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May 5, 1928

# Western Story

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## Magazine

**Longhorn Law**  
By  
**WALT COBURN**

Howard E. Morgan  
Harrison Conrard  
Ray Humphreys  
George Owen  
Baxter







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13



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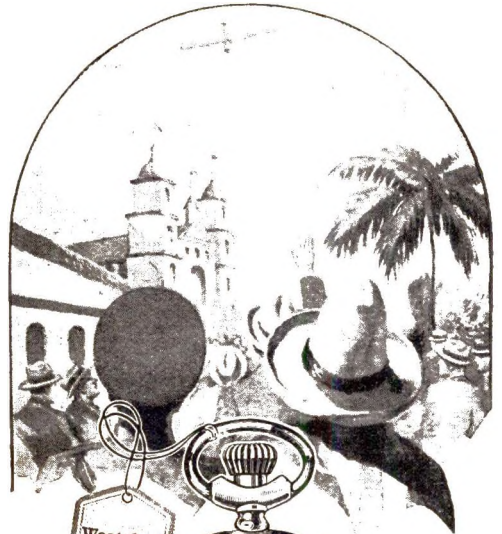
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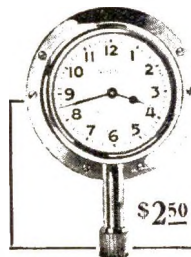
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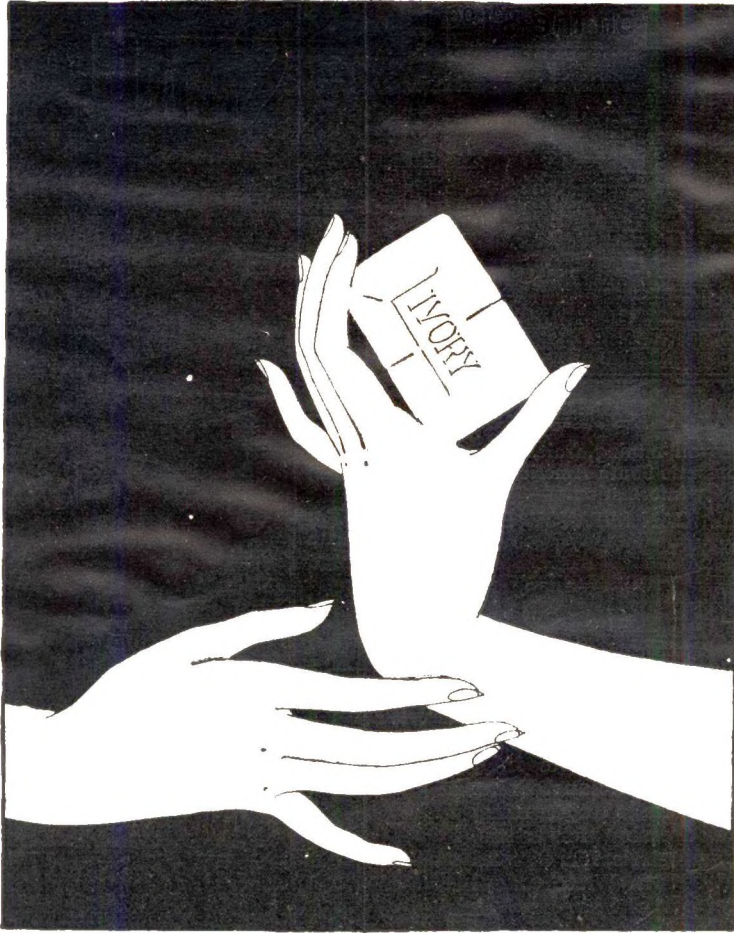
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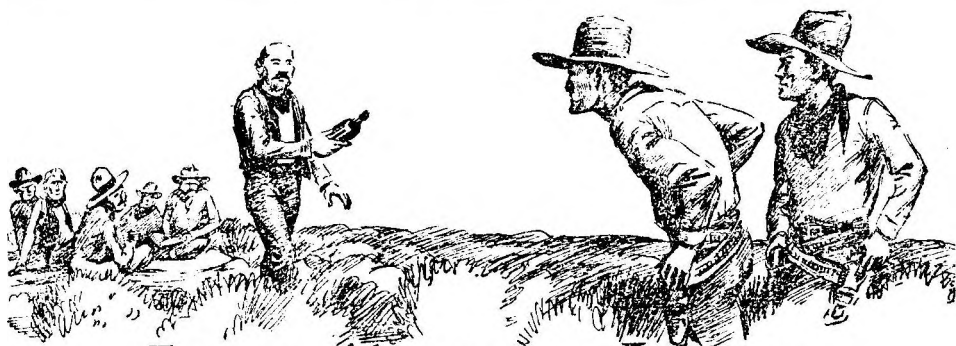
## Magazine

E V E R Y W E E K

Vol. LXXVII

MAY 5, 1928

No. 6



## Longhorn Law

By *Walt Coburn*

*Author of "Chico," etc.*

### CHAPTER I.

#### MEN OF THE PECOS.



WENTY men, ranging in age from beardless boys to one old fellow whose white whiskers came almost to his breastbone, sat about a camp fire. The camp fire was at a certain spot on the north bank of the Pecos in Texas. Each man there wore at least one six-shooter. Some had rifles. The old man sat with a sawed-off shotgun across his lap. It must have been almost midnight. It was the autumn of 1876.

Not more than half a day's ride from the camp fire, mile after mile of brand-new barbed fence lay in a tangled heap. Grain and hay fields lay trampled by thundering hoofs into heartbreaking

ruin. Here and there a home had been burned to the ground. A few new graves had been dug and loved ones buried in them.

So a meeting had been arranged between the men who owned the ruins of those places and certain cowboys who represented the big cow outfits suspected of cutting those fences. They had met here at a neutral ground to talk over matters and to arrange, if possible, some amicable sort of agreement between the cattle baron and the small rancher. Something had to be done. And after almost ten hours, the solution was not in sight.

For in the memory of the grim-lipped nesters was stamped the indelible picture of recent horror. Their clothes bore marks of fresh soil from the digging of new graves. This camp fire

served but to remind them of burning barns and houses and haystacks.

Brad Claiborne, the youngest of the Claiborne clan, was fifteen. He had not slept the night before. His blue eyes, under his uncut tow-colored hair, were red from weariness and grief, but he tried not to doze as he kept his eyes on his grandpap, he of the long white beard. Now and then his boy's glance dwelt on the cowmen. They were bearded, armed, spurred, cold-eyed men, whose breath smelled strongly of corn whisky—hard men, who drew good pay from their outfit, and who were pledged to die fighting, if need be, to earn that pay. Old Claiborne hated them with that silent, bitter hatred learned a few years before when he fought their breed after the Civil War. For Claiborne had belonged to the jayhawkers and these men were remnants of Quantrell's guerrillas.

Brad's eyelids were heavy. His bones and muscles ached. The voices of the men seemed muddled, like the lazy drone of bees. The boy's head sank lower, his eyes blurring with a film of exhaustion. He and grandpap had buried the boy's father and older brother that morning. The women had pulled out in the wagon for town, bound for the railroad and the safety of their kinsfolk's home in Missouri. Brad and his grandpap were the only Claibornes left. The boy's head nodded sleepily, then jerked erect, a shamed sort of grin on his tired mouth. It was old Claiborne's voice, brittle with hate, that jerked the boy into wakefulness.

"We ain't a-gittin' nowheres, here. Ner we won't, though we set here till doomsday. I knowed it afore I rid here. I'm old, overripe fer a quiet grave, if there's a hand left tuh bury me, like I buried my boy this mornin'. I ain't got long tuh live. If there's a man from the Cross Triangle bound fer heaven by some mistake, I'll pick the other place fer a last deal. I rid here

fer tuh kill a man. I'm a-killin' him now!"

The twin barrels of the sawed-off gun belched. Two loads of slugs ripped through the chest and abdomen of the Cross Triangle boss. Then, in the space of a second, even as the Cross Triangle man sagged forward, his pipe still in his teeth, that circle of men became a rim of gunfire, a rim of death. Guns belched crimson. Heavy slugs thudded into flesh at point-blank range. There was a moan, a gritted word, a death grin. Men, living and smoking and talking but a minute ago, now lay in twisted heaps, their dead hands gripping guns. A circle of death rimmed the firelight that cast a red glow toward a star-filled sky.

Brad saw his grandpap go down, his white beard splashed with crimson where a ball had drilled his jaws. A lanky cow-puncher was thumbing the hammer of a long-barreled Colt. Brad's bullet caught the man square above the bridge of his hook nose and he dropped sidewise, his knees buckling. Old Claiborne had got to his knees and, holding a six-shooter in his bony hands, tried to shoot at a second Cross Triangle man. But it was Brad's shot that dropped the cow outfit's killer. The old whitebeard sagged lower, crimson staining his whiskers. Brad's eyes met those of his grandfather in a brief farewell. The old fellow smiled.

"Yuh got two on 'em, Braddie," he croaked, then toppled over on his face. A dying man, one of the nesters, pitched into Brad. The boy lost his balance, falling backward from the rim of light out of the circle of death. Instinct, rather than fear, made the boy roll over and over into the brush. His left shoulder burned as if it had been cut open by a dull knife and vinegar poured into the place. His eyes, slitted under the thatch of corn-colored hair, saw grotesque shadows of men against the background of the firelight. Only two



or three guns were roaring now. Then he saw two men face one another across the fire, two men who stood on their feet on ground covered everywhere with dead and dying men.

One of these was a rawboned giant in hickory shirt and nutbrown jeans, a nester. He was bent forward from the waist, a spitting gun in his huge, hairy hand.

The man who faced him, swaying a little as he stood there, was a beardless youth in wide-brimmed hat and chaps, with a handsome, reckless face, a little white beneath the weather stain, a black-haired, black-eyed youth who grinned as he shot from the hip, using two guns.

Brad, fascinated, watched. He saw the lanky nester sink slowly in his tracks, then suddenly crumple. He saw a red line across the cowboy's cheek widen and grow brighter.

The young cowboy stood there, the only living man among those dead and dying forms, his white, long-fingered hands reloading his guns, the smile gone from his lips.

Brad's gun was raised slowly, steadily. From where he crouched, at a distance of thirty feet, he could kill the cowboy with ease. His thumb was pressing the hammer back.

Then the young cowboy sheathed his guns and took off his hat. His face was lifted, the black eyes tilted toward the stars.

"Heaven have pity on me, and on these others," he cried. "Heaven have pity on me, the living, have mercy on these, the dead. Amen." Turning abruptly, he was gone.

Brad, still numb with awe and wonder at the young cowboy's white-faced fervor and the spell of his rich, soft-toned voice, lowered the hammer of his gun. He heard the thud of a horse leaving the place. Then, sick from pain and exhaustion and the grisly sight lit by the glow of the dying fire, he got his horse and rode away. As he went, he

bound the flesh wound in his shoulder with strips torn from his undershirt.

When he had ridden for about an hour, Brad remembered his grandpap back there at the fire, but to linger in that territory meant death at the hands of the cowboys. Some one would bury his grandpap, along with the others. No use riskin' a man's life carin' fer a dead man. Grandpap'd understand.

So Brad Claiborne rode on. Into a crimson sunrise, he rode, into a new life, bound for a new range somewhere beyond the Texas border—New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, wherever fate might send him.

That dark-haired boy in chaps and buckskin who had prayed with his face to the stars was a cowboy, leading the gay, reckless, carefree life that now beckoned Brad Claiborne. He longed to follow the long trail that led northward. His blood pulsed faster when he envisioned the great herds of longhorns headed up the Chisholm Trail. Brad had followed his last plow furrow. There was enough gold in his money belt to purchase a pair of boots and a decent hat. He forgot the pain of his wound as he dreamed. No home ties held him. He was the last man of the Claibornes. He would not cramp his life within the four sides of a nester fence. He would be a cowboy—a cowboy such as that black-haired youth who had reloaded his guns by the fire, then sent up a prayer for mercy on the dead men.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE CHISHOLM TRAIL.

FIVE years later Brad Claiborne rode the point of a trail herd, headed for Montana. There was little about this tall, well-built fellow to remind one of Brad Claiborne, the boy of fifteen. Only the texture of the corn-colored hair and the color of the eyes were unchanged.

Tanned, smooth-shaved, straight-featured, he rode with easy grace. His hat was tilted back from his face. His spurs tinkled merrily. He sang some old trail song as he lazed in the saddle. He had followed the call of his dreams and was now a cowboy. That he rode up on the point was indication that he was a top hand at the work. This was his fourth trip up the trail from Texas to Montana, and he told himself that it would be his last.

On the other point rode the trail boss, a grizzled veteran, careless about such matters as shaving and clean clothes. He looked like a tramp on horseback, with his battered hat, his buttonless shirt, his patched chaps and run-over boots. But "Old Cedar," as he was called, was one of the best and shrewdest trail bosses in the business, and from his vast wisdom of cattle and horses and men, he gave freely to Brad Claiborne, whom he called "Tow Head."

For it was Old Cedar who had, five years ago, doctored the boy's shoulder and put him on as horse wrangler. Brad hadn't whimpered during that painful process of range-land surgery. He hadn't whined or weakened or snivelled. And Old Cedar was of the school that admires what he called "guts." He had taken the boy under his wing and made of him a cowhand. He abused Brad, he favored him, he cussed him, and he praised him. And, because he knew the boy well, because he knew the restless blood of cowboys, he read certain signs that told him Brad was becoming restless after five years of trail work and round-ups, five winters and summers of northers and blistering heat, five years of education in the cow work, five years of hard riding and danger.

"Feet's a-gittin' itchy, ain't they, Tow Head?" Old Cedar asked that night, as they camped on the south bank of the Arkansas River.

"Some." Brad grinned. He had an

easy grin that began at his mouth and finished at his eyes that then became cracks of sparkling blue light. Brad was never much to talk, even to Old Cedar.

"Goin' up the trail has got to be too tame, eh, boy?"

"Dunno, Cedar. A man had orter see somethin' afore he settles down."

"Hum! Yo're a wart hog fer takin' punishment, I'll say that. Bin acrost country that men twict yore age never seen. Fit Injuns and outlaws. You killed one man as I know of, and I never counted the Injuns. Most boys yore age has never bin beyond the Staked Plains. And you call this settled down! Why don't yuh join up with the James boys and Cole Younger?"

"Because," said Brad solemnly, "they're Quantrell men and my folks was jayhawkers. We fit 'em, Cedar, until I'm all that's left uh the Claibornes."

"Well," grunted Old Cedar, "Jayhawkers er guerrillas, it's all the same. Both right, both wrong. Nothin' fer a bald-faced boy tuh mix into."

He looked curiously at Brad. The boy had never told him about that fight on the bank of the Pecos, there on the border of the Staked Plains. Cedar had never asked, for there was still trouble down there. Homes were burned, men killed, fences cut. Some of the small ranchers had quit their homes and now preyed on the trail herds that traveled the Goodnight and Chisholm Trails. Whole herds were stolen, the cowboys killed, the beef sold. For this was that troubled period following the Civil War when the Southwest was governed pretty much by six-shooter law, when Jesse James and his brother, Frank, roamed the country, robbing, killing, avenging real or imagined wrongs. This was the day when Dodge City was the toughest town of its size in America.

"I reckon," said Cedar, smiling



faintly, "you didn't know I once rid alongside Quantrell? I was a guerrilla, Tow Head. I become one when the jawhawkers burned me out, killed my children, and mistreated my wife. She killed herse'f, thinkin' they'd come back. She was dead when I got home. Cole Younger was with me, fer I'd fetched him along tuh eat supper."

Old Cedar's face looked grim and terrible, there in the flickering firelight.

"Me'n Cole picked up the sign uh five men. I knowed who done it, without readin' their tracks. I've hunted 'em down, one by one, till I hung three with my own hands. Hung 'em, by grab! And if I kin find them other two, they'll hang at the end uh my saddle rope. Though Frank er Jesse er the Younger boys'd do the job fer me, willin', if I'd give 'em the say-so." He crammed some natural leaf into his black pipe, and with calloused thumb and forefinger picked a hot coal from the fire and dropped it into the black bowl of the pipe. His eyes looked red in the firelight.

"Thode' Jackson and his brother 'Tug.'" Cedar named them in a low, vibrant voice. "Thode's the big 'un with one ear bit off. Tug's short and heavy set, with a busted nose, and the little fingers on each hand is webbed, like a duck's foot. They travel together. Scairt, I reckon, tuh split up. They're both outlawed, low-down, an' sneakin'; both dead shots."

"Supposin' they get you, Cedar?" asked Brad.

"'Tain't likely, Tow Head."

"But supposin'?"

But Old Cedar smiled grimly and shook his head. His fingers, toying with a rope end, were fashioning a knot, a hangman's knot. He had fallen into a brooding silence and the boy slipped off to his bedroll without disturbing him.

Brad was pulling off his boots when a rider came in from the herd to call

the guard. Cedar rode with the relief, out to where the herd was bedded down, a mile back from the river.

Five miles away, the Hashknife was holding a big herd. Across the river could be seen a speck of light that was the trail camp of the Long S herd, owned by a man named Slaughter. To prevent a mix-up, the guards were doubled.

Brad, booked for last guard, pulled the tarp over his head and dropped off to sleep. It seemed that he had hardly shut his eyes when he was awake, pulling on his boots even before his eyes opened. His ears were filled with a low rumble. The ground shook as if in the throes of an earthquake.

"Stampede! Roll out, boys!"

Men moved like shadows, using quirt and spurs. A night black as death. Five thousand longhorn dogies were running.

Brad and the others rode by instinct through the black night. A few minutes later they were racing along the flank of the stampede, fighting with rope and slickers, turning back the cattle. Up, up toward the point, slapping at the cattle with torn slickers, racing with death. For a stumble meant death under that wave of fear-crazed stampede.

Working like madmen, they rode along the rim of the herd, gradually whipping the leaders off their course, turning them back into the flank. Horns and hoofs went clattering, clashing, rumbling. After an hour of horse-killing labor, the herd was a tired, bawling, milling blot. Above the sound of the cattle could be heard the chant of cowboy song. Three or four Hashknife men had ridden over to keep the herds from mixing. There was the hint of dawn in the east. Tired men, and leg-weary, wet horses halted here and there on the edge of the herd.

"Wonder what got 'em runnin'?"

"Hard tuh say. They're crazy. Old Cedar hisse'f was on guard."

"There was two-three shots," said a Hashknife man. "I was just in from guard and fixin' fer bed. Heard three shots, plain. It don't look like no man'd be fool enough tuh shoot around a herd at night."

"Some drunk fool comin' from Dodge, mebbe. Cedar'd orter know. Where's Ol' Cedar?"

But no man had seen Old Cedar. A sort of shiver passed over Brad, a shiver of premonition. He knew now that it must have been the shots, not the stampede, that had wakened him. Brad left the knot of riders and rode at a trot around the herd. With some animal instinct, the boy sensed danger. He rode with his hand on his gun. He knew, even before he reached the bedground those cattle had left, that he would find tragedy there. And in that first, ghostly gray of coming day, Brad saw Old Cedar's horse standing with dropped reins at the head of a little draw. On the ground lay the old trail boss, his silvery hair matted, his face ashy gray in the dim light. A man made of softer stuff would have been dead, but the faint spark of life stayed in the old cowboy's body.

"I knowed yuh'd git here, Tow Head." His voice was a thin thread of a whisper. "Tell the boys tuh plant me deep so the coyotes can't git to me. Plant me beside the trail, boy— Git the herd stopped?"

"Yes. Who shot yuh, Cedar?"

"The Jacksons. One from the front, t'other from behind. I thought they was my own men, in the dark. They got me, Tow Head."

"And I'll git them, Cedar," said the boy huskily. "I promise it, Cedar! You bin good to me, the only man that ever treated me good. I ain't forgettin' it. You rest easy, Cedar, I'll git 'em both."

"I knowed yuh would, Tow Head. I kin die now, easy. Dark, ain't it? Dark— So long, Tow Head."

### CHAPTER III.

DUDE CARVER, KILLER.

THEY buried Old Cedar beside the trail. Then the herd plodded on.

Brad Claiborne, twenty years old, was now boss of the trail herd. Weeks later, he delivered the herd at Miles City, up in Montana. He was paid in gold and currency which he carried in a money belt under his shirt and undershirt, next to the skin. He paid his men off that evening and when he was certain that every man was too drunk to follow, he slipped out of town. He was riding the best horse in the remuda, and leading another horse to change to. Neither horse had been saddled for a week. They were stout and fresh and he rode them hard for the first hundred miles.

For he carried a small fortune in his money belt and he trusted no man of his crew, despite the fact that they were a likely enough crowd of cowhands. But more than one trail boss had been waylaid and killed on the way back, and the money for their trail herds had been spent in the saloons and resorts of the frontier towns.

The cattle had belonged to "Old Man" Chisholm of the Lightning Rod brand. To Chisholm, and to no other man, Brad would pay over the money. Brad had sent word back from Dodge, explaining briefly about the death of Old Cedar. He had expected Chisholm to send out a man to take Cedar's place. But either the messenger had been waylaid and killed, or Old Man Chisholm had gamgled on the loyalty of Brad. Brad looked for a letter at Dodge. So about dusk one evening, he rode into that border metropolis. At a barn on the edge of town, Brad stabled his horses. The man who owned the barn was a friend of Chisholm, a close-mouthed fellow with a shrewdish wife and a litter of cowed, shrewd-eyed youngsters.

"Any message fer me?" asked Brad, who trusted the man only when he could



watch him, despite the fact that the fellow drew wages from Old Man Chisholm. Brad was taking every precaution.

"None as I knows of. Yuh got up tuh Miles City all right?"

"I did." Brad smiled faintly as they stood there in the barn. The man held a lantern in his hand and their faces showed in its yellow light. Brad patted the cedar butt of his Colt. "I got there. I aim tuh git back tuh Texas, too, even if I shoot my way back." He turned toward the open door. "Lead the way out," he said.

A sneer twisted the thin-lipped mouth of the man who owned the stable. Brad was still smiling, but he made no effort to hide his suspicion.

Once outside, the boy left him without a word. The man stood there, his spare frame outlined in the lantern light. With a muttered word or two, he went on to the house. Brad walked into town and up the main street. He ate a hearty supper at a restaurant, then strolled into a shack that served as an office for the sheriff. A man sat at a littered desk. He looked up with a faint, quizzical smile.

"I'm huntin' fer the sheriff," Brad announced.

"You're lookin' at him."

Brad explained who he was. He asked if there was a message of any sort for him from Chisholm. The sheriff shook his head.

"Then I'll be pullin' out," said Brad. "I'd like tuh buy a hoss. One that'll pack a man a long ways and pack him fast."

"Your horse played out?"

"No. I left two good saddle hosses at a man's barn. But I don't aim tuh get 'em. Some man here in Dodge tipped off the two Jackson gents that Cedar was across the river with a herd. They killed Cedar. Now, it might be that this same gent will tell certain folks that my hosses is at his barn. I might

git shot from the dark as I go to get 'em. I'd rather be safe than sorry."

"For a boy," said the sheriff, "you got a mighty level head. I have a horse I'll sell for what he cost me."

"I'll need a saddle."

"There'll be a saddle on him. He'll be at the hitch rack in front of The Palace. A line-backed dun geldin'. It's just as well we make the deal here. I'll leave the horse at the hitch rack, when you're ready to pull out, step into the middle of him. He'll pack you far and plenty fast."

"I'd like tuh return the favor some day," said Brad, when he had paid over the price of the horse and saddle.

"Maybe some day you'll git the chance. Good luck, Claiborne."

Brad shook hands with the sheriff and went down the street to The Palace. This was a saloon and gambling house where the dusty, thirsty cowboy from the trail found excitement. A dozen gambling games were going full blast. Five bartenders served the line of men and girls at the bar. There was a dance floor and a fiddler. The place was hazy with tobacco smoke that hung in layers in the yellow lamp light. A jumble of sounds filled the thick air.

Brad pushed through the swinging short doors and into the place. One or two men at the door eyed him with idle curiosity. Brad stepped up to the bar, his eyes searching the faces of the crowd that lined it. He smiled a little as he saw a man slip from the throng and out a back door. The man was none other than the close-mouthed, lanky individual that owned the barn that housed Brad's two horses.

The fellow had been one of a little group at the far end of the long bar. Brad eyed them carefully but unobtrusively, as the bartender shoved out a whisky glass and a bottle.

There were five men in the group, cowboys, by their garb and general manner. All of them wore guns. One

of the group was a short man with a broken nose. That would be none other than Tug Jackson.

Beside Tug stood a tall, wide-shouldered man. Even before Brad spotted the missing ear, he knew the man for Tug's brother, for the two bore one to another a marked resemblance. Their eyes were identical. They each smiled the same brief, straight-mouthed smile, and they were looking at Brad with a bold, insolent stare. The five were talking among themselves. One of them laughed and slammed a fist on the bar. The bartender responded with glasses and a bottle.

The men drank, then the taller Jackson, whom Cedar had called Thode, left the group and with one other man sauntered carelessly up to where Brad stood.

"I reckon," said Thode Jackson, hooking his long thumbs in a sagging cartridge belt, "that I'm speakin' tuh Tow Head uh the Lightnin' Rod outfit. Am I right er wrong?"

"My name is Brad Claiborne," admitted the boy, wondering what their game would be, "and I work for that iron. But I don't recollect ever meetin' you."

"We're meetin' fer the first time," said Thode Jackson. "I'm greetin' you in the name uh Dodge City, welcomin' the thirsty stranger with dust caked in his gullet. I hate tuh see a man drink his licker alone like a poor sheep-herder. Me'n 'Slim' here is joinin' yuh in a drink."

Whereupon they edged to the bar, one on each side of Brad, who was toying with a drink he had no special taste for. He sensed their game now. They meant to keep him in sight until he made ready to leave town. Also they so maneuvered their positions that he could not face them both at the same time. With a sidelong glance down the bar, Brad saw Tug Jackson and his two companions leave it and take up positions near the front and rear doors.

They were cutting off his exit. He was hemmed in, guarded, and, if need be, they would kill him there in the saloon. But because they could not rob him in there, Brad knew that they would not shoot unless forced to. They preferred some secluded spot like the stable.

Thode Jackson and the man called "Slim" stood leaning against the bar, talking and making friendly overtures that held a thread of sinister double meaning.

Their voices were loud. They spoke as old friends might speak of an outfit for which they had worked. Thode quizzed Brad about the trip north. Brad replied carelessly, biding his time, trying to plan a way out. Thode refilled their glasses. Brad wondered if the sheriff had brought the horse. He was wondering how he would get out without trading shots with the five men.

Brad had vowed to kill the two Jacksons. But he had no intention of being killed while carrying out that promise. The odds were five to one. There was no doubt in Brad's mind as to the ability of these men with a gun. He was willing to face two men, but fighting five was not to be considered.

"Well, bless me if it ain't my old sweetheart!" cried a girl's voice, coming from behind Brad. The throng from the dance floor was coming in to the bar a laughing, jostling, bantering throng.

"Brad Claiborne, as I live!" A pair of soft arms went about Brad's neck from behind. He turned, his face blank with astonishment, and found himself looking into a pair of soft long-lashed eyes. The girl was pretty in spite of her cheap, brief dress. Brad had never seen her before in his life.

"Let him alone," growled Thode Jackson gruffly. "he's busy."

"Brad ain't ever too busy to talk to his old friends. He's dancing with his old schoolmate from the Plains. There's the fiddle. Come on, Brad!" And she



dragged the blank-eyed boy away from the bar and into the crowd that once more made for the dance floor.

"For Pete's sake, cowboy, play your cards," whispered the girl. "Smile, boy. Say something. Anything. Like we were old friends. Put your arm around me."

Brad obeyed. Then they were on the dance floor, and his feet clumsily found the waltz step.

"What's the game, lady?" asked Brad, his voice sharp with suspicion. He had learned a little of the red, raw frontier life during his five years along the trail. "Listen," she breathed into his ear, keeping up a gay pretense, though Brad felt a shiver of fear sweep over her as they danced. "Where is your horse?"

"Handy," replied Brad, still on guard.

"When we come off the floor for our drink, I'll lead you to the end near the front door. Never mind Thode Jackson and Slim. They'll be taken care of."

"You get Tug Jackson and the man with him. I'll take care of that Johnnie at the back door. When Tug hits the floor, you git. Fork your horse and head south. A man will catch up with you. He'll be the same man that took care of Thode Jackson and that Slim. He's standing near Thode now."

"Who is he?"

"He's Old Man Chisholm's bodyguard, come here to see you got home with his money. His name is Carver. 'Dude' Carver."

"The Lightning Rod Kid?" gasped Brad, his eyes searching for that young man whose two guns were making history in the Southwest. But he saw no one of sinister bearing, save the leering Thode and the cold-eyed clan that followed him. Brad had heard strange tales of the Lightning Rod Kid. His guns were for hire to the top bidder. For a year and more Chisholm had retained him as a bodyguard and killer. For this was the day of six-gun law and

every cattle baron in the country had one or more killers on his pay roll. And Dude Carver stood out from these as a leader. His deeds of daring were sung from Mexico to Canada, and—as was the case of Billy the Kid, who ranged over the line in New Mexico—Carver gained credit for a list of crimes never committed by him. They said of him that he was a college man from an old Virginia family; that he was the gambling son of a minister, and that he was the fastest man in Texas with two guns.

"Dude Carver, the Lightning Rod Kid?" mused Brad aloud. Then, before he could question further, the dance was at an end as if by some pre-arranged signal from this girl with the brown eyes and cheeks that were white under her rouge.

Moving with the crowd, she led Brad past Thode Jackson and Slim, who called out something that was meant for wit but carried the barb of insult.

"Easy, boy," whispered the girl. "Tug's your man, Tug and that black-looking man sitting at the empty table playing solitaire." She spoke in a low tone as Brad filled their glasses and paid for the drinks. She saw that he was smiling, but noted that he held his glass in his left hand and that his blue eyes were glinting coldly.

"You'll do, Brad," she said. "Here's luck!"

"Here's thanking you," said Brad earnestly.

"Thank you, Brad." They drank, the girl making a shuddering grimace as the raw stuff burned her throat. "Watch 'Dude'—white hat and buckskin shirt—next to Thode Jackson."

Brad turned his eyes toward Thode Jackson and Slim. Between the two stood a tall man not yet thirty, smooth-shaven save for a small black mustache. His beaver hat was a costly one, his buckskin shirt gay with stained porcupine quills. He had a handsome, reckless face, with a white scar across one

cheek. Brad gave a quick start. He had seen that face before—that night down on the Pecos! Dude Carver was the young cowboy who had stood there in the firelight, reloading his two guns.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### AN ENEMY MADE.

AS Brad caught his eye, Dude Carver smiled crookedly. Then, as Thode Jackson leaned along the bar and said something, Brad saw Carver stiffen. Slim stepped back, his hand on a low-hung gun. Thode's teeth bared in a snarl. Dude Carver's arms were lifted; in each hand was a long-barreled Colt. And, even as the guns of Thode Jackson and Slim jerked out, Dude Carver fired.

"Brad!" whispered the girl. "Quick, boy!"

Brad whirled quickly. Tug Jackson, crouched, slit-eyed, was standing in the doorway, a gun in each hand. The man at the empty table had upset it and was crouched behind it, his gun tilted over the edge.

Brad stepped out in front of the girl, pushing her back with his left hand. Tug Jackson's gun swung toward him. Brad shot, his gun at the level of his hip; shot again, and the man behind the table pitched across it, a black hole in his forehead. Tug Jackson lay in a crumpled heap, his muscles quivering a little.

Brad whirled toward the girl, picked her off the floor, and swung her to safety behind the bar.

Then Brad saw Carver, a little white, crooked smile on his handsome mouth, using Thode Jackson as a shield. Brad saw Jackson, who was badly wounded, try to struggle free. He saw Carver's gun spew flame and lead into the close-held body, so close that the bullet thudded dully into the flesh, the flame of the gun setting fire to Jackson's flannel shirt. Dude Carver was backing

toward the front door, dragging Thode, now an inert mass of flesh and bone. A man at the rear door was shooting at Carver. His bullets, fast and straight, were smashing into Thode Jackson's torso. Brad, crouched, his gun smoking, edged for the front door, his eyes narrowed as he watched for a shot at Carver's assailant. The man was behind some empty barrels. Brad caught a swift glimpse of a bearded face between the barrels and shot without hesitation.

"Keno!" snapped Dude Carver, and flung Thode's body from him. Together they made for the door. The men and women in the place had sought shelter at the first shot, and those men who stood out of the line of fire made no move to take up the quarrel for the dead.

Brad found the line-backed dun. Carver and he raced down the street at a run. And from between two buildings, a pasty-white face, twisted with fear and fury, watched their passing. Holding a shotgun he dared not use, the owner of the barn cursed with futile rage as the two riders faded into the night.

When they had forded the river, they slackened pace. Dude Carver carefully reloading his two guns. Baring his head, he looked up at the star-spotted sky, his lips twisted in a bitter smile, and prayed:

"May Heaven have pity on us, the living! May He find mercy for those back yonder, the dead!"

Brad did not break the silence that followed. Dude Carver rode bare-headed, his thick, curly hair so black that it shone. He rode with his head sunk low as if in prayer or deep meditation. Then, when they had traveled like that for half an hour, Carver lifted his face and smiled. He took a bottle from his saddle pocket, drew the cork, and passed it to his companion.

"Take a drink, Claiborne, it'll do your



nerves good. I always get drunk after one of those little dramas. By the way, I nearly missed you. Just got to town when I met the sheriff leading that dun horse. He told me you were here, said you were at The Palace. Well, we squared Old Cedar's debt, eh? I always was fond of Cedar. Drink hearty, Claiborne!"

Brad took a long pull at the bottle. His nerves were taut as fiddlestrings, and the liquor would ease the tension. He passed the bottle to Carver, who eyed it hungrily.

"A toast, Claiborne," he said, as a man might voice his thoughts in retrospective mood, "I drink to that strange fate that points out the trail of such men as you and I, men meant for other things, perhaps, if there's truth in heredity. I, a preacher's son, tutored in the ways of peace and good will. You, a Claiborne. And if you have traced their blood line you will find them a family of soldier folk. Yet we ride, you and I, side by side, our gun barrels yet warm from a debasing sort of brawl, along a trail destined to be stained deeper with red. So I toast our good fortune. May we never see that day when we face one another across gun sights!"

Dude Carver tilted the bottle and drank deeply. He rode on, the uncorked bottle in his hand. And as the fiery stuff warmed him, the bitterness faded from his smile. He turned toward his companion.

"You've changed, Claiborne, since that night, five years ago, down on the Pecos."

"You remember me, then?" asked Brad.

"The minute I laid eyes on you. It is part of my business never to forget the face or the name of a man met under such circumstances. We were on opposite sides that night. I thought you'd been killed, like the others. Close quarters, that night! I had three slugs

in me when I quit the place. Have another drink?"

"Not just now, thanks. I'm not much of a hand at drinkin'."

"I hope you don't bear me ill will because of that night on the Staked Plains?"

"Nope. That's over and done with. And I reckon you saved my bacon to-night, back yonder. Them Jacksons was out after my taw."

"So the Old Man figured, when he got word they'd killed Old Cedar. And he sent me up to be your guardian angel. When I saw Thode and Slim corner you, I sent 'Sherry' to spring their trap."

"Is that her name?"

"It's spelled 'Chérie' in French, but Dodge don't study much French, so it's Sherry. Poor little woman! She has a baby four years old. It's tough luck! Her husband was a tinhorn gambler, a crook who put her to work singing, and gambled away her earnings. He was killed for holding an ace that he slid from the bottom of a deck, one night in Abilene. I found her here. Well, she made enough to-night to quit the dance-hall business. Have a drink, Claiborne? No? Then I drink alone. To Sherry! Sherry, who perhaps some day will sing somewhere and the world will worship at her feet!"

They rode on into the soft night. Dude Carver drank, but showed no trace of intoxication. Sometimes he talked. Then he would lapse into long silences.

"Old Man Chisholm will meet us at Santa Fe," Carver told Brad. "He'll no doubt offer you a top job. Good wages, not much work, and he furnishes ammunition."

But Brad shook his head. "I'm a-driftin', directly I git my time. I'm filled up on shootin' folks."

Dude Carver smiled thinly and took a drink. "I said the same thing more than once, Claiborne," he said, "but

Fate decreed otherwise. Killing men is like rolling a rock down hill. Start it, and it won't stop. You shot Tug Jackson. The Jacksons have friends and kinsfolk in New Mexico and Arizona, some back in Texas. Your life won't be safe unless you quit this country. See what I'm getting at? And if you stay in the cattle business, you'll be working for a big outfit that's after the small outfits, or you'll be lined up with the little fellows. And you'll never be able to throw away your gun."

Daylight was rimming the sky line when they rode up to a trail camp. Half a dozen men squatted about, eating breakfast.

"*Buenos dias, gentlemen,*" called Carver. Brad saw their faces relax and half a dozen guns slide back into tied holsters.

"Howdy, Dude! Git off."

"Don't mind if I do. This boy is Brad Claiborne. He took Cedar's herd north for the Old Man."

"Then git off, boys," said a tall man who seemed to be boss. Brad needed no man to tell him that these men were rustlers, that the herd now grazing off the bedground were stolen cattle. Carver seemed to know them all. One of them jerked a thumb at Carver's stained buckskin shirt.

"Bin butcherin', Dude?"

Dude Carver smiled and handed over his half-emptied bottle.

"Butcherin?" he said softly, in a voice that was meant to grace platform or pulpit. "You might call it that. I killed Thode Jackson and Slim Jones. Claiborne here took care of Tug, 'Black' Barker, and 'Fat' Edwards."

"Yuh did?" growled the tall man sullenly.

"We did. I dropped by here for the sole purpose of telling you, Bob. They knew better than to kill the Old Man's trail boss. They had it mapped out to kill Claiborne and rob him of the Old Man's money. They met with bad luck.

Any complaint, Bob? Anything stuck in your craw?"

"You got a nerve! Them boys worked fer me, Dude Carver."

"Brad and I are working for Chisholm. So long as we draw pay, we'll fight to protect his property. They knew a sight better than to bother a Chisholm herd. My hand is spread on the table. Call it or let me rake in the chips."

"There's six of us, Dude," said the leader insinuatingly.

"There won't be, if you pull a gun," smiled Carver, his two hands on his pair of guns which he wore in low-tied holsters. "Gentlemen, fill your hands!"

They stood there, Dude Carver and Brad Claiborne, side by side in the first light of dawn, ready to go down fighting. Six pairs of cold, speculative eyes watched them. Six guns were ready to jerk from holsters, spitting death.

Brad knew that the tall man was Bob Hill, a notorious rustler. His men were picked from the border riffraff for their reckless courage and contempt for death. Brad and Dude Carver were standing, as it were, on a powder magazine, smoking, tossing away a lighted match that might set the quiet dawn shuddering with racking gunfire.

One of the men had set down Dude's bottle. Bob Hill picked it up and walking up to Dude, handed it toward him. "There's yore bottle, Dude."

"Meaning, you aren't drinking from my bottle, then," said the smiling Dude, but made no move to take it. Those facile hands still rested on his guns.

"Throw it away, Bob," he suggested. "I don't want it now. Throw it away. You're siding with the Jacksons, then?"

"Looks that a way, Carver," came the grim reply.

"Then I give you warning, Bob. Stay off the Lightning Rod range. Leave the Old Man's cattle alone. Or else, Bob Hill, you'll never take another stolen herd up the trail."

"We'll see about that, Dude," said Hill grimly. "Mebbe so yuh'd like tuh work this herd I got gathered. There may be some Lightnin' Rod steers among 'em."

"If there is some of the Old Man's stuff in your herd," said Carver, as he and Brad swung aboard their horses, "you stand to lose the whole herd. We've been square with you, boys. Don't make the mistake of tempting your luck too far, Bob."

And, turning his horse, Dude Carver rode away slowly, Brad beside him. Bob Hill stood there. Dude's bottle still in his left hand, watching them out of range. Then with a quick word, he smashed the bottle on a rock.

"Hear me, boys. I'll smash Dude Carver and his pardner like I smashed his bottle! Mark them words!"

## CHAPTER V.

### BILLY THE KID.

**B**RAD and Dude Carver camped at a water hole about noon. Dude had two more bottles wrapped in his slicker but, since leaving the rustlers' camp, he had not taken a drink. Brad saw that he had fallen into a sullen mood, riding with half-shut eyes that were dark with brooding thought.

"I told you, Brad, that you weren't through fighting," he said once, breaking his own silence. "Two of those men are cousins of the Jackson boys. I wanted to learn how they felt about losing five men from their midst. Well, I learned enough." He laughed unpleasantly.

They stayed an hour or more there at the water hole, letting their horses rest. Dude buried the two bottles of liquor in a clay bank. When they saddled again, Dude held out his hand.

"You'll find the Old Man at Santa Fé, Brad. Better tie with him. He's a man who can make or break you, and I think he's taken a liking to you. And

dash it all, I'd like to have you with me. You have sense, and you don't get on a man's nerves like most gents. Better trail with us?"

"I dunno, Dude. I got some money laid by, and I got a honin' fer to own my own iron."

"I hope, Brad, that we never fight on opposite sides," said Dude Carver. "And I wish you luck, Brad, all kinds of it."

"You ain't goin' to Santa Fé?"

"I'll drift along in a few days. Tell the Old Man I'll be along directly."

And with a careless wave of his hand, Dude Carver rode away. Brad knew that he had headed back for Dodge City and that he intended taking the herd of cattle from Bob Hill. But Brad asked no questions. He mounted his horse and rode on alone, glad to be rid of the erratic Dude, yet missing the fellow's company.

Dude, he knew, had quit drinking because there was work to do. When that grisly work was done, he would dig up the whisky and drink, as Brad had seen him drink, as a thirsty man drinks water.

Dude Carver had been born for the more mundane things of life, in surroundings of gentility and peace. He was highstrung as a blue-blooded colt, with a sensitive brain that must needs be numbed into restfulness by whisky. Dude, with his handsome face, his well-kept hands, his fancy clothes and silver spurs, was a gay, yet starkly tragic figure that moved across the early Southwest in meteoric passage, as gayly brilliant, and as surely doomed, as a fallen star.

The sheriff at Dodge had told the truth about the dun-colored horse that now carried Brad at a tireless running walk. The distance from Dodge to Santa Fé, New Mexico, was perhaps four hundred miles. Brad estimated the distance as being about that, and roughly guessed that in eight or nine



days, easy traveling, he would ride into Santa Fé. It took him ten days, for water had been scarce and the trail unfamiliar. Both he and his horse were gaunt and weary when they rode, one glorious evening, into the old Spanish pueblo town of Santa Fé.

When he had cared for his horse and eaten his first decent meal in a week, Brad hunted up Old Man Chisholm. He found the grizzled cattleman talking to a boy with tawny hair and buck teeth, a slim, quick-moving youth with cold eyes and a wide grin. Brad knew that this must be Will Bonney, better known as "Billy the Kid."

Chisholm shook hands warmly with Brad but did not trouble to introduce the two boys. He led them into a Mexican saloon and the three sat at a table where they were served drinks. Both Chisholm and the Kid sat so their backs touched the wall. And while Chisholm and Brad talked, the tawny-haired youngster whose guns were destined to write red words into the history of the West, sat with restless eyes that scrutinized every man who came and went through the door. Brad gave his boss a detailed account of the trip.

Brad unfastened his money belt and handed it to Chisholm, who buckled it about his middle, outside his shirt and under a coat he was wearing.

"Ain't you gonna count it?" asked Brad.

"When I git time," said the cowman. "I don't reckon you'd be fool enough to cheat the Old Man, even if you was crooked, which you ain't. Eh, Billy?" He chuckled, and the Kid grinned. Then he paid Brad his wages, and added a generous bonus.

"Billy'll show you the town, Brad. Git a bath and a shave and some clothes, then take in the *baile*. Them Mexican gals kin sure dance, too. Keep outa quarrels. Keep yore mouth shut, no matter how drunk yuh git. If yuh go broke, Billy'll show yuh where tuh sign

a note fer more. We'll hit the trail for home, come daylight. Got another herd gathered at Llano Estacado to deliver at Dodge. You'll go up in charge, Brad." He chuckled and clapped Brad between the shoulders.

"I'm right sorry," said Brad slowly, "but I'm quittin'."

"Eh?" The smile died on the cowman's grim-lipped mouth. His eyes lost their twinkle. "How's that, again?"

"I'm goin' over into Arizona," said Brad.

"Quittin' the Old Man? When you've done so good? You got the world by the tail, young man. Don't be a fool. Stick to Chisholm and you'll git along."

"If I go busted," smiled Brad, "I might come back beggin' a job. But I got a little money and I want to see a few critters wearin' my own iron."

The grin came back to the cowman's mouth but there was little humor in it, and what little humor was there held a grimness that was akin to a threat.

"Show Brad the town, Billy," he said. "Be at the corral by daylight. So long!" His nod was one of curt dismissal.

Billy the Kid proved to be an expert guide. He had a pleasant personality that won him friends wherever he went. When he grinned, those about him smiled in quick sympathy. The Mexicans welcomed him. White men shook his hand. Brad found this boy who had the name of a killer to be without swagger or braggadocio, modest, quiet mannered, likable. Yet under that pleasant manner lay an alert suspicion that showed in his quick movements and the restless glint of his eyes, like a tame leopard, always prepared to strike without warning.

Brad bathed and shaved. The Kid took him to a store where he purchased an outfit from boots to hat. Then they made their way to a dance hall where a Mexican ball was in full swing. A

Mexican stringed orchestra played waltz and fandango. Brad had never seen so many beautiful girls, dark-eyed, graceful, laughing señoritas.

"Billito!" Thus they welcomed the boy whose guns were so deadly. And Brad had no difficulty in getting dances. His first shyness left him and he spent a most pleasant and wholesome evening dancing.

There was a goodly sprinkling of white men there, cowboys and a few who wore tied guns and whose eyes were as restless as those of Billy the Kid. Brad felt the quick, suspicious looks that followed him. He knew without being told that they had him branded as one of Chisholm's men, that news of his coming had preceded him, and with it had come a more or less garbled version of his prowess as a gun fighter. And because he was young and flushed with success, Brad enjoyed this measure of notoriety.

He had stepped outside to smoke and enjoy the clean, cool air. As he struck a light, a voice, soft, drawling, tinged with mockery, came out of the shadow.

"All dressed up and tripping the light fantastic! A Beau Brummel among the dons and damsels of old Spain. Felicitations, Brad, and greetings!"

"Dude!" gasped Brad, startled by something in his late companion's voice.

"None other, my *amigo*. Dude Carver, at your service, slightly under the influence of liquor but enjoying good health." Whereupon he stepped out of the shadow and into the half light that came from a window.

His handsome face was drawn and haggard. A dark stain blotted the left sleeve of his buckskin shirt. His clothes were soiled and his left arm in a sling made of a stained silk neck-scarf. His gait was steady, his tongue had none of the thickness of a drunken man, but his dark eyes burned feverishly, bloodshot and sunken under the

white brow, and his whole expression was changed.

"I saw you through the window, Brad. I've been waiting for you. Can you let the *baile* worry along somehow without your gallant presence for half an hour? Good. Get your hat. Then meet me at the corral. It's important or I wouldn't annoy you."

Brad, filled with some misgiving but burdened with the fear that Carver needed him, got his hat and made his way down the street to the edge of town where a Mexican ran a feed corral. Dude met him with a smile and a proffered bottle. But Brad had no taste for whisky.

"What's up, Dude?"

"You broke with Chisholm?" countered Carver.

"Yes."

"And he gave you The Kid as a guide and told you to see the town?"

"Yes."

"Got your money in your pocket?"

"You bet."

"Then saddle up and get out of Santa Fé. Hit the trail. Don't pull up until you hit Arizona. Buy that little bunch of cows, Brad; marry some good girl, and settle down. I only wish I could go with you!"

"I don't savvy, Dude. what yuh mean?"

"I mean, Brad, that the Old Man has a habit of getting what he wants. Just now he wants you. He'll get you or he'll smash you. And Billy the Kid will be helping him do it. Get out of Santa Fé, and get out now."

Dude Carver put his hand on Brad's shoulder. His face looked softer now, and his lips twitched with a wistful sort of smile. Brad knew that, for the second time within a fortnight, he owed his life to Dude Carver. But when he tried to mumble some sort of gratitude, Dude waved him away with a gesture.

"Before I'm hanged some day, Brad, I may need a friend. I haven't any,

you know. Not a friend—and even a cur dog has friends! Now, pick a stout horse out of that bunch and drift. Then I can take my bottle and get beautifully drunk, so drunk that I'll be happy. Adios, Brad." Dude Carver turned away abruptly. A moment later he was gone.

Brad roped the best-looking horse in the corral, saddled the animal, and rode away into the star-filled night, his brain whirling in a jumble of mixed and troubled thoughts.

Oddly enough, he held no hard feelings against Old Man Chisholm. He was no worse, no better, than the other cattle barons who ruled their ranges with the despotism of some feudal king. What they wanted, they went after. Good men were at a premium. But the life of a hired fighter was swift-moving, thrilling, and invariably short. There was always a man who moved his gun hand a split-second faster, and the "boot-hill" gained another man who had died with his boots on.

Brad had lost all taste for such a life. Already he was regretting the fact that he had killed a man, even in self-defense. His sunshine had lost something of its warmth, and he had seen the terrible, tortured soul of Dude Carver mirrored in the deep-set, haunted eyes of that killer.

