't get that far," Slug Hagey rejoined with a chuckle. "They'll drop him soon as he gits within range. And if they don't—well, that means they can't fight any more. Which bein' the case, we'll horse in ourselves and finish 'em up some pronto!"

CHAPTER XI.

GRANDPA ADMITS IT.

IT was just as Slug Hagey had anticipated. The sharpshooter was unable to fire at that Indian. And what was still more gratifying, the old man did

not fire either! Six-high rode directly up to the bowl and the prisoners did not so much as throw a rock at him!

As Slug Hagey and his companions watched this astonishing scene, the truth struck them in a flash.

"He's out of ammunition!" Slug cried hilariously. "Tain't only because he's wounded. It's because they ain't got a shot left. Or I'm a caterwopous liar."

"The ole mosshorn emptied the six-gun and them was their last shots!" another cried. "And here we been settin' on our haunches afraid to go inside their range!"

"A girl and a ole man, and a kid who's been hit!" another snorted. "And they bluffed us out!"

"Come on, men!" Slug Hagey shouted. "Let's go get 'em!"

The men swaggered off toward the bowl, all talking at once, joking, laughing, shouting cries of triumph.

"I'll finish the sharpshooter!" one of them cried fiercely. "He drilled me in the shoulder—and I'm itchin' to pay him back!"

"I'll finish the ole man!" a half-breed growled. "He tried his best to dump me, when he fired them last shots. Let me have the fun of shootin' him down. Won't do it quick. Oh, no! I'll take six shots, workin' up slow from his feet!"

"I'll take the girl," Slug Hagey said. "Don't nobody touch her. She's a woman, and we got to treat her as such. No cause for hurtin' the girl. We'll keep her in the gang, and make her cook for us, and tend the fires!"

"You can have her!" an old renegade said. "I'm goin' down to Mexico with my part of the ransom, and get a cook of my own!"

"Me too!" cried another. "I'm goin' to get a cook, and a *moso*, and a couple new horses, and a big adobe in Nogales!"

"And it's goin' to be a good swag!" Slug Hagey cried. "They ain't many

left to divide it—what with the chief dead and gone!"

"And three men killed," another added.

"And old Six-high satisfied with that there shoestring of mine!" Hagey laughed.

It was the last statement Slug Hagey ever made.

The gang had reached the bowl. That is to say, they had come to the circle of rocks around its base, and were about to scramble up the steep, slippery sides, when they realized that something had happened.

The old Apache had dismounted a moment before and swung his huge, lanky carcass over the edge. The gang did not see what happened to him then.

As a matter of fact, it all came so swiftly that the old Indian did not know who had happened himself.

As soon as he dropped into the granite floor of the bowl something like a grizzly bear leaped upon his shoulders. He felt a sledge-hammer fist land upon the base of his skull. A fountain of stars spurted up before him, and his knees sagged.

Six-high Buffalo was conscious in that moment of disaster that a little gray-haired man had grappled him about the legs, tackling him, and clinging there so that he was helpless to move. As the same moment the "grizzly," or whatever that animal was that had pounced on him, had jumped away, yanking his six-gun out of his holster in the same gesture!

And now there was a deafening fusillade of shots behind Six-high's ear—fired from his own gun!

The shots were not aimed at the old Indian. They were aimed at the gang of men who were climbing up the walls of the bowl.

Slug Hagey was the first man to fall. He caught sight of a tall, lanky figure looming above him against the blinding light of the sun. Slug reeled backward

and crashed to the ground, where he lay huddled and quiet between two boulders.

Almost at the same instant, the man next to him toppled backward. The rest whirled, ducked low, and scurried off like a bunch of scared rabbits. It was lucky for them that the ground about the bowl was a hodge-podge of boulders, and brush, and ditches, or else it was more than likely that every man Jack of them would have been killed.

Just how Neal Simpson could dispose of them was problematical. But the enraged old Apache took the matter on his own hands.

Of course, his first impulse was to save himself. He kicked himself free of the stocky little man who was clinging to his legs, and then dived over the rim of the bowl and rolled down its steep slippery side into the brush at its base. He landed not very far from the body of Slug Hagey, which was lying between two boulders.

Six-high had a score to settle. His companions had played a trick on him. The old Apache was tired of being the butt of their tricks. He had been the beast of burden for this gang for many weary moons, and his only reward was to be kicked about and sent for ransom money, and led into traps, and laughed at. It was the end of the rope.

He picked up Slug Hagey's six-gun and started to use it. He did not fire at the man up there on the rim of the bowl. Instead, he went crashing through the brush, chasing out the crouching bandits as if they had been quail. They thought he was running away from their enemy up there in the bowl, until the old fellow started blazing away at them.

At this they stopped firing at the bowl and turned upon the old Indian. One of them winged him, but it did not worry him any more than a blowfly worries a Mexican horse.

And now while they were firing hot

and heavy at each other, Neal leaped over the rim. The few that remained saw that they had two madmen pouring shots at them from two different sides. They had had enough gun play. One after another stood up waist-deep in the brush with hands upraised.

"All right, old-timer!" Neal called to Grandpa Buckley. "You've got a chance at last to be of some help. Get the carpet bag from that cayuse, and also a lass rope, and tie these coyotes back to back."

Six-high Buffalo did not seem to realize that the fight was over. He kept squeezing frantically at the trigger, oblivious of the fact that it was snickering on empty shells. He stood there upon a round boulder, a smoking six-gun in his hand, a gigantic, white-maned figure glaring in triumphant fury at his erstwhile comrades.

"Now then, old buck," Neal said to him, "you get down from that rock, get aboard this cayuse, and vamose. Savvy?"

The Indian stared intently at him. "Then Six-high don't ketch-'im Jesako cord?"

The girl came down from the bowl holding a snake-skin of cartridges in her hand. The Indian pointed to it. "Give-'im Six-high the cord and he vamose."

"Take it, old buck," Neal said. "It's your reward for bringing the ransom straight to the right quarters."

The giant Apache grabbed the cord eagerly, fire gleaming in his eyes. "Six-high wear-'im on neck, *Bueno*. He is Jesako now. Plum cultus hombres—they trick Six-high—clif". He chuckled in grim triumph. "By in-bye they catch-'im cord around neck, too! Tight rope—not dream cord." With which prognostication, he stalked over to his lop-eared cayuse, swung his massive and rheumatic bones to the saddle, and rode off.

A little later the whole gang were corralled inside the bowl. "Counting the

casualties, the wounded, and the remaining prisoners," Neal said, "we ought to get eleven thousand reward for this catch."

"You ain't forgettin' the men which I bumped off last night?" Old Buckley said proudly.

"You get three thousand for that little gun play, pard," Neal said indulgently.

"I could've drilled another one to-day, but that iron of yours has a powerful ornery kick. Reckon I'm slicker with a shotgun."

Sal Buckley put out her hand to the young cowboy. "You come back with us to the sheep ranch, pard?" she asked.

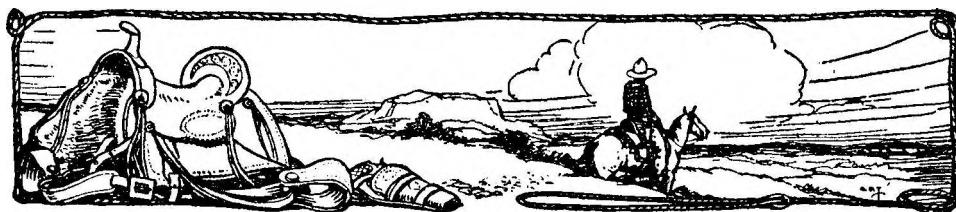
Neal looked around at the group of ragged, broken men whom he had taken prisoners.

"Reckon I better stay here and watch

this gang," he said. "You and your granddad ride up and get your three brothers and a posse. Tell 'em there's a big troupe of performers ready down here to do a tight-rope act."

The girl did not release his hand. "You'd drop off to sleep as soon as we left," she objected. Then, turning to old Buckley, she said, "Grandpop, you know the trail. You ride up and get the boys. I've got to stay with this cow-puncher."

"Tell 'em you're down here in the desert with a cow-puncher!" her grandfather exclaimed. "Zowie! They'll go plumb loco. But"—he admitted, shaking his gray locks—"I reckon he can take care of you, little chicken. Ain't nothin' can stand up in front of that gun of his—nor behind it either, I'm graceful to admit!"



ANOTHER OIL STRIKE

SO great was the flow of oil in a new oil well in Texas that in half an hour after it had begun operations the entire surrounding valley and hillside were black with its eruptions. This seems to be a notable well in every respect. A week before it had thus rained oil on the landscape, it gauged two thousand one hundred and sixty barrels from a depth of one thousand two hundred and eighty feet; then it increased to one hundred and twenty thousand barrels, and still later to one hundred and thirty thousand, at the same depth. This was a record not only for west Texas but for the nation.

The oil "game" is notoriously uncertain. No one can ever tell just what oil will do, and little was expected from this particular gusher, yet it holds the world's record. But when prosperity follows the oil trail new arrivals soon appear on the scene. Camps are quickly made, bunk houses erected, and soon all are fully occupied. The scene assumes a somewhat businesslike appearance, with derricks and men in full action, and pipe lines curving in every direction.

But oil brings trouble, too, and not every one is lucky. Some operators who have drilled deep, find sulphur water and not oil, and even many who have found oil in rich quantity have found themselves involved in litigation with contestants for the property.



The Lost Anthill Mine

by Arthur Preston Hankins

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

ESAU BADGER'S search for The Lost Anthill Mine, equipped by his nephew, Radford Kerval, is complicated by the attacks of Tom File, Esau's ancient enemy, and his gang. Esau's adopted daughter, Merry Roane, loyally loves the unscrupulous gambler who has taken her dead father's place. Radford forgives his uncle's escapades because of Merry, whom he learns to love.

Their first expedition has been frustrated by File, and a band of wandering Yaquis. Austin West, Merry's college chum, is one of an engineering party encountered in the woods. The construction activities will somewhat interfere with the search, and increases the need of haste. Badger readjusts his plans after a momentous visit to El Paso, which renews police interest in him. He conducts a gambling resort at Sidewinder, the construction-camp town; Merry gets a place as waitress, and Rad, wounded in one arm, acts as clerk in the commissary tent. An old Indian, Mad Owl, pays for his purchases with golden nuggets and arouses the interest of Radford and File, who has also got a job at the camp.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SIDEWINDER.

WHEN the triangle was rung for supper that night, Rad saw Tom File going into the big dining tent with the others. So he knew that, if the outlaw had followed Mad Owl that afternoon, he had not traveled far.

File was still wagon boss of the outfit. It was his duty, among other tasks, to ride horseback between the camp and Fort Kelsey to see that the skinners of the freight wagons were not in difficulty. It was a long haul for the four-up and six-up teams, through a

lonesome country that offered no aid if a freighter got into trouble. Hence Tom File, patrolling the road from camp to town on a fresh horse every day, was there to succor them in their need. But as the skinners were old-time, experienced hands, his duties were nugatory. It was a job entirely to the liking of any lazy man who was accustomed to the saddle.

Rad waited four days after the appearance of the Indian with the nuggets, then decided to ride to Sidewinder to find out whether or not Esau Badger and "Merry" Roane had arrived. If they had passed through Camp 2 on their way to the rag town, Rad was not aware of it. But it would not be

in conformity with his uncle's plans for them to look him up, so he had hopes that they had passed through and were already established in the new village. He was anxious to tell Esau Badger about Mad Owl's gold—to say nothing of his keen longing to set eyes on the black-eyed Merry again.

Rad could not get away from the commissary until after the evening meal. It was half past six, then, when the stable boss saddled a horse for him and he loped away up the new road that traced its course along the creek.

Day was vanishing when the lights of the rag town began to blink at him through the thinning forest. Soon he rode into a large clearing, and the road became a street.

As is usual with mushroom towns, all the buildings and tents fronted on this single street. Coal-oil lamps were alight in every window. Rad heard the strains of music and a medley of voices and harsh laughter before he was within the confines of the town.

As he rode along he noticed that every place was a saloon, gambling den, dance hall, and restaurant combined. All the dives were filled with construction laborers, and the overflow surged along the street—men who hailed from the Bowery to the City of Mexico. Sidewinder was picturesque, with the rising moon casting a pale radiance over its white tents and new pine shacks, the solemn forest all about it, and the forgotten plateau squatting, monsterlike, in the distance.

Rad found a place to tie his horse. Then he began strolling from one resort to another, in search of his uncle.

Also, he kept a keen lookout up and down the street for the coming of Tom File, for he felt sure that File would follow him if he found out that he had left the camp. The stable boss, with whom File was in close touch, would probably tell him about saddling a horse for Radford.

And presently he saw his man, mounted, slowly entering the town from the forest.

In the most pretentious saloon of all, one constructed of lumber and corrugated iron, Rad found his relative.

The dive was called The Morning Glory. Three bartenders were at work, and there were gambling games opposite the bar. The rear end of the structure was given over to a kitchen, separated from the public by a short-order counter with tall stools before it.

A crowd of drunken, loud-mouthed stiffs was swarming before a roulette wheel. Other games were keno, Klondike, poker, craps, and faro. Behind the poker table, with his long, tapering, white fingers outspread on the green top, sat Esau Badger, his eyes gray-green and cold, his hatchet face impassive. Not the flicker of an eyelash revealed recognition of his nephew as Rad crowded his way closer to the game.

He loitered about, anxious to have a secret conference with his uncle, but Esau Badger made no move to quit the poker game. Rad's eyes roved to the entrance frequently, for every moment he expected File to appear.

His uncle had made a statement at Fort Kelsey that caused Rad to believe he would shoot Tom File on sight. Rad did not want this to happen, because he was afraid that such an act would work havoc with their future plans. He had no particular love for File, but what the old gambler had threatened smacked too much of premeditated murder. And Rad did not approve of this, for Merry's sake if for no other reason.

But as time passed and File failed to appear, and Esau Badger showed no inclination to turn over the dealer's chair to an associate, Rad left The Morning Glory to find out why the wagon boss did not come. For he was confident that File must be seeking him,

that no other business had brought him to the rag town.

Once more he walked along the crowded street, from one end to the other. Then, on a second trip, he began entering the disreputable dives, hoping, fearing, that he might find Merry Roane working behind one of the restaurant counters.

But he did not discover her during this search, and at last he paused before a place that he had not given much notice on his former trips.

It seemed to be a restaurant exclusively, for there were neither bar nor gambling games, and there were cloth-covered tables with chairs about them for the accommodation of the diners.

Rad entered, and as he did so a familiar figure came from the kitchen into the dining room, carrying a loaded tray.

It was his girl of the photograph, the girl who had sent him on the quest for the lost Anthill Mine—Merry Roane.

Rad heaved a sigh of vast relief as he watched her. This restaurant was quite evidently the most respectable place of business in Sidewinder. He could have no objection to Merry's working here, for Rad was anything but a snob and had no scorn for honest labor.

But his blue eyes widened, then narrowed, as they followed her lithe figure. She had stopped at a table around which three men were seated. And one of them was Austin West, assistant to Captain Henderson, resident engineer.

Rad seated himself at a table near the front, and waited for her to come to him. In the meantime he noticed that she and the men on whom she was waiting were on very friendly terms. The four were laughing and jesting, and the ardor in West's eyes, as they lingered on the pretty waitress, was unmistakable.

And now Merry Roane was coming toward Rad's table. He moistened his lips and waited, feeling a little sullen

and a little guilty because of this sullenness.

The girl was quite close to him before she recognized him. Then she paused, and he saw a quick light dart into her dark eyes, a slight catch of her breath.

She came on then, a smile lighting her face.

But before she reached his table she stopped dead. Her eyes widened. They were fixed, not on Radford, but on something behind him—something or somebody in the street outside.

Rad turned quickly in his chair.

Through the window he saw Tom File grinning at them, one hand caressing his flowing brown mustachios.

Rad scraped back his chair, but, with a little humorous gesture of adieu, File vanished.

"Well?" Merry was standing beside him now.

"Just a cup of coffee and some sort of sandwich," Rad ordered, and he knew that his face was flaming.

"You saw? Through the window?" She had lowered her voice.

Rad nodded. "He followed me into town," he explained. "We're both working at Camp 2."

"I know. At least, I know that you left Fort Kelsey with the Camp 2 outfit. Have you seen Daddy Badger?"

"Yes—dealing poker in The Morning Glory. But he wouldn't quit the game when he recognized me. I'm dying to have a talk with him. Something new has developed. And I want to prevent him from killing File, if possible. File will be drifting in there soon. Then things will begin to happen."

"How do you know, Rad?"

Briefly he told her what Badger had threatened to do.

Worried lines showed on her smooth brow. "If he said that, he means it. You must stop him, Rad. That will never do."

"Of course not. Aren't those fellows

with Austin West a couple of the others of Captain Henderson's party?"

Merry nodded.

"I thought I recognized them. Aren't they likely to go into The Morning Glory and see your father dealing poker there?"

"Yes, almost any time. But I don't think that any of Captain Henderson's men have done so yet. Daddy and I are trusting to luck. It's favored us so far."

Radford shook his head. "Strikes me as a foolish business all around," he said. "How did you come to get employment in such a respectable place as this?"

Merry colored slightly. "Austin West owns it," she admitted. "When I told him about daddy, and that I expected to go to Sidewinder and get a job as waitress, he—he offered to make this investment just to give me an excuse for being here. His family is well off, and he borrowed the money from his father."

"And you jumped at the idea!" Rad accused, uncomfortably sullen once more.

"I did not! I tried my best to dissuade him. But he simply wouldn't listen."

"Oh, I suppose it's all right, of course. He knows why we are in this country, then?"

"Yes, I had to tell him all about the deception daddy played on Captain Henderson's party."

"And he doesn't object to your being the daughter of a notorious—er—gambler?"

She flushed again and gave him a look that he did not like. "I'll get your sandwich and coffee right away," she told him, and turned about with a swish of her crisp, white skirt.

"Merry! I didn't mean to offend you. Come back. We've much to talk over."

But she was tripping kitchenward

and gave no indication that she had heard.

She returned soon and placed his order before him without a word. She scribbled on a pad and laid the cashier's check beside his plate. Then, as she apparently had nothing more to do at the moment, she went back to the table occupied by the engineers.

Angry at himself and at her, Rad bit into his sandwich viciously, took one impetuous gulp of steaming coffee—regretted it—and rose from the table.

He paid the check and stamped out into the street. He hastened along through the gloom, and presently found himself before The Morning Glory. He entered and pressed his way through the throng toward the poker table.

Just at that moment the back door opened and Tom File's lank figure appeared.

Then Esau Badger's cold, familiar voice rang out:

"Clear the way, there! Get away from that back door, everybody! I'm gonta kill that man that's coming in!"

CHAPTER XXXII. THE HELPING HAND.

THE crowd in The Morning Glory stood petrified at Esau Badger's sharp commands. Then, comprehending, they began scrambling in all directions. They crowded against the wall, ducked under tables, ran behind the bar, and many of them fought for an exit through the front entrance.

Radford Karval, however, was not among these safety seekers. He leaped forward before his uncle's voice had ceased. But before he had taken three steps there came the crash of a heavy-caliber automatic, and a stream of orange fire darted from the poker table toward the door.

Rad knew that his uncle had missed. He had seen that the spiteful stream of flame was slanted upward, and he knew

that the bullet must have gone above File's head by several feet.

Puzzled at this, for he knew his uncle was no bluffer, he crowded through a group of men who had been too dazed to run for safety.

A man with an automatic pistol in his hand bumped into him. Rad thought him to be another of the gamblers. In a twinkling he had wrenched the weapon from the man's hand, and then he shoved on toward the poker table, unable to see much because of the milling crowd.

Then suddenly he was free. And the first thing that he saw was his uncle and another man struggling for possession of the gun with which Badger had tried to kill Tom File.

As Rad dashed toward them he noted that the fellow was heavy-set and of a swarthy complexion. There was time for him to take in no more details, for next instant the automatic that he had confiscated crashed on the fellow's skull, and he fell like a sack of potatoes to the floor.

Esau Badger staggered back against the wall, and the automatic fell. There came a crash as Rad stooped for it, and he was knocked sidewise by the falling poker table. His quick-witted uncle, now unarmed, had tipped the table over as a breastwork, and had ducked behind it.

As Rad recovered his balance and stooped again for the gun, he felt a sharp twinge in his mending arm. His uncle had reached out, grasped his shoulder, and was trying to drag him to safety behind the table.

He managed to kick the gun on the floor in the right direction. It banged against the up-ended table top. Then he sprawled over the fallen man as his uncle jerked him again. A shot rang out from the door just as he crawled to safety by his uncle's side behind the table.

"Thanks, my boy," drawled Esau

Badger in the midst of a great quietude that had settled upon the room.

"I came up here to keep you from killing File," Rad panted, "and then began fighting to save you from him."

"Where is the fellow?"

"He's gone, I think. He fired once, at me, and ducked through the doorway."

"No—just a bluff, Rad. He doesn't want to kill us—yet. Just a moment. I'll have a peek, and a try for that gat on the other side of the table. You've got quick wits, Radford."

"The same to you," said Rad. "Be careful!"

Moving slowly, Esau Badger crawled to the edge of the table top and peered around it toward the door. Then an arm shot out, and when he jerked back beside Rad again the heavy automatic was in his hand.

"We'll just lie low for a little," he said unconcernedly.

"This table top is thick. If a bullet pierced it, it would lose lots of its force. How quiet it is!" He chuckled. "Cowards, all of 'em! Gosh, how they shoot for cover when a gun begins to sputter!"

"Did you see File when you looked?" asked Rad.

"No, and the back door's closed. As I said, File doesn't want to kill us—yet. He wants the map."

"Of course. But who is the fellow I beaned?"

"Don't know him. He was standing, watching the poker game, close to me. He was upon me while I was getting out my gun. He knocked up my arm and ruined my aim. I think he was a plant, Rad."

"What do you mean?"

"File's man. Planted near the game to keep me from shooting him."

"But he's not one of the old gang."

"No, he's a new one. An Indian or a half-breed, I think. Though he may be a Mexican. Darn him! I'd have

got File if he hadn't knocked up my arm."

"Then File knew you were here! I thought he was hunting you."

"Don't underestimate Tom File, my boy," warned Esau Badger.

There came a call from one of the bartenders: "Your man's beat it, Badger. Might as well come out from behind that table."

"Right," said Esau Badger to his nephew. "This is foolish. Let's show ourselves and find out about the bird you floored."

But when they stood up behind their oaken shield they discovered that the swarthy man had vanished.

In a matter-of-fact manner Esau Badger righted the table and began collecting the cards and poker chips that were scattered over the floor. Men came hesitatingly forward to help him. And soon he was seated on his throne as if nothing out the ordinary had happened, carefully stacking the chips before him.

The returning crowd milled about uncle and nephew, showering them with questions. The gambler whose gun Radford had appropriated grinningly requested its return. But Badger held up a slim white hand for silence.

"Just an old-time grudge between myself and that fellow at the door," he said. "Explanations may be in order, but I decline to make them. The game will be continued, gentlemen, but I'll not officiate, if you'll excuse me. I want a word with this man who helped me out."

He beckoned to a fellow worker in the dive and placed him in charge of the poker table. Some of the men who had been playing found their overturned chairs and drew them up again. In a short time the chips were clicking and the cards sputtering as before.

Then Esau Badger and Rad went out through the door where File had so suddenly appeared, Badger holding his

nephew's arm as if he were taking him to jail.

"This way," he directed, as they stepped into a dark alley.

They followed the alley for a short distance, then Rad heard the jingle of keys. A door was unlocked, and they entered a little cabin.

Badger struck a match and applied its flame to the wick of a coal-oil lamp.

The cabin was a small one, built of new lumber. There was in it a single bed, a chair, a homemade table, a saddle that Rad recognized as his uncle's, two others that were unquestionably his own and Merry Roane's, and almost nothing more.

Badger motioned his nephew to the chair, and seated himself on the bed, after lowering the shade of the cabin's single window.

The uncle lighted an aromatic cigar and offered one to Rad. Then he leaned back, clasping one ridgy knee, the cigar in a corner of his mouth.

"That darned Indian interrupted what might have turned out to be a rather pleasant little entertainment," he observed. "But we'll not grieve over spilled milk, my boy. Let's get down to business."

Rad nodded at the saddles. "It seems that you've made some preparations," he remarked.

"I've done all that could be done for the present, my boy. Your horse, Merry's white *Pharos*, and a new horse for myself, have been sent out from Fort Kelsey by the estimable Bill Noxie, at my request. They're close at hand, and ready when we want them. Also a couple of our pack mules, with their outfits. We'll not need more than two, with the plateau so close."

Rad nodded again. "And where is the map?" he asked.

"It's safe—perfectly safe. In a place where Tom File never would think to look for it. To be candid, Rad, it's in the hands of Austin West—a likable

young chap, who seems willing to do anything in the world for us."

"For Merry, perhaps," Rad said shortly.

"Quite correct. But it was my own idea to place it in his keeping—in the keeping of a wholly disinterested party. File might contrive to get it from you, or Merry, or myself. But Austin West is out of his ken."

"All right. But West seems to be figuring rather largely in the plot of late. Let that pass, though. When do we go about the business that brought us into this infernal country?"

"As soon as I've killed Tom File."

"Oh, forget that, Uncle Esau! That will never do. We don't want any killings unless they are necessary for self-protection."

"This one is necessary for self-protection, Rad. I should think you could see that much. We must get File out of the way so as not to experience a recurrence of what happened in the chasm that momentous day. We can't have him dogging our footsteps forever. Besides—"

"No 'besides' about it, uncle! Forget your personal grudge against this man. Let's go after the lost mine, and kill him only if he interferes again."

"Well, well! We'll forget that matter for the present."

"Good! Now, I rode in to-night to tell you something. File followed me from Camp 2, where he's working as wagon boss, and—"

"Yes, I know all that. Austin has kept me informed about things out there. You see, he's in close touch with all the contractors on the line, and he happened to find out about File's working at Camp 2. I wasn't surprised to learn it, for File's a foxy hombre."

"West again!" muttered Rad to himself. "Better turn everything over to him." But aloud he said: "All right, then. About all that I can tell you, it seems, is the story of an old Indian

called Mad Owl, who drifted into camp last week with a pill box filled with gold."

"Ah! That is interesting. Let's have it all. That may be our gold, Rad."

"File trailed him out of camp."

"M'm-m! Foxy Tom! Don't you see, Rad, that I must kill that man before we can go on with this deal with any degree of safety? But there! We promised to forget that. Tell me all about this Mad Owl and his gold."

Rad told the story, brief as it was.

"Rad, we must get in touch with this Indian at once," was his uncle's comment. "That is, find out where he comes from, who he is, and as much about him as we can. He'll drift into Sidewinder in the course of time. That's inevitable. I'll spread the word among my friends to be on the lookout for him."

"Yes, that's a good idea. Now tell me about West. Is he interesting himself in this thing solely on Merry's account?"

"Of course. Just willing to help us out because he's in love with Merry. He belongs to a wealthy family. He's not interested in gold. But don't you worry, my boy. He hasn't a chance with you to—"

"Yes, you told me that before. I saw Merry waiting on table in his restaurant to-night—the restaurant he started in order to give her a decent place to work at Sidewinder, and—"

"Tut, tut! He comes in mighty handy, Radford. Let me use him if I can."

"Then you're baiting him with your daughter!" Rad flamed. "Uncle Esau, sometimes I think you're the most despicable man—"

"Careful, Radford! Don't say anything you may be sorry for. And once again we'll change the subject. I'll tell you something you don't know about Tom File."

"Shoot, then, and be brief. I want to get back to camp."

"Like your job, eh? Well, Tom File has given his old gang the double cross. Just dropped 'em out of the deal after our little scrap on the side of the plateau. Told 'em, perhaps, that we'd given up, and there was no use for them to try to go any farther in the matter."

"Yes?"

"Exactly. At least, that's the way I figure it—and sometimes I'm good at figures. So he's here, ostensibly alone. Wants us to think he's playing a lone game, anyway. But, believe me, he isn't!"

"Explain that, please."

"Have you forgotten the brown-skinned gentleman that spoiled my aim a little while ago? Well, there are other brown-skinned gentlemen in this benighted country. Men whom Tom File can fool and double cross easier than he might the old gang."

"Uncle Esau, you don't mean those renegade Yaquis! Impossible!"

"Not at all impossible, my dear nephew. File has taken up with that wandering outfit, and will probably be their leader. He'll sic them onto us, and what they'll do to us, if they get the chance, will be aplenty."

"I don't doubt that in the least, uncle. By golly, I can't believe it, though! Such a thing never occurred to me."

"But isn't it logical to believe it, since Tom File is here without the gang we tangled up with?"

"Yes, halfway logical. But your guess may be wrong."

"It's not exactly a guess, Radford. It's a theory, built up on observation and the knowledge that I know File has been in touch with some hard-looking Yaquis since he came into the country."

"And how on earth did you find that out?" asked Rad.

"Tom's job of riding the road as wagon boss gives him many opportuni-

ties to do things unknown to his employers," said Esau Badger. "But another man is riding the road, from camp to camp, on other business connected with the building of this railroad. That man is Austin West. On several occasions he saw Tom riding with queer-looking renegade Indians—"

"That'll be enough!" Rad interrupted. "I'm sick of the helping hand of Austin West. I'm going back to camp. I'll see you when you send for me, or if I have anything to report. And if, in the meantime, you kill Tom File, why, you'll have killed him—and I won't be responsible for not saving his life."

"So you see," said the gambler, as Rad indignantly bounced to his feet, "we have little to fear from that band of half-savage Yaquis unless Tom File is leading them. That means that I must kill Tom File."

"Kill him, then!" snapped Rad, and stamped to the cabin door.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE NOTE.

IT was plain to Radford Karval, as he rode back to Camp 2 through the moonlit forest, that his uncle's hatred for Tom File was becoming an obsession. Tom File had ordered his gang deliberately to fire on Merry Roane as she was dashing up the trail with her foster father. This attempted murder of a helpless girl outraged Esau Badger's sense of chivalry. And when that girl chanced to be the dearest thing in the old swindler's life, his longing to punish the perpetrator of the unmanly act knew no bounds.

His desire to get File out of the way so that he would not bother the three in seeking the lost mine was a secondary consideration, Rad believed.

If File had known that Merry Roane and Esau Badger were established in Sidewinder, why had he trailed Rad to the rag town? Rad puzzled over this,

until finally he decided that the outlaw was looking for a chance to catch Rad and his uncle together and spy on them. But he would be more wary now, after learning that the old gambler longed to take his life. Rad would have to be on the lookout at his end of the game.

With his uncle, Rad wished that Tom File were out of the deal entirely. But he scarcely wanted to see him obliterated in the manner that his uncle had chosen.

Rad was anxious to resume the quest for the lost Anthill Mine, and willing to take chances on Tom File's interference. But he believed that his uncle never would consent to a new attempt until after he had settled with his ancient enemy.

Rad's only hope lay with Merry. Perhaps she could exercise the necessary influence over her foster father to induce him to resume the search and let circumstances take their course. He would see her again as soon as possible and put the matter up to her.

But he had offended her to-night. How loyal she was to Esau Badger! And, perhaps above everything else, Rad admired loyalty in a woman.

Confound that Austin West, anyway! He was responsible for all of it. He might have known that Rad could not have traveled into that wilderness in company with a girl like Merry and not fall in love with her. Then why in the dickens couldn't he lay off, like a man? But no, he had to horn in and try to win her! And the worst of it was that, despite his uncle's assurances, Rad believed that Merry was growing fond of the young engineer. He was a handsome cuss!

With his thoughts in a turmoil, Radford reached Camp 2 and turned his mount over to the night stable boss. He wondered, as he sought his sleeping tent, whether Tom File had returned, or whether he was still at Sidewinder, "plotting against the whites."

Things were still at sixes and sevens in the commissary, and Rad was kept busy for several days after his ride to the rag town. He even worked far into the night at stock taking, and found no opportunity for another moonlight ride.

He saw nothing at all of Tom File during this interval, and the old Indian, Mad Owl, did not present himself again to make more purchases.

Then, one afternoon, Merry Roane rode into camp on her white horse, Pharus.

What a picture she made! How Rad's camp mates stared at her! She wore her usual riding costume—the heavily beaded shirt of many colors, the chaps, the quilted boots—and her spurs, martingales, bridle, and saddle gleamed with silver mountings.

She rode to the entrance of the commissary tent, dismounted like a feather floating to the ground, lowered Pharus' reins, and made inquiry for Radford Karval. A man conducted her inside, and she thanked him with her dark, companionable eyes and a smile that made him heave an unexplainable sigh.

"Hello, cousin!" she greeted Rad, on the other side of the long counter. "I thought I'd take a ride and see what sort of layout you have here."

There was no trace of anger or resentment in her tone or manner, and Rad experienced a thrill of gladness.

He showed her about the immense tent, and she marveled that such a complete stock of goods was to be found out there in the wilderness. But as they passed along a corridor made by tiers of cased goods, and were hidden from the others in the tent, she whispered quickly:

"Daddy Badger wants to see you to-night. He sent me out to tell you."

"Something new?" Rad asked.

"Yes, indeed. Mad Owl showed up in Sidewinder and created a turmoil. He carried a bag of gold that startled everybody, and he handled it like a

drunken sailor. If it hadn't been for daddy, he would have been slugged in the back of the head and robbed. But let him tell you about it. I must be riding back at once. Waitresses haven't many leisure hours, you know."

"But I want to have a talk with you, Merry," Rad protested. "Your father seems determined to kill Tom File before we continue the search. I don't like that attitude. I want to go ahead, and let him shoot the man only if he interferes with us. And I want you to dissuade him from his mad resolve."

The girl shook her head. "I know," she said. "But I'm afraid I can't do anything with him. I never before knew him to hold such a grudge against any one."

"Then," said Rad, his lips straightening, "let's you and I take this matter into our own hands."

"Just how, Rad?"

"You have the map?"

She nodded, and a light of understanding leaped into her eyes. "Austin has it, but I can get it from him any time."

"Then let's you and I take a sneak with it and hunt for the mine ourselves."

She surveyed him reproachfully. "And leave my daddy out of it? Hand him the double cross?"

Rad laughed. "Nothing of the sort," he assured her. "I think you know I wouldn't do anything like that, Merry. But don't you see that, if we go ahead on our own, he'll follow us? That looks to me like the only logical way to get him going. If he thinks that we are so thoroughly against the idea of a gun fight between him and File that we've become disgusted and have decided to proceed without him, he'll forget, temporarily at least, his ambition to kill this man."

"He'll shoot up there after us, to find out what it's all about, and then we'll

give him the horse laugh and coddle him into a good humor again. And we'll keep him out there, believe me! And once we get hot on the trail of the gold, he'll be too much interested to hanker for the life of his enemy."

"Think that over, if you can't just see it now, and let me know your decision when I come in to-night."

Her dark eyes were meditative. "It's worth a thought, anyway," she admitted. "I'll let you know to-night, then."

She turned about, but he grasped her warm, brown hand and held it.

"Yes? What is it, Rad?"

She was looking him straight in the eye, but when she saw the sudden expression on his face she lowered her long, black lashes as on that day when she had discovered that he was treasuring her photograph.

"Er—just good-by until to-night," he floundered helplessly.

"Oh! Good-by," she returned as lamely; and, withdrawing her hand, passed on without lifting the smoky lashes that screened her eyes.

At nine o'clock that night Rad was tying his horse before West's restaurant. He did not know whether or not the lizard-hipped Tom File had followed him to Sidewinder. He entered the restaurant and seated himself at the same table that he had occupied before.

He waited, but saw nothing of Merry Roane. There was only one diner in the place, and he was busy with his food at a corner table. The cashier was at his post, and voices came from the kitchen. Rad moved his chair uneasily. He was of that class of people who demand immediate service when they go into a place to spend their money.

Suddenly the swinging door to the kitchen shot open, and a red-haired girl came through. She carried something on a tray. Her large mouth was occupied with at least a nickel's worth of chewing gum. She went to the lone

diner's table, and awkwardly deposited a couple of dishes. Then, swinging her empty tray at her side, she made for Radford. She stood over him and looked down at him flirtatiously. She was rather pretty.

"Roast beef, roast pork, lamb chops, pork chops—" she began.

But Rad held up a hand to stop the verbal flow of victuals. "Is Miss Roane in the restaurant?" he demanded.

"She's beat it," said the girl. "Flopped the job. Won't I do?"

"Scarcely," Rad returned, a bit discourteously, and started to rise.

Then "Redhead" seemed to remember something. "Is your name Karval?" she asked, quite plainly interested in him.

"It is," Rad told her primly. "And then?"

"Then here's a note for you. I didn't read it."

"That was thoughtful of you," Rad grinned, accepting the folded bit of paper that she offered. "And kind of you," he added, "to handle the matter in the masterly way you did. Do you accept tips?"

"Do I? Don't be silly. You're a big boy now!"

"Then here's a dollar for your trouble," said Rad, producing the coin. "And thanks."

Her reddish eyes followed him with an ardent look as he left the place. "Class!" she muttered, as the dollar found its way into a mysterious feminine receptacle.

In the street, aided by the light streaming from the restaurant window, Rad read his note:

DEAR RAD: Please meet me at nine o'clock at the south end of the street, near the last house. MERRY.

It was already five minutes after nine. Rad mounted his horse and set off at a gallop along the dusty thoroughfare.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECOND TIP.

A SLIM bulk in the darkness, Merry Roane stepped into the road as Rad reined in abreast the last habitation at the south end of Sidewinder's single street.

"Rad! Is that you?"

"No other." He swung to the ground. "What's the idea? Lost your enthusiasm for slinging hash?"

She laughed a trifle nervously. "It never existed. Rad, I'm ready to be off."

"After the lost mine? When?"

"This instant."

"You're a little precipitate, aren't you?" he asked laughingly. "There are several preparatory matters to be attended to first, you must remember, and then—"

"You're wrong. All preparations are made. Your horse and my Pharos are waiting for us back in the trees. Also the two mules, fully packed and ready."

"Great grief! Who helped you?"

"Are you trying to offend me, Rad? Remember that I was raised on a Mexican rancho. Don't you suppose I can pack a mule and throw the one-man diamond hitch?"

"You've done all that? Bought supplies, packed the critters, and—and everything?"

"And—and everything," she mimicked. "We're all ready to hit the trail, when you've decided how to dispose of the horse you're forking now."

"For the love o' Pete!" Rad could not restrain his incredulity. "What brought on all the speed?"

"I do things that way, once I've made up my mind."

"But it's the speediness with which you made up your mind that surprises me most. Explain that, please."

"Well, I had a talk with daddy after I left Camp 2. I tried my best to make him see the folly of provoking a gun

fight with Tom File. He couldn't see. We quarreled for the first time since we've known each other.

"I don't know what's got into the man! He's as stubborn as a mule. Esau Badger isn't a killer, in the strict meaning of the term. He's never afraid of a gun fight, but I've never before known of him deliberately trying to start one.

"However, that seems to be his idea for a pleasant sojourn in Sidewinder, and, as I said, we quarreled. So I'm going to take the bit in my teeth and try your scheme. If you're ready, I am. I've written daddy a note. It will be delivered after we're gone. How about that *caballo*, now?"

"Why, he's somewhat of a camp pet," replied the dazed millionaire. "I imagine he'd mosey home if I turned him loose and slapped him severely on the rump."

"Try it."

"But my job, Merry?"

"You need one, don't you?"

"That's not the idea. I don't like to leave Lenover—my boss—in the lurch. It's not exactly my style, you see. However—"

"Yes?"

"Lenover would probably tie the can to my tail in a short time, anyway. I'm only substituting for the regular commissary man and assistant bookkeeper. The real prince may show up any day to demand his place. And the power was speaking about it only yesterday, saying he'd had a letter from this bird and expected him to be on his way out long ago."

"...hat better alibi can you ask for, Rad?"

"I guess you're right. Well, if this old hay press will trail himself back to Camp 2—— I don't want to be pinched for horse stealing."

"Give him a trial."

"Temptress, you win!"

Rad hung the reins over the horse's

neck, and remarking, "This hurts me more than it does you," faced him about and slapped his rump. Whereupon the horse snorted indignantly, tossed his head, and went galloping down the street.

"He's a homer, all right," observed Merry Roane. "Come on, I'll lead you to our outfit."

"Did you treat Austin West as scurvyly as I'm treating Dillingham, Wadsworth & Burt?" Rad chuckled as he stepped to her side.

"Just about. My red-headed sub chews gum and talks with the patrons of the restaurant."

"So did you—with certain patrons."

"But I didn't chew gum, Rad—not on duty. Oh, be your age! Come on, we're playing hooky. I like it. It's something new. Let's hold hands and run."

"A fine suggestion," Rad told her.

He grasped her hand, thrilled to the core of his being at thought of playing hooky with her and leaving Austin West behind.

They ran through the solemn black trees that fringed the road, her soft hand warm in his.

"Do—do you think Daddy Badger will follow?" she panted.

"'As the night the day,' " he quoted. "Since you've agreed with me, I'm surer every moment that my scheme was a dazzling inspiration."

"All right. Keep on thinking that way. My courage is slipping. This is the most desperate thing I've ever done."

"There must always be a first time. You'll grow comfortably accustomed to sinning. How did you manage to get the saddles and things out of your father's cabin?"

"Just stole 'em."

"Simple, to say the least," was Radford's comment.

Rad Karval had not ridden a hundred

yards up the street to meet Merry Roane when Tom File entered Austin West's restaurant and sought out a table in a far corner. Nobody could have exhibited more patience than the bad man from Carpenter as he awaited the coming of the red-headed girl. He hitched up his holstered six-gun and laid it tenderly in his lap. He meditatively stroked his flowing brown mustachios as his dark, melancholy eyes wandered innocently about the room.

Then the gum-chewing waitress approached him and began spinning out her list of meats.

File eyed her speculatively. "Jest gi' me a cup o' black coffee," he said as she finished.

She tossed her head disdainfully. "No order less than fifty cents in this joint, pal," she told him. "And take off your hat."

"Ne' mind them items, kid. I reckon I c'n pay fifty cents fer a cup o' Java if I want it. An' I look better with my hat on. C'mere a minute."

Surveying him with a new light in her reddish eyes, the girl stood close to the table.

Then, like the strike of a rattlesnake, Tom File's lean hand shot out and grasped her wrist.

"Now, listen," he said impressively: "You and me's jest holdin' hands, ain't we?"

"It begins to look that way," replied Redhead, with a knowing grin. "But you're hurtin' my wrist, old-timer."

"Listen furder," said File, slightly increasing the pressure: "It's gonna hurt worse ner that if yeh don't savvy what I want yeh to."

A look of apprehension supplanted the flirtatious one that had come into Redhead's eyes.

"Well, what's it all about?" she demanded, trying to make her voice sound brave, but quaking inwardly. There were hard men in this country, and this girl knew it well.

File nodded toward the cashier, whose face was hidden behind a magazine.

"He won't savvy you and me's holdin' hands," he said, "providin' you don't raise a holler. Onderstand?"

The waitress nodded.

"So I'll tell yeh this," the outlaw proceeded: "If yeh don't come across, I'll jest naturally break this here maccaroni wrist o' yourn. And when yeh holler, er faint, an' that hombre tries to butt in, I'll fill his frame with lead. Believe me?" He tightened his cruel grip a little more.

"I—I guess so," replied the now thoroughly frightened girl, and she unconsciously stopped chewing.

"Then, here we go," said File: "What was wrote on that piece o' paper yeh handed the last man yeh talked to in this here beanery?"

The girl's face whitened more than ever. "I—I didn't read it," she stammered. "Le' me go, now. I—I don't like this!"

Tom File's smile was grim. "What was wrote in that note?" he persisted; and it seemed to the swinging brain of the waitress that her slender wrist was bending.

"I tell you I didn't read it!" Two tears fell from her reddish eyes, and the freckles, heretofore almost unseen, stood out boldly on her ghostly skin.

"Listen here," said File grimly: "I ain't no lady's man whatever, 'Orange Blossom,' but I read a heap o' story-books about women and love and things like that. And I never read about one o' the genteel sex that could deliver a note, wrote by another gal, to a man, and her not keep from readin' it. No, sir, kid, it never was done. So tell me what was wrote in that there missive er I'll naturally break yer wrist. I mean it! Look in my eye and see if I don't mean it!"

"Orange Blossom" looked; she saw; she surrendered. She had never been so frightened in her life.

"It—it said— Oh, please don't twist that way! It said, 'Dear Rad: Please meet me at nine o'clock at the south end o' the street, near the last house, Merry.' That was all, so help me! Now le' me go! Oh, please!"

Slowly, as if reluctant to do so, Tom File released the pressure on her spindling wrist.

"No, yeh didn't read her," he said thoughtfully. "Yeh jest committed her to mem'ry—that's all. I see 'im ridin' south, anyway, so I reckon yeh told the truth. Ne' mind the coffee, kid. And here's fifty cents. Slip it in yer poke, 'cause I didn't eat nothin'. Nobody ever said Tom File was a piker and got away with it."

He rose and hastened toward the door, spur rowels whirring.

The cashier laid down his magazine and looked up expectantly.

"No quail on toast, so I don't eat here," said File, and passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XXXV.

KIDNAPED.

THE stable boss at Camp 2 had found it was worth his while to let Tom File know when Radford Karval took out a saddle horse. So by reason of this little arrangement, File had been able to take the trail shortly after Rad left that evening.

File had heard, too, of the arrival in camp that day of a beautiful girl who rode a finely equipped white horse, and whom the commissary clerk had conducted about the big tent. File knew that this could be no other than Merry Roane. So when he reached Sidewinder, he rode toward the restaurant in which the girl had waited at table, hoping to find his quarry there.

Nearing the place, he had come upon Rad's saddle horse tied in front of it. The rest was easy—watching guardedly through the window; witnessing the de-

livery of the note by Merry's gum-chewing successor; secreting himself when Rad came out, read the missive, mounted, and rode away south.

Now File walked out of the restaurant with feigned deliberation, swung himself into the saddle, and raced off after Rad. But before long, to his utter surprise, he met the galloping horse that Rad had released. File was a thorough horseman. He seldom failed to recognize a horse that his eyes once had fallen upon. What was the meaning of all this?

He did not attempt to catch the animal. It wasn't the horse he wanted. He set spurs to his mount and continued on, until presently he knew that he was nearing the last house, mentioned in the note.

He reined in, dismounted, and plodded on warily afoot. Unseen by Rad and Merry, he darted behind a convenient tree just as the pair grasped hands and started to run through the woods.

It was a difficult matter for him to trail them, for the moon did not cast much light in the forest. But by pausing now and then he heard the snap of brittle twigs and other sounds of their progress, so that he was able to keep after them.

And soon he came to a dead stop again, secreted himself, and peered around the bole of a tree at what was taking place in a moonlit, open space in the woods. He saw Rad and the girl tightening saddle cinches, mounting their horses, and jerking two packed mules into activity with lead ropes.

This was enough for the crafty File. He knew well where the pair were going. The pack mules meant, beyond a doubt, that the quest for the Anthill Mine had been resumed. Why his old enemy, Esau Badger, did not make one of the party remained a question. But he might be able to find an answer to that later.

He noted the direction that the little cavalcade took on leaving, and, with a grim chuckle, walked back to his waiting horse with his customary passivity.

He reached the horse, swung into the saddle, galloped back toward the heart of the town. He passed along the entire length of the crowded street, and, on the other side of Sidewinder, turned into the forest to his left.

Ten minutes later he was dismounting before a flimsy shelter made of willow boughs, old gunny sacks, and an occasional plank, before which a camp fire burned low.

A man stood in the entrance, his hand on the butt of his six-shooter. He was a squat, swarthy man, with intensely black hair that hung almost to his shoulders. His dress was half American, half Mexican. There was a wide red band about the middle of his body, suggesting a hidden knife, and the ends of it hung down almost to his knees and were fastidiously tasseled.

"Hello, Gaspar," greeted File. "How's everything?"

"Bueno," the man replied in Spanish, lazily lounging toward his visitor.

"Somethin's broke to-night," said File. "And I got work fer yeh to do. Savvy?"

"Si."

"Saddle up, then, and git ready to ride."

"Si, señor"—and the man returned to his miserable abode and came out with a Mexican saddle over his shoulder.

A little later the pair were riding side by side along the road to the rag town.

"Remember the boy that knocked yeh dizzy when the *garitero* tried to smoke me up that night?"

"I shall never forget that night," replied the other, still speaking in the Spanish tongue. "That night, my captain, I saved the life of you. Is it not so?"

"Sure—sure. Badger would 'a'

plugged me, all right. But that's nothin'. That's what I'm gonta pay you for—to save my life—when we git the gold."

"Ah, the gold! Are we nearer to getting it, my captain?"

File refused to renounce his English, for he knew that this renegade cutthroat from Mexico—half Yaqui Indian, half Spanish—understood his language perfectly. "We're gettin' hot," he admitted. "That's why I come for yeh to-night."

"Speak," urged Gaspar. "I shall do your bidding. I and the simple-minded Yaquis who trust me and believe in me."

"More'n I do," File muttered to himself. But aloud he said: "Here's yer job, then. Know that restaurant where the *garitero*'s gal was workin'?"

"Si, señor."

"Well, she's flew the coop—not workin' there any more, I judge. And they's a red-headed lady that's took her place."

"I know. I was in the village this afternoon."

"Well, what yeh gotta do is to watch that red-headed gal. Get me?"

"Si, si!" The smoldering eyes of the renegade sparkled in the moonlight. Watching red-headed gals apparently was not a distasteful task for Gaspar Lopez.

"Proceed," he urged.

"Find out all ye can about her," Tom File instructed. "Trail her up and locate where she rooms at. And if ye see her doin' anythin' funny, nail her and bring her out to yer shack, and send fer me."

"I do not understand—'funny'!"

"You savvy, all right. Anything suspicious. F'r instance, if she makes a move to see the gambler, grab her. It's like this, Gaspar: To-night the gal you been watchin'—the gambler's daughter—she give this red-headed jane a note, to be handed to the boy that cracked you with his gat. That gal and the boy,

they've beat it—no matter where jest now. But her dad didn't go with 'em. Followin' me, hombre?"

"Si, señor."

"All right. Now, sence she used the red-headed gal to slip her message to the kid, it follows that Reddy needs watchin' right along. I don't know what she may be up to—maybe nothin' at all. But yeh got nothin' else to do, now that the other gal has gone, so I want yeh to keep yer eagle eye on Red-head."

"It shall be done, my captain."

"And mind this pertickeler, Gaspar: If it looks like she's aimin' to have a talk with the gambler, set yer dirty claws in her red hair and drag her to yer shack. Then I'll come, and we'll find out what it was she was goin' to see Badger about."

"And will that help us to find the precious gold, my captain?"

"Sure will. Take it from me, boy! They's somethin' new in the wind, and I wanna find out about it without the *garitero* knowin'. Savvy?"

"Si, si—I comprehend."

So it transpired that, on the following afternoon, Tom File faced a terrified girl, bound hand and foot, in the shack of Gaspar Lopez, and grinned at her maliciously. Then he turned to her swarthy captor.

"Well, Gaspar, I'm here," he said. "What's the charge agin' the prisoner?"

"She went to the cabin of the *garitero*, in the alley back of the saloon where he does the gambling," explained the renegade. "On the door she knocked, and in her hand was this." He displayed a sealed envelope. "But the *garitero* was not in the cabin, and to the rear door of the saloon she walked. There was no one but we two in that alley, my captain. So I——" He paused and shrugged significantly, and nodded toward the white-faced waitress.

Tom File snatched the note from his hand, read, on the back of it, "For Mr.

Esau Badger, Kindness of Maggy Draper," and tore off one end of the envelope.

He chuckled deep down in his scrawny throat as he read Merry Roane's communication to Esau Badger, confessing what she and Rad Karval meant to do. As an excuse for their amazing act, she wrote that they were growing weary of inactivity, and that, as her foster father seemed to find gambling more fascinating than seeking a lost mine, she and Rad had decided to go ahead alone. He could follow them if he chose, since he knew the way and had means of transportation.

No mention was made of the real reason back of this unexpected move.

"Good job yeh did, Gaspar," Tom File praised the renegade, as he tore the note to ribbons. "And we'll jest naturally keep Miss Redhead here till I give the word to set her free."

"Git yer hoss pronto and round up yer gang o' dirty Yacks. Have 'em ready to move to-night. I'll watch over Reddy while yeh're gone. When ye git back, make one o' the Injuns keep the gal here, 'cause I'll need you with me to handle them dirt eaters."

"S'long as Reddy don't git to Esau Badger, he won't know where them two have gone. And we won't have him to deal with up there on the plateau. Jest the two of 'em—the *garitero*'s daughter and the kid. Easy meat! Git goin', now—and make her snappy!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE LONE CAMPER.

LEADING the packed mules, Merry Roane and Radford Karval reached the base of the forgotten plateau and began the ascent up the jagged crevice made memorable to them by the battle with the File Gang. The moon shone on the rugged stones and lighted the ancient trail, and the silent pair moved along briskly toward the summit.

They came upon the remnants of the shattered boulder which the Yaquis had rolled into the trail. The mules and horses daintily picked their way through the débris and continued on.

It was after midnight when the cavalcade reached the summit, and Rad, who had never before traveled to the top, looked about over the vast plateau, weird and uncanny in the moonlight.

"Can you continue on from here after dark?" he asked the girl.

"Yes, I know the way pretty well," she replied. "Daddy showed me the day that we raced up here, with the File Gang firing upon us. I've brought along a pocket compass. We have only to travel due south from the end of the trail in order to reach the ant hill."

"What is this ant hill?" he questioned her. "It's indicated on the map, I know, but nothing much is said about it in the directions. I never asked your father. I allowed him to lead the way pretty much himself after he had butted in."

"The ant hill is just a—hill," she hazily explained. "It resembles an ant hill in shape, I believe, and that's why the old discoverers of the mine named it that."

"All right. That's enough for me to know for the present. Lead on."

Accordingly the girl led the way, Rad bringing up the rear with the pack mules tied head to tail. They traveled through weird, tall cactus plants and yuccas that whimpered in the night wind. These grew at such regular intervals that it seemed they must have been set out by a landscape gardener.

Suddenly Merry Roane reined in the white horse, whose nostrils fluttered a soft snort of surprise.

"Look!" the girl's voice floated back to Rad. "A light!"

Dragging the mules after him, he spurred his horse to her side.

Sure enough, off through the strange growths a light flickered unsteadily.

"Camp fire," Rad immediately announced. "We'd better look into this before proceeding farther."

"Assuredly," Merry Roane agreed.

"You hold my horse and the mules, and I'll sneak ahead afoot and investigate."

"Be careful," was her quick admonition, as he slid from the saddle and handed her the reins and lead rope.

Ten minutes later he was crawling forward on hands and knees. He reached the bole of a particularly large yucca and paused behind it. Just beyond, quite close, the camp-fire flames licked upward toward the heavens.

Rad peered about the bole of the tree, and smiled grimly at what he saw.

Seated close to the camp fire of greasewood roots, with his shaggy burros close at hand, sat Mad Owl, the mysterious Indian who carried about small fortunes in a dingy pill box. The inscrutable eyes, set like precious stones in his leathery old face, blinked lazily, in what apparently was a desperate fight against sleepiness.

For five minutes Rad watched him nodding there, then stole back to Merry with his report.

"It's a mystery why he doesn't curl up in his blankets and go to sleep," he said. "But it's plain that he doesn't want to. Merry, he's afraid to go to sleep, that's what!"

She looked at him thoughtfully through the darkness. "Afraid somebody may be trailing him," she added finally. "Yes, that's it. File, do you suppose he's headed for now?"

"File or some of the hangers-on at Sidewinder. Probably the man who tried to rob him, and from whom your father saved him. Where do you suppose he's headed for now?"

"Home, perhaps."

"And he alone, unless he has a family, knows where that is. What ought we to do about this, Cousin Merry?"

"Why, I don't see that we're con-

cerned in Mad Owl's movements in the slightest, Rad."

"But we are. That gold that he traded in to me isn't placer gold. It hasn't known the action of water since it ran as molten metal into the rock crevices from which this old Indian took it. He gouged it out, I tell you! That gold, Merry, came from the lost Anthill Mine. Therefore, it isn't a lost mine at all, since Mad Owl knows its whereabouts."

The girl on the white horse was silent for many minutes. Her tone was low when she at last spoke.

"That's what Daddy Badger thought," she told her waiting companion. "And another 'therefore' is this, Rad: The lost Anthill Mine is the property of Mad Owl, and we have no right to make an attempt to take it away from him."

This thought had been troubling Radford Karval, too, ever since the old Indian had displayed his gold in the commissary tent. So it was his turn to keep silent for several minutes, while he reasoned the matter out.

"Anyway," he said at last, "we're not sure that Mad Owl's gold comes from the Anthill Mine. There may be other veins in the country. And it's up to us to keep on with the search until we know the truth of the matter."

"Of course," she agreed. "But if, eventually, we discover that Mad Owl has beaten us to it, what then?"

"What will be your father's answer to that question?" he countered.

"I can't tell you that," she replied doubtfully. "Daddy's a sport, all right, and a game loser. But whether he would consider an ignorant old Indian as entitled to the fruits of this discovery remains a question. I'm sure, though, that he'd be willing to see that Mad Owl never wanted for anything."

"But that would scarcely satisfy me," Rad told her grimly. "Ever since the white man landed on this continent he

has been robbing the Indian of his rightful holdings. I'm agin' it."

"I'm with you, too," the girl promptly returned. "But, of course, if we developed the mine, and it proved to be as rich as we think it is, we could give Mad Owl more than he is getting now, perhaps, and still be ahead of the game."

"That sounds reasonable, of course," he said. "And I'm sure your father would be willing to enter into an agreement with the Indian to that effect. Anyway"—he sighed deeply—"we came into this country to find the lost Anthill Mine, and we're going to carry the project to the finish."

He mounted his horse.

"So what now?" asked Merry.

"We're not going any farther tonight," he readily answered. "Since we're out to find the lost mine, it would be foolish of us to throw away a chance to take a short cut to our goal."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that we're going to stick around and follow Mad Owl when he sets out in the morning."

"Rad!"

"Please don't misunderstand me, Merry. Mad Owl may, in the end, be glad that we trailed him. We may be able to protect the old boy from other trailers who would handle him less gently than we will."

"All right—I understand. Shall we find a place to camp?"

For answer Rad swung his horse to the left and presently, at some distance from the squatting Indian, they settled down to await the coming of day and the continuation of Mad Owl's pilgrimage across the forgotten plateau.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE BOTTOMLESS PIT.

AT the first hint of dawn in the eastern sky, Radford Karval was astir. He knew Indians pretty well, and imagined that Jenjen Madoul would be

on the trail at an hour that would put a white man to shame.

"It will be an easy matter to trail him through this sandy loam," he told his sleepy companion. "So we'll not attempt to keep him in sight. However, we'll keep as close to him as possible. If he loses us, I'll be very much mistaken."

They made a cold breakfast of canned pork and beans and bread, drinking only water from their canvas-wrapped canteens. And when the stock had finished munching the rolled barley in their nosebags, they threw on the packs and saddles. The eastern sky was lighting fast as they set off toward the point where they had sighted the Indian's camp fire.

They came to a halt when they reached the spot, and Rad dismounted. As before, he left the stock in Merry's care and stole away on foot for an investigation.

Mad Owl's camp site, he found, was represented by a tiny pile of charred greasewood roots and ashes.

But the little hoofprints of the burros, leading straight into the south, were plainly visible.

Rad hastened back to the girl and told her that Mad Owl had departed, and ten minutes later they were following the small hoofmarks in the loamy soil, with Radford in the lead and trailing skillfully.

Lighter and lighter grew the sky. Finally the sun peered through the saddle of a twin-peak mountain of the chain. Due south marched the little cavalcade, through the giant cacti and the whispering yuccas, Rad following with ease the dragging progress of Mad Owl's burros. Ahead of them loomed a smooth-surfaced hill, as evenly proportioned as a pile of beach sand—undoubtedly the "ant hill" for which the lost mine had been named.

Several times they caught sight of the Indian plodding on ahead of them,

and on these occasions they fell back promptly. Toward noon the trail of the burros deviated from a straight course toward the ant hill and cut off into the southwest. The trailers held a short conference as to whether they should continue toward the hill, or follow Mad Owl. They finally decided on the latter course.

The plateau was a level plain, devoid of such growths as demand much moisture. Only the cacti and the yuccas and the hoary sage and greasewood. It was a dry plain, undoubtedly.

But deserts have their oases, and as the pair continued to follow the quarry they saw in the distance a patch of bright green that unquestionably bespoke an ample supply of water. This, they decided, was Mad Owl's destination, and perhaps his permanent home.

In the middle of the afternoon Rad called a halt. The patch of green was now so close that he dared not travel farther toward it, lest Mad Owl see him. The binoculars that Merry had thoughtfully brought along showed cottonwoods and willows, and what seemed to be an alfalfa patch with irregular boundaries.

"Only an Indian would plant a patch of alfalfa in that haphazard fashion," was Rad's comment.

He rode a little to the east, for the purpose of getting a view of the spot from another angle. And when he once more raised the glasses he saw a tiny adobe house squatting among the trees, and other evidences of a permanent habitation.

Returning to the girl, he said: "I think we've tracked Mad Owl to his lair. So this is no place for us. We have no reason to spy on him when he's at home. We want to see him when he goes out after more gold."