So as Brad rode into the soft, still night, he tried to pray for peace, peace as quiet and restful as this starry night. He felt old, though he was but a step past boyhood, old, and without the dreams that belong to youth. He had ridden from that camp fire on the Pecos with the swift pulse of youth in quest of adventure. He had found it, had tasted of its intoxicating cup until drunk. Now, as a man who has partaken of too much liquor, he felt the reaction and nausea of it.

Was he destined to ride, as Dude Carver rode, forever in the company of dead men who leered out of the shad-

ows, whose voices whispered in the pines and babbled in the creeks, whose presence, ghostly, intangible, drove one to the forgetfulness of whisky? For only the man who comes into the world with stillborn conscience can kill and live without the haunting pain of regret. Was such to be the way of Brad Claiborne?

Brad reverently lifted his tortured face to the stars that blinked like a million camp fires, and prayed fervently: "Heaven, help a man tuh go right!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### BRAD CLAIBORNE, RANCHER.

SO much for the puny prayer of man. Destiny moved Brad Claiborne as a chess player moves a pawn across the board. In leaving Santa Fé, the young man who already had tasted too deeply of adventure's cup left a great danger, for over in Lincoln County, red trouble brewed its potent mixture. History was in the making, and Brad had, upon the advice of Dude Carver, ridden away from it.

Through the history of the Lincoln County war are woven multicolored threads. Primarily, its fabric is of tarnished gold, stained with blood; golden wealth such as was represented by the vast ranges with the water that is so scarce in the Southwest, golden power for which men die. Such is the way of all wars, and this cowman's war was no different from the others.

Then there are the more drab threads in its fabric: Men who were drawn into the affair against their wills, peaceful men who had come to the country to build their homes. These drab threads were also discolored in the end by spattered crimson.

A single black thread there is for even the black cloak of a man who held a Bible instead of a gun became target for the bullets of ambushed men. A man of the Gospel had been singled out by

Fate to lead one faction of those warriors of New Mexico.

And through the whole of this fabric runs the colorful thread that is Billy the Kid. He rides his way through history without once checking his mad gait, his long, tawny hair flowing, his cold eyes shifting, his guns roaring. Billy the Kid, who died at the age when most boys are learning the pages of college texts! And when he died, at the age of twenty-one, his guns had taken toll of twenty-one lives.

So the Mexicans lost their beloved Billito, whom they loved and sometimes feared. That he was bad has been proved, for he killed those who barred his path, killed them with a deadly calm and certainty that was appalling. And yet there were many who claimed him as friend and who will point out that his badness was forced upon him, that during that fierce war, Billy the Kid fought bravely, and fought on the side of justice. His deeds have come down in song and story. Wet-eyed señoritas offered prayers for the repose of the dead boy's soul. His brief life was colorful, tragic; but perhaps, when all is said and done, it was a trail of his own choosing. The ghosts of dead men never haunted him. They fell. He rode on. He danced and drank and laughed and forgot. And, when his time came, he died with his hoots on and a gun in his hand.

Brad Claiborne, ranching in the San Simon Valley, heard bits of news that traveled from Lincoln County, scraps of stories, partly vague, partly vivid. Drifting cowboys brought new stories, some of them conflicting, for each faction held that it was right.

Always, before the bearer of news rode his way after a meal or a night's stay at Brad's cabin, the boy would ask of Dude Carver.

"Dude Carver?" would come the reply. "Him and Chisholm split. Carver pulled out fer Texas er Mexico."

"Carver? Well, he's rustlin'. Bob

Hill smashed him with Chisholm. Yeah. Up at Dodge. Carver run off Bob Hill's herd, done it single-handed. Shot Bob up a batch, but Bob Hill's tough and made a live of it—and turns the joke on Carver, fer Hill and his men was workin' fer Chisholm all the time. So Carver's taken to rustlin'. Hangs out over along the Animas."

"Carver? Dude Carver?" replied a third man when questioned. "He's dead. Billy the Kid killed him near Fort Sumner. A man kin spit on his grave without ridin' off the Fort Sumner road. Yeah, Dude Carver's dead."

But still Brad, settled after a fashion in the San Simon, did not believe that Dude was dead, though he had good reason to think that Dude had broken with Old Man Chisholm—even as Billy the Kid had left the cattleman to take his stand in the Lincoln County war.

Feed and water were plentiful, there in the valley. Brad had bought up some young cows and, together with a few other small cowmen, he rounded up his calves and ran his iron on them. He liked to ride through the herd and see his B Bar C on his stock, just as he took pride in his cabin and barn and corrals which he built with the help of some Mexicans.

He was boy enough to mix play with his work. Something of the tightness of his trail days left his mouth. His eyes laughed oftener. He worked hard, made friends in the valley, and sometimes rode as a cowhand with the larger outfits who knew him for a good cowhand and did not molest his cattle.

Sometimes a band of hard-riding, heavily-armed men drifted through the valley. Brad came to know them. Because he minded his own affairs, because they found a welcome at his cabin, the rustlers left him alone. Now and then, as they drifted across with a stolen herd, they dropped a few unbranded yearlings on Brad's range. Once or twice they even ran the B Bar C on the



critters before dropping them, by way of payment for Brad's hospitality.

Brad breathed easier these days, though he still wore his gun by day and slept at night with it under his pillow. And as the months dragged on and his cabin lost its newness and became home, Brad would dream as he puttered about the place. Into these dreams was woven the vague image of a woman. Nameless, to be sure, for Brad had met few women, and her face was vague. He laughed at himself for dreaming but, nevertheless, when at rare intervals he attended dances, he cast about somewhat self-consciously for that girl of his dreams who might some day share his new home.

Sometimes he rode into Benson or Tombstone, to relieve the drab monotony of range work. Usually he rode alone, clean shaven, dressed in his best boots and clothes, with a feeling of holiday spirit sparkling in his blue eyes.

On one of these trips he came face to face with two men who rode along the trail. One of these men was a stranger. The other was Bob Hill. Hill, a sardonic grin on his scarred face, pulled up.

"Well, if it ain't Claiborne! Howdy, young man, I thought you was dead and planted. Charlie, this is the rooster that killed Tug. You boys had orter git along right good. Charlie Lorne here is kinsfolk to the Jackson boys. They hung Dude Carver, I hear. Can't be you're still workin' fer Old Man Chisholm?"

"No," said Brad, his tone curt, his eyes glinting with suspicion. "No, I'm ranchin' on my own hook."

"So? Well, we may see yuh some day. Me'n Charlie has important business right now. Yep, I wouldn't be a bit su'prised but what we'll drop past yore place one uh these days. Just fer old times' sake."

The two men rode on. Brad saw a bottle pass between them. They were

headed in the general direction of the San Simon Valley.

Brad did not enjoy his brief stay at Tombstone, and some premonition told him that his days of peaceful living were numbered. In Tombstone he learned that the sheriff had given Bob Hill and Charlie Lorne notice to quit town—and quit it before sundown.

Also, in Tombstone, he learned that a man called Colonel Hollister had moved in a big herd and bought a huge strip of land near the Chiricahua Mountain south of San Simon. They described this Colonel Hollister as a giant of a man, a free-handed spender, a stanch friend if he liked a man, a hard hater if crossed. He was buying out the little ranchers, paying them in gold, and buying land and stock at a fair price. And the word was out that he would make life a burden for those who did not choose to sell out to him.

The methods of Colonel Hollister were those of that day. Men said that he drove a fair bargain, much fairer than some. Rumor had it that the cattle baron had an eye on the San Simon Valley.

So it was with a troubled heart that Brad rode homeward. These disquieting rumors of invasion by a big cow outfit, coupled with his meeting Bob Hill and Charlie Lorne, urged him to a faster gait. He had quit Tombstone at an hour somewhat later than was his wont. He planned to put up for the night at a stage station on the road to Galeyville. It was a bit after sundown when he rode up to the stage station.

There was a saloon and eating house there, and two or three spare bedrooms for stage passengers, if the stage were late and the driver did not wish to brave the dangers of a dark road beset by outlaws. The place was run by a grizzled old fellow whose peg leg and general manner smacked of the old-time pirate. A slatternly woman provided meals of a sort. Brad had seen the stage, bound

for Galeysville, pulling out from the way station. He looked forward to a quiet evening there, and an early start in the morning.

Four saddled horses stood at the hitch rack in front of the saloon. Brad, with the caution of a man who has enemies, eyed the horses, then swung to the ground, leaving his own mount standing there with dropped reins. Then he stepped boldly into the saloon.

Four pairs of eyes watched his entrance. A hush, such as follows an interrupted conversation, held the four men at the bar.

"H're ya, Brad?" "Peg Leg" greeted him with a leering grin. Brad pretended not to notice the extended hand. He had no intention of wasting his right hand in greeting Peg Leg. That right hand might be needed to draw a gun.

One of the four men grinned an indifferent welcome. Another asked Brad to join them. All four were strangers. Brad knew by their actions that they were here for some purpose other than a drinking bout, for they were cold sober and the condition of their lazing horses showed that they had been there at least an hour, perhaps longer.

Peg Leg's grin was a little too wide, his voice a tone too loud, his manner an edge too cordial, thought Brad. Peg Leg was uneasy. His pale eyes shifted restlessly from the men to the road that led from Galeysville.

"Stayin' fer supper, Brad?" he asked, as he set out a glass.

"I reckon."

"Layin' over fer the night?" came the second question, and it held a hint of dread or fear.

"Mebbe," came Brad's careless reply.

"Shore a elegant night fer ridin'," said one of the four, toying with a glass of whisky. "Moonlight, and all."

"That's right," agreed Brad carelessly, though he knew that there would

be no moon that night. He wondered why these four wanted him to go. They were no ordinary cowboys. Rustlers, more likely. Well, they were four against one. If they wished him to move on, he would move rather than be shot for being stubborn.

"I'll eat supper," he told Peg Leg, "then be movin' along. Here's how, gents!"

"How, stranger!" They looked relieved at Brad's decision.

He watered his horse and fed the animal at the barn. But he left the saddle on, merely loosening the cinch; and before he left the barn, he made sure that his gun would slide freely from its holster. Then he passed the saloon where the four men still stood at the bar, and made for the wash bench at the back of the house.

Peg Leg's wife appeared with a clean roller towel. Brad spoke to the woman pleasantly. She looked up, her eyes red from weeping, an ugly welt across one cheek. Her thin mouth twisted as she snarled:

"You, eh? One of 'em, be ye? And till now I thought ye was a man, Brad Claiborne! And no good'll come of it, says I. Her as sweet and purty and innocent as the day is long! Fer shame, ye low-lived skunks! The lot of ye'll hang and I'll be there to see ye! Her a slip of a baby! 'Tis murder ye're doin'! May Peg Leg be the first ta swing! If it's pizen I had in the house it'd go into yer vittles, it would!"

"What are yuh drivin' at?" asked Brad. The woman looked hard at him. Then her face went pasty-white.

"Ye ain't one of 'em, Brad Claiborne?" she whispered. "Then he'll kill me fer yappin'! But it's die I will before I'll have the harm of the pore thing on me hands! The pore darlin'!"

"Who yuh talkin' about?"

"Who else but her in yonder? Her that they lied to and got her off the stage! Colonel Hollister's gal!"

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE RESCUE.

FOR a moment Brad stared hard at Peg Leg's vitriol-voiced wife. For all her appearance, and her environment, her eyes held a light of kindness that shone from her woman's soul. Nodding to her to follow, Brad stepped into the house.

From the kitchen to the combined dining and living room, ran a narrow, shadowy hallway, flanked by a couple of bedrooms, a closet, and a sort of store room.

Passing along the hallway, Brad shoved aside the worn plush hangings as if to step into the living room. Something hard jabbed him in the back. A woman's voice, shaking a little with fright, but dangerously desperate, called out:

"Put up your hands or I'll shoot!"

"Don't shoot, lady," said Brad.

"Brad Claiborne's all right, miss," put in Peg Leg's wife.

Brad, his arms still raised, turned slowly, a smile on his face. At the end of the hallway was the wife of Peg Leg, a shotgun in the crook of her arm. But Brad had no eyes for the lanky woman. He was staring at a girl who stood in the dark hallway, holding a long-barreled rifle that shook in her hands.

She was the most beautiful girl Brad had ever seen. She was small and dark and slender, like a boy, and wore a flannel shirt and jeans and a pair of boots. Her hair had been braided, then coiled about her head like some glorious crown. Under its jet coils a pair of dark-gray eyes were set in an oval hut firm-jawed little face, now paled to the whiteness of ivory.

"I'm Brad Claiborne, ma'am. I'd be mighty proud tuh he'p yuh. Would yuh mind pointin' yore gun up at the roof?"

"You—you mean you won't hurt me?"

"Miss, why should I be hurtin' you?"

"Because Colonel Hollister is my father."

"I haven't anything against Colonel Hollister. Who is it that aims to hurt yuh, miss?"

"Those men at the saloon. They're waiting for their leader. They intend taking me away and making my father pay ransom. Peg Leg told the driver I was to wait here for father, but when the stage pulled out, they gave me these clothes to put on. A man was left here to guard me. This lady hit him on the head with a club and we locked him in the closet."

"Who are those men?" Brad put the question to Peg Leg's wife.

"Rustlers from the San Simon and Animas. They sold to Colonel Hollister for cash, but they want more money. They be comin' now!" She had stepped to the curtained window and peered out. She swung back from the window, her face a shade pale, but her bony hands gripped the shotgun without trembling.

Brad drew his six-shooter. "Step into the front room, both of you," he ordered. He ran to the back door and barred it. Then he took up a position near a rear window. He saw Peg Leg and his four companions halt at the wooden bench that held wash basin and water bucket.

Brad's gun was raised. His finger pressed the trigger of the cocked gun. The man who had lifted a dipper full of water stood petrified, for Brad's bullet had hit the dipper, drilling it, knocking it from the man's loose grip; and, as they reached for their guns, Brad's voice, cold, uncompromising, deadly, cut through the hushed silence.

"I'm shootin' to kill the next time. Who wants to be first to try his luck?"

Brad, who had prayed for peace, now felt a little sorry that none of these men made a move to fight. He wanted to show that girl in the room beyond that he could and would fight for her.

One of the men was cursing Peg Leg for a traitor. Peg Leg was snarling denial and in the same breath blaming Brad for a meddlesome fool. Yet he was badly scared, and the others were stupidly confused.

"Either lay down yore guns or else begin to use 'em!" snapped Brad. "You mangy dogs, fight!" But they were backing away from that challenge. They could not see Brad, who crouched by the window. None of them wished to barter shots with a man who was hidden, a man whose gun backed the cold challenge of his words.

"When the sign is right, Claiborne, we'll give you yore full share of lead. But we ain't just ready yet."

The man who spoke was edging back toward a corner of the cabin. In a moment he would be beyond the line of Brad's vision and, once out of sight, dangerous. Brad lifted his gun, thumbing the hammer. The roar of it filled the house. Powder smoke stung his nostrils. The man who had hacked from his companions leaped out of sight, but his gun lay on the ground and the hand that had held it was broken at the wrist.

"Stand yore hands, gents!" called Brad. "Line up with yore backs to this window. Hands in the air! Guns in yore scabbards! I'm takin' up a little collection for the colonel. Back up to this window, pronto!" Brad's gun barrel smashed out the rest of the bullet-splintered pane, and as the men backed, hands raised, to the window, he picked their guns from their scabbards. Then he called to Peg Leg's wife. She came, still armed with the shotgun which Brad bade her hide. He ordered her to unbar the back door. When he had herded his prisoners into the kitchen, the woman tied them with ropes and shoved them, one at a time, into the closet where one of their number already lay with a cracked head. Peg Leg, snarling threats, was the last

to be dumped, trussed like a pig for market, into the dark closet.

The girl, posted at the front window, was watching for the approach of any one, enemy or friend. She had a pair of binoculars. Now she called out that two riders were coming, a mile or more away.

"Then we'd better be moving," Brad told her, locking the closet door and pocketing the key. He turned to Peg Leg's wife.

"You'll come along?"

"Not me. I'm a-goin' clean away. I'm ridin' fast to Benson. Then I'm travelin' by train to an even'er climate. I'm leavin' that wooden-legged gent flat."

Nancy Hollister took a thick roll of bills from her pocket and made the woman accept it.

"With what I'm takin' off Peg Leg and these varmints," said his wife acidly, "I'll be able to enjoy old age like a real lady. You two'd better git afore Bob Hill and Charlie Lorne git here. They're bad actors, wuss'n the likes of these skunks."

Brad was about to make some answer when he saw the man with the broken hand running for the hitch rack. The fellow went among the frightened horses, heedless of their hoofs. A moment later he was in the saddle and away.

"Hurry!" yelled Brad, making for the stable. The girl came at a run, Mrs. Peg Leg behind her. Brad led his horse from the barn. He put the girl on one horse, Peg Leg's wife on another. Then he unsaddled the others and turned them loose. He ran into the house and gathering the guns, dropped them, together with the saddle guns, into the well. They were all ready for the race now. The wounded man was headed for the two horsemen who took shape out of a dust cloud. Brad and the girl waved the woman a brief farewell as she raced for Tomb-



stone, her money in a flour sack, a quilt in her hand.

"Time we left here," smiled Brad. "Can you ride?"

"Do I sit my horse like a tenderfoot?" smiled Colonel Hollister's daughter. And they both laughed as their horses leaped forward.

Brad knew the country and its hiding places. To head for his own ranch would be folly. He had gathered enough from the men he had outwitted to know that the rustlers hated Hollister with deadly bitterness.

"Our best bet is to make for the rough country, miss. There in the Chiricahuas we kin hide out till the coast is clear. It's about our one only chance. That is, if you ain't afraid to trust a man you never laid eyes on till now?"

"Of course, I'm badly scared," she admitted, "but I think I can trust a man who has already risked his life for me." She smiled, or made a brave attempt at smiling. Brad saw she was badly frightened.

There was no sign of pursuit. Evidently Bob Hill and Charlie Lorne had halted at the stage station to release the men in the house. That would give Brad and the girl a decent start, and they both rode stout horses.

Twilight was thickening into dusky night. In an hour they would be well hidden by darkness. Brad had been heading in a direction that was almost at right angles to the Chiricahua Mountains. To an observer it would seem that he was heading straight for his own ranch.

"Soon as it's dark, we change our direction," he told her, "and swing off that a way and into the hills. I fetched a sack of salt. It may be that we'll have tuh live on straight meat fer a day er so. Once we quit Sulphur Springs Valley and hit the hills, we're gonna be hard tuh ketch. I hope yore father won't think I've run off with yuh."

She gave him an odd look. "Have you ever met my father?"

"No, ma'am. They told me in Tombstone that he was buying out the small ranchers, payin' 'em a fair price."

"And did they also add," said the girl, "that he has a way of making it hard on those who won't sell to him?"

"Something like that."

"They spoke the truth. You are Brad Claiborne, from over on the edge of the San Simon Valley. You are on Colonel Hollister's list. I saw the name and remembered because I knew some Claibornes in Tennessee. Yes, you are one of those small ranchers he intends buying out."

"I'm not selling out to anybody," said Brad grimly.

"That's what a man told my father. I wonder, Brad Claiborne, if you'd be so ready to help me if you knew that Colonel Hollister is even now working to force you into selling?"

"Yo're a woman," said Brad slowly. "You needed help. I come along about that time and lent a hand. That's all there is to it. Colonel Hollister don't figger into it."

"Even if you should be his enemy?" persisted the girl.

"Yo're a lady," smiled Brad a trifle embarrassed by the friendliness of her eyes, "any man'd be doin' as much as I'm doin'."

"I'm not so sure about that," replied Nancy Hollister. "I'd rather think, Brad Claiborne, that you are finer than most men." Her recent fright was gone and in its stead was gratitude to this man who had saved her. Gratitude, and perhaps the thrill of something that was deeper than mere gratitude, something that flushed her cheeks and brightened her eyes and her smile.

Brad, unused to subtleties, rode along, awkward and ill at ease in the company of so beautiful a girl. He was somewhat embarrassed by her garb, too. He had never seen a woman wearing men's

clothes—clothes that revealed her graceful, boyish figure customarily hidden by crinolines. But Nancy Hollister seemed wholly unconscious of her odd clothes. She read Brad's embarrassment, however, and liked him for it.

And that night, as Brad broiled rabbit by an open fire, while she watched, restraint slipped away and they talked and laughed and joked. And when they had eaten, and the spell of the camp fire found its way into their hearts, Brad told her much of his boyhood, his disappointments, and his dreams.

And when at last they both became drowsy, Brad fixed her a bed of grass and leaves and the saddle blankets, and curled up not far away, sleeping with his gun in his hand.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A BILL OF SALE.

COLONEL HOLLISTER should have belonged to the day and age of moats and serfs and flagons of ale and broadswords. He was a huge, ruddy man with a bellowing voice, a steely eye, and an indomitable will. He would wrestle, fight, run a foot race or shoot at a mark for ten, or ten thousand, dollars; and usually he won, by sheer skill or, if outmatched, by subtle trickery. He carried a fortune in his money belt; he was rated a fast man with a gun, and he never moved abroad without his bodyguard. This bodyguard was none other than Dude Carver. It was said that Hollister had saved Carver from hanging in New Mexico; that he had bought Dude, as a man might buy a horse.

True enough, Hollister had saved Dude Carver's life. And Dude, when the hangman's noose was slipped from about his neck, smiled twistedly and thanked the cowman. Hollister had hired him and his guns on the spot.

During the months that Dude Carver followed his employer, he had won his

wages tenfold, for the colonel had enemies. Dude's guns had cut down their number.

The colonel and Dude were gambling at Galeyville when a messenger on a played-out horse brought a cryptic note from Peg Leg, at the stage station. This note, the handiwork of Bob Hill, Charlie Lorne, Peg Leg, and the others of that luckless band of conspirators, told the colonel that his daughter had been stolen by a rancher named Brad Claiborne.

The messenger displayed a bullet-cracked wrist and colored the message with a dramatic recital of Brad Claiborne's high-handed bit of outlawry.

Like an enraged bull, Colonel Hollister bellowed and stamped. Dude Carver sipped his drink, smiling crookedly, his eyes smoldering. Smoking lazily, as he sat back in his chair, he paid but little heed to Hollister. He seemed wrapped in brooding, bitter thought.

"A thousand dollars to the man that kills this Claiborne!" roared Colonel Hollister to the crowd that was gathering. Dude looked up, his thin lips twitching.

"Go after the snake, Dude!"

"For a thousand dollars?" Dude Carver's right eyebrow was raised in mild disgust. "Hardly!"

"Five thousand, then!"

"Brad's a sweet shot, colonel."

"Ten thousand, then."

"Ten thousand sounds better, colonel." Dude Carver rose, brushing tobacco crumbs from his spotless clothes. "Ten thousand. Not ten thousand dollars, however. I'm speaking in terms of cattle. Ten thousand head of steers."

"What?" Colonel Hollister's voice roared like a thunderclap.

"And the girl, Colonel." Dude Carver faced the big cowman with smiling insolence.

"Take care! Carver, do you want me to shoot you like a dog?"

"No, indeed. I'm making you a busi-

ness proposition. Take it or leave it. You're getting off cheap. There isn't a man in Galeyville that can kill Brad Claiborne, even if you offered a million. And, as for the girl, she's placed in a somewhat peculiar and unfortunate position. This little affair rather blasts her chances of a profitable and suitable marriage among the élite of, let us say, Virginia, or Kentucky, or Carolina. And I assure you, colonel, you might journey a long way and do worse than pick Dude Carver for son-in-law."

"You're a scoundrel, Carver! I'll kill you like a dog!"

"I think not. You aren't fast enough with a gun, and you're too shrewd to chance losing a valuable man. Kill me and see how long it will be until some gent pots you from the brush. I've laid my cards on the table. Read 'em. I'll be in the barroom when you've reached a decision."

Dude Carver bowed, smiled crookedly into Hollister's blazing eyes, and strolled out into the saloon.

His daughter—since her mother died and left her, a leggy little thing of ten, in his care—had been an unending source of worry to the swashbuckling colonel. A heady sort of youngster, possessing much of her sire's temperament, she had grown up like a colt on a big cow ranch. She rode with the cowboys, sharing their work and their grub, getting in their way, saving them from her father's wrath, stealing his liquor and cigars to bribe the men. Flaring suddenly into swift fits of temper, sweetly and meekly repentant in the next breath, she ruled the ranch. The cowboys worshiped her. Hollister growled at her and spoiled her. And so she had grown up, wild, untamed, willful, yet lovable.

Finally, in desperation, Hollister had sent Nancy to boarding school in Virginia. During the years he kept her there, they grew apart. Her new environment had tamed her and chastened

her. She had acquired polish, a measure of education, a rudiment of snobbery, a certain amount of hard, common sense, and womanhood.

In a bluff, selfish way, Colonel Hollister loved the girl. After a fashion, Nancy returned his affection, but the usual bond of father and daughter was sadly, pitifully lacking. Hollister had married her mother for money and the daughter had seen her mother die of a broken heart. More than once Nancy had taunted her father with that. He had replied with anger and sometimes, when he caught her, with his quirt; and, instead of tears, those quirtings brought forth vixenlike remarks learned from the cowboys.

Nancy had welcomed boarding school. She had a woman's longing for the softer things of life. Her wild little heart was hungry for love, understanding, and sympathy.

An innocent love affair with a boy at a near-by military school had led her into some girlish prank. She had been expelled from school. And she was now returning to face her father and his roaring wrath, when fate had halted her home coming.

In Colonel Hollister's pocket was a lengthy letter from the school. Its version of Nancy's escapade was highly colored. Nancy had disgraced herself, her family, her school, et cetera, et cetera. The blustering colonel was prepared to mete out punishment.

More than anything in life, Hollister loved power. Even as the ruler of a feudal kingdom seeks to extend his boundaries and fatten his coffers by invasion, by bloodshed, by ruthless methods, so the colonel was pushing his border line further. His men were picked cowboys and gun fighters. They drove his cattle on; they fought to hold what they took. The honesty, the fairness, or the justice of life had no part in the dealings of Colonel Hollister.

Dude Carver was his killer, his pro-

tector, and oftentimes his adviser. Carver, who had education, a keen brain, and a lightning-swift gun hand, had become almost indispensable to his employer. And Hollister never dreamed that Dude Carver stayed on because he had seen a picture of Nancy Hollister and had fallen in love with her image. Dude, who had never allowed love to enter his scheme of things, was desperately, hopelessly, in love with a girl whose voice he had never heard, whose face he had never seen, save in the form of the ivory miniature that Hollister had left lying on his table and Duke had promptly annexed.

So now, once over the shock of his first rage, Colonel Hollister found much for profitable consideration in Dude Carver's astounding offer. He saw a chance to humble this harum-scarum daughter. He saw the opportunity to permanently establish Dude Carver as his business manager and field general. Hollister secretly envied Dude's polish and education and his power among men. Now he saw a chance to make use of Dude Carver, to push his lands into further territory, to hold that new range by the sheer power of Carver's guns and brain.

As Colonel Hollister came into the barroom, Carver leaned idly against the bar, his dark eyes alight with some smoldering fire that flushed his tanned cheeks.

"You win, Dude! Finish Brad Claiborne, fetch back that little imp of mischief, and I'll give you a third interest in all I own as a wedding present. By gad, sir, I think you're just the man to tame that young wild cat."

"Put it in writing, colonel. Try to trick me and I'll make life a short, sweet thing for you. I haven't been your jackal for nothing."

Hollister chuckled. He took a certain pride in his very infamy and slippery dealings. It was only another proof of Carver's cleverness and worth. With

pen, ink, and paper, Colonel Hollister drew up his agreement. Dude dictated the wording of it, and at his request, the odd document was made in triplicate. Both men signed all three copies of a document that was nothing more or less than a bill of sale of Nancy Hollister.

"One copy for you, colonel," smiled Dude Carver, "the second, I'll keep."

"And the third?" asked Hollister curiously.

"The third copy I'm sending by messenger to Brad Claiborne!" Dude's lips twisted into an ugly line. "What I want, I'm willing to fight for. I'm fighting for her in the open."

## CHAPTER IX.

### WAR DECLARED.

IT was their second night in camp.

"I reckon," said Brad, as he broiled some quail he had snared, "this ain't much of a supper fer a lady."

"I've eaten heaps worse, Brad. I'm no lily that's been raised in a hothouse. I used to know some mighty rough language for a kid. I learned to smoke, too. Dad calls me a wild cat, a she-devil, and sometimes worse. You may agree with him if ever you see me mad."

"No, ma'am," Brad defended her stoutly.

"If you call me 'ma'am' again, I'll throw a fit. I reckon that saving my life entitles you to call me 'Nancy.'"

They were getting along splendidly, this daughter of the lordly, bellowing cattle baron, and the poor but proud and chivalrous Brad Claiborne, whose sire had been a jayhawker.

"Mebbe so," he said hopefully. "If I fetch you back safe to yore dad, he'll not bother me and my ranch."

"Maybe. Most maybe, though, he'll offer you an extra thousand and figure he's done his filial duty."

"Ma'am?"

"His duty as a father. You're sort



of shy on book lingo, aren't you, Brad?"

"Somethin' scan'lous," admitted Brad, grinning. "Never had a chance to pick up much that a way."

"Well," admitted Nancy, munching quail, which she held in her fingers, "there's a lot between my book covers that I didn't savvy. But if ever we get out of this jam, I'd be proud to help you learn what I've picked up."

"Would you, now?" Brad's eyes shone wistfully.

"Sure I would, Brad. Ain't—aren't we pardners? But I'm wondering if we'll ever see much of one another. You have the colonel sized up wrong. He's a big, bulldozing son of a gun, Brad. I'm not a bit proud of him. When I think of how he treated my mother, I could stake him out and stick hatpins in him."

"Gosh!"

"You don't want to sell. How about the others near you?"

"We agreed not tuh sell out. Those boys'll stand by the agreement. We won't run ner we won't sell. There's about twenty-five of us." Brad, supper forgotten, stared into the fire.

"What's wrong, Brad?"

"Did you ever hear tell of what the Texas folks call the Wire Cutters' war?"

"Yes. Between the big outfits and the little fellows. A lot of men were killed."

Brad nodded. "A lot of men. Some good, some bad uns. My brother, my dad, and my grandpap got killed. I was a kid then, but I killed two men. Out of twenty men that sat around that council fire, two of us was left—me and Dude Carver. I'd hate tuh see another such slaughter. It's wrong. This country is big enough to hold us all." Brad finished his quail before he went on.

"I run away from gun fightin'—had all I wanted, and more. I felt like I'd

never git my hands clean, sort of. I don't know just how tuh explain. I'd had a-plenty. I wanted tuh find a place where it was quiet and peaceful, where a man could build a home. A little place all his own, where he could have some cows and a few ponies and mebbe a dog fer company.

"I reckon I come as close to prayin' fer them things as a cowboy who don't savvy God's language kin. And for the last year er so it looked like He'd heard me. I got so that I'd ride out without a gun sometimes. I'd learned to listen to the birds of a mornin' when the sun shone. Seemed like they hadn't sung so sweet since I was a kid. And I'd ketch myse'f laughin'. I'd fergot how tuh laugh, sort of. And every night when I'd git set fer bed, I'd thank Heaven that things was peaceful like I'd hoped fer—— But I reckon I asked too much."

The fire was dying down to a bed of red coals. Nancy Hollister groped in the dark until she found Brad's hand. She held it tightly in both of hers. For she had seen into the very heart of Brad Claiborne and wanted him to know that she understood.

"And now, Brad, you'll fight to hold that little home?"

"Till they kill me off," came the low reply.

"I'd never heard any side but Colonel Hollister's side of it," said Nancy. "With all my heart, Brad, I hope you win your fight. I hope that peace will come for keeps into the valley and that you will be very, very happy. I hope you will find the girl of your dreams and that she will prove worthy of a real man's love. For alone you cannot know the real meaning of the sunshine and the song birds and the stars. With all my heart, pardner, I wish you happiness."

It was a queer speech for the girl known as "Hollister's wild cat." Darkness hid the mistiness of her eyes, the

wistful longing of her smile; but her hands gripped Brad's hand tightly.

Brad was as a man stricken dumb. He wanted to tell Nancy Hollister that when he saw her face in the glow of the camp fire, he saw the living image of that girl of his dreams; that, down in his heart, he had been cherishing her presence with a hopeless sort of worship. She was that girl who would have made his loneliness bearable. And she was the daughter of Colonel Hollister, who was a cattle king and Brad's enemy!

It was one of those Southwest nights when the stars are thick in a low-hung velvet sky—quiet and peaceful and heavenly, the stillness broken by no man-made sounds. Such a world as it was in the beginning of God's creation—big and clean and unstained by man's depredations.

Humility of heart silenced Brad's tongue. But Nancy understood and was happy. She told herself that she was glad he did not speak of love. But because she was Nancy Hollister she made up her mind that before they parted she would force his love's confession from him. Of all the men she had met and known she liked Brad Claiborne best!

"I reckon," said Brad, after a long silence, "that this'll be our last night together in the hills. We're on the edge of the valley. We'll be able tuh make Galeyville by to-morrow evenin'."

"Promise me you'll show me your ranch, Brad, your home."

"Yuh'd like to see it?" smiled Brad eagerly.

"More than you can guess. Yes, Brad." Her voice shook a little, and she withdrew her two hands from his.

He fixed her makeshift bed and went to take a final look at the horses. She was asleep when he came back to the dying fire. Brad sat there for a long time before he lay down to rest, his gun gripped tightly. Had he known what

to-morrow held, there would have been no sleep for Brad Claiborne.

They were up at dawn, and made another meal of quail which Brad caught with snares. The sun was rising when they left the hills and rode down into the green valley.

"Can't see my place till you ride up on it. I reckon my water rights are the best in the valley. That's why yore dad wants my place. If things pan out, I'll plant fruit trees. I already have flowers and a vegetable garden. The spring is just above the house. Fine water—cold, too, even in summer. I've sycamores and a big hackberry tree. Some cottonwoods a hundred years old."

He chatted along, eager to show his home to the girl. He wanted her to like it, and, because he wished to surprise her, he did not mention those things he had built: The cabin, with its shady veranda, its huge stone fireplace, its vines, the curtains on the windows; the flowers he had planted; the truck garden, with its fence to keep out stray stock; the stable that would hold ten horses, the corrals and branding chute. He wanted to surprise her, but it was he who was surprised, terribly, horribly surprised.

For only smoking ashes marked the site of his cabin, his barn, and his corrals. The little home was burned to the ground. The flowers and garden were trampled into ruin. Brad Claiborne's home was no more.

He went white as chalk under his tan. For some moments he sat his horse, staring hard at the smoking ashes of what had been his home. A man might have run a knife into his back and twisted the dull blade and hurt him less. Brad's face and lips were gray. Then the shock of horror and grief left his blue eyes. They were hard as tempered steel as he turned to the girl. He hardly saw that she was crying, that her face had gone white as death and her hands shook.

"I reckon, Nancy, that the colonel has begun the war." Brad's voice was calm, too calm. The color was coming back into his face. His right hand had fallen to the cedar butt of his long-barreled Colt. Mercy seemed fled from his heart and he was a grim-mouthed, slit-eyed killer.

Nancy Hollister could find no voice to tell him that she was sorry. Words would be too weak, too inadequate. She sat there, dabbing at her eyes, in dumb agony of torture. She could not have suffered more if this had been her home—their home. But she could not find the words to tell him. She saw him swing from the saddle, and walk, a trifle unsteady, skirting the trampled garden, to what had been his cabin.

Then, because she could not bear to watch the man's silent agony, she turned her horse and rode back into the screening manzanita brush. She got off her horse and sat down, shaking as if chilled. Half an hour later he came to her. There was an odd smile on his mouth and he held a letter in his hand. Without a word he passed it to her. It was the document drawn up by Dude Carver and Colonel Hollister.

To whom it may concern: This is an agreement between Colonel James Hollister and Jefferson Carver, better known as Dude Carver.

Jefferson Carver agrees to kill one Brad Claiborne, and return to Colonel Hollister his daughter, Nancy.

In return for these two favors, Colonel James Hollister will deed over to Jefferson Carver one-third interest in all his land and cattle holdings. Colonel James Hollister also agrees to give in marriage the hand of Nancy Hollister to Jefferson Carver.

Nancy Hollister looked up from the document. Her face was white, and her eyes had a hurt, tortured look in their dark depths.

"Brad," she said huskily, "I don't know whether to scream or groan or laugh. This seems like our day of ca-

lamity. You have lost your home. I have lost my father. I'd rather see him in his grave than to have read his signature on such a thing. He's selling me, Brad, and throwing in a bunch of cattle for good measure. Selling me to a murderer! The price paid for me is the life of the only man who has ever treated me decently." Nancy Hollister got unsteadily to her feet. Her hands let go the paper and went out in a pitiful gesture of supplication.

"Brad," she said in a low, vibrant voice, "there was something you wanted to say to me last night. Because you are the finest man I have ever known, chivalry held you silent. You would not speak because you and I were alone and I was in your care. We're still alone, Brad. Terribly alone. If you still can find in your heart that which was in it last night, ask me to be your wife and I will go with you. To the end of the world, Brad Claiborne!"

"Thank God!" Brad's voice shook huskily, and reaching out he took her into his arms.

## CHAPTER X.

### RIDERS OF DESTINY.

**W**HAT I want, I'll fight for!" Dude Carver was as a man gone mad, coldly, dangerously, silently mad. He rode at the head of his picked men, down into the San Simon.

"What I have, I hold!" Brad Claiborne stooped to kiss his bride. In the ranch house of a neighbor, twenty-five men and their families had gathered at Brad's warning call. One of them was a minister, and even as Dude Carver led his men into the San Simon, that minister made Brad Claiborne and Nancy Hollister man and wife.

Some of those ranchers and their wives crossed the plains in covered wagons. Their ears had heard the bloodcurdling war cry of hostile Indians. They had fought the rustler

bands of the Llano Estacado and the Animas Valley; they were ready now to defend their homes against this new invasion, and had banded together to fight this land-grabbing baron of the cow country.

The law of the great Southwest was still too puny to lend assistance. The law officers of Tombstone and such towns were too engrossed with more immediate problems of law enforcement. So these men gathered to defend their property and their lives as best they knew how.

No man there but had worked for the big outfits. All had sniffed powder smoke. They came from fighting stock. Their women were of the frontier breed that could handle a bullet mold as well as a skillet.

But to-night was Brad Claiborne's wedding night. To-morrow had not yet dawned. There was laughter and a little weeping among the women as they saw, in this ceremony, their own cherished wedding day. The men pumped Brad's hand and clapped him on the back. A trapper, clad in buckskin, took a fiddle from a battered case.

"Pardners fer a Verginny reel!" he cried.

The twin lines formed quickly. Men on one side, women opposite. It was not the first time these plainsfolk had danced while a man stood watch outside with loaded rifle.

Quadrille, reel, polka, waltz. The fiddling trapper warmed to his work. Now and then he took a nip of corn whisky. There were doughnuts and cake and coffee. There was laughter. The sky pilot and his dimpled, pink-cheeked wife danced with the others. While, on a near-by knoll, the guard swept the country with vigilant field glass.

"Like Injun days," chuckled the fiddler, who was married to three squaws and whose home lay a thousand miles north, in the fur country. He had

come south as a government scout, and was returning soon.

"Happy, Nancy?" whispered Brad as they waltzed.

"Happy? Happier, Brad, than I ever dreamed I'd be."

"I haven't even a home to take yuh to."

"We'll build our home together, Brad. I have money of my own, too." And Nancy laughed gayly when Brad bristled at the suggestion.

It must have been past midnight when the guard announced the approach of a rider, a lone rider, coming from the direction of the Animas.

Two or three men slipped from the dance to take up posts outside. The fiddle squeaked on to the tune of "Sandy Land." But something of their gayety had gone from the dancers.

A rapping at the door.

"Come in!" some one called.

Into the lighted room stepped a young man whose tawny hair came almost to his shoulders, a smiling, pleasant-faced boy who wore two guns, a boy fresh from the red ground of the Lincoln County war. This visitor of the night was Billy the Kid.

Emissary of death? A messenger from the Hollister faction? Brad stepped from the crowd.

"Brad Claiborne!" Billy the Kid grinned, his buck teeth showing. He held out a hand in unmistakable gesture of friendship.

"Howdy, Billy!" cried Brad. They were almost of the same age. Both were of light complexion, and of that slim-flanked, wide-shouldered build that marks the cowboy. Each was dressed neatly and after the same prevailing fashion in cowboy raiment. Of the two, Billy the Kid looked the less dangerous as he stood there, his hat in his hand, his eyes dancing, his wide mouth spread in a grin, yet he was known to be the most dangerous man in the Southwest. He was barely twenty-one. He boasted



that he had killed twenty-one men—some in fair fight, some from behind, whichever way the play came up. Few of the women had ever seen him. Most of the men had never laid eyes on the Lincoln County killer.

"I bin hunting for you, Brad Claiborne," he said by way of greeting. He still smiled. His hands hung near his guns as his quick eyes scrutinized the crowd. Brad had often wondered if, on another night, in Santa Fé, this boy had been told to kill him.

Brad stiffened, a trifle white about the mouth. To be killed on his wedding night! "We better tend to our business outside, I reckon," said he.

Billy the Kid looked at Brad quickly. Then he laughed heartily. "Not that, Brad. We're friends. I have never fought a friend until he proved himself a traitor. I come as a friend, Brad. You run out on me that night at Santa Fé. I reckon I know why you drifted. I don't wonder you got suspicious. The Old Man is a peculiar old rascal, but he didn't give me any orders to kill you, Brad. If he had, I'd told him where to go. No, it's a message from Old Man Chisholm that sent me here. At least, that's a part of why I'm here——" Billy the Kid's eyes again searched the crowd as if he sought some man's face and was a little disappointed at not finding it.

Then he took a bulky package from inside his shirt. It was wrapped in a red neckscarf. The Kid unwound it. The package bore Brad Claiborne's name. Brad suddenly remembered that he was proving a poor host. With quick apology he took the Kid's hat. He was about to introduce the boy, when the fiddling wrapper pulled the resined bow tunefully across his fiddle-strings.

"This here tune," the fiddler called out, "is in honor of the boy standin' yonder. It's called 'Billy the Kid!' Grab yore pardners!" And as the fid-

dle sent out the quick notes of the song which New Mexico had dedicated to the young outlaw, the Kid blushed confusedly.

"Nancy," said Brad as she came up, "this is my friend, Billy the Kid. Billy I want to present my wife."

Nancy shook hands with the boy. He bowed stiffly, with that now-forgotten reverence for womankind that belonged to the plainsman.

"Didn't know you was married, Brad."

"Now, ain't that odd, Nancy," said Brad, "and we bin married all of five hours?"

"This is your wedding party?" grinned Billy.

Brad and Nancy nodded.

"Then open that package. The Old Man couldn't uh timed it nicer."

Brad opened the package. It contained several packages of bank notes. With the money was a note.

You want to go into the cow business, eh? Well, here's a start. You needn't have run off, Brad, that night, from the Old Man. When you git located and can spare the time, come and see me. My father's folks was Claibornes and I'd like to see what sort of kinsfolk that makes you and me. Good luck, Brad. Don't be too hard on the Old Man when you think of him.

Brad stood like a man in a daze. He handed the note to Nancy, then turned to Billy the Kid, who stood there, laughing like a schoolboy.

"You see, Brad," he said, "John Chisholm ain't as bad as he's painted. He's a good friend to men who act right by him, and he's a hard hater. No halfway business about the Old Man. He thought a heap of Old Cedar. He liked the way you took holt of the herd and finished Cedar's job. He told me you'd earned this much, that it was worth it, and more, to be able to remember you'd done it fer him."

"Why, Brad," cried Nancy, "this means a grand start for us."

The dancers now gathered around to get a glimpse of Brad's new wealth.

"Somebody take care of Billy's horse," said a member of the crowd. But the Kid shook his head.

"Have to be moving along. I might drop in later. Business before pleasure, as the sayin' goes. Adios, folks!"

He was gone, as suddenly as he had come. He halted at the knoll to chat with the man on guard. Then he rode away into the moonlit night.

Not more than forty miles away, some men were hazing along an immense herd of longhorn cattle. These cattle belonged to Colonel Hollister, but the heavily armed cowboys were not Hollister's men. They were outlaws who took the orders of no man, save one; and that one was a tawny-haired boy known as Billy the Kid. They moved along boldly with their stolen herd. They laughed and joked and sang, these riders of the night, as they pushed their herd along. Ahead, on either flank, and at the rear, rode silent, keen-eyed men with naked guns laid across their saddles. Rustlers, outlaws, they were the human wolf pack of the border, and their leader was the most daring, the most fearless, the most feared man in the cow country.

Billy the Kid rode alone, in the same direction as the herd, angling toward a certain meeting point, a narrow pass between ragged hills, through which the stolen herd must pass.

Coming from the opposite direction toward this pass rode that other crowd of hard-eyed men. At their head rode Dude Carver, murder in his heart.

No man, save Billy the Kid, knew the reason that lay behind this stolen herd. No man of his own band guessed that this reason was a woman, a woman who once graced the dance halls of Dodge City. A woman known as Sherry.

Because, one night in Dodge, the woman Sherry had told Billy the Kid a story, and the boy had remembered that

story, this stolen herd now moved out of the Animas and into the San Simon Valley. So moves the unseen hand of Destiny, shaping fragments so as to fit into the finally completed scheme of things, moving men and horses and cattle across the waste lands, like pawns across a chess board.

So it was ordained that two women were to be the background of a night's tragedy. One woman was Nancy Hollister, the other was a woman of the dance halls, known as Sherry. The two were queens of Destiny's chess game. The queens' knights were moving out under the stars, riding forth to fight—perhaps to die—pawns, moved by the hand of Destiny.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WAY OF COLONEL HOLLISTER.

*QUIEN ES?*" The challenge ripped the velvet night. "*Quien es?* Who comes?"

Two armed men barked the words, two men who guarded the pass while the rest of their band slept. One of these men was Bob Hill; the other man was Charlie Lorne. Failing in their attempted kidnaping, these jackals of the desert had cast their lot with Hollister's men and were taking orders from Dude Carver.

"*Quien es?*" They called once more. The click of hoofs, the bawling of that stolen herd was filtering through the pass.

And even as the echo of the challenge thinned, guns slashed the night with roaring flame. Bob Hill pitched headlong from the rock on which he stood. Charlie Lorne slumped in a heap, jerking his gun lever, dying even as he pulled the trigger of his rifle.

A moment passed and chaos filled the rocky pass. Stampeded cattle charged blindly, urged by those behind. The two men in the lead of the herd jumped their horses up the rocky slopes to

safety just as the leaders of the herd broke past, followed by a deluge of horns and hoofs and thundering beasts gone mad.

The Hollister men raced for safety as that avalanche of death tore through the pass. Horses bolted. Men, some of them half clothed, climbed up the rocks, guns and cartridge belts in their hands. The herd blotted out their camp, tearing on into the night. And on the flanks of that mad herd rode the rustler crew, all save Billy the Kid. He alone stayed back, smiling a little as he sat his frightened horse, watching a certain narrow trail that ran down off the side of the pass.

Into the brain of a hunted man there creep certain instincts, intuitions, and crafty reasoning. Billy the Kid's faculties were those of the mountain lion or wolf.

Out of the din and chaos that filled the night there came a nameless feeling that the man he sought was taking no part in it. That man would presently ride down that narrow, twisting trail, and he would be Dude Carver.

The watching Kid reined his horse back into the deep shadow of a brush thicket. His steady gray eyes watched that trail. They narrowed a little as a frightened horse, bearing a reckless rider, came at a swift, desperate pace off the hillside. A smile played about the Kid's wide mouth. He had come a long way to kill Dude Carver. His reason was locked within his heart. Now he was given his chance to plant a dozen shots in the swaying body of the horseman who raced off the hillside; but he did not draw his guns. Instead, he let Carver ride past within easy stone's throw of where he sat his horse. He saw Dude race for the far end of the pass, heading for the San Simon and the trail that led to the ranch where Brad Claiborne, his bride, and their friends danced to the tunes of the buckskin trapper's fiddle.

Billy the Kid let Dude Carver go by and clatter out of sight in the shadowy pass. Then, still smiling, the boy followed. He had come to kill Dude Carver in his own fashion, when and where he chose, and he did not choose this spot or this hour for the task. For to this boy who smiled and danced and killed, the value of life was cheap. He killed quickly, without effort, without a single regret. If need be, he would face Carver and shoot him down; or, if ambush came easier, it would be from ambush. A life was a life. The manner of its taking mattered less than a little. Billy the Kid hummed a gay Mexican tune as he followed Dude Carver into the open country, keeping his distance.

Back in the rocky pass guns blazed in the wake of the running herd. Men fought with a silent grimness, crouching behind boulders, dodging, cursing, dying.

Among these men was one whom Destiny had marked for death. That man was Colonel Hollister, who had ridden to warn Carver that the ranchers of the San Simon had gathered at one ranch and were prepared to fight. He had intended riding back to town, but, his horse being tired, decided to wait until morning. That decision was about to cost the cattle king his life.

The test of a man is death. Hollister met that test now as he stood with wide-spread legs, bellowing orders to his scattered men, steadying them by the example of his own courage. Hatless, his shirt open, exposing a mammoth hairy chest, he gripped his guns and roared his contempt for the enemies that shot at him.