Merry nodded.

Rad pointed toward the ant hill, which now lay almost due east of them.

"That's where we belong," he said.

The girl nodded again and swung her horse about. They moved back so that the yuccas and cacti served as a screen between them and the Indian's home, and set off for their original goal.

It was slow traveling with the pack mules, so that evening was close at hand when they came to the base of the hill that stood for so much in their series of adventures.

It was indeed similar to a pile of sand that some child, at play on the beach, had made by allowing the shiny particles to sift through his fingers. Little grew on its smooth sides. But it was not all sand, for here and there showed outcroppings of rock, which proved that its inner structure was substantial.

They gazed at it in awe for a time, for it was rather huge and weird, and then the girl consulted the ancient map for water indications.

"We must travel halfway around the thing before we come to the spring that is indicated here," she told her companion. "The spring is on the south side of the ant hill. We'd better be getting at it."

So they followed the base of the odd, lone mountain, their horses picking their way among large boulders that, in ages past, had rolled down from the summit. They urged on the lead mules, for night was approaching fast.

Half an hour later Rad's horse began to whinny softly. Then Merry's Pharos took up the nasal strain. Whereupon the two mules joined in with their brassy voices.

Rad looked at the girl. "Savvy the burro?" he asked.

"I think I know what it means," she answered. "We're dead."

"Sure as shootin'. The critters smell it, or know it's close because of some sense that is unfathomable to us. It won't be long now."

It certainly was not long. For presently Pharos stopped dead in his tracks

and gave forth a loud snort of surprise. And the girl discovered, with a strange shock, that he was standing on the brink of a deep pool of water as clear as crystal. One more step and he would have plunged into its depths as unexpectedly as if he had stumbled into a well.

Rad rode to the girl's side, voicing his complete surprise. The pool was full to the brim, and the overflow trickled out in a thread of water that crossed the plain into the southwest. Toward this Rad guided the way, and at the little stream the animals were able to lower their heads and drink.

While they were about this welcome task Rad and Merry dismounted and stood at the edge of the circular well, gazing down into its mysterious depths. For it seemed to them to be nothing else than a gigantic well, bored by the hand of man. Its sides, all around, were as perpendicular as the sides of any man-made well. And its waters were deep, unfathomably deep, for they were so clear that the awed spectators could see marine growths gently moving about at least thirty feet below the surface. The diameter of the hole was about forty feet, and it was almost round.

"Gosh almighty!" breathed the man.
"This *is* a freak. I can't remember anything like this as being indicated on the map."

"It isn't indicated on the map," Merry told him. "All that is written on the map is '*Agua de fuente*,' the translation of which is 'spring water.'"

"A fellow would hardly call this a spring. It is a spring on a great scale. It seems to me that the great map would have prepared one for a surprise like this. How deep do you suppose the thing is, Merry?"

Her shapely shoulders gave a shrug, perhaps a throw-back to her days in Mexico, where shrugs convey so much.

"I'm an ass. I suppose, but I must

know right now," said he. "We ought to be getting settled for the night, but it will take only a minute."

He went to his horse and took his lariat from the right-hand fork of his saddle. Then he removed the one on the girl's saddle. Both were forty-foot ropes. He tied them together and returned to the well. He made fast a stone to one end of his double lariat, stooped on the brink, and began lowering it into the water.

Presently he looked around in amazement at the girl. The end of the uppermost lariat was in his hands.

"Virtually eighty feet, and no bottom," he said tonelessly.

Making his rope fast to a boulder, he returned to the animals, lazing beside the little flow of water. He removed the pack ropes from both mules, and fastened them together. These he carried to the well and fastened to the lariats. His rope was now approximately a hundred and fifty feet in length.

Slowly he began lowering. Down, down went the weighted rope, slipping silently through his hands.

And now he held the end again, and began lifting the rope up and down repeatedly, feeling for something solid.

"No bottom at a hundred and fifty feet, skipper," he presently told Merry. "I might tie on the lead ropes, our bridle

reins, and the tent ropes and gain, perhaps, fifty feet more. I'll do so to-morrow. This, my dear cousin, is the original bottomless pit of tradition. There simply ain't no bottom to her."

"And to think," remarked the amazed girl, "that no mention of it was made on the map, Rad! Surely the old Spaniards could have picked on no more distinguishing feature than your bottomless well as an accurate guide to the lost Anthill Mine! What's the answer to that fool problem?"

"I can think of only one answer," Rad returned. "And that is, that the bottomless well was not here in the Spaniard's day. Since then there's been a cave-in—a settling of the earth's surface—what is commonly called a 'land sink.' It's caused by the action of a subterranean flow of water. And when the surface of the land gives way, the water sometimes comes up. But not always. That depends on the new formation down below that takes place when the crust comes crashing in."

"How terrifically profound you are!" Merry laughed. "But you must stop playing in the water now and make us a home for the night. It's growing dark."

"I'm only wondering," he said, as he hauled in his sounding line, "if this will have any effect on our search for the lost Anthill Mine."

To be concluded in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



THE EYES OF THE SALAMANDER

ONE usually thinks of the salamander as blind. And yet he is so afflicted only because of his environment. For, if he is taken from his cave home while young, he is capable of developing very useful eyes that would, otherwise, degenerate and make him unseeing, says Doctor G. Kingsley Nobel, curator of herpetology at the American Museum of Natural History.

This theory is proved by field work which Doctor Nobel recently conducted in the Ozark Mountain caves in southwest Missouri. His experiments in that region showed that, while generations of salamanders had been losing their eyesight shortly after birth through disuse, the stimulus of light was able to develop that faculty almost to the point of the normal.



In the Teeth of Danger

By Clinton Dangerfield

Author of "Playing for Life," etc.



AY, Monte-hawse, how much longer do yuh think we're goin' to have to wait? It can't be that they never got the pardon! Such a thing couldn't happen after the governor done promised! We ain't goin' to believe it could!"

In the anguished suspense of his loyal heart, Don Dane, cow-puncher from the Bar Thirty, was appealing to his four-footed pal for comfort.

The bay stamped as though in answer, cupping out the soil with an impatient forefoot.

For a terrible hour Don had been waiting just where the mouth of the narrow canyon began to separate the mesa, like a great cut made by a Titan's knife.

Nearly as fretted as his master, the powerful and rangy bay gelding stirred restlessly, feeling the mood of his rider, and anxious to be gone.

Don halted his horse in the middle of the canyon's mouth, where he would be easily observed by the pardon-bearer

for whom he waited, and his keen, gray eyes strained again and again toward the south, in the hope of seeing the messenger appear.

For if that hoped-for rider, Cleghorn, should flash into the moonlight and come racing toward him, then the anxious-hearted cowboy would know that the governor had granted a pardon to Jim Maxwell, who, without that pardon, would die at sunrise.

Don Dane and Jim Maxwell had been friends since boyhood, and Maxwell's high temper—which had precipitated him into his present ghastly predicament—had never made any trouble between the two pals.

The condemned Maxwell had another friend, not quite so close as Don, but a real pal for all that—Jasper Cleghorn—the rider for whom Don was now watching and listening.

There was neither telephone nor telegraph to rush a saving message through the air; these were still new inventions, not yet acquired in this man's country where horse and rider meant everything!

Don Dane was the last link in the relay, and he said to himself that surely, considering how high the full moon was, Cleghorn should have appeared!

Though the restive Don did not know it, he was not the only man there at the mouth of the canyon, watching for Cleghorn and the pardon.

Hidden on the escarpment, not far above the cowboy's head, lay a spy who had been set there to flash a signal in case the rider with the pardon came and sent Don Dane forward with the precious paper.

The spy up there on the escarpment had a piece of rich, resinous wood prepared for the torch that he would fire and wave, if Cleghorn came and Don flashed off on his lap of relay.

If only the merest spark of the torch fire were seen where the canyon ended, then the scoundrels who were there would be only too ready to carry out the details of the trap which they had already prepared for the last rider in the relay—should the pardon be granted.

For there were those who did not intend to see Maxwell survive. If Cleghorn, rider from the south trail, materialized—well, so much the worse for that soft-hearted fool, Don Dane, who believed his and Cleghorn's hopeful plans a secret! A difficult art—secret keeping! And a bad thing for Don if that rider from the south sent him racing on with a pardon which must never reach its destination, or rather, not until Maxwell's tortured spirit had passed beyond all human help.

Don stirred in his saddle. Under the movement of the cowboy's splendidly fashioned, six feet of fearless manhood, the leathers squeaked faintly. Up the canyon, the western wind sighed hollowly.

Don muttered:

"Why, Jim Maxwell and me, Monte-hawse, we learnt to swim together in

the same ole swimmin' hole! We stole our first apples together. We learnt to smoke behind the barn, same time, and one was just as sick as t'other. Then we always had jobs on the same ranch, and there never was a time when yuh couldn't count on Jim as the finest sort—ya pal. It jest ain't possible that, when the sun rises, a hangman could be throwin' his lariat around the neck of the best friend yuh and me ever had! We couldn't have it, Monte-hawse. It jest couldn't be."

As if this statement were a kind of benign charm productive of excellent results, both horse and man now caught the drumming of approaching hoofs racing over the malpair from the south.

The horse pricked his ears, and Don Dane uttered a half-sobbing cry:

"If only it's Cleghorn ridin' there! If only——"

He could not finish the sentence. In that sickening uncertainty, his heart hammered with terror for his friend, and his eyes seemed to lose their unusual keenness.

The south trail twisted among broken buttes, but at last the horse that both man and rider heard came galloping hard around the nearest one and broke out into the open moonlight. Broke out and came flying on, the rider waving his right hand, and in that hand a white oblong showed clearly.

Jasper Cleghorn sprang from his reeling gray, and thrust a heavy envelope on Don Dane.

"It's here—it's all right! Get on with you! I'm half an hour later than I thought I would be!"

Then, as Don caught the envelope from his hand, he added

"Are you well heeled?"

"Yeah," Don answered, slapping a six-gun and carefully putting the pardon in a pocket of his coat. "So long, Cleghorn. You'll hear good news tomorrow."

Don Dane wheeled his Monte-hawse

and was gone, running like a swift shadow under the sharp and silvery light of the moon. He vanished—and then the weary Cleghorn caught on the lip of the left-hand escarpment the glow of a torch, it's light flashing out like a red and baleful star. Cleghorn's anxious and experienced mind jumped to a hurried conclusion, and a correct one. The interference which they had tried to guard against, and which all along they had dreaded, was afoot!

He fired at the torch, hoping that he might strike it from the hand of the holder, for Jasper Cleghorn was a crack shot.

But he had not counted on the fact that he had ridden exhausting miles. Once his horse had fallen with him, jarring his right shoulder badly, and leaving his sore and jaded muscles less steady.

Instead of hitting the torch, as he meant to do, his bullet caught the spy fairly between the eyes and dropped him where he stood, dead.

Yet the torch went out also, for it fell with the falling man, whose dying body dropped across it, and smothered out the flame. Down below, Cleghorn gave a little satisfied grunt.

"Pretty good," he said to himself, "I hit that torch fair and square! Knocked it clean out of the fella's hands, and he'll think twice before he lights it again!" Then he added a little ruefully: "Maybe, after all, I was too hasty; it might've been some poor gink lost up there tryin' to find his way home. But, anyway, this moon ought to be good enough light for anybody."

Thus innocently was the worst of bad men disposed of in his eerie.

Meanwhile, having seen nothing of that star of ill omen which had flashed out behind him, Don Dane was racing through the narrow canyon, it's rocky bottom ringing with the music of his horse's feet marking out the measure of Don's happiness.

To-morrow, when the sun rose, he and Jim Maxwell could go away from the jail together, and Jim could forget all his past agonies of mind that had haunted him day and night, forget that the long, writhing shadow of death had crawled so close to him.

Exultantly, the cowboy said to himself that they had surely put one over on the ring which had tried so hard to destroy Jim Maxwell; he chuckled as he thought how he, Don Dane, and Jasper Cleghorn, and a couple of other faithful adherents to Maxwell's cause, had wrung the pardon from the governor, had planned the relays, had put it all through—in time!

Yes, of course he would be in time! There were hours yet before the red rising of the sun should flame out its scarlet peril to the man behind prison bars.

Don was conscious of a fierce delight in his own tireless strength in Maxwell's service, and a thrill of wild gladness went through him in foreseeing the light which would illumine his friend's face when the good news came to him.

The canyon was narrowing steadily now; he did not mind that, as he had been through here before, and knew that there were no box canyons to head him off. This was an excellent short cut, saving him miles in the length of the route. Yet, as the walls drew closer in, cutting down the space between, Don was riding into a trap far worse than any blind canyon would have been.

Where the jaws of the rock walls nearly closed and the overhang above was much broader, the shadows deepened into blackness, so that they threw a deadly bar of night across the canyon's end.

Beyond this bar of blackness the moonlight burst out in fresh splendor, but it made the shadows all the deeper, and all the more confusing to the eyes

of a man who would be passing through those jaws.

Don was racing his horse; there was no other way. But he knew his horse well; Monte could certainly make the miles yet ahead in time, even though his rider must take out of him every ounce of endurance.

As Don Dane rushed toward the narrowing jaws ahead, he took no special heed of the big candelabra cacti and the shrubs which crowded together on each side of the canyon's end, and yet, behind those cacti, behind the several fallen boulders that helped to narrow the end of the canyon, four men were hiding, and watching eagerly, listening with keen ears to the sound of his galloping horse.

They were a precious crew, the paid tools of a man far more intelligent than they. A man who used them for his dirty work whenever he saw fit.

These four weak-headed, rotten-hearted, cruel-minded and red-handed men, slinking and cowardly in spirit, useful, therefore, to the mind behind them. That mind had a quick fertility of thought and used their stupid shoulders to carry all the danger of his work.

This work, so far as the trap they had laid was concerned, was simple enough; it was the mere stretching of a wire some few inches above the rocky floor of the canyon, just high enough to catch the running horse at his knees and throw him.

This might kill both rider and horse; but certainly they would get a terrific shaking-up, and whatever happened to the rider, he would be too stunned to give any trouble.

Don, in his impatience, played directly into their hands. He knew that he should be restraining his horse's speed, rather than increasing it, and yet in his exhilaration over the pardon he did not seem able to avoid shaking the

reins a little, and his Monte-hawse answered with a wilder outburst of speed, flashing forward toward the jaws of the darkened trap.

In the next two seconds, it seemed to Don Dane that the floor of the canyon rose up and smashed him in the face. He was conscious of its coming, of what seemed the end of all things, and then—there was only oblivion.

He came back to his senses, to hear, in a low, chuckling voice:

"Look, boys, he's stirrin' now! I told yuh the fellow wasn't dead! Wa'n't either him or his horse hurt to speak of at all!"

Another voice said:

"I guess his head's too hard to bu'st. Crazy he must be, takin' all this trouble 'bout Maxwell jest becuz he was his buddy!"

The words brought back with a rush to the still half-dazed mind of the cowboy where he had been, and what he was riding for. He staggered up to his feet, his head swimming, and cried out sharply:

"Where's my horse? I gotta get back on him, pronto."

But as he spoke, staring wildly from one antagonistic, sneering face to another, he discovered that his hands were bound behind him. That discovery gave him the key to why he was in Old Man Callahan's cabin, instead of being down in the canyon's gorge where he knew he had fallen!

He burst out:

"So that's why I went down! Yuh was there—all of yuh! Yuh set a trap for me—a wire!"

"Well, I guess most any man would come to a conclusion like that," the leader said, "but then, o' course, the real truth of it is that yore horse is weak-ankled, Don. Yuh just simply come a cropper, and we—outta the plumb kindness of our hearts—we picked you up and brought you in here."

"The kindness of yore hearts," gasped the cowboy. "It was yuh—it was all of yuh that done it! And I know who set yuh on to do it—and who paid yuh to do it so that Maxwell should die! But if yuh dare go on with this, yuh'll get yourselves hung instead of Jim Maxwell, for yuh're interferin' with the State's business—the governor's own business, for I'm his messenger—and when yuh destroyed that pardon——"

The leader of the hired band, one Scove Appleby, took off his hat and rubbed his bristly hair. His unstable eyes roved restlessly over the cowboy, as he cut in on Don in a voice of chill cruelty:

"Yo're jest simply off when yuh talk that a way! We ain't never destroyed no pardon. It's in yore pocket right now, Don, and I'll show it to yuh!" He suited the action to the word, proving that Don still carried the pardon. Jamming it back in the cowboy's pocket, Scove hurried on: "And to keep us from gettin' into any trouble, this here is the story we'll tell in the mawnin'!"

"We'll say yuh had an awful fall. We found yuh, picked yuh up on the road, and brought yuh into Old Man Callahan's cabin. Him bein' away, we jest borrowed the cabin. We didn't know yuh were carryin' no pardon, or we would, o' course, have toted it along ourselves. Yuh never come to until—say, about eight o'clock in the mawnin'—that will be to-morrow mawnin'—when that there ceremony about Maxwell was over—all over and done with. And then yuh come to, and we find out that yuh are on yore way with the pardon. And we are jest plumb horrified that all the time that pardon was a-lyin' in yore pocket! A senseless man's pocket! And we might ha' took it out and gone on with it, only—how should we know? And as we're all set and minded to tell this same story, and as

there's the testimony of four of us agin' yuh, why, yuh must have sense enough to know that it won't pay yuh to get up no cock-an'-bull story about us! More 'specially, Don, as everybody knows that Jim Maxwell has left everything he's got to yuh and Cleghorn."

Listening to this rapid-fire explanation, the desperate cow-puncher pulled his wits together.

While Appleby was speaking, Don Dane had looked from one face to the other. In each he had met nothing but the lowest animal cunning and meanness, yet there remained one chance, for surely he could appeal to their greed.

"Boys," he said thickly, "let me go on with the pardon—give me back my horse, and before I go, I'll deed to yuh everything that I own! I've got a piece of land and some cattle; I been makin' a little start to go into business for myself; I'll deed yuh everything! Yuh can witness it for each other, only—let me go!"

But, almost simultaneously, they shook their heads and laughed, and in their laughter, their scorn over what he had to offer, he understood clearly enough that the bribe which had bought them had been a big one. He realized that the black-minded snake who was behind all this must indeed have loved Jim Maxwell's girl desperately, being willing, apparently, to pay almost anything to get Maxwell's life blotted out by a disgraceful death, from which surely she would turn to a new love, and a new day.

The leader said:

"Yuh might jest as well take it easy, Don, and thank yore lucky stars we didn't give yuh a crack on the head and put yuh outa business. Take it all in all, we ain't sech a bad lot! Now, yuh go set over there in the far part of the room. Go set on old Callahan's bed, and we'll have us a game o' cards over here. Don't try to start nuthin', becuz yuh can't."

Don Dane walked slowly to the south end of the room and sat down on the bedside to think.

As he did so, the four bad men drifted over to the big stone fireplace at the north end of the room, a fireplace which ran up into a crude stone chimney.

In the west wall was the one door of the room, and in the same wall, near the fireplace, moonlight filtered through the only window, contending with the yellow glow of the kerosene lamp.

The four dragged the puncheon table to the left-hand side of the fireplace. They set two stools and two split-bottomed chairs around the table, sat down and began a game of cards, first taking the precaution to fasten the door with a bit of rope; it had no lock.

The one window in the room was right beside them, and very small anyway; also, their prisoner's hands were securely bound behind him. What harm, then, could he do? He needed practically no watching.

They set out a flask or two of choice whisky, and began, in considerable exultation of spirit, to enjoy their game. They had carried out their orders precisely, and ahead of them loomed a reward which would allow each one of them an almost indefinite spree.

With a violent effort, Don Dane shook off the wave of despair which threatened to overwhelm him and dull his intelligence past thinking.

Resolutely, he sharpened his brain again, with the courage inherited from his pioneer forbears, and said to himself that no situation was so bad that thinking might not be of some help. To this end, he began to look, with a penetrating, and desperate gaze upon the room.

Old Man Callahan's cabin had not been swept for a week; there were ashes on the hearth, and pieces of potato left over from baking done there. He had built that hearth himself, had Callahan,

and he had made for himself the rough chimney which led up from it; he had built the cabin too, of hewn logs, and was very proud of it.

In that end of the room where the unhappy prisoner sat, there was a rough, cord bed with a straw mattress on it, covered with grimy quilts.

Between the bed and the east wall, there was a considerable space, and on the floor, piled against the wall, were more quilts, faded and dingy from long use, yet still showing their old-fashioned patterns—Rising Sun, and Steps to Washington.

They had been made by Callahan's wife long ago. When she was alive, she had washed them carefully, and hung them out in the sun and wind, but Callahan was indifferent to such things. Yet he had his own ideas of making improvements; he had built a stone chimney, where most men would have made one of stick-and-mud.

In order to get the rocks into smaller sizes, he had used dynamite quite freely in his work, packing it a long way on a pair of little burros.

Above the pile of quilts on the floor was a short, narrow shelf, and on this shelf were a couple of empty medicine bottles, some faded newspapers, and a white-poplar box, corded with heavy string.

It was the sight of that box which acted like a spur upon the frantic mind of the cow-puncher. He had stayed overnight here in the cabin only a few weeks ago, and he had then asked old Callahan if he had had any sticks left over after blasting.

Callahan had answered that in the box on the shelf were a half-dozen or more sticks of dynamite, but that he would not sell them, or give them away, because he meant to blast out his little spring. It was a mere trickle, and he intended to get back into the main water source and enlarge it as soon as he could get around to it.

Perhaps he had used the sticks already for this purpose, but Don had no way of telling.

He got up from the bed and began to pace up and down, as though in his restless misery and anxiety he could not help himself.

The four gambling at the hearth, with considerable stakes already on the board, shot him dark glances at first, but soon returned to their game, satisfied, and with very good reasons, that he could not possibly escape.

But through Don Dane's mind a sentence suddenly flashed: "It takes a sixty-pound jar to set off dynamite." Often and often, he had heard that in the old days of stump blasting on his father's farm at home. Dynamite! He knew something about it from his experiences there.

If put deep in the ground and tamped hard enough, it would blown *down*. But if not tamped, if set off with no weight on top to drive it downward, then the explosion might shatter sideways—up—any way that the freak of its inherent atomic energy dictated.

If that box crashed beside him, and if the crash caused jar enough to set off the dynamite, it was he who would be the first one to be blown into kingdom come.

But there was a way—if he could work it—by which he might be able to free himself by the dynamite. It was just as likely that he might kill or cripple himself. But he would have at least a chance of escape, and unless he escaped, Maxwell would have no chance whatever.

The players crowded at the left-hand side of the fireplace were deep in their cards now. They gave him—set back as he was in the shadow—scant attention, if any. They knew he could not tackle the door, or approach the small windows, without coming directly under their observation. Thus, any worry about their prisoner seemed superflu-

ous, and they were not men given to taking unnecessary trouble.

They played, quarreled, and swore over their cards, and when Don thought them most absorbed in the game, he edged closer to the shelf.

Thankful that his height gave him a great advantage in the matter, he edged on closer and closer to the shelf until his shoulder leaned against it, as though he were very weary. Once, one of the men glanced toward him, but all the fellow saw was the tall, resigned figure waiting there as though in the depths of despair.

Now, Don turned his head, and very slowly and quietly set his big white teeth in the cords on the box.

Very, very slowly and softly, he began drawing it toward the edge. The cord hurt his mouth, and tore his lips, but he did not even know it. Nearer, and nearer yet, he drew the box to the edge, and, whimsically, there came back into his mind a picture of the first circus he had attended and the iron-jawed man there who lifted weights with his teeth, even picking a woman up by her hair!

Well, if that man could swing a woman so, surely *he* might swing a box not likely to weigh over a very few pounds.

On and on came the box, and in the loud arguments now in progress at the card table the faint sounds that it made as it traveled over the wood of the shelf were unheard.

Now it was coming over the edge, over and over. And now the drag on his teeth was getting harder and harder! Very softly and carefully, Don moved back, a step or two at a time, until, at last, one edge of the box rested against his chest, and the other was on the edge of the shelf.

He stepped still further back, and the box slipped from the shelf. He swung around now with his back to the card players, to shelter the box from them,

and, very slowly, he dipped down and let it rest on the heap of quilts at his feet.

Then, still with his teeth, he maneuvered it into exactly the position he wanted.

Now he drew off, casting a swift, apprehensive look toward the quarreling players. They were not alarmed! He swung his right foot a little forward, measuring the kick—yes, the distance was exactly right, shrewdly judged for the maximum of power in delivery. Not that he meant to kick the box itself, or burst it open! No, he would thrust his foot under the box, and then—send it flying toward the players with one powerful thrust. It was indeed, more a thrust than a kick.

Don allowed himself just room enough to get his right foot well under the box, and now, with one mighty heave that ran from hip to toes, he sent the poplar box, with its perilous freight, flying in an unimpeded line through the air, straight to the stone fireplace.

The result was in the hands of fate, for the more one handles dynamite, the more one learns how tricky the substance is. Some rash miner may thaw it out, when frozen, at his fire, and escape; another may attempt the same thing, and be blown to atoms. One jar may set it off, another and larger one may leave it unMOVED. Only when the technical necessities of its uses are wholly fulfilled can one depend on dynamite.

But Don felt that he had at least seven chances in ten of a perfect explosion. And so, as the box left his foot, he whirled on his left toe and dived like a seal under the heavy bed. There, if the explosion came, he might perhaps survive.

The box smashed with a sharp, ripping sound against the right-hand edge of the big, stone fireplace, and as the vibration of the impact rushed through

the sticks of dynamite, a noise, which seemed simultaneous, followed.

It filled the ears of the man under the bed as though one of those long-promised collisions between our earth and the sun had taken place, and the whole little planet had gone absolutely to pieces!

It beat on his eardrums until he was almost deafened by the noise. Acrid smoke curled in his nostrils.

Then came the crash of falling timbers and chimney stones, and the cracking, inward smash of that whole end of the house.

Then followed an unnatural silence, while long fingers of smoke came reaching in the darkness toward the man under the bed. This was the sickening dynamite smoke, but it was sweet in the cowboy's nostrils, for he was alive and the cabin was wrecked to a finish. A wall of débris had surged toward his end of the room, and it was with difficulty that he struggled out from under the bed!

Now he stood erect on the ruins of the little cabin. Where the fireplace had been, logs were piled in terrible confusion. Torn bits of roof, jagged bits of chimney, thrust themselves up. But nowhere was there a single sign, sight, or sound which indicated in any way the presence of the card players buried under the ruins.

No groans came from the wreck, no whisper for help!

Half-stifled with the acrid smoke and still half-deaf from the noise of the explosion, Don staggered out. At the woodpile, he found the kindlin' ax, and managed with surprising quickness to saw the rope on his wrists, heedless of a few cuts.

Then from among the snorting and terrified horses, still quivering from the fright the explosion had given them, Don picked out his own, flung himself into the saddle, and rode at a breakneck pace down the long road beyond him.

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Too Many Heroes

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Grandpa Takes 'Em for a Ride," etc.



HAR in thunder have yuh been all mawnin'?" demanded Sheriff Joe Cook of Monte Vista, as his deputy, "Shorty" McKay, strolled into the office at noon. "I been lookin' fer yuh up one side o' the town an' down the other!"

"I've been in the public library, boss," said Shorty, as soothingly as he could; but the sheriff was in no mood to be calmed by soft words. The daring robbery of the Second National Bank the day before, when a lone, masked bandit had made a successful get-away with three thousand dollars in bank cash, had put the sheriff in bad humor.

"Been in the library, eh?" snarled Sheriff Cook angrily. "Been readin' up on how to ketch bank robbers, no doubt, in some ol' book that some nut wrote a hundred years ago, I suppose! A lot o' help yuh are—an', say, yuh wasn't in the library, after all, come

to think o' it, 'cause I stuck my haid in that lookin'!"

"I left thar about eleven o'clock," said Shorty meekly, "so yuh musta been thar after that, boss. I left thar an' went over to the Monte Vista *Clarion* office fer a bit—"

"Blabbin' about how yuh was intendin' to ketch the robber, I reckon!" cut in Sheriff Cook hotly.

"No, lookin' up the ol' files thar," said Shorty quickly. "Yuh see, boss, that's a big feelin' in town here that —waal, that the town oughter do somethin' handsome fer Max Hill, that hero cow-punch! Max might have got that bank robber ef luck had been with him."

"We gotta git that bank robber, whether luck is with us or not!" said the sheriff tartly. "An' as fer Max Hill—"

"He's the hero o' the hour!" reminded Shorty.

"Yes, he's the hero o' the hour, right enough," admitted the sheriff, "but

what has that got to do with yuh wastin' yuhr hull mawnin' between the public library an' the Monte Vista *Clarion* office? We got to git the robber—clews or no clews. Gosh knows we've lost enough time already without yuh vanishin' fer a mawnin' an' holdin' up matters! We gotta git downright busy."

Shorty grinned brazenly at his nettled boss.

"On what clews?" he asked meaningly. "Yuh know waal as I do, boss, we've run down every idear we got! Nobody recognized that cooky as did the job at the bank. He went in at noon, when everybody but Jim Holcomb, the cashier, was out. He locked Jim in the vault, scooped up the cash, an' blowed, an' nobody seen him blow in', after Jim Holcomb had touched off the big gong alarm, but Max Hill. Max shot at him, but had no luck, an' the robber disappeared—an' left us with absolutely nuthin' to start work on."

"I know all that, Shorty."

"We chases up one road an' down another," went on Shorty swiftly; "we has a posse scramblin' hither an' thither, but thar ain't no clews! Holcomb kain't identify the bandit, an' neither kin Max Hill; an' the robber seems to have vanished right inter the earth. We has nuthin' to go on, boss, as I said, an' while we is markin' time, waitin' fer somethin' to kinda turn up, I kinda thought it would be nice fer us to take the initiative in arrangin' an affair in honor o' Hero Hill, jus' to show our appreciation o' his efforts to shoot the bandit."

Sheriff Cook's eyebrows went up in a questioning arch.

"An' affair?" he asked. "What kind o' an affair?"

"Waal," said Shorty, "the town should show honor to Max Hill in a substantial way. But we've had other heroes in Monte before this. So I got

the idear that we could avoid jealousies an' the like by havin' a big congress o' heroes right here in town, to pay homage to Max Hill in the fust place, an' to honor all the livin' local heroes in the second place—speeches, music, mebbe a barbecue, a dance, a general good time."

"Yeh?" drawled the sheriff, narrowing his gray eyes.

"Yeh!" agreed Shorty. "So I was over to the library lookin' up the files o' the ol' Monte Vista *Bugle*, which went extinct ten years ago. Then I looked up the *Clarion* files, too, makin' a list o' all the fellers as could be considered heroes. Oh, yes, I was over to the chamber o' commerce, too, seein' Bill Webster, the secretary, about sendin' out the invitations to the different heroes fer Thursday, an' he agreed. Then I saw the mayor an' got his promise o' coöperation, along with the city council; an' I talked to Wade Mountford about arrangin' the barbecue, an' to Tom Hartsell about the music—the Hartsell Happy Harmonizers will play fer us. Mebbe yuh could make a speech, boss, an'—"

The sheriff got to his feet suddenly.