His iron-gray hair was tousled, red-spotted his shirt and trousers. He swayed a little as he jerked the triggers of his guns, but he did not fall. It was as if he bore a charmed life. Bullets struck him, but he still kept his feet, roaring orders, flinging taunts at his hidden foes. He shot at the shadowy

figures of horsemen who raced along the canyon floor in the wake of the vanished herd that had come and gone like some cyclone.

And as the last of them rode past, the echoes of their guns fading in the night, Colonel Hollister's dying eyes swept the hills and the desert that he had come to rule. A dozen bullets riddled his huge frame. His eyes were glazing, darkening with the shadow of approaching death. Like some old feudal king on his rocky throne, his glance lingered on that which life had given him and death now took from him. Reluctantly, he left his worldly kingdom for what lay beyond life. A grim sadness stamped its mark on his face. He tossed his empty guns away. His empty hands went out in a last gesture of farewell. And so he died, the vision of his kingdom in his unshut eyes.

It was not cowardice that prompted Dude Carver to flight. Dude was no coward, but he had signed an agreement to kill Brad Claiborne, and that duty drove him on. Carver liked Brad as well as he had ever liked a man, but he had never called any man friend. He owed no man allegiance. He loved Nancy Hollister. To win her, he would kill Brad Claiborne. As Hollister's son-in-law he would rule a small kingdom, but wealth held no attraction for Carver. Once he had married the girl, he would get a large enough sum of money from Hollister to start in the cow business. Not in Arizona or New Mexico, but in another country.

"Where I can hang up my guns and quit the whisky," he told himself. He might have added, "Where the ghosts of murdered men can not haunt me."

He was drunk now, as he quit the pass. He had been drunk for three days or more. Not as we think of a drunken man, for his legs were steady, his tongue was normal, and his brain was clear. That killer's brain was clear, to be sure, but it lack'd that undefinable

instinct that must be functioning to warn him of danger and to make his gun hand a split second faster than that of his opponent.

The whisky fired his brain as he rode. He would ride alone to meet Brad Claiborne. He would kill him where he found him, and he would tame Hollister's wild cat. Over and over again he planned it, as he rode with a half empty bottle.

Now and then he looked back over his shoulder with a quick, furtive glance. That animal instinct was telling him that some one followed. But because the haunting, mocking, invisible souls of dead men forever rode with Dude Carver, he despised himself for a weak-hearted fool, and rode on, on, into the gray shadows of dawn. And behind came Billy the Kid. Billy, who followed with the skill of an Apache, keeping always just out of sight, always within rifle distance.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE TRAIL TO HAPPINESS.

THE fiddling trapper was gone. Laughter and song had given way to low-voiced counsel and speculation. Children slept, lying in rows on the wide beds. Women tried to cheer one another. Brad was reminded of another dawn when his aunt and his cousins had left a cabin down on the Pecos, a dawn whose stillness was broken by the clump of sod dropped into new graves. He got to his feet with an abrupt movement.

"Men," he said in a low tone that carried to the group of womenfolk. "Men of the San Simon, I want to say a few words, as few as possible."

Briefly, in the homely language of the cow country, Brad told them the story of that fierce war in Texas, the Wire Cutters' war. He told it in all its stark tragedy and horror, sketching in the pathos of the woman and chil-

dren left behind by those warriors of the Pecos.

"Men of the San Simon," he concluded, "there are two survivors of that war. I am one. The other is Dude Carver. So I'm a-goin' to ride out alone to meet Dude Carver. I'll explain to him that me and Nancy is married, that no power but God kin tear us apart, and that the settlers of the San Simon is here to stay.

"Twice, since that night on the bank of the Pecos, Carver has proved he was my friend. We've slept in the same blankets, ate at the same fire, smoked the same tobacco, and more than once he's told me he hoped we'd never be enemies. Surely he'll listen to what I have to say.

"So, men of the San Simon, I'm goin' to keep blood from staining this little valley. I'll meet Carver as a friend. As sure as there is a heaven above, this business will be settled without them babies in yonder room losin' their dad-dies."

Brad turned to the minister who was known as "the Sky Pilot" of San Simon, a kindly faced man in black garb, a Bible under his arm, a Colt buckled about his waist.

"There stands a man of God," said Brad; "let him tell you all that I'm right."

"Spoken like a man," smiled the Sky Pilot of the San Simon. "Men, this boy speaks with courage and wisdom. He is right. Let him ride as a man of peace. If his bold mission fails, then may God guide our actions. Let us offer a brief prayer for the safety of this boy who but a few hours ago was joined in holy wedlock to yonder brave girl who smiles so splendidly."

So they stood grouped there in the cabin, the men and the women, while the Sky Pilot offered his prayer.

Nancy bade Brad farewell with a bravery that matched his own. Then Brad Claiborne rode away into the

dawn, alone, to meet the man who was coming to kill him.

Brad rode without the moral support of those words he had spoken in the cabin. For, down in his heart, he knew Dude Carver for a merciless killer, whose brain and heart and soul had been warped and twisted dry of mercy. Brad rode away from the ranch, away from his bride, to fight for that which God had given him. He was ready to kill Dude Carver as he would kill some mad beast that threatened his bride. Love had come to Brad at an hour when he most needed it. He had held the girl of his dreams against his heart. God willing, his dreams and hopes would come true. Surely, if God watched over mankind, He would not let wrong conquer.

But Brad was too much of a fighter not to look well to his weapons. He examined his gun as he rode, spinning the cylinder, balancing the gun in his hand, drawing it in swift, smooth pulls from its holster. His eyes, clear and steady, were like blue fire.

Mile after mile he rode. Night was gone. In half an hour the sun would come up. He was traveling across a level stretch dotted with patches of brush. The trail twisted in and out between them. One could see only as far as the next turn. Brad's eyes ached from staring ahead. He watched his horse, trusting to the animal's senses, rather than his own.

He saw the horse's head rise, its ears pointed forward. Some one was coming toward him along the trail. Brad's gun was in his hand. Then an abrupt twist in the trail brought the two men face to face—Brad Claiborne and Dude Carver, each holding a gun, ready to shoot. Their horses halted so close that their muzzles touched. Brad saw that Carver's left hand held an almost empty bottle. The gun in his right hand was cocked.

"And so we meet, eh, Claiborne?"



Carver's dark eyes looked like red slits.

"As friends, Dude?" Brad's voice was steady.

"I have no friends, Claiborne, and well you know it. I've come to kill you. I sent you word. You got it?"

"I got it. You needn't have burned my ranch."

"Our estimable *amigo*, Bob Hill, did that. I'm no house burner. I want Nancy Hollister. To get her, I'll kill you or any other man that stands in my way."

"Nancy Hollister is my wife, Carver. I'd like to keep you as my friend."

"Friend? You know well, Claiborne, that I want no man's friendship, yours least of all. But I don't want your ghost trailing me. I'll fight you fair for her. Get down on the ground."

Carver swung from his saddle and, ignoring Brad's drawn gun, holstered his own weapon. He lifted the bottle, a satanic smile on his thin lips.

"I drink, Brad Claiborne, to your very bad luck!" He did not lower the bottle until it was empty. Then he threw it aside and jerked off his neckscarf. He held the gayly colored scarf by a corner.

"A little game I learned in Mexico, Claiborne. A game of elimination. Perhaps you are familiar with its simple rules? We each hold a corner of the handkerchief. As the challenged party, you may name the weapons—knives or guns. The man who first lets go will, by all laws of nature governing life and what lies beyond life, be quite dead one second after."

Neither man had heard the thud of a horse's hoofs in the soft sand. Carver, speaking loudly, did not realize his voice carried far. The sound of the approaching horse ceased. The rider had dismounted, had slipped off spurs and chaps, and was coming through the brush with the speed and silence of a cougar.

"Knives or guns, Claiborne?" came the taunting, sneering challenge.

"Dude, ain't there another way outa this?"

"I didn't think, Brad Claiborne, that you were such a whimpering, sniveling coward. Even a coyote fights for its mate!"

"Guns, then," said Brad, and reaching out took the other corner of the neckscarf. Their right hands dropped with lightning speed to their guns. The neckscarf went taut. Two bodies crouched, tensed, twisted sidewise. The still morning was shattered by an explosion.

Brad stood there, white-lipped, narrow-eyed, half dazed, his gaze fixed on Dude Carver, who still held the neckscarf even as his dead body sagged and wilted. Carver's gun barrel smoked from the shot that nicked Brad's hat crown. A thin wisp of smoke came from Brad's gun but Brad's bullet had missed by a hair's breadth. Yet Dude Carver was dead, stone dead. A dark, ugly spot was above his left ear, the right side of his head showed a gaping hole where a soft-nosed slug had plowed through his brain and torn its way out.

The twisted smile still distorted Carver's dead mouth. His left hand, white and well kept, still clutched the gay scarf. And Brad stood there, staring like a man in a trance.

"I didn't know what else to give you for a weddin' present, Brad," said Billy the Kid, coming from the bushes with a lithe, silent step.

The young outlaw stood there, a wide grin on his mouth, his gray eyes, cold, devoid of hate or regret, traveling from Carver's dead body to Brad's astonished face.

"Two birds with one rock, as they say, Brad. I bin after this fine hombre for many moons." Billy the Kid knelt beside the body. His hands searched the dead man's pockets. From Carver's coat he took some papers and

squatted on his heels, reading their contents. One of them, he tossed to Brad. It was a copy of the agreement between Hollister and Carver.

Then he nodded over some letters. They were written by a woman, the faint perfume of them mingling with the lingering taint of powder smoke. There was a newspaper clipping with a fairly good print of a woman's picture. The clipping told, in glowing terms, of the marvelous success of a new operatic star in New York, a Madame Sherry. The picture was a fair likeness of the girl Brad had met at Dodge City.

Lighting a match, Billy the Kid set fire to the letters and the newspaper clipping. When they were gray ash, Billy stood up, smiling oddly.

"There is nothing on earth lower than a man that'll blackmail a woman, Brad," said the yellow-haired boy. "Carver was that low. A poor woman once killed her husband. She had good reason to do so. Carver saw her shoot him. He used that knowledge to make her help him. She was sort of stuck on him, I guess, because he had a way with women. She'd put things in writing. He was holding it over her like a club, so I told her I'd git the letters and burn 'em. There's the ashes of a wom-

an's foolishness. Brad. She kin begin life all over now."

Billy the Kid fashioned a cigarette and lit it. Then he chuckled softly, as if enjoying a good joke.

"Queer old world, Brad, when yuh look at it clost. All sorts of humans. Well, we better plant Dude Carver. Yore bride'll be watchin' for yuh. My boys'll be thinkin' I'm lost. Now, don't go mixin' in no more handkerchief fights. If I hadn't come along, he'd uh made a nice new bridegroom over into a shot-up corpse. You'd uh took him along with yuh, but there ain't much satisfaction in that. Yeah, it's a queer old world!"

It was Brad who fashioned a headstone from the end gate of a wagon and carved on it the name of the man who had died there.

Billy the Kid had ridden off with a careless grin to join his men. Brad was left alone.

Alone, in the glorious sunshine of a new day, he carved the headboard and placed it to mark the grave of the man who had no friend.

Then Brad Claiborne mounted his horse and rode back along the trail--the trail that led to peace and happiness and love.

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### AMERICA'S NORTHERNMOST RAILROAD

**N**OT only is the railroad, built back in gold-rush days from Nome to within thirty miles of the Arctic Circle, the northernmost railroad in America, it is also free—if you are fortunate enough to be able to supply your own car. In other words, the tracks are free, but the traveler must own a train, dog wagon, or flanged wheel automobile in order to make use of it, unless he prefers to ride in the "up-to-date" vehicle now in use there.

This picturesque means of conveyance is a small box car with windows, operated by an automobile motor, and supplied with a spotlight, locomotive bell, and a large jack for getting the car back on the tracks after it has jumped off, as frequently occurs. There is also a small willow brush, fastened in front of the wheels, to brush the snow from the rails. This car runs over the line three times a week, carrying passengers and supplies.

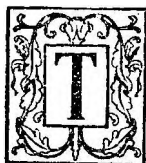
This being a one-track railroad, and switches placed only every ten miles, it is necessary for two travelers, meeting between switches, to come to an agreement as to which shall back up.



# Wolf's Brand

By **Harrison Conrad**

*Author of "Cowboy, Watch Your Step!" etc.*



THE mystery about the "Lone Wolf" was not one of identity. True, his real name was unknown, but names are not the only reliable marks of identification. Brands serve quite as well, often better, and those that the Lone Wolf carried were the kind that could not be blotted.

Knowing this, he disdained to hide his saturnine features behind a mask when he appeared in St. Elmo like a phantom, deftly and deliberately gathered unto himself whatever he coveted, and then, again like a phantom dissolved into the closing dark—for it was always in the early hours of the night that he came.

Since many of St. Elmo's citizens had seen him at close range, everybody in the town and surrounding country was familiar with his prominent physical points. He was tall, dark, black-haired, black-eyed, with a beak of a nose, and with the thumb and three fingers missing from his left hand. He always wore a raincoat and a brown derby, the latter a conspicuous note in

a country where derbies were not in high favor.

The real mystery about the Lone Wolf was where he came from and whither he went. Poses had repeatedly tried to run him down after he had raided a saloon, the Chinese restaurant, the general store, or some other establishment, but each time the trail was the same baffling puzzle. It simply led round in a wide circle through the pine-covered mountains—never the same way, but always passing certain points—and finally ended in the main street of St. Elmo itself, where it was lost in the dust.

It seemed that the only solution was that the Lone Wolf must live in St. Elmo. But it was incredible that in a town of seven hundred people, where everybody knew everybody else, a man could completely obliterate himself, and for weeks at a time successfully keep in concealment his mouse-blue grulla mare, whose peculiar physical characteristics were as well known as her master's. The mare was small and swift as the wind.

It was like flinging a challenge into

the teeth of the Lone Wolf when Leo Carter came to St. Elmo and started the Citizens Bank, himself constituting the entire directorate and office force, in the first-floor outside corner room of the Saguaro Hotel building. And he acted with his eyes open; for he had not only heard about the much-dreaded outlaw, but the prominent citizens of the town had frankly warned him that his venture was foolhardy.

In spite of all this, Leo staked his entire fortune on the enterprise. His capital of thirty thousand dollars represented his share of the estate of his father, a moderately successful cowman in the next county who had been mysteriously murdered and robbed of a large sum of money after making a sale of beef cattle: Leo had chosen to take his share of the estate in cash and leave his three brothers to carry on the traditions of his father's outfit.

He had received a business education and had served an apprenticeship with a banking institution in Tucson. When his father's estate was settled, he decided to branch out for himself. St. Elmo, a growing town on the railroad, was in the heart of a prosperous stock country, and there was not a bank within a hundred miles of it in any direction. So it was St. Elmo that he selected.

For two months the Citizens Bank was a dead enterprise. Leo was liked; he made friendships readily and held them; but nobody came to the bank to open an account or negotiate a loan. This was not because of any lack of confidence in the young banker himself. A bogey stood in the doorway, with a club fitted to scare off clients. It was the Lone Wolf.

Then J. Willoughby Moreley, promoter and president of the North American Exploration, Mining and Development Corporation, broke the deadlock. Mr. Moreley lived in what he called a suite in the Saguaro Hotel. Al-

most immediately after he had established his headquarters in St. Elmo, nearly three years back, he had become the town's most influential citizen. He was a big, amiable blond of thirty-five or thereabouts.

The property of his corporation with the impressive name, which was out in the hills some twelve miles from town, was quite worthless; but this was indulgently winked at, for its urbane president always had plenty of money to spend, and he spent it freely, if not altogether wisely, spent it on his own pleasures and not on the worthless mine. The only improvements that had ever been put on the property were a stone cabin, where Mr. Moreley spent a part of his time, and a high long-armed crane at the bottom of a narrow fifty-foot-deep canyon.

One morning, Mr. Moreley, attired in well-tailored riding togs—he kept two saddle horses at the livery stable—came breezing into the Citizens Bank and dropped a canvas bag on the glass shelf in front of the cashier's wicket—dropped it in such a manner that it gave forth a delightful tinkle of gold coins.

"Good morning, Mr. Carter," he greeted affably.

"Good morning, Mr. Moreley," Leo returned, assuming his best business manner. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Perhaps. I have been thinking of opening an account with your bank, young man; but before I decide to do so, will you tell me, please, what assurance I may have that this rascal that's known as the Lone Wolf won't gather it in and leave me holding the sack?"

"I am quite able to take care of my customers' deposits, Mr. Moreley," Leo returned somewhat stiffly, "and I am fully prepared to guarantee their safety."

It was not a boast. He looked as if he could do just that. He was a six-footer, brown-haired, with steady, gray

eyes and big, capable hands, and his lithe, athletic-looking body was as firm as bone. Courage, resourcefulness and an indomitable will were indicated in his tight mouth and firm chin.

"Besides," the banker added, "I carry a sufficient deposit with my correspondent in Tucson to cover any contingency that may arise."

"That and your own sterling honesty are assurance enough for me, young man," said Moreley with an ingratiating smile. "We need an institution like this in St. Elmo. It deserves encouragement and patronage. I have recently learned that it is the fear of the Lone Wolf that is keeping customers away. A foolish fear, and it must be dispelled. So I have decided to take the lead. I flatter myself that by opening an account I shall establish confidence in your bank; and I shall, moreover, take pleasure in doing some missionary work in your behalf among my townsmen. I have here, Mr. Carter, three thousand dollars for my first deposit."

"Thank you, Mr. Moreley," said Leo, though he was tempted to decline the account. He did not like J. Willoughby Moreley, but, being a business man, he must mask his personal prejudices. So at last his maiden account was on his books.

It proved to be fertile seed. Secret hoardings were uncovered and his business immediately took on a small boom. Within a week his deposits had run up to forty thousand dollars and he had made several satisfactory loans.

Leo had done up the bulk of the money in canvas bags in preparation for dispatching it to his Tucson correspondent, but he had been too busy to get the shipment off. It was piled up in his safe and would go to-morrow.

Then came the Lone Wolf.

But he did not wait until night. He came at five o'clock, shrewdly timing his arrival for the exact moment when Leo turned from his cashier's desk to carry

his tray to the safe. Leo had pulled down the shades and locked the front door. The side door was always locked but he had not yet bolted it. It was by this door that the Lone Wolf let himself in, evidently with a master key. So noiselessly had he made his entrance that Leo was not aware of his presence until he turned toward his big second-hand iron safe to be confronted by a black muzzle in the steady hand of a tall, beak-nosed man in a brown derby and a long, drab raincoat. Before Leo could catch his breath, his gun, which he always carried, was flipped from its holster.

"I need this Citizens Bank in my business, young feller," said the Lone Wolf in a low, nasal drawl, as he pocketed Leo's weapon, "and I've come to get it."

He got it; and when he galloped away on his grulla pony, he carried with him, in a gunnysack, every dollar that the safe had held, excepting only the silver, and it hardly totaled a thousand dollars.

Leo, gagged and thoroughly trussed up, was left lying on the floor. He was not an excitable young man and he calmly took stock of the situation. If the Lone Wolf were allowed to escape, the Citizens Bank was irreparably ruined, Leo himself was likewise irreparably ruined, and his depositors would suffer heavy losses. He winced when he thought of the action the depositors might take.

He saw instantly that he must do more than recover the money. The menace of the Lone Wolf must be disposed of for all time if the bank was ever to be opened for business again. Failure in either purpose would mean defeat in the very beginning of his career, a defeat that would load an intolerable burden upon him which he must drag through the rest of his life.

But Leo Carter was of that stalwart breed to whom defeat is merely another



word for deterred victory and failure is no more than a barrier that must be vaulted in the race for success.

And this was his own battle, his alone. He must not call for help. He did not dare do so. The word must not get out that the Lone Wolf had raided the bank. Not, at least, until he had brought in the bandit and the money. No telling what the depositors would do. Men do foolish things in the fever of excitement. If nobody but himself had seen the Lone Wolf, they might even believe—and act on that belief—that he himself had framed a way to make off with the money.

Leo had set to work to throw off his bonds even while the sound of the retreating hoofs was still in his ears. The Lone Wolf was an adept at hogging up a prisoner, and he had done his work thoroughly. But he had overlooked a small penknife that lay on the low, open desk. The knife was Leo's way to freedom, though the straining effort cost him more than a precious hour.

The bandit had taken his gun, but a reliable old frontier .45 was hidden under a pillow in his sleeping quarters, which connected with the banking room. It took him but a few minutes to exchange his neat gray business suit for overalls, boots with spurs already buckled on, blue woolen shirt, and broad, black sombrero. He did not take time to put on his chaps. It was six thirty when, with the gun in the bosom of his shirt and the penknife in his overalls pocket, he let himself out by the side door. It was still more than two hours until night. These long June days did not darken until nearly nine o'clock.

He had brought his favorite saddle horse from the ranch, and it was being cared for at the livery stable. Down at the stable he noticed casually that one of J. Willoughby Moreley's animals was not in its stall.

"Mr. Moreley out for a ride?" he in-

quired of the hostler as he adjusted the saddle.

"Mr. J. Willoughby Moreley rode out on his buckskin pony this mornin'. Said he was ridin' up north to take a peek at some outcroppin's that he'd heard about. He took a little roll o' camp gear and said he wouldn't be back till late—mebbe not till mornin'."

"Then he didn't go to his mine?"

"No, he went t'other way."

As Leo cantered down the street, he observed that the town was in its customary repose. This was a reliable index that the Lone Wolf had come and gone without anybody but himself seeing him.

He rode down the side street that the bandit had taken in leaving town. Small hoof tracks led in and out of the alley that ran behind the Saguaro Hotel. In a glance, Leo's expert eye took in every detail of these hoofprints, their size, their neat shape, and the fact that the shoe calks were quite sharp.

He did not try to follow the trail, but struck off across the hills straight for the property of the North American Exploration, Mining and Development Corporation, for in the tales that he had heard about the Lone Wolf's raids that was one of the points that the fleeing bandit always passed.

Leo knew the location of the property for he had ridden out to it several times, and he could safely depend upon his perfect sense of direction to guide him straight to it in a cross-country short cut.

But he encountered difficulties in the rough hills that upset his calculations, and dusk was closing in when he dropped down from a high ridge to a point near the worthless mine. Here he cut the Lone Wolf's trail. The bandit was running true to form. He had passed this regular station in his circuitous route through the hills back to St. Elmo.

The trail was lost on a stretch of bare

flat rock, fully forty feet wide, which extended back to the stone cabin, more than a hundred feet away. Beyond that hard blanket he picked it up again and rode on, with his .45 now in his hand.

Leo had followed the trail for more than a mile when he reined in to an abrupt halt and flung himself off his horse. Something peculiar had struck him about those tracks, even in the thickening dark. A closer look revealed what it was. The shoes were apparently of the same shape and size as those on the feet of the Lone Wolf's grulla, but the calks were not so sharp. They were, indeed, blunt and worn. This horse that he was trailing was not the same horse that the bandit had ridden onto the level stretch of bare rock in front of J. Willoughby Moreley's stone cabin.

Instantly Leo formed a judgment that caused him to abandon the trail forthwith. He turned aside and de-toured in a narrow parabola to work around to a point on the canyon's rim across from Moreley's stone cabin. Darkness came down before he had gone far, but he knew the stars.

Hills and side canyons, however, took him off his course. At the end of nearly an hour of difficult going he came upon a plain trail. He got down and struck a match.

Under the dim flare he saw the fresh scores of shod hoofs. They had unmistakably been made by the Lone Wolf's mouse-blue mare. They were of the same shape and size as those he had examined at the mouth of the alley in St. Elmo, and there were the imprints of the sharp shoe calks. Two sets of tracks traversed counter directions, but Leo quickly determined that the last way the pony had gone had been toward the higher hills.

"Getting warm," he said to himself as he remounted. He turned his horse toward the high hills, the way the grulla

had last gone, and gave it its head, trusting to its infallible sense to keep the trail in that dead dark. "No wonder those posses never caught up with him by following the tracks that led round through the hills and back to town. I'm beginning to see light!" he added.

A little more than three hundred yards farther on, the trail began to curl steeply upward along the wall of a canyon. The horse snorted its distrust of the precarious way, but Leo urged it on. High up, along the edge of the precipice, the trail led, winding round huge boulders and tangles of brush.

A point was reached where Leo had to speak sharply to his mount when it halted and refused to go on. With a protesting snort, it heaved itself up a stiff pitch of smooth rock. Then it slipped and went to its knees. Leo stepped off nimbly, with one hand clinging to the reins and the other holding his gun; but no sooner had his feet touched the rock than his heels shot from under him.

Both he and the horse floundered about frantically in an effort to regain their feet. The struggle was brief. In a few seconds the horse plunged off the trail into black space. Leo abandoned the reins and snatched wildly for some friendly anchor. His struggles had no effect except to bring him nearer the brink of the precipice, and in the briefest fraction of time he followed his mount.

But he did not fall far. After dropping through space for a breathless interval, he crashed into a catclaw and hung. One hand still held the gun; with the other he made a quick grab and caught the thorny bush in a death grip. The horse kept on, smashing down to the canyon floor amidst an avalanche of released boulders.

"Heard you comin', feller," gloated a nasal voice, with a snarling laugh, somewhere above, "and I was all fixed

and waitin' for you, me keepin' that anglin' rock soft-soaped to side track any smart Aleck that might try to get too fresh. Now, I got to work round my slickery place so's not to jine you down at the bottom o' that deep hole. And got to hurry; Bill must be waitin'."

It was the Lone Wolf. Leo could not mistake that nasal drawl. And Bill was waiting. Who was Bill and where and why was he waiting?

But this was no time for speculations. The tricky bandit was already making a detour around the trap. Leo could hear a horse scraping and scrambling among the rocks well above him. The Lone Wolf must be headed off and prevented from joining his confederate—for now it was certain he had a confederate. And his name was Bill.

Leo was grateful for that friendly catchlaw. He was unhurt, save for a few bruises and many scratches. He had been fortunate; but a lump rose in his throat when he thought of his mangled horse lying at the bottom of the canyon.

He thrust his gun into the bosom of his shirt and noiselessly released himself from the clawing bush. Noiselessly also he writhed along the almost perpendicular wall, swinging by firm handholds from rock to bush and from bush to rock.

Presently from the distance a duet of shots sounded close together.

"Keep your shirt on, Bill," came the nasal growl from the darkness above. "Be with you pronto. Nothin' to worry about now, with that hombre piled up down at the bottom o' the gulley. I'll answer your signal soon as I get this critter safe down in the trail."

While the Lone Wolf was droning his self-congratulatory soliloquy, Leo made out a moving smudge above him. He gripped a bush and slid the gun from his bosom. "Up with 'em, lobo!" he clipped, as his thumb jerked back the hammer.

A snarl came from the blur as it whirled with a streak of fire. It was met with a counter-streak. The two reports were as one, and an instant later Leo's gun spoke again. There was a groan, then the shadow sagged and crumpled up. Another blurred object, behind the first, halted and now remained motionless. It was the grulla. It must have been trained to gunfire not to have bolted.

"Guess those shots answered your signal, Bill," Leo muttered as he pulled himself up on the trail. "But it's somebody besides the Lone Wolf that's coming."

The bullet that had been intended for him had gone wild; but both his shots had scored. The Lone Wolf was dead in the trail.

"I don't like the idea of playing ghoul," said Leo as he picked up the derby and began stripping off the raincoat; "but I may need these things before I get through."

In the dead man's pockets he found a huge roll of bills and a bunch of keys.

"I'm not robbing you, remember," Leo said aloud, "just taking care of this stuff. And I've got to find the locks that these keys fit. I'll take your gun and belt, too, fellow. Now I'm going to see what you've got on the pony."

A reconnoitering feel of the war bag that was tied behind the cantle made it plain that it held nothing but clothing. Leo put on the derby and raincoat. In the dark he could easily pass as the Lone Wolf, for his height was practically a counterpart of the dead bandit's. Two more shots came as a signal from the distance when he led the pony into the trail and mounted.

"Coming, Bill!" called Leo, and fired two answering shots as he started the grulla down the steep trail. "Be with you pronto. Then we're going to find out where your pal cached the Citizens Bank. I need it in my business."

He gave his thoughts audible speech

that he might practice the Lone Wolf's nasal drawl. He chuckled with satisfaction when he found that he could mimic it perfectly.

The Lone Wolf's gun was a .45, like Leo's, and the belt was full of shells. He refilled the empty chambers of both weapons and returned his own gun to the bosom of his shirt.

He gave the pony a loose rein, knowing that she would travel straight to the spot where the Lone Wolf and his confederate had agreed to meet.

"Who's there?" came the challenge from the darkness when Leo drew near the rim of the canyon at a point directly across from Moreley's cabin.

Leo felt his hair bristle at the back of his neck. He knew that voice. He was prepared for the revelation that it brought, for he had more than half expected it. Still, the actuality of it gave him a distinct thrill. It was the voice of J. Willoughby Moreley.

"Who d'you reckon?" Leo answered in his practical nasal drawl.

"I ought to insist on your giving the right countersign, Wolfey," Moreley chided harshly; "but I won't quarrel with you when you're in that pceevish mood. Can't you see yet that with this last haul the time's ripe to lay 'er down? Got to quit while the quitting's good."

Leo, tingling with excitement, reined in when Moreley bulked out of the dark and stood at his stirrup.

"Off with you!" Moreley snapped. "And don't be all night about it. Every minute's precious."

"Sure, Bill," Leo said as he dismounted. "I was jest wonderin' about the kid——"

"Did just as I said he'd do," Moreley cut in. "Told nobody and tackled the job himself. I climbed the ridge and watched him after I'd made a couple of miles of false trail. It was almost night when I lost sight of him, but he was still on the course. We may be sure that he finally lost it in the dark

and is probably breaking his fool neck right now trying to cut it again. But you never can tell what a kid like him will do. He might take a notion to turn around and back track. So let's hurry. We'll put on the sling and I'll swing you across. You'll find the Citizens Bank"—he chuckled—"waiting where you left it. Grab it and ride as fast as you can straight for the line. I'll meet you in Nacozari with the rest of the swag just as soon as I can slip away without arousing suspicion. One thing I've got to do before going is to draw my three thousand out of the Citizens Bank—if that young financier can dig it up."

"And if he can't?"

"I suppose I can afford to lose it."

"Ain't that the truth?" Leo laughed nasally.

He was tempted to force the issue right then and there; but in a quick mental grasp of the situation he realized that the time was not yet ripe. He must first learn where the loot was cached, and he must enmesh J. Willoughby Moreley in a net of evidence that would hold him securely.

But he must be on the alert. This was a desperate game and he was playing with deadly peril. At any moment he might make a slip that would reveal his true identity, which the thick dark was helping him to conceal.

"Let's get the pony into the sling quick!" Moreley said curtly. He dropped something to the ground, something that he had been holding in his arms.

Get the pony into the sling! Leo's pulse quickened. Then it was true, as he had suspected when he had turned from the false trail, that that was the real reason for the tall crane down in the canyon. It had never been intended for loading ore in dump wagons, as Moreley had once told him. It was built like a gibbet, and when it was revolved by its multiple-gearred, hand-

operated winch, the prodigiously long jib could swing a small load from one rim of the canyon across to the other. Thus it was explained the abrupt ending of the grulla's trail on the hard surface in front of the stone cabin and the false trail that began at that point and led around through the hills to St. Elmo.

"Better you put the sling on, Bill," Leo suggested, fearful of making a betraying bungle. "My bum hand's hurtin' me somethin' terrible."

"Your bum hand's always hurting you when there's work to be done," Moreley snapped out. "All right, I'll put it on, as usual."

Leo heaved a deep sigh of relief. It had been a crucial moment, but once more he had acted perfectly in the character of the Lone Wolf.

The sling consisted of two heavy leather cuffs, thickly padded at the top, which fitted over the forelegs of the pony. These were reinforced by wide web belts, one passing across the animal's apron and the other around her body over the saddle cinch, and also by a leather breeching that fitted snugly against the hips. Into heavy rings that were fastened to the cuffs were hooked four enormous snaps, which were connected to chains that reached up only a few feet to the stout wire cable that ran over the pulley at the end of the crane's long jib.

"I'll take your gun, Wolfey," said Moreley. "It'll lighten the load that much."

Leo made no protest; he unbuckled the belt and passed the weapon over without a word. He still had his own .45 tucked in his shirt.

"Up in the saddle," Moreley commanded. "Quick!"

Leo hesitated. Of a sudden his courage began to topple. His heart sickened at the thought of swinging through that black space on the pony's back. His life would be literally in the hands of this unscrupulous crook.

What if Moreley had penetrated his disguise and had discovered that this was not the Lone Wolf at all but a sheep in the Wolf's clothing?

"Shaky as usual, are you, Wolfey?" Moreley sneered. "It's the last time you'll have to do it. So, up with you."

"Can't help it, Bill," Leo droned. "It always makes me nervous. But here goes." He stepped into the saddle with an air of bravado and arranged the skirts of the raincoat.

"That's the stuff!" Moreley led the horse close to a pine tree. "Be ready to unhook the rope the minute I call up my O. K." Then he disappeared over the lip of the rim.

"Can't back down now, with the big chance almost in my hands," Leo bolstered up his shaken courage. "But I've got to shed some of this Lone Wolf regalia before I take the big jump." He threw off the raincoat and derby. "I won't take any more chances, but will finish this job soon after I land on the other side. Must be another rope over there for him to climb up, and I'll have my gun on him when his head pops in sight. I'll have to take a chance on finding the money. I ought to've nabbed him before it had gone this far. But it's too late now. Got to see it through."

"O. K.!" came Moreley's voice from the bottom of the canyon.

Leo unhooked the rope and it slithered away through the darkness. Then he waited, hardly breathing, for the next turn in the adventure.

It began with an ominous snick of links. The forefeet of the pony were lifted from the earth. Leo grabbed the chains with both hands as the saddle tilted backward at a sharp angle. A shiver ran through the animal; then, swaying and revolving slowly but dizzily, substantial support fell away beneath her hind feet and she went swinging out into black space, with the burden on her back.

Leo choked down a cry of terror that



rose in his throat. He gripped the chains until the links made a deep impress in his palms. A sickening sensation clutched at the pit of his stomach. But one dread evil was saved him. The benevolent blackness curtained the dizzy drop down to the canyon floor.

The grulla had swung hardly three yards from the rim when the outward movement suddenly ceased. The jib stood still and Leo's heart stood still with it. The appalling thought came to him that the arch-crook had known all along who he was and now he was making ready to spring his trap.

"This is as far as we go for the present, Wolfey!" Moreley's gloating announcement dispelled one terrifying fear to make place for another that was no less terrifying. "I'm locking the crane, and there's no chance for you to climb the chain with only one good hand. I've suddenly decided that I need all the swag myself. Besides, I'll feel easier with you out of the way. No chance then for you to squeal on me for bumping off the Carter kid's old dad——"

"You brute!" Leo groaned in a gasping undertone. "So you're the cowardly cur that murdered my dad!" His right hand snapped from the chain to the front of his shirt and out came his gun.

"Then," Moreley was saying, "you know there's a three-thousand bounty on your head, Wolfey, and I'm going to collect it. Things will break with the kid financier to-morrow morning and he'll have to spill the word that the Lone Wolf carried off his little bank. I'll make it a point to be the first inside his door, if he opens up at all, and when I present my check for my three thousand, and demand it in cash, he'll have to wilt. My horse will be outside all ready for action and I'll be the first on the trail. I'll put a bullet or two through you and the grulla when I reach here. When the others come

straggling along, I'll have a yarn all ready about how I shot you in a gun fight up on the rim and you and your celebrated pony went over. Everything's fixed; a big charge of dynamite under the crane—which I'll explain that you destroyed—with a ten-minute fuse. Adios, Wolfey! You've been a good partner, but from now on I play my game solo!"

Leo saw a match flutter to flame; then a brief splutter. He opened fire when a shadow darted away from the base of the crane. He emptied his gun, but Moreley merely sent back a mocking laugh.

"So you intended to turn the little trick yourself and held out a gun on me, did you, Wolfey? I figured you would, but I beat you to it!"

Leo thrust the empty gun into his shirt. He was not going to die like this and let the murderer of his father carry off his depositors' money. He had two good strong hands and he knew how to make them serve him.

Already he was climbing the chains; then up the slender wire rope he went to the pulley. Over the flimsy steel jib he flung a leg. He slid backward along the slender arm to the steel pole.

Within five minutes he was on the canyon floor. He could hear the retreating hoofs of Moreley's mount dying out in the night. In a second or two the spark that was crawling toward the crane's destruction was pinched off.

He knew how to operate the crane. On one of his trips to the worthless property of the North American Exploration, Mining and Development Corporation he had made a careful examination of the winch, which, he had then noticed, was kept well oiled. He quickly let the dangling pony down, and with his penknife he slashed off the sling. He led the horse to the foot of the crane and respit the fuse.

"He'll be listening for the grand smash, and if it doesn't come he'll ride

back to see what happened," Leo said to himself as he swung up on the grulla and rode at a gallop down the canyon.

He was climbing out of the gash at a point several hundred yards below the crane, where the wall broke down, when the explosion rocked the earth.

"Now's the time to find out where some of the Lone Wolf's keys fit," cried Leo. He gained the top of the wall and sent the pony straight toward Moreley's stone cabin.

He soon found a key that clicked the lock in the heavy door. Entering the cabin, he saw by the light of a match, a cot, a small cook stove, coils of rope, and sundry other articles. A stone partition divided the cabin into two rooms. One of the keys fitted the lock in the partition's steel door. He pushed back this door, struck a match, and entered a small room, whose high, iron-barred window gave it a cell-like appearance.

There was a cot in one corner, and on it lay a plump gunny sack. Leo's pulse was galloping when, with his penknife, he snipped the stout cord that closed the mouth of the gunny sack and eagerly thrust in his hand. Out came a heavy canvas bag with the clink of gold. He struck another match to flame and saw his own marks on the bag. Then he knew that the Citizens Bank was safe.

But he was not yet through with his investigation. He lighted a candle that stood on a chair and made a hurried examination of the room. He discovered a small hole in one of the slabs of the flagged floor. A key fitted it and a turn clinked a lock. One side of the slab tilted a few inches to give a handhold. It swung on a pivot, and in the vault beneath it the candle flame revealed bags upon bags of hidden loot.

Leo had seen enough. He closed down the slab and was soon out in the saddle, with the precious gunny sack flung across his lap and both doors locked behind him.

Back at St. Elmo he roused Tom Dodd, the local deputy sheriff, and after a brief consultation the Lone Wolf's grulla was locked in the officer's stable.

The next morning the door of the Citizens Bank was opened at eight o'clock, as usual. A horse galloped up the street and stopped at the hitch rack in front of the bank. Tom Dodd came breezing in, and close on his heels followed J. Willoughby Moreley.

"Lookit here, young feller," Dodd blustered, swaggering up to the cashier's window, "mebbe you're O. K. yourself but I've got a fool notion in my head that this bank of yours ain't as safe as it might be. So right here'n' now I'm druggin' out the five hundred I deposited with you some two-three days back."

"Sorry you feel that way about it, Mr. Dodd," Leo returned, shoving a check pad toward the officer. "but if you prefer to withdraw your account, it's all right with me. Please make out your check."

He took a bundle of currency from a huge pile that was on his desk and passed it under the wicket in exchange for Tom Dodd's check. Dodd withdrew to the front window and proceeded to count the money.

"Something I can do for you, Mr. Moreley?" Leo inquired in his most pleasant voice.

"Well—perhaps!" Moreley, who had been staring unbelievably at the bundle of currency in Tom Dodd's hands, shambled up and cleared his throat. "If there—h'm—beg pardon, Mr. Carter, but if there's any doubt about the security of your depositors' money, as Mr. Dodd has intimated, perhaps—h'm! perhaps I should withdraw my funds also. Three thousand dollars, you know."

"Would you accept a draft on my Tucson correspondent?" Leo asked with feigned nervousness.

"Draft? No!" Moreley laughed

evilly. "I've got to have the hard cash!"

"Certainly, Mr. Moreley. Glad to accommodate you. Plenty of cash this morning; really more than I should carry." Leo's left hand waved a careless gesture toward the piles of currency and gold, no longer in bags, that were spread on the desk. His lowered right hand was not in sight.

Moreley went pale and his eyes widened to a stark stare as they followed the gesture. Then a great light seemed to flow in upon him when he looked up and saw Leo's scratched face and the hard glitter that had come into his eyes.

"So I'm a fool—and it was you!"

His gun cracked while the words barked from his lips.

Leo had expected a desperate move when Moreley discovered that he was caught. He flung himself aside; as the slug whizzed past his ear, his own .45 spoke its deadly message.

Moreley's knees buckled; Tom Dodd caught him and eased him to the floor.

"I'm a witness to it that you done a good, clean job, young feller, and after he got in the first shot, too," said Dodd, straightening up and shoving the bundle of currency back under the wicket. "No bank could be safer'n the Citizens now, and here's my five hundred again to back my judgment."

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## BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

### The Red Flamingo

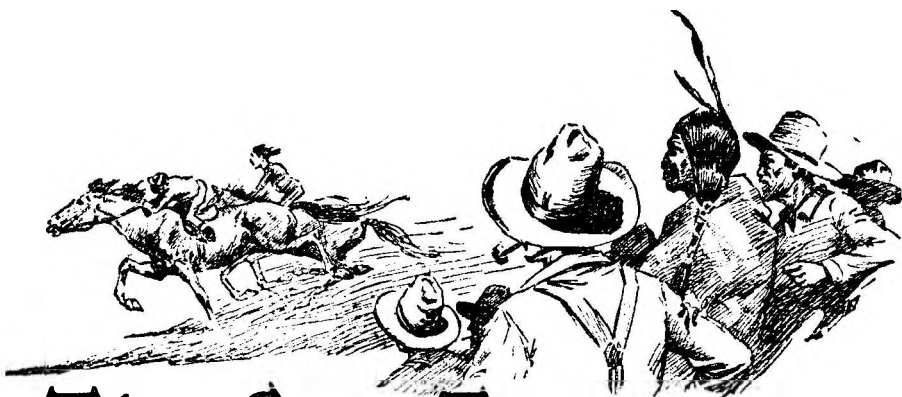
**T**HIS unusually beautiful bird is found only in warm climates and most abundantly in the tropics. Lakes of salt or brackish water in the vicinity of seacoasts are the favorite resorts of the flamingos. To lakes of fresh water they are only occasional visitants and they never resort to them for any length of time. They are always abundant on the seacoast, more especially where the shores are flat and swampy.

Aurora herself was never adorned with more roseate tints than the wings of these birds. They seem to literally glow with pink and carmine. The name of the flamingo, both in Greek and Latin, was derived from the magnificent hues of its glorious wings, and the French epithet *flamman* only repeats the same idea.

They stand with their legs immersed in water, their necks curved in front of the breast, the head being laid upon the back, or buried beneath the shoulder feathers of the wing. Generally the whole weight of the body is supported by one leg, the other being held obliquely backward or drawn up close to the body. In this strange position the flamingo sleeps.

The manner in which these birds obtain their food is equally remarkable. Like all other sieve-beaked birds, the materials upon which they subsist are procured by raking in the mud. When in search of food, the flamingo wades into the water to a convenient depth, and then bends its long neck until its head is on a level with its feet. Then it plunges its beak, with the upper mandible downward, into the mud. In this position it rakes about at the bottom of the water, moving backward and forward with short steps, and opening and shutting its bill while its tongue is busily at work.

The loud, harsh voice of the flamingo resembles that of the goose. Its foods consist principally of snails, crustaceans, and small fishes. The nest is made in shallow places in the water, and composed of a conical mound of mud scraped together by the bird's feet to the height of a foot and a half above the water. Not more than two, but occasionally three, eggs are laid, of a chalky whiteness.



# The Gun Tamer

by George Owen Baxter

Author of "Tragedy Trail," etc.

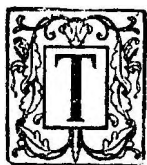
## Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

COLONEL MACKAY is so pleased with Señor Felipe Consalvo, a young fortune hunter, that he invites him to his ranch. The colonel's wife, Lydia, and daughter, Mary, are each affected by the youth who, under the colonel's supervision, is being taught to use firearms—at which he is singularly inept.

The sheriff arrives—secretly invited by the gentle Lydia—ostensibly to check up on an earlier rustling. He suggests a race between the colonel's horse and the visitor's. The poor but proud señor wagers a ring valued at ten thousand dollars. Hearing that Budge Lakin, a man killer, is annoyed that his girl, Elizabeth Kane, admires Consalvo, that wise youth puts himself under the sheriff's protection.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WON BY A LENGTH.



HE argument of the sheriff was simple and clear. By the things which cleave to man and to which he in turn cleaves, he may be judged. And if the horse the Mexican rode turned out, indeed, to be a grand one, then it might appear that Consalvo was something more than a graceful parlor decoration.

On the other hand, by the manner in which the youth bore himself in the face of danger from Budge Lakin he might be judged again. And, in fact, in the second matter, young Consalvo acted with such excitement that even the lip of pretty Mary Mackay curled a little and her blue eyes turned cold.

For Consalvo openly proclaimed even at the dinner table that he was no warrior, no fighting man, and that he demanded the protection of the law against Lakin. The sheriff smiled a little and assured him that he would do what he could.

Mrs. Mackay, on the other hand, seemed much pleased, and, in her quiet way, she said: "I admire you, Señor Consalvo, for this attitude. We have had enough of the wild young Westerners who go about carrying guns and shooting men as though they were rabbits. I see, indeed, that you follow a higher morality!"

And she smiled gently, and apparently sympathetically, on the youth.

Mary Mackay, however, frowned at her plate, and writhed in concealed anguish which was not, however lost on her mother, who smiled genially upon her and commended to her an-

other portion of steak. Mary Mackay seemed not to hear.

Then the talk turned upon the horse race which had been proposed, and the Mexican showed more signs of life, for the conversation became quite heated as the merits of Jerome Second were brought forward.

He had shaped handsomely as a yearling, trained well, and won his first two-year-old start in magnificent fashion, coming up hard on the bit at the end of the six furlongs, and pulling sweetly away from the rest of a big field, even so. So handsome did his win appear that the Colonel, observing, bought the animal on the spot and shipped him West to head his stud on his new ranch.

"And," said the colonel, "you have to know, Consalvo, in all fairness, that among the colts he beat that day was the three-year-old champion of that season. At least, he had an equal claim on the championship. I mean Ormuzd; you've seen the name?"

At this Consalvo studied the table and shook his head.

"Ah, well," sighed he at last. "Conquistador never has failed me, and I should be failing him if I scratched him from the race."

"Indeed," said Mary Mackay, "you should!"

She spoke so meaningly that all heads turned toward her for an embarrassing moment—all save the head of her mother, who appeared not to notice, and who now carried the talk quietly into other channels.

However, the race was set for the next morning, and it was run.

A sort of semiholiday was declared; all work fell through for the day, and the whole force of cow-punchers—except a vitally necessary few—together with the farmers from the lowlands of the valley, and the lumbermen from the upper reaches of that land, and the sheep-herders, and the storekeepers,

and all the others on the long pay list of the colonel forgathered at the appointed time and place to watch the running.

They could have a good view of it, for they could stand on a little hill which looked up and down the ravine floor over which the course was laid out. There the road looped loosely and turned back toward the hill around whose foot it curved. So those who stood on the crest could watch every stride of the contest and, by shifting a little to the side, they could be at the very finish.

All were there, and among the rest the gigantic and sullen Indian, Pedro, stalking slowly from place to place, and turning his dark eye upon Conquistador on the one hand, and upon Jerome Second on the other.

They were far different types. To make Jerome Second a picture horse, one would have wished to clip a few inches from his legs—there was such an excessive deal of daylight under him; but otherwise, he was an ideal creature.

Conquistador was manifestly shorter in the legs, but his shoulders had a magnificent slope, and the length of his rein promised to make up somewhat for the deficiency of stride that showed in his legs.

He bore himself quietly and proudly; whereas Jerome Second, as if he scented the race in the air and hungered for it, danced up and down, and threw his lofty head, and glared fire from his eyes like any dragon.

The negro on his back, for all that he had been a professional jockey and lived in the saddle ever since weight kept him from the races on the flat, was worried and hard put to it to keep his mount in some order or prevent him from bolting down the road.

The Mexican was full of admiration for the tall thoroughbred. It seemed that he could not help exclaiming as

he examined the beautiful creature, and he congratulated the colonel on having such an animal in his stables.

"For," said Don Felipe, "one touch of that fire will last through ten generations!"

"He's leaving his race at the post," exclaimed the colonel. "Confound it, if every one is here, let's begin the thing! Richards, get out there and drop your handkerchief for the start, and try to do it without scaring Jerome to death. Are you ready, Don Felipe? Are you ready, sir?"

"Ready," smiled the Mexican.

And again, looking askance at Jerome Second, he shook his head deprecatingly.

"He is beaten," said Mary Mackay, in a tone between contempt and disgust, "before the race starts! What a way to go into a contest!" And she actually turned her head and looked at a cloud blowing out of the tree tangle on the north and then sailing through the blue above the valley.

At this moment the sheriff approached Mrs. Mackay.

"How's your bet on the race, ma'am?" he asked.

"Is there any betting?" she replied. "Oh, I know that my husband got a bet from poor Don Felipe! But I'm going to persuade him not to collect it. Of course, the little horse hasn't a chance!"

"Little?" said the sheriff. "He stands within an inch of sixteen hands, I take it! And I've finished betting a couple of hundred myself on him!"

"Who in the world would take your bets?" asked Mrs. Mackay.