"Yes, dang yuh, Shorty, I kin make a speech, an' I'm gonna make it right now an' not wait until day after tomorrow to do so!" The sheriff pointed an accusing finger at Shorty. "The great trouble with yuh, Sap, is that yuh kain't ever foller a main idear in nuthin'. What we got to do fust is to git that robber, afore we go entertainin' any heroes. That entertainin' business is a secondary consideration. Fust, we gotta git the robber."

"How?" demanded Shorty suddenly.

"I dunno," said the sheriff, frankly enough now that he was too angry to mince words; "but we gotta git him. We won't git him holdin' no congress o' heroes! Yuh drap that idear until later. Yuh go git yuhr hoss an' start ridin'—makin' every dog-gone ranch

on the Gun Barrel Road. I'll make all the places on the Wagon Wheel Gap Road. It's a cinch that robber didn't git through any o' the towns on the main roads, seein' we had 'em all warned half a hour after the robbery. He must be hidin' out here in the valley. We gotta run a fine comb over it fer him."

"An' all we know is—from the cashier an' Max Hill—that the robber was tall, masked, dressed in cowboy clothes, an' rode a bay hoss," said Shorty. "Thar's a thousand men in the valley would answer that description. It's like lookin' fer a haystack in a needle, as the poet said. It's hopeless."

"It ain't hopeless," retorted the sheriff.

"Waal—"

"Shorty, yuh do as I tell yuh afore I loses my temper in earnest an' swings a jolt off yuhr jaw!" said the sheriff sullenly. "Git goin'! Git goin'! Yuh hear me—git goin'!"

Shorty got going, naturally enough, but he did not go far. He put the saddle on his pony and rode around a few blocks, hiding the horse in a feed stable and hastening off to the city hall to further arrange matters for the congress of heroes. The idea, Shorty had discovered, had caught on like wildfire. It appealed to the popular fancy. The mayor and the council were for it whole-heartedly. So was the Monte Vista *Clarion*. So was everybody in town, it appeared, except the sheriff. Every one felt that Max Hill, the Perry Park cow poke, deserved some sort of recognition for his efforts to balk the holdup—even if those efforts had been in vain.

The whole town knew what Max Hill had tried to do. Max had admitted it, bashfully, after Lew Walker, the hardware dealer, had spread the story. Max was in the Walker store, just putting some shells into a new

rifle he had purchased, when the big gong alarm over the front door of the Second National Bank, across the street, had begun to sound. It was the noon hour and few persons were on the street. At the sound of the alarm, which Cashier Holcomb had set off the minute the bandit had locked him in the vault, Lew Walker, who was in the back of the store, had yelled to Max Hill:

"Max, that's the bank robbery alarm goin'!"

"I know it!" Max had cried, making for the front door, rifle in hand. He had raised it to his shoulder and was ready when the tall, masked bandit had run from the bank, making for his waiting bay horse. Max had fired, but—unfortunately—he had missed. And before Max could fire a second time, the robber had spurred around the corner out of sight. There had been immediate confusion. A posse was in the saddle inside of fifteen minutes, but the bandit had vanished. And he had left no clews. So all the town-folks could do, after the excitement had cooled off, was to congratulate Max Hill on his nerve and daring, even if he had not hit the robber.

"He may have hit him," said Lew Walker proudly, "fer it was a good rifle, an' Max is a good shot; but ef he did hit him, he didn't git him in a vital spot."

"I don't think I hit him," said the truthful Max Hill. He seemed quite abashed by the attention paid him. The fact that he had missed the bandit seemed to weigh heavily on him. Modesty—or regret—had sealed his lips. He refused to talk much of the matter, merely shaking his head sadly at any mention of it.

"All I kin say is that I'm sorry," Max had announced.

But the town knew that Max deserved some token of appreciation. There were mighty few men in Monte

Vista who would have acted so quickly and so utterly without thought of personal safety as had Max. He had not wasted a second getting to the door. He had fired almost instantly. The sad fact that he had missed could not be blamed on him. It was a pot shot, at best. He had been using a brand-new rifle. The bandit had been quick as a cat, too. So when Shorty had broached the idea of the celebration to honor Max and all the other unsung heroes of the old cow town, Monte Vista had agreed with a whoop.

The arrangements for the congress of heroes went on steadily. Shorty did not ride the Gun Barrel Road that afternoon, as the sheriff had ordered. He knew—or rather felt—that it was a wild-goose chase. He laughed frequently as he busied himself with the celebration arrangements, thinking what Sheriff Cook would say if he only knew what was going on. But the sheriff did not know, luckily. The invitations to the congress of heroes went out to the heroes on that afternoon's mail. The sheriff, coming in late in the evening from his fruitless ride along the Wagon Wheel Gap Road, found Shorty waiting with a report for him.

"The bandit," said Shorty, "don't seem to be anywhars around the Gun Barrel section. Yuh git any trace o' him, boss?"

"No, I never," admitted the sheriff sullenly. "To-morrow we tries the other two roads, Shorty—the Alamosa an' the Red Cliff Pikes. Yuh kin take one an' I'll take the other. It's about all that we kin do, I'm afraid. I reckon the scamp has given us the slip."

But Shorty rode neither the Alamosa nor the Red Cliff Pikes the next day. The sheriff rode the latter, and he thought that Shorty was patrolling the former. But not Shorty. There were a thousand-and-one items to attend to in final preparation for the congress of heroes, and Shorty, as originator and

chairman of the committee in charge, was busy.

Wednesday night found everything arranged for the celebration on the morrow. The grand jubilee was to open at noon with a rally in the park, where the Hartsell Happy Harmonizers would render a selection entitled "See, the Conquerin' Hero Comes!" and after that Mayor Louie Swift would welcome the heroes, introducing them to the crowd. Then would follow speeches by the city councilmen, prominent citizens, and the local preachers. The city marshal, Art Wachter, would then pin pretty red, white, and blue ribbons on the breasts of the manly heroes, decorating them, as it were. The sheriff would speak—perhaps—and after that would come the great barbecue, more music, and the afternoon and evening would be devoted to games and dancing.

Sheriff Cook, coming in "dog tired," as he expressed it, from his long day in the saddle on the Red Cliff Road, heard with indifference that the town had just completed all arrangements for the big congress of heroes' celebration set for the following day in Monte Vista.

"Waal," he sighed sadly, "I guess that's about all we got left to do, Shorty, come to think o' it. We kin pay honor to Max Hill an' figger we're doin' our duty. Thar wasn't a trace o' hide or hair o' that bandit monkey on the Red Cliff Road. I went to every ranch in that territory. How about yuh an' the Alamosa Road?"

Shorty carefully crossed his fingers behind his back.

"Boss," he said, choosing his words with precision, "I fell down, too. It's a blame shame, all right enough! Mebbe after the celebration fer Max we kin start all over ag'in."

The day for the congress of heroes broke clear and cool. The streets were jammed early by the incoming ranchers and folks from as far away as

Gunsight, Como, Squaw Mountain, Globeville, Cherry Hills, and Lakewood. The heroes began to dribble in, most of them on horseback, and some of them accompanied by their families in buckboards. Most of them came in with startled, awed expressions, because, until they had received the invitations to appear, they had not realized that they were heroes. It was a tardy celebration for some of them, who had performed their deeds of valor many years before. But the crowds were happy. Frontier Park was soon crowded. The Hartsell Happy Harmonizers were on the job, tooting away. Popcorn and peanut venders were in competition with the band. Mayor Louie Swift and Marshal Art Wachter and Deputy Shorty McKay were bustling around. Monte Vista was all set to honor her heroes in splendid style.

When noon came, the congress of heroes assembled on the wooden platform erected in the center of the infield at Frontier Park. There were seven heroes on hand, it appeared, including the hero of the hour—Max Hill. He seemed quite uncomfortable, but he tried to grin despite his embarrassment. A couple of the remaining six heroes were right at home, however, perfectly willing to be lionized, it seemed. The remainder appeared to be like Hill, doubtful as to the why and the wherefore of all this fuss. The Hartsell Happy Harmonizers opened the program with a raucous selection that drowned out the popcorn and peanut peddlers without difficulty. Sheriff Cook, arriving late—and disgusted—took a seat on the platform.

"Ladies an' gents," said Mayor Swift, rising after the music had ceased, "it is with the greatest o' pleasure that I stands here to introduce to yuh all the great heroes o' Monte Vister—men who have unselfishly risked life an' limb, dared death an' disaster, *pool-pooched* at danger in various

forms, to render assistance to their feller man! They are worthy successors, these seven heroes o' Monte Vister, to that great ol' hero o' ancient times, as Mr. McKay told me about this mawnin'—Nero, who fiddled while ol' Rome burned, riskin' his life to finish a public concert despite the cracklin' o' great flames all around him."

There was thunderous applause from the spectators.

"An' speakin' o' flames," went on Mayor Swift grandly, making a great arch with the fat, black, smoking cigar he held in his right hand, "I desires to introduce to yuh at this time the fust o' our famous heroes that yuh sees gathered here on this platform with us in Monte Vister to-day! I refers to Mr. Terrell Davis, the gent with the whiskers on the far left end, who so distinguished hisself fifteen years ago, when, unaided an' with overwhelm' nerve, he run into the burnin' Doc Brown livery stable an' drug out four valuable saddle hosses, worth all o' a hundred bucks per each, at a loss o' his own eyebrows an' a wallet containin' three dollars in cash which he lost while gropin' in the smoke fer the halter straps!"

The crowd roared its appreciation as Terrell Davis rose bashfully and bobbed his head to the applause.

Doc Brown, in the audience, cupped his hands, at the height of the uproar, and shouted a correction to Mayor Swift:

"I later sold one o' them rescued hosses fer one hundred and twenty dollars," he cried, "tharby increasin' my gratitude to Mr. Davis by twenty dollars. I say, three whoopees fer Terrell Davis—hip, hip, hooray!"

The crowd joined in on the three cheers.

"An' next, in the way they are seated, is a man who needs no introduction to yuh all to-day—Mr. Max Hill, famous cow poke, who is our

latest hero!" roared Mayor Swift. "He, without so much as a moment's hesitation, seized up a rifle from the Lew Walker hardware-store counter an' blazed away at the dare-devil bandit who had robbed the Second National Bank here day before yesterday! It wasn't Mr. Hill's fault that he didn't wing that robber—mebbe he did wing him—but the feller didn't drap. It was not Hill's fault that he didn't drap! Max was handlin' a new rifle, an' in this day an' age rifles are not what they was once, when our grandfathers hunted the U-tays an' the Sigh-Ox Injuns in this valley."

There was another burst of thunderous applause, and another man arose in the audience, cupped his hands, and shouted. He was Lew Walker, the hardware dealer.

"Thar wasn't nuthin' wrong with that rifle!" he protested indignantly. "I guarantee my rifles and I resents any such—"

But the crowd paid no heed. Mayor Swift was talking again.

"I now interduce the next hero, Mr. Al Cooper, who stopped that runaway stage on the Platte River Road twelve years ago, steppin' in front o' said gallopin' hosses an' wavin' his hat so furiously that stage stopped!" said Mayor Swift. "Give him a hand, folks. That's the ticket—hooray fer Al Cooper!"

"An' now," said the mayor, as the applause for Al Cooper subsided, "we go to our fourth hero, Mr. Earl Carpenter—the man who bravely swum Cherry Creek the time o' the great spring flood, rescuin' several families on the western bank by warnin' them o' the high waters, an' leadin' them an' all their live stock, includin' a large flock o' imported Tottenberger—I think they was—goats to a cliff whar all was safe. Mr. Carpenter!"

Again the park rocked with the clapping and shouting of the thousands of

hero worshipers. Mr. Carpenter rose and bowed.

"In addition to the three families an' the goats," he said loudly, "thar was a number o' Holstein milch keows, a maverick brindle steer, four span young mules, two aged mares, a smooth-mouthed geldin', three colts, a shepherd dawg, an' one cat!"

"Hooray fer Earl Carpenter!" yelled the crowds.

"Our fifth hero is Mr. Jack Elliott," went on Mayor Swift, "the man who got the Christmas mail through the ice blockade here years ago, bein' forced to straddle a buckin' broncho to do so! When his own hoss slipped an' fell on the ice on Berthoud Pass, Mr. Elliott caught up an unbroke hoss in a snow drift, mounted him, an' rid him inter town with the mail sack over his shoulder, said mail bein' distributed in record time right here in Monte Vister, when the hoss started to buck, throwin' Mr. Elliott so hard that one insured package was busted, likewise Mr. Elliott's left ankle which laid him up in bed for two weeks."

"I made good fer that insured package!" cried Elliott, above the applause. "It cost me one dollar and thirty-four cents to do it, too!"

"Our sixth hero," went on Mayor Swift, with a grand gesture toward the right of the line of blushing heroes, "is none other than Mr. 'Ace' Barnhart, the man who was the fust youth to offer hisself as a sacrifice—a hooman sacrifice, folks—fer the new doctor to vaccinate in the fever scare here years ago! We all had our doubts about the doctor an' his needle jabbin', but Ace was brave enough to volunteer, comin' through fine, although it was afterward learned that the doctor was a fake an' that he had vaccinated Ace with plain water. Three cheers fer Ace Barnhart!"

The crowds applauded wildly.
"Our seventh an' final hero is"—

Mayor Louie Swift hesitated and glanced at the slip of paper he held in his hand, as if in doubt—"he is—Mr. 'Pud' Gregory, who, I am reliably informed, distinguished hisself as a hero when he shot a bad man here some years ago jus' when said bad man was about to plug a half dozen holes through an innercent an' unarmed citizen. Three cheers fer Mr. Pud Gregory, folks—let 'er rip!"

The crowd let loose, but almost instantly Shorty McKay, who had been seated on the platform, jumped to his feet. He ran out in front of the mayor, holding up both hands for silence. The crowd, amazed, subsided, just in time to hear Shorty shout.

"This man Gregory is a dog-gone impostor!" whooped Shorty. "His name was put on the list through a error! He ain't no hero! It's all a mistake! He's such a coward that he hadn't nerve enough to explain things to us, but he comes up here with the real heroes to be honored! Gregory a hero —bah! I hereby arrests him fer false pretenses, impersonatin' a hero, an' receivin' undue applause."

The deputy laid violent hands on the surprised Gregory.

The crowd was in a furor immediately. There were many who had not understood all that Shorty had said and were astounded at his treatment of the man Gregory. There were others who, hearing the deputy's explanation and knowing Shorty was always on the square, were heart and soul behind Shorty. Yells and catcalls, shouts and hisses, went up. Mayor Swift sought to intervene. The sheriff got to his feet, yelling at Shorty. Marshal Wachter was up, adding to the din. The city councilmen were in confusion. Even Max Hill and the other distinguished heroes were in the mêlée, but Shorty, wasting no time, dragged his unlucky captive, Gregory, down from the platform and hustled him off

across the field, where the crowd was thinnest. It was plain that Gregory was going to jail!

The congress of heroes threatened to break up in a riot.

"Gentlemen," cried Mayor Swift, taking the situation in hand, "please to be calm! This ain't no way to pay honor to our great hero guests. I assure yuh all will turn out nice! We'll find out about Gregory—quiet now, everybody—while City Marshal Art Wachter, assisted by Doc Brown, comes up here an' pins the honorary badges o' red, white, an' blue on the breasts o' our heroes! This way, Art an' Doc—quiet everybody, please! Yuh two gents arguin' thar in front please postpone yuhr fight until later."

The crowd calmed gradually at the mayor's insistent urging. There was a lot of murmuring, however. A few in the throng ran out after the disappearing Shorty and his protesting prisoner, Gregory; and among those who ran was Sheriff Joe Cook, bubbling over with indignation. Max Hill, the hero of the hour, also galloped out across the field. The bulk of the crowd remained for the rest of the hero program, however. By the time the sheriff, angered at what he termed his deputy's rash imprudence, reached the Monte Vista jail, Shorty had his prisoner safely locked up in a cell. The sheriff had barely started to upbraid Shorty for rashness, when in came the breathless Max Hill, the hero of the hour, red-faced and raging.

"Shorty!" cried Max, interrupting the sheriff's hot flow of words, "what's the idear o' draggin' Gregory off like yuh did? Whar is he? That ain't no way to bust up a program!"

"So I said!" put in Sheriff Cook.

"Gregory's in jail," said Shorty, scowling at Max Hill; "he's a danged faker. I don't know how his name got on the list, or how he come to have the nerve to git up on that platform when

he must 'a' knowed he was invited through a error."

Max Hill's face was now livid with rage.

"Error nuthin'," he cried furiously! "I know that Gregory bird! I'll tell yuh all somethin'—I was the innercent an' unarmed citizen he saved from bein' murdered years ago by 'Slats' Langer, the gunman. It was Gregory as saved my life—shootin' Slats at risk o' his own, after Slats had already drawed his weapon."

Shorty, instead of showing anger, laughed softly.

"Oh, is that so, Max?" he asked. "I didn't know yuh knowed Gregory. It all happened—what yuh say happened—so long ago that yuh must 'a' been jus' a mere kid. Yuh ain't never been very chummy with Gregory, ef he did save yuhr life as yuh claim! How come that?"

"I never knowed the man's name as saved me that day," said Max Hill sadly, "because I was, as yuh say, jus' a kid. An' the man didn't wait to interduce hisself after he shot Slats. But I recognized Gregory the minnit I saw him on the platform ter-day as the man who had saved me; an' the mayor's introduction o' Gregory substantiated it when he tol' how Gregory had saved an innercent citizen from a bad man. It was Gregory that saved me. I recognized him easy by his stooped shoulders, the way he holds his head to one side, an'—"

"Yuh recognized him the other day, too!" yelled Shorty.

"What?" asked Hill.

"Yuh recognized him the other day, too, I said!" repeated Shorty sternly. "I'll tell yuh what I got Gregory in jail fer, Max. I got him in the coop fer bank robbery! He's confessed. An' I say ag'in that yuh recognized him the other day when yuh saw that bank robber comin' out o' the Second State Bank, Max—that's why yuh

missed him. Yuh might as well own up to that!"

Max Hill's face had gone chalky white. He looked from Shorty to the startled sheriff. Then he nodded his head.

"Ef he's confessed," he said wearily, "I guess I might as waal admit that I did recognize him, Shorty, as yuh say; an' that that was the reason I didn't kill him—gratitude, I reckon, fer what he did to me. But I didn't know his name until to-day—an'—"

Max Hill choked up suddenly.

"It was Gregory robbed the bank, wasn't it?" persisted Shorty.

"Yes," said Hill, and he sighed in evident relief.

"Yuh go back to the celebration, Max," said Shorty kindly. "I guess yuh better not say anything about this, either. But I don't blame yuh altogether fer not squawkin' on Gregory. Yuh didn't know his name, although yuh might have told us the truth why yuh didn't shoot him comin' out o' the bank. Yuh go along, Max, we'll have to have yuh appear later agin' Gregory; but jus' now yuh're needed at the celebration. Go on back, brace up, an' keep mum."

"All right," said the unhappy Hill, and departed.

"Great guns!" exploded Sheriff Cook, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief. "How yuh do it, Shorty, beats me! How did yuh know it was Gregory pulled the bank job, an' how did yuh make him confess so quick? I don't git it."

Shorty laughed again.

"He ain't confessed yet," he said, "but he will, as soon as he knows Max Hill has identified him. I had to let Max think he had confessed. An' I never was sure it was Gregory did the robbery until Max Hill admitted it here a second ago. Fust off, boss, we had no clews to go on. The bank cashier, bein' new in town, hadn't recognized

Gregory. We had guarded the roads an' notified the other towns, however, so the robber couldn't git outta the valley. Apparently, he never tried to do so. That meant the robber was a local feller.

"I got to thinkin' it' was mighty funny that Max Hill, bein' so fortunately near at the time, an' such a crack shot, hadn't hit the bandit. Thar was some talk that he had hit him, but not in a vital spot. I examined the front o' the bank buildin' carefully, with a ladder, an' found whar Hill's bullet had struck, away up high, above the door. A good shot like Max couldn't have missed like that, unless purposely. Max was so queerly silent, too. I knowed, o' course, that Max was too honest to be in on the robbery, but I got to thinkin' why Max would have purposely failed to hit the man. I decided that Max did miss purposely, an' all because he recognized the man at the moment before he fired. He didn't have time to figger out an alibi why he shouldn't fire at all—so he shot—but shot high!"

"Why should Max perfect a bank robber? It could be nuthin' but a case of gratitude. Who had ever done anything fer Max? I looked up the old files, findin' that ol' story about the killin' o' Slats Langer, bad man, years ago, by an unknown hero jus' as Slats was about to plug Max in a drunken fury. The newspaper accounts said that no one knew just who had fired from the hip to save Max, but the account did name the men in the place at the time—Jean Bosquet, Harry Tarvin, Horace Stewart, Ralph Brady, Pud Gregory. A little interviewin' o' ol'-timers developed the fact that Pud was thought to have been the man, although he had never bragged o' it, an' the indifferent investigation at the time hadn't proved it.

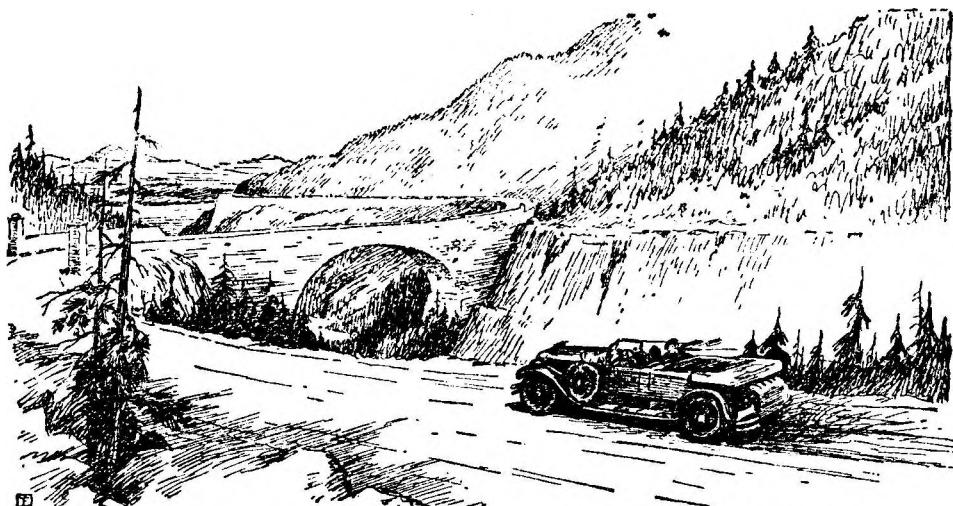
"So I had to figure a way to git Pud in town; git him to admit bein' the

hero o' the ol' gun fight; see that Max recognized him; git Pud in jail, an' pretend to Max that he had confessed the bank robbery. I decided on the congress o' heroes. I had the mayor, who was in with me on the scheme, sound out Pud, an' Pud admitted that he was the ol'-time hero o' the gun fight that saved Max Hill years ago.

"I saw Max start as he recognized Gregory on the hero stand to-day. When I accused Gregory o' bein' a faker, I figured Max Hill would be right around to stand up fer the man who had saved his life. Then, springin' the bank confession on Max, I thought Max would admit it. He did. Yuh see, boss, Max wasn't intentionally shieldin' Gregory, seein' Max didn't know Gregory by name; but Max did purposely miss the bandit because o' gratitude—he couldn't kill the man who had saved him. All I needed, therefore, was to parade the bandit afore Max ag'in, see Max recognize him, have Max come to his aid when I accused Gregory o' fakin', an' then kid Max inter admittin' it was Gregory he recognized comin' out o' the bank. Simple enough, wasn't it?"

Sheriff Cook gulped before he replied.

"Simple enough," he grunted, "ef yuh got a scrambled brain, Shorty, as kin work around in forty-eleven different directions all to once an' wind up coherently, after all—like yuh has! I reckon we might as waal go an' git a confession from Gregory, after which we kin return to the congress o' heroes; an' ef I don't miss my guess, I'll nominate yuh fer that vacant cheer once occupied by Pud Gregory. Any man as kin think backward, forward, sideways, and upside down, all to once, is a hero sure enough! An' I reckon the crowd, hearin' yuh jailed the bank robber, will give yuh more applause than it gave all the other six heroes put together—an' I don't mean mebbe!"



Highways Old and New

(The Million-dollar Highway) by Edna Erle Wilson

OUT in southwestern Colorado there is a new thoroughfare bearing the proud title, "The Million-dollar Highway." This name, however, is not an imaginary one, but has its foundation in reality, for, cut for the greater part of its way from the sheer face of the cliffs, the building of this trail was not only a daring undertaking, but an expensive enterprise. In fact, The Million-dollar Highway, with its magnificent and awe-inspiring scenery, its unsurpassed engineering, and its staggering cost of twenty-five thousand dollars a mountain mile, lives up to its high-sounding name.

In the seventy-five miles of its route from Durango to Ouray, this modern road blazes a triumphant trail across the roughest topography in America. As it passes in turn the highest peaks and deepest canyons in the Rocky Mountains, the traveler feels something of the mystery of a land rich in prehistoric lore and Indian legend. For here high on the cliffs an ancient people built

their primitive dwellings, the interesting ruins of which still remain. Here, also, the savage Utes fought their traditional enemies, the plains Indians, danced their tribal dances around leaping camp fires, and paddled their canoes up and down the sparkling mountain streams.

Durango, the starting point of The Million-dollar Highway, is a famous mining town, watched over by such great mountain peaks as Las Platas, the Lone Cone, and the Sleeping Ute. The latter derives its name from the fact that it represents the gigantic form of an imaginary Indian. In fact, this town owes its unique atmosphere to its mountains and its smelters, through whose furnaces upward of three million dollars' worth of precious metals have passed. Durango is also a live-stock center, the cattle from neighboring ranches being sent here for shipment.

Leaving this Colorado mining town and the Sleeping Ute behind, The Million-dollar Highway winds for many

miles along the River of Lost Souls. For a great part of the journey Engineer Mountain is seen in the distance, beckoning the traveler on. In spite of the mysterious lure of this peak, few who follow this trail will be able to withstand the temptation to desert the main highway, for a one-mile trip down a winding by-path takes one to Lake Electra. This thousand-acre lake appeals alike to the sportsman and the beauty lover. In its clear surface are mirrored many ever-changing reflections, while its waters afford excellent fishing, boating, and duck shooting in season.

Returning to the main road, The Million-dollar Highway begins to climb and soon passes over the face of Engineer Mountain. A little farther on, at the foot of West Needle Mountains, an altitude of eleven thousand feet is attained, and there the traveler comes into close companionship with those peaks which loomed so high a short distance back when the ascent was beginning.

Forty-nine miles north of Durango the journeyer reaches Lake Morass, which nestles at the foot of the Needle Mountains, the strange purple peaks of which are reputed to contain more vertical topography than any other region in the world.

Along this stretch of the highway a vista is spread before the wayfarer which surpasses Switzerland's most rugged outline, for thirteen of Colorado's forty-six peaks over fourteen thousand feet are found in this vicinity.

At all times of the year the snow lies on these mountains, which cut the horizon in jagged lines and change color with every passing cloud. A grim reminder of pioneer days is found at this point in the trail, for here it makes its way over barren country which was burned out so thoroughly fifty years ago as a protection against Indian raids that it is still devoid of all vegetation.

The road now deserts its lofty elevation for the lowlands, as it twines into the midst of the San Juan mining district on its way to Silverton. Although Colorado since early times has been famous for its mines, the county of which is Silverton is the seat, has the distinction of being the only one in the United States which has not an acre of agriculture within its boundaries. Since the first hardy settler built his log cabin in this town, mining has been the sole industry, furnishing a livelihood for all of Silverton's citizens.

The first impression the adventurer over the trail receives of this Colorado town is a strange one, for so high does the road wind above Silverton, that one might be viewing it from the high altitude of an airplane. Completely walled in by Mount Sultan, Mount Baker, and Mount Kendall, this mining community is often cut off from the outside world during the winter season.

An interesting incident is recounted about Mount Kendall, which was named for a certain Cornishman. This daring Westerner made a bet that he could start from Silverton, climb the mountain, and return in an hour and a half. He won his wager, whereupon he boldly made a second that he could repeat his adventure at night. The result was a tragedy, for in the darkness Kendall's foot caught in a stone and he plunged to his death.

With picturesque Silverton behind, the highway begins to climb skyward again, and makes its way over Red Mountain Pass at an elevation of eleven thousand twenty-five feet. In pioneer mining days, this section was renowned for the high quality of its silver output. Red Mountain, as its name implies, is a vivid scarlet, making a brilliant splash of color against the sky, while the town of that name is one of the highest incorporated towns in the world.

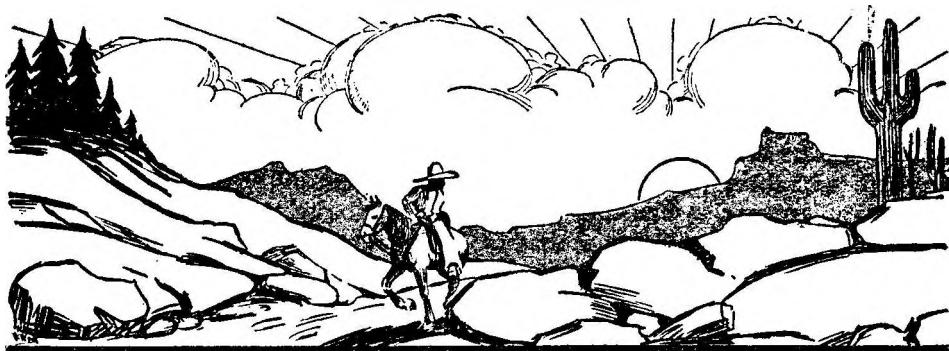
At this stage of the journey the traveler is again reminded of the high cost

of road building, for there are spots in the Uncompahgre Canyon where the construction of the highway cost as much as ninety thousand dollars a mile.

The trail, by a series of switchbacks, now spectacularly loops its way down to Ouray. Seven miles south of the town, however, there is a break in the rugged massiveness of the mountains in the form of Ironton Park, a beauty spot covered with mountain flowers and grasses, and dotted here and there with lakes. Several miles farther along, The Million-dollar Highway passes a bridge where Bear Creek falls two hundred and fifty feet into the stream below, and

then, rounding a curve, Ouray, Gem City of the Rockies bursts into view.