"Your cow-punchers think that Jerome Second is the wind," grinned the sheriff, "and they're offering four and five to one. So I just stepped down and took a chance. You never can tell. Besides, Señor Consalvo sits the saddle pretty well."

"You have some sort of inside in-

formation," declared Mrs. Mackay, with much interest. "Now, what can it be?"

The sheriff hesitated, and then with a still broader grin he pointed at the tall Indian.

"He got three or four hundred dollars out of his wallet and bet it on his master's horse," said he, "and where the money of the stable goes there's sure to be a bet worth something! They're off!"

At that moment, the handkerchief dropped, and the two horses bounded forward on the road.

Jerome Second, his head high and his ears flattened, floundered for a moment and fell well to the rear; but coming into his stride, presently, he caught the other with what seemed ridiculous ease, and then flaunted into the lead.

"There you are!" said Mrs. Mackay. "The race is as good as over!"

"Is it?" The sheriff grinned. "I tell you, ma'am, that pony of yours thinks that he's still running two-year-old sprints, and he may kill himself off before they reach the turn. This here is five miles, you've got to remember!"

The negro rider, at least, knew the length of the running, and he was fairly leaning back with the strength of his pull. Even so, Jerome Second continued to put distance between him and Conquistador until the far turn was reached, and far into the lead he turned toward the finish.

"Blood!" cried the colonel, striking his hands together. "Blood will tell! The blood of the English race horse will tell, and all this nonsense about the Arab—why, sir, the Arab is two centuries out of date, at the present moment!"

The sheriff merely replied—for he had been addressed: "Look at that!"

And he pointed again to the Indian.

Pedro, muffled in a blanket in spite of the heat, wore a faint smile as he watched the progress of the contest.



Certainly there seemed little reason for that smile, for if Conquistador was not losing any more ground, at least it was sure that he was not regaining any of his disadvantage.

His master sat erect in the saddle, seeming to have little knowledge of how a horse is jockeyed to a high speed by throwing the weight toward the withers, or swaying the body in rhythm with the stride.

So they came within a half mile of the finish, toward which the spectators now streamed hastily down the hill.

"Look!" cried the sheriff. "Now comes the tug of war!"

Suddenly Don Felipe had leaned forward, and the stallion beneath him seemed to gather strength and speed; he flung forward, cutting down the distance between him and the leader with every stride.

It was the rider, however, and not the horse, upon whom the sheriff focused his glass at this moment.

"Cool as a cucumber," he murmured to himself. And then, turning directly away from the race, he glanced toward his hostess.

He saw that her hands were clenched, and her face had grown a little pale. She seemed to pay no attention to the race, but instead, her gaze was fixed upon her daughter.

Toward her, in turn, the sheriff looked, and he saw that Mary Mackay had clasped her hands at her breast; her lips were parted with the wildest excitement, and with faint nods of her head she kept time with the labor of the runners.

"By gravity!" whispered the sheriff, to some all-hearing ear. "have I got the clew at last?"

He turned to watch the finish.

The voice of the colonel now dominated the scene. He was yelling to his jockey instructions which the negro could not possibly hear.

"The whip, the whip, you fool! Give

him his head! Stop that pull! You're killing him! Now favor him through that soft bit! The whip! The whip!"

It seemed, actually, as though the negro had heard the voice calling, for with the finish a furlong away, and Conquistador a pair of lengths in the rear, he took the whip and cut Jerome Second severely.

Nobly, nobly the stallion responded. In his blood lines there appeared the name of no faint-hearted stallion, no weak-souled mare, and he went forward under the whip with a fresh burst of speed.

No whip, on the other hand, flashed above Conquistador. No whip was needed. Straightened like a string from the tip of his nose to the end of his wind-blown tail, he darted arrow-like for the finish. If his stride was shorter than the thoroughbred's, it was more rapid, more smooth with the smoothness of bounding water down a cataract. He gained. He reached the hip, the girth, the head of Jerome Second.

Suddenly the taller stallion seemed to stagger as though struck; Conquistador, that instant, pricked his ears, and he shot away, to win by an open length.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THERE WAS SOMETHING.

WHEN the colonel could speak it was to say: "He sulked, the brute! I'll sell him! No, I'll give him away! Sulked, by heaven!"

As for the negro jockey, tears were streaming down his face.

"I done what I could sir," said he. "But that other had the devil in him. He went by, and Jerome, he jus' seemed like he was sick. There was no more running in him! The Indian drugged him, sir. Look at him now!"

Trembling in every limb, head down, blackened with sweat and

streaked white with foam, Jerome was the very picture of an exhausted horse.

"And look at that!" said the colonel.

He pointed to Conquistador, nuzzling at his dismounted rider, and with pricking ears stealing, as it were, the sugar lumps from his hand.

"Remember," said Mrs. Mackay gently, "that the winner always seems to be comfortable!"

"Aye," said the wise sheriff, "it's easy to win after you're once across the finish line. But before that—however, I guessed that there was something in the Mexican's horse. And I guessed"—he said this looking Mrs. Mackay full in the eye—"that there was something in the Mexican!"

Mrs. Mackay said not a word in answer. Her anxious eye was tracing her daughter through the little crowd, and taking note of the fashion in which she greeted Don Felipe, and then rubbed the wet muzzle of Conquistador. She came back, radiant. She said: "Felipe says that Conquistador has taken a fancy to me. He's not usually so gentle with strangers. But what a *lamb* he is, mother! And how beautifully Felipe rode him!"

Mrs. Mackay answered: "Mexicans are almost born in the saddle, my dear. Of course, he rode his horse well. And you know," she added softly, "that the race was worth winning!"

"Money?" said the startled girl. "Oh, Felipe is quite above any thought of that!"

"One knows a man very well before one knows that," said Mrs. Mackay, and her eyes wandered a little, and fell upon the face of the sheriff, a keen and intent listener to this dialogue.

But how did the Mexican take his victory.

He was the height of smiling good-humor and he could be serious, too, for he said gravely to the colonel: "Of course, Jerome Second was too anxious. You know a race horse has to be

worked regularly, but coming in fresh and soft from the pasture, so to speak, his nerves were all on edge, and he killed himself off in the first mile. I could see the change. I gave up hope when he darted past me. As though he were thrown out of a sling! What a horse! But then I saw that, as you feared, he'd left his race at the post. Of course, it really wasn't a contest at all!"

The colonel listened, and he seemed to take some small comfort from the words.

And so they came back to the house.

In the patio they had tea, and the colonel was fortifying his spirits with whisky and soda, when the sheriff touched his shoulder and leaned above him.

"Colonel Mackay," he said, "I dunno but there may be trouble out there in the barn."

"In the barn?" murmured the colonel. "And why, if you please? There ought to be trouble, though, and there will be trouble, if I have the courage of my convictions and discharge the whole lot of them for a troop of lazy inefficients! What condition was Jerome in? He was soft! The scoundrels have been writing down oats in the bills, and feeding my horses hay alone! I'll have an eye to this, by Jove!"

"I mean trouble of a slightly different kind," said the sheriff. "I mean—Señor Consalvo is out there, ain't he?"

"Yes. He's with his horse. He said that he'd come in to tea later. More glory to Conquistador—but I wouldn't own a horse with legs like those!"

"Not about horses, either," insisted the sheriff, "but just now I seen Budge Lakin ride past the patio gate with a cloud of dust around him and a mighty businesslike look about him!"

"Lakin? The fellow who's been threatening Don Felipe's life?" cried

the colonel. "In the name of heaven, man, are you going to sit here and wait for a murder?"

At that moment, there was a sound of a double explosion of guns, muffled only slightly by the distance between the house and the barn.

The colonel sprang to his feet; there was a sharp clattering of glasses and dishes, and the hiss of many in-drawn breaths.

"Rankin," exclaimed the colonel, "if there's a tragedy in this, I'll hold you personally responsible for gross slackness in the execution of your manifest duty and——"

He was cut short by the scream, sharp and terrible, of Mary Mackay, who hurried through the patio entrance.

The sheriff seemed undisturbed—he and Mrs. Mackay.

"If there's a tragedy," said he, "I got a little idea that it won't be the blood of Mr. Consalvo! You wait, my friends, and see! And as for Budge Lakin, he's had trouble comin' to him these many months!"

Then he went with the others slowly toward the noise.

Other sounds had followed the noises of the explosions. There had been great shouts and many voices calling; and as they started from the patio, a white-faced man rushed up to them: "Get a doctor! Who's a doctor here?" he shouted. "He's dying!"

"Who's dying?" asked the colonel, grasping his cow-puncher by both shoulders. "Consalvo has been murdered?"

"Him? It's Budge Lakin that's been shot down, and dyin' he is, if I ever seen a man!"

But Budge was not dying. Kind providence had made the bullet glance along his ribs, causing him to shed much blood, and think bitter thoughts of death and a life of judgment to come; but, after all, he had not more than a surface plowing of the flesh

to complain of. Budge was carried to the house on a plank and he lay in a guest room, saying harsh words softly.

"How did it happen?" asked the colonel.

"I come out here to throw a scare into the Mexican," confessed Budge, "and I sure succeeded. I fired a shot over his head and told him to quit the country, and he begged for his life. And then I jiggled my gun, and tried to do something fancy, but the thing went off, and I plugged myself!"

"You're lyin', ain't you?" said the dry sheriff.

"How d'you know?" exclaimed Budge, amazed. And then he added sullenly: "Ask him if it ain't so!"

They found the Mexican sitting on a box in a corner of the barn, his face buried in his hands.

"It was the hand of Fate!" said Don Felipe devoutly. "Fate struck down the bully! Let Fate be praised! This day I vow to the blessed San Guadalupe——"

The sheriff left the colonel and Mary Mackay with Don Felipe; the colonel half amused and half contemptuous, and the girl half contemptuous and half sad and frightened.

The sheriff went back to the house and took up the guns of the would-be man-destroyer, Budge Lakin, and examined them with care.

"A neat, nice, balanced pair, Budge," said he. "And I hear that you got hopes of bein' a regular two-gun man some day!"

"Humph!" snorted Budge. "I got no ambitions at all. I'm gunna get a job and settle down. This here—it was only a game, to-day."

The sheriff smiled slowly. "I've always sort of understood," he said, "that when a gent flashed two guns, he did the missing with one of 'em and the hitting with the other. But still, it's a strange thing——"

"What?" said Budge.

"Nothin'," said the sheriff, and left the room abruptly.

Outside, however, he sat down and pondered over that same mystery.

It was very odd, thought the sheriff, for in all his long life he never had heard of a revolver making two loud reports while firing only one bullet.

And certainly there was only one empty chamber in the revolvers of Budge Lakin!

## CHAPTER X.

### WHAT THE SHERIFF THOUGHT.

**L**AKIN was not the only invalid in the house of the colonel. The other was the young Mexican, Señor Don Felipe Christobal Hernandez Consalvo. He went to bed also, and gave as a reason the shock which his system had received from the close call he had had with death.

Some of the people who heard of this illness were amused; only Mary Mackay was openly indignant and disgusted; and then the sheriff looked up Mrs. Mackay and found her at a sunny window with her knitting.

"My husband wants to buy Conquistador," said Mrs. Mackay.

"I'd say," said the sheriff, "that he'll never get him."

"And why?"

"Because Don Felipe ain't a fool."

"That isn't the reason he gives."

"What does he say, then?"

"That, after his encounter with Budge Lakin, he's so terribly upset and frightened that he is sure he must have at hand the fastest horse in the world to snatch him away from the teeth of danger—which he feels closing about him—and his destiny——"

"Aw. I know all that Mexican lingo!" sighed the sheriff. "I been south of the border and I've heard a lot of it. Fate and destiny and death and life all hashed up together and poured out in one fine sausage. But I

dunno, Mrs. Mackay. D'you think that that was the real reason? The one he gave, I mean?"

Mrs. Mackay went on with her knitting, tilting her head gracefully and thoughtfully to the side.

"And what do you think?" she asked rather abruptly, looking up at the sheriff.

"I think," said the sheriff, "that two heads are a lot better than one, ma'am!"

"Of course they are—sometimes. But what has that to do with this matter? Ouch!"

She cried out as a great wasp darted through the open window and flashed its wings in her face.

"Gracious, sheriff," said Mrs. Mackay, "can you be expected to uphold the law when you can't keep a poor woman from being stung to death?"

"Where was you stung?" asked the sheriff.

"I wasn't stung, but I might have been.

The sheriff rolled a cigarette and lighted it before he trusted himself to continue the conversation, and then he said with some remnant of emotion: "When my wife was livin', that was just the sort of a remark that she would've made. Well, ma'am, suppose that we get this thing straight. Suppose that we get out of the dark and into the daylight?"

"What dark, sheriff?" asked Mrs. Mackay brightly.

"The dark of foolin' around and pretendin' not to notice the other fellow's ideas," said the sheriff with a touch of heat.

"Really," said Mrs. Mackay, "I don't know what you mean!"

"Don't you?" said the sheriff. "Don't you, ma'am!"

And he sat back in his chair and swung a foot excitedly back and forth—a wonderfully meager foot and leg

to support the reputation of such a man as Rankin.

Then he tried again, and declared bluntly: "I know what your trouble is, I think."

"Oh, do you," said she, and clasped her hands with a sort of girlish brightness.

"Dog-gone it, Mrs. Mackay," remarked the frowning sheriff, "sometimes you can be sort of tryin'. can't you?"

"I hope not!" said she trustfully, not at all offended.

"When I looked things over," said the sheriff, "I seen that there was no possible chance, unless it was among the servants, of anything being wrong in this house. Nothing possible except the greaser—I mean, Don Felipe. Excuse me, ma'am!"

"It's quite all right," said she, and resumed her knitting.

"I looked at him and I said that sure he was a safe man, all right. And yet, there's nothing like trying. I started to try him out. Like horse, like master! Same as with dogs. I worked up the race. And it seemed to me, ma'am, that Don Felipe, he rode like a man, and his horse ran like a horse!"

"I suppose it did," answered she.

"Ma'am," said the sheriff, "would you mind doin' me a first-rate favor?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then lay down them dog-gone knitting needles and look me in the eye while I'm talkin'!"

Mrs. Mackay laid the needles aside obediently and then sat up straight, and folded her small hands, and looked at the sheriff out of mild, large, blue eyes.

The sheriff blinked.

"All right," said he. "You're gunna make me work it all out for you, and then if you agree, you'll say yes at the end. But the second thing that happened to-day was something more!"

"Oh, you mean the terrible accident?"

"Accident, ma'am?" asked the sheriff.

"But what else would you call it?"

"Well, I'm gunna tell you just what happened, so far as anybody knows. Budge Lakin comes pilin' out to the barn and throws himself off of his horse. 'Where's the Mexican?' he hollers, and one of the stableboys points out where Mr. Consalvo is. Budge disappears in search of him. There's a couple of reports. And the boys runs in—after a minute allowed to get over the shivers—and they find Mr. Consalvo on his knees beside Budge, who's bleeding bad, holding him by both shoulders, and talking to him hard and fast."

"Yes," said she.

"Now, after that, Mr. Consalvo got a terrible case of nerves, and he pretty near threw a fit, and he said that Fate had saved him from bein' killed, and what not."

"But certainly it seemed that way!"

"Hold on, ma'am! When that race was bein' run, did you ever see a man ride cooler or steadier, or with more nerve?"

"I know very little about such things."

"I doubt it!" said the blunt sheriff.

"I've seen you ride, yourself. And I've watched. But wasn't it sort of queer that Don Felipe should've gone so much to pieces right after the shooting that he had to go to bed and take sal volatile and what not?"

"I never thought of that."

"I think that you have, though," declared the grim sheriff. "Only you wouldn't help me along by admitting nothing. But now I'm gunna speak up loud and bold, ma'am!"

"Of course you may speak as loudly as you please, sheriff," said she. "Shall I close the window?"

The sheriff, instead of shouting as

he had threatened, leaned forward and whispered: "During that race, I watched Miss Mary!"

At this, Mrs. Mackay started ever so slightly and reached automatically for her knitting, but the sheriff snatched it away.

"No, no!" said he. "Look me in the eye and tell me if I'm a fool or a wise man. The thing that bothered you more than the danger of poison or murder was that this here smooth-talking, grinning greaser—that he'd up and marry your girl. Ain't that right?"

Mrs. Mackay did not speak. She merely stared.

"He's got the colonel hypnotized," went on the sheriff in the same insidious whisper. "And your daughter, she couldn't keep her eyes off of him!"

"Until the shooting accident! Then, of course, she began to despise him!"

"Do you really think she did?" insisted the sheriff.

"Haven't you heard what she said about the poor fellow? Of course he can't help his nerves when they get the better of him."

"Nerves?" said the sheriff, rising to his feet. "I tell you that there's more nerves in the hard hoof of Conquistador than there is in the whole make-up of that same young gent!"

Mrs. Mackay rose also. She seemed horrified.

"Oh," she cried, "do you mean to insinuate that he—that he's playing a part?"

"I don't mean to insinuate nothing else," said the sheriff firmly, "and you don't mean nothing else, either! We understand each other perfect!"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean!"

"You do, though, but I'll tell you a little more exact what happened when Budge Lakin walked into that barn. No, I don't *know*; but I just the same as know. Well, ma'am, when Budge come in, he seen the Mexican, and he

got ready for a slaughter. There ain't a thing that Budge likes so well as a gun fight. I mean there ain't a thing up to to-day. But I miss my guess if he ever pulls a gun again so long as he lives! He's got a changed look in his eyes, I tell you, and it ain't the loss of blood that's changed him!"

Mrs. Mackay seemed frozen with interest.

"Mind you," went on the sheriff, "it sure looks like a slaughter. For here's the slender Mexican, all dolled up like a joke, almost, and about as sensitive as a girl, you'd say! And, on the other hand, here's Mr. Lakin, cool as they come, working out with his guns for hours every day, practicing his draw, and thinking of nothin' but danger and death, as they say in the books. "But what happens?"

"Why, Mr. Lakin, he outs with a couple of double-jointed insults and swears a little, and announces what he's gunna do. And then he goes for his gun to do it. He's never failed and he's been there before. He knows he's about the fastest man in the world, pretty near. But what he knows doesn't pan out. He gets out his gun as fast as ever. But the Mexican beats him to it and puts a bullet right through him—or what should have been right through him, except for the luck that played on Lakin's side, just then. And Lakin's gun goes off and drills a hole in the roof, or punches through the floor. I dunno which! That, ma'am, is what really happened out there in the barn."

## CHAPTER XI.

### UNDER THE WINDOW.

WHEN Mrs. Mackay had heard this startling restatement of the event, her eyes grew a little larger and her mouth became an O.

"But," she said, "but——"

"But," interpreted the sheriff, "how



come it that Consalvo would play the coward afterward? Well, after he'd dropped young Lakin, he leaned over him and grabbed him by the shoulders and says to him: 'Look here, Lakin, there's still a spark of life in you, but I'll put it out now unless you talk turkey. This is the yarn you'll spin—that you fired both the shots, and that the second one hit you by accident, when you were doing the double-roll. And if you welch on that story, or if you ever let a soul in the world guess that I shot you, I'll find you, Lakin, and by the love of—excuse me, ma'am—I'll fill you fuller of lead than any herring ever was filled with salt!' That's what he said to Lakin, and Lakin believed him. And that was why there was the queer look about Budge's eyes when I talked to him. He seemed sort of in a dream, and believe me when I say that dream was a nightmare!"

"I've never heard any supposition so extraordinary!" said the lady.

"Ain't you?" The sheriff grinned. "You didn't guess out something like this yourself, I suppose? No, maybe not. Because you figure that he wouldn't've purposely made a fool of himself before your girl. But you forgot something else. Maybe he was worse scared of being known to be a man-killer than he was afraid of losing the favor of Miss Mary."

Mrs. Mackay said at last: "I've never had any one talk to me so frankly. But it's made me know that I'm right. My husband took Don Felipe for an extraordinarily charming and helpless young Mexican. But I didn't! There was only one thing he said that I believed!"

"And what was that?"

"He admitted that he'd left his country to try to find treasure. I believed that! Yes, but I don't think that he'll ever blister his hands working for it! Only—no—I didn't imagine that he was such a desperate character as you

suggest. And yet—there's something about him that fits in with what you say. He has a cold look in his eyes, now and then!"

The sheriff shuddered.

"There ain't any need to describe that look," he said. "I've felt it, a couple of times, when my back was turned, and it sent the chills through me!"

Mrs. Mackay frowned.

"But he couldn't suspect you of being here to—to—well, to investigate him!" she said.

"If he's what I pretty well know that he is," said the sheriff, "there ain't much that he wouldn't suspect a sheriff of doing. He hates me like poison. His smile turns to wood when I come near him. And maybe I'm gunna have a chance to make him realize that all he guesses about me is true! Only—whatever I do, I've got to do it quick!"

He began, at this, to walk nervously up and down the room.

"Because," said the sheriff, "if I leave, there may be trouble while I'm gone. And if I stay, there's more than sure to be trouble. Oh, I tell you that he has his eye on me! He knows that I could finish his trick!"

"You could?" exclaimed Mrs. Mackay. "How could you finish it, Mr. Rankin?"

"There's never a crook as polished and smooth as he is," said the sheriff, "without there being a record behind him. And there's never a record that can't be looked up somewhere. If the police on this side of the border ain't got it, the police on the other side have. And inside of a couple of days of search, I've got an idea that I can work up all the details. He'll be known; and his horse'll be known too. Unless I'm reaching in the fog, that horse has saved him more than money, before to-day!"

"What else do you mean?"

"His hide," said the sheriff roughly.

"You mustn't stay here another minute!" said Mrs. Mackay. "I asked you out here to help me through a great problem. You've guessed what my problem is. Now I can see yours. But your men will be here before long!"

"Sure they will," said the sheriff, "but what good would they be in a polite and careful game like this? They can understand if you show them a target to shoot at. But what else are they good for? They'd call the Mexican a sissy, ma'am!"

"I suppose they would," she nodded. "Then you must leave at once. Suppose that he *should* suspect? Suppose that he *should* feel that you must be—must be——"

"Shot?" filled in the sheriff briskly.

"B-r-r!" shivered the lady. "Of course, I'm not really afraid of that, because I know what a famous lot of things you've——"

"Humph," said Sheriff Rankin. "Famous bunk and fiddlesticks! If you ain't scared for me, I'm scared for myself. I'd rather be dropped into a den of rattlers at midnight than dropped in the way of that fancy-shooting young greaser. I never fought for fun in my life, ma'am; and I never felt less like getting into trouble than I do now. And at the same time——"

As he spoke the last words, he raised his voice even louder than before, and side-stepped rapidly toward the window. Out of this he suddenly leaned, and barked in a sharp tone: "Get out of there, Pedro! You're spoilin' the garden!"

Mrs. Mackay ran to look.

There was a private patch of her garden underneath that window, to be sure, and the bare feet of Pedro were standing in the garden sod, while he looked up with sullen respect to the sheriff.

"What are you doing there?" asked

the lady of the house, adding to the sheriff: "Of course, he doesn't understand a word of English!"

But she had put her question in Spanish, and the Indian slowly brought his hand from behind his back and exposed in its fingers a small bunch of little red roses, such as blossomed at that season on the climbing rose vine.

Mrs. Mackay was touched.

"The poor thing!" said she. "There's the Latin love of beauty for you! Now, what one among our cow-punchers would have wasted any time in stealing flowers or even in begging them? You may have all that you want, Pedro!" she said, leaning farther out the window and smiling down on the great creature. "Just be careful that you don't crush things with your feet, won't you?"

At this appeal, the face of the great fellow lightened a little, and a strange, twisted smile of happiness appeared on his lips. Something he muttered in a husky voice, and bowed almost with worship to the lady of the house. Then he withdrew, going off with his usual soft, long strides.

"How silently he goes!" said Mrs. Mackay, still leaning to watch him. "Even when the cat runs on that gravel I can hear it; but not a sound from that man. However, size doesn't always count. They say that the elephant can go through the jungle without noise."

"And the moose," said the sheriff hastily. "I been nearly smashed from behind by one that I was looking for ahead of me. Now, what d'you make of that Indian?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Mackay thoughtfully. "I've thought that perhaps if he were approached tactfully, you know, and with a little persuasion, he might be induced to tell something about his handsome young master!"

She turned to Rankin as she spoke, and he answered with a mocking nod.

"If all those flowers was gold pieces," said he, "and all the leaves on those vines was silver, and you could collect 'em all and pour down all that money at the feet of that Indian and then beg him to tell us one dog-gone syllable of the truth about his boss, d'you know what he'd do?"

"Do you think he loves his master as much as that?"

"Loves him? I don't know," replied Rankin. "But I do know that he's mortal scared of him."

She studied this new phase carefully.

"I suppose you're right," she said at last, "and this man Consalvo——"

"Or whatever his name is," said the sheriff.

"Whatever his name is," she accepted the emendation, "is really a formidable person. But don't you think——"

"Hum," said the sheriff.

"Are you thinking of something, sheriff?"

"I am."

"And what, please. Because we're complete partners now, aren't we?"

"I'm thinkin' of Pedro," said the sheriff, "and the blank look of him when I yelled from the window."

"He didn't start," said she.

"He should've," said the sheriff.

"But he doesn't know English."

"Neither does a mule," said the sheriff, "but a mule jumps out of his skin when I yell at him the way I yelled at that Indian."

He continued moodily.

"When I yelled, a sort of a wriggle went up and down his back. But he waited a minute before he straightened up."

"What on earth do you mean by that?"

"Wouldn't you guess, now? A smart woman like you?"

"I'm not smart. I'm very silly and vague, and my brain is simply spinning with this whole affair."

"It meant, ma'am, by my way of thinking, that the scoundrel was out there spying on us."

"But not knowing the language——"

"Ma'am, any poker face can hide more knowledge than that!"

"Heavens!" cried Mrs. Mackay. "If he understood what we were talking about!"

"Aye," said the gloomy sheriff, "if he did! And by the wriggle that went down his back I judge that he did. His nerves was all fixed and set against the shock. He waited—so's I wouldn't think that he knew what I was saying. But he waited too long. When you slap a wolf in the face, it doesn't stop to ask what language you're doin' it in!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### WHAT FRIGHT CAN DO.

LYDIA MACKAY, like one exhausted, leaned back in her chair and pressed her hand across her eyes.

"The moment your men come, you could trump up some excuse and arrest him!"

"Trumped-up excuses don't go in this country. What could I arrest him for? Winning a race? Not getting himself shot?"

"We can go to my husband and tell him what we think!"

"The colonel would only smile. He knows men pretty well. He's had a lot of experience, I mean. Would he listen to us? Mrs. Mackay, stay here and run this end of the game as well as you can. I'm going to head for town and look for the records of a handsome young gent that rides a fine horse and speaks Spanish like a native. That ought to lead to something!"

He went straight to the door, and there Mrs. Mackay overtook him and took one of his bony hands in both her soft ones.

"Whatever you do, be careful of yourself, Mr. Rankin," she said. "People have told me that this county never could be run, if it weren't for you. Now I understand why. You've looked through this whole mysterious tangle as if it were a bit of crystal. Everything that you suspect, I feel also. My poor dear Mary is only a child. But she doesn't know it. She thinks that she has a mind to make up for herself. And goodness knows what may come of it. If there's anything to be done—anything to make away with this danger—oh, Sheriff Rankin, do it quickly!"

The sheriff nodded, compressed his lips a little, and left the house.

He passed Mary Mackay in the patio and thought her expression was particularly black.

"How's the invalid?" he asked.

"He? Consalvo? Oh, he's up again, I think!"

What utter contempt!

"A narrow squeak for him," said the sheriff.

The girl said nothing, but looked back to her book; yet it did not escape the sheriff that the leaf she was holding trembled though there was no wind, and that her head was bent unnecessarily low.

He almost hesitated and spoke again, before he realized that this was the very time for silence. After that he went slowly on toward the barn, much disturbed, for he was enough of a practical psychologist to understand that the very violence of the girl's disgust and contempt must have meant a feeling of quite another sort beforehand. And what she once had felt, she might feel again. If she were to guess, for instance, what he guessed, that the young Mexican was just the opposite of the cowardly part he was playing, what would her reaction be? Not sheer suspicion or chagrin, he felt sure!

At the barn, he saddled his mustang and climbed on its back, and so headed it across the hills. He was just going for a little slant toward the mountains, he said.

Once well out of sight of the whole establishment of Mackay, he turned sharply to the right and began to angle toward the town.

The mustang was suited excellently for this sort of business, for though it might not be able to muster any great speed, yet it could gallop all day long and buck the saddle off at the end of the trip, and its wise feet hardly cared whether they went over rough or smooth. Many a speedy horse carrying some violator of the law had learned to his cost that the little mustang and his withered flyweight rider would not be denied—if only the race were long enough!

So the sheriff made excellent progress across the roughest sort of going, and he was more than halfway toward the town, where the telegraph and telephone and his own records would put him in touch with the criminal knowledge of the Southwest, when something loomed up behind him, and casting a look over his shoulder, he was aware of Don Felipe on Conquistador.

The sheriff halted, and faced about; and without thinking what he was doing, his hand went down to his cased rifle. No, rifle work would be too slow, if this youth were what the sheriff thought.

Up came Conquistador, running with a marvelous lightness and ease.

"You'd never think he was in a race yesterday," admired the sheriff.

"Would you?" said the youth. "I saw you ahead, señor," he went on, taking off his hat and making his usual low bow of greeting, "and therefore I came after you. I suppose that you are riding to town?"

"Me? Nope. I'm just wandering around getting a little exercise."

"Ah, yes," said Consalvo. "I understand! To sit all day in a great house and listen to talk—it makes some people very weary."

"But not you, Señor Consalvo?"

"I? Alas, señor, I am as one of those butterflies that pass idly from flower to flower—sun myself on a green leaf—and fly on again. There is no pleasure to me except in aimlessness, and no joy except in every moment for itself. You see, señor, that I am not one of the burden-bearers of the world. I realize my faults and weaknesses. They are almost feminine, perhaps! But I admit the greatness and the nobility of other and stronger men. However, señor, we are as God made us, are we not? I have prayed to the blessed and powerful saints to intercede for me, for I have managed nothing, as yet. And when even prayer will not accomplish a thing, why should man with his puny power attempt to do it?"

In this manner Don Felipe babbled aimlessly on, making gestures with both his graceful hands, and guiding his stallion merely by the touch of his knees.

The sheriff observed and admired this singular youth. Either Don Felipe was a great fool, or a great actor. Still the sheriff could not decide which, and he determined to bring the matter to a head instantly. Delay he did not mind, in ordinary matters, and he was as willing as any man to use the patience of the snake or the hunting cat.

Now, however, too much depended upon a swift solution of the problems which were before him, and he determined to strike without warning. After all, the highest moral right was on his side in thus breaking the law of fighting men, no matter of what nation.

"Consalvo!" he said suddenly and sharply.

"Señor?"

"I want your real name!"

And so saying, the sheriff whipped out his revolver.

He found himself covering blank nothingness where recently a man had been seated on the back of the stallion, and the same instant a revolver exploded under the neck of Conquistador.

It was the old Indian trick of dropping down the side of one's horse and shooting, whether arrow or bullet, under the neck of the animal; but the sheriff, though he had seen the trick a thousand times before, never had dreamed that it could be managed with such neat facility.

He had no time to wonder or ponder. While his gun hung in the air, for that fifth part of a second, the weapon of Consalvo exploded and a well-aimed bullet sped for the forehead of the sheriff.

Good fortune saved Rankin then. By all tokens, he should have died on the spot, but the gun whose shot had been delayed was now poised high before him, and the slug encountered it, tore it from the hand of the sheriff, and dashed the Colt into his face, so that he reeled and toppled headlong from the saddle.

By the time Rankin's spinning wits had recovered their equilibrium, and his eyes cleared, Don Felipe was sitting on a rock beside him, and with a clean white handkerchief was binding a cut in his forehead.

"I thought I was dead," said Rankin soberly, "and that you was the first fiend I met below. But you turn out different, Consalvo!"

"Alas, señor," said Consalvo, making an appealing gesture with both hands, "you frightened me almost to death! Was it only a joke that you were playing?"

The sheriff, seeing that both the don's hands were engaged, made a swift movement to snatch out his second

revolver, for he intended to die fighting, on this occasion of his first defeat.

The gun already had been taken, and Rankin saw that he was helpless.

He pushed himself into a sitting posture; the bandaging was completed that moment.

"You'll have a bad headache for a minute or two," commented Don Felipe. "But after that, nothing will be wrong. There is no fracture. Everything is well with you! The skin is hardly broken. There will be a little black-and-blue place, however, in the center of the forehead. And that is all. It is where Señor the Sheriff accidentally struck his head against a low branch, while riding through the woods."

The sheriff had fallen into a deep trance, so it seemed.

He stared before him, and he saw nothing, but his own thoughts.

"And I didn't get in a single shot!" said he.

"Señor, your gun hung in the holster. I myself saw it!" said the Mexican, in the most conciliatory manner. "It was the shock of fear that enabled me to strike back; and it was luck that made me fortunate. How otherwise could I ever have succeeded in—in answering the question of Señor Rankin, that famous man?"

Rankin, curiously looking into the face of the youth, saw that he was not speaking with a sneering smile, but rather with the most open-eyed innocence.

"By grab," said the sheriff, "you remind me a terrible lot of somebody!"

"Do I?" said the other, and seemed delighted at this notice. "Señor, señor, who could it be?"

The sheriff grunted.

"Oh, dash it, Consalvo, or whatever your right name is," said he, "won't you stop this fooling and talk straight to me? Lead me to the place where

you're gunna dump a bullet through my head, because I'm pretty tired of this play acting, and I'd just as soon have the thing finished."

## CHAPTER XIII.

PATIENT? LIKE A CAT.

THE sheriff said this with an air of real annoyance and impatience, but Don Felipe threw both his hands out in a wide gesture, and then drew up his shoulders in such deprecation as was worth much to see.

He closed his eyes; he leaned back a little and raised his eyes to the dusky sky of the early evening.

"Murder, Sheriff Rankin!" said he. "Murder! Good heavens! To connect me with such a thing! Murder! Would you have me kill you in cold blood?"

At this, the downright sheriff could contain his feelings no longer, and he burst out, with bitterness:

"Look here, Consalvo, there ain't any audience. There ain't any use. Be yourself. Be nacheral. Which I mean, what good does it do you to go on acting your little part? How does it help you?"

"Ah, Señor Rankin," said the other, "it hurts me very much to hear you say this! I have been looking up to you as to a great man, a colossal figure"—he magnified the diminutive form of the sheriff with a great sweep of his eloquent hands—"a hero of the frontier, and now you descend to such speech——"

"Son," said the sheriff, "my Spanish has pretty near given out, and I'll have to start cussing you in plain English before long!"

"I would endure it," said Don Felipe with a patient air, "because when I was even a child, señor, the good padre who taught me made me learn the value of forbearance!"

"Friend," answered the sheriff,



"shall I tell you where you learned patience?"

"Tell me, then."

"From seim' the way that a cat sits by a mouse hole!"

The sheriff grinned a twisted smile as he made this observation. But the Mexican replied gravely:

"To him who wears smoked glasses, all the world is dark. Believe me, señor, when I say to you with all my heart that I am not an evil man in all the ways you think."

"You are not," answered Rankin with much sourness. "You're a lamb, Consalvo. A lamb, and the point is that you'll never be shorn till somebody sinks a bullet in you."

"Let us forget all talk about guns," said the Mexican with earnestness.

"You hate 'em, don't you?" said the sheriff. "You hate 'em like poison. But you've practiced enough with them to be able to make a quicker draw than Budge Lakin or me!"

"As for Señor Lakin," said the Mexican, "of course the terrible accident that happened to him was a great shock to me and——"

"Quit it!" barked the sheriff.

Don Felipe was silent and rolled a cigarette.

"You fair choke me," explained the sheriff. "I seen that only one shot was fired out of the kid's guns. Where did the other one come from, then? Because there was two shots fired! Why, Consalvo, it's as plain as day. And even if you'd shown nothing against him, the trick that you've turned on me was as pretty and smooth as I ever seen in my life."

"As for Señor Lakin," said the Mexican seriously, "it well may be that he loaded another shell into his gun to take the place of the second——"

"Well, and how did you happen to do the old Indian trick and nail me, Consalvo?"

"I was terrified when you spoke so

sharply and moved for your gun. Naturally I dropped for protection. And then it happened that I acted instinctively. In my youth I was much with the wild Indians on my father's estate. They had taught me many of their tricks, and that was one of them. I hung by one hand in the mane and by the heel of one foot. But what should I do? Hang there forever? No, no! So, filled with fear, I snatched out a gun and fired blindly."

"It's smooth," said the sheriff. "It's mighty smooth and pretty neat, altogether. But it won't half do, old son. It simply won't begin to do, I got to admit to you. No, Consalvo, you're an old hand and a rare one. And if I ever looked a killer in the eyes, I'm lookin' at one right now!"

Don Felipe sighed, and answered nothing at all.

"The remaining question is," said the sheriff, "what and when, so far as I'm concerned?"

"Why, I help you back on your horse, señor, and hope that soon you will recover from the ugly bump you received when riding so unluckily close beneath the tree——"

The sheriff stared, and then he muttered softly and fluently for a moment. After that, he shook his head.

"Oh, Consalvo," said he, "you are a deep one! I thought so before. Now I see just how slick you are! I'm square, and you know it. I see through you, and you know it. You don't want to have a murder on your hands, right now when you're playin' your game with the little lady in the big house, yonder. So you'll do a cleverer thing: You'll turn me loose, because then I can't squeal on you! Is that it?"

"What a way to put such an action!" exclaimed Don Felipe.

"Ugly, ain't it? But now, Consalvo, I'll tell you where I stand. I ain't clever, and I ain't smooth. But I'm honest. And being honest, I got

to do my job the way that I swore I'd do it when I took my office. You know what that means. To uphold the law and capture its breakers. If I was loose, my friend, I'd have you behind the bars in two days, if I could catch you. And if guns were needed to bring you down, I'd use guns, and a posse to shoot 'em! That, Consalvo, is where you stand with me. I've spoken my piece. Now, you can play the rest of your own game. The cards are all in your hands, right up to the aces."

The sheriff then cleared his throat, and leaning against the rock at his back, he rolled a cigarette with perfect calm, lighted it, and blowing out the inhalations with deliberate enjoyment, he watched them rise and dissolve in the air far above his head.

So, for some moments, Don Felipe watched him, and the sheriff watched the smoke. Silence lived between them. They could hear in the near-by trees the noises of birds returning to their nests and settling down with many little musical family squabbles.

"Alas! Alas!" sighed Don Felipe. "*O Dio mio!*"

The sheriff turned his head and regarded his conqueror with a sort of dissociated interest.

"It is as I feared," continued Don Felipe. "How much better if the bullet had flown straight and true to the mark, and taken away your life, señor! How much better for me, and perhaps for you, also!"

He waited, but the sheriff made no remark, and Don Felipe began a soft-voiced soliloquy.

"Observe how part of our life is used, and the rest wasted! When we are children, we are burdens to our parents. They love us because they begot us and because we come to endure their caresses. We grow older and enter our young manhood. We must be taught, and still we are a drain.

And after we have been taught, we are cast out into the world, or led gently by the hand into it. It hardly matters! In both cases, soon the friction of real life begins. On some of us it raises calluses. From others it simply removes the skin, and leaves them naked spirits in a hard world—naked and sensitive souls like mine, señor."

"Well!" commented the sheriff briefly.

The younger man flowed charmingly on, carried away by his own thoughts, picking his words with some care, delighted with the music and the rhythm of speech.

"And after all these periods, at last a man enters upon his age of usefulness. It is a short age. Soon his little store of original ideas is consumed. Though he goes through the gestures and though he uses many words, he is saying nothing except what he has said before. Upon part of the world these empty gestures make an impression; to the very end of his doddering old age a portion among mankind will believe in him as he sinks into the grave, mumbling nothingness. But to a few it is given to see that there is no great virtue except wisdom, and that there is no great vice except folly. And to those of us who have such perception, it appears that we are walking among men who either are green and useless, or withered and fit to fall. And perhaps so it is with you, señor! Perhaps so it is with you."

He made another pause.

But the sheriff merely yawned, and then said: "It's getting sort of cold here on the ground, Consalvo. Are you about done?"

Consalvo sighed once more.

"You have done many things," said he. "You have made yourself a great name. You are one of those figures who, when they are seen from the future, will appear great, and cast a broad shadow which will swallow the names

and the fames of ten million lesser creatures. But now I fear that you have reached the crest and that you must begin to fall! You must descend at last! How much better, then, if you had died in battle against a foe-man worthy of yourself even when you were in your first and earliest prime! But no! Fate chose to divert the bullet!"

"Son," said the sheriff, a little stirred, "the way that I was ten years ago, I would've shot the whites out of your eyes before you had time to blink twice!"

"Self-confidence is a noble thing," said the Mexican gently. "How I love to see it! Pride, pride is the greatest of virtues! All that is good and great must spring from it. And yet, señor, never in your life have you been as I am, whether with horse or dog, with gun or with woman——"

He paused and dusted a speck from his sleeve.

"Never, señor," he said with a soft finality.

The sheriff broke in: "If you've talked yourself out, my young friend, I wish that you'd cut it short and finish with me. Because I'm beginning to hate the look of you!"

"I should," said the Mexican gravely. "I should take you at your word and finish you. But a foolish scruple holds me back. Never have I drawn a weapon on a helpless man. I hate to begin now!"

"If that holds you back, hand me my gun, will you?"

"It would be more proper. It would be better. But still it would be useless. To me has been intrusted an ineffable and terrible power. In the old tales, the great knights tilted and lesser men fell before them as by witchcraft. A touch of the spear of Lancelot, and a dozen common warriors fell softly to the dust. A wave of his sword, and a score of giants shrank blinded into

their castles. And so to me, also, a power has been given——"

He leaned, picked up a stone, and tossed it high into the air.

"——to conquer with ease," concluded the speaker. "A gift, and not a labor to me, my dear Señor Rankin."

A gun exploded from his hand. How it came into his fingers the sheriff could not tell. And the stone, dropping swiftly toward the earth, was snuffed out. Only a shower of dust descended lightly.

"I cannot pistol you in cold blood. In the heat of action, as you led on your posse—ah, that would be another affair! But as the matter stands—no, you must live!"

"Son, I've explained the danger to you!"

"Live, but not at large," said the other. "You place a great burden upon us. Already our hands were filled. Mrs. Mackay is almost as dangerous as you. Or shall I say: She is far more dangerous? Yes, I shall. Oh, wonderful, graceful, delicate, and terrible creature! If she were younger, nothing could keep me from her. If she were a beggar in the street, I should have taken her and raised her, till she could have raised me. Beautiful and noble Lydia Mackay—weighted down and tied to an ass who does not even see the danger in her mild eyes! Be sure, señor, that the duel I fight with her sends me to bed at night with a weight on my brain and exhaustion in my soul. To endure for five minutes the calm question of her eyes is a torment worse than all pains. I have endured, not once but many times. I see her, as it were, raise a lantern above her head and throw the long shaft of the light far, far within the shadowy depths of my secret soul. Already she has seen too much. She has seen the glint of the steel, and the hidden weapons. And now, while I combat with her, I must divide my forces and keep

you a prisoner, also. So you understand, Señor Rankin, why it is that I am sad?"

"My lad," replied the sheriff, "what I see is enough to make me sort of sad that you ain't an honest man. If you could use your gift of gab, say, like an honest man, what a cracking politician you'd make! Why, they'd change the laws so's you could be president before you was thirty! You're gunna jail me, are you?"

"I am. I must. Unless—for the last time—you will give me your parole? Unless you will swear——"

"I love cussing," said the sheriff, "but I hate swearing."

"Simply give me your ordinary word that you will know nothing about me——"

"And give up all chance of squaring things with you?"

"No. Only for two weeks."

"Two years you might as well say!"

"Give me a week, then. Give me only five days, and you go as free as ever you were in your life. And at the end of the five days, you can take my trail! Agree, sheriff!"

"Consalvo," said the sheriff, "in five days you'd finish your job."

"Perhaps, and perhaps not," argued the other. "I have Mrs. Mackay against me. She is a terrible force. Even with an extra pair of ears serving me, she almost circumvented me."

"The Indian understands English, then?"

"As well as you do, señor."

"Well, I thought that! You're going to steal the girl, Consalvo?"

"Steal her?" said he. "Good gracious, señor, am I a fool?"

"What will you do, then?"

"I, simply, will be forced, persuaded, dragged into a marriage against which I protest from the first. I shall be dragged, not by my overwhelming love for her, but by her own persuasions!"

Consalvo paused and smiled genially.

"Man," said the sheriff, considering, "I dunno but what you're plain and plumb nutty! D'you think that anything could make a fine, high-strung, well-bred, delicate girl like that, proud as Lucifer, already ashamed of you for the way you behaved after the affair with Budge Lakin—d'you think for a minute that she'd ever urge you to marry her?"

"It is difficult," agreed Don Felipe. "Oh, it is extremely dangerous and difficult work, and a single misstep will ruin me! The idiot Lakin already nearly has destroyed all my work. I must walk over quicksands. And yet, señor, I would not have it otherwise. What is the victory, unless it is dearly won? What is the glory, unless there is peril with it?"

"Glory? Glory?" said the sheriff in a rising voice.

"We have come," said the other, "to a point where we are separated by a difference in definitions. But now, señor, the time is not far off when I must go home to dinner, and ride past the cow-punchers, who will scowl at the weak and cowardly Mexican. Will you come with me, at once?"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### FIRE!

THEY waited dinner for the sheriff. Felipe Christobal Hernandez Consalvo was much concerned and offered to ride out to explore the country.

"It would hardly be safe, Don Felipe," said Mrs. Mackay gently. "You know, there are apt to be rough men abroad at this hour. I hardly would vouch for the safety of the roads! "Would you, Mary, dear?"

And she leaned a little toward her daughter in anxious inquiry.

Mary, playing a softly fingered tune at the piano, struck a loud and sudden discord.

"I don't know!" she said fiercely, and began to play with noisy abandon.

"We'll have to sit down before long," said the colonel. "Odd that Rankin didn't leave word that he would be away for a while."

"But, my dear, something may have come up—he has a thousand things to think of, you know!"

A moment later a cow-puncher rode in with the evening mail. Among the rest was a ragged scrap of paper, just the size of that which fitted into the sheriff's notebook. On it was written:

Mighty sorry. Met with business while I was ridng, and I'll have to be away for a few days. Will you please just send my boys back to town? Will explain when I get back.

This note was signed with the sheriff's name, and the eyes of Mrs. Mackay brightened as she read.

"The poor, dear sheriff," said she. "What a dreadful life for a man to lead!"

"Every man's business looks pretty mysterious to those who are not in it," declared the colonel conclusively. "I suppose that he wouldn't take up other work if he could! And then, he's a single man, of course."

"Of course," said Lydia Mackay, "and no doubt that makes him braver. Shall we go in to dinner, then?"

They went in, except Mary, who had to be called twice before she left the piano.

"I'm not hungry," said Mary gloomily. "I—I'm going up to lie down. Where's Tag? Has anybody seen Tag?"

"You must eat your meals, child," said the colonel.

"I had too much for lunch."

"You hardly touched your food at noon," answered the father severely.

"I want Tag," said Mary. "Who's seen him?"

"I think he was out playing with the men," said Don Felipe. "They were

having him climb the rope ladder to the top of the bunk house, you know. May I get him for you? Please let me!"

"No," said Mary. "No! I'll get him myself!"

And she turned and swirled out of the house.

Dinner for the "hands" being a good deal earlier than that in the big house, she found the cow-punchers taking their ease in the cool of the evening.

"Where's Tag?" she asked.

"He's taken a fancy to the top of the house, miss," said some one.

And, at that moment, there was a shrill barking from the top of the bunk house.

"I want him down at once," said she. "You haven't any right to take him up to such a dangerous place. Where's the ladder?"

There was a narrow rope ladder that sometimes was thrown up from the upper end window of the bunk house so that it hooked over the edge, and up that ladder Tag loved to climb when he was in the slightest degree encouraged.

He was a little Irish terrier, with a wise beard and a pair of sparkling eyes, and he loved battle with a consuming devotion.

"Somebody took the ladder away to see what Tag would do," was the answer. "But Tag don't seem to mind it. Hey, Charlie, where's the rope ladder?"

"I dunno. I didn't have it," answered Charlie from within.

"I don't care how you get Tag, but I want him in the house—in five minutes!" said the girl.

And she turned and stalked away.

Silence fell over the group she left behind her, and darkness unilluminated even by the gleam of a cigarette or the dull glow of a pipe.

"She's plumb wild," said some one softly, at last.

"I never heard her talk like that before."

"You take any woman," said Zeke, the oracle, "and they're all like that. Every once in a while, they go bad—like a mustang. Got to buck a little and kick the man they love the most in the face. The best way is just to forget what they say. A woman, she always says more than she means anyway!"

"Does she?" said some one dryly. "Well, I say that trouble will be popping soon, if we don't get that fool of a pup down! Who took the ladder, I say?"

"Jerry done it."

"Hey, Jerry!"

"He's inside the bunk house, sleeping, I suppose."

"I never seen such a fool for sleeping, Jerry!"

"I'll go wake him up and ask him what he done with the ladder. He's got to get the pup down and take him in and explain to the girl. I won't do it!"

The speaker strode into the bunk house, and there he saw Jerry, not asleep, but stretched on his bunk, trying to light his pipe and at the same time remain buried in the magazine story he was reading.

"Jerry, come here!" bellowed the voice of justice. "Get the ladder and snake the pup down off of the roof, will you? And do it pronto, you bone-

head. Miss Mary is around raising heck about her dog!"

With that, he turned his back, and Jerry, with a groan, swung his legs off the bunk.

"I dunno where the ladder is," he mumbled.

He was a heavy man; ideas came to him slowly.

"I say I dunno where the ladder is," he repeated, but the other had left the bunk house and there was a noise of voices on the outside.

"I better go tell them," said Jerry. "Ouch!"

For here the match flame touched the tip of his finger. He dropped it, and rising with a great groan, he strode toward the door, and then out into the darkness where the others waited.

In the meantime, the glowing end of the match fell to the floor. In nine cases out of ten, such a fall would have put out the last flicker of fire that clung to the bit of wood, but in this case a tiny head of flame remained. Even so, it should have caused no damage, but Jerry was a careless man, and his mattress was so loosely tied that some of the straw had dribbled out of it and fallen to the floor, and the match struck squarely in that long-dried tinder.

It seemed to go out. Then a thin, twisting streak of smoke arose, wavered, and was followed by a bright red eye of fire, looking upward, and growing instantly wider and wider.

**To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.**



### A STEER RUNS AMUCK

**I**T can readily be seen that a steer would be sadly out of place on city streets, but New York was recently treated to the spectacle of one running amuck through that colorful section of the city known as Hell's Kitchen. A free-for-all rodeo, with policemen swinging lariats from taxicabs, became the order of the day, when the steer gave a snort at the cattle pen he had been invited to enter, and then went charging up the street, scattering pedestrians before him. After many difficulties, Western tactics—in the shape of the lariat—subdued the beast.

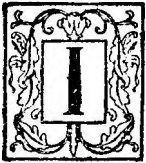




# Dogged

By Howard E. Morgan.

*Author of "Share and Share Alike," etc.*



IN his little cabin on the sunlit ridge top, "Dad" Wister puttered happily about, preparing his noonday meal. Each time he passed a certain chair, the old man paused to tussle playfully with a fuzzy, round-bodied puppy, which growled with mock fierceness and rushed forth to attack the old man's outthrust forefinger as soon as it came within range of its limited vision. At intervals, the old man even essayed a song in a cracked, tuneless voice, a song of the olden days, when his body had been young and his heart always light. He often thought of those days now.

Not that Dad Wister had ever been much happier than he was this particular day in the late autumn of his life. Good fortune had crowded upon him of late. Many things, all promising potential trouble, had smoothed out one by one, leaving him with a pleasanter outlook on life than it had been

his good fortune to contemplate during many, long, bleak years.

The pleasant climax had come that morning in the form of a letter from his old partner, "Jumpy" Hollister. Jumpy had lost his toes in the Klondike gold rush; he walked with a queer, hopping motion, which had earned him his nickname. In his letter, Jumpy had promised to meet Dad at Pasadena, California, on a certain date. That was all. But it was enough to make Dad Wister very happy, for none knew, least of all Jumpy Hollister, that within the past six months Dad Wister had become a rich man—rich, that is, in terms of the simple existence of an old desert rat. After almost a lifetime of searching, most of that time in the trackless mazes of the Tomico Hills, he had found gold, lots of it, and all within less than a mile of his cabin, which had been his home for forty years.

Dad had worked all winter on his little claim, and now, in the golden

springtime, he was ready to quit. To the best of his knowledge, Dad was without kith or kin. However, his sociable, kindly old soul would not permit him to enjoy his good fortune alone. He was, therefore, asking his old friend and erstwhile partner, Jumpy Hollister, to join him in California. Jumpy would be hard up, Dad knew; he always had been and always would be. Dad would buy one of those pretty little bungalows, which formed, to his mind, the very background of California; and he and Jumpy would keep bachelor's hall, within easy reach of the snow-capped mountains in case the pleasant, lazy life in the city became tiresome, and they should want to get back to the hills.

Outside the cabin, the sun shone brightly. In the crotch of a chestnut tree, two bluebirds joined in tuneful antiphony. A jack rabbit squatted on the edge of the clearing, only its velvety snout showing, sniffing at the pleasant odor of broiling steak emanating from the cabin.

Despite these indications of serenity, however, the spring-lit mountains, scantily clothed in their new green garments, were not without their harbingers of evil. High above the little cabin, circling lazily across the dome of vivid blue, were two buzzards, keen-eyed, ravenous vultures of the wilderness. The attention of these unsavory birds of prey was centered on the little cabin. Both of them were well aware of man's prodigality with food. Several times within the past few months the old man down there in the cabin had thrown away the better part of the carcass of a deer. What had happened once might well happen again; and so they waited, patiently circling, hour after hour, watching that little cabin.

However, these two feathered birds of prey were not alone in their espionage. On a wooded ridge top half a

mile across the valley, two men crouched in a spruce thicket. These two men were also watching Dad Wister's little cabin. One of these was a young man with a thin, pale face and dark eyes, set far apart in a wide forehead. These dark eyes were kind, but there was weakness there, too. The young man's mouth was full-lipped and sensuous. There was hesitancy in his speech, and his eyes invariably wavered, drooping or darting aside, when he talked. This was Steve Lockhart, born and brought up in the Tonico Hills. It was said that no man, with the possible exception of Dad Wister, was more familiar with the treacherous steeps and rock-strewn gullies of the Tonico Hills than Lockhart. Young Lockhart had never been much good; lazy and shiftless as a lad, he had degenerated, almost inevitably, into a thief. Lockhart's companion was "Dode" Schuler, a professional crook with several jail sentences behind him. With Schuler's skill in the business of thievery and Lockhart's familiarity with the Tonico Hills, these two had successfully accomplished several daring holdups within the space of a few months.

Their attention was now centered upon Dad Wister. No matter how close-mouthed a man may be, when good fortune visits him it is seldom that he can keep news of this good fortune to himself. It was so with Dad. Although, deep in his simple old heart, he was sure that he had told no one, yet in Westfield, the little cattle town at the base of the mountains, it was generally known that Dad Wister had found gold up in the hills. Just how they had become possessed of this knowledge, no man could have said. Nevertheless, all were quite sure it was so.

Lockhart, his connection with Schuler as yet unsuspected, had heard these rumors in town and had passed them

on to his companion in crime for what they might be worth. The two men had spied on Dad Wister off and on for a week and had soon become convinced that there was indeed tangible basis for the rumors. By the use of a pair of powerful binoculars, they had even discovered where the old man hid his gold; and now, to-day, as Dad Wister's sturdy old heart beat high in pleasant prospect of the life of ease that stretched before him, Schuler had planned to possess himself of the old man's gold.

"It's now or never, Steve," Schuler said, as he replaced the binoculars in his coat pocket. "I tell you, the old rooster is just about ready to make a get-away. His claim is cleaned out; he ain't left that cabin for three days. I'd like to see what was in that letter the mail runner brought him this morning. Maybe he's got some more dough cached away some place—in a bank, maybe. We might as well have it all."

Steve Lockhart was interestedly following the movements of a busy chipmunk. He smiled as he watched the antics of the industrious little fellow. He did not reply to Schuler.

"Well, what do you say?"

Lockhart looked up quickly in response to the suggestion of anger in his companion's voice. "Yes—er—that is—no," he stammered. "No, I wouldn't try it, not while the old man is there, Dode. He'll put up a fight, and maybe we'll have to hurt him. Decent old hombre, Dad is. I don't want to see him get hurt. Why, we might even have to kill him."

Dode Schuler laughed unpleasantly, and watched his companion from beneath lowered lids. Schuler could not understand Steve Lockhart; the kid was like a woman, he told himself, in lots of ways, tender-hearted, and a regular fool in his fondness for animals—dogs, cats, horses, everything. At

times he was timid, too, like a woman; but there were other times when Steve Lockhart was man-sized, and a dangerous individual to cross. The trouble was, there was no way to tell what would and what would not upset him. Now, take this business, for instance: there was Dad Wister, a simple old coot, no more dangerous than a decrepit horse, and yet for a week Lockhart had argued against tackling the old man. Why? Dode Schuler shrugged his thick shoulders. He didn't know. He couldn't figure it out; but he didn't dare push the thing too far for fear his companion might flare out into one of his infrequent bursts of rage. No, he didn't dare push things too far; he had need of Lockhart. The kid's familiarity with these trackless hills had been, and would continue to be, of inestimable value.

Finally, Schuler sighed elaborately. "You got me wrong, Steve," he said, trying hard to achieve an aggrieved tone; "there won't be no killin', I'll promise you that. I ain't no more anxious to nose into a killin' than you be. But there's a rich haul there; the old bird is gettin' ready to leave, and we've got to start somethin' soon. Ain't that right?"

Lockhart dubiously agreed.

"All right, then, I'm promisin' you there won't be no killin'. Does that satisfy you?"

Lockhart smiled, uncertainly. "You're promising me something, is that it, Dode? Don't make me laugh! I wouldn't believe you——"

"Don't, then!" Schuler jumped to his feet and picked up his rifle. "I'm goin' after that dust right now, and I ain't makin' no promises. I'll put a slug into that old coot if I have to, whether you like it or not. Now, are you comin' with me, or would you rather sit here and watch the birdies, and the chipmunks?"

"Aw, you don't have to go and get

sore," Lockhart muttered apologetically. He scrambled lazily to his feet, and as Dode Schuler swung swiftly down the ridge wall, Steve Lockhart followed.

As Dad Wister ate his lonely meal, his back to the open doorway, the puppy stood on its hind legs at his side and whined lugubriously. "Yeah, I know you're hungry, young feller, but venison ain't your meat, not just yet. Your ma will be back soon; time she was here now. You ain't got no call to complain. She don't keep you waiting for your grub very often."

The puppy refused to be placated, however, and continued to whine. The old man stooped to nuzzle the little fellow, but, with his hand outstretched halfway to the puppy, he stopped, his stooped body tensing almost imperceptibly.

A shadow in the unmistakable shape of a man's body had appeared on the sunlit floor. Dad Wister turned slowly. Two men, with handkerchiefs covering the lower part of their faces, confronted him. One of them held a rifle, the black barrel of which pointed unwaveringly at Dad's heart.

There was no hint of fear in the old man's face as he came slowly to his feet, lifting his hands above his head. His eyes rested on the second bandit, who stood leaning uneasily against the door jamb.

"So this accounts for all the money you've been spending so freelike lately, eh, Steve? I allus thought you had more sense, somehow. I——"

Dode Schuler stepped forward and jabbed the old man solidly in the ribs with the rifle. "Shut up!" he growled. "Reach for the ceilin', an' keep reachin'!"

Dad Wister, as though overcome by sudden panic, stumbled back against the wall. Just above his head, along that wall, hung a well-worn rifle. For an instant it seemed as though the old

man's groping fingers were reaching for the gun. Dode Schuler swore. He stepped back, leveling the gun at the old man's heart. Just as his finger tightened about the trigger, however, Steve Lockhart sprang forward. Quick as a flash, he struck out with the barrel of a six-gun which he had snatched from his belt. The .45 struck the barrel of Schuler's rifle, knocking it downward. There was a deafening report. The heavy leaden slug tore into the hard floor between Dad Wister's feet. Steve Lockhart tore the blue-bandanna handkerchief from his face.

"You fool," he hissed, "aimin' on killin' an old man in cold blood! I knew it was in you; I knew you'd do it, with half a chanct; but there ain't goin' to be no killin', not here. Get that straight in yore pint-sized brain, Dode."

Schuler's heavy face was gray with rage. His big hands clenched and unclenched about the stock of his gun. The cords in his bull-like neck throbbed. For a long minute the two men faced each other, seemingly on the point of flying at each other's throats. With a mighty effort, Schuler controlled himself.

"I—I was only goin' to wing him," he muttered. "He was reachin' for his rifle. You seen him. We can't take no chances, Steve. Now, I'll watch him; you get the dust; then, we'll tie him up and leave him. Is that gentle enough for you?"

Lockhart hesitatingly thrust the gun back in his belt. Then he started feverishly tearing at the single bunk. Beneath this bunk was Dad Wister's hoard of gold. Both men knew it. Several times they had seen the old man visit his hiding place. Lockhart found the gold without difficulty. There were four pokes there, each weighing about twenty-five pounds. One by one, Lockhart lifted them out

onto the floor. Just as he removed the fourth one, there was a crunching sound, followed by the thud of a falling body. Lockhart turned swiftly, gun in hand.

Schuler faced him, grinning. "Well, I was right, Steve. The old coot reached for his gun. I got him just in time. Now, now, don't get sore; I didn't hurt him—not much. Just tapped him over the head, easylike. He ain't hurt bad; not bad at all."

Lockhart's white lips muttered inaudible maledictions. He bent over the still figure and laid a palm close to the injured man's heart. He breathed relieved at what he found. "He's alive, all right," he muttered, "but I don't believe he reached for no gun, Dode. Dog-gone, I sure am gettin' sick of your killin' ways. I do believe you'd rather hurt somebody, or some thing, than eat."

Schuler laughed, unpleasantly. "You sure do get the dangedest fool notions, Steve. I——"

Schuler suddenly stepped backward, and snarled, as a small fuzzy animal scampered over his feet. "A rat!" he exclaimed, and swung his rifle quickly about, striving to bring the little animal, which was circling madly around and around the room, into focus.

"No, no, don't shoot—it's a dog!" Lockhart cried. "Just a little feller; on'y a pup."

Ignoring Schuler's rifle, which still tentatively pursued the mouse-colored puppy around the room, Lockhart also followed the frightened little animal, hands outstretched. "Come here, little feller; nobody's goin' to hurt you," he said. "Here, here, lookit—a swell bone." Snatching a bone from the table, Lockhart held it enticingly before him. Bottled up in a corner of the room, the puppy was finally confronted by this enticing bait. The little fellow was hungry, and the bone was ambrosia to his hungrily twitching

nostrils. The bait was not withdrawn when he made a grab for it. He seized the precious morsel in his tiny jaws and, growling fiercely, retired to his bed of burlap bags to enjoy the feast.

Grinning, eyes shining, Steve Lockhart stood, hands on hips, watching, as the little dog wrestled inexpertly but happily with the bone.

"Come on, come on, give us a hand here! Old Whosis will be comin' around in a minute; then I'll have to hit him over the head again, and you'll be so upset maybe you won't be able to carry these two pokes of dust." And, as Lockhart continued to watch the puppy, Schuler began to mutter.

Lockhart waited until his companion's burst of profanity was over; then he stooped and picked up one of the pokes. "You're always braggin' how strong you be, Dode. You can carry three of them pokes, easy. They don't weigh over seventy-five pounds. I know——"

"You take them two pokes, or——"

"Or what, Dode?" Lockhart unsmilingly interrupted. "Or what?" he repeated.

"Or—or—or——"

"Or nothin', that's just about the size of it! Now, you listen to me for a minute, Dode: right now is the time for us to get straight on this business. We've got Dad Wister's dust. So far, so good; but it ain't worth a nickel to you, without me. Alone, you couldn't get ten miles away from this cabin without being caught, and you know it. With five minutes' start I can lose myself in these hills so that nobody, not even old Wister himself, can find me. You know that, too. And so, the way I figure it—I'm the boss. What I say goes. The first thing I say is that you're totin' three of them pokes. I'm totin' the other one—and the pup. Yessir, I'm goin' to take that puppy along, Dode. No kiddin' now, ain't he a cute little tyke?"

Dode Schuler did not reply. The truth of what Lockhart had said was all too evident to him. Without Lockhart, he would be helpless. Therefore, for the time being at least, it was necessary that he let the young fool have his way.

There would be plenty of time later to settle with Steve Lockhart. Without a word, he picked up the three pokes and started for the door. Lockhart thrust the puppy, bone and all, in the pocket of his mackinaw; then, stooping to assure himself that the old prospector still lived, he caught up the other poke and followed his companion.

Just as he stepped out through the open doorway, a yellow shape skittered between his legs and, whining softly, nosed about inside the cabin. The puppy, which had thrust its head out of Lockhart's pocket, started to cry. Lockhart laughed. "That's your ma, I betcha," he guessed; "maybe she won't like it when she finds you're goin' away without her, and so——"

While the old dog was still striving to locate the puppy, whose bawl of welcome she had heard distinctly but which she had been unable to locate, Lockhart pulled the cabin door shut. The instant the old dog found herself shut up inside the cabin, she began to bark. Lockhart hesitated. "Dog-gone," he muttered, "that won't never do! That old hound will make enough noise to raise the dead. She may attract attention. But I don't know; guess maybe it won't do no harm at that. It'll be dark soon, and all we need is about fifteen minutes' start."

Lockhart caught up with Schuler, took the lead, and struck up into the hills, following the beds of rocky gulches, the humpbacked ridges of towering rock piles, and the smooth surface of sandstone ledges, tending always upward into the hills and leaving a trail that even a Navajo Indian could not

follow. Schuler, with seventy-five pounds of gold dust and a fifty-pound pack strapped to his broad back, followed perspiringly.

The big man was mad through and through. He knew better than to give vent to his rage, but he received some small satisfaction from teasing Lockhart. Well Schuler knew that little things would bother Lockhart more than a direct exhibition of anger on his part. He said: "I never seen a feller like you, Steve, always goin' out of your way to make trouble for yourself. That pup, now: what do you want a dog for where we're goin'?"

Lockhart sensed the ugliness behind his companion's tantalizing manner. He merely grinned, however, and scratched the puppy's ears with gentle fingers. "We're goin' to be up there in them hills, just you and me, for some time, Dode; six months anyhow, maybe a year. Long before that time is up I'm goin' to be dog-gone sick of lookin' at your ugly mug. The pup will be somethin' to fool around with, and somethin' more pleasant to look at."

Schuler sneered. "The little rat will probably eat us out of house and home," he muttered. "Mebbe you've forgot that bear cub you took along when we struck out into the Hardpan, last winter."

"Buster was a lot of fun, though, Dode. You got to admit that."

"Lot of fun! Just what did he do that was funny? Uncovered our food cache and ate everything in sight. We would have starved if——"

Steve Lockhart laughed. "If what, Dode?"

"If—if you hadn't finally agreed to eat the bear."

"Well, there you be, Dode. The way I figure it, Buster saved our lives. There wasn't nothin' left in that food cache, anyhow, but half a slab of bacon and some jerked beef. We lived

on poor Buster's carcass for almost a month."

"And was we sick?" Schuler interrupted. "I never want to see another bear steak."

"Yeah, *you* was sick," Lockhart agreed; "but only because you made a hog of yourself. And I still say that if I hadn't taken that bear cub along, we would have starved. As it turned out, we got by through the winter. Without Buster's hundred-pound carcass to feed on, our bones would be rotting up there in the Hardpan right now, Dode."

"All right, have it your own way," Schuler sneeringly conceded, "but *you* can't eat a dog; and, anyway, you're a regular fool about animals, and you know it. But how much farther are we going to-night? I'm ready to quit, right now."

"I'm aiming for 'Mad' Muller's cabin," Lockhart answered; "we'll be safe there for to-night. As a matter of fact, we probably could stay there. Old Wister won't be able to follow our trail; we won't have nothing to fear from him for some time. The best he will be able to do is to pick us up kind of by accidentlike. He knows most of the out-of-the-way places in the Tomico Hills. But he don't know the place we're aiming for, Dode; nobody does; nobody but me."

Dad Wister struggled back to consciousness to the accompaniment of the dog's anguished barking. The old man's head hurt, and the dog's shrill yelps beat painfully upon his eardrums, magnified in intensity a hundred times by the very nearness of the beast, and aggravated by the throbbing ache in his head. Little by little, the old man's dizzy senses cleared. With considerable effort, he scrambled to hands and knees; then clawed his way up onto the bunk.

The sight of the disordered bunk brought complete recollection of the

details of the robbery. Dad sank his grizzled head in his hands, and groaned miserably.

Gone, everything gone; the net result of forty years' hard work gone beyond recovery! If the thieves had been outsiders, there would have been some chance of his getting the gold back. Dad knew the Tomico Hills, none better; but, with Steve Lockhart involved, it was different. Young Lockhart was probably the only man in the State who could successfully hide away in the Tomico Hills where Dad Wister could not find him. All this was very clear to the old prospector. He could not follow Steve Lockhart; even an Indian would be unable to follow where Lockhart would lead. His gold was gone!

Staggering drunkenly, Dad stumbled to the door and, after much fumbling effort, threw it open. With a single shrill yelp, as though thanking her master for letting her out, the old dog dashed away. At the end of a hundred yards, however, she came to a sliding stop, raced back to the old man, clawed at his legs and whined. Although Dad was fond of the dog, just now, due to the weight of his other troubles, he was scarcely aware of her presence.

But he was unable, for long, to overlook the animal's frantic actions. Hoping that she had succeeded in attracting his attention, she again turned and dashed away along the ridge top. Once more she stopped, a short distance away, barked softly and whined. Realizing that the master was paying her no attention, she again returned to him and this time caught his trouser leg where it bagged at the knee and pulled him gently.

The old man roused finally out of his unpleasant preoccupation, shivering, like a man awaking from a horrible nightmare. "No, no, Jess—the old man don't feel like playin'; not now,



Jess. Go get the pup and wrestle with him for a while." And as the dog still tugged at his trouser leg, he thrust her gently away. "Go on now, Jess! I tell you, I don't feel like foolin'. I'll get the pup for you. Come on!"

He turned away into the cabin, and for several minutes fumbled about among the burlap bags in the corner, looking for the puppy. "Guess he ain't here, Jess," he muttered. "Funny, too. Now, I wonder——"

Dad realized, suddenly, that the old dog had made no attempt to help him in his search for the puppy, although he was sure that she knew what he was doing. "Is he gone, Jess? Is that it? Maybe—he follered—them—fellers?"

And, exactly as though she understood what her master said, the dog once more started out through the open doorway and along the ridge top. Dad Wister followed this time, and within the first dozen yards he realized that the old dog was on the trail of the two thieves.

In a circle of wet ground beside a little spring near the cabin, the old man knelt and examined the tracks carefully. "No, sir, the pup didn't *follow* them," he decided. "But Jess, she—now, I wonder—Steve—Steve Lockhart—he has always liked dogs. I wonder if he took the pup with him? I wonder. Jess, she sure is following them tracks. Well, it won't do no harm to follow her a ways, anyhow. If Lockhart's got the pup, she knows it; and she can follow them fellers' tracks where no man can follow them."

Trembling with excitement, Dad Wister hobbled back to the cabin and got a rifle. A minute later he was following the old dog's yellow shape up into the hills. Not for a single instant was she at a loss. Nose to the ground, she trotted silently and purposefully in and out among the rocky ravines and sandstone ledges, holding always, Dad

noticed, to those spots where a man's tracks would be least apt to show.

Unencumbered by heavy loads, such as the thieves were packing, Dad made comparatively good time. He was still dizzy and sick, but the possibility of regaining possession of his dust, remote though it was, acted as a tonic and lent strength to his trembling limbs.

It still lacked an hour of dusk when Dad came in sight of Mad Muller's cabin. Almost immediately he saw Steve Lockhart. Stripped to the waist, the thief was washing in a bubbling spring behind the cabin. The old man's heart throbbed violently. He lifted the rifle to his shoulder, then lowered it. With a low whistle he called the old dog to him. "Now, Jess," said he, "I don't know just how to tell you what I want you to do. This here is something new to us; but you lie right here and be still, understand. I'll 'tend to them two birds, and I'll get the pup. Understand me, now! Lie down! Be still!"

The old dog understood the meaning of these two commands very well. Perhaps for the first time in her life, however, she did not want to obey them. Over there in that cabin was her puppy. Whether the master knew this or not, she was not sure. She whined dolefully. "Be still, I said!" whispered Dad. She obediently quieted, rested her nose on outstretched forepaws and watched the old man with doubtful eyes as he crept stealthily across a thickly wooded ridge on the opposite side of which, set conspicuously atop a flat span of rock, was Mad Muller's cabin.

It took Dad Wister over half an hour to cross that hundred-yard space. By the time he reached a thick cluster of cedar scrub less than fifty yards from the cabin, Steve Lockhart had finished his ablutions and, sitting on a flat rock which served as doorstep to

the cabin, was attempting to feed the puppy out of a tin can. The little fellow had not yet been weaned, and his efforts at feeding himself were ludicrous. Steve Lockhart laughed until the tears came to his eyes at the puppy's clumsy antics. Dad's long rifle unwaveringly covered Steve Lockhart, but he made no move. There had been another one. Perhaps they had separated? But no, there were two packs lying there on the cabin floor. Where, then, could that other fellow be? For several long minutes, Dad remained absolutely motionless, his eyes circling the craggy walls about the cabin.

Suddenly, he caught the dull gleam of light reflected from a gun barrel, high up on the wall behind the cabin. Almost at the same instant there was a puff of smoke, followed by a crashing report. The instant he glimpsed that gun barrel, the old man had twisted aside. The bullet tore through the cedar scrubs, a scant six inches from his head. Two more reports followed in quick succession, but both shots went wild.

Dad dropped on hands and knees behind a convenient boulder. He saw Steve Lockhart rush into the cabin, and return, rifle in hand. The old man swore softly under his breath. He couldn't see the man up there on the cliff wall; he couldn't even see the tip of the gun barrel, now. If he fired at Lockhart, the man up there would spot him. What to do? Already the quick autumn dusk was descending. In a few minutes it would be dark, then he would be helpless.

There was a rustling in the brush at the old man's side. Jess, the old hound dog, dashed suddenly out into the open. Lockhart, his nerves taut, yelled and fired at the moving shape. And Dode Schuler, thinking that the attackers were rushing Lockhart, jumped to his feet. Dad Wister's gun leaped to his shoulder. He fired. In response to

the shot, Dode Schuler's heavy body spun clear about. His gun struck a rock and dropped from his fingers. For an instant he balanced, teetering unsteadily on a rocky ledge; then, clutching with his fingers at the smooth rock, he sprawled sidewise and tumbled headlong down the rocky wall.

With one eye on Schuler, the old man sent two shots into the cabin wall, one on either side of Steve Lockhart's head. "Drop that gun, Steve," he called; "I gotcha, dead t' rights."

White-faced, trembling, Steve Lockhart obeyed. Gun ready in his hand, Dad Wister started across the open toward the cabin. In the middle of the open space, the old dog, with the puppy held by the nape of the neck in her mouth, met him. Her stub tail was tight between her legs, and her ears were drooping. She had disobeyed the master and confidently expected to be disciplined. She laid the pup at the old man's feet, as though hoping that this offering might serve to placate him.

"Found him, did you, Jess? That's a good dog, good dog!"

At these words, indicating that the master was not angry after all, the old dog dropped the puppy and cavorted around and around, yelping shrilly.

"Turn around, Steve, facing the wall, and stick up your hands!"

Finding no other weapon on the thief, Dad kicked the rifle aside. "All right, Steve, you can put 'em down now. Go drag that partner of yours over here. I got him in the shoulder, but like as not he broke his neck fallin' down that wall."

Still white of face, Steve Lockhart obeyed. As Dad Wister had said, there was a neat bullet hole in Dode Schuler's right shoulder. Inspection proved, however, that he was not otherwise injured. Gun in hand, Dad watched and issued instructions as Lockhart bound and skillfully dressed

his companion's wound. When Schuler groaned and opened his eyes, the old man threw Lockhart a piece of rope, part of which had served him as a belt. "Tie him up, Steve, and tie him good. Yeah, I know that wound hurts him; but I ain't takin' no chances."

With this task completed, Lockhart faced the old man, uncertainly. "What—what about me, Dad?" he stammered.

"That's just what's been worrying me, Steve. I dunno what to do with you. First thing, though, you're totin' that dust back down to my cabin; and then, Steve, I—I—I think I'll let you go. I ain't forgot that you saved my life to-day. Then, too, if it hadn't been for you and the puppy, I would never have got my dust back, and so, like I say, I'm goin' to let you go. I don't think you're bad inside, Steve; and maybe, with this fellow out of the way, you'll go straight. How about it?"

Steve Lockhart nodded violently. "That's right, old-timer, I sure will. I've had enough of this—this business. Why, just to-day, you—you—he would have killed you. Murder! And I would have been just as guilty as him. Thievin' is one thing, Dad; killin' is somethin' else again; and it looks as though you can't work one racket without runnin' into t'other. I was done, anyhow, even before this happened. After takin' him up into the hills where he'd be safe, I was goin' to beat it. Honest I was, Dad. I'll take your dust back and—and would you sell me that pup, Dad? He sure is a cute little tyke. I'm goin' away, across the line probably. I'd sure like to take him with me."

Dad Wister nodded. "All right, Steve. I won't sell him, but he's yourn. I can't think of no sermon—no better example of friendship and square dealin' t' set before a man than he kin get from the companionship of a good dog."

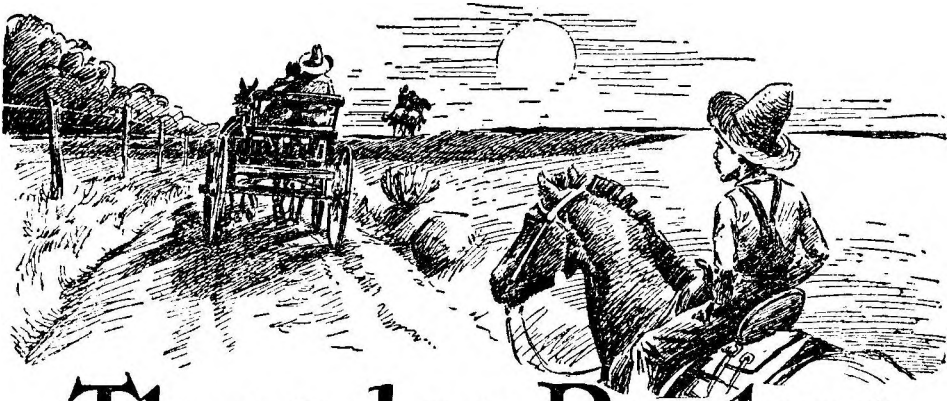
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### DRIFTING ALASKA VOLCANO

ALASKA'S famous Jack-in-a-box volcano—the other name of which is Bogoslof Island—has moved four miles south and one mile east of its chartered position, according to Commander James F. Hottel, of the United States coast-guard cutter *Northland*. The commander has recently returned from a completion of the *Northland's* maiden voyage to northern waters.

Bogoslof gained the title of Jack-in-a-box many years ago because of frequent changes in its contour caused by disturbances of the floor of Bering Sea. Commander Hottel said: "We found the island radically changed since a United States coast-guard vessel visited the place in 1907. Between the two rocky points of Castle Rock and Grenwingk, there exists no channel to-day. In this former passage there had arisen a huge new mound or peak, one hundred and seventy-five feet above the sea; and from this new crater there constantly emerges a heavy cloud of steam and vapor. This new formation is very similar in appearance to McCullough Peak, formed in 1907.

"We circled Bogoslof Island carefully, and astronomical observations and bearings showed the island to be four miles south and one mile east of its chartered position. The new crater has arisen from about one thousand fathoms of water, is one quarter of a mile wide, and about two and a half miles in length.



# Thunder Brakes

## by Cherry Wilson

Author of "The Lad Who Found Christmas," etc.

### Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

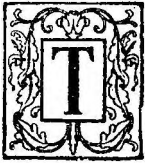
**TEX** RANKIN is wounded in a fight with Box Bar men to put Curly Q herds on Thunder Brakes. His chum, Dell Young, is in love with June, whose father, Jefferson Hale, has ordered the two youths off the Curly Q to which they had come at June's request in her desperate need.

Janice, daughter of Hale's enemy, Rush Kinney, begs Dell to tell her of Tex's past. Dell himself knows little, but fears Tex is also in love with June.

Meanwhile, none know what has become of the Box Bar men, and wait for Tex to revive and tell them. Young Hector Hale, who adores Tex, forces his way to his bedside and rouses him. Tex whispers a few words to the boy, who disappears. Dell offers to seek Hector, for whom the Box Bar people are also looking in their anxiety to know the whereabouts of Kinney and his men.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

"HE'S COMING BACK!"



**T**HEIR arrival without the boy plunged the Box Bar into the wildest excitement. June was distracted. Where could Heck have possibly gone?

"He'd have to leave tracks," Dell reminded her. "I'll trail him, June."

"How?" sarcastically queried the Box Bar puncher, considering that a slam on himself for not looking for tracks before he lit out for the Curly Q. "How can you do that? With the place tracked up like it is an' night come on?"

How, indeed! There was nothing to do but wait in the most heart-breaking suspense for another dawn. At

six that night, the search party came in, fagged and discouraged.

"We've scoured the range," the sheriff told Mrs. Kinney and Janice, "from Thunder River to Little Klotch Creek. It ain't possible we missed them. They just ain't there!"

He was completely flabbergasted when he heard he had one more to search for.

"Reckon," he pondered, when he'd given it some thought, "that the Texan told the kid where the men are, an' he's gone to fetch them?"

Only that hope made the night endurable. For Tex was sinking—

"It's the crisis," the doctor came out to tell them. "He's fought pneumonia on his feet two days. We can look for the change toward dawn. I'll stay!"

For a while June sat with Dell in

the parlor. She sat on the couch beside him, staring with unseeing eyes at the wall, or sobbing her fears.

"He's just a baby!" she'd cry. "He never was away from home overnight in his life! I can't bear to think of him out in the cold."

"He was bundled up warm, June." Dell said, trying to comfort her. "He's as much of a man as any of us. He'd look out for himself. Besides, it ain't so cold now."

Her eyes thanked him.

"Isn't it strange, Dell," she said, growing calm, "how real trouble makes you see clear, as a summer storm washes the haze from the air and brings the hills near? Here we've been worrying about the cattle till this comes along. And now we see it's nothing—nothing at all that we've lost them. Dell."

He looked at her quickly. "Lost them?" he cried. "Not if *they* know it, June! They're tyin' into that hay like they was used to it! I never got so much kick out of anything as the way they——"

"Hay?" The blood left her face. "Dell, are you delirious, too?"

"Good, ol', unadulterated alfalfa!" He saw now that she didn't know. "The Kinneys didn't tell you? Didn't want their right hand to know what their left give, I reckon. But they couldn't very well hide their hand, for there was a Box Bar puncher on both loads! Maybe you think we didn't do some tall whoopin' when they drove in! An', June, they're lettin' the herd Tex put on stay at Thunder Brakes!"

June jumped up and ran to Janice, who was just coming in.

"Oh, Janice," she cried, carried out of her grief by gratitude and affection, "you—you did that! After all——"

"Don't shame me—June," Janice's eyes filled with tears, as she hugged the girl—"for *one* neighborly *act*! We should have shared with you."

Her head rose proudly as Jeff Hale, who had overheard this through the half-open door, came in. He came slowly in, as though the coals of fire she'd heaped on his head were an actual weight.

"You sent hay to my herd?" he asked her strangely.

"For June's sake," Janice explained, still holding her head high, still clasping June.

"Girl"—miserably, Jeff Hale appealed to the girl he'd insulted before the whole range—"I ain't got any right to ask you to, but I hope you'll listen. What I say ain't because of what you did, for I meant to say it before leavin' this roof. I'm a hypocrite! I'm everything you ever thought me—an' worse! I've wore blinders all my life—but that ain't no excuse, for they was of my own makin'. They narrowed my view, kept me from seein' a thing but myself. They kept out the light of God's sun—happiness, innocent fun, till I got to thinkin' jist to be happy was wicked! But, thank Heaven, they're off! Janice, I'm seein' clear. An' no matter how much you hate me, girl, you don't hate me as much as I hate myself!"

"I don't hate you, Jeff Hale!" said the girl, deeply moved.

"No!" Hale found no consolation in that. "You ain't got the meanness in you to hate, not even for the vicious way I treated you once. I'll never git over bein' sorry for that. I know it's too late to be sorry—for, if it wasn't for that, these past three years of trouble would never have been; these black shadows wouldn't be over this house to-night! But I—I'm sufferin', too! I'm an ol' man, Janice. Will you—can you, for June's sake if not for mine, overlook all that's past, an' forgive?"

In her straightforward way, Janice gave him her hand. She had her apology at last, and, though it had come

too late, she was too generous, too touched by the rancher's sincerity, to refuse it.

Heavier settled the shadow over that household as night wore on. No one tried to sleep but the weary searchers. Dell, planning to go out with them in the morning to search for the boy, couldn't sleep and didn't try. Tex was nearing the crisis—that overshadowed everything else. Dell's heart was not out in the cold with Heck, filled with awful thoughts of what could have snatched him from sight and home—his heart was with Tex. Again he listened, straining for every sound from that room. They were all in there—Kinneys and Hales, keeping their solemn vigil.

For this was more than the prayerful watch over a man's struggle for life. It involved seven lives, and those who loved them, and those who loved them, full of suspense, watched Tex fight. Long ago, he had ceased to mutter or move. Would he slip off to the Range Invisible with that secret locked in his breast? Or would he come back?

The doctor held his pulse. Why did he frown as he held it? Was it so faint that he must add the sense of hearing to that of touch?

For ages, Dell waited, alone. June had promised to call him at any change, so that, one way or another, he could say good-by to Tex. Every sound seemed to tear the heart out of him, for he thought it was June.

The darkest hour comes before dawn. Night had drifted into that darkest hour. The house was astir now, as the searchers made ready to start at dawn. He ought to go, Dell knew. There ought to be a Curly Q man in the party. It looked as if he were shirking.

"See here, buddy"—Lou was beside him, fingers gripping his shoulder hard—"he's your pard—you stay! I'll take your place in the search!"

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Tightly his hand gripped Lou's, but he couldn't say even as much as thanks.

They left, and the house was so still that Dell heard the clock in the kitchen tick. Not a sound came from in there, where Tex was going through the valley of the shadow of—

"Come, Dell!" he heard, as June's soft hand slipped within his.

He went in with her that way, and then—

Looking at Tex, he knew why she'd called him so gently, taken his hand—it was in pity again! Tex had already said good-by to him! Tex was—

He stumbled forward, to be caught by Jeff Hale and led to a chair. So he didn't see the doctor lay down the wasted hand and sigh deeply; but he heard the most blessed words tongue ever uttered:

*"He's coming back."*

## CHAPTER XIX.

"I'LL STOP YOU, BAT!"

UP in the jungle of chasms and crags that lay north of Thunder Brakes was a wild canyon, one of many similar canyons; and in it was a cabin—which wasn't a cabin in the accepted sense of the word, but a "hole in the wall." Here, long ago, a fugitive horse thief had fronted and roofed a natural rock niche, making a fortress so perfectly hidden, so well blended into its wild setting that a man might ride within twenty yards of it and never detect it. But no man would be likely to come within even a mile of it, for it was a blind canyon and devoid of any attraction but the dugout, whose very existence was unknown. For years deserted, "too lonesome for a pack rat even," it was well peopled now!

Men jammed it—wild-eyed, desperate, half-crazed men! For them, for three long days and longer nights it had been a living tomb. Three days

without water. Two without food—the sandwiches they had carried to sustain them in their fight for Thunder Brakes had tided them over the first day. One day without heat—for the fuel, burned with religious economy, had lasted two. And now to the horrors of hunger, thirst, and fear, was added the enervating, penetrating chill of their stone cell.

For them, there was no escape. The heavy, iron-bound door—locked on the outside by an iron bolt driven through an iron hasp—had nobly withstood their frenzied battering. No escape for them, even had it fallen! For, whereas yesterday, had they been able to break out, they would have been free to leave that chamber of horrors, to-day it would be fatal to go. Yesterday, they had fought for that bit of window—too small to admit more than one face at a time—to look at the strip of sky, and feast their eyes at least on freedom, to prayerfully scan the trackless snow for help; this morning they fought for it to plead with, bribe, threaten, and cajole their guard.

For last night they had been found! But, maddeningly, that had not meant deliverance. Their guard was deaf to reason; indifferent, even gleeful, over their fate! And the day broke over the grotesque spectacle of a boy of eleven in absolute mastery of six stalwart, desperate men!

"Good Lord, this is awful!" "Rush" Kinney paced his prison like a caged wolf, looking not unlike one, with his sunken, burning eyes and three days' beard. "All that kid's got to do is lift that bolt out, an' we're free! Free to go home—home—home! But he may pull out any minit an' leave us to die here! Men, when I think of what the folks at home are goin' through! Mohave, try him again. He's got to listen to sense!"

The gnarled little man with the pallid mustache and cold eye, who had

made such a deep impression on Tex, rose from the bench obediently, but without hope.

"It's no use," he told Kinney for the hundredth time. "Heck's got the Hale stubborn streak—only in him it runs to bein' true blue to his friends. This Texan is his friend, an'——"

"Well, *you* used to be!" Kinney, desperate, burst out. "Remind him of it! Put it on thick!"

"Bat" Rouge, wildest, more nearly crazed than any of them, surily drew back from the window to let Mohave there.

"Heck!" Despite the fact that he was suffering from the boy's obstinacy, a thrill of pride ran through Mohave as Heck leaped up from his nest of boulders, coolly cocking a six-gun almost as big as he. "Heck, be a good scout an' let us out! We'll die in here. We're most froze—most starved, now. A real hombre never goes back on a friend, Heck. Jist lift out the bolt! I'd do as much for you!"

But the boy's heart was set against that appeal. It came nearer breaking him than Kinney's attempts to reason with him or Bat's awful threats.

"Don't beg me no more, Mohave!" His pitiful quaver gave Mohave a deep sense of shame. "I told you I won't, an' I won't! Tex put you here, an' I'll see you stay! If Tex didn't want you here, he wouldn't have locked you in!"

"He's weakenin'!" Kinney encouraged. "Keep it up!"

"Listen, Heck," Mohave implored. "I wouldn't do *you* this a way! Remember the bows an' arrows I used to make you. Remember that rawhide hackamore I——"

"I ain't rememberin' a thing!" Heck's little whimper belied his words. "I'm sorry, Mohave, but if you *will* mix with a wild bunch, you gotta take your medicine! It ain't *my* fault!"

And much as Tex had braced his

trembling body against that door jamb to hide his weakness from his enemies, so the boy dropped down behind the boulder to hide his tears.

The scarlet thread of adventure had crept at last into the monotonous pattern of Hector's life. At last he wasn't missing anything. At last, he was "having fun!" "*Men—hole—in—wall*——" Tex had whispered, and he knew!

For when Heck had found this place, while hunting birds' eggs last spring, he had named it "*Hole-in-the-wall*," after a famous outlaw retreat. And he hadn't even told June about it, because he meant to use it for a rendezvous himself, when he grew up and was king-pin of a famous outlaw gang. But *Tex* had found it, and he liked the use Tex put it to even better—to jail the Box Bar crew!

He hadn't meant to stay when he came up. He thought Tex had killed them and poked them in there, and he just wanted to see. But he'd found them alive, and they'd hounded him to let them out. Bat Rouge had told him he'd better, because they had a hole 'most cut through the rocks and would be out by morning, anyway. And so he'd decided to stand guard till Tex came and make sure they didn't.

He'd told them he'd shoot the first man to come out—give them any brand of bullet they preferred—and he could, too, for he had all kinds right handy! Snooping around before dark last night, he'd found the heap of guns behind the boulder. The rock had shelved out over them, so they hadn't been snowed under, and he had a regular arsenal around him now.

Propped up there in the midst of his guns, in the nest of boulders facing the dugout, Heck wished Tex would hurry up and get well. For it was pretty hard keeping awake all night. Pretty cold, too—even with a camp fire. And he was hungry enough to eat a raw

dog! Besides, he could hear them chipping, chipping at the rock in there, and had to watch so close. His eyes got tired; they kept—going—shut——

"You young whelp!" He woke with a start to see Bat's face in the window, distorted by rage out of all human cast. "You're monkeyin' with dynamite! I tell you, we got this wall most bored through! You let us out, or when I git out, I'll clean up on you—yeah, an' that Texan, too!"

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" taunted Heck, behind the gun, little recking the fires he fanned. "*You* clean up on Tex! Yeah, in a pig's eye! Lookit what he done to you! Lookit your face—like you fell under a stampede! *You* lick Tex! Pooh! There ain't men enough in the whole Okanogan to lick Tex!"

Goaded almost beyond endurance at being shamed by a boy before these men who had seen his defeat, Bat howled, black with fury:

"Go bring him here, an' see if he's man enough——"

"That's the stuff!" Kinney applauded. "That's the way to talk to a kid!"

"Bring him here, an see if he's man enough to unlock that door an' try me again!"

Gee, how Heck wished he could, and make up for the fight he'd missed!

"Where is he?" yelled Bat.

And, as if he knew just where to hit to lash this man on the raw, Heck shouted:

"He's up to the Box Bar!"

"You lyin' brat!"

Rush Kinney, grayer than any wolf, started forward.

"I ain't lyin'!" denied the boy, in satanic glee at the consternation he'd spread—for their excited mutter came out to him, and he'd seen Bat flinch, through the pane. "The women," Heck played up to it, "musta took a big **shine** to Tex, for they invited him home **from** the dance! An' he's there



now, an' Janice is sure makin' him right at home!"

"He's lyin'!" Kinney swore as Bat, inarticulate with fury, swung back. "He's tryin' to git our goat—like he's done all night!"

"Don't ever git that in your head," said the former Curly Q man, who had been Hector's pal. "You're hearin' truth."

"If I thought that," Kinney cried hoarsely, wildly pacing his prison, "I'd go mad! The Texan was crazy—the look of him made my blood run cold! If I thought he'd gone down to the ranch—to my wife and daughter——! *He did!*" The man was wholly distraught. "He's killed Lou an' the rest! That's why they don't come!"

Mohave had the only cool head in the lot. "How would they come?" he argued. "They don't know there *is* such a place. We didn't know it! Bat an' his three followed the Texan here. The Texan tricked Bat's men into the cabin, licked Bat——"

Bat Rouge spoke viciously.

"Licked Bat," repeated Mohave, with secret relish, "an' ~~threw~~ him in! Then you an' me—who've circled down by Janice's cabin—trail the rest here, to run into a gun in the hands of a maniac an' git locked in ourselves. But nobody's goin' to trail us, for the snow wiped out every track. Judging by the way it piled up on that brush yonder, it snowed a foot or more night before last. If we wait to be found, there won't be much left of us to find! Nobody'll come here in a month of Sundays——"

"I ain't waitin' to be found," gritted Bat Rouge. "I'm gittin' out!"

And, tortured by the jealous fear that Tex *was* at the Box Bar, had been there for three days—improving the time he'd been in anguish here by furthering his acquaintance ~~with~~ Janice Kinney—Bat resumed his ~~vicious~~ <sup>jealous</sup> attack on the wall. By careful sound-

ings, this spot beside the window had been judged the weakest. But, so far, it had defied the best efforts of all.

All but Bat had given up hope. But he kept steadily chipping at the spot, nicking, splintering slivers of granite, until he'd used up every knife blade among them; but he succeeded, at last, in digging out a good grip for his hand. The wall had been so constructed that the stones wouldn't push out, but if they came, they must come inward. Now, in a very frenzy, Bat pulled till his veins stood out purple, and perspiration streamed down his face despite the chill that had taken the heart out of the rest.

Utterly dispirited, his fears for his own fate swallowed up in fear for his family, Rush Kinney slumped down on a bench and buried his face in his hands. This was what a man came to when he rode Hate. Hate got the hit in its teeth, and a man couldn't stop, couldn't see what he was riding into. And a man never rode Hate alone, but carried his family along with him.

He hated Jeff Hale! Hale had insulted his family and blackened his name. The things Hale had accused him of had given him a bad name in the country. Nobody liked Hale, but trust folks to side with the underdog! Where there was smoke, they said, there was bound to be fire. But he hadn't done one of those things! He wouldn't stampede a man's cows. He wouldn't burn a man's hay! Why, he'd carry the rope to hang a hombre who would. Yet, folks thought he'd done those things to Hale. No wonder he hated him!

And he intended to run Hale out of the country. That's why he had held on to Thunder Brakes. If he could keep Hale off until spring, he'd be closed out, and forced to go. He'd come up here to do it—drop a few cows, and bluff him out. But——

"Not at the cost of human life," he

groaned aloud. "I wouldn't have stood for bloodshed!"

Bat Rouge, resting from his labors, eyed him contemptuously.

"Bah!" he jeered. "There'd have been blood spilt all over them flats, an' you know it! I didn't come up here for any pink tea with Hale. An' there sure will be bloodshed when I git out!"

Shudderingly, Kinney stared at his foreman. How little you knew a man till you got in a jam with him! He was finding Bat out. Bat got them all into this jam by his fool play, his conceit in his fists, but you'd think to hear him that *they* were to blame. To himself, now, Kinney admitted that he never had liked Bat. When Hale fired him years ago, and he'd come to the Box Bar, Kinney thought Bat had blabbed too much—even though he had a good right to be sore at Hale, but Kinney had found out these last three days how Bat had nursed that hate till it was running wild with him.

Watching him, now, tearing at that wall like a mad beast that he might get out and fulfill the vow he'd made a hundred times since they were penned up here—to kill the Texan—Kinney came very near being glad the Texan had locked them up. If they had clashed with the Curly Q, Bat would have killed some one, and he'd have been responsible. He, Kinney, would be a murderer! He'd suffered much, and the end was not yet, but he was spared that—

He sprang to his feet as Bat, with a terrific wrench that shook the structure, lost his hold and fell heavily back, yelling with fierce exultance:

"*It give!* I felt it give! Help me, you shorthorns—a few hard pulls will bring it out!"