This town in its impressive setting, surrounded by cliffs ablaze with color, is considered by many to have the most perfect location in America. Certainly there is much to intrigue the traveler who is interested in Western and pioneer life, for the town still retains something of the atmosphere of the days when it was a mining camp. Here The Million-dollar Highway comes to an end, but it is safe to say that this fascinating Western trail will live in the memories of all who have followed along its adventurous way.



DEATH OF THE POET LAUREATE OF CALIFORNIA

ALTHOUGH born in Illinois, Ina Coolbrith has been so inextricably identified with the West that she has always been regarded as a Westerner. In the early '60s she went to California over the Overland Trail with the Indian scout, James Beckwith, and was the only woman in the party of pioneers. Her first glimpse of Western life was of the mining camps.

Her literary career began with the *Overland Monthly* in 1868, of which Bret Harte was then editor. She soon became a regular contributor to the magazine, in company with such writers as Mark Twain, Thomas Starr King, Joaquin Miller, and others, and then was laid the foundation of her literary celebrity. After her fame was established, she came East, but was too devoted a daughter of the West to remain long absent from it, and later returned there. The San Francisco earthquake destroyed a large number of important manuscripts written at the best period of her career.

Honors were heaped upon Miss Coolbrith, and she was made Poet Laureate of California by act of the State government in 1915. She was the recipient of another signal honor in being made the only woman member of the famous Bohemian Club of San Francisco. She was the author of "A Perfect Day and Other Poems," "The Singer of the Sea," and "Songs from the Golden Gate." With Miss Coolbrith passes the last of the early literary group in California, many of whom achieved world-wide fame.



Bucks and Springs

by ***Seth Ranger***

Author of "Hardrock and Poke Take It—Easy," etc.



TRACE of pink in the eastern sky; a tremendous bird chorus; the fragrant odor of dewy sage; the whirring wings of a flock of quail, then a flood of golden light, and day had dawned on the range. The bird chorus died quickly away; a rabbit nibbled briefly on grass laden with drops of dew; but the horse that had topped the ridge a few moments before dawn remained, looking into the east as if enjoying the coming of another day. Probably, he appreciated it fully.

He might have been a statue carved against the eastern sky, but for the fluttering of his mane and tail. The sun climbed higher and the magnificent black stepped leisurely from view. A quarter of a mile away, a band of wild horses loped tirelessly over the range. He watched them a moment, but made no attempt to join them even after he left the height.

On the opposite ridge a man and girl rode into view. The man pulled up instantly.

"Look!" he cried. "There's Gunpowder himself!"

A breathless, "Ah," escaped the girl's lips. She had seen the horse under different circumstances a year before. Ringed by thousands, he had bucked off a man who held the world's championship as an all-round buckaroo. The thousands had stood up and cheered the horse. From the moment he had been led into the arena, he had battled, and yet he had fought fairly. He had not struck out with his forefeet, bitten, nor kicked. Nor did he attempt to turn on the fallen rider whom he had bucked off. He seemed to regard the whole affair as a contest between man and horse, as indeed it was.

Lois Burke turned impulsively to the man at her side. "Buck, tell me about him," she cried. "Why do they call him Gunpowder?"

Buck Hagen grinned. "It's because the first time he was entered in a round-up he seemed to sort of blow his rider into the air. He had been entered as just plain Bill, but somebody called him 'Gunpowder,' and the name stuck. I guess he's the most famous horse in the world. Other horses come and go, but Gunpowder pops up every year. He's never been ridden, Lois." Grim lines settled about the rather plain but strong face of the speaker. "But he's going to be this year. There's fame and fortune for the man who can ride him."

"Who is the man?" she asked.

"I figure to be," he said without boasting; "that is, if I'm lucky enough to draw him next month."

"Why, Buck," Lois exclaimed, "you're the last man I should expect to seek fame and fortune in Hollywood on the motion-picture lots! You've told me again and again that you are a rancher."

"I am!" With a jerk of his thumb, he indicated a group of unpainted buildings huddled against the base of the mountain. "I'm fighting a slow battle, trying to build up a ranch and stock, particularly the kind of stock I want, out of nothing. Give me six months in Hollywood as the man who rode Gunpowder, and I'll have enough money to make a real ranch out of the Bar Circle B."

Lois was quite familiar with the new brand that had appeared on a handful of cattle three years previous. The B was circled and beneath was a bar. It made a nice brand.

"And if you're bucked off?" she inquired.

"Huh!" he grunted, "I've got to ride Gunpowder. If I don't, Cal Dexter will probably help himself to my whole business and I'll be back where I started. With him, money is everything. I'd like to have a big ranch, too, but I'm not going to get it the way some do. Sportsmanship comes ahead

of a lot of things, and money is one of 'em. There's no sportsmanship in Dexter."

"Just a moment, Buck!" The girl spoke coldly. "Cal Dexter is my friend."

"Prob'ly," he admitted, "but you're the only person he is a friend to—a real friend, I mean."

"You wouldn't talk that way before Cal," she said quickly.

"Oh, wouldn't I?" he retorted. "I've told him plenty to his face. Knowing he's got me in a corner, unless I raise some money, he just laughs. That's why I've got to ride Gunpowder. There can be no halfway business. Either I win everything, or I lose everything. Well, Lois, let's talk about something else. I'm riding for pleasure this morning."

The girl rode along in silence, contrasting the two men in her mind. There were scores of young men on the range, but these two seemed to have definitely ridden into her life. On the one hand, there was Cal Dexter, handsome, and the owner of a big ranch. He was always smiling and considerate. On the other hand, there was Buck Hagen. As he said, he had fought his way up to the top without help. The fury with which he attacked a problem, sparing himself not at all, reminded her of the fury of some wild beast making a kill. He was cold, utterly calm, and deadly. He had said he expected to ride Gunpowder this year. He cared nothing for fame. Therefore, the ride and its rewards were a means to an end—not the cheering thousands; nor the fame that would go with it.

"What makes you think you can ride Gunpowder, Buck?" she now asked.

"Because I've studied him and figured him out." He spoke thickly. "I've got to ride him, Lois. I won't lose all I've gained. Something tells me I'll draw him in the finals. It's a hunch, I know, but most of my hunches

come true. Well, here we are? Want to ride past Indian Springs, or shall we go around?"

"You don't need to ride home with me, Buck. It's broad daylight and I know the country."

"When I take a girl to a dance," he answered, "I figure to see her home afterwards. Guess we'd better go the Indian Springs way. It's shorter, steeper, but prettier."

The man turned into an obscure trail that was hardly more than a scar on the mountain. The descent was abrupt and from the depths of the canyon came the heavy, unpleasant vapor of a hot springs. The walls about were covered with painted and carved figures, the work of Indians, both ancient and modern. Those who could read the primitive signs, said the carvings and paintings told of the curative properties of the mud and water of the springs.

Bud Hagen turned suddenly and caught the girl's hands. "Before we go farther, Lois, I want to know. Will you marry me? Not now, of course, I wouldn't take any girl to that ranch of mine. But I love you and I—" As he hesitated, she instinctively knew that he had almost said, "I intend to win you!" Instead, he concluded, "and—and—I'm going to do my best to win you."

"Buck, I can't answer you now. I admire you a lot, Buck, for what you've done! But, frankly, I sometimes think you are a stranger to us all. We don't know what lies beneath that hard shell of yours."

He gravely admitted the truth of her words. "That's right, Lois, people don't know what's under my shell. Sometimes, I hate for 'em to find out. Maybe some day you'll learn. In fact, I wouldn't want any girl to marry me unless she knew what she was getting. Well, here we are. Better rest the nags before we start out."

The trail led across the narrow can-

yon and scaled the wall on the opposite side. A hundred feet from the hot springs flowed a stream of ice water which trickled along its course and watered the deep grass that generations of horses had eaten while their masters camped at the spot.

Lois suddenly touched her companion on the arm. "Look, Buck," she whispered, "somebody's lost his hat in the mud. It's a good hat, too. Better fish it out."

It was quite possible that the hat, a fine, broad-brimmed, white Stetson, had blown from the head of some one standing on the rim of the canyon.

Buck Hagen leaped to the ground, sprawled on his stomach, reached out, and deftly plucked the hat from the mud. To his amazement, there was a head beneath it.

"Pink-toed scorpions!" cried a voice, "Can't a man have no privacy any more? I got down in this mud to my chin, covered my head with a hat, then you have to pull it off to see what's going on! You make me sick!"

"Old Man" Wray's face was red as a beet as he delivered this brief speech. "I got my opinion of any feller that'd go riding with a girl this time in the morning!" he added.

"Don't get excited, 'Pop,'" Hagen answered, "I'm taking her home from the dance at the Sutton House."

"Huh!" The old man snorted. "Now I've got my opinion of both of you—dancin' all night! Well, you two young chumps goin' to stay here all day? I've gone twice as deep as I usually do to get out of sight, and it's danged hot down where my feet are!"

The appearance of Old Man Wray was a sure sign that the annual round-up was near. With a burro, Jabez, as his only companion, Wray spent his time in the hills prospecting. He remained until his rheumatism became unbearable. Then he would journey down to Indian Springs and bury him-

self in the mud. When he emerged, he was as lively as any man, and the cure lasted for several months. At the round-up he was given charge of what was known among buckaroos as "The World String." This was the string of outlaw horses ridden by those entering the world's championship. It was impossible to bribe the old man. And the few riders who were willing to tone an outlaw down by feeding him a doped apple never succeeded in getting near enough to accomplish their purpose. But old Wray's bark was far worse than his bite.

"Saw Gunpowder this morning," Buck observed.

"Yeah? Coyote bait! That's what he is now, coyote bait!"

The girl shuddered at the term. It was applied to horses no longer considered fit. It meant that they were taken out and shot.

"What do you mean, Pop?" Buck was curious.

"Exactly what I said," Pop answered. "He's about done. That horse has throwed his last man."

"He won't be in the arena this year, Pop? He won't be in the world string?"

Pop snorted. "Oh, he'll be there right enough! He'll have to be. Thousands come to see him. He's the most famous nag they've got. Yeah, he'll be there, and some lucky cuss will ride him and get a lot of fame he don't deserve. That'll break the old boy's heart."

To the girl it was evident that Pop Wray was not as hard about the matter as he wanted them to think. Crusty old men often consider a sympathetic streak in their make-up as a serious weakness:

A curious expression came into Lois' eyes as she dismounted, apparently to examine a rock where the Indians had ground their corn. When neither man was looking, she dug her horse in the

flanks. The animal bolted, instantly. Two seconds later, Buck Hagen was in hot pursuit. The girl looked down at the old man, whose squirming suggested that the mud was getting hotter. "Pop, what is the matter with Gunpowder?" she asked. "He looked all right to-day?"

"I've watched him on the range these many years, Lois. It wasn't until this year that I saw the change. His joints don't work as smooth as they used to; the muscles are stiff. Can't you see the old boy won't be able to throw 'em this year? Listen, Lois," Pop continued, forgetting the hot mud. "Gunpowder knows what those contests mean. He loves the roar of the crowd; the feel of a buckaroo leaving his back; he knows victory, not defeat. He's always played the game like a true sport, but can't you see how he'll feel when he gives his best and still the man stays in the saddle, raking him? I know crowds. They like a winner. They won't know it ain't the Gunpowder of old. They'll think a great buckaroo has been discovered. And with a heart that's stronger than his body, the black will drive himself until something breaks, and I'm afraid that something is going to be his old heart. And mark you, Lois, when they see that fine horse, tottering from exhaustion, head a-hanging from defeat, they'll suddenly stop cheering and lumps will come into the throats of the old-timers. They'll know Gunpowder's made his last ride."

As he finished speaking, Pop Wray seemed to be looking into the past. He knew what it was to have age creep up; to give his utmost and find that utmost not enough; to go down to defeat. "I guess, Lois, it's the way of the world," he said. "Gunpowder will go into the show again because he's never been ridden; because people are coming to see him."

"Can't we stop it?"

"No, Lois, we can't! It's too big

for us. The demands of the public are too strong. I could have stopped it several months ago. I almost did, with a bullet. It wouldn't have been the best way, but I couldn't do it. I should have, for his sake. Now—it's too late." He jerked his foot violently. "Cansarn yuh, Lois, get outa here, I'm roastin' alive!" Pop's emotions were getting the upper hand. That was as good a way as any of hiding the fact.

Lois walked up the trail. Buck Hagen was coming with her horse. She vaulted into the saddle and followed him from the canyon.

Old Pop Wray crawled from the mud, dropped into a rocky pool of warm water and washed off. "Certainly gave myself a fine old cookin' that time," he grumbled. "So Lois Burke is going with Buck Hagen for a change! I guess it lays between Buck and Cal Dexter. Unless she's a chump, she'll take no chances on a mysterious jasper like Buck. He's a fighter, though. When it comes to the world's goods, Cal's got a fistful of aces and kings. Buck's got treys and deuces. Wish I was younger, I'd set in that game myself." He dismissed the young people from his mind and thought of Gunpowder once more. "Poor old hoss! He'd be lots happier as coyote bait!"

Buckaroos were rounding up the world string. With one or two exceptions, they were easy enough to handle. There was a new horse in the string—an unbranded outlaw that had drifted from some unknown range. He was a gray with wickedness in his eyes. He nipped the other horses within reach and once screamed and charged a passing buckaroo. Three times his heels found marks on others of the string.

"There's a horse that's a killer," a rider remarked, "when he's turned loose he'll bear watching. Wonder what the round-up association will

name him. Say, notice anything about Gunpowder?"

"No, what?" All eyes turned toward the black.

"He ain't got that what the newspaper feller called the poetry of motion. Them muscles don't move smoothly under that velvet coat of his. Somebody will ride him this year."

"That's what they've been saying every year."

"I know it! But this year it'll be Buck Hagen or Cal Dexter. I'll bet a month's pay."

"I'll take that bet, brother. And I'll make you another. That whoever draws the gray brute will buck off."

"I won't take that bet!" The other grinned.

The string swung down a draw toward the lower country; the buckaroos followed.

At the lower end of the draw, a familiar figure awaited them. He was mounted on a burro and his long legs almost touched the ground. Everything about him suggested wear and tear except his hat. This was a fine white Stetson, slightly mud-stained on the underside. He bit a chew of tobacco. "Whoa, Jabez! We swing in behind 'em."

"Hello, Pop!" The first buckaroo smiled. Pop was a favorite. "Glad to see you back."

"Danged near didn't make it," Pop answered. "Figure this is my last round-up. The rheumatics is getting me worse every year."

"You've been saying that for ten years, Pop," the other answered, "and each year you show up."

Pop Wray watched the world string move past. Here were horses which the world knew well by name. They had bucked off their men more often than they had been ridden. But two had never been ridden—Gunpowder and the new gray with the evil eyes. Pop's eyes studied the veteran. "Hello,

big boy," he said in a low tone. "Come here!" He whistled sharply.

The black swung toward the old buckaroo.

"You never forget a friend, do you?" Pop growled as he rubbed the horse's nose. "Got some sugar around here somewhere. Hey, Jabez, turn around there! You ain't in on this. I sugared you this morning." The gnarled hands explored various joints as the horse ate the sugar. Pop shook his head. "It's in the inside, where people can't see it. Outside, Gunpowder's the same."

Two miles farther on they met a powerfully built man who galloped up on a white horse. Everything about him, from the silver-mounted saddle and bridle, suggested wealth. Instead of the cluster of unpainted buildings that was Buck Hagen's background, this rider had great barns, a tree-sheltered ranch house, and modern equipment. His bronzed face contained more than a fair share of good looks and plenty of determination. His quick smile had been termed more than once, "a hair-trigger smile." His large dark eyes were friendly, inviting confidence.

Pop Wray nodded, and called: "Hello, Cal! Riding this year?"

"The sun rises every morning, don't it, Pop?"

"Guess it does!"

"That's my answer. I'm riding. I figure to see Hollywood this coming winter!" Which was another way of saying that Cal Dexter expected to be the world's champion buckaroo.

A rider galloped up beside the rancher. "You're going to be surprised, Cal," he said. "Old Gunpowder didn't winter so well. The old punch is gone."

"Looks good!"

"Watch him close. His muscles don't work smoothlike. Cal, the man that draws Gunpowder this year is going to grab plenty of glory. He'll be ridden!"

The rider edged closer. "I could draw him for you, Cal!"

"How!" The rancher was interested.

The rider, who was known as "Slim" Glick, held up his hand. The palm was empty. He waved it, and there magically appeared in it a bit of paper. "Now if I was reaching in the hat, drawing your number, Cal, it'd be an easy matter to palm a number and substitute Gunpowder's name. I'd do it for nothing."

"For nothing?"

"Yeah. Then I'd step out and cover all the bets offered that you bucked off. I'd get great odds, Cal. And you'd get a bunch of glory."

"I know horses," Dexter said softly. "I want a closer look at Gunpowder." Cal Dexter rode on.

As he swung into the main road, a second figure cut in from a side trail. Buck Hagen had decided to go to town for mail. The round-up was several weeks off yet. Occasionally, he received letters of importance. The two men, sworn enemies, met face to face. Something of the tiger at bay came into Buck's eyes. Obviously, he was checking an almost overwhelming desire to attack Dexter.

Dexter faced him calmly. "Don't go off half cocked, Hagen," he said. "I know there isn't room for both of us on this range, as well as you do. I'll make you a proposition. I'll buy you out, or you buy me out."

Hagen almost choked. "You know I can't buy you out, and you know you wouldn't pay me a decent price, when you figure to get my place for nothing. Anyway, why talk? We're both here to stick, whether there's room or not. One of us will have to take a licking. Maybe we can settle it in the finals of the round-up?"

"I'll think it over," answered Dexter, using the same words he had used to Slim Glick.

Lois Burke was disturbed. She had ridden down to the lower country and examined Gunpowder. Impulsively, she stopped at the Hagen ranch on her return. "Buck," she said, getting to the point at once. "Promise me one thing. If you draw Gunpowder, will you buck off?"

"What!" His exclamation came out like the lash of a whip. "You're asking me to throw a contest? Lois, that's not like you."

"It's because it is like me, Buck, that I'm asking it. Listen, Buck." It was impossible to read what was in her eyes as she studied his face. A man who understood women better would have known instantly that there was more than appeared on the surface. "Listen, Buck," she repeated. "Gunpowder has gone back. You can ride him, but the victory to you, personally, would be a small one. You'd always remember you had ridden the shell of a once great horse. The movie contracts might help some, but not that much, Buck!"

He paced the ground in front of her.

"Buck," she said, taking full advantage of the love he bore her, "I don't want you to do it for me. I want you to do it for the old horse. You're a young man, at your best. He's an old horse, Buck!" Desperately she tried to penetrate the shell that surrounded the mysterious man within who always fought with the fury of a tiger.

Presently Buck spoke. "If I draw Gunpowder, Lois, I'll know as soon as I'm on his back whether he's the old horse the rodeos know, or whether it's his last ride. If I think it is, Lois, I'll buck off. But if he's the horse of old, I'll ride him to a finish. I'll ride him slick, and I'll rake him."

There was a flush on her cheek, suggestive of victory, when she left him.

Halfway to the Dexter ranch, Lois saw Cal coming toward her. He was a picture to delight the heart of a director of Western motion pictures. Cal

rode as though he had grown to the saddle. He swung in beside her. His eyes brought a flush of pleasure to her cheeks, a different flush from that Buck's yielding had brought.

"Listen, Lois," Cal said softly, "why put it off longer? You know you'll marry me some day. Why not admit it? I love you. I can't put it the way I'd like to, but you understand—girls do, you know. With my big ranch, and your little ranch, we'd just about control the valley. Of course, there's Buck Hagen's, but he can't last much longer. It isn't in the cards. I expect a violent outburst, maybe gunplay, when the show-down comes. He's a wild cat at times."

Almost any girl would have found it difficult to resist that handsome face, even if there was not a big cattle ranch behind it. Lois' eyes fell on the silver-mounted saddle and bridle, with its engraved silver plate telling that Cal had once been the winner of a rodeo. Buck's saddle was cheap and badly worn. He had never won a saddle in a rodeo. His busting of bronchos had been for more practical purposes.

"Lois, when will you give me an answer?"

"After the rodeo. And listen, Cal, will you do something for me?"

"Anything!"

She made the same request she had made of Buck Hagen. As Buck had considered, so Cal considered. He smiled, gently.

"Isn't that a lot to ask of a man, Lois, who has waited for years for this chance?"

"I suppose it is, Cal," she admitted. "I know it's every buckaroo's ambition to ride Gunpowder. But now, he's old, and this will be his last ride."

"Don't you worry, Lois, about that nag. I've looked him over. The old fire is there. I may buck off despite my best efforts." He indicated the trend of his thoughts. "How about a honey-

moon trip to Hollywood? I may work in a Western picture. They—they've been after me!"

She shook her head. "I'm making no promises to any man until after the rodeo," she answered.

It was the following day that she arrived in town. She rode directly to the arena. The world string was grazing in a pasture back of the grand stand. Apart stood the gray fiend, as yet unnamed by the round-up people. The association members were searching for a suitable name. Some were in favor of barring the animal entirely. "No," objected the chairman, "we've announced that this is Gunpowder's last year. We've also announced that an unnamed horse is appearing for the first time and that he will be Gunpowder's successor."

Lois gave the gray a quick glance. A curious sensation surged through her, as if this evil-eyed outlaw would some day play an important part in her life. Pop Wray was sitting on the top rail. He climbed stiffly down and removed his hat. "What brings you down here so long in advance of the show, Lois?"

"Pop!" she said, getting to the point at once. "I want to borrow Gunpowder from now until a week before the show." She saw him prepare for a firm refusal, so she pulled his head down and whispered into his ear.

Amazement filled his face, then he chuckled. "Pink-toed scorpions!" he cried. "Danged if I don't let you! Danged if I don't!"

It was round-up week! A thousand dust-clouds marked the progress of hard-riding buckaroos as they came in from all points of the compass. The round-up city was like the hub of a mighty wheel with hundred-mile spokes. Miners on burros; sporty cow-punchers on the best horses in their saddle string; ranchers, their wives and chil-

dren on buckboards; stately Indians in costume riding highly decorated ponies; all moving to the common center; all wondering if the great Gunpowder would win his last ride.

Cal Dexter was there with his silver-mounted saddle. He was dressed in a pink silk shirt, a hundred-dollar Stetson. He wore fine whipcord riding breeches and highly decorated boots. Cal had trained his horse to rear. At least once during each block he became the center of attraction as he seemed to have some difficulty with the animal. The tourists looked on with admiration; moving-picture cameramen hastily set up their machines.

No one saw Buck Hagen arrive. Buck was just another buckaroo whose overalls had been washed too many times, whose boots were worn and stained. His shirt was hickory; his Stetson battered. Buck spent a lot of time at roping practice. His steer horns were two sticks stuck at angles from a bale of hay. He was wondering about Gunpowder and his promise to Lois Burke.

In the midst of his practice he was conscious that some one was watching him. He turned quickly to face none other than Lois.

"Well done, Buck," the girl said with approval. "It seems to me you were a little weak on roping last year."

"I was," he admitted. "I'm a Northwest rider, you know. The Southwest furnishes the best ropers; the Northwest the best riders."

"I wanted to thank you again, Buck, for promising to buck off Gunpowder if you draw him. It was fine of you to do that for me!"

He hesitated. "Maybe it'd be better if I let you think I made that promise to please you, Lois. You called my attention to his condition and—well, I wouldn't break the old boy's heart. That's about the size of it, Lois. I never was much on grand standing."

For a moment she thought she saw beneath his shell.

"Then you plan to buck off?" she asked.

"Yes. I heard the rumors about Gunpowder and I looked him over when he came off the range. It'd be no credit to ride him." Fire suddenly filled his eyes. "I hope I draw Outlaw, that's the new gray they brought out. There's the worst killer that ever entered an arena."

Even as Buck spoke there came an uproar from the corral holding the world string.

"Quick!" the girl gasped.

Pop Wray had slipped from his accustomed place on the top rail. Outlaw was screaming in fury and rushing at the old man. Buck dived under the bottom rail and dragged the old man clear as two ropes settled about Outlaw's neck. Cal Dexter and Slim Glick were the ropers.

Pop Wray, unhurt, but thoroughly furious, got to his feet. "Pink-toed scorpions!" he cried angrily. "How I hate a bum sport—either horse or man! What that brute needs is a good clubbing over the head."

Parke, president of the Round-up Association, rode up. "I think I shall have that horse barred," he said. "He'll give the crowd a tremendous thrill, but—we don't want thrills at the price of serious injury."

Buck Hagen turned instantly. Again his features were as cold as granite. "I'd like to have you include him, Mr. Parke," he said. "Any rider fit to ride the world string should at least have a chance at that horse. He's one of the greatest outlaws I've ever seen—and the most dangerous."

Parke rode away in a thoughtful mood.

But Slim Glick was more than thoughtful. "Listen, Cal," he said to Dexter. "I've been practicing my palming trick some more. I think I

can fix it so you can get Gunpowder and Hagen will draw Outlaw."

"If I was sure," Cal answered, "I'd make Hagen a bet or two."

"I'll make it sure," Glick said. "Go ahead!"

Dexter hurried over to his enemy. "Buck," he said brusquely, "I've questioned your sportsmanship for some time. I've always figured you were at heart a four-flusher." Buck Hagen's hands clenched, but he knew his enemy was baiting him. He held his temper. Dexter went on: "I'll bet you, as between us, I win the bucking contest. I'll match every head of cattle you want to put up. I'll go further. I'll match the mortgage I hold on your ranch against your interest in it. If you buck off, you pack your bag and ride off your ranch, leaving everything to me. If I buck off, I'll tear up the mortgage and double your stock. Are you on?"

Buck's whole being cried out to accept the challenge. Then he remembered. He had promised if he drew old Gunpowder to buck off. "Never went back on my word yet," he snarled half to himself. Then he fairly shouted. "No!"

A sneer spread over the other's handsome face. "Ah," he said softly. "I thought so—four-flusher."

Buck Hagen walked away to keep from doing something desperate. The expression of a cave man completing his kill was in Buck's face just then.

Cal Dexter joined Slim Glick. "He wouldn't take the bet, Slim!"

"Too bad!" Slim answered. "You'll win the championship any way, but it'll take longer to get him off the range."

In a room filled with smoke and the odor of leather, the finalists were drawing horses. Slim Glick and Buck Hagen alone remained. The others had drawn their numbers and sighed with relief when neither Gunpowder's name nor that of Outlaw had appeared.

Slim reached into the hat and lifted the two remaining slips of paper. They disappeared between his fingers. From another finger a single slip of paper dropped. He grinned as he turned to Buck: "You can have what's left, Hagen!"

Without waiting for Slim to disclose what he had drawn, Buck picked up the remaining slip. "Outlaw!" he read aloud.

The moment's delay had given Slim a chance to sort the two original slips and the single substitute he held in his hand. He glanced at the substitute. "Gunpowder," he said. "Cal Dexter rides Gunpowder."

"You mean," drawled a wit, "Cal Dexter bucks off Gunpowder. Buck Hagen bucks off Outlaw. I don't think there's a man living that can ride either. One of the other boys wins this year's championship—they drew softer nags."

"There are no soft nags in the world string," another buckaroo observed.

Purple shadows were already falling in the deeper draws. Not a man, woman, or child had left the packed stands. Colorful Indians sat silently on their mounts; buckaroos lazed in the saddle. All eyes were on the arena. The announcer's voice came sharply. A change in the tone indicated that he, too, was tense.

"In the west end of the arena, Cal Dexter riding Gunpowder. Watch out!" He cleared his throat. "This is Gunpowder's last ride. I want to correct the rumor that has gone out that Gunpowder becomes coyote bait after to-day. Gunpowder is to be retired by the Round-up Association to a green pasture, and a warm stall."

The black made no effort to fight off the handlers. He submitted to the saddling process, while Dexter, with Slim Glick, stood by. The wealthy rancher suddenly caught sight of Buck Hagen walking toward Outlaw. "There's a

four-flusher, Slim, that'll buck off!" he exclaimed.

Hagen stopped.

"You've stung him, Cal," Slim whispered. "He's mad enough to do something crazy."

Hagen's lips were drawn tightly over his teeth. "Dexter," he said thickly, "I'll take that bet. All my cattle against an equal number of yours; my ranch against the mortgage you hold on it!"

"What a cinch!" whispered Slim. "You on weak old Gunpowder; him on that killer, Outlaw. Take it before he backs down!"

"I'll take that bet, Hagen." Dexter advanced with extended hand. The enemies shook on the deal. "All bets off if we both buck off before the gun."

"That's understood!"

A strange silence swept over the grand stand. Rumor spreads fast. The crowd felt that Gunpowder was through; that he would be ridden. And the thousands who had appeared year after year to see him ridden, now, did not want to. Yet they looked. "He'll buck, then run," it was predicted, "run with a man on his back."

For a moment the black stood there, as if understanding that this was the greatest moment of his life. Then he bucked stiffly for a fifty-yard stretch. "He's through!" a man groaned. "That's not the old Gunpowder!"

Triumph was on Dexter's face. The crowd might say the horse was through, but the motion pictures would show him riding the black. That was what counted. And then something happened. Gunpowder seemed to go mad. He twisted, and turned, and brought into play all the tricks his years had taught him. As he grew warmer, his fury increased. A tremendous cheer rolled over the arena. The horse responded. And now he was the horse of old—Gunpowder the unconquerable. His explosive bucks were loosening Dexter from the saddle. A serious ex-

pression came over Dexter's face. His hundred-dollar Stetson was blown off and trampled on.

The crowd was mad; on its feet, yelling: "Gunpowder! Gunpowder! You've shook him loose. Blow him up! Touch off the blast, big boy! He almost went that time!"

Gunpowder's head went up. Dexter's hold on the reins lifted him slightly before he slacked off. His shoulder muscles bulged and the pink silk shirt split wide up the back. Daylight flashed between him and the saddle. Gunpowder humped up his back and was going up as Dexter came down. The shock was tremendous. The rider was knocked into the air. For a moment he seemed to remain stationary, then he crashed to earth.

Twice Gunpowder bucked, then, as of old, he turned and looked back at the fallen man. He was a sport, for he trotted toward the gates. At the entrance, he stopped and whinnied his triumph. A cow-puncher caught his bridle and led him slowly past the stands. Parke galloped up and hugged the black; women's hands reached out to pat his velvet neck; flowers were hurled by scores of hands.

"Pink-toed scorpions, that's a scene!" shouted Pop Wray as he patted Lois Burke on the back. Tears were sliding down the old man's weathered cheeks, but he was proud of them and could lick any man who made any remarks. "You turned the trick, girl! You're idea worked, Lois. Pink-toed scorpions, what a scene!"

Calmness came, and with it the announcer's voice:

"In the center of the arena, Buck Hagen riding Outlaw. Watch out!"

The white-coated stretcher-bearers stationed on each turn of the track grew tense.

"Buck off," snarled Dexter. "Buck off, and all bets off! Buck off!" He droned it again and again as if hoping

to jinx the buckaroo gently climbing into Outlaw's saddle.