With the strength of unexpected hope, the men ran to his aid, and the rock, loosened by his persistent efforts, crashed in on the floor. But there was still no opening. The walls were three

feet thick, and more stones were between them and freedom. But the entering wedge was in, and, heartened by this, the men fell to breaking up table, bunks, benches, anything that would serve as pries.

Out in the bright morning, his nerves strung to breaking, the boy shrilled:

"Stop! Stop! I'll shoot!"

He mustn't let them break out—they'd kill Tex for locking them in! Tex—sick in bed at the Box Bar!

"Stop!" he shouted. And then his sharp eyes saw the rock beside the window move, and a black hole loom where it had been. Into that hole, true to his promise, he emptied his gun. He heard curses, and, snatching another weapon from the heap, he emptied that, too.

"You think I can't shoot! Ast Mohave! I can shoot like a son of a gun! An' I'll shoot the first son of a gun to poke his nose out that hole!"

"He will!" Mohave warned them. "An' he'll shoot to kill! He's got more nerve than the bunch of us! Stay back from that hole!"

"Be balked by that cub of a Hale!" Bat snarled, at the risk of his life putting his face to the hole.

"All I got to do," he yelled to the boy, "is jerk another rock out! I'm givin' you one more chance to open that door!"

He ducked, as a bullet smashed through the opening and flattened against the wall. Then, completely berserk, yet with cunning enough not to show his body at the opening, he clawed and yanked, shouting triumph as another rock gave way. The hole was wide enough now to admit the body of a man—a small man.

"Git through!" He thrust Mohave toward it. "The other rocks seem too solid to move. Somebody's got to unbolt the door for the rest of us. He won't shoot you!"

"I will, too!" screamed the boy, hearing. "Mohave, I will! Don't make me, Mohave! You ain't none of you goin' to git out at Tex! Honest, Mohave, *I will—I will—I will—*"

His old friend knew he would, knew that rising hysteria wasn't weakness, but deadly purpose, knew Heck meant that bullet which pinged on the wall beside him to be a warning. And he took it, leaping back.

"I'll take my chances right here!" he told them grimly.

Cursing him for a coward, Bat tore again at the stones. Nothing could withstand him. The five were cold with something beside the chill of the place as they watched. Another heave, and another rock crashed inward, and the hole was large enough for Bat!

As he stood beside it, panting, crouching, as crouches a beast to spring Kinney, in sudden alarm, commanded:

"You open that door—an' that's *all* you do, savvy! You leave the boy alone!"

The face Bat turned on him was so livid that he involuntarily shrank. Bat gathered himself to dive through the hole in the least possible fraction of time.

"Go back!" shrieked the boy, as he suddenly bulked there. "I'll blow you into the middle of next week, Bat! I'll *kill* you——"

Bat was through, and bounding toward him. Heck's gun crashed fire and smoke. Bat half spun, clutching at a flesh wound in his shoulder; then, raging, twisting, dodging, so that Heck's next two shots went wild, he bore down on him, wrested the smoking gun from his grip, and, heedless of the men's horrified shouts, struck the boy a blow that knocked him senseless in the snow. Nor did he stop here, but—crazed by the fire in his shoulder, the unleashed fury stored in three awful days—he kicked the helpless boy once, twice—

drew back his foot to kick again, when Mohave, first to follow in his fear for Heck, threw himself upon him, shouting:

"You dog! You yellow dog!"

Snarling like one, Bat whittled on Mohave and, with the strength and quickness that had made him the best scrapper on Thunder River Range, sent his fist crashing into Mohave's face, dropping the man senseless beside the boy he had reached too late to save.

Then, brandishing Hector's gun in the face of Kinney's demands to halt, Bat ran to where the boy's pony waited and, leaping on it, rode off like mad for the Box Bar Ranch.

Halfway down the canyon, he met Scotty galloping toward him with extra horses. For Tex had told his secret with his first conscious breath, and the Box Bar was joyfully awaiting Scotty's return with the men. But Bat didn't stop at his excited hail. He almost ran him down, didn't seem to see him, didn't see him! For Bat Ronge was seeing the Texan at the Box Bar, and what he would do to him. And his face was awful with what he saw!

So awful was his face that Janice, eagerly watching for her father, eagerly flying out to meet the first arrival and hear news of him, stopped in her tracks, halfway between the door and Heck's poor little lathered horse.

"Is the Texan here?" Bat cried thickly, flinging himself down and coming toward her, his bold, glaring eyes riveted on her face. His lips curled as her hand flew to her breast and she did not answer.

She saw blood dripping down his left hand from under his coat sleeve, making red blotches on the snow, but it meant nothing, compared to this new, swift-dawning horror—now when she thought all horror past! She had forgotten that Tex had imprisoned them—that they would be out for vengeance.

And Tex was helpless to defend himself, must not even be disturbed, for he was getting his first natural sleep, and the doctor said everything depended now on quiet and rest!

"Is the Texan here?" More than wolfish was Bat's sneer.

Still she didn't answer.

He pushed past her, and into the hall, where she caught up with him, clung to him, begging him to be still.

"He's here," she admitted, wild with anxiety. "In the bedroom—sick! Too sick to——"

"When I git through with him," snarled Bat, "he'll be dead!"

Down the hall he heavily strode, heedless of her clinging weight.

"Bat, are you crazy?" she implored, in utter horror. "He's sick! You mustn't go in, I tell you! Hear me—you must not! No! No! No! I won't let you!"

"You can't stop me!" he raved, tearing her arms from about him, throwing her roughly aside. "Nobody can stop me—*now!*"

Then, flinging himself into the parlor, he had just sanity enough to know Death when he saw it face to face!

For Dell stood before the closed door of the room where his partner lay. And Death quivered in his left hand—as proficient in the use of the gun it held as had been his broken right. The threat of death was also in his gray eyes, and in his ominous, low-voiced:

"I'll stop you, Bat!"

## CHAPTER XX.

"MOHAVE'S GUNNIN' FOR BAT!"

**B**RED on the frontier, Rush Kinney was used to scenes of violence. Of necessity, he had partaken in many, but always fairly, justifiably, and always he gave the other man an even break. But never could he have killed a man with such equanimity—nor had a pang of re-

gret for it then or thereafter—as he could have killed Bat Rouge. His striking down Mohave—a man of half his strength and size—was a coward's trick; but his attack on the boy—whose only crime had been a childish misconception of the situation, and the manly courage to face it—placed him beyond the pale. It was as well Bat Rouge put himself out of Rush Kinney's reach then!

As Bat dashed away on the stolen horse, and the men, a little dazed by their sudden liberation, bent over Mohave, Kinney lifted the boy in his arms and carried him into the dugout, laying him gently on the one bench that had escaped destruction.

"Game li'le kid!" he said huskily, smoothing the boy's hair back with rough tenderness. His blood leaped hot at sight of the purpling bruise on Heck's cheek where Bat's fist had landed. Then, as Heck showed signs of coming to, Kinney's blood turned to ice as he remembered that Bat was on his way to the Box Bar in that murderous mood.

Running outside, with some wild idea of covering on foot the miles between this lonely canyon and home, he saw Mohave and was fastened to the spot.

The little man had picked himself out of the snow and was gingerly feeling his jaw. On his lips was a mirthless grin of self-mockery, which nobody shared. Nobody made any comment. There was about him a deadly coldness that stilled all.

With quiet deliberation, he sorted over the heap of guns, his hand closing lovingly about his own. Deliberately he broke it, looked at its loaded chambers, closed it, and spun the cylinders. Then, with grim satisfaction, he jammed it in his holster and took note of his audience.

"Bat's gone?" His voice had no shade of emotion.

Dumbly, the Box Bar rancher nodded.

"Where's the boy?"

Kinney pointed toward the dugout. He knew exactly what was in Mohave's mind, knew how futile would be any effort to dislodge it. What Mohave would do, he would do! He was a mighty bad man to rile. And Kinney watched, strangely fascinated, as Mohave went in and bent over Heck. He saw the long, sensitive fingers slide over the bruised cheek, probe down the side, under the clothing, wrenching a cry of pain from the boy when they touched the spot where Bat had so brutally kicked him, and he shivered at the cold glitter in Mohave's eyes. Then——

"Scotty!" his men yelled, and Kinney forgot everything else. For, whirling, he saw his cowboy racing up the canyon, with the saddled, plunging horses in his wake, and his eager demands for news of wife and daughter rang above the frantic cheers.

"Fine as silk, both of 'em!" grinned the cowboy, pulling his horse to a rearing halt in their midst. "Ma's jumpin' sideways, helpin' Mary rustle you a scrumptious feed, an' Janice is plumb lookin' the glass out of the winder for you, boss!"

To head off further questions—for Ma Kinney had put him under oath not to tell a word of what had transpired there till she could prepare her husband—Scotty put in one of his own:

"What's wrong with Bat? Met him out here on a Curly Q hoss, goin' like grim death was after him! He wouldn't even give me the trail sign, an' he sure had blood in his eye!"

Rush Kinney jumped on his horse.

"Mohave!" He sent his big voice booming toward the dugout.

Mohave appeared in the door. "Leave my hoss," he said quietly. "I ain't goin' yet. Might as well tell you,

Rush—I'm quittin' the Box Bar now."

"Now, see here," Kinney fumed, pulling the rein in his anxiety to be off. "I savvy how you feel—about workin' under Bat, but it won't be necessary for you to quit, Mohave. I'm firin' Bat the minit I——"

"That won't be necessary, either!" The calm response sent a shudder through all.

"What you aim to do, Mohave?" Kinney asked weakly.

"Be my own man, so I can settle my own affairs. First thing, I'm takin' the kid to the Curly Q. His folks'll be worryin'."

Scotty's mouth opened to tell him that the Hales were at the Box Bar, but shut tight, recalling Ma's strict injunction. Then, afraid he couldn't keep it shut all the way back with Kinney, and thinking that he could tell Mohave when the rest were gone, Scotty suggested:

"I'd better go along with Mohave, an' spell him off."

Too impatient to parley longer, Kinney put spurs to his horse. Fear soon put him far in advance of that eager band. How long had it been after Bat left that Scotty came? Ten minutes? Not more! Bat was riding hard, but Kinney's horse was fresher, faster than the boy's pony. He ought to catch up with Bat before he got home. But he was still a quarter mile from the Box Bar, when Bat forced his entrance there.

So when Rush Kinney jerked his horse to a plunging halt in the home yard, nobody came to meet him. Nobody watched for him from window and door. In terror, he bounded up the steps, reached for the doorknob, and fell back in a confusion of emotions.

For the door had opened to Bat's broad back. And as Bat steadily drew nearer, Kinney—at a loss to account for this new style of exit—saw the

blue-black barrel of a revolver following him out. At the flashing, natural thought that this was the Texan in control of his home, Kinney's hand dropped to his weapon; but surprise paralyzed it, as the man who held the gun now came in sight—a gray-eyed, determined, patched-up and crippled young puncher—and a perfect stranger to him! And to cap his astonishment, he saw his own and only daughter, backing up the strange puncher, looking as he had never seen her look before—vivid, flaming, queenly, in womanly outrage.

"Janice," he roared, bewildered, "what does this mean? What's this hombre think he's doin'—puttin' my foreman out of my house at the point of a——"

Janice put a finger to her lips. "*S-s-sh*, dad!" she implored. The fact that Tex's life hung on quiet now was paramount even to her father's return. "It's Dell," she said softly, though her eyes flashed at Bat. "He's puttin' Bat out for me. Bat came storming down here—bent on trouble. He wouldn't be still. He wouldn't get out when we explained about Tex. He hurt my wrist—see? And Dell——"

White with anger that his foreman should dare lay a hand on his daughter, Kinney turned on him.

"*Git out!*" he rasped, pointing a long arm down the highway. "I've seen enough of you in the last three days to last me a lifetime! *Git!*"

"*Please*, dad!" pleaded the girl. "Oh—hush!"

"Fired, huh?" Bat's face was black and corded with rage. "Fired for fightin' *your* battles! Fired for wantin' to git back at the yahoo to blame for them last three days! You'd kick a man out hungry—an' crippled to boot? Waal, Kinney, maybe you won't be so easy, when you hear what's been goin' on here——"

It was the convulsive movement on

Dell's part, rather than Janice's entreaties, that shut him up.

"Bat"—Kinney's voice shook uncontrollably—"git to the kitchen an' stow away grub to last you to Blue Buttes. Tell Mary to fix up that shoulder you're whinin' about. Then—git! Don't let the grass grow under your feet, for when I hear what my girl's got to say, you may go—feet first! Besides, Mohave's on your trail, an' he'll be here pronto!"

That was like a sluice of ice water to cool Bat's heated brain. And his face grew gray, as, for the first time, he realized the folly of his mad outbreak at the dugout. Mohave! He'd rather have the devil on his trail than that little killer. He'd lost his awe of him up there—when Mohave had been unarmed, and he armed with two big fists, either of which could crush him—*had* crushed him! Now Mohave was out, with a gun in his fist! Suffering a complete loss of appetite, muttering a threat to come back and finish what he had started, Bat slunk toward the bunk house.

"Now, my young buck," Kinney turned the lightning of his wrath on Dell, "where do you come in? What in the name of——"

"*S-s-sh*, dad!" Janice was about frantic now.

"Is that Texan here? He'll find me anything but easy! No loony Lone Star longhorn can stampede me into a dugout with a gun, keep me prisoner, an' git away with it! If I find he has been here——! *Is he here?*" he roared at cowboy and girl. "What's the matter with you—has the cat got your tongue?"

"My stars, Rush," said Ma, coming out and shutting the door behind her, "I wish he had yours!"

While Kinney sputtered at that, the Box Bar men came pounding up, and, seeing Dell, whom some recognized as the Texan's partner, set up such a bul-

labaloo of question and cross-question that Janice and Ma, despairing of maintaining quiet and order, begged them to take their noise down off the porch—to the bunk house, anywhere, but away from here. Rush Kinney's brain—giddy from his long fast—spun like a top, and he cried aggrievedly to Ma:

"Holy cow, you ain't done a thing but 'shoo' me since I got home! What's wrong here, anyway? Why should I allus be shoo——"

"We shooed for you." Ma firmly retorted, "when *you* was sick!"

Kinney looked at her queerly. "Ma, who's sick?"

"The Texan." Bravely she met his look. "Rush, come in."

Taking his hand, she led the dazed rancher inside. Wildly her heart beat under her calico gown. Always, she had been able to "get around" Rush, but this was a man's game. Would he listen to her now? Could she soften his heart toward the Texan who had imprisoned him, toward Jeff Hale, whom he had so bitterly hated for years? How could she explain the presence of both? Well, one thing at a time and that done well, was a very good rule, Ma Kinney knew. She'd begin with Tex.

At the bedroom door—the one that led into it through the hall, for Jeff Hale was asleep in the parlor, and she must avoid that room as if it held a plague—Ma stopped to warn him to make no demonstration, when she saw new cause for alarm. Dell was right behind her, as determined to protect Tex from Rush Kinney as he had been to protect him from Bat. He hadn't a gun on Kinney, but he had it handy, and his purpose was plain on his pale, set face.

"Dell," Ma said gently, "go back. I want to talk alone with Rush. He won't touch Tex. He won't make a sound."

"How the heck do you know I won't?" fumed the rancher. He knew Ma was boss, but he didn't care about the news getting around.

"You can trust that to me, Dell," said Ma.

And, thinking how much he'd already safely trusted to her, Dell did.

June sprang up from the bedside as they entered, her eagerness to ask Kinney about her brother crowding out any thought that his presence might mean danger to Tex. But before she could speak, Ma whispered kindly, "Go out to Dell, June," eliminating her, too, from the scene.

Rush Kinney, looking down on Tex, could hardly believe he was the man who had trapped him. For the sleeping face, fresh-shaven, utterly relaxed, bore little resemblance to the wild, crimson countenance that had horrified Kinney then and haunted his memory since. Pain was gone from that face, but its scars were left, and a great weakness that was a better protection from a right-minded man than even Dell's gun.

"He's been so near death, poor boy," Ma whispered. "Rush, he was out of his head with fever when he locked you up. He wasn't responsible. We brought him here to care for him, because I—I couldn't let him die, and maybe never know—where you were, Rush. He wasn't able to tell us until this morning."

Rush Kinney's eyes were lifted to Ma. Her face was marked, too, with suffering. She'd fought for this man's life—for him. That thought, the reaction of being home and finding his loved ones safe, had a softening influence on him.

"Rush"—Ma had been doing some thinking herself—"this boy almost caught his death puttin' those cows on Thunder Brakes. We're to blame for it! We didn't want that land—really. And as far as I can see," said Ma and

killed two birds with one stone, "we've been as stubborn as Hale."

Sure now of her ability to control the next situation, she led Rush back into the hall to tell him of Hale. Then, to her dismay, she saw Hale coming toward them; saw her husband stiffen to see his archenemy here, snort like one hostile animal meeting another, and she could almost see his iron-gray mane uprear.

Endless to Ma, June and Dell the moment in which the two old foes regarded each other.

Then, deep on the hush, resounded the Curly Q rancher's husky, uncertain:

*"Heaven be thanked!"*

And, as Rush Kinney glared dumbly at that, "Heaven be thanked," Hale cried tremulously, "that you're safe, Rush!"

It was a long time before Kinney found his voice, and then it was a cold voice he found. "That's strange talk from you, Jeff Hale!" said he.

Hale's white head bent sorrowfully. "It is," he owned humbly, "an' more's the shame! But hear me, before you judge me, Rush. Hear my story, an' see why I can't hold enmity toward any man. I've apologized to your daughter. She's been big enough to forgive the thing that started this row. Now, I'm apologizin' to you for the dirt I done you—fencin' them springs. Under the circumstances, Rush, I don't blame you for burnin' my hay, an' for——"

"Jeff, you think I done that? You mean to say you actually think I burned your hay? Why, man, I swear——"

He broke off at a loud commotion outside. Boots pounded on the porch, rang over the threshold.

"Likely, the search party," Ma suggested, rushing to quell the noise. "I sent word you'd been found——"

The door burst open, and Scotty's terrified face peered down the hall.

"Boss, git out here on the double quick! Mohave's gunnin' for Bat!"

As Kinney stamped out, the Curly Q members pounced upon Hector, who had followed the cowboy in. June caught him up in her arms, hugging him, kissing the bruise on his cheek, to his intense inner comfort, but outward disgust.

"Aw, I ain't a baby!" he sobbed on her neck. "Even if he did lick me! He licked Mohave, too!"

Jeff Hale stiffened at that, and a flame shone in his eyes, so long dead to fire.

"Who hit you, son?" he asked.

"Bat!" Heck looked around proudly. "But it took the best scrapper on the range—next to Tex—to do it! He hit me here! See? An' he kicked the stuffin' out of me. See—it's all black an' blue already. There'll be green in it by to-morrow!"

But Jeff Hale, too, had gone to find Bat.

He found him backed up against the bunk house by Mohave, and immediately fell under the spell that had gripped the entire outfit, massed at the scene. And though Bat was a hideous sight, crouching there, with hate and fear in all their primal nakedness depicted on his swarthy face, in every line of his huge body, it was Mohave who held their spellbound gaze.

For the little man was little no longer. A terrible power, terrible purpose, added cubits to his stature. He dominated Bat Rouge, dominated all, as he "settled his own affairs," according to the old code of the West—a code which forbade the interference of any one, as long as the odds were fair and equal.

"See this, Bat!" Keeping his cold eye on Bat, he significantly indicated the gun in his holster. "It's the great leveler! It makes up the difference nature put in us. I'm as big as you are now, an' we're goin' to fight!"



"I won't!" Bat's voice was a wail of terror.

"You won't want to," Mohave was relentless, "but I'm goin' to *make* you! But, first, you're comin' clean. I've been watchin' you, Bat, for two years now. You'll be surprised how much I've learned!"

Sheer panic swept the Box Bar foreman.

"Hale"—Mohave changed neither his tone nor position—"listen in on this. You, too, Rush. You'll git a earful!"

Wonder intensifying their strain, the two old ranchers stepped nearer; and Mohave, watching Bat like a hawk, addressed himself to his old employer.

"Hale, you been wonderin' who stampeded your cows after the springs was fenced?"

"No, by Heaven!" Jeff Hale denied hotly. "I know it was Bat!"

Rush Kinney's voice rose above Bat's strangled protest, but Mohave swept aside both.

"Correct!" he approved. "I know, too! I was ridin' range with Bat at the time. We parted trails that day, an' when we joined up again, he crowed he'd done it."

"It's a lie!" shrilled Bat.

"Hale"—Mohave might not have heard that, either—"you been wonderin' who burnt your hay last fall?"

"No!" roared Hale, enraged at the memory. "We tracked Bat from the stack to the Box Bar!"

"It's a lie!" Wildly Bat's eyes besought Kinney to back him up, but the rancher was shocked beyond all speech.

"Correct!" Mohave approved again. "Mebbe there ain't much I can tell you, after all. Hale, do you know who beat you up down in Spokane, an' robbed you of the money you'd mortgaged your ranch to raise?"

"I do." Hope leaped to Bat's eyes as Hale began, "It was a sail—" His jaw clamped down on the word, for it

wasn't necessary to use a pickax now to remove an idea from Jeff Hale's head.

Some one snickered hysterically, for this was a standing joke in the country. And even Mohave faintly grinned.

"It was Bat! I can prove it."

"It's a lie!" Bat yelled, shaking all over in a convulsion of terror and hate. "He's lyin', I tell you! He——"

"Hale," in steely tone, Mohave cut in, "your goin' wasn't any secret here. We knew why you were goin', an' how much money you carried. The day after you left, Bat asked for a lay-off. Wanted to visit a sick pal up on Tunk Creek, he said. Am I right, Rush?"

"So far," Kinney admitted in dread.

"An' while he was gone, Hale was knocked out an' robbed! Well, I had a suspicion—knowin' Bat probably better than any of you. An' I wrote to my ol' bunkie, who happens to be foreman of the Triple X, Bat! He said you hadn't been there, said he'd never heard of you, nor had any of his men. But he said he remembered a hombre of your description did ride into town on a big black, which he left at the livery stable, an' took the train to Spokane!"

"It's a lie, I tell you!" Bat frothed.

"They can check up on it—after!" Mohave was watching Bat with terrible intensity now. "My pard, up there, found out for me that you come back three days later on the train, got your horse an' started for Thunder River Range the night of the blizzard——"

"You—you——"

Dell, who had followed Hale out in wrath over the attack on Heck to remain an awed spectator, now became an active participant.

"I can check you on that!" he told Mohave, as Bat turned livid, and settled in his crouch. "Tex an' me were at the stable when he rode in. Curious will back us up! Bat knocked a train

check out of his hat, an' Tex has got it! We can easy prove——"

"Thanks, pard," Mohave said softly; "we won't need to. In half a minute I'll tell you why."

A terrible suspicion, borne by him all along, became a more terrible certainty to Bat. Abject terror seized him, and with it the courage that comes with despair. He must get out, or still that tongue. He couldn't get out——

"Bat," continued Mohave, in his final denouncement seeming to grow by leaps and bounds, filling the bright and sunlit space with his awful presence. "Bat, you've done every scoundrelly thing a man could do to make trouble for Hale. You've let Rush Kinney in for arson an' worse. You've rode roughshod over this range, because no man would call your time. But it ain't for them things *I'm* callin' you. It's because you beat up a kid that calls Mohave pal; knocked him out—kicked him when he was down! You're too accursed mean to encumber the earth! Bat, you've got Hale's money sewed in your clothes right now!"

Bat's hand hitched to his gun—fatally!

The explosion crashed deafeningly on the strung nerves of the women within. Then it died away into silence—dead, profound.

But, as if it were a lullaby to insure the sleep that was life itself, the convalescent Texan slumbered on.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"EVERYBODY HAPPY? YEAH!"

**B**AT ROUGE was gone; gone forever from the range he had ridden roughshod, tramped so ruthlessly in his No. 10 boots; and the air was purer, the sun brighter, and every one better for his going.

Mohave, with a last wave, a last "Adios!" was gone—speeded by the tearful prayers of his kid pal, Heck,

and the good wishes of all who knew him.

"Reckon he'll hit for the border," decided the sheriff, who, with the returning search party, rode in on the echo of that shot. "Waal, I'd best be after him."

"Why?" asked Kinney, who was still quivering with righteous wrath that his foreman had made him guilty of all the crimes Jeff Hale had accused him of. "Mohave shot in self-defense. We'll all swear to that!"

"Jist the same," said the conscientious officer, "I'll have to bring him back."

Still—considering that the Canadian border was only a score of miles away—he evinced no great haste to be about it.

"You say Mohave said the money was on Bat?" he asked. "Hale, could you identify it?"

"There was ten one-hundred-dollar bills," the Curly Q rancher explained, "in the bill fold June gave me for Christmas—black, with my initials in gold."

Under their tense gaze, the sheriff made a search of the dead man's clothing. Sure enough, eventually a fat, black, initialed bill fold turned up!

"That yours, Hale?" He held it out. "Got your initials—J. H. See?"

"Looks like it!" admitted Hale joyfully.

"Ahuh!" ejaculated the officer, examining its contents. "Ten one hundreds! Hale, this is sure lucky for you! But, of course, I'll have to keep it, you savvy, till after this case is investigated."

This settled, the sheriff lighted a cigarette and turned to Kinney. "Now, Rush, would you mind tellin' me where in Tunket you was while I been ridin' my hoss to death huntin' you?"

So Kinney told him of their confinement in the lonely dugout, which, he declared, "it would take a crazy man

or a kid to find!" And the sheriff, running through the files of memory, recollected one "Dry Creek" Johnson, a horse thief, who operated in that section years ago and had a hidden hangout in the Thunder Brakes region, to which he was wont to retreat when the vigilantes were pressing him hard. He reckoned Johnson had built the dugout, and he wondered how the Texan had ever stumbled onto it!

Hale, then, explained that he had a line cabin a mile west of the dugout, where Tex had intended to stop. But, in his delirious condition, he had blundered into the wrong canyon, and found the dugout instead. It took a lot of explanation to make everything perfectly clear to the sheriff, who had never before struck his constituents as being an obtuse fellow.

"I'd best be hittin' Mohave's trail," at last he drawled, putting his toe in the stirrup and giving his body a heave. "Glad everything's turned out so fine here for everybody. Waal, so long, folks!"

"He's been *so long*," and Kinney grinned as the sheriff's broad back bobbed away, "that a slow hoss could have made a start Man-O'-War couldn't cut down. Boys, Mohave's safe!"

Now, in spite of this lengthy discussion and all its interruptions, the dinner Ma Kinney had prepared for her famished husband and crew had not even had time to get cold. So—as the last sign of tragedy was borne from the Box Bar—they all went in to dinner, for it would take more than a tragedy to blunt the ravenous appetites these men had acquired in their three days' fast.

For the first time in their long feud, Rush Kinney and Jeff Hale kicked their boots under the same table.

"Rush, I've been a stubborn ol' fool!" Jeff Hale blamed himself.

"Jeff, at your worst, you wasn't a patch on me!" Kinney went him one better.

They kept on calling themselves names, each trying to outdo the other, while Janice and June, nervous and shaken by the sad occurrence, chattered twice as fast in an effort to forget it, and made up for the years of their forced separation.

But Dell, who had stayed to dinner at everybody's insistence, ate little and said less. There wasn't anything for him to say, and nobody to say it to. He felt lonelier than when he had been alone, and he decided not to stay and be a wet blanket. He'd go over to the Curly Q and pack up. Tex was too weak to have company yet. So he'd get all ready, and come over to-morrow and say good-by to Tex.

Excusing himself, when they all left the table, he went to the barn. Lou saddled his horse, and Dell swung up, pulled it about, and headed down the Box Bar drive.

"Dell!" Had he been gone a month, that voice would have reached him. Riding back to the porch where June waited for him, Dell smiled steadily, determined to cast no cloud over her day. But something in his smile, something about him sitting there in the saddle, his forehead still bandaged, his arm bound over his breast, brought tears to June's eyes. She ran down the steps and caught his bridle, nervously toying with it, as she spoke:

"Dell"—her voice shook more than a little—"you'll be back to-morrow? Tex will be able to talk to you then. Promise you'll come over the first thing in the morning, Dell!"

"Sure!" That was easy. He meant to. He wouldn't go without seeing Tex.

Earnestly June watched him ride off in the sun, his spurs jingling merrily, his blue bandanna fluttering out—a jaunty figure for all his crippled arm.

On the crest he turned and stood in the stirrups to wave his sombrero to her and show her how fine everything was with him!

Then he rode over the hill, and with the hill between, and no need to act, all the jauntiness went out of Dell. He slumped, his pace slowed, muting his spurs' merry jingle, and the white-and-gold, sunny valley through which he rode was an empty casket, rifled of every dream.

Some folks said love wasn't anything much. Love was everything! Everything was nothing, without love. Still, he'd always have something. He'd always have his own love for June. Love didn't need to be loved back to make it worth while. He'd always be glad he came to the Curly Q. He'd always be glad—glad it was Tex that June loved. Tex had always been so kind of alone, and unhappy—well, Tex would be happy now. Everybody was happy, even the cows!

For he could see the Curly Q herd down in the feed yard, munching Box Bar hay, or standing about in the mellow sunshine—tottery, still, but all fed-up—chewing their cuds—plumb happy!

And down there, knee-deep in a rick of alfalfa, old Calliope was pitching hay in the racks, bellowing happily:

"Oh, I went down South for to see my gal,  
Sing polly wolly doodle all the day!  
My Sal, she is a spunky gal,  
Sing——"

"Great snakes, Cal!" objected Dutch, with even more than the old-time spirit—proving that he was happy, too. "Shut up that infernal racket! Let's count our blessin's, Cal. Our boss is plumb humanized. Our cows is saved. Tex is gittin' well. An' I'll eat my shirt, boots, an' bandanna, if we don't have a weddin'!"

Yeah, everything had turned out fine for everybody!

Then why did Dell's lean jaw quiver

as he packed his suit case in the bunk house to strike out on his own—for Texas, maybe? What blinded his eyes, making him run to his bunk? And what made him slide down beside it, his good arm stretched across it, and his fist slowly clench and unclench? What, as he huddled there, with his face buried in his bunk, shook his slim body, shook every fiber of him?

"Everybody happy? Y'eah!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### OVER THE SKY LINE.

TRUE to his promise to June, Dell rode over to the Box Bar next morning—a morning memorable to Thunder River Range, every cattle range in the Okanogan, every range in the great Northwest.

June met him at the door and took him in. Not as she had last time—as if she was sorry for him, but as if—he didn't know how to express it! He'd never seen her like that—so nervous and flurried—telling him he mustn't stay long, mustn't excite Tex, mustn't let Tex talk too much.

Then Dell was in the bedroom, looking down at his partner, and his heart jumped up in his throat, and he couldn't say a thing! But Tex couldn't either. Their eyes said a lot, though, and so did their hands in that long grip. He grinned at Tex, and Tex grinned back—the old Tex!

Yeah, he was just the same, for all that he'd have to stand twice in the same place—supposing he *could* stand—to cast a shadow. But the reckless look had gone out of his face; the hungry light had gone out of his eyes. His eyes weren't so big and bright now, either, but natural, happy, as if Tex had found Trail's end at last.

Dell wanted to tell Tex how glad he was about that, then break it easy about his going away; but it was hard to say either. So he sat down in the chair

by the bed, swinging his sombrero between his knees, trying not to see June fussing around Tex, trying to think of some way—

"Sam Houston!" Tex exclaimed—natural as life, but weak—lifting a thin hand to the soft wind billowing through the open window. "Feels jist like summer, Dell!"

Glad to have something cheerful to tell, Dell stepped to the window.

"Take a look, Tex!" he cried, pulling the curtain aside.

Tex's dark head turned on the pillow, and his dark, wondering eyes journeyed out to the transformed world. It was a lavender world, stained with the diluted hue of the purple-black cloud that had come rolling up from the south in the night, spreading over the range, swathing the hills in deep lavender mists, veiling in lavender the face of the sun. So that the sun wouldn't be shamed by the working of a magic greater than its own? And a curious rushing filled the air—the soft swish made by millions of evergreens slipping their burdens and springing erect; the swirl of Badger Creek, already unchained, running full-banked with melted snows.

"Tex, it's the chinook!" Dell answered the wonder in Tex's eyes. "Tomorrow night the snow will be gone! Spring's here! Ol' winter's dead at last!"

The Texan's face was flooded with great content.

"I licked it!" he proudly grinned. "I licked the winter. It give me a hard jolt or two, but—it's dead, an' I'm still in the ring! Dell, I won't be afraid of winter again."

Glad of this, too, Dell sat down again. If Tex was going to make his home up here—that was *three* times June had fluffed up his pillow since he came in!

"Reckon all hands'll be busy," Tex grinned—eager, Dell could see, to get

out—"pullin' weak cows outta the mud now—instead of outta the snow!"

Dell saw a break in the fence, and lunged for it. "Yeah," he said as he crossed his legs, hoping he sounded offhand, "but I reckon I won't stay for the spring work, Tex. Reckon I'll pull out—don't want to leave all my hoof-prints on one range."

Tex looked at June, and she started fluffing up that pillow again. But Dell caught her whisper:

"Tex, you tell him now!"

"Oh, he ain't goin' so quick as all that!" Tex teased her, in a way that stabbed Dell all over again, and made June blush like a rose and run out of the room.

Dell braced himself to hear Tex tell it. He *had* to look happy. He had to smile. He could stand anything for a minute or two.

"Pard"—Tex's tone was mighty serious, so was his thin face against the white pillow—"I got something to tell you, something I ought to have told you long ago. I know now, my not tellin' has made you see things—well, different from what they was. But I—I was so touchy about it, an'—ashamed to tell you, Dell."

"Don't tell me, Tex, if you'd rather not."

"But I want to, pard." Tex's weak voice was eager. "I ain't ashamed of it now! Recollect that night in Blue Buttes, when I told you it was a family matter that brought me North? The truth is, Dell, I come up to hunt my family. You see, my parents had trouble, an' my home was broke up when I was jist eight. My dad was a mighty hard man—narrow as a boot lace, stubborn as a mule, an' jealous of his shadow. My mother was an angel, or she couldn't have stood him as long as she did. But there was a limit to what she could stand, and she reached it one night when he got jealous because she wanted to go over to

a neighbor's house to a dance—not over her goin', mind, but jist her *want-in'* to go! He flew into such a tantrum that she had to leave him. An' she took her two children—my baby sister an' me—down to El Pas'."

Dell stared at Tex, divining, rejecting in fear that which he divined.

"Mother went to work, Dell, supportin' us kids as best she could. Dad sold out, an' followed her there; not to make up—he was too stubborn for that—but to sneak in the house, when she was at work an' I was at school, an' steal my baby sister from her ol' Mexican nurse! That was the last time we ever saw either of them. Mother's heart broke, an' she died in a year. I know now that dad tried to locate me after he heard of her death, but I'd been taken to another part of the State."

Gently the chinook stirred Tex's dark hair, swept from his face the pain of remembering.

"Naturally, Dell, I never had any use for my dad, but I grew up wantin' my sister, wantin' a home—kin—somebody to love! I set out to find her. It was a long, long trail, but I found her at last! Found dad, too! And there was the rub—that was why I didn't tell you——"

Dell's eyes were looking straight through Tex now, and his face was white as a sheet.

"Pard, grab the saddle horn," Tex gave warning, "for I'm goin' to pitch! *June is my sis!*" I knew it when she came into the depot that night. I'd have canceled my ticket to heaven to help her! Ain't she sweet, Dell? Yeah, I remember you said so that night of the blizzard. But I wasn't in any hurry to own dad—Jeff Hale—after the way he treated us—seein' how he was treatin' her like he had treated my mother. But I—I couldn't keep from tellin' June, Dell. I bogged down an' told her that night you saw

us—out at the horse corral. I told her not to tell you, to wait till I could tell you myself. Then I got sick, an' I couldn't. She told dad an' the rest, when they thought I was—goin' West. But she wouldn't let them tell you."

Did joy kill? Dell had heard that it didn't, but he was sure it was killing him! Tex hadn't broken his pledge to Jeff Hale or to him. Tex was as true as the North Star—true as the truest thing in the world. Tex was his partner still! And June——

"Dad an' me," Tex went on with a note of deep feeling, "have had a talk. He's plumb changed, Dell. I've changed toward him. He didn't suffer jist one year, but *every* year! He hid his sufferin', like I hid my shame of him, an' it kept him mean. But when June told him—about me—it was the last straw, an' it broke him up. He's so sorry—an' blood's thicker than water, Dell! I'm plumb proud of him now. I'm Tex Hale from now on—Rankin was the name of the man who raised me. An', pard—a strange radiance lighted the face of Tex, a strange reverence throbbed in his tone—"I'll be up in a week or so, an' I'm goin' home, Dell—*home!*"

"To Texas?" Dell's lips moved mechanically.

"No, you moony yahoo, to the Curly Q! With my sister, my dad, an' the gamest li'l scout that ever trod shoe leather, my half-brother, Heck!"

So it wasn't good-by that Dell said to June in the Box Bar parlor, with his good arm around her, and her sweet face—pinker, prettier than he'd ever seen it—looking right into his, and his heart running wild. He said the farthest thing from good-by. He said—well, what they all say!

Two months have passed. The war—in which man was allied with brute against Nature—is ended. The weaklings, both man and brute, are gone.

All that are left are strong. And the frozen range has thawed and flowered—the more gorgeously flowered for the unusual severity of the season passed, as is ever Nature's remorseful, beautiful recompense.

Vividly blue is the summering columbine in the thickets. Summer winds sing sweet requiem in the fragrant grasses for the winter-killed. In the grasses, prairie dogs, who have slept through the winter, tumble and play; calves playfully kick up their heels, who know not winter yet, and on the sky line, cowboys who have beat the winter ride easy and free.

Who are these riders on the sky line this fragrant May twilight—here, on the hill, between the Box Bar and the little schoolhouse on Badger Creek? Who is this lean, sinewy, dark-eyed cowboy, and who this black-eyed girl, riding up on the sky line, their horses reined close?

"Dad says"—the girl's happy laugh was a joy to hear—"we ought to be able to hold Thunder Brakes—with a homestead and lease on it both!"

"An' a *home!*" happily added the man. "Don't forget that! Janice, when I think you an' I will be married one week from to-day, an' livin' over on Thunder Brakes——"

"Tex, you're mussing my hair!"

"Who cares? You allus look pretty to me! That's all you care about, ain't it?"

"Watch out, Tex, or you'll be getting jealous. You know what——"

"Jealous? Girl, I'm *that* jealous, I could——"

Then they dropped over the sky line.

And, lo and behold! right where the riders have been, are a team and buckboard that have gone out of their way to drop Jeff Hale off at the Box Bar so he could "chew the rag with Rush," while the young folks enjoyed themselves.

"Oh, Dell, I can't believe this is me—going, *really!*" cried a sweetly excited girlish voice. "Listen, Dell, I hear the music——"

"June, I ain't listenin' to a thing but you! I'm loco about you! An' to think I got you, an' my partner, too! Everything *sure* turned out fine for every——"

Then they dropped over the sky line, too.

And who is this small figure looming up here on a little bay pony to stop on the sky line, look at the romancing four just ahead, and wheel his horse, preparatory to turning back?


"Aw, mush!" That disgusted treble can only be Heck's! "I'm goin' back to the bunk house an' chin with Lou. *He* ain't got the girl-bug—yet."

More riders, more buckboards, follow by scores. But you don't catch any of them turning hack! For there's a big dance at the schoolhouse to-night. And everybody is turning out—as light hearted and gay as if there never had been, never would be again, the white days, the grim phase, of Thunder River Range before the chinook.



### A TENDERFOOT GETS HIS WOLF

IT is not every one who can shoot a wolf at the tender age of nine. This, however, is the distinction that Hugh Lamar Stone of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is enjoying. He was sojourning in the vicinity of San Angelo, Texas, where he encountered the wolf, and shot it at a distance of seventy-five yards with a rifle. So a nine-year-old boy from the East has become a Western hero!



# Red Raiders

(Victoria, the King Philip of the Southwest)  
by A. B. Searles



MUCH has been written of the great Indian heroes of the Atlantic coast. King Philip, Powhatan, Massasoit, Osceola, Tecumseh, and a score of others are familiar to the average reader as powerful chiefs who led their tribes when the Eastern States were young. But from the annals of the West, rich though they are in the lore of the red man, we have become well acquainted with the titles and deeds of only a few. We know Sitting Bull, Geronimo—how many more? Of that host of others who warred on the invading whites our knowledge is limited indeed. Yet in the raids led by these unsung sachems may be found stories as thrilling, deeds as brave, and horrors as appalling as any in the tales of the more famous warriors.

One of the most interesting of those little-known figures, perhaps, is the ill-starred Victoria, chief of the Chiricahua Apaches. This tribe, when the Bosque Redondo Reservation was broken up in 1868, was transferred to the Ojo Caliente Reservation in Grant

County, New Mexico. Here for ten years they lived and prospered under the wise guidance of their leader.

From the Pecos the Apaches had learned agriculture; and their decade on the Ojo Caliente was one of peaceful and constructive enterprise. Buildings were erected, irrigation ditches were laid, and the foundation of a future civilization began to develop.

Into this quiet atmosphere broke the edict of white men, greedy for the land and power it would give them. It was proposed to move the tribe again, this time to the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona. In those days New Mexico was regarded as a sort of second California, almost an El Dorado—hence the eagerness to control completely the desired area.

Victoria rebelled. "Let the government leave us here alone," he said; "we harm none!" But despite his protest, in 1878, under military guard, he and his people were herded to San Carlos.

Embittered by this injustice the chief twice escaped from the reservation and returned to Ojo Caliente, only to be



driven back with abuse. Finally he took refuge at the Mescalero Reservation near Fort Stanton, from where, in 1879, he and thirty chosen men stole forth in the dead of night to take the warpath. Thus was inaugurated what was to be the bloodiest war that ever devastated New Mexico, Arizona, and Chihuahua.

At this time Victoria must have been a striking figure. He was over fifty when he began his career of revenge. Set atop a short, stout body, his massive head retained the dignity and majesty of his unbowed spirit. From long, tangled gray hair looked forth a fierce, hawklike face, seamed and marked by bitter years. His left arm was paralyzed. Yet this man, crippled, no longer young, was able with the aid of a handful of braves, at no time exceeding three hundred, to hold at bay for eighteen terrible months the armed forces of the United States and Mexico.

Victoria's first offensive was staged at Ojo Caliente. For several days men had been joining him, two or three at a time, until on that fateful night in 1879 he had thirty tested warriors at his side. It was about two o'clock in the morning when the attack commenced. The small guard of eight whites, little dreaming of disaster, had somewhat relaxed their vigilance. Suddenly was heard the fierce war whoop of the assaulting Apaches. Outnumbered four to one, the defenders of the fort were speedily dispatched. No quarter was given. From that encounter Victoria and his braves rode away in triumph, the scalps of their victims dangling at their belts, and forty-five horses captured from the Ninth Cavalry as reward for their effort.

The die was now cast for war, and Victoria, though formerly peaceful in his relations with the white men, from this time until his death turned his hand against them in revenge. The whole blame for the horrors that succeeded

this initial outbreak does not rest on the shoulders of the red man alone. A deplorable lack of foresight on the part of the authorities was largely responsible for the disaster. We can palliate to some extent the atrocities committed by Victoria and his braves when we view them in the light of this fact.

Victoria's first move after the successful raid on Ojo Caliente was to gather about him a larger number of warriors, together with those women and children who cast their sorry lot with him.

The deeds of violence that marked the attack on the reservation immediately aroused the whites. Now the qualities that made the old sachem such a dominant leader came to the fore. His sagacity and courage were unexcelled. There were times when it seemed that nothing short of a miracle could save the little band that fought at his side. Yet again and again he was able to extricate himself and his people from almost unbelievable situations.

During the eighteen months of his career, Victoria was harried over about one hundred miles of country ranging through New Mexico, Arizona, and Chihuahua. He fought on mountainsides, in canyons, and at river fords. After a battle he would dash away, often with the cavalry at his very heels, and avenge his slain by falling upon some unprotected ranch.

There is one story that gives a glimpse of the more gentle character that underlay Victoria's grim nature as here recorded.

It tells that one afternoon Victoria and a very small party of braves were hunting. The cavalry was not more than fifteen miles behind them, but near was scarce, and the expedition was essential.

The party had become separated when a signal reached that part of the band headed by Victoria, demanding that they

rejoin the others. The chief and his braves eagerly hastened to ascertain the cause of the summons. The reason was soon apparent. A six-year-old girl, straying from her home, had been captured, and the warriors were awaiting their chief's instructions as to her disposal.

The Indians were for killing and scalping her at once—all but Victoria. Against the advice of his counselors he made his own decision, taciturn, calm, regardless of their censure or approval. The child was escorted safely almost to her own doorstep.

That night two neighboring ranches were pillaged—but the home of the child was spared. The motive of the old warrior is hard to surmise. Was it a random impulse of generosity, a stray moment of mercy? Or was it in keeping with his real character as it would have been manifested had he been allowed to continue in peace with his people? No other incident of the kind is recorded to guide us in our estimate of the motives that impelled this act.

Aside from the instance just quoted, the toll of life and property during Victoria's raids was appalling. Nothing was safe from his depredations, and his effrontery was unique. He attacked ranches, mining camps, wagon trains, cattle guards, Mexican soldiers, and even veterans of the United States army. Over one hundred and forty white people were killed in Grant and Sierra Counties alone.

When too closely pressed on American soil, the wily sachem would slip into old Mexico, there to continue his marauding. Once he captured five hundred horses from under the very nose of the military governor of Chihuahua. Finally the United States and Mexico combined forces to apprehend him. Even so he repeatedly managed to slide from the grasp of the law with ease and celerity.

At one time, with the support of

only about two hundred braves, Victoria outwitted an armed force more than ten times stronger than his own. He was caught at a ford, hemmed in on all sides by overwhelming numbers. Pressing him from the north was Colonel Buel at the head of one thousand United States Cavalry and three hundred Indian scouts. Colonel Carr guarded all paths to the west with a command of six hundred cavalry; and on the east was General Grierson with the Tenth United States Cavalry. Against these terrific odds Victoria and his little band fought valiantly for four days, sustaining heavy losses. On the fifth day Victoria gave ground—and on the sixth he slipped over the border into Mexico. Naturally this intensified the feeling against the chief and his braves. Henceforth every effort was bent to the task of destroying him and dispersing the warriors of the Apaches.

Victoria's last stand was, perhaps, the most spectacular of his career. The American and Mexican forces had parted at last, and bands of the latter were returning to their base through Chihuahua. From one such faction a group of three hundred under Colonel Larrazas, the grim old leader met his fate.

Late in the afternoon the Mexicans stumbled full upon the Apaches. For some reason Victoria's people had divided. Those attached to the chief were camped on the edge of a small lake that lay at the foot of three basaltic hills, the Tres Castillos. Only one hundred braves guarded the place.

Into this little oasis of quiet rode the avenging Mexicans. They wasted no time in preparation. At once they dismounted and surrounded the three hills. To escape the sudden hail of lead the Indians sought shelter among the rocks that littered the slopes.

As the sun sank and the purple dusk stole down, a night of horror and agony began. Above the eastern horizon

climbed the honey-colored prairie moon—and by its light through the hours that followed ran rife a crimson terror.

The silence of the prairie night was shattered by the anguished death cries of the Indian braves. The screams of the frightened children, the sharp reports of the guns, the fierce war whoop of the Apaches, blended in a wild crescendo of discordant sound.

Through it all, wounded but valiant still, strode the crippled chieftain, urging his men to greater deeds by his own brave example. Once, just at dawn, he stood poised for a moment on the summit of the highest hill and hurled a last defiance to his foes.

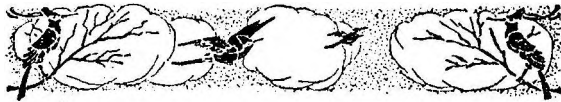
With the first rays of the rising sun the Indians realized defeat. Their ammunition exhausted, they were snored down by the Mexicans like animals as

they skulked among the rocks. Women and children fell with the warriors—quarter was given none.

At eight o'clock in the morning Victoria met his death. Courageous even in defeat, he carried on despite three wounds, until a bullet found his heart.

But the war did not end here. It was not until 1887, with the capture of that far more famous leader, Geronimo, that peace descended upon the prairies of Arizona and New Mexico.

Though time has dimmed the memory of Victoria, yet he who has been called the "King Philip of the Southwest" deserves a tribute in passing. We can say of him at least: Savage he was, cruel and revengeful; yet he fell as befitted a noble warrior, in the heroic though misguided defense of his people.



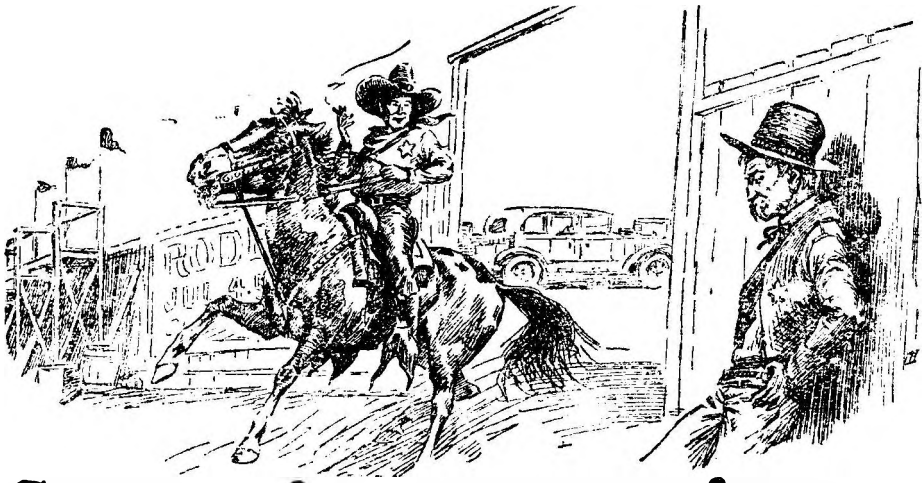
### SENTENCED TO HANG SEVEN TIMES, WESTERN PIONEER STILL LIVES

**F**EW men sentenced to hang live to tell the tale. But "Diamondfield Jack" Davis, sentenced not once but seven times to hang, cannot only tell the story of his last-minute escape, but keeps as a souvenir the rope meant for his neck, a rope bearing seven hitches and a knot.