The blindfold was suddenly removed, and across the arena floated a terrible scream. The gray became a fiend. A hush fell over the stands of awe-stricken spectators.

The arena manager spoke sharply to a group of cow-punchers: "Be ready to ride in with your ropes. When Hagen bucks off, that brute will turn on him." Parke was mentally saying, "We'll never enter that horse again."

And then the fight was on. Outlaw had all of Gunpowder's fury of the contest, plus a hate for all mankind. In a series of bucks, mixed with sun-fishing, Outlaw went half the length of the arena. Again and again, he would suddenly throw back his head and attempt to crush the rider's legs with his big teeth. He would turn almost over on his back, then come down stiff-legged. Buck Hagen was taking punishment, and no doubt of it. Before the crowd had cheered the horse; it was now cheering the man.

"Ride him, cowboy! Scratch him! Rake him! Bust that gray fiend right now!"

Advice from a thousand throats rolled over the arena, but Buck Hagen heard nothing; saw nothing. Between these two, time had rolled back to the Dark Ages when the first man subdued the first horse. And Buck Hagen was something from the Dark Ages just then. The muscles of his powerful arms knotted and relaxed as he met each trick; the light of battle was in his eyes, the determination to win. They smashed into the grand stand, Buck's face six feet from Lois', but he did not see her. She gave him a searching glance, for now they were seeing the real man. The hate that flamed in his face when he encountered Cal Dexter or spoke of him was missing. There was a half smile around his lips, if one searched for it.

Then something man-made broke in—the crack of the gun.

Buck Hagen had ridden Outlaw, and won a world championship, a silver-mounted saddle, a motion-picture contract, and a moment's glory!

For a moment, Buck relaxed. With a vicious heave, the outlaw spilled him to the ground. A girl's scream rang out sharply, and Pop Wray whipped out a .44 and considered dropping the brute, but there was too much danger to those beyond in case the bullet glanced.

Riders were converging on the gray, but he ignored them. With the scream of a killer, he turned. High into the air the sharp hoofs lifted and came down. The jaws were open, the teeth ready to tear the man apart. Then Buck Hagen rolled clear, as the outlaw's hoofs struck the earth. His hand groped and caught the stirrup. He held on with his left hand, and as the horse's head came around to crack the wrist, he struck him on the nose with his right fist. With a mighty heave, he caught the pommel of the saddle. His body was almost stretched out as the outlaw galloped. Ropes had missed the wildly tossing head and were being suddenly recoiled by the pursuing riders.

Buck spilled over the opposite side as the gray hurled himself into the grand stand. The boards splintered from the impact. As the horse leaped into the open, Buck swung back into the saddle once more and gripped the reins. He waved the others back. "Let me settle it one way or the other," he called. "This is a finish fight."

The crowd saw something not on the program. No gun stopped this fight. Again and again, they saw Buck take blows that drained the color from his face and left him tottering in the saddle, yet always he had the reserve strength to meet the reserve of the outlaw. His clothing was in shreds, his

arms were bleeding, staining the white lather around the horse's neck.

"How long? How long?" Lois cried. "No man can stand such treatment much longer!"

"And no horse," answered Pop Wray.

The end came suddenly. A whinny that was both a confession of defeat and a plea for mercy came from the gray. He trotted slowly across the arena. Near the gate, Buck waved the others back and leaped to the ground. Perspiration dripped from both man and horse.

Buck's arm went around the outlaw's neck. "It's all right, old man," he said softly. "It's all right! You've made your last ride here, because you're going with me. We understand each other now, eh, boy?" And he slapped the horse on the shoulder and sent him into the corral, completely oblivious of the cameras that were getting this final touch.

The round-up city was dancing and every one was wondering where the new champion was and why he had not appeared to claim his silver-mounted saddle. But out of doors, the shadows in the draws were bathed in moonlight. Its soft gleam fell on the riders. Buck Hagen was saying humbly: "I don't suppose you want me, Lois, after that ride to-day. It was a tremendous fight, and brought out all my primitive nature. I had to fight to win. I've always had to fight and—"

"And always will, Buck, in this life," said Lois gently. "It's not the fighting that matters. It's how you fight, and how much mercy you have. They said you had none, but I found you had, and when you were willing to sacrifice everything rather than ride a horse and break his heart. Then and there sentiment showed through your iron exterior, Buck."

"I tried to hide it, Lois. Men some-

times mistake it for weakness, and I have to fight harder. Did Cal Dexter promise to buck off?" he asked suddenly.

"No, Buck. I asked him, but he said it was too much to ask. I agreed that it was too much for me to ask of him." She smiled. "People are so easily deceived by a smiling face, such as Cal's. But you were not, Buck."

"Nor you," he answered. After a pause, "Then—it's a breathing spell and a honeymoon trip to Hollywood?"

"Yes, Buck!"

They rode on in silence for some distance. At length Buck spoke.

"I can't see how Cal Dexter bucked

off! I examined Gunpowder and knew he was stiffened up with rheumatism. Last winter was a hard one. And Cal sure lost plenty when he bucked off. I can't understand it."

"I can," Lois answered with a mysterious smile. "It occurred to me that if the curative properties of Indian Springs would loosen the muscles and joints of Pop Wray year after year, it might help old Gunpowder in his last ride. So Pop and I hazed him up to the springs and, as Pop said, gave him the works. And see what happened!"

"Yes," chuckled Buck, "I'll always be able to close my eyes and see what happened."



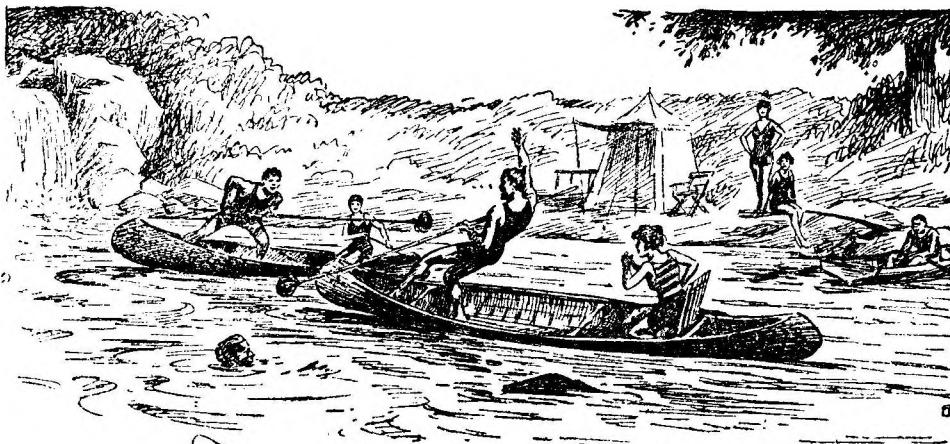
PESTS FOR PASSENGERS

THE poet said that it was sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child, and possibly there may be some modern writers, even of prose, who would exclaim that sharper than a "back-seat driver" it is to have a Gila monster for a guest.

The possibility occurs to one on reading that a gentleman of Arizona thinks it extremely likely that the wandering lizards—one, the aforesaid Gila monster, five hundred miles from home, and the other an intrepid iguana out, apparently, on a limb—which have been found in his State, have been transported thence by automobile. He even suggests that the motorist may have been a willing transportation agent, and enlarges on the disposition of the man at the wheel to move from one locality to another "anything from a horned toad to an entire cotton plant."

Viewing the "base uses" to which some automobiles are put—for they are to be seen loaded with everything from an oil stove to a grandfather's clock—one feels like assenting in part to the learned gentleman's dictum, but most people, we feel, would draw the line at an iguana, even though its name seems ingratiating enough. If one were to find oneself confronted on the highway with the pleading eyes of an iguana begging for a ride, would one be hard-hearted enough to refuse, even though as a companion the iguana promised little joy?

But, evidently suspecting the weakness of mere motorists, the authorities of Arizona and California have stationed horticultural inspectors at strategic points to intercept and inspect automobiles crossing the State lines, and hereafter the motorist may expect to find himself "frisked" at the frontier for smuggled snakes, just as one finds himself forcibly deprived at a night club of the means of seeing them!



Pioneer Towns of the West (AUSTIN, TEXAS) *By Duane Clark*

AMONG the thriving cities of Texas is its capital, Austin. Not only does Austin boast of air mail, but also of air-passenger service. New business organizations are constantly bringing their headquarters to flourish in this city of a little over four hundred and twenty-five thousand people.

Because of a four million, two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar bond issue which has been passed within the year, new buildings of various kinds are being erected which will improve the already fine city of Austin.

The present form of government is the city-manager plan, which replaced the commission form of municipal government in 1926. For seventy years, beginning in 1839, the aldermanic form of government held sway. The first city administration held only a mayor and chief of police. Edwin Waller was the first of twenty-eight men to hold the important executive office in Austin. His picture now hangs in the council room at the city hall.

It is said that over three hundred and

fifty persons come into Austin each day over the bus lines. As many arrive by train, and many, of course, visit the city in their automobiles. There are twenty-seven miles of paved and asphalt streets, and many more of excellent gravel roadways.

One of the most important industrial establishments in Austin is that of the Walker Properties Association, where chile con carne, tamales, and other special concoctions are manufactured. A large Coca Cola plant bottles Coca Cola entirely by machinery, so that no human hand touches it.

Austin is constantly striving to improve itself. New parks and playgrounds are being constructed. A sanitary and storm-sewage system, enlarging the city power plant so that the water supply will adequately meet the growing population of the next few years, is another of the ideas being put into effect. With the installation of natural gas, demand for this fuel has become increasingly popular.

The colored population of Austin amounts to ten thousand, and schools

have been erected to meet their needs. Tabor Park has recently been purchased as a site for a new junior high school at a cost of thirty-five hundred dollars. The building will cost fifty-five thousand dollars. For the negro population, Austin has six schools. There are fourteen for the white people. Constant additions and improvements are being made in all departments.

There are several hospitals, for whites, negroes, and Mexicans, the latter include five thousand of Austin's population. Besides schools and the University of Texas, several churches adorn the city. The Salvation Army occupies a new two-story brick building. The Student Union comprises several imposing buildings. This project was financed by ex-students of the university and their regents' board. Besides the Texas School for the Blind, there is a Deaf, Dumb and Blind institute for the colored people.

All about Austin are rare beauty spots where the tourist or resident may feast his eyes and enjoy nature at her best. Lake Austin is often the scene of water carnivals. Barton Springs contains fine summer resorts. Swimming pools, and a pavilion where dances and picnics may be enjoyed, are the outstanding attractions. West of Austin, the Colorado River wends its way through hills of varying purple hues.

From Mount Bonnell, the legend goes, an Indian girl leaped to her death. This cliff is called Lover's Leap.

This river is spanned by the Colorado

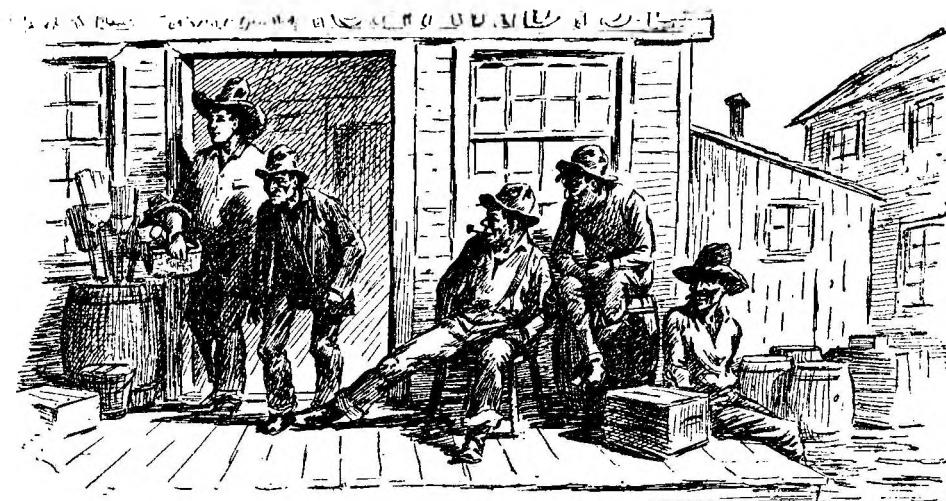
Bridge which links the Austin Highway with that of San Antonio. Hamilton's Pool attracts many of the vacationists of Austin, who come to marvel at the beauty of the falls and cascades and the moss-hung trees bordering it. Almost every creek and stream around Austin bears a few cascades or waterfalls. Near the city is a limestone quarry from which tons of stone are being taken yearly, with no appreciable decrease of the supply.

Above Mount Bonnell is Mount Barker, higher and less accessible. Cedars and mountain laurel form a heavy jungle of shrubbery which is difficult to penetrate. Near here is another peak called Cat Mountain, so named because of its many limestone caves which form the homes of wildcats. Some of the beauty spots cannot be reached by automobile, but the time is not far off when roads will be built through this wild and rugged country. The Pedernales River Valley knows few rivals when it comes to grandeur.

Besides the attractive places outside of Austin, the streets in the city proper are especially pretty and well arranged. University Avenue, south of the campus, is an example of this.

Austin has six banks, five hotels, eight theaters, and many other advantages. The city is five hundred and nine to seven hundred feet above sea level. Five national highways pass through Austin. Perhaps the greatest industry is the export of cedar. Spinach, pecans, and poultry are next in importance.





Madman of Moller Mountain

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "A Swim for Safety," etc.



S man invariably distrusts anything he cannot understand, so the people of Stottstown distrusted Joe Metzger. The huge-bodied, silent youth was an enigma even to Sheriff Hal Smith, who made it his business to know every man, woman and child within the wide, if thinly populated area that was Stotts County.

Outside of his personal peculiarities, there were other more material things that served to render Joe Metzger unpopular in Stottstown. In the first place, he lived with Carper Gove in the latter's little cabin in the Moller Hills. Carper Gove was a member of that widely scattered family, common in the West, known as desert rats. But, in one particular Carper Gove was different from most of his fellows. He was a rich man. The old miner had no relatives, and Joe Metzger was his only close friend. This circumstance alone reacted unfavorably against Metzger.

On the surface, it appeared, naturally enough perhaps, that the lad was interested in his benefactor's money.

No one knew where Joe Metzger had come from. This for the simple reason that neither Carper Gove nor the lad himself had ever volunteered an explanation. Something over a year since, following a three-months' trip to parts unknown, Carper Gove had returned to his little cabin, accompanied by Joe Metzger. Since that time the queer pair had been always together; the old miner never even visited Stottstown, a scant dozen miles from his little cabin in the foothills of Moller Mountain, alone.

The curious ones eventually learned that Joe Metzger was not so stupid as he at first glance appeared. They learned one other thing, too, which, in the light of future events, took on a sinister meaning.

It was Carper Gove's custom to visit Stottstown each Saturday morning to purchase groceries and other necessary supplies. As usual, Joe Metzger, this

particular Saturday, accompanied Gove to Stottstown. As usual, too, the lad carried a huge market basket swung over a sun-browned arm. Also as usual, he walked close at old Carper's side, so close that it seemed almost as though his strong young body aided the old man's limping steps. In town, he followed old Carper's every move with doglike, devoted persistence.

It was along toward mid-afternoon, just as they were starting back for the cabin in the hills that it happened. "Stag" MacQuade, the town bully, lounged on the porch of the general store, his bulky body slouched in an old chair. Some of the more active of Stottstown's male gossips gathered around MacQuade. The latter had just finished the garbled recital of a story told him that day by a drummer, when Carper Gove and Joe Metzger came out of the store. Gove's rheumatic joints were apparently bothering him more than usual, for he was limping painfully. MacQuade was still laughing at his own joke when the two passed him. He turned, and, winking broadly at his audience, suddenly stuck out one of his long legs. His big foot neatly caught Carper Gove's rheumatic leg. The old man cried out, stumbled, and would have fallen headlong off the porch had not Joe Metzger lifted him bodily and set him on his feet.

Carper Gove was not an old man, neither was he as helpless as that crippled leg might indicate. Muttering angrily, he turned upon the laughing MacQuade. Stottstown did not for one moment doubt Gove's courage. Many times during the past twenty years he had proved it. But, this time, Carper Gove was not called upon to fight his own battle.

Joe Metzger set the heavy market basket down, very gingerly, on the porch. He approached the furious old miner. Very gently, he pushed the old man aside. Then, before any one had

the slightest idea of his intentions, he reached down and caught the loose collar of Stag MacQuade's shirt in the lean fingers of his right hand, and, with a surging heave of his broad shoulders, yanked the bully upright. Stag MacQuade was a big man. He stood well over six feet in height, and weighed two hundred pounds. He was strong as an ox and duly respected as the vicious fighter he undoubtedly was. But, during those few breathless seconds, as Metzger's grip tightened at his throat, Stag MacQuade was, evidently, helpless.

A miraculous change had come over Metzger's placid features. A killing rage was mirrored in his pale, blue eyes. A thin, white line circled his mouth. His cheeks were white. Words hissed out through his lips, but no one knew what he said. Stag MacQuade began to struggle. Joe Metzger loosened his grip at the bully's throat, stepped back, and struck out swiftly, right and left in quick succession.

The tremendous power behind those short-armed blows none but Stag MacQuade was able to adequately gauge. The bully's bulky body catapulted headlong off the porch. He struck on head and shoulders in the street, ten feet away. But powerful as those blows undoubtedly were, Stag MacQuade—a blacksmith by occupation—was not badly hurt. Wiping a hairy hand across his mouth, he scrambled to his feet. By the time he was standing upright, Joe Metzger was facing him, not three feet distant. The lad's long arms hung loosely at his sides. He spoke no word. With a characteristic motion, he whisked the long, yellow hair out of his eyes and edged toward MacQuade, his wide shoulders swaying, knuckles showing white, so tightly clenched were his fists. Stag MacQuade swore explosively, lowered his head, and, both arms flailing, bore down upon his youthful opponent. Joe Metzger did not dance

aside. He stood his ground and for a long minute swapped killing punches with Stag MacQuade.

A close observer might have noticed that while perhaps one in ten of MacQuade's blows found their mark, well over half of Metzger's bone-crushing punches went home to some vital portion of his adversary's anatomy. But the lookers-on were far too excited to notice this. Hence, they were amazed beyond words when Stag MacQuade's towering body abruptly crumpled to the ground.

Joe Metzger did not pause to learn the result of his handiwork. With a toss of his yellow head, he put the hair out of his eyes, then caught up the market basket, fell into step beside the wondering Carper, and started away.

Although Stag MacQuade was a loud-mouthed egotist, he was, after the fight, loud in his praise of Joe Metzger. "I've fought some tough ones in my time," he said, "but I never faced a man who packed a wallop like that kid." In proof of which statement he bared his body to the waist, displaying to his wondering audience black-and-blue spots as big as a man's palm.

"Like the kick of a mule," some one suggested.

"Absolute," Stag MacQuade agreed; "and a right special mule at that. I've been kicked by lots o' mules in my time; by hosses too; and I've mixed in some pretty tough fights—but no livin' thing ever knocked the everlastin' stuffin' out o' me like that kid's fists done."

In a land where strong men are idolized, next only to crack pistol shots, Joe Metzger might well have become somewhat of a hero as a result of his fistic argument with Stag MacQuade. But, startling events, all centering about Joe, robbed him of this pleasant notoriety.

Two days after the fight in Stottstown, Lars Anderson, a miner, was picked up unconscious near the Gove cabin by three cowboys from the Bar Z

Ranch. The big miner's body was literally one huge black-and-blue spot.

When he was finally revived in Doctor Zane's office in Stottstown, Anderson told a strange story. He had stopped off at Carper Gove's cabin, he said, for a drink of water. At first, he had intended staying for supper. But instinct told him that something was amiss in that cabin. Carper Gove had acted queer, sort of stunned like; and Joe Metzger, that usually placid youth, was nervous as a setting hen. The two of them—the man and the boy—had sat there looking at each other across the table as though each expected the other to jump at his throat any moment. "By jing, aye bane scared, I tell you," Anderson said. "That kid, he looks wild all right. Aye come away quick."

Just as he was leaving the cabin, Anderson said, something hit him on the head. Thereafter, he was vaguely conscious of a terrible pummeling. The blow on the head had rendered him half conscious, so that he was mercifully spared complete realization of what happened after that. He was convinced that Joe Metzger had administered that beating, although, upon being closely questioned by Sheriff Hal Smith, he could not swear to it. "Aye bane sick feller, sheriff," he said. "Everyting is red. I don't see noting. But I know—somebody—beat the life out o' me."

This statement was proved most conclusively by the big miner's condition.

It was night then. Next morning, the sheriff planned on taking a trip out to the Gove cabin and looking into the matter.

But he was spared the trouble.

Early next morning Carper Gove routed the sheriff out of bed. The old miner's face was gray with fear. His clothes were torn, and his face and hands were scratched and bleeding. "It's Joe, sheriff," he gasped. "The boy's out of his head. Crazy as a loon. He jumped me last night—threatened to

kill me, he did. He follered me. But—but—I—I—got away."

An hour later, the sheriff, accompanied by two armed deputies, surrounded the Gove cabin. The three officers approached cautiously, guns ready.

But all this caution proved unnecessary. Joe Metzger sat, head in hands, fully clothed, on the edge of Carper Gove's disordered bunk. His own bunk had not been slept in. The lad submitted meekly enough when called upon to surrender. As the sheriff spanned his prisoner's wrists with handcuffs, he noticed that the boy's hands were clammy and cold. His broad shoulders slumped dejectedly, and there was a pitiful something in his blue eyes that inspired the sheriff with a curious surge of sympathy.

It was not necessary for the sheriff to warn the lad not to talk. Not once did he open his mouth on the way to Stottstown. Lodged in the jail there, the cynosure of curious eyes, he maintained this silence.

For a time, the sheriff was in doubt as to what to do with his prisoner. It was evident that Joe Metzger was mad. Certainly, no sane person would have attacked Lars Anderson, who was one of the most harmless of men, and administered the terrible beating that Anderson had been subjected to. Sheriff Hal Smith was invariably fair in his treatment of all men, friends and enemies alike. It would not do, he assured himself, to bring Metzger up before an ordinary jury. His case was one for the alienists at Tucson to decide.

And decide it they did. Four of them sat on Joe Metzger's case. All four were puzzled. They admitted this much to the sheriff. But the same conclusion was finally arrived at by all of them. This decision was that Joe Metzger was mad! Shortly after, Joe Metzger was placed in the State Hospital for the Insane at Tucson.

With his youthful companion gone, Carper Gove wandered about like a lost soul for a time; but there was in his attitude a noticeable lack of friendly regard for the boy that puzzled Stottstown. To all intents and purposes the old miner had always regarded Joe Metzger as a son. But Carper Gove had changed tremendously. Not once during the four months following Joe Metzger's confinement did Gove so much as mention the lad's name. In many other ways he acted queerly. All these oddities of behavior were laid to Joe Metzger's account. It was only natural that Carper Gove should have been vitally upset by the terrible experience through which he had passed.

It was in the spring, after Metzger had been imprisoned something over six months, that the sheriff, called out on a horse-stealing case, found himself near the Gove cabin as night overtook him. It had rained steadily for several days. The sheriff was cold and hungry, and wet. He was not particularly anxious to spend the night with Carper Gove. The kindly old law officer felt, somehow, that he was responsible for young Metzger's incarceration in the madhouse at Tucson. He had several times been criticized, even by his friends, for his action in the matter. Far better, these friends had said, to hang a man by the neck until he was dead than to sentence him as Joe Metzger had been sentenced. These criticisms had hurt the sheriff. He had always liked young Metzger. Of course, he had done his duty as he saw it. No man can do more. But, the fact remained, it was a terrible punishment to visit upon any human being. Although Carper Gove had never said anything about it, the sheriff felt, somehow, that the old miner blamed him for having dealt too harshly with young Metzger.

Carper Gove was sharpening a long-bladed knife on a well-worn whetstone when the sheriff appeared. The old

man turned, knife in hand, cheeks gray, eyes staring. For an instant, the sheriff was afraid that the old miner was about to throw himself upon him. But recognition came finally, and, with a shuddering sigh, Carper Gove sank into a chair.

"I'm in bad shape, Hal," he apologized. "Every time some one comes—I—I—I think—it's him. He's awful strong, Hal. Some time, he'll break loose. You mark my words. And when he does—he'll come straight here."

Sheriff Hal Smith was more disturbed than his placid face showed. "Now, now, Carper," he soothed; "get a hold o' yourself. He can't get loose. Not a chance in the world. He——"

"But you don't know him, Hal," Carper Gove argued. "I tell you, he's as strong as two men. And when a man is a little off, you know, he's stronger than ever."

The sheriff nodded. He had heard that, too.

"—No ordinary steel bars can ever hold him," continued Carper. "He'll get away. You just mark my words. And he'll come straight here. But I'll be ready for him. Luckily, he ain't got no use for a gun. He'll trust his bare hands. A gun ain't no use at close quarters, anyhow. But I'll be ready for him. This knife——"

Carper Gove brandished the razor-edged hunting knife suggestively. "I—I'll be ready for him," he repeated.

The sheriff spent an exceedingly unpleasant evening, listening to Carper Gove's fear-struck ravings. A dozen times he attempted to draw the old miner into a recital of some of his adventures. In his youth, Carper Gove had many times circled the globe. He had participated in several wars. His wiry body was covered with scars. On a little shelf was a chamois sack filled with medals of one sort and another. Usually, old Carper was more than willing to talk about himself and his ad-

ventures; but to-night he could talk of nothing but Joe Metzger.

Dog-weary from a long day in the saddle the sheriff rolled early into the bunk that had been Joe Metzger's. Ordinarily, he would have been asleep almost the instant his head touched the pillow. But, this night, he could not sleep. Carper Gove, in his own bunk across the room, lay still as death. The old sheriff was still tingling from head to foot as a result of Carper Gove's fear-struck fancies. If he, a mere listener, could be so upset, why was it that Carper Gove, the man directly concerned, could go to sleep immediately? The sheriff was puzzled. The whole thing, somehow, did not make sense. If he had ever seen a nervous wreck Carper Gove was just that. And yet, the instant he lay upon that lumpy bunk, Carper Gove's twitching body had become still as death itself.

By the time the battered old clock on the mantelpiece across the room had struck off two hours, the sheriff's worried thoughts had almost convinced him that there was something wrong with Carper Gove. Just as he was about to investigate, a suspicion of movement on the bunk across the room attracted his attention. With slow, cautious fingers, Carper Gove had turned aside the blankets which covered him, and stealthily got to his feet. So noiseless were the old miner's movements that had Sheriff Hal's eyes, due to his lying awake so long, not been thoroughly accustomed to the dimness within the cabin, he would hardly have believed that Carper Gove had actually left his bunk.

But the old miner was on his feet now, and, with that same elaborate caution, was crossing the room. The sheriff caught the dull reflection of light on metal. He then saw that Carper Gove held, tightly clenched in his right hand, that same long-bladed knife which he had been so industriously sharpening.

Even with all this visual evidence, however, the sheriff did not guess Gove's intentions until the latter stood directly over his bunk. Then, with a motion deceptively swift, that gleaming knife in Carper Gove's right hand, lifted—and fell.

The blade was aimed at the sheriff's blanket-covered body. But, at the last moment, the wide-eyed old officer twitched aside. The knife sank to the hilt in the thick roll of blankets between the sheriff's arm and body.

The sheriff's gun was in his holster, which holster hung from a peg on the wall, well out of reach. Assured that he had to do with a madman, the sheriff strongly desired to get his fingers on that gun. With this in mind, he caught Carper Gove's knife arm strongly with both hands and pulled downward with all his strength, hoping to throw the mad miner off balance enough to permit him to scramble to his feet and reach his gun. But Carper Gove's lean arm was as tense and hard as a bar of tempered steel. And the fingers of his free hand that reached downward through the blackness, seeking a hold at the sheriff's throat, were like metal-edged claws. The clutching strength in those gripping fingers was like nothing human.

If Sheriff Hal had been in doubt before, he was now convinced that he had to do with a mad creature. There was the strength of three ordinary men in Carper Gove's wiry body. For a moment, the sheriff struggled futilely, then, with an almost superhuman effort, he rolled out from under Carper Gove and, wrapped in a tangle of blankets, sprawled upon the cabin floor. Before he could extricate himself, the mad miner was upon him. Once more that sharp-edged knife lifted and fell. At the last moment, the sheriff freed a foot and kicked upward and outward with all his strength. His heel struck Carper Gove beneath the chin. The sheriff was

a big man and a powerful one. Human flesh and blood could not resist that kicking blow. Gove's wiry body hurtled back the length of the cabin, bringing up against the heavy log door with a crash.

With a celerity dictated by that desperate fear which all normal persons entertain for madmen, Sheriff Hal scrambled free of the blankets and sprang to his feet. Quick as he was, however, Carper Gove was as quick. Even as the old sheriff's fingers fumbled blindly for the holster on the wall, Carper Gove, apparently uninjured, approached, long-bladed knife held rigidly before him. With his eyes fixed on the mad miner, Sheriff Hal groped for the holster containing his gun. He found the wooden peg driven into the wall, finally, but—the holster was gone! Gove had removed the gun!

A gasp of dismay breathed through the sheriff's tight lips. He stumbled back against the wall, his frantic thoughts searching for a way out of his predicament. Then, with a hoarse-voiced yell, Carper Gove sprang in. Sheriff Hal seized the madman's knife arm and clung desperately with both hands. Around and around the black room the two men struggled. The sheriff clung to the madman's knife arm with desperate strength. Thrice he lifted Carper Gove's body clear from the floor. Thrice he crashed the madman's slender frame against the log wall. But Gove seemed impervious to the bone-crushing impacts. The big table was overturned. The pot-bellied stove in the middle of the room was brushed aside by the struggling men. And then, Sheriff Hal's heel, groping backward, came down upon the sharp leg of a broken chair. Just for an instant, he lost balance. In that instant, Carper Gove's free hand sought and found his enemy's throat. Gasping for breath, fighting for his life, the sheriff felt himself being borne backward to the floor.

Even as his shoulders met the dirt floor, the sheriff continued to cling with both hands to Gove's knife arm. True, those steel fingers might soon squeeze the breath from his lungs, but the sheriff possessed the normal man's dread of a knife. If worst came to worst, he would far rather meet death by strangulation than through the medium of a knife thrust between his ribs. But Carper Gove's grip at the sheriff's throat had relaxed somewhat. The mad miner was mumbling, dazed, rambling sentences that at first made little sense.

"You would try to kill me, eh?" the madman snarled. "You, the sheriff, and while I slept, at that! Don't deny it. I know. I saw you. But I was too smart for you. Ha, ha, ha! You're no better than the rest of them. Lars Anderson tried it, in the daytime. But I fixed him. I beat him with the flat of an ax. And Joe——! Joe tried it a dozen times. Always at night. But he was clever, Joe was. He would slip away before I could get him. Got so he slept outside the cabin. Just outside the door. He made a bolt so that he could lock the door on the outside. That was smart. Joe was smarter than either you or Anderson. Joe——"

Abruptly the sheriff loosened his grip on the madman. Involuntarily the old miner sprawled forward. Sheriff Hal twisted aside and struck out with every bit of strength remaining. His clubbed fist hit the madman just over the heart. It was a terrible blow. Just for an instant, Gove's body relaxed. And, in that instant, the sheriff tore those clutching fingers from his throat, rolled over quickly, and sprang to his feet. His foot came in contact with a thick cedar chunk which served as a chair. Quick as thought itself, he caught up the heavy block of wood, and turning, hurled it with all his strength at the madman just as the latter was again advancing, knife in hand.

The block of wood, weighing probably thirty pounds, thrust aside the knife which the mad miner held before him, snapping it off at the hilt. And the force behind that hurtling weight sent Carper Gove sprawling on his back on the floor. The sheriff leaped headlong upon the fallen man. But the fight was over. In falling, Gove's head had struck solidly against the edge of the bunk. His body was limp. He was unconscious.

Two hours later, shivering in the icy drizzle, Sheriff Hal Smith urged his unwilling horse down the slippery mountainside toward Stottstown. Carper Gove, hands handcuffed behind his back, feet tied under the horse's belly, sat on the saddle before the sheriff. The old miner, after recovering consciousness, had evidently been exhausted. And he did not seem to know what it was all about. He had asked once the reason for the handcuffs, but when the sheriff had answered evasively, the old man had not pushed the matter.

On his way to Stottstown, Sheriff Hal Smith's thoughts were busy ones. Although his experience in cases like this one was limited, he had heard of several similar instances. Carper Gove was undoubtedly mad, this madness taking the form of an obsession that some one—every one, apparently—sought his life. Without doubt, Gove had several times attempted Joe Metzger's life. With that craftiness which is oftentimes peculiar to madmen, he had attempted—successfully on one occasion—to create the impression that Joe Metzger was the mad one. And it was Carper Gove who had tackled Lars Anderson. But why had Joe permitted himself to be put away? This was what puzzled the old sheriff.

It was not until he talked to Joe Metzger a few days later that this matter was cleared up to his satisfaction. The sheriff told the lad exactly what had happened at the Gove cabin. Joe,

grown thin and haggard as a result of his incarceration, shook his yellow head sadly.

"I was afraid of it," he said, "and maybe I did wrong. Perhaps I should have told you all about it. He might have hurt somebody—bad. But, I couldn't tell you, sheriff, I couldn't tell anybody. See what I mean? You—you haven't any idea, sheriff, how much I thought of old Carper. He saved my life, you know, down in Las Varras. He was so good to me—I don't remember my father or my mother. He kind of took the place of both of them. Of course, I knew all along that he was a little off; but he wasn't bad—at first. He got worse and worse, though, as time went on.

"He got hit on the head once. There's a deep groove there yet. His head used to hurt him where that groove was. When it hurt him bad—usually at night—he used to say queer things. Then, one night, he jumped me with a knife. He swore that I had tried to kill him. Well, I sure fought for my life in that cabin that night! Next day he seemed to be all right. I hoped it wouldn't happen again. But it did—several times. I didn't say anything about it, because I knew that he would be sent away, and I couldn't bear to see him sent to a place—like this. It would kill him, I knew. When he told you—about me—I didn't say anything, either. Figured that with me gone he might be better. I figured, too, that it would be lots better for me, a young feller, to stick it out in a place like this—than it would be for him. But I guess I did

wrong, sheriff. He might have killed somebody. He might have killed you. He didn't, and I'm awful glad. But—do you think it will be necessary to send him here, sheriff? Can't you turn him over to me? Get me out of here, and I'll take him away back up in the hills some place. I'll watch over him day and night. He won't ever hurt anybody. I promise you, sheriff."

For perhaps the first time in his life Sheriff Hal Smith was close to tears. The unselfish devotion of this youngster wrung his heart.

"It can't be did, Joe," he said sadly. "But—mebbe—it won't be necessary and—"

Joe Metzger sprang to his feet. "What do you mean?" he asked, searching the sheriff's face with wide eyes.

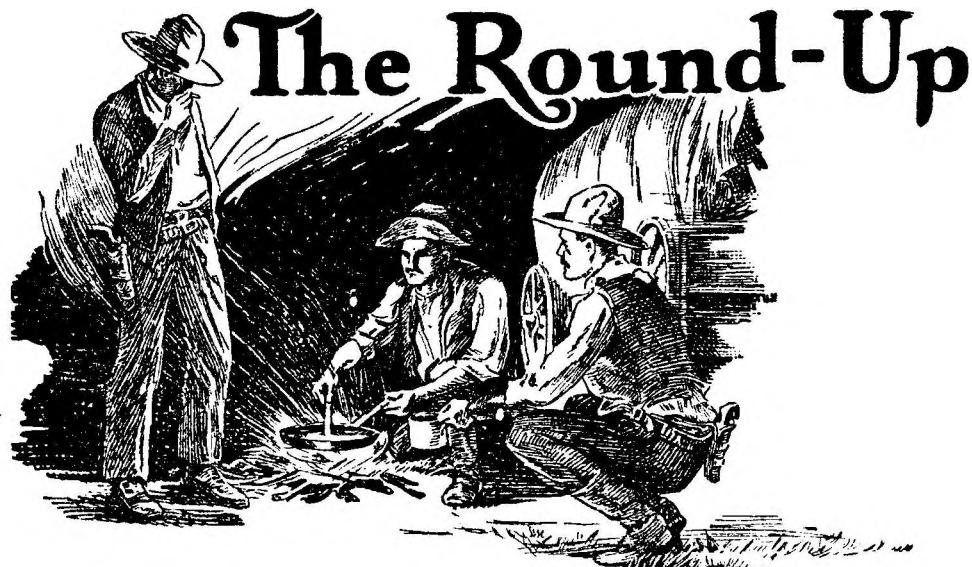
"Waal, I don't rightly know, Joe," the old officer answered. "You see, they got Carper downstairs, now. In fact, he's been there since yesterday morning. They found that place on his head. There was just a chance that they might operate on him and remove suthin' or other there that presses on his brain. It's that pressure that makes him crazy, d'ye see? But the doctors, they didn't hold out much hope. Carper ain't young—"

The sheriff was interrupted by the arrival of a gray-whiskered, bespectacled man. "Howdy, doc," the sheriff greeted. "Any news?"

The doctor removed his glasses and smiled. "Yes," he said; "good news. The operation was a success. Carper Gove will live. And, from now on, he will be as sane as you or I."

THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE UNITED STATES

A NEW trail, the highest in the country, is soon to open up the summit of Mount Whitney, in California. With this trail completed, and with horses and mules for transportation, devotees of the outdoors will be able to climb high above the timber line, cross the high Sierra Range, and drop into Sequoia National Park. The summit of Mount Whitney is fourteen thousand five hundred feet above sea level.



AKIND and gentle girl is "Cactus Kate," of Ventura, California, for there be times when she uses no bit at all, let alone a severe one. Now, please tell 'em about it, Kate:

"Boss of the Round-up and Folks: The talks about horses in the Round-up sure have been interesting, and I want to stand by those who believe in kindness to horses. What would we do without horses? It sure would be terrible if we had none. Then why be cruel to them? The meanest horses can be trained by kindness and firmness. A horse can be treated gently and still be spirited.

"I wonder if Miss MacKenzie feels proud when her horse prances on account of her spurs and cruel bit. I know I am proud when my horse holds his head high and steps like a king, with a loose rein and no spurs. I ride with a hackamore or a light Texas bit, and I am not afraid to run my horses on the roughest ground or steepest hills. I trust them and they trust me. I hardly ever use spurs except when working cattle. People are always wanting to buy my horses, but I would never sell my favorites.

"There is a horse on the ranch that has been treated as Miss Mexico or Spanish Bit would treat him. His tongue has been pretty nearly cut in two by cruel bits. And I have seen others like him. A spade bit is heavy, and, even when used carefully, makes a horse throw his head or open his mouth.

"Well, I guess this is a pretty big say for a little girl, but I love horses and just had to say something for them. Adios."

That's jest the way we feel about it, Kate: "Why be cruel to them?" There is no need to be cruel to any living thing, whether it be a canary bird or a horse. We have always found it a much harder job to train a boy to be "good," than a horse or a dog. Try treating the hands on a ranch rough, and see how far you'll get. Handle a team of work horses rough, and you'll find that they'll last nowhere near as long and will not do half the work they would if you treated them firmly and kindly. It is not kindness, of course, to let a hot horse have all the cold water he wants to drink. Real kindness, that is also firmness, means

giving the horse only the amount of water he should have under the given circumstances.

So, too, the horse must be trained to behave, for his own good as well as for yours. He must be taught to stand without hitching. He must be taught to stop and go when he's told to stop and go. For, if he is not taught these things, when caught in a jam he may well injure himself as well as his owner.

No, from our point of view, at least, life is not worth living, if you've got to be cruel to living things with whom you come in contact.

Here is a dandy know-how man, Freedom S. Davis, who'll now hand out some information on the subject, and, what is more, he stands ready to give more. And we will certainly be glad to get that more, if he'll be glad to come here and give it to us:

"Boss of THE ROUND-UP: I don't often butt into the circle, but this discussion of how a horse should be treated or maltreated has grown tiresome. Have ridden horses since 1870, when, as a twelve-year-old boy, I came to Colorado. Most of the time, until 1888, I was punching cattle or breaking horses. How many horses I spoiled in seven years I hate to remember, but, in '78, Free Tanner, a Mormon, of south Utah, and the best horse trainer and tamer I ever saw, showed me how foolish it was to torture a horse that you wanted service from.

"I had, before I met him, been raised in the old Spanish school; that is, I would clap a fifty-pound saddle on an eight-hundred or nine-hundred-pound horse, climb on, and sock spurs and quirt into him to take the buck out of him. Tanner showed me that it was just as sensible to make your child steal something and then punish him to impress on his mind it's wrong to steal.

A horse is a child in many ways. Some submit because their spirit is broken; others become rebels and outlaws. In which group would you want your children classed? That's the answer.

"Now take a horse, green, off the free range—a baby, so far as man and his evil works are concerned. He remembers being choked with a cruel stricture around his throat, a hot iron clamped to his shoulder, hip, or side, and, if a gelding, the exquisite torture of making him one. Don't mistake—a horse remembers, and the 'Power that Is' records. All right. When the time is right, he's herded into a corral, switched out on a rope, blindfolded, a heavy saddle put on his back, and a hated two-legged animal atop that saddle is hooting, and booting him in the ribs, and yelling, much as the mountain lion that killed his mamma performed.

"Bueno. He knows what it is now. It's a two-legged panther, and he must kill it, just as his mammy tried to kill the four-legged one that tried to eat her baby. So he tries all the tricks he saw her first try. He buck-jumps to loosen all holds, sunfishes—paws in air—to let him slide off backward, deep-sea dives—stands on head; finally in despair he throws himself backward to crush this torturing beast—that's how his mother died, before she could get up again—only to find that fiend in the saddle again. Well, he's only a baby, and he submits—or he's an outlaw and resents.

"The question finally is, do you want your horse to be a friend, or a slave that only obeys from fear? After my training with Free Tanner, I traveled over New Mexico and old Arizona, Nevada, and south California for seven years, looking for spoiled horses to re-break, and, in that time, I can truthfully say that, out of some fifteen hundred of them, no horse I ever had the first handling of ever knew how to buck.

"If the boss desires, I will tell how I

broke my horses, without the cruelty of bucking, tender mouths, runaways, kicking, and kindred vices.

"Am tired of seeing Spanish Bit. Give me a chance, and I'll run her back in her hole where she belongs. For a little brief notoriety, she's stirring up too much trouble on the range. I haven't been there for several years, but I drove up from Texas over the old Chisholm and Goodnight Trails, and could tell many stories of both. But I'm not a story-teller."

Now for a little about guns. "An Old Regular Army Sergeant" will be the one who'll take a few shots:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP: I like your WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE fine but get more kick out of some of the things I hear in the Round-up, especially about antelope-catching horses and Corporal Newman's story about guns.

"I live in Texas and am an old regular-army man—was in Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, when the new regulation equipped us with .45 automatics and took away our old .38 single actions. Officers and men alike fell flat at target practice, men who were expert pistol shots with the .38. About the biggest thing we did was unjam-

ming the darn things. If there are any other old regular-army cavalry or artillery men here at Round-up, I believe they will tell you the same thing. Personally I wouldn't give one of those old .38s for an armful of .45 automatics, if I had to depend on a gun for my health.

"A Sergeant Tinkham and myself hunted wild goats and hogs all over those mountain ranges on both sides of the Pass—Murphy Ridge, Cow Peak, Needle Peak and all the other peaks. We both used the .25 Savage, and we usually toted back a few goats; but we always left the old Springfield in the gun rack. The Springfield is a good gun, but for reasons of our own we preferred the Savage. Hunting goats and hogs on those ridges is a mighty dangerous sport. The goats usually keep to the ridge and the hogs in the gullies and ravines. If you were to take a misstep, it would be like falling from an airplane, with nothing between you and the bottom but air. From some of those ridges, one can look straight down for a thousand feet or more.

"Ask Corporal Newman how long he's been in the army. What big city raised him? How much has he hunted? His knowledge of guns is really pitiful."

A GIGANTIC IRON HORSE

WHILE the excavators and explorers are continually discovering the bones of extinct forms of life in giant shape—dinosaurs, mastodons, and the rest, the modern wizards are busy turning out very nice little mammoths of their own. There is no need for us to hang our diminished heads just yet.

This iron horse—which, by the way, is a passenger locomotive designed for the Canadian Pacific—weighs a mere four hundred and twenty-four thousand pounds, is nearly one hundred feet long, and has a tractive power of sixty thousand, eight hundred pounds, which is equal to three thousand, six hundred and eighty-five horse power. Notwithstanding the formidable proportions of this steed, the use of nickel steel wherever possible has reduced its weight to a minimum, and the high ratio of tractive power to weight is a notable feature of the new engine.

When this mighty monster outlives its usefulness—if that day should ever come—and goes to the scrap heap, there will, doubtless, be some moralizing philosopher to observe: "There were giants in those days!"



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*.

BELOW the foothills of the San Bernardino Range and west of the great desert stretch that is the Colorado Basin, is the Imperial Valley of southern California—bounded by the foothills, the desert stretches, and the Mexican border.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Over the line from Mexico, in the very southeastern corner of California, with the waste lands of the Colorado Basin and the great Colorado Desert sweeping down upon it, is Imperial Valley, sprawling at the foot of the San Bernardino Range. Imperial was once like Death Valley, not quite so hot, and not quite so low. The Salton Sea, the lowest spot in Imperial Valley, is two hundred and fifty feet below sea level. The sea is about ten or fifteen miles wide and about thirty miles in length. At the rim, along the Salton Sea, one can look out over the desert country for miles, and see the foothills in the far distance. The Imperial Valley stretches northward from the Mexican border about two hundred miles, I should say. To the north of the valley is the San Bernardino Range, and to the west are the San Jacinto and the far end of the Coast Range mountains.

The painted canyons stretch across the northern end of the valley, and they are gorgeous to see. I've seen them by moonlight as well as by daylight, and they leave a

never-to-be-forgotten impression. I'll give you-all an outline of one of the trips made through the valley just a short time ago.

With Los Angeles as a starting point, we traveled southeastward until we struck the valley at Coachella. From Mecca—which is two hundred feet below sea level—we took the trail through the canyons of the hills. We crossed the valley, and on to Blythe, on the Colorado River. From Blythe we had forty miles of sand dunes to cross before we reached our destination. The trail took us north from Blythe to Blythe Junction—better known as Rice—a little place boasting of one store and twenty-five inhabitants.

We camped one and a half miles from Rice, with a section gang of one hundred and twenty-five Mexicans. Well, folks, we were on a desert stretch that almost compares with Death Valley. Out there in the Colorado Basin we were forty miles from water—forty miles from nowhere! Forty miles in a sage-covered wilderness, with nothing but shifting sand dunes about us. Yes, that basin, that Colorado Desert, is so desolate and dry that there's not a jack rabbit anywhere around. A few buzzards, plenty of lizards, sidewinders, rattlers, Gila monsters, and tarantulas. For two nights we camped out on that Colorado Desert wilderness, and watched the moon come up over the distant mountains and listened to the Mexicans play their wild, Spanish music.

Our trail did not cross the Imperial Valley on our return to Los Angeles. Instead, we

went north fifty miles until we hit the National Old Trails road, fifty miles west of Needles. Returning, our trail took us through Ludlow, Daggett, Barstow, and Victorville, the old Mojave towns of the West.

I'm a native son of the West, folks, and California is my home. I've been down into Mexico and up into Canada, but give me the desert country of southern California for my stamping ground. I'll be glad to hear from some of the hombres who would like to call a twenty-four-year-old Southwesterner "pard."

ARTHUR D. VAUGHAN.

1411 East Forty-seventh Street, Los Angeles, California.

East of Imperial Valley.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Yuma is a border town in Arizona, nine miles from Old Mexico, and not very far east of that stretch of country in California known as Imperial Valley. Just across the bridge on the California side is the Yuma Indian reservation.

Everybody seems to be talking about Arizona, and as all of Arizona's towns have been coming in for a great deal of attention, I think it's time that somebody thought of Yuma, the little city that boasts of one-hundred-per-cent sunshine. Besides having a wonderful climate, Yuma is a picturesque little place. Yuma is one of the towns that can claim border romance. I hope that some of the Gang sisters will let me tell them about this section of the Southwest.

YUMA MISS.

Care of The Tree.

El Centro and Imperial.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Recently I was across that little valley that was an unclaimed waste land just twenty years ago. El Centro is the county seat of Imperial County, and one of the biggest of the towns of the Imperial Valley. Just a few miles north of El Centro is Imperial, and to the south and east of El Centro is Calexico, on the international border. Just below Calexico is the Mexican town of Mexicali. Holtville is east of El Centro about ten miles, and to the north of Imperial are Brawley and Calipatria. And here, in this little valley below sea level, there are five hundred and eighty-eight thousand acres under cultivation, and there are still two hundred and fifty thousand acres to be taken up. With the waste lands all about it, here is one of the paradise spots of the Southwest.

Folks, I've traveled thirty thousand miles

in the last year, and if there's any part of this old country you'd like to hear about, just drop a line. I have followed the circus life more or less since I was a boy, and I can tell you what it means to get paid off with a pick handle!

ROY YOUNAN.

740 South Shelby Street, Louisville, Kentucky.



Lone Lookout, Care of The Tree, is in charge of a lookout station because he wore the badge of The Hollow Tree. Are you wearing the little W. S. M. badge of friendship?

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.

Montana range rider.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I see where a range rider and broncho buster is looking for a new stamping ground. Well, I want to say this. As I'm a range rider from western Montana, I can refer said range rider and any one who is looking for a similar stamping ground to that same Montana country. Western Montana has plenty of wild mountain-range country, and plenty of wild horses and cattle. My particular range and stamping ground was the southwest corner of the State.

J. N. GOLLETT.

701 South Third Street, Yakima, Washington.

A fire lookout station.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like to tell you-all that I am now perched in a fire lookout station, a place I've always wanted to be; and, folks, I want to tell you also that it is because of the little Hollow Tree badge that I am here! A young engineer who lives alone in his cabin in the hills saw my badge and recognized a kindred spirit. He was the means of helping me to find this little lookout station up in the hills of old New England. It is a small beginning, but I hope that my experience here will lead to something bigger in the real mountains of the West some day.

My front yard is edged with juniper, scrub oak, and wild apple trees. My nearest neighbors are crows, bluejays, and chickadees. How I love the soundless nights! A monotonous life, you say? Well, just recently a neighboring tower burned down, the lookout barely escaping. Now, folks, you don't exactly call that living a monotonous life, do you? I'd like to exchange notes with lookouts in the West, and with all Gangsters, everywhere, who love the big outdoors. I have a tremendous longing to roam the West some day.

LONE LOOKOUT.

Care of The Tree.

At the foot of the Wasatch Mountains.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Westerners are bringing their cities to the front these days, and I'm thinking that this is a good time to speak of the city that nestles at the foot of the beautiful Wasatch Mountains—Salt Lake City, Utah. We are camped down in a valley just west of the Wasatch Range that traverses the State, north and south. And the highest of these beautiful mountains are snow-capped all the year.

Salt Lake City is one of the places that no one who sees the great West ever misses. Folks, I'd like to take on a few more pals, among the married sisters of the Gang. I'm thirty-two, and would like to hear from some of the folks who are about my age.

MRS. B., SALT LAKE CITY.

Care of The Tree.

Northwestern Texas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a native of the old Choctaw National in southern Oklahoma. I've been all over my native State, and have pretty much covered Arkansas, as well as Texas and Mexico. I'm now in northwestern Texas, in the heart of the ranch country. This is Terry County, and Brownfield is the county seat.

I'm nineteen, folks, and lonesome for some pals from all over the world. I'll exchange letters and snaps.

JOE GOZA.

South Route, Brownfield, Texas.

"How would you-all like to swap yarns with a soldier? I'm twenty-three years old, and have plenty of time on my hands to answer any number of letters, so let's have 'em, folks, from everywhere. I'll also exchange snaps, of which I have a great number taken in various parts of the world." This

Gangster is Kenneth C. Black, Department of Training, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

"Wonder if some of the Gang can give me some information about working conditions in Arizona and Texas. In exchange, I'll be glad to tell a few facts about the Pacific coast, from Seattle to Prince Rupert," says Larry Wilkinson, 997½ North High Street, Columbus, Ohio.

"I'm sure other folks besides myself would like to hear from some of you folks south of the U. S. A. Can't we have more yarns about Mexico, folks? I expect to make Mexico my home in the very near future, and I want some advice from hombres down that way. I'm twenty-one, and hoping to hear from some of Mexico's folks, *muy pronto*." This hombre is Jack A. Albright, 1810 St. Louis Avenue, East St. Louis, Illinois.

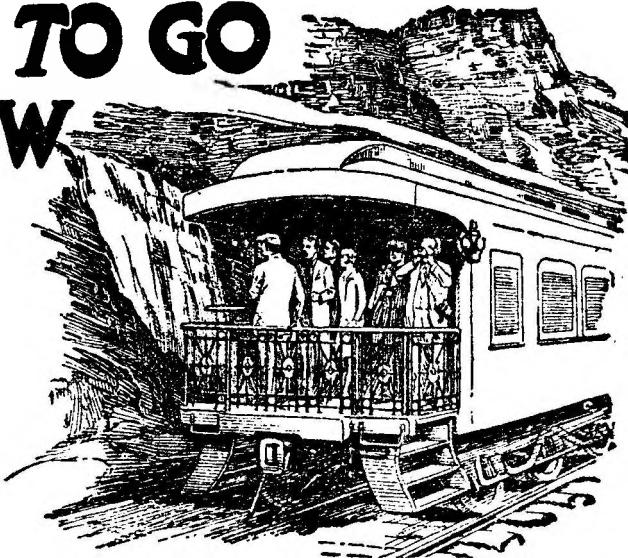
"What are the chances, sheep-herders, for an hombre to get out into the open? I served with the Thirty-second Division during the war, and entered the service when sixteen. I want to get out and follow a life in the open—perhaps as a sheep-herder, perhaps in the big timber. What are the chances that a tenderfoot would have, folks? Let's hear from you outdoor hombres," says William French, Station 27, Box 97, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"Is there room for a lonely Kansas Gangster? I'm not a cowgirl, but I can ride, and I love outdoor sports. Some day I want to make my way West, on horseback," says Miss Billie. Care of The Tree.

"Howe, Nebraska, is a small town in the southeastern part of the State. I live in the country most of the time, and ride horseback a great deal. I would like to hear from some of the sixteen-year-old girls who like the outdoor, country life." Gangsters, this is Helen Clark, of Howe, Nebraska.

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.

WHEN the big spring thaw sets in, a lot of hombres get those restless blues that lead to the open road. One of these vagabonds is Spud W., of Spokane, Washington. He writes: "I'm a Canuck who has just landed here in the Northwest. Since my arrival I've heard such fine reports about the Puget Sound country that I'm planning to hit the trail for that section soon. Can you give me some information about auto routes, Mr. North, as I expect to travel by car?"

We surely can! From Spokane to the coast, Spud has his choice of several routes. He can go almost directly west to the Columbia River, through the Grand Coulee to the famous Wenatchee apple district, thence across the Cascade Mountains, and through Snoqualmie Pass to Seattle and to Tacoma. Or he can branch off at Davenport, just west of Spokane, and cross the Columbia River over the new State

bridge just completed, and at Vantage Ferry join the other highways a short distance west of Ellensburg. Or he can go southwest from Spokane, over fine roads, through the fields of waving grain in the Big Bend Country to Pasco, or south by the Lewiston Spiral Highway and Walla Walla to Pasco, thence northwest through the famous Yakima Valley to join the other highways at Ellensburg. These splendid roads are all a part of the Pacific Northwest Scenic Highways system, and all converge near Ellensburg into one main highway through the Cascades and down the famous Snoqualmie Pass to the marvelous Puget Sound country.

Spud is not alone in his craving for the great outdoors, for Larry M., of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, shares his ambition. "I work here in an office in the city," writes Larry, "and have been accustomed to spend my yearly vacations at some near-by resort. This

...see what this strange book has done for others!

"Worth \$10,000" "Instantaneous Personal Magnetism" has led thousands to success beyond their fondest hopes. For example, J. P., Inglewood, Calif., writes: "I would not part with it for \$10,000 if I could not get another!"	Becomes Manager Not only personal popularity, but financial success comes automatically to those who master Shaftesbury's secrets. L. G., Sacramento, Calif., writes: "I have been advanced to manager of our new store!"	Royal Recognition Shaftesbury's secrets are said to have altered the course of international affairs! Queen Victoria, Gladstone, Cardinal Gibbons and two Presidents of the United States, listened eagerly to this "Man of Mystery."	"Success At Last!" Magnetic Power—as revealed by Shaftesbury—has been the starting point of more than one brilliant career. For example, E. Garrigue of the Metropolitan Opera House, writes: "I would not sell the insight it gave me for \$1,000."
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People suddenly seek out your society and become eager to talk with you. The world becomes anxious to *help* you and see you succeed. This way you actually draw power from others—for even the wealthy and influential are as

clay in the hands of one who has mastered the secrets of Magnetic Power and Personality.

But the most surprising thing is the fact that even your closest friends cannot fathom the change that has come over you. They marvel—utterly baffled—while YOU sit back and smile to yourself at their bewilderment! Just picture yourself in such a situation!

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The first half hour you spend with "Instantaneous Personal Magnetism" will open your eyes to things you have probably never dreamed of. Step by step, it reveals *HOW* to develop Magnetic Personality; *HOW* to use certain Oriental Secrets; *HOW* to read people's feelings by watching their lips; *HOW* to control others by a glance; *HOW* to attract the opposite Sex; *HOW* to use Magnetic Healing—all explained in such a simple way you *unconsciously* start using these secrets at once, without effort or exertion!

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**SEE FOR
YOURSELF
...BUT DON'T
SEND A PENNY**

year, however, I have an extended leave and feel I want something entirely different. Can you recommend some good ranch in the Southwest, Mr. North—preferably New Mexico? I've been reading about that part of the world, and the Southwest Indian country sounds fascinating to me. I wonder if it would be possible for some cowboy from the ranch to take me on a trip where I could see some Indian life."

It seems to us that the San Gabriel Ranch would hit Larry about right. This outfit is situated in the historic settlement of Plaza del Alcade, half-way between Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico. The valley in which the San Gabriel is located stretches for many miles between two ranges of the high Rocky Mountains, the Sangre de Cristo on the east, and the Jemez on the west. The Rio Grande del Norte flows through the center of the valley, and on the west, on a high plateau between the river and the mountains, stretches the famous Pajarito Plateau with cliff dwellings and prehistoric ruins by the thousand.

Trips covering the entire Southwest Indian country are arranged for guests at the San Gabriel. With experienced guides from the ranch, treks are made to the homes of the Navajos, Utes, Apaches, the fascinating Canyon de Chelly and Hopi country, and also to such distant points as the Chaco Canyon, Rainbow Bridge, and the White Mountain Apache country. The most timid tenderfoot would feel safe on these expeditions, for the cowboys in charge are as thoroughly familiar with the Arizona and Rainbow Bridge country as they are with New Mexico. They know where the best camp sites are to be found. They also know the traders and the Indians all over the Southwest.

On such a jaunt, Larry's desire to see redskin life would surely be grati-

fied, for much of the interest of this part of the world centers about the Indian. On a trip between Santa Fe and the Rainbow Bridge in southern Utah, many high spots are touched. The first day out from San Gabriel Ranch the great Puye Ruins of the Pajarito Plateau are reached. The Jemez Mountains are crossed by wonderful trails. If there is time, Larry may stop to fish or camp under the pines, and at the foot of the range, on the other side, the Navajo country begins. A day or two from the mountains brings the journeyers to the mouth of the Chaco Canyon, with its countless ruins, so different from any seen before or after. Here the trail follows closely the famous route of Lieutenant Simpson, and Larry will have a chance to visit the remarkable Pueblo Alto, Pueblo Pintado, the better-known Pueblo Bonito, and countless other ruins.

After leaving Pueblo Bonito, Larry may spend three or four days in a region where only Navajos live, making an occasional stop at a trading post to buy silver and blankets, or to add something to his supplies. Here the desert people live as they did hundreds of years ago, weaving their blankets, making their silver, and tending their sheep, untouched by contact with the white man. From this point on, Larry would be truly in "Indian country," where he might pass weeks and months seeing no white man. Even in the Chuska Mountains, which are three or four days' journey from the Chaco Canyon, he will meet only an occasional trader. Here in the mountains, camp is made again by a little stream of clear water, and one may see the Navajo dances and hear the weird music so strange to the ears of the paleface.

After a stop in the Chuska Range, the journeyer suddenly finds an abrupt and unexpected ending to the trails through the Piñon Forest. Then,

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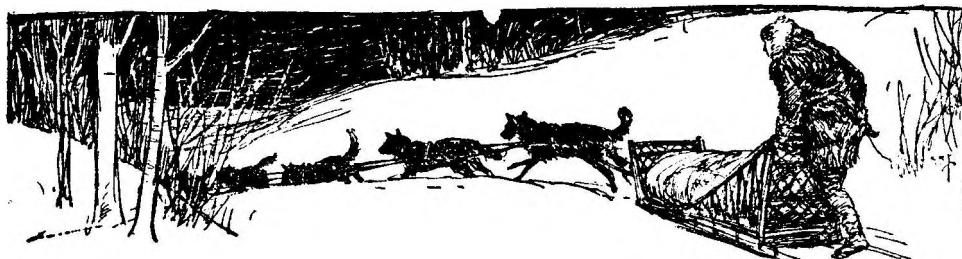
Age

with no warning, Larry will find himself looking straight into the little-known Canyon del Muerto, a thousand feet or more deep, where are some of the most remarkable and picturesque ruins in the Southwest. Here a real mountain path leads down a steep route. When the bottom is reached, a new world opens up—a deep, narrow canyon, walled in with gigantic rocks of every color, and grotesque shapes, monuments, castles and caves without end. In this land of the prehistoric cliff-dwellers one indeed feels the linking of the past with the present. Underneath the wonderful cliff ruins are the homes of the Navajos.