Diamondfield Jack has had an exciting and perilous career. Born in Virginia in the early '60s, the son of a member of the Confederate black-horse cavalry, Jack went as a youth to Abilene, Kansas, with a herd of Texas cattle. Gradually drifting farther West, he participated in such stirring events as the gold boom of Deadwood, South Dakota; the opening of the Cherokee strip in Oklahoma, the Montana boom, and those of Tonopah and Goldfield, Nevada. He took part in Mexican and Central American revolutions, and fought in a labor war in Butte, Montana, in which, to his dismay, he lost all his teeth.

Seven times the date was set for Diamondfield Jack's hanging for the murder of two sheepmen; seven times from a barred cell he watched a gallows being erected for him. And after his lawyers had fought for seven years to save him and death seemed a certainty, two men confessed to the killings for which he had been convicted, and the governor sent in a last-minute pardon.

Who can blame this pioneer of the West, who is spending his old age on his Spring Mountain mining claim in Nevada, for believing that seven is, at least for him, a lucky number?



# Shorty's Lynchin' Bee

by Ray Humphreys

Author of "Bird Crazy," etc.



WITH a smile a yard wide spread across his flushed and happy face, Deputy Sheriff "Shorty" McKay came bouncing into the sheriff's office at Monte Vista doing a little jig.

"Waal, boss!" he cried enthusiastically to Sheriff Joe Cook, who was hunched over his desk, "I got it all fixed; things are sure goin' to pop here on the tenth; an', boy, yuh an' me is goin' to figger in it all like a coupla mountains among a lot o' sand dunes. We're goin' to stand out like hosses in a sheep flock."

Sheriff Joe Cook turned up a sour face.

"The floor rafters in this office warn't built for no Sioux Injun war dances," the sheriff said, coldly, "an' ef yuh ain't danicin' but is tappin' out some message in Morse code with yuhr festive dawgs all I kin say is I don't get yuh—any more than I gathers sense from what yuh're shootin' off at the mouth. An' this ain't no picnic ground."

Shorty flung his Stetson down on the table.

"Say, boss, it was a pure inspiration, that's all!" he said, breathlessly. "Th' Chamber o' Commerce committee was heninin' an' hawin', sure mired down fer idears, when I ups an' mentions yuhr name, respectfullike, an' adds my own, an' pronounces my plan, which is took up an' applauded, acted upon by vote, an' passed unanimously."

Shorty paused for breath.

"Waal, what's all the excitement about?" asked the old sheriff, suspiciously. "It must be some hocuspocus for yuh to lose yuhr head over—it kain't be nuthin' serious."

"The heck it ain't serious!" protested Shorty, eagerly, "an' I was sure lucky to kinda drap in on the Chamber o' Commerce committee while it was bogged down, with no idears about the tenth. Yuh know what the tenth o' the month is, don't yuh, boss?"

The sheriff's blue eyes sought the calendar on the wall.

"Yes—Saturday!"

"Oh, yes—Saturday," agreed Shorty, not bothering to entirely conceal his disgust; "but it's the day that big delegation o' Denver business men arrives here on that thar 'good-will' tour, as we has heard about in Monte Vista for weeks. The Chamber o' Commerce committee is in charge o' entertainment an' was thinkin' o' a little rodeo, but that was expensive, so I——"

Sheriff Cook leaned back in his chair. "So yuh nominated me, an' yuhself, to be the entertainment, I gathers," said Cook, dismally. "We'll sing, mebbe; or twang a coupla mandolins, dressed up like Mex señoritas; or mebbe it's slapstick comedy an' I does the sensible thing an' clouts yuh over the head with a nice piece o' cordwood."

"Boss, listen," besought Shorty, almost tearfully. "It's the chance o' a lifetime fer us to demonstrate how efficient we are. I suggests to the committee that we has a stage coach holdup an' a posse catching some Injuns by mistake, while we goes ahead an' grabs the real bandits, prevents a lynchin', an' recovers the loot. Th' committee whooped an' yelled when I mentioned it."

The sheriff shook his head sadly.

"They would," he said, slowly. "it's sure humorous! I kin see myself clownin' fer them Denver visitors in a home-made melodrammer like that! I kin hear the blank cartridges poppin' an' see the fake Injuns bitin' the dust, but I does *not* see myself present thar, actin' a fool! Yuh said we'd stand out like mountains among sand dunes—yes, like mountain jackasses among sand dune loons, like two big squirrels among a lotta chipmunks, like——"

"But, boss——"

"As yuh come in I was perusin' my annual report," said the sheriff, crisply, "the one I am to hand in on the fifteenth o' the month to the county commissioners, an' thar are only eight unsolved crimes in our bailiwick the past

year—one murder, the robbery o' the store at Wagon Wheel Gap, the burnin' down o' Juan Garcia's ranch house, an' four rustlin' jobs—that looks like efficiency, I don't think! An' yuh, Shorty, instead o' plannin' how we kin make boobs outta ourselves, could be better engaged——"

Shorty put up a protesting hand.

"Boss," he pleaded, "I never fergets them eight unsolved crimes fer a second; I has 'em in mind all the time, tryin' to fathom 'em out. Yes, sir, I had 'em in mind even when I suggested the entertainment fer the tenth, boss. I——"

"Apple dumplin'! or whatever yuhr favorite expression is," growled the sheriff. "Yuh trot right back to the Chamber o' Commerce now an' announce that I has vetoed all arrangements fer us disgracin' ourselves afore that Denver delegation. I may be an ol' fool but I'll be blamed ef I'm goin' to demonstrate it in public, an' I refuses to allow yuh to expose yuhself in any such——"

"But, boss——"

"Get outta here!"

The plans for the tenth were not changed, however. It was true that Shorty went back to the Chamber of Commerce committee with tears in his eyes and reported that the sheriff had refused to enter into the spirit of a frontier fiesta and fake holdup, such as Shorty had suggested, but the committee wasn't worried. It was an influential committee—numbering, as it did, such big men as "Red" Feeney, the café owner; Eddie Owens, the druggist; "Pappy" Stewart, the retired capitalist; Charley Burns, Len Frieberg, and others. The committee waited on Sheriff Cook at once and eloquence flowed for almost an hour while the perspiring committeemen pointed out to the old sheriff what a fine idea the whole thing was, after all; but at the end of the hour Sheriff Cook had only been

partly convinced. He offered a compromise.

"I'll tell yuh gents what," he said, briskly. "I'll meet yuh halfway. I kain't say I'm sold none on the idear, seein' whar it originated, but I'm broad-minded, at that. I ain't goin' to get out no hoss in that dusty rodeo arena an' chase no fake crooks an' do no fancy actorin', fer I'm no stage star. I never was nearer no stage than the fifth row, an' that was at a musical comedy, whar thar was a swell chorus. However, ef my deputy, Shorty, insists on makin' a fool outta himself, an' yuh all insists that he so do—waal, he may—with my blessin'!"

And thus it was arranged. Shorty was tickled pink, and the committee was satisfied. There wasn't much time and the plans had to be rushed. The co-operation of the Monte Vista feed barn was obtained for the big coach; Shorty himself arranged for the band of Pinte Indians to assist in the spectacle; the Monte Vista troop of the national guard volunteered to help out by furnishing a score of crack riders for the show; Shorty chose several of his close cronies to play the part of possemen in his own posse; big supplies of blank cartridges were doled out, and the tenth arrived with the whole town excited over the frontier drama—all except Sheriff Cook, who was still pessimistic over the whole affair.

"Who is goin' to play the part o' the pore galoot who is caught an' almost strung up afore yuh arrives to prevent the lynchin'?" asked the old sheriff, mildly. "I'd sure hate to be him ef somebody missed a cue or yuh was so busy tippin' yuhr hat to the applause, that yuh fergot to arrive in time to save him."

"We've hired Manuel Guitterez for that part," said Shorty.

"Guitterez—a cheap crook hisself!" exploded the sheriff, in surprise. "Why ring him in on a community show?"

"Nobody else was keen fer it, an' we offered him ten dollars an' he accepted," said Shorty. "Naturally it turns out in the end that he ain't guilty, after all, an' he's exonerated."

The sheriff mused a minute. "It wouldn't bother justice none ef thar was a mistake an' Manuel was really lynched," he said, grimly, "he's a bad aigg. But who has volunteered to play the part o' the real crook?"

"His name," said Shorty, "is bein' held secret."

"But yuh kin tell me, Shorty."

"We all took a oath," said Shorty, "I kain't tell nobody!"

There were over two hundred "good will" boosters in the Denver business men's delegation that rolled into Monte Vista on a special train. They were immediately whisked up to the Chamber of Commerce for a big noon banquet—featuring all the good things to eat that the Monte Vista Valley raised in profusion. It was some banquet! Then the visitors were rushed out to the rodeo grounds for the big show, and there the rest of Monte Vista had already assembled. The big grand stands were packed to capacity. The Denver visitors took their reserved seats. Sheriff Joe Cook, lounging along the arena fence, shook his head sadly.

"Pore Shorty, I gotta hunch he'll regret this foolishness. He'll be a reflection on me, an' the office, an'——"

Shorty rode up on a prancing pinto. He had a big tin star pinned on his yellow silk shirt. Immediately he spied the sheriff.

"Boss, the fireworks is about to start!" he exclaimed, happily. "I sure wish yuh was in on it all—boy, we're goin' to stand this gang up on its hind laigs with excitement."

"Why the big, clownlike star, Shorty?"

"So folks kin see it," said Shorty; "they gotta recognize I'm playin' the part o' the sheriff."

"Oh!" said the sheriff, sadly, "some more apple pie, eh?"

But the crowd was excited, at that. Strange how any foolish thing will excite a holiday crowd, thought the sheriff. The Denver delegation surely wouldn't fall for any such crude drama as Shorty and his associates were planning to present. Of course, the Monte Vista folks might get a kick out of it—yes, *might*! It would be a farce, nothing more. A healthy laugh—at Shorty's expense. The old sheriff shuddered and looked around at the crowded grand stands.

"Thank gosh I wasn't crazy enough to play no part," he began, but he didn't finish. Shouts from the grand stand interrupted him. He turned to look out into the arena and saw the cause of the excitement. There was the big pioneer coach from the Monte Vista feed barns in full flight, hauled—or rather, yanked along—by six wiry mules. The mules were running like scared jack rabbits. Old Harry Tarvin was on the driver's seat, handling the ribbons as only he could handle them. *There* was a fool for publicity, any time, any where, decided Sheriff Cook. Harry would risk his neck gladly before a crowd, and this time he appeared to be risking not only his neck but the necks of all the passengers he had with him in the swaying stagecoach.

How that coach did go! It fairly flew around the arena, and the assembled crowds shouted themselves hoarse. Yes, Shorty was keeping his word about excitement, anyway! The sight of a crazed mule skinner encouraging six half-broken nules to run away with a rickety old coach-load of other crazy folks was enough to send the shivers up and down the spine of any reasonable man. The sheriff's face went white as he watched the breathless performance. The mules appeared to be actually running away, and the stage looked as if it would drop to pieces momentarily,

but there was old Tarvin on the driver's seat whooping like a mad man and swinging his whip with gunlike reports.

"Plumb cuckoo!" groaned Sheriff Cook, wilting on the fence.

And at that moment another shout went up from the crowd! A masked horseman had galloped out from behind the corrals on the far side of the arena and had set out in uproarious pursuit of the stage. The masked man held a belching gun in each hand. He fired point-blank at Tarvin, on the driver's seat, and Tarvin jerked a six-gun and seemed to forget all about his mules while he langed back at the desperado. Meanwhile, the six mules, scared by the sudden fusillade of the roaring guns, tucked their tails down between their hind legs and really began to reel off speed. The old stagecoach swung dizzily, spun this way and that——

"That danged Tarvin is drunk, sure as shootin'," began Sheriff Cook, in awe; "he's gonna spill somebody."

But at that moment the masked horseman took all attention from the coach. The horseman, who rode in a style vaguely familiar to the old sheriff's practiced eyes, cut straight across the arena, timing himself nicely to intercept the leading mule team on the speeding coach right in front of the grand stand. Sheriff Cook shivered again at the apparent recklessness of this mysterious rider in rushing right into the path of the six-mule hitch.

"Ef anything should happen!" moaned the sheriff, ominously.

Well, something did happen. The strange rider was still firing one gun, which he had reloaded, when he veered in ahead of the running mules. He jerked up his hand and fired again point-blank at Tarvin, and that was to have been Tarvin's cue to stop the stage; but the mules had other desires, and besides, there was a patch of loose dirt right at that particular spot in the arena. The masked rider seemed to

sense instantly that Tarvin, sawing on the ribbons, couldn't stop his mules, and he yanked up his running pony; but the pony skidded, stumbled, and flopped, and the rider went headlong right under the noses of the lead mule team on the coach.

One mule jumped the man's body, and the other leader shied out and away from it. The crowds groaned in dismay, but the man had kept his head and put his arms up around his face and kept on rolling. The swing team's sharp hoofs seemed to miss him by a miracle. By that time, Old Tarvin, scared out of ten years' growth, had put a heavy foot down on the brake pedal and had nearly pulled his arms out of their sockets dragging on the reins, and the big stage came to a jolting stop just as the near wheeler carefully stepped over the rolling form in the dust. The masked robber came up, smiling, mask still on. He had lost his guns and he stooped and picked one up, leveled it at Tarvin, and motioned him down. The nervy cuss, thought Sheriff Cook, to look death in the face as he had done, and still go on with the horseplay!

Tarvin wrapped the reins around the dash and came down, hands in the air. The passengers climbed out of the coach—three youths, and three pretty Monte Vista girls—and all their faces were white as chalk. They had had their thrills, sure enough! They lined up along the coach, and then the bandit, covering them all with his gun, peered into the coach, found a little strong-box, seized it, and backed away. The next minute he had mounted his pony and galloped off, the cheers of the delighted crowd ringing in his ears. The sheriff sighed and shook his head in bewilderment.

"Another fool fer luck!" he grunted. "I thought he was a sure goner—he's got nerve, that feller has!"

More musketry. Up the arena came

a troop of cavalry, riding like mad. Old Tarvin, running out behind his stage, flagged them down. There was a moment of pantomime—elaborate gestures—as Tarvin apparently told the soldiers of the robbery. The leader of the troop stood up in his stirrups and waved a saber, and off went the cavalry, kicking up a ton of dust, and riding as if each trooper's life was insured seven ways from Sunday! Again the sheriff groaned and fidgeted. Surely, some one would be injured if this rough-house kept up. The crowded grand stands, however, were whooping and cheering crazily—Shorty's promise of excitement was being kept!

And then came the poor, misguided Indians, the Piutes, riding out from behind the corrals on the far side of the arena. The galloping soldiers saw them instantly, and set up another volley of carbine fire. And the chase was on again. The crowds went wild with excitement. Around and around raced the Piutes, riding for dear life, apparently, while the only prize Shorty had offered them was a plug of chewing tobacco per man. On came the troopers, enveloped in dust and smoke. *Bang, bang, bang!* The air was full of noise. A reckless Indian rolled off his pony and sprawled right in the path of the rushing cavalry—and escaped unhurt. He knew enough about horses, it seemed, to know they wouldn't step on him—but the big crowd was simply delirious with delight.

Sheriff Cook rubbed his brow with his handkerchief.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, "this is kinda hot stuff!"

Meanwhile, Tarvin had maneuvered his stage off the scene and in another minute the dare-devil troopers, blazing away, had overtaken the Piutes and surrounded them. The noise was deafening. Smoke hung low over the arena. There were a few moments of hand-to-hand struggling and wrestling on



horseback, and the Indians were disarmed, while applause rocked the grand stands. Then another rider suddenly appeared from behind the corrals, a strongbox under one arm—it was the nervy masked rider, again, apparently still fleeing with the loot. Right after him came three riders in hot pursuit—Shorty, with his big shiny star, then Max Hill, and “Doc” Healey, two close cronies that Shorty had chosen to constitute his “posse.” The masked rider didn’t appear to have a ghost of a chance.

“Huh!” said Sheriff Cook. “They musta have changed the program some—I thought Manuel Gutierrez was to figger in this.”

The posse caught the masked rider before his tired horse had taken six good jumps. There was more shooting, but, as if by a miracle, no one appeared to have been hit. The mask was ripped from the crook’s face, and it was Manuel Gutierrez, after all! Sheriff Cook whistled! Now where was the fake hanging to come in? Possibly the committee had eliminated that at the last minute as being too gruesome? Shorty and Max Hill and Doc Healey bowed low as the thunderous applause came from the crowds, but in a moment they were back in their saddles, having tied Gutierrez’ hands behind his back. Now the posse saw the troopers herding the poor Piutes at the other end of the arena and there was another mad ride down there, with Shorty gesturing in pantomime, and the Indians were absolved from blame and allowed to ride off to the audience’s cheers.

And then something blamed funny happened.

Shorty, in the rôle of sheriff, actually placed a noose around Gutierrez’ scrawny neck, and Max Hill and Doc Healey yanked the bewildered bad man from his pony quick as lightning; It was good acting and the crowd yelled approval, but Sheriff Cook rubbed his

eyes in dismay at the strange sight. There must be something wrong.

“What in thunder!” he cried. “A sheriff *assstin’* in a illegal lynchin’ bee? Something’s gone floey with this program!”

Shorty, taking the end of the rope, mounted again, and so did Max Hill and Doc Healey. The Mexican’s horse had shied off, and for a moment the next step in the program was problematical. Then the posse puts *spurs* to their horses and started off on the trot, and for a split second it looked as if the gentleman with his head through the noose was going to be dragged at the end of the hemp. But he wasn’t. He was nimble as a hare. He broke into a mad run after the departing horses and in that way managed to keep the rope slack. It was all very realistic, indeed! Too much so, in fact, for Sheriff Joe Cook, whose eyes were wide as saucers.

“What in heck is inter that puppy, Shorty!” he howled, so that bystanders near him looked at him askance. “He’s puttin’ up a fine show fer a deputy sheriff! That’s swell advertisin’ fer our office—aidin’ an’ abettin’ in a lynchin’ bee!”

Apparently it was going to be a lynching bee. The little posse headed straight across the arena to the grand stand. The judges’ stand, used in the rodeos, was right in front of the grand stand. There was a beam extending from this stand, on which, in racing season, a bell hung. The posse seemed to have designs on the beam. They rode up and dismounted, and Shorty himself, with his big star and a great look of importance on his face, swung the end of the lariat over the beam. Max Hill caught the end as it went over and flopped back and Gutierrez was seen to tremble and shake all over, like a man with chills and fever.

Sheriff Cook climbed up on the fence.

"Hey, Shorty!" he bawled, wildly. "Get hep to yuhrself, yuh idjut! Yuh're playin' sheriff out thar, an' look what yuh're doin', yuh mutt! Yuh're mixed up on yuhr program, yuh half-witted galoot! Wake up—wake up—get hep to yuhrself!"

A lot of folks looked at the sheriff, wondering what he was driving at, and the Denver delegation looked and figured that the old man was some local character whose age had undermined his good sense. As for Shorty, he never heard the shout. At least, he pretended not to have heard. There was no slack in the rope now. Another minute and poor Guitterez was actually being hoisted up, on the end of the hemp, while the thousands in the grand stands stood up on tiptoes and yelled themselves hoarse. What a show! Why, it looked like the real stuff! Excitement—boy, howdy!

Guitterez was kicking in mid-air now, hands working frantically at their bindings, eyes staring, and tongue babbling in Spanish.

Sheriff Cook leaped the fence with a stifled groan.

"Hey, yuh fools!" he shouted, lustily. "Yuh're hangin' that man, yuh murderers! Ease off thar!"

Guitterez was yelling loudly in Spanish now.

The grand stand was rocking with applause. Apparently, the crowds wanted it thumbs down for the hapless villain. But Shorty, seeing the sheriff coming across the track, was howling in Spanish to Guitterez, and poor Guitterez, figuring that every breath might be his last, was talking back fluently—angrily—loudly!

The sheriff reached the judges' stand.

A quick motion from Shorty and down came Guitterez like a sack of meal. The noose was yanked off his neck by Max Hill, whose acting was superb. His face was black with rage,

apparently. Guitterez' face was almost white. He sank down on the ground, hands still tied behind his back, and panted. Shorty, gathering up the rope, mounted his pony. Max Hill and Doc Healey followed in quick order. The crowd didn't quite understand this turn in events. Many thought the sheriff had ended the show unexpectedly. The sheriff, approaching Guitterez, was about to say something strong to the posse when the posse departed in a cloud of dust and more gun play.

"O-o-oh!" groaned Guitterez, rubbing his neck the minute Sheriff Cook slashed the bonds that had held his hands.

"Waal, I'm sorry, o' course," cried Cook, soothingly, "but yuh let yuhrself in for this, Manuel; yuh hired out to them young fools. They sure would o' lynched yuh in their enthusiasm ef I hadn't——"

A wild roar from the crowd brought the sheriff's head up. Great guns of grief! What were the fools doing now? The three horsemen—Shorty, Max Hill and Doc Healey—had actually leaped their horses over the fence in front of the grand stand, scattering spectators to all sides. Their guns were still blazing.

There was confusion in the grand stands. Hoarse shouts, wild yells, the screams of women—uproar was heard on all sides. The sheriff speedily forgot the groaning Guitterez. He stood on tiptoe, amazed, to see what the three horsemen were trying to do—and then he gasped in astonishment.

Shorty had flung himself off his horse and ran up one of the aisles in the grand stand, quick as a cat, the lariat trailing behind him. Even as the sheriff looked, he saw Shorty suddenly pounce on a seated spectator. There was a brief struggle. A gun was fired into the air—and it didn't sound like a blank cartridge, either. Then

Shorty jumped back into the saddle, dragging the subdued spectator with him, on the end of the rope. Max Hill and Doc Healey were off their horses now, waiting eagerly. They laid violent hands on the unfortunate captive. The crowds were too astounded to applaud all this action. Silence settled over the scene.

"Ha!" exclaimed Guitterez. "They have got Quijano."

"Who?" cried the sheriff, completely mystified.

But Guitterez didn't answer. He seemed to remember, suddenly, that he had business elsewhere. He staggered to his feet and ran out across the arena as if he were trying to win a race. Sheriff Cook looked after him in astonishment. But for only a moment. The thunder of hoofs came again. The three horsemen had let their horses through a gate in the fence this time and were tearing down the arena now with another agile captive at the end of their hemp—the man was leaping in great hops in an effort to keep up with his captors.

The cavalcade arrived at the judges' stand again.

"Here, yuh scatterbrained imbeciles!" whooped the sheriff, rushing toward them. "This tomfoolery has gone fur enough——"

It was Max Hill who rode his horse right into the sheriff. The jolt sent Cook spinning and before he could get up Max Hill was out of the saddle and struggling with him on the ground. Meanwhile, Shorty and Doc Healey had whipped the end of the rope over the beam again and another kicking, squirming Mexican was going up, yelling in Spanish and calling on all the saints to aid him. The struggling sheriff, wallowing on the ground with Hill, heard the great thunder of applause from the crowded grand stands! Were the fools cheering because three hot-headed youths were hanging an-

other innocent victim, or were they pleased and applauding because Hill had attacked the sheriff? The sheriff flushed with shame. He was in the fracas, after all, being made a fool in the sight of thousands of people. He swore and tugged at his holster, muttering that he'd show Hill something in a .45-caliber weapon, but Hill didn't seem to want to see it. The struggle went on, and meanwhile Quijano was going higher on the rope, and his screams were becoming louder—and, strange to say, also much more coherent.

Shorty was yelling in Spanish now, too!

The grand stands were delirious with clamor!

And then, suddenly, at a word from Shorty, the end came. Hill released the perspiring sheriff just as Quijano was lowered to earth and the noose on his neck loosened. Quijano was panting for breath. Sq was Sheriff Cook. But the noose was not taken entirely from the Mexican's throat. No! Sheriff Cook saw red. He heard the mad whooping and yelling from the stands and realized that he had been exhibited as a prime clown in the affair, after all. Perhaps the spectators thought it was all part of the show—his intimidation, his rolling in the dirt, his unsuccessful battle with the wiry Max Hill.

"Shorty!" said Sheriff Cook, ominously. "Yuh an' yuhr two crazy pals are goin' to jail fer all this just as sure as——"

And then Shorty did a strange thing. He pushed the sheriff rudely to one side, out of the way.

"No fool like an ol' fool!" growled Shorty, through gritting teeth, and the sheriff noticed that Shorty's face was very tense. "Yuh keep yuh're shirt on five seconds an' yuh'll feel like fifteen cents."

There was no doubt of that. The

sheriff already felt like thirty cents' worth of nothing. The grand stands continued to rock in applause, and at each outburst new waves of shame spread across the sheriff's face. Well, he had been shown up as an idiot, after all! He had been paraded as a great big fool before the Denver delegation—thanks to that impudent Shorty and his too strenuous way of stringing up victims. Why had they strung up Quijano, after all?

But even at that moment Shorty was up in the judges' stand, an old megaphone he had found there in his hands, explaining.

"Ladies an' gents," he shouted, and the racket subsided. "We thank yuh one an' all fer yuhr kind attention to our little frontier drama that yuh has seen enacted here in the last few breathless minutes! We thank yuh fer yuhr great applause, by which we take it yuh enjoyed our efforts. We tried to make everything realistic—jus' as it might have happened here years ago——"

He paused for breath.

"But while we was stagin' our little drama for yuhr amusement," he went on, "we was also doin' a little piece o' actual sleuthin'—a little ketchin' o' a real crook! In the past year we have had eight unsolved crimes in this bailiwick, an' Sheriff Joe Cook an' myself were worried sick—me, in particular, I was upset over it all."

"Apple cider!" whooped Sheriff Cook, angrily, from the ground. He'd see that Shorty in private.

"So," continued Shorty, "when we planned this play fer yuh all to-day I insisted that we hire one Manuel Guitterez to play the part o' the bandit. Mr. Guitterez, who has vanished now, hasn't a very fine reputation. We often suspected him o' crime, but couldn't fasten it on him. Waal, I persuaded him to play the part o' a victim o' a mob who was to hang him, but I was to rescue him. That was what we told

him. Instead, we actually pretended to hang him, me tellin' him in Spanish that we blamed him for the eight unsolved crimes an' was goin' to accidentally git rid o' him."

"Huh?" cried Sheriff Cook.

"So, Mr. Guitterez, as he went up on the rope, decided to explain matters," went on Shorty. "He confessed that one Juan Quijano was the actual guilty man. He said Quijano was in the grand stand even then, fortunately. So we went after Quijano. I knowed him by sight, always figgered he was on the level. We took Mr. Quijano from among yuh, as yuh saw, an' started him up the hemp route an'—an' he confessed to all eight crimes; so that, while we gave yuh amusement an' thrills, we also ketched our smart crook—thereby demonstrating that the sheriff's office in Monte Vista, ably filled by Sheriff Joe Cook an' his deputy, yuhr's truly, is always efficient, alert, smart, an' on the job, workin' even as they plays, an' returnin' the taxpayers one hundred per cent service. I thank yuh all!"

And then pandemonium broke loose in earnest. The applause was ear-splitting. And, yelling loudest of all, and tossing his hat in the air, was Sheriff Joe Cook himself. He grabbed Shorty and shook him by the hand as Shorty came down out of the judges' stand, grinning. It seemed that the old sheriff was going to kiss Shorty in his delight—but he didn't.

"Shorty," he cried, brokenly, "it was waal done—clever—all of it! But that Guitterez feller has some nerve even at that—the way he rode in front o' them runnin' mules fer the holdup sure showed he——"

"Shucks!" interrupted Shorty, "that wasn't him—that was me! I had to double fer the rat in that scene, or leave it out."

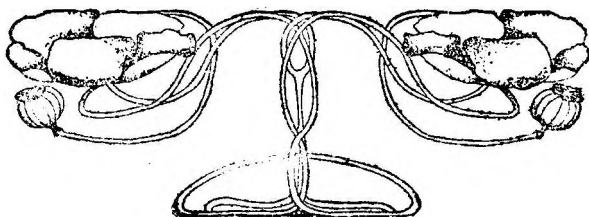
The sheriff was speechless just for one second.

"Waal, Shorty," he cried, as the tears

rolled down his cheeks, "I'm an ol' fool, all right, buttin' into yuhr business like I did—too dumb to know; but that ol' sayin' that thar is no fool like a ol' fool is all wrong—it's all apple tart, as yuh would say. Thar's no fool like a young fool, Shorty, jedgin' from

the way yuh risked yuhr neck rollin' around under them mules' hoofs."

And then, his voice faltering, the old sheriff just stuck out his hand again and he and Shorty shook once more—while the grand stands continued to howl and thump in approval.



#### DOG ON TRIAL FOR LIFE

**K**AISER BILL had killed sheep, and they were going to kill Kaiser Bill. So the justice of the peace said. But Mrs. Henry Gay, of Mount Sterling, Kentucky, wasn't going to let that happen. Kaiser Bill was her pet dog, and she loved him, so she appealed to the next higher court, which was the circuit court.

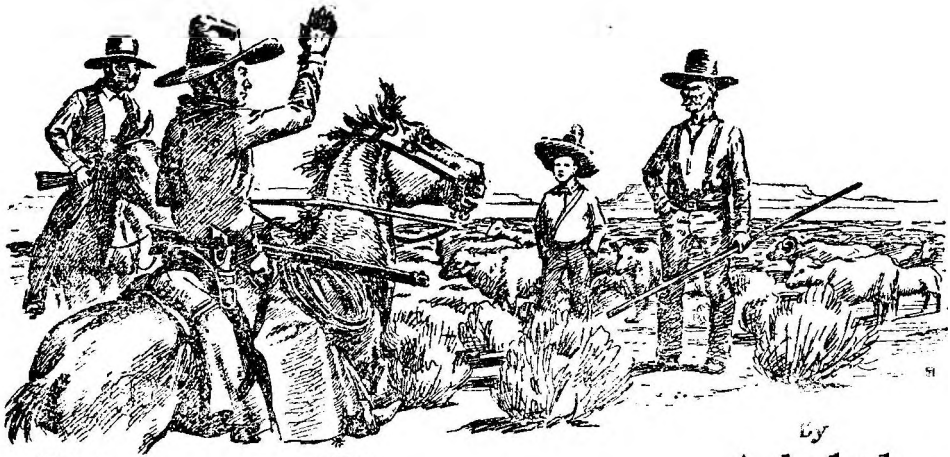
Kaiser Bill's attorney, W. B. Briggs White, argued that neither the State nor federal constitutions give the right to take the life of a dumb brute. If any one suffered from that animal's actions, the only course could be to sue the owner.

So the defense attorney argued, but to no avail. Judge Henry Prewitt decided that he had no jurisdiction in the matter. According, he said, to Chapter 10 of the acts of the Kentucky Legislature of 1908, on page 25, when proof is clear that any dog is mad or has been bitten by a mad dog or has wounded any sheep, the justice of the peace before whom the dog is tried shall order the dog killed. And this had been done.

Things looked decidedly dark for Kaiser Bill, but his attorney was not idle. He filed a supersedeas bond with the circuit clerk. His next step, now, is to get the court of appeals to assume jurisdiction in the case.

Meanwhile, Kaiser Bill is not exactly idle, either. There are expenses to be paid if he is to fight for life in the higher courts, and Kaiser Bill is preparing to pay them. He cannot write stories for the news sheets, nor can he speak for himself. About all he can do is to show himself so, with the aid of Henry Gay, and Ann Ratliff Gay—Kaiser Bill's three-year-old playmate—the dog will appear in a local vaudeville theater. Gay will do the talking, asking dog lovers to sign a petition to the governor of Kentucky for a pardon.

No doubt, Kaiser Bill considers the actions of those about him just a little confusing, as he follows them with his great eyes. And probably most of all, if dogs can wonder, he wonders at his own sudden importance in the eyes of a strange world.



# Free Grass

*Author of "One Too Many," etc.*

by  
**Adolph  
Bennauer**



AT meal times, Jiles Granger was never one to talk. He believed that eating was a function sufficient unto itself. But to-night, as he sat at the table with his boy, some secret perturbation impelled him to break that custom.

"The old home pasture is gettin' mighty thin, 'Bud!'"

The boy nodded.

"If we don't want them sheep to starve we'll have to switch 'em to new grazin' grounds pretty pronto!"

"Sure will."

For a few moments the clatter of their knives and forks was the only sound within the cabin. Then Jiles again looked up.

"There's plenty o' free grass a few miles south o' here!"

"Plenty," agreed Bud, helping himself to a second cup of coffee.

"An' we're goin' to use it—cattle or no cattle," snapped his father. "I'm a fightin' man, an' I generally gets what I goes after! I guess you know that!"

"You bet!"

"All right! We'll drive our sheep down to that coulee to-morrow."

As if that settled the matter, both went back to their eating. But the mind of Jiles Granger was not upon his meal. It would not be so easy to change pastures as he said, and he knew it. For this was a cattle country, primarily, with not half a dozen sheep ranches in the whole twenty thousand square miles of it; and the cattlemen were willing to let the spare grass dry up and rot in the rains and begrudged even a single blade of it to their age-old enemy—sheep.

Particularly was this true around Larkspur, the county seat. For here the Cattlemen's Association had its headquarters and here were located the tremendous holdings of Gene Letterman, president of the association and owner of the Cross L. Letterman was a cattleman of the old school, and if there was anything on earth he hated worse than sheep it was a sheepherder. The fact that Granger's homestead lay directly along the northern boundary of the Cross L, did not tend to lessen that hatred any. In vitriolic terms he had told the intruder what

he thought of him and made their respective positions clear. So long as Granger kept his sheep on his own grounds, he had declared, they would not be molested, but any that drifted across his boundary line would be instantly shot.

"Well, it's got to come to a showdown sooner or later," Granger consoled himself grimly, "so it might as well come now! Anyway, I won't be doin' a thing that ain't legal! There's a county road runnin' across his ranch that I've got as much right to use as he has, an' if he tries to drive me off of a strip o' ground that the gover'ment has set aside as free grazin' land he's goin' to have a man-size fight on his hands!

"Still, it won't do to get too hostile, either," he reflected after a moment. "One man can't do much agin' a dozen, no matter how good a fighter he is, an' it's certain I can't count on any help from Bud! If only he'd took after me, 'stead of after his mother! He's a good boy, but there ain't a spark o' fight in him. All he does is set around an' dream. He's plumb worthless at a time like this."

There was some cause for his complaint. Though no son could have been more dutiful than Bud, none could have resembled his father less. While Jiles Granger stood a scant five feet six in his socks and weighed only a hundred and thirty-five pounds, he was a born fighter. His boy, though measuring five feet ten and tipping the scales at a hundred and seventy, was as undemonstrative as an Indian. He spoke but seldom, became excited never, and went about his work so unostentatiously that he easily gave the impression of being lost in perpetual abstraction.

But this was merely Bud's way of doing things, as it had been his mother's before him. Together with her dark hair and eyes, he had inher-

ited her disposition, and no one who knew Louise Granger had ever accused *her* of lacking in accomplishment. Behind every success that had come to Jiles Granger was the evidence of her gentle, guiding hand, and in just that way Bud was helping his father now. It was simply that the veteran sheepman, who had admired this quality in his wife, was unable to perceive or understand it in his boy.

The sun was just clearing the mountaintops when the two turned out the next morning. As usual, Granger was keyed up to highest tension and the apparent apathy of Bud aroused him to more than ordinary criticism, though the latter had already taken care of his share of the work and was assisting Jiles with his own. While they intended to spend a month or more at the new grazing grounds, they prepared only enough grub to last them a week, figuring on returning at the end of that time for additional supplies. Then Granger strapped a six-gun about his waist, filled the belt with cartridges, and they started out.

Reaching the road, which crossed the western portion of his land, the old herder swung the sheep into it, five abreast, and headed due south. A glance along the column caused him to smile with satisfaction.

"They're followin' it like a chalk line, Bud!"

"Sure are," assented the boy, reflecting his father's grin.

"Old Letterman can't complain any about that!"

"Not a bit!"

As he started forward along the line again Granger's face showed the measure of his relief. With this, his most immediate problem, satisfactorily disposed of, he felt that he would have nothing further to worry about until they reached the grazing grounds. But in this he was doomed to disappointment. Before he could regain the head

of the column, the leading sheep had entered the little canyon that marked the beginning of the Cross L holdings. And scarcely had they done so when there was a sharp *crack-crack* from somewhere ahead and the foremost two dropped dead in their tracks!

The whole line stopped instantly, apparently as much astonished as Granger, himself, for the latter was in total ignorance as to where those shots had come from. But while he was still struggling between anger and astonishment, two riders appeared in the pass ahead of him, a long-barreled Winchester across the saddle of each. The nearer of the two was Sam Slade, foreman of the Cross L; the other was one of the punchers.

"Thought we'd get yuh, sooner or later, yuh sneakin' snoozer," was the foreman's opening comment. "We've been watchin' yuhr pasture lately an' we knowed yuh couldn't hold out much longer. Drive them woollies right ahead, if yuh want to! We'll drop 'em as fast as they come!"

All trace of astonishment had left Granger now and become replaced by a feeling of blinding rage. Like a flash, his gnarled but capable fingers flew back to his holster. But in the nick of time he restrained himself.

"You low-down coyote," he fairly yelled. "What do you mean by shootin' down my sheep?"

Slade laughed harshly.

"Don't try to pull off anything like that! Yuh know what the boss' orders are as well as we do! Any o' yuhr sheep that drifts over into Cross L territory is to be shot!"

Only the presence of those Winchester prevented Granger from speaking fully what was on his mind.

"But I ain't trespassin' on Cross L territory," he retorted chokingly. "Every one o' my sheep is standin' on the county road, a road that's open an' free to anybody!"

Before the foreman could make any answer to that charge two more people appeared in the little canyon. One of them was Gene Letterman, himself, the other his eighteen-year-old daughter, Edith. Evidently they had been riding in that vicinity and were attracted to the scene by the sound of the shooting, for neither carried a weapon of any description. The pretty face of the girl bore a look of shocked surprise, her father's only one of grim satisfaction. That he had arrived in time to overhear Granger's protest was evidenced by his opening words.

"That's where you're wrong, Granger—if you're not just pretending! This road does *not* belong to the county! It's as much a part of the Cross L holdings as my own doorway!"

Had that statement come from any man but him, Granger would have paid no heed to it. But Letterman spoke with an assurance that commanded respect. And as president of the Cattle-men's Association he would not be likely to make such a statement unless he could prove it. The sheepman's anger changed to perplexity. He turned and stared mutely at Bud, who had just come up. But the boy's eyes were bent upon Edith and he seemed to have lost all interest in the quarrel.

"Well, I *thought* it was a county road," Granger explained sullenly. "It starts from way up north an' goes clear south to——"

"Just an old trail that the freighters used before the railroad came through," the cattle baron interrupted him curtly. "Now it isn't being used at all, except the part that crosses my land. This afternoon I'll have a barbed-wire fence thrown across the mouth of this canyon and close it for good!"

Born fighter that he was, Jiles Granger perceived that he was beaten. Once more he turned to his boy, as in the



old days he would have turned to Louise. But all he saw was Bud's profile. Lost in admiration, the boy was still staring at Edith. And with as much interest, if nothing more, the girl was staring at him.

The old sheepman's proud spirit broke. The thought that his own flesh and blood would desert him at such a moment was too much.

"But what am I goin' to do?" he cried desperately. "My pasture's all gone an' I've got to get south to that coulee! I can't let them sheep starve!"

The heavy features of Gene Letterman remained unmoved.

"Get to it, then! But not across my land! I'm grazin' about a hundred head of horses in this section and I don't want the air polluted by a lot of sheep!"

Granger's cheeks flushed at the double insult, for his eyes, sweeping the locality about him, saw nothing upon which a herd of horses might feed. This part of the Cross L holdings lay high and dry and, though thickly covered with grass, that grass, at this season of the year, was as dead and brittle as broom straw. It was only in the low lands, like his own homestead and the little coulee to the south, that the grass was still green enough for grazing purposes.

But any reply he might have made was forestalled by Slade.

"This ain't the only road to that coulee," he proffered with a sidelong glance at Letterman. "If yuh're so set on gettin' there yuh might try the one farther west—even if it is a little longer."

Granger did not catch that sidelong glance. He saw only a chance to save his sheep.

"I ain't lookin' for no short-cuts," he returned promptly. "Just where does that road lay?"

"Well," said the foreman soberly, "yuh go straight west from here for

about three mile. That's the other boundary o' the Cross L. There yuh'll find a pack trail that leads south through the hills. It ain't traveled a whole lot an' in some places yuh'll have to use yuhr imagination to find it, but if yuh follow it south for about five mile yuh'll come to Aspen Creek. There ain't any ford there, but at this season o' the year the creek's most dry an' yuhr sheep can cross it easy. Once yuh're on the other side yuh can cut straight back, cross country, to that coulee."

Once more he glanced significantly at his boss. And this time his glance was returned. But, as before, Jiles Granger perceived nothing amiss. His cheeks were slightly flushed as he turned to his boy.

"Much obliged! Reckon there's no reason why we should run afoul of each other ag'in. Come on, Bud! Snap out of it an' gimme a hand with them dogs! You've been dreamin' long enough!"

But in his usual quiet way the boy was already passing down the line of sheep, his dogs at his heels. And though Letterman's party were incapable of appreciating such work, they saw that column of dumb animals turned about and started away again so quickly and easily that it seemed as if they were acting of their own volition, instead of at the direction of Bud. Nor was there any appreciation in the eyes of Jiles Granger, though he could never have duplicated the act himself. Filled with just resentment at Bud's recent attitude, he was in a mood for anything but praise. Scarcely had they passed out of ear-shot of those behind than he cut loose.

"Ain't you ever goin' to grow up, boy? Twenty years old an' big enough to lick any two men, yet you ain't got the sand of a jack rabbit! You stood there like a blanked idiot, an' never offered to put in a word!"

Quite unmoved by this outburst, Bud allowed his tanned, rather handsome young features to relax into a smile.

"I figgered they'd be less riled if I didn't say anything," he explained. "Besides, I was busy lookin' at the gal!"

Granger snorted wrathfully.

"*Gawkin'* at her, you mean! Like as if you'd never seen a gal before! That's what makes folks think sheep-herders is so dumb!"

"But Edith is a right pretty gal," said the boy dreamily. "An' I'll bet she's as nice as she is pretty."

His father glared at him a moment, then broke into an exclamation of disgust.

"So that's it, eh! You've fell in love with the young lady! You poor fool, you might as well fall in love with the moon! Ain't you had a sample o' what the old man thinks of us? His daughter wouldn't wipe her shoes on a sheep-herder! Now, get back to the end o' that line where you belong an' don't ever let me hear you talk such nonsense ag'in!"

With no tempting bits of grass to delay them—for this was a comparatively barren stretch of country—they reached the western boundary of the Cross L holdings almost before they realized it. And here, as Slade had stated, they found a trail cutting south across the hills. But of all dim trails it was the dimmest—and the spakiest. It had been picked for easy grades, rather than for directness, and at some points it literally curved back upon itself. They managed to keep to it with more or less accuracy, however, and at the end of two hours they came out of the hills and dropped down into a great dry wash, through the center of which, and seemingly no wider than a man's hand, flowed all that was left of Aspen Creek.

Assured now, that the Cross L foreman had spoken in good faith, Gran-

ger became consumed with a growing eagerness. Once across the creek, there would be no more trails to delay them; it would be a straight cut, across country, to the little coulee; and as it was now almost noon he was in a fever of impatience to get there.

"All right, lad," he directed crisply. "We'll water 'em here, then push ahead ag'in! We've been wastin' time long enough!"

But the boy, who was staring curiously at the damp, level stretch that lay between him and the water, shook his head dubiously.

"I wouldn't try to cross here, dad!"

Granger glanced from him to the stream and back again.

"You wouldn't? Say, are you plumb loco? There ain't enough water out there to wet your socks."

"It ain't that," said Bud. "I don't like the looks o' that sand!"

He caught up a stick as he spoke and tested the moist earth here and there.

"Satisfied now?" his father asked, grinning, when the ground yielded stubbornly to his thrusts. "She's as solid as concrete. If she wasn't, there wouldn't be any trail here!"

Still the boy was not convinced.

"I got a hunch the trail ends here, dad. I don't see any on the other side. If you'll take my advice——"

But temper and impatience had got the better of his father.

"I'd be as big a fool as you are," he snapped. "Course, you don't see any trail on the other side! This is one o' them places where you got to use your imagination. Only you never had any to use! Come to life now, an' let's get them sheep started!"

As if realizing the futility of arguing further, the boy proceeded to obey. But this time the sheep needed no urging to get started. The sight of the water, which they had scented from afar, had filled them with a fever of

unrest, and scarcely had Bud called away the dogs than they bounded forward, blating joyously. Seizing his horse by the bridle, Granger started forward with them, hoping to keep them in some semblance of order. But one group of a dozen or more broke away from him and before the dogs could overtake them, had gained a patch of slate-colored sand close to the water's edge. There they suddenly stopped, and there they were destined to remain. For, even as Granger gazed, he saw the treacherous earth open up and swallow them!

"Quicksand!" he gasped. "Butch! Collie! Hold 'em!"

But again the dogs were not needed. The rest of the sheep stopped of their own accord, as if stricken dumb by the tragic fate of their companions. Before they could recover from that state, Bud was among them with his own dogs. Working quickly and silently, he soon had the whole herd turned toward the higher ground. And where many a son could not have resisted the temptation to say "I told you so," he merely stared at his father with blanched cheeks and wide eyes. Then he said something quite different.

"Now I know why Slade sent us down here! This whole creek is lined with that quicksand! He never meant for us to cross it!"

But Granger had sensed this, too, once the first shock of his astonishment was over, and if there is a rage so great that it baffles expression, such a rage held him now. He could only return the boy's stare, his features working convulsively.

"He sent us all the way down here, just for that," he echoed chokingly. "He meant for us to lose the whole herd! An' Letterman was in on it, too!"

Suddenly he straightened. His tanned face was a ghastly white, the light in his gray eyes terrible to be-

hold. His hand strayed back to his holster.

"The man don't live that can put anything over on me like that," he cried. "We set out to reach that coulee an' we're goin' to do it! We're goin' back an' start across Letterman's land ag'in! An' if any of his men tries to stop us, heaven help 'em!"

So back they went, across all those weary miles of hills and the long desolate stretch eastward, Granger too infuriated to speak, the boy keeping silent through sympathy. Tired feet made their progress slow and it was well into the afternoon before they reached the canyon where Slade had halted them. And here they found themselves halted again, not by any menacing Winchesters, but by a four-strand barbed-wire fence that stretched clear across the mouth of the little draw!

Suspended from the top strand was a sign which read:

#### TRESPASSERS FORBIDDEN

I will not be responsible for the lives of any who disobey this order.

GENE LETTERMAN.

The face of Jiles Granger turned from red to white and back again, then he broke into hysterical laughter.

"So he kept his threat, eh! He's closed all trails agin' us! Run up to the cabin an' fetch them wire cutters, Bud! An' at the same time bring along my rifle. We'll show him what we think o' that!"

But if his father had gone mad the boy had not.

"Wouldn't be no sense in that," he protested calmly. "He could have the law on us for cuttin' his fence! An' he'd be cleared for shootin' us, too! I'm afraid he's got us blocked!"

The rage which Granger had been nursing against Gene Letterman burst upon his son.

"Blocked, eh? Not so long as I can

pull a trigger! An' if I had a man for a son, 'stead of a——"

"Fightin' won't do no good, dad," Bud interrupted him shortly. "He's probably got half a dozen men cached along that canyon who'd wipe us out in no time! Fact is, I think he's hop-in' you *will* start a fight, just so he can have an excuse to get rid of us!"

Enraged though he might be, Granger was still sane enough to perceive some truth in the boy's words. But this fact did not alter his stand.

"What if he is? This is the only way we can get to that coulee, an' it's better to go down fightin' than to let them sheep starve on our hands."

But the boy shook his head.

"They ain't starved yet! An' we still got a chance o' gettin' through here—by law! Course, Letterman says this ain't a county road, but that ain't provin' it! There's a place in Larkspur where they keep records like that! I heard Sheriff McKenna say so. Tomorrow we can go in an' see for ourselves!"

Perhaps Granger's rage had been more pretended than real. Perhaps it was the thought that a legal victory over Gene Letterman would be more satisfying than one of arms that decided him. At any rate, after a great show of bluster, he was persuaded to forego present hostilities and agree to Bud's plan. That afternoon the sheep were turned into the home pasture as usual, and the next morning, leaving them in the corral under the further protection of the dogs, the two rode in to Larkspur to see Sheriff McKenna.