We'll wager that Larry will feel that many days of exploration in this region are too few to discover its won-

ders. At the mouth of Canyon de Chelly is the trading post of Chin Lee, where all parties pause for fresh supplies. Here the traveler has the choice of many routes. He may go north to the Mesa Verde, on to the wonderful Rainbow Bridge, to the Hopi Country and Grand Canyon National Park, or back to the railroad at Gallup. Mighty few trips that I can think of offer as much variety as this one.

There are several other interesting expeditions that Larry could take from the ranch, but there is not space to tell about them here. We are sending Larry the routes, however, and will be glad to forward them to any other hombres who are interested in exploring the Indian country of the Southwest.



THE COSTUME OF AN INDIAN

NOW that there is the agitation which arises with every annual rise in temperature for a suitable and comfortable dress for men, it may be amusing to quote the following description from the "Life and Travels of Colonel James Smith in His Captivity with the Indians." Possibly, reflection may suggest that men are better off at present. Curiously enough, these "new cloths" were presented to the worthy colonel by the women of the tribe.

"They gave me a new ruffled shirt, which I put on, also a pair of leggins done off with ribbons and beads, likewise a pair of mocaksons, and garters dressed with beads, porcupine-quills, and red hair—also a tinsel-laced cappo. They again painted my head and face with various colors, and tied a bunch of red feathers to one of these locks they had left on the crown of my head, which stood up five or six inches. They seated me on a bearskin, and gave me a pipe, tomahawk, and polecat-skin pouch, which had been skinned pocket fashion, and contained tobacco, killegenico, or dry sumach leaves which they mix with their tobacco—also spunk, flint, and steel."

Despite one's sympathy with the gallant colonel in his "garters dressed with beads" and "tinsel-laced cappo," we must commend the young ladies of the tribe in that they did not deprive him of a smoke. For have not a pipe and tobacco consoled man under many trials?

Button Rupture Newest Way [Without Pressure]



I take pleasure in informing you through the use of the New Science System my rupture is entirely relieved. At the time I ordered your System I had been ruptured 20 years.
M. P. Brumbaugh,
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I am writing to let you know that my rupture does not trouble me any more and I think in a little while it will be gone. Your appliance has all you claim for it. Before I got it I could work only part of the time. Now I can do almost anything.
Mrs. C. W. De
Lene, Glens Falls,
N. Y.

SCIENCE now advises discarding cruel steel springs, barbarous leg straps, and other harness that press against the rupture and thus prevent nature from healing it. A new sensible method has been perfected, after thousands of test cases, called Magic Dot—entirely different from any other way. Instead of "pressing" it "seals" rupture, and of course allows users to run, jump, bend and cough in perfect safety.

Breathes Air

With this 1-25th oz. device is a new kind of pad, air-porous and washable. It actually breathes air, and cannot slip off the rupture—a feature, you'll frankly admit, that is lacking in your present appliance. In fact, it is so superior and different that it is praised by physicians as "an entirely new departure." Users report they have forgotten they are wearing it. But don't buy it yet.

See It First

By a special arrangement you can now have it sent to your home without obligation to wear it. Don't send a penny or order it now. Just mail the coupon for full description of "Magic Dot" and details of this unusual offer. Act now for quick relief. Write your name and address on the coupon and mail it today!

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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.

Persons will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

JEANNETTE.—You stayed with me in 1927. Please write to your friend at the same address, or care of this magazine.

EVANS, GEORGE and DUSHANE.—Served in the United States Marines, with Hub L. Hulsey, at Norfolk, Virginia, in 1924. Please write to Bill Hulsey, 707 East Lamar Street, Sherman, Texas.

CHEEK, JAMES MILTON.—When last heard from he was working for the Tidewater Power Co., Wilmington, North Carolina. May be in Norfolk, Virginia. Information appreciated by his old partner, Walter W. Freane, 211 North Eighteenth Street, Billings, Montana.

MCKINNEY, HANCEL.—Twenty-four years old. Auburn hair brown eyes, five feet, eleven inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. A deaf-mute. Information appreciated by his father, T. B. McKinney, Star Route, Augusta, Illinois.

BUYS, FRANK RICHARD.—My father. Formerly of Pender, Nebraska. Last heard from in Lyndon, Montana, and Cheyenne, Wyoming, in 1915. Information appreciated by Mrs. Alice Buys Westcott, Bronson, Iowa.

NICK and JOE.—Every one is worried about you. Dad is not so well. Last heard from in Merced, California. Please write to your sister, Marian, care of this magazine.

PORTER, JESSE C. or R. MCCLURE.—Thirty-two years old. Dark-brown hair, heavy eyebrows and lashes, and ears set close to head. Scar on temple and back of hand near finger. Served in the Forty-second Division, 117th Ammunition Train, in the World War. Last heard from in Luling, Texas, January 18, 1926. Saw your picture in paper last November. Everything O. K. We love you and can't do without you. Please come home or write to your faithful wife and three babies. Lucille, care of this magazine.

DUNCAN, FRED A.—Sixteen years old. Six feet tall, brown eyes and hair, and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Has three tattooed designs on his arms. On upper left arm the name Lucille. Information appreciated by his anxious grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. A. P. Duncan, 2903 Oregon Street, Los Angeles, California.

HOLCOMB, MARSHALL.—Twenty-five years old. Disappeared in fall of 1927. Red hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Five feet, eight inches tall, and weighs one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Has a diagonal scar on left forearm about four inches long. Information appreciated by his brother, G. D. II, care of this magazine.

SILK, JACK W.—Thirty-three years old. Six feet, one inch tall, weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds, dark hair, ruddy complexion. Was at one time a State trooper, and served in the United States navy during the World War. Last heard from in Philadelphia, in 1924. At that time he was planning to go to New York and take a position as a guard in a bank. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. Jack W. Silk, care of Hotel St. James, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

BILLIE.—Please come home. Jeannette needs you. Dorothy Morris, 429 Jackson Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

NOTICE.—Would like to hear from any one who was connected with the Denison, Texas, Band, in 1887 or 1888, in order to prove the width of its teacher, Frank Philip Conroy, so that his widow can procure a pension. Information appreciated by Mrs. Nannie Conway Newton, 631 Shafer Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

BUDD, HARRY W.—Last heard from in Salem, Blood River, and Portland, Oregon, in 1914. Information appreciated by an old friend, I. A. B., care of this magazine.

CARTER, HENRY.—Believed to be in Merryville, Louisiana. Tall, dark complexion, and heavy mustache. Information appreciated by Laures Matthews, care of this magazine.

WILSON, MRS. MARGARET.—Of Little Rock, Arkansas. Please write to your friend, Doctor Marguerite Messmer, care of this magazine.

WOOLEY, MRS. GEORGE.—Of Rosedale, Kansas. Please write to your friend, Doctor Marguerite Messmer, care of this magazine.

HILL, EDMUND LEE.—Last heard from in 1927. Information appreciated by his son, Samuel William Hill, R. F. D. 3, care B. F. Sory, Wilmington, North Carolina.

BARKER, ARLEY.—Last heard from in Stuttgart, Arkansas, in 1913. Remember the good times we had hunting ducks? Please write to your old friend, Clifford Willoughby, 408 Bowman, Rear, East St. Louis, Illinois.

MCKIBBEN, MICKEY.—Please write to your old friend Esther, Mrs. Charles Van Orden, Fort Worth, Texas.

HURT, ALBERT, ETHEL, TOMMIE, LUCILE, and JOHNNIE.—Ages ranging from fourteen to twenty-five. Last heard from in 1917. My mother nursed your mother during her last illness at Gainesville, Texas, in 1915. Information appreciated by Blanche Frances Martin, Box 1947, Coolidge, Arizona.

MARTIN, HATTIE and MYRTLE.—Believed to be married. Last heard from in Gainesville, Texas, nine or ten years ago. Please write to your half sister, Blanche Frances Martin, Box 1947, Coolidge, Arizona.

THOMAS, MRS. ALBERT, nee OPHELIA MARTIN.—Last heard from in Johnstown, Colorado, ten years ago. Please write to your half sister, Blanche Frances Martin, Box 1947, Coolidge, Arizona.

BALTIMORE.—Please write to F. Penashaw Farm, Narberth, Pennsylvania.

NOTICE.—Would appreciate information concerning a sister of Henry Griffiths, Christian name unknown, who was married, August 12, 1830, at Bosley, in County of Salop, Shropshire, England. Address Mrs. Douds, 1 Pringle's Buildings, Choppington, Northumberland, England.

DEVOTO, CATHERINE.—Last known address was 600 State Street, LaPorte, Indiana. Please write to Chester Anderson, Marine Barracks, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

CAMPBELL, NEIL JOSEPH.—A plumber. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in December, 1926. Red hair, blue eyes, five feet, eight inches tall. Information appreciated by H. R. C., care of this magazine.

HAZELWOOD, JAMES A.—Sixty years old. Was a clerk in Wilson's store, in Giltner, Nebraska, in 1906. Had one son, Chester, and two daughters. Information appreciated by John Meyers, Box 344, Tribune, Kansas.

THORP, R. E.—We left San Francisco, California, in June. My letters to you were returned. Please write to Sis, care of Winston Camp, Rockport, Washington.

KIRKPATRICK, RALPH HARRISON.—Twenty-four years old. Was discharged from the army in April, 1928. His mother is very ill. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. R. B. Peed, care of Peed's Grading Camp, Route 1, St. Charles, Illinois.

C. A. L.—There are letters waiting at this office for you. Please write to M. A. B., care of this magazine.

ELMO.—Still love you. Am worried. Please come back or write to Marion, care of this magazine.

BROWN, JOHN JAMES OLIVER.—Born at Pittsburg, Kansas, in 1883. Father's name was Charles Scynour Brown. Moved to Texas. Please write to C. W. Brown, Box 382, Black Diamond, Washington.

SCOTT, HUBERT W.—Brown hair, brown eyes, and scar on left cheek. Last heard from three years ago in Oakland, California. Information appreciated by W. Scott Route 3, Linwood, North Carolina.

SELBY, HENRY.—Have news to your advantage. Please write to Roy A. Siple, Hamilton, Michigan.

MYERS, WILLIAM.—Last known address was, in 1918, 500 Capital Street, Charlestown, West Virginia. Last heard from in Columbus, Ohio, in 1919. A land agent. Information appreciated by N. E. Henderson, Box 66, Cedar Grove, West Virginia.

KRAPIL, JOSEPH.—I still love you and always will, no matter what has happened. Everything has gone wrong since you left. Please write to your wife. Patches, care of this magazine.

KYLE, WILLIAM.—Would like to hear from you soon. Everything O. K. Please write to Grace, care of this magazine.

WIN \$3,500.00!

Here's news for puzzle fans: C. W. Francis, Matilda Hikens, A. F. Holt, Miss Leola Markus, Alvin Smith won from \$1,400.00 to \$3,500.00 each in some of our last puzzles. Over 800 cash prizes awarded within a year. In Oct. 1928 alone we paid over \$11,000.00 in prizes and in the next few months will award between 300 and 400 cash prizes in our puzzles. Here's a new puzzle for you.

Find the "Different" Picture

Here are twelve pictures of Charlie Chaplin, the world famous United Artists star. No, they're not all alike, even though they look alike. Eleven of them are exactly alike. But one and only one is different from all the others. That's the real Charlie Chaplin. Can you find him? The difference may be in the hat, shirt or tie.

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CLARK, JAMES.—Twenty-one years old. Six feet, three inches tall. Last heard from in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, three years ago. My letters returned. Please write to your mother, care of this magazine.

SERGEANTS WELLS and DIXON, JOHN VITALIE, SHORTY FININ, CECIL GREEN, HAGERSTOWN BOUND.—Please write to an old buddy, Private, care of this magazine.

MULES, TREVOR.—Late of Penarth, Wales. Believed to be in Baltimore, Maryland, or Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please write to your buddy, Thomas W. Patterson, Box 1017, 25 South Street, New York City.

HELDUND, HJALMAR.—Born February 6, 1881, at Stockholm, Sweden. Placed in an orphanage there and later adopted by a family named Johnson, Karlskrona, Sweden. Mother's name was Emma. Left Sweden for America in 1903. Information appreciated by his sister, Hulda Heldund, care of this magazine.

G. G.—Are you lonesome? I am, too. Worried. Please write to N. 22 North Thirty-fourth Street, San Jose, California.

MAX and CHUM.—We are still at the old stand, waiting for news. F., Box 566, Deer Lake, Montana.

AKINS, ELLIS.—Formerly of Kansas and Indiana. Moved to Foss, Oklahoma. Please write to C. W. Brown, Box 382, Black Diamond, Washington.

BROWN, HOMER.—Last heard from in Chetopa, Kansas. Please write to C. W. Brown, Box 382, Black Diamond, Washington.

RIGLEY, KATHERINE.—Last known address was 810 East Ninth Street, Kansas City, Missouri. Please write to Short Cut, care of Mrs. L. W. Boost, 119 West Third Street, Jamestown, New York.

CLARK, HARRY.—About forty-five years old. Six feet tall, light hair, and blue eyes. Lived in Raymondsburg, Texas, in 1927. My last letter to Raymondsburg was forwarded to Corpus Christi, and then returned to me. He is my father's younger brother, and I would like to get in touch with him immediately. Please write to Ruth Clark, Box 161, Hot Springs, South Dakota.

SMITH, JAMES.—I have work for you at your old trade. Must see you at once. Please write to Gerald McBride, Cyril, Oklahoma.

BONDARUK, FRED.—Dark complexion and about five feet, ten inches tall. Has a scar on the left thumb. Left home November 5th, 1923. Last heard from somewhere out West, in 1925. Information appreciated by his sisters, Helen, Mary, and Jennie, care of this magazine.

DUVAL, CLARENCE S.—Six feet tall, gray eyes, and dark hair. Formerly of Newport, Vermont. Information appreciated by his daughter, Myrtle Duval, 62 Coventry Street, Newport, Vermont.

DALE, CHARLES.—Kane tried very hard to locate you. Information appreciated by Dane Sanderson, Box 31, Gooding, Idaho.

AHSLEY, JAMES.—Please write to your mother, Mattie Bryan, care of J. W. Simmons, Box 361, Montpelier, Idaho.

SHIRLEY, SIGMA.—Last heard from in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and in Rapdon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Please write to S. S. M., care of this magazine.

WOOLBURGH, MRS. MARY.—Last heard from in New York City, in 1926. Information appreciated by her son, Harry Woodburgh, No. 1117, Box R, Napancoc, New York.

DONOHO, HOMER C.—Eighteen years old. Dark hair and gray eyes. A small scar on each temple. Left home in May, 1926. Last heard from near Kevil, Kentucky. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. E. W. Donoho, Route 3, Mayfield, Kentucky.

NEWMAN, RICHARD H.—Born in London, England. Was a sailor when he was younger. Has one brother, Benjamin, in Australia, and two sisters. Another brother, John, came with him to the United States. They worked in New York City and in Buffalo, New York. Information appreciated by Mrs. Raymond Miller, Box 145, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin.

SOUTHWORTH, MRS. J. E.—About five feet, three inches tall. Brown curly hair and gray eyes. Has a mole on left cheek. A nurse. Last heard from at Abilene, Texas, in November, 1926. Information appreciated by her daughter, Alta, now Mrs. Joe Matthews, Star Route, Arnott, Oklahoma.

PIPPIN, WHITE.—Your father and your son, Nobel, are dead. Please write to Walter, care of this magazine.

FLOWERS, WILLIAM.—Please write to Ramona Reynolds, Box 232, Englewood, Colorado.

MOLSON, R. A.—Please write to your bunk mate of P. V., care of this magazine.

MILLER, JOHN C.—Last heard from in Cleveland, Ohio, fifteen years ago. Information appreciated by his friend, Ruby Williams, care of this magazine.

WILSON, TEX.—Do you remember the boy who was with you when you were with the Lu-Clar Vaudeville Show, in Montana? Please write at once to Edward R. Gun, 300 South Noland Street, Independence, Missouri.

REED, HEYDEN.—I need you. Very important. Please come home. For address write to C. H., care of this magazine.

BREWER, RUFUS.—Fifty years old. Light, curly hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Houston, Texas. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Susie Deats, 1308 Avenue M, Cisco, Texas.

BUSH, MRS. LOUIS, or MRS. JOHN MCGOWAN.—Please write to your son, R. S. McG., 1810 West Superior Street, Chicago, Illinois.

LADE, JENNIE and EMERY.—Last heard from at Debach, Illinois. Please write to your brother, Charlie, care of this magazine.

PHIPPS, JOE MORRIS.—Twenty-eight years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, dark hair and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and seventy-five pounds. When last heard from, in March, 1924, he was leaving Akron, Ohio, for Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Victor Keene, 493 Alexander Street, Akron, Ohio.

JACKSON, R.—Last heard from in Pueblo, Colorado, in May, 1928. Information appreciated by his mother, care of this magazine.

HUDSON, DALTON.—Twenty-six years old. Six feet, four inches tall, black hair and eyes, dark complexion, and weighs about one hundred and eighty-five pounds. Last heard from in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1924. Information appreciated by Klitty, care of this magazine.

H. V. L.—No one wishes you harm. G. E. R. well and is in third grade. Misses you. Dad and I are not very well. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

MILTON.—Your silence is breaking mother's heart. Please write to your sister, Laura E. Bell, care of this magazine.

WEBB, MRS. WILLIAM.—Formerly of Kenny, Illinois. Last known address was 1013 North Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois. Please write to your friend, Gerty E. Thompson, 2423 Eleventh Street, Rock Island, Illinois.

BRUNQUIST, EDWARD.—Born in Kewanee, Illinois, nearly sixty years ago. Last heard from in Alaska, ten years ago. Please write to your brother, Merle E. Thompson, 2423 Eleventh Street, Rock Island, Illinois.

BAUGHMAN, CLARETTE ELIZABETH.—Last heard from in Blair of South Omaha, Nebraska. Was at her sister's funeral, in Plankinton, South Dakota, in 1905. Information appreciated by her niece, Mrs. Pauline Parsons Stephenson, Route A, Box 113, Cupertino, California.

HANSON, PETE and FLORENCE.—Pete was last heard from in Kimball, South Dakota, in 1911. Florence's maiden name was Brayton. Please write to your old friend, Mrs. Pauline Parsons Stephenson, Route A, Box 113, Cupertino, California.

CROSBY, WILLIS.—Frank has been very sick. Mother is worrying because she has not heard from you for over a year. Please write to Rose Davis, Little Marsh, Tloga County, Pennsylvania.

DAVIS, MRS. O. V.—Last heard from in Houston, Texas, in 1926. Information appreciated by her brother, L. F. Hunt, Box 878, DeRidder, Louisiana.

HENRY, NELLIE.—Five feet, six inches tall, dark hair and eyes. Formerly of Sioux City, Iowa. Last heard from in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1923. Information appreciated by Lorin Jones, 1714 East Heroy Avenue, Spokane, Washington.

PARKER, ERNEST and FRANCES.—At one time ran a cafe in Boise, Idaho, and later one in Kansas City, Missouri. Last heard from in 1919, when they were running a delicatessen in Utah. Have one daughter, Frances, about seventeen years old. Information appreciated by an old friend, Paul G. Stevens, Box 128, Centerville, Washington.

MEREDITH, HAL and MARTHA.—Hal plays a Hawaiian guitar. Is tall and slender. Martha is of average height and blond. They have one daughter, about seven years old. Last seen in Portland, Oregon, in 1925. Information appreciated by an old friend, Steve, P. G. Stevens, Box 128, Centerville, Washington.

BLAZIER, CLYDE R.—Thirty-one years old, blue eyes and light hair. Was in the navy during the World War. Last heard from in New York City, working as a salesman. Last known address was, in 1926, Hotel Colonial, 814 Columbus Avenue, New York City. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Annie Blazier, McRae, Arkansas.

SHOWERS, FANNIE.—Do you remember the jockey who came to the Myrtle Point Fair in 1920? Please write to Harry Mitchell, care of this magazine.

HALEY, CHARLEY.—Last heard from in Nashville, Tennessee. Information appreciated by his niece, Elsie Haley, care of this magazine.

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34x4 1/2	3.50	1.45
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33x5	3.65	1.75
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MISSING DEPARTMENT

MOORE, R. G.—Of Millersburg, Iowa. Please write to H. J. Her, Headquarters Company, Twenty-seventh Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

PEIRCE, or PEIRSON, GOLDIE MAE.—Twenty-seven years old, five feet, nine inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Formerly of Coon Rapids, Iowa. Last seen in Omaha, Nebraska, November, 1922. Information appreciated by Antoinette Christina Schnebeyer, Eldova, Iowa.

JUSTICE, J. F.—Forty years old. Six feet, one inch tall, light hair, and gray eyes. Joined the army at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 1908. Last heard from at Fort Russell, Wyoming, in 1916. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ollie Deppenbeck, nee Justice, Peno, Oklahoma.

HALL, W. H.—Thirty years old. Five feet, six inches tall, blond, and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. A bronc-maker. Last heard from in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1926. Information appreciated by Mrs. R. D. Alexander, 2038 Pleasant Avenue, Birmingham, Alabama.

COOK, FLOYD.—If you still remember your little friend of 1922, please write to E. H., care of this magazine.

DARLING, EDGAR.—About fifty-five years old. Blond, blue eyes, and light complexion. Last heard from twenty-one years ago. Wife's name was Edith. They had several children; one, Alton, was eight years old then. Important news. Please write to B. H., care of this magazine.

COURSEY, EDDIE.—Information appreciated by his uncle, I. E. Farris, Christoval, Texas.

KING, JOSEPH.—Have found out that what I wrote you was planned by others to part us. Everything is fixed so that you can be happy. Please come home or write to your wife, Lillian, care of this magazine.

NEPTUNE, QUINCY and ELZIE.—Last heard from in Willshire, Ohio, twenty-five years ago. Have bad news for you. Please write to J. E. Winans, care of Hackett's Store, Fifteenth and Brighton Avenues, Kansas City, Missouri.

ELSTON, JIM and ROSE.—Last heard from in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1926. Have bad news for you. Information appreciated by J. E. Winans, care of Hackett's Store, Fifteenth and Brighton Avenues, Kansas City, Missouri.

REDMAN, JOHN.—Last heard from in Panhandle, Texas. Information appreciated by J. M. R., care of this magazine.

HYDE, ED.—Last heard from in Denison, Texas. Information appreciated by M. Brisco, Route 1, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

MCMULLEN, EDWARD JAMES.—Forty-six years old. Last heard from, twenty years ago, at 2519 Brown Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Gertrude E. McFarland, R. D. 1, Narvon, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

BENJ.—I need you now. Please write to your mother, care of this magazine.

JONES, LULA.—Last seen in Altoona, Alabama, in 1914. Please write to your Aunt Lizzie, care of this magazine.

BISHOP, JAMES.—Born in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania. Was in Battery K, at Fort Hamilton, New York, in 1892. Information appreciated by Charles H. Bishop, Hospital, French Camp, California.

STEPHENSON, PAT J.—Last known address was, in August, 1928, Hotel Clyde, Portland, Oregon. Information appreciated by Pat, care of this magazine.

LINNABARY, LAFE.—Forty-six years old. Last heard from in Taft, California. A cook. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Esther Feldmann, 635 Locust Street, Terre Haute, Indiana.

STONER, or TURNER, JIM.—An auto mechanic. Lived about forty miles from St. Joe, Missouri, in 1919. Information appreciated by Regret, care of this magazine.

OWEN, JOHN RALPH.—Sixteen years old. Last heard from in Tennessee. Information appreciated by his brother, Omar M. Owen, 723 Walnut Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

BENNETT, MARGUERITE CAMP.—Left her husband, Floyd Bennett, about thirty years ago. Information appreciated by her grandson, Charles J. Bennett, 203 Arlington Street, Big Spring, Texas.

LANE, CARL IRVING.—Twenty years old. Last heard from in East Swanzee, New Hampshire, in 1916. His father, Carl S. Lane, died in 1914. Carl went to his grandmothers. He had two brothers, Herbert and Allan, and a sister, Frances. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. George Jacquin, 110 Noble Avenue, East Syracuse, New York.

LANE, HERBERT.—Last seen at the Onondaga Orphans' Home in Syracuse, New York. Was adopted from there in 1916 or 1917. Information appreciated by Mrs. George Jacquin, 110 Noble Avenue, East Syracuse, New York.

THOMAS, FOSTER.—Left England fifty years ago. Information appreciated by his sister, Carolina's daughter, G. Booth, care of W. G. Dean, Port Washington, Long Island, New York.

HEATH, ALDERBERT.—Thirty-six years old. Red hair and blue eyes. Lived at Port Huron, Michigan, when he was about seven years old. Information appreciated by Aunt, care of this magazine.

DZIKIY, JOHN, or JOHN D. JAMES.—Please come home or write to your sister Anna, Hillside Avenue, Pitcairn, Pennsylvania.

MURPHY, FRANK, JAMES, OVIE and ADELL.—Last heard from in an orphan home in Albany, Texas. Information appreciated by their father, J. A. Murphy, Box 1094, Bay City, Texas.

SIMMONS, MRS. O. E., formerly O. E. MILLS, and R. A. SIMMONS.—Please write to Bud S., care of this magazine.

GRAY, VIRGIL.—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall, blond hair, and weighs about one hundred and thirty pounds. Formerly of Springfield, Missouri. Last seen in Sterling, Illinois, in 1928. Information appreciated by John A. Cleverstone, 430 Twelfth Avenue, Clinton, Iowa.

MCCLENDON, ROBERT.—Son of Maria Tolliver of Hollywood, Alabama. The father of Eugene, Carrie, and Robbie Lee McClendon. Last heard of in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Information appreciated by Eugene McClendon, 1900 Jackson Avenue, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

WEBB, ALBERTA McCLENDON.—My mother. Last heard from in Scott, Arkansas. Information appreciated by Eugene McClendon, 1900 Jackson Avenue, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

STEVENS, STEVE.—When last heard from, in September, 1928, was working for the Boot Ranch, in Lakeview, Oregon. Information appreciated by Dutch, care of this magazine.

LOUBERT, HENRY.—Twenty-four years old. Six feet tall, light hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Last heard from in August, 1928, in Sault Ste. Marie. Everything is forgotten. I am very worried. Please write to your mother, Mrs. Harold Rittenhouse, Box 419, Iron Mountain, Michigan.

GEYER, ELIZABETH E.—Thirty-seven years old. Dark hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Camp Baldy, California. Information appreciated by her sister, Mrs. Florence Prother, 109 Cincinnati Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

CHENOT, JOSEPH G.—We were in the same outfit in the Panama Canal Zone, from 1923 to 1926. Please write to A. J. Penz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

KOCH, A. W.—Fifty-five years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, brown eyes and hair. Last seen in Norphlet, Arkansas, working in the oil fields. Please write to A. J. Penz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

GARLICK, CLYDE W.—Please write at once to your brother, Wilfred, care of this magazine.

DALRYMPLE, JIM.—Please write to Leonard J. Le Drew, Room 24, U. S. S. "Seminole," Pier 17, Stapleton, Staten Island, New York.

SMITH, OAKLEY T.—Thirty-three years old. Formerly of Smith's Cove, Digby County, Nova Scotia, Canada. Served in 1918 Infantry, from Waltham, Massachusetts, during the war. Worked in the State Hospital, Waverly, Massachusetts, from November, 1926, to April, 1927. Believed to be in British Columbia. Information appreciated by an old friend, E. J. M., care of this magazine.

PRICE, CLIFFORD.—Thirty-nine years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, dark hair, hazel eyes, and fair complexion. Weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Last heard from in Westwood, California, in 1926. Information appreciated by Mrs. Emma Price, Box 75, Copperopolis, California.

NOTICE.—On October 16, 1889, a baby girl was born, probably in Chicago, Illinois. We believe her name was Allen. When she was three weeks old she was placed in an orphan asylum in the country, and was later adopted from there by a family named Gathercoal, at Kingston, Illinois. Any information concerning the parents of the child will be appreciated by X. Y. X., care of this magazine.

BROOKS, ROBERT.—Forty-three years old, slender, dark hair and eyes. The boy needs you. Please write to Mrs. Carrie Brooks, care of this magazine.

STEPHENS, STEVE.—Last heard from in Lakeview, Oregon. Please write to Tom Kinney, Sebastopol, California.

PATTERSON, CLAUDE O.—A former engineer on the Union Pacific Railway. Left Nampa, Idaho, for Portland, Oregon, in July, 1924. Information appreciated by his son, Joe Patterson, Box 117, Motor Route B, Bend, Oregon.

POPE, B. M., or BARNEY FOLK.—Fifty-nine years old. Light hair and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Last heard from, several years ago, in Yakima, Washington, in the lumber business. Have good news for him. Please write to Mrs. Helen F. Harper, 623 North Twelfth Street, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

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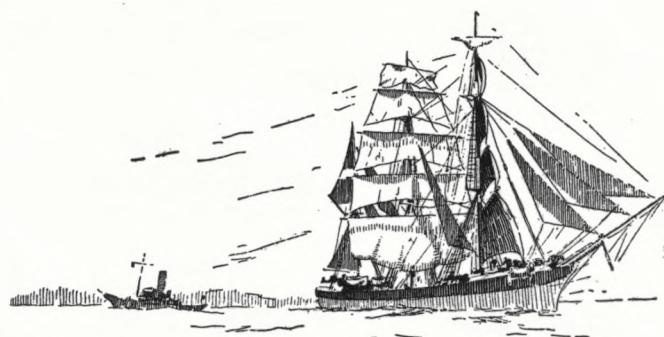
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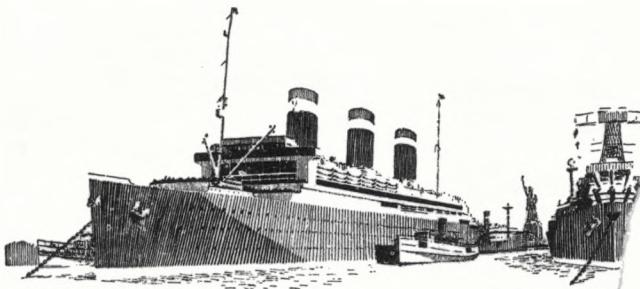
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