Knowing the habits of sheriffs, Granger was in some apprehension lest McKenna should not be in, but when they drew up before his little office the open door reassured him. As he dismounted and tied his horse to the hitching rack, he was aware that Bud was gazing curiously at a buckboard

on the **other** side of the street, though he did not trouble to ascertain why. Assuming that the boy would follow, he entered the place and bluntly stated the nature of his business.

The sheriff did not seem at all surprised.

"I been expectin' yuh, Granger," he declared, leaning back in his swivel chair and eying the sheepman speculatively. "Letterman was in here inquirin' about that same road yesterday afternoon."

Despite his astonishment, Granger could not help feeling a thrill of satisfaction.

"He was! Then he was just bluffin' when he said it belonged to him! It's a county road, after all."

But McKenna shook his head solemnly.

"The records didn't show it, Granger. An' we looked over every one in the courthouse."

The sheepman's face fell.

"That means it's a part o' the Cross L?"

"Well, it is, an' it isn't," said the sheriff. "Years ago, before there was any railroad through here, it was known as a public road an' in that case it was open to everybody. But when the railroad come through it couldn't be called a public benefit any more an' Letterman had a perfect right to close it."

A flood of anger succeeded Granger's dismay.

"Then I ain't got any right to use it? I got to stay holed up there an' let my sheep die like rats in a trap?"

The sheriff shrugged evasively.

"That all depends! As the case stands, Granger, yuh're the only one that **wants** to use that road beyond the boundary of his own property. An' that ain't enough to satisfy the law! But if yuh could show that it was used as a **thoroughfare** by two or more different parties the law would declare

it a public benefit an' throw it open again."

The sheepman's face was purple with emotion.

"A fine chance I'd have o' doin' that, when there ain't anybody livin' around there but me! You an' your law make me sick, McKenna! You're just another tool of Gene Letterman's, like everybody else around this cussed country! I wouldn't have made the mistake o' botherin' you at all, if it hadn't been for this boy here——"

In the midst of his outburst he paused, surprised to find that Bud, whom he had expected to see standing beside him, was nowhere in the room. But an instant later, chancing to glance through the open doorway, he discovered why. The boy had not followed him into the sheriff's office at all. He was standing beside the buckboard on the other side of the street, chatting familiarly with its occupant. And that occupant, the astonished sheepman perceived at a glance, was none other than Edith Letterman!

In three strides Jiles Granger was out of the room, his gray eyes flashing with resentment at such apparent disloyalty. Doubtless, he would have crossed the street and vented his wrath upon the boy where he stood, but just then the conversation between the two terminated and the girl drove away. Bud came over, cheeks flushed, head held high, obviously unaware of the tirade that was about to descend upon him.

"So that's the kind of a son you are!" the old man roared. "You leave your father to fight his battles alone while you go an' make eyes at the daughter of the very man he's fightin'."

Bud winced a little but managed to achieve a smile.

"I figured you'd be in there some time," he returned mildly, "an' I couldn't afford to pass up a chance like that."

An expression of disgust tempered his father's wrath.

"You poor simpleton! Didn't I tell you that girl ain't your kind, that she wouldn't wipe her feet on a sheepherder? She's just makin' a fool out o' you, only you're too big a fool to know it!"

Bud shook his head impatiently.

"I wasn't makin' love to her, dad. I don't know her well enough—yet! We was talkin' about that road, same as you was. I seen yesterday that she wasn't any too pleased at the way her dad acted. Now she's plumb riled up about it. She told me about his comin' in to see the sheriff yesterday, an' when he went home he turned a herd of his best hosses into that north section to make it look as if he was usin' that part of his ranch regular!"

Granger stared at the boy for a moment, then turned to his horse to cover his confusion.

"A lot o' good that information does us! It was a fool's idee for us to come here, anyway! All we've done is waste a lot o' time!"

"You mean," said the boy, as he untied his own animal, "that the sheriff couldn't think of any way to help us?"

As they rode away, his father told him just how helpful and sympathetic McKenna had been.

"It's a regular cattlemen's combine," he concluded wrathfully. "There ain't any justice for sheepherders! Everybody around here is in the pay of that skunk, Gene Letterman! An' now that it's been legally proved that he owns that road, there's no sense in our tryin' to fight him! I ain't afraid of him or his men, but I ain't fool enough to buck the law! About the only thing we can do is to sell out to some other sheepman an' leave the country."

Very plainly, Jiles Granger considered himself licked, and his consequent air of depression hurt Bud more than any of his outbursts of anger.

"If we could only find somebody else that was usin' that road," he suggested hopefully.

His father laughed bitterly.

"Out where there ain't nobody livin' but us? Even if we found such a man he'd be afraid to open his mouth on account of Letterman. We throwed away our only chance when we let ourselves be bluffed out yesterday. Now we'll have to take our medicine."

The remainder of the trip was made in silence. But, so far as Bud was concerned, it was not the silence of capitulation. His pursed lips and narrowed eyes proclaimed that he was thinking deeply.

It was almost noon when they reached their little homestead. And while Bud took the sheep out to graze, Granger remained in the cabin to prepare their meal. Never had that simple task meant so much to him. That afternoon he intended to ride out and offer his sheep to the highest bidder; as soon as they were sold he and Bud would leave that section of the country forever; and the thought that this might be the last meal he would eat there brought a lump into his throat that would not be downed. He had grown to love the place very dearly by now and to be forced to leave it, was like being banished from paradise.

In time the coffee came to a boil, the beans and bacon were done, and the table set. Going to the door, Jiles bellowed the usual "Come an' get it" to his boy. Bud had never failed to answer that summons before, but there was now only silence. After waiting a few moments Granger called again—with no better luck. Then, his impatience getting the better of him, he started out to look for the boy. He found the herd of sheep easily enough, grazing under the watchful eyes of the dogs, but Bud was nowhere in sight.

"What on earth is he up to now?" he fretted angrily. "Curled up some-

where, dreamin' about that gal, most likely, just when——"

The words died upon his lips, for at that instant he beheld something which drove all thought of the boy from his mind. Just beyond the little canyon to the south, where he and Letterman's party had had their falling out, was a line of pale-blue smoke. It was too broad to belong to any camp fire and there were no trains in that direction which might have caused it. He perceived its significance in a flash.

"It's that dry grass," he gasped. "Some fool puncher dropped a lighted match!"

But his only reaction to that discovery was a feeling of bitterness.

"An' that's the place Letterman said he was grazin' hosses in. The skunk! That stuff wouldn't feed a goat, let alone——"

He paused again, this time even more startled than before. For he perceived that there *were* horses in there! A herd of a hundred or more, frightened by that advancing line of fire, appeared suddenly at the farther end of the canyon, running toward him. On the instant he recollected what Bud had told him—that Letterman had turned them into that section to prove his occupation of it. And at the same instant he realized something more.

"Why, the fool's cut his own throat!" he cried. "The fence he put up to keep me *out* of his land is goin' to keep them critters *in*!"

This statement was proved almost before it was uttered, for the herd of horses, tearing madly down the canyon, were brought suddenly to a halt by the four strands of wire that barred its other end. There they remained, milling about frantically, while the line of fire, fed by a brisk southerly wind swept slowly but surely toward them. Before it could reach the canyon, however, four more horses, bearing riders, came into view from the east. Obvi-

ously, the Cross L punchers had understood the herd's predicament as well as Granger and were hurrying to their rescue.

And at this thought a change came over the sheepman. His gray eyes, which had registered only astonishment before, flashed suddenly with a vengeful light. His lips curled into a sneer of hate. With the laugh of a madman he darted back into the cabin, caught his rifle off the wall, and, leaping upon his horse which stood near, set off at a gallop toward the little canyon.

He reached it about a minute after the Cross L men, just as Sam Slade was dismounting with a pair of wire cutters in his hand, while Letterman and the two punchers kept the frightened herd away from the fence.

"Go ahead an' cut, Slade," he chuckled, swinging the rifle to his shoulder. "Let 'em come right along! I'll drop 'em as fast as I can pull the trigger!"

In their excitement the Cross L men had not noticed his approach. Now they turned to stare at him in amazement. That he was temporarily insane there could be no question. But even an insane man can shoot straight. Slade made no further move toward the fence. Letterman, with a roar of anger, pushed his horse forward.

"This is no time to show spite," he snapped. "Can't you see that fire back there? Don't you realize we've got to get these animals out of here?"

Granger laughed, not pleasantly.

"Then get 'em out—but not across my land!" he jeered. "I'm grazin' a thousand head o' sheep over here an' I don't want my pasture cut up by a lot o' scrub hosses!"

That Letterman caught the boom-rang was evidenced by his deep flush. But before he could make any answer there came an interruption from another quarter. Suddenly, out of no-

where, Bud Granger rode up to his father's side. Leaning over in the saddle, he calmly took the rifle from his hands.

"Dad was just bluffin'," he told Letterman smilingly. "He wanted to show you up for the way you treated him yesterday afternoon. But we ain't the kind to shoot down other people's stock. You're entirely welcome to drive all the hosses through here that you want to!"

Granger seemed momentarily stunned at his boy's act. Gene Letterman merely sneered, and Slade sprang toward the fence.

*"With this understandin'!"*

Even Slade paused at the sharpness of the boy's tone. His cheeks were rather flushed now, his lean figure erect, and his hand was dangerously near to the trigger of the rifle.

"You know what the law says, Letterman! If two or more parties use a certain road it can be declared a public benefit! Once you cut down that fence an' let them hosses through, this trail stays open for good!"

Had the occasion been less dramatic the expressions on the faces of the Cross L men might have appeared ludicrous. Wide-eyed and open-mouthed they turned and stared at their boss, who, in turn, was staring at Bud. For a long minute the cattle baron glared at the boy, rage and astonishment struggling for the mastery. Then he glanced desperately behind him. The advancing line of fire was very near now. Already its greedy tongue was licking along the slopes of the canyon. When he turned back to Bud his eyes held a certain amount of respect.

"All right, kid! You win!"

Half an hour later Granger and his boy were sitting in their little cabin, dispatching a cold meal. But never had they eaten one that tasted better. And once more the sheepman was im-

pelled to break his time-honored custom.

"You see what a little nerve will get you, Bud! If I hadn't offered to put up a fight that skunk would have walked right over us! Now I've made him give us just what we wanted—an open trail back an' forth to them grazin' grounds!"

Bud merely nodded, his thoughts apparently on other things.

"Course, I was only bluffin' him with the rifle, like you said," his father explained. "I was thinkin' about that road all the time an' in another minute I'd have sprung it on him. Only you beat me to it."

"Sure," said the boy abstractedly.

His father munched contentedly for a moment.

"A mighty lucky thing that fire started when it did!"

"You bet!"

"I didn't see it till I went out to look for you. I called twice for you to come an' get it, but you didn't answer, so——" He paused suddenly, his knife halfway to his mouth, as an astounding thought leaped into his brain. "Say, Bud, *just where was you when that fire started?*"

The boy had been staring into his cup of coffee as one stares into a crystal, his mind anywhere but on the present. But at his father's words he glanced up with a start, his face the color of a ripe tomato.

"Who? Me?" he stammered. "Oh, just down the road a bit! I seen Edith Letterman ridin' by an' went over to talk to her. Say, dad, if you meet a nice gal an' she invites you to come see her some time, how soon before you can call?"



### ALASKA AGAIN SHAKEN BY AN EARTHQUAKE

ALASKA has recently been congratulating itself upon emerging from an earthquake of unusual intensity without loss of life and with but little damage to property. The southeastern part of the Territory was given a vigorous shaking in a seismic disturbance that seemed to have its center in the ocean bottom several hundred miles from the mainland. Residents of Juneau, Alaska, rushed into the streets, when the first shock was felt. After that many recurrent tremors were felt. Reports of the quake were received from various towns in southeastern Alaska, and from Seward, a mining town of northern British Columbia.

Various cable lines throughout the section were broken. The tremor also took toll in broken dishes and windows as well as in large numbers of frightened citizens. It had diminished in force, however, by the time that it reached the mainland. News of the quake had its effect on the Japanese fishermen of Hilo. Dispatches from there said that the fishermen upon hearing of the disturbance rushed into the outer harbor, spread their nets, and brought up whole boatloads of strange deep-sea fish. They expressed the belief that undersea heat, incidental to the disturbance, had caused the fish to seek higher and cooler water.

Little credence was given the belief that the shock was the result of a volcanic eruption along the Alaska Peninsula or the Aleutian Islands, since reports from Seward and other towns near the so-called volcanic area showed that no disturbance had been felt.



## Sunset on Mount Shasta

By James Edward Hungerford

THE sun is slippin' down to rest,  
Behind ol' Shasta's rim ;  
It's golden shafts begild the west,  
The world is growin' dim ;  
The tall peaks catch each partin' beam,  
Like silver do they shine ;  
The sunset magic sets agleam  
Each wavin' mountain pine.

Adown the trail the daylight fades,  
As ol' Sol's light withdraws,  
An' softly steal the twilight shades  
Through coulees, canyons, draws.  
The birds are seekin' nests o' rest ;  
The woodland creatures go  
To their retreats in nature's breast,  
Ere Sol has ceased to glow.

I sit here in my ranch-house door,  
An' watch the magic sight.  
I've seen the same scene times galore.  
As day fades into night ;  
But no two sunsets are the same—  
In beauty they increase  
As nature makes the heavens flame,  
An' paints each masterpiece.

She takes her mystic, magic brush.  
An' sweeps it 'cross the sky,  
An' with each stroke, the colors gush  
From her art shop on high ;  
She dips her brush in ol' Sol's rays  
An' takes what she may choose.  
An' sets the western skies ablaze  
With all the rainbow hues.

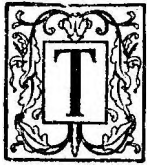
An' as I watch Sol slowly sink  
Behind ol' Shasta's rim,  
The little stars come out an' wink  
A bright "good night" to him.  
I marvel at the work o' art,  
An' deep down in my breast  
I feel the magic in my heart  
O' sunset in the West !



# The Rod Rider

by Hugh F. Grinstead

*Author of "All Black," etc.*



HE seemingly endless night was giving way to the gray dawn of a spring morning, but so far as Luke Woodson was concerned it might just as well have remained dark. Lying rigidly upon the truss rods beneath a rapidly moving freight car, his smarting eyes beheld only a gray ribbon of roadbed that flashed under him like an endless band. He was hungry and thirsty, his muscles ached and he was covered with dust; but he had made up his mind to stick where he was as long as he had strength to hold on, or until he should be discovered and forcibly ejected by one of the trainmen. The train was moving southwest, and every mile it covered lessened the distance between Luke and home.

He had not chosen this uncomfortable berth because "riding the rods" was his favorite means of transportation. On the contrary, he would have much preferred the back of the wildest outlaw horse on the Box-M Ranch, and with a better chance of sticking it out

on a long ride. But circumstances had conspired to place him in unfamiliar and unpleasant surroundings.

The week before he had accompanied two cars of fat steers from the ranch to the distant cattle market. The cattle had been sold and returns duly made to the owner. It was while seeing the sights in the unfamiliar city that the cowboy had in some way been relieved of his own roll, even losing his railroad pass for the return trip. Thus he suddenly found himself in a strange city without friends, and with less than two dollars in change that he had got together after ransacking his various pockets.

Rather than endure the chaffing from other Box-M punchers that was sure to result if he telegraphed home for funds, he had determined to beat his way back, some six hundred miles, on freight trains. He had heard how a man might travel thus with ease; a few attempts at stealing rides had disillusioned him. Time after time he had been discovered and routed from empty cars. Finally, he had crawled beneath this car in the

night, maintaining a precarious hold on the supporting rods now for almost ten hours. Only twice during the night had the long through freight stopped, once to take water and again in order to let the express train pass.

The full light of day followed quickly upon the dawn, red beams from the rising sun shot athwart the roadbed and played on the gray sand and tufts of bunch grass that encroached upon the steel rails from either side. Luke tried to shift his position slightly, but his limbs were like wood, and he feared to take the chance of losing his balance by moving too far. By cautiously turning his head, he could glimpse the country through which he was passing. Level land it was, covered with a sparse growth of short grass, dotted here and there by clumps of thorny bushes and an occasional cactus.

"Begins to look like home, all this buffalo grass and mesquite brush," Luke muttered to himself. "Two hundred miles more ought to get me there, if I can hold out that long."

Another hour passed. The train thundered over a short bridge spanning a dry streambed and continued on its way through a region where no sign of habitation of any sort could be seen. After a time came a long blast of the locomotive whistle, the train was beginning to slow perceptibly. It was with delight that the dust-covered traveler hailed the prospect of an opportunity to get off and stretch his legs. In broad daylight the chance of boarding the train undetected when it started would be extremely doubtful. But loath as he was to being left behind, Luke felt that he could no longer endure his cramped position.

The long train ground slowly to a stop. After a short interval it crept down upon a lonely siding, evidently for the purpose of giving another train the right of way. The instant the wheels ceased to move, Luke dropped stiffly to

the ground and crawled from under the car. He glanced uneasily along the string of cars, but there was nobody to be seen on that side. More boldly, he began to walk briskly back and forth by the side of the train, swinging his arms to restore the circulation. The prospects of resuming his journey shortly looked favorable, but his hopes dropped to zero when he heard a noise overhead. Looking down from the top of the car was a burly brakeman, and the expression on his face was by no means pleasant.

"Hey, you hobo, beat it out of here, and don't you try to climb back on this train when it starts!" he shouted angrily. "Either that or cough up half a dollar," he added, when the young man addressed said nothing.

"I got lung trouble, coughed my last cough, financially speakin'," Luke replied with a grin. "I reckon I already owe the Santa Fe Railroad for about four hundred miles o' ridin', such as it is, but I ain't in no shape to pay the bill to-day. Couldn't even advance that fifty cents you're cravin'."

"Well, you won't ride on this train any more," growled the brakeman. "More than that, you'll have a sweet time catching a freight, trains don't stop here everyday."

"I'd rather ride a buckin' broncho any day than your old train; reckon I'll just stretch my laigs a-walkin' on to the next station."

The trainman grinned maliciously. "You'll get 'em stretched good, then, it's twenty miles," he retorted.

Since there was apparently no alternative, Luke accepted a situation that would delay his westward journey for a time. Except for the fact that progress afoot would be much slower, he would have welcomed the prospect of walking rather than lying stretched out upon the unyielding rods. The open country held no terrors for him, astride a horse he would have been at home, day or night.

Presently the eastbound train roared by, and immediately after its advent the long freight rolled out upon the main track and continued its westward way. From the rear platform of the caboose, the brakeman waved his hand and grinned tauntingly at the stranded cowboy. Luke sat upon the end of a cross-tie and looked after the departing train until only a column of black smoke was visible. He then stood up and gazed out over a region apparently untouched by the hand of man, except for the railroad and the line of telegraph poles.

"Sheep country," he sniffed contemptuously, as he spied a narrow trail leading away from a shallow pool of water by the side of the track. "A cow-puncher afoot in sheep country—shipwrecked on a desert island—I reckon they ain't a heap of difference."

But Luke was hungry and thirsty, and the prospect of eating mutton and listening to the pent-up garrulity of a flock tender was much to be preferred to walking twenty miles on an empty stomach. He scanned the horizon for signs of a herder or his camp, there was sure to be one not many miles away. After a few minutes he caught the reflection of sunlight on a roof to the north of where he stood, apparently two or three miles off. He couldn't be sure whether it was ten or shack, but there was no mistaking the evidence of a habitation of some sort. He set out resolutely in that direction. When he had walked for an hour, he was compelled to revise his estimate of the distance. He thought he must have gone at least four miles when he topped a slight rise and saw before him a brush corral and a board shack near a water hole. That it was a sheep camp he knew by the thousands of small hoof-prints about the corral, although the shack might easily have belonged to a homesteader.

He stopped at the water hole and drank, then washed some of the dust

and cinders from his face and hands. Knowing that the wayfarer is ever welcome to such fare as a sheep camp affords, he pushed open the door to the shack and entered. The grub box by the door absorbed most of his attention. When he surveyed the interior of the room, he uttered an exclamation of surprise. Instead of the usual disarray, the bed was neatly made, while a curtain across one corner hid such articles of apparel as one might expect to find hanging on nails driven in the wall.

"One of them dude herders from the East, I reckon; the kind that shaves every day and keeps his shoes shined," Luke mused as he rummaged in the provision box. Had he looked behind the curtain, he would have been more than a little surprised.

He brought out coffee and the coffee-pot, bacon, and a slab of bread. There was a small camp stove in one corner of the room, but he preferred to do his cooking in the open. He gathered such dry fuel as he could find and made a fire down by the water hole. He set coffee to boil and sliced enough bacon to fill the frying pan. When the bacon was done he fell to eating. He was bound to admit that the sheep-herder could make good baking-powder bread, dude though he might be. He only wished there had been more of it.

When he had finished eating, he returned the cooking utensils to the place where he had found them. He had not slept the night before, and now that his hunger was appeased he could not resist the temptation to sprawl in the shade of the shack for a nap. He must have been more than one night in arrears, for he slept soundly all afternoon. He was half conscious of the bleating of sheep late in the afternoon, then he drifted back into deep slumber.

Some time after that he was completely aroused, and rudely. He felt the harsh strands of a rope encircling his wrists, and knew that his hands were

being tied behind him. He struggled to sit up, but a half hitch of the rope around his legs rendered him helpless. Another half hitch, deftly turned, secured him beyond any possibility of escape. He blinked in an effort to get the sleep from his eyes, since he could not rub them. He knew that twilight was giving way to darkness, and when he did manage to turn his head, he saw only the outlines of a broad-brimmed hat above him. This vanished almost instantly, and he heard the retreating footsteps of his captor beyond the corner of the shack.

Luke was more angry than frightened at finding himself so helplessly tied. It occurred to him after a moment that perhaps the herder, fresh from the land where a thief is a thief, had trussed him up because he had entered the shack and helped himself to the food he found there. This idea of the herder's ignorance in such matters was amusing, or would have been under different circumstances. A sound from the inside of the shack indicated that the herder had entered the room and was moving briskly about. Presently pencils of light streamed through cracks in the rough wall.

"Hey, sheep-herder!" Luke shouted. "What's the big idee, anyway? Don't you know it ain't nice to treat a fellow this way just because he's et dinner with you when you wasn't at home?"

Failing to get a response of any sort from the person inside, he proceeded to relieve himself of his opinion of sheep-herders in general, and this one in particular. But all his abuse of the keepers of sheep, their ancestors and offsprings, failed to arouse the herder to speech. The natural conclusion was that this herder was the spineless creature he had been suspected of being. Luke paused for breath, then delivered a final broadside.

"Pick the wool out of your ears, you mangy coyote, an' listen to what I'm

sayin'," he called. "Just give me half a chance, let loose one hand, an' I'll wallop——"

He stopped suddenly. The light had moved through the doorway to the outside, the beams shot past the corner of the shack, and an instant later the legs of some one carrying a lighted lantern came in view. And then as the entire figure of the person became visible, Luke realized that, indeed, he would have need of no more than one hand to cope with an adversary so slight. He marveled that a mere youth could have so neatly roped and tied him.

"Say, kid, what the Sam Hill——" he began, only to break off suddenly and stare. Something, it may have been the general carriage or the rounded figure, warned him that this was no boy at all. It was a woman. She wore overalls and a broad-brimmed hat, and so far as he could see the face beneath the hat might have belonged to a human scarecrow; but that the person approaching him was a woman, Luke felt quite sure. Had he been in a different frame of mind, he might have offered an apology for the things he had just been saying—to a woman.

He waited silently, with some curiosity and not a little apprehension, as she approached. She stooped down and quickly released his feet, leaving his hands tied as they were. He got but an imperfect view of her face as she did this. He could see a revolver in the holster at her waist, and was aware of her alertness as she stepped back.

"Get up," she commanded. Luke obeyed with some difficulty.

"Now look a-here, ma'am," he began suavely. "I'd be a mighty lot obliged if you'd tell me how come I'm tied up this way. I didn't take a thing from you but a little grub, just like any man would do when he knew he'd be welcome. I would have cut wood for that, only I couldn't find the woodpile."

"You know well enough why I tied

you up," she snapped. "You're welcome to the food you ate, anybody is free to take what they find. I guess you'd try to make me believe you was innocent of that Burnt Rock affair."

"I dunno, I didn't burn no rock, honest I didn't, ma'am," Luke replied uneasily.

It was bad enough to be helplessly bound and at the mercy of a sane person, the situation as he now saw it was truly alarming. He had always thought sheep-herders were a queer lot, had heard numerous tales of how they went crazy from loneliness and monotony. Undoubtedly, he thought, this woman wasn't quite right in the head, to be talking about burning rocks. He had tried to speak placatingly, but had evidently not succeeded. There was irritation in her tone when she spoke.

"You can't fool me with that sort of talk," she retorted. "Just as well keep still, I won't believe a word you say. Now, I'm going to take you to Gilson's Ranch right away. Don't try any tricks, because I'll be right behind you with my gun in my hand. You can do all your talking to the sheriff or the judge or whoever it is."

She jerked her words out with a nervous intensity. Some homesteader's wife, Luke thought, gone loony from the monotony of her surroundings. He didn't know how far it might be to Gilson's, but he was willing enough to start right now and walk half the night in order to get where there were people who would rescue him from this queer woman with her peculiar notions. He started off in the direction she ordered. Only when it was necessary to give directions concerning the trail did the woman speak again. Luke made no reply whatever. He walked on for two hours, the woman close behind him. Then he made out a light a little way ahead, and in a few minutes the woman was knocking at the door of a humble ranch house. A man came to the door.

**WS-9F**

"Why, howdy, Miss Frazier," he said. "What's happened?" he added, when he saw her prisoner with his hands tied behind him.

"It's that—that man they've been looking for—I think," she replied.

"You mean the feller that robbed the Burnt Rock bank?"

"Yes, he went to sleep by my shack after he had eaten enough for two men. I knew it was him, nobody else would be that hungry. Besides, the description tallies, his clothes and all. I had him tied when he woke, and I thought I would bring him over here where you could watch him till we let the sheriff know."

"I—I reckon you've been mistook," the ranchman replied regretfully. "Pete Maddox come by here not more'n three hours ago with the news that the sheriff caught that feller over by Walnut Arroyo early this mornin'. He had the money on him. Too bad, but I reckon the sheriff gits the reward money."

"What? The wrong man?—I don't see how—oh, I'm so sorry!" came disjointedly from the woman as she slumped down upon the doorstep.

It was the first time Luke had seen her face clearly in the light, and now he beheld not the bedraggled countenance of an overworked woman, but the face of a very pretty girl. The nervous tension of the last few hours had been too much for her, she was on the verge of hysterical tears.

There was an awkward moment in which Luke had time to grasp the significance of the situation. The realization that there had been more of disappointment than regret in the girl's tone disturbed him. She had been sorry, not because she had mistreated him, but because he had been the wrong man. The thought rankled.

The girl had quickly gained control of herself. She dabbed nervously at her eyes as she stood up.

"Turn him loose, please, Mr. Gilson,"

she said. "I'm just a hopeless little fool, after all. Make a mess of everything."

She didn't trust herself to say more, but picked up her lantern and strode off in the direction of her sheep camp. His bonds quickly cut by the obliging ranchman, Luke stood staring after the girl until only the wavering light of the lantern was visible. His musing was cut short by a word from the ranchman.

"Now you might tell, long as you're here an' all, how come you was asleep at that girl's sheep camp; or you needn't to, just as you like. I allow they ain't no real harm in you," he added.

Luke did tell him, told in detail of his experiences at beating freights in his attempt to get back to the home ranch. How he had been hungry when he struck the sheep camp and sleepy when he had eaten his fill.

"Now, don't you go to holdin' nothin' agin' that girl," the ranchman insisted. "She was all upset an' flustered is how come she made it look like she was peeved all because you wasn't the right man an' she couldn't git five hundred dollars fer sendin' you to jail. She sure needed the money."

"Is that her sheep outfit?" Luke inquired.

"The homestead is, but the sheep mostly belong to Old Jake Finney. The girl has been runnin' 'em on shares the last year, but I reckon they'll all go back to Old Jake unless she can raise three or four hundred dollars in the next week. He's got some sort of written agreement with her that's got teeth. He always gits the best of a trade. Me, I'm a cattle man, but the way things is goin' we ain't got no cause to be lookin' down on sheepmen no more. If cattle prices was any good, don't know but I'd sell out now an' go in for sheep."

"This girl—is she—is she—er——" Luke began.

"June Frazier? Why, she's plumb all right, if that's what you're drivin' at," the ranchman interrupted. "Her an' my wife visits together a heap, considerin' they live all of four miles apart. That girl knows more about sheep than most men, an' she 'tends to her business a heap better. Yes, I'd say she was a reg'lar thoroughbred. Soon's she's had time to think it over, she'll wish she'd apologized to you some different. She was all upset account of bein' mistook so."

Luke wasn't so sure she owed him any further apology. He felt rather in her debt when he considered the harsh invectives he had heaped upon the heads of sheep-herders in general, her in particular. He recalled some of the things he had said—and she really wasn't like that at all, she was pretty.

"Might just as well stay all night with me," Gilson suggested. "I'll show you a place to sleep now, an' in the mornin' I can rig you out with a hoss an' outfit so's you can ride like a human the rest of the way. Two hundred mile ain't no great ways in the cattle country. You can drift the critter back this way with the first cow outfit that's trailin' this far. Hosses ain't worth a heap noways, an' I reckon that the meanest-feelin' man on earth is a cow-puncher afoot."

Luke thanked the ranchman and went to bed. He must have made up his lost sleep in the afternoon, for he lay awake more than two hours. Most of that time was spent in mentally abusing himself for his ungentlemanly conduct toward a girl, a very pretty girl as it happened.

The sun was not very high the following morning when he set off on the borrowed horse with sufficient provisions for a five-day journey. When he had proceeded a mile or so along the trail the ranchman pointed out, he turned deliberately off to the right, and by a wide detour passed Gilson's ranch

and headed toward the little shack by the water hole.

"I ain't got it in me to leave the country without 'pologizin' to a lady for the mean things I said," he muttered to himself as he jogged along.

He presently beheld a cloud of dust made by a band of moving sheep, and rode straight toward it. When he was close enough to make out the slender form of the herder, he knew he had made no mistake.

"Mornin', ma'am," he said as he rode up.

She had not recognized him until he spoke. She appeared to be startled, perhaps a little frightened. She looked about her uneasily.

"I come back to tell you how low-down an' onery I been feelin' account of the mean things I said about sheep-herders. I hadn't seen all of 'em then," Luke hastened to explain.

"Oh," she said simply, but there was a note of relief in the word.

"I couldn't leave the country without 'pologizin' proper," he hurried on. "I'm takin' back all I said, besides what I thought of myself at the time."

There was evidence of a smile while she listened, and when he had finished she laughed.

"That's funny," she said. "I have been hating myself since last night for the way I treated you. I think I even forgot to tell you how sorry I was for what happened."

"I ain't."

"What?"

"I mean I ain't sorry I happened to strike your camp for dinner yesterday. Too bad I didn't happen to be that bad hombre you took me for!"

"I'm glad you were not."

"But you lost five hundred dollars because I wasn't him."

"I never lost money that hurt me less."

"I—I reckon maybe I understand."

"But you were afoot yesterday, and

now you come riding. Are you a cow-puncher?" she asked quickly.

"I was—yesterday."

"And to-day?"

"I'm a sheepman."

"I didn't think you could drop so low over night, judging from the compliments you paid to sheep-herders all and severally at our first meeting."

"Like I said before, I didn't know all of 'em."

"Where is your sheep outfit?" she asked, ignoring his last remark.

"I ain't found it yet, just comin' to it gradual. It's like this," he explained. "I got four-five hundred dollars of my wages saved up in the bank. Allowed to buy cattle an' start on my own hook; but with beef prices low an' wool goin' higher all the time, I got my eyes opened. Looks like the sheep business is a heap the best. It ain't like it usta be, they's some mighty nice people runnin' sheep now. I'm just lookin' things over, first good thing I strike I'll buy."

"Would you consider anything in this part of the country?" she asked eagerly.

"Allow this is as good sheep country as a fellow could find. I'd rather buy a half interest with somebody that knows sheep. I don't know a heap about 'em, an' I'd rather get my experience in broken doses."

She looked at him sharply, but did not reply at once. The sheep were moving and the herder walked on after them. Since it would be discourteous to ride while she walked, Luke swung to the ground. Leading his mount, he walked by her side.

"So that was the reason I found you asleep on the ground after eating two meals at once. You were breaking into the sheep business," she presently remarked with aggravating seriousness.

"Yes'm, I was er——" Luke began and floundered helplessly. He shook his head and started all over again. No use to lie to a girl like that, it couldn't be done successfully.



"I reckon I was just a-breakin' in unbeknownst, then," he replied. "I et your grub because I was hungry, an' slept on the ground because I stayed awake all night ridin' a freight. I picked a sheep camp because it was the only thing in sight."

He told her how it had all come about, and she listened until he had finished.

"An' I didn't have no idee of goin' into the sheep business until about fifteen minutes ago. It struck me like a cyclone in the springtime. Now, if you think maybe you can help me find a good pardner that's got experience to put up agin' my little stake, I'm game to tackle it."

"I—I'm sure I can," she responded.

"Then I'll be ridin' back to Gilson's instead of to the Box-M. I'll write to

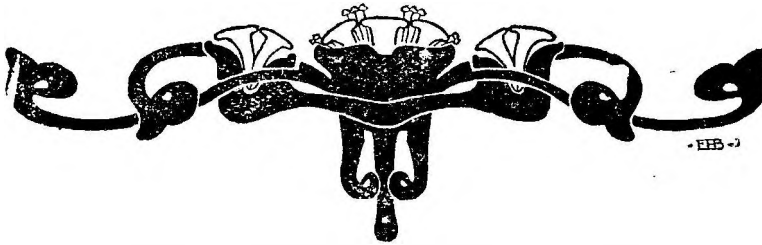
em soon's I run across a post office somewheres."

"And eat dinner with me some time when I'm at home and you're not so hungry," she said, smiling.

"I had already figgered I might do that," he replied as he caught up the reins and swung into the saddle.

Two hundred yards on the way to Gilson's, he turned in the saddle. The girl was standing where he had left her. A wave of his hand was answered by the flutter of a handkerchief.

"An' somehow I ain't feelin' mean an' low-down like I always figgered a cow-puncher would that has forgot hisself an' turned sheep raiser," Luke muttered as he rode on. "I'm feelin' real kindly toward that brakeman, too, which I wasn't yesterday. That's funny."



### THE PROBLEM OF INDIAN EDUCATION

**G**UARDIAN MOTHER" is the name the Navajo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico have bestowed on Mrs. Louisa Wetherill, who has lived among them for nearly thirty years, ever since, in fact, she went to New Mexico with her husband, John Wetherill, for the purpose of establishing an Indian trading post.

"When the Navajos receive a comprehensive education through the industrial schools," declares Mrs. Wetherill, "they will realize their privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. They are hardly impressed with their position as American citizens now. Their natural good breeding, however, will make them civic assets if they are given the industrial training necessary for their development."

Mrs. Wetherill goes on to say that anger is considered the worst sin of man by these Indians. Possibly their traditional stoicism makes it easier for them than for their white brethren not to let their angry passions rise.

Mrs. Wetherill, who was appointed a member of the Advisory Committee of One Hundred on Indian Affairs by Secretary of the Interior Work, is one of the best American authorities on the history and life of the Indian tribes. She is in favor of industrial training as a solution for the problem of Indian education, and believes that it would benefit all the tribes.



**E**MMETT WATTS, DeQueen, Arkansas, he speaks up, does Emmett, and he says:

"BOSS OF THE ROUND-UP AND FOLKS: I've been a constant reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for about four years, and why? Because, in my opinion, it is the best magazine of Western fiction on the stand.

" 'The Maverick of Marble Range' was the best story I have read in a good many moons. Robert F. Horton deserves a little applause for that marvelous story.

"I have just finished reading 'Weakling of the Wild' by Max Brand—my favorite author—but I didn't like it as well as his 'The City in the Sky.' 'The Green Sombrero,' by Johnston McCulley, was also good, but it wasn't long enough.

"Frank Richardson Pierce's stories are always good. Sure wish he would write another story as good as 'All Around Frying Pan.'

"The 'Shorty' McKay stories are fine. And the arguments in the Round-up are—well, I just can't miss 'em, that's all.

"Here's wishing WESTERN STORY

MAGAZINE the best of luck in the future."

How about this, boys? Fred R. (Tex) Brewster, 24 Seaver Place, Batavia, New York, speaking:

"BOSS AND FOLKS: Under the modern conditions of transportation, many of us are forced to travel by automobile, therefore making a man-size six-gun in a low-swung holster decidedly in the way. I think a discussion on the half-breed Texas holster as made by Heiser, of Denver, would be in line in this connection.

"I for one would like to know the ideas of others on this subject. The Hardy & Turnsnow spring clip holsters are good ones, too, but I like to see the H H H brand of Heiser on my leather goods.

"Hope this will start something."

Here is a nice letter—just got it from Bob Hewitt, 10 Dodge Avenue, Worcester, Massachusetts. And, before we read it, let it be known by all these present, that all folks as writes us get answered, and answered the best we can—and pronto.

Bob writes:

"DEAR BOSS: Please don't think that I'm tryin' tuh horn in on yore time; I ain't. But when a man treats me 'white,' I sure aim tuh let him know that I appreciate his kindness.

"Just the other day, I wrote home to Shell, Big Horn County, Wyoming, and told of the 'coldness' of folks livin' in this section of the United States. Yore letter makes me want tuh sort of modify my statements, 'cause I sure swung a wide loop, which same was all inclusive.

"Yuh wrote me a personal letter. I just can't quite get over that, 'cause I know danged well that yuh've got enough work tuh keep yuh busy, without takin' time off for that. Thanks, old-timer, yuh're a longhorn!

"I'm sorry tuh have that little piece I wrote stray back tuh the home corral, but there ain't no hard feelin's on my part. None whatever. I'm givin' yuh credit for knowin' the breed and brand of the stuff yuh're after.

"I'm close-herdin' a little story that I'm a-hopin' will pass yore inspection. I don't know just how soon I'll have it at the shippin' corrals, 'cause I'm not crowdin' it none, the trail bein' kinda rocky; but as soon as I drag back the loadin' chute, I'll holler and let yuh know.

"I'll leave yuh now and lope ahead. Got tuh keep that there little herd of words from boggin' down on me.

Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, little dogies,  
It's yore misfortune and none of my own.  
Whoopee ti yi yo, git along, little dogies,  
For you know Wyoming will be yore new home.

And now, a little something as to snakes. Haven't touched on them there varmint for some time.

It's "Pop" Ranney, Endicott, New York, who's goin' to let out a few hisses:

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: As there seems to be some discussion of snakes, as well as guns and nags, around your camp fire, and since the poisonous ones come in for their share, will quote a few paragraphs from Ditmar's 'Reptiles of the World,' which may be useful in distinguishing them from several non-poisonous species:

"But two species of Elaps occur in the United States. Their red, yellow, and black-ringed coloration causing them to look rather alike. There is also a strong resemblance to several harmless snakes, particularly the following species: Arizona King Snake, *Ophibolus Zonatus*; Western Milk Snake, *O. doliatus gentilis*; Scarlet King Snake, *O. doliatus*, and the Scarlet Snake, *Cemophora coccinea*. Careful examination will demonstrate a valuable character that may be generally employed in distinguishing the venomous from harmless reptiles. It will be noted in the case of the poisonous snake that the black rings are single and bordered with a pair of yellow rings. With the harmless species the yellow rings are single and bordered with a pair of black rings.

"The species of Coral Snakes found in the United States may be easily separated as follows:

"Snout black; a yellow band across the head, followed by a black ring.

"Harlequin Snake; Coral Snake, *Elaps fulvius*.

"Habitat: Southeastern United States into Mexico.

"Snout black; a yellow band across head; followed by a red ring. Sonorian Coral Snake, *Elaps euryxanthus*.

"Habitat: Arizona and northern Mexico.

"The Harlequin Snake or Coral Snake of the Southeastern part of the United States, is a common reptile in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, where it is dug up in sweet potato fields during plowing. Specimens are found wandering about after heavy rains. The

## THE ROUND-UP

scales are highly polished and opalescent; the pattern consists of regularly disposed, broad scarlet and black rings, separated by narrow rings of yellow. The snout is black; a wide orange band crosses the head. It is not unusual to find specimens with the scarlet much obscured by a scattering of black spots; on the abdomen the coloration is more brilliant. A big example is a yard long and three quarters of an inch in diameter at the thickest part of the body. The head is blunt and flattened, but little distinct from the neck and has minute, beady eyes.

"Despite assertions to the contrary, the species of Elaps are highly venomous. In proportion to the reptiles' size, their fangs are capable of inflicting damage equal to the Old World allies."

"With all due apologies to Ditmars, who furnishes this valuable information, I will now sit back and listen."

Well, if here isn't Seth Ranger, one of our popular and prolific authors. "What's that in your hand, Seth?"

"It's a story, boss, all neatly typed out. Hope you like it and buy it. Sometimes you think I go and write about things as can't happen but I take a number of Alaska papers and while browsing through them last night picked out several items of tragedy."

"Here is one; man and dog are attacked by a bear. The dog is killed and the man knocked unconscious. He recovers to learn that he has been knocked into his camp fire. One foot is burned off; the other partly off. He crawls fifteen miles to a cabin and is later found by an Indian. He is expected to live."

"Another one; man in Alaska town loses dog; goes to editor and has a reward notice of one hundred dollars published. Next day drops into newspaper office to see if there are any results. Nobody there. All hands, including the editor, are out looking for the dog."

"So you see that nothing I write about is ever as strange or tragic as what actually happens."

## THE WEST

### *And What Do YOU Know About It?*

1. What Danish navigator discovered Alaska?.....
2. In what year was the Alaskan coast reached?.....
3. New Mexico became the 47th State of the Union in.....
4. What two men discovered Lake Tahoe?.....
5. Which State boasts of the birthplace of Buffalo Bill?.....
6. When was the Pony Express inaugurated?.....
7. Who killed the first grizzly bear seen by Americans?.....
8. When was the great Comstock lode discovered?.....
9. During the next thirty years how many millions were mined from it?.....
10. What was the date of Custer's last fight?.....

*Answers to last week's questions:* 1. A State. 2. A famous overland stage man, who made the first trip from Atchison to Denver. 3. New Mexico, Arizona, California, and parts of Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. 4. William F. Cody, alias "Buffalo Bill." 5. 1859. 6. Famous Apache chief. 7. John W. Marshall. 8. 1848. 9. Horace Greeley. 10. Thirty dollars.



Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

**W**HENEVER some one mentions range land we find ourselves asking the question: "Is it fenced?" Unfenced range land seems to offer the maximum amount of adventure per square mile. A great many thrilling contests have been waged, however, within corral gates, which goes to prove that ranch life doesn't lose its glamour because of the fact that the range land is not unfenced.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We do not have to herd here, as most of the range is under fence. I take care of the cattle end of the ranch here, which is a mixed ranch—sheep as well as cattle. We have two thousand acres of foothill range on the slope of Horse Heaven Hills. And, by the way, there are quite a number of wild horses on the ranges here yet, and they are to be found in still greater numbers on the reservation.

The country around Mabton, which is the nearest town to our ranch, is hilly and sandy and runs to sagebrush and cactus. Within a radius of about fifty miles there are six or seven stockmen, but the country beyond is given over to farming. I've been around in this part of the country most of my life, was born in Prosser, nine miles from here.

The month of September is rodeo month. You'll sure see the towns decked out in cow-

boy regalia then. Issaquah, Sumas, Toppenish, White Swan, Goldendale, Tenino, and Ellensburg are some of the rodeo towns. This valley has had some of the best riders.

On our ranch we have all white-faced stock, and our brand, which marks cattle, horses, and sheep as well, is a half circle and a cross. We have thirty-five hundred sheep and we lease range land for surety on grass shortage. There are any number of sheep raisers in Yakima Valley, as well as cattlemen. Most of the sheep raisers lease range land from the government. If they herd the bands up into the mountains in the summer they surely stay about three months, returning in November. Some return later, as it depends on the range land. If the land is high up, then the season is short, but if the range land is low they can remain longer.

The country is very dry here in summer, and it's quite hot, but the winters are not severe. Altogether, it's a pretty good section of the country to be located in.

Well, folks, I'll be riding on.

EDWARD LEACH.

Box 2, Mabton, Washington.

Oklahoman.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Of all the sixteen States that I've been in, I think Oklahoma, the Sooner State, is by far the best for me. There are a lot of real men there. Here are a few of the things that the State is noted for: It has the longest pipe-line bridge in the world, which is across Red River, near

Burkburnett, Texas. It has the largest oil refinery in the world. And there is more broom corn raised in Oklahoma than in any other State.

Texas comes in for my admiration next. Western and southern Texas is the cattle country. The south is swampy, and rice is raised there. Cotton is raised all over the State, and Galveston is the great cotton-export city. Galveston is built on an island, and several times it has been almost destroyed by water.

Iowa is the great corn-raising State. I've been over that State pretty much, too. A buddy and myself are going to attempt a trip around the United States this summer, and we plan to cover somewhere near fifteen thousand miles. I would like to hear from any one close to our route, which will be from Stigler, Oklahoma, to New Orleans, Louisiana, around the coast to New York City, and then north to Montreal, Canada. We'll go across Canada to Washington State, then down to California, and to El Paso, Texas.

Come on, folks, let's hear from you-all.

CHARLES F. HADDOCK.

Box 150, Stigler, Oklahoma.

Prospector looking for a pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am hoping that through The Tree I'll find a partner who'd like to go prospecting with me. I haven't much of a grubstake, but between two of us we could probably manage.

W. P.

Care of The Tree.

This Gangster will see Arizona.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Most boys when they're young want to go West. I was one of the kids who longed to be out there. And I've still got the idea that I first had when I was twelve. I'm nineteen now.

A pal and myself expect to start for Arizona soon, if everything turns out the way we hope, so if Gangsters living in Arizona will write and let us know the living and working conditions in their State, we'll be very grateful.

I'll be glad to hear from Gangsters everywhere, though, and will do my best to please.

WILLIAM MOLLOY.

5925 Beaubien Street, Detroit, Michigan.

Yes, we wish this Gangster could deliver all the Hollow Tree missives.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am in the service of the post-office department as letter carrier, and have delivered thousands and thousands

of letters from every State and from almost every country. I suppose if all my walking had been done in the interest of sight-seeing, I would have visited pretty nearly every place on earth.

My task is to carry both joy and sorrow to folks, and I wish that I had the job of delivering only the letters that go and come through The Hollow Tree.

I am thirty-five, and very lonely at times, so would appreciate a bit of service through The Hollow Tree post office. I'll see if The Tree can give me anything like the service that Uncle Sam does through his big post office.

JOHN W. COX.

216 Tyler Street, Pueblo, Colorado.



**"I've not had my Hollow Tree badge very long, but I've made several friends through it already. It sure is some little friend maker!" says Martin Harms, 724 West Eighth Street, Davenport, Iowa.**

**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.**

This Gangster wants a good pard.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young man of twenty who's anxious to get a partner of about my age to go into the poultry business with me, on a fifty-fifty basis. I'm located in the eastern-central part of New York State, not so far from New York City, and think that this is just the location for a medium-sized hatchery. My mother has a farm with several buildings which could be used to start with. Work could be had here while we are starting the business.

All letters will be answered and greatly appreciated.

FRED PULVER.

Box 240, Millerton, New York.

The Texas Panhandle.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a lonely girl of sixteen, living in the Panhandle of north-western Texas. The oil town of Borger is not far from Amarillo, which is the town in which I live.

I'm fond of all outdoor sports, and especially of horseback riding. My uncle is game warden and also gate keeper of the Harding Ranch, or the Palo Duro Canyon, and I'll be glad to tell about it to the girls who write to me.

BILLIE STEPHENS.

1705 Lincoln Street, Amarillo, Texas.

Yes, the Owl is hooting for you, Gangster.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have a favor to ask of the Owl. I would like to have souvenirs of every State. I prefer leaves from trees, as they are flat and fit nicely in my big book of souvenirs. I would certainly appreciate it if the Owl would hoot a few times and broadcast my plea for me. Miss BOBBY ELLIS.

2525 Jackson Avenue, Joplin, Missouri.

This Gangster has the pioneer spirit.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young widow of a little more than thirty, born and raised in this wonderful West. Have lived in Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Also spent three years in western Canada, where it gets forty and sixty below, and where one can see the magic sight of the northern lights.

I've had some very interesting trips. I once took a fifty-mile ride in a box car when I was quite young. My brother had loaded all our belongings in the car, including the live stock. I was afraid to go on the passenger train alone, and so I hid myself in the freight car.

My mother and I had an eventful trip from The Dalles, Oregon, to Walla Walla, Washington. We made the trip with a horse and one-seated buggy. There were few autos then, and we had to ford several rivers, as the roads in some places were little more than trails. One evening, just at sunset, we were traveling along a rocky road beside a hill and our horse stopped. She was just an old plug, but wise with years. We looked ahead and saw a rattlesnake stretched across the full width of the road. I took a small hand ax, the only weapon we carried, and got out and clipped off the rattler's head. We carried a load of geese in the back of the buggy, and every time we stopped to camp, we would have a regular "goose concert."

I've a great deal to tell the sisters of the Gang who will write to me. I used to be able to handle a rifle pretty well, and always had a horse to ride. I also love mountain climbing, and all outdoor sports. Mrs. P. W.

Care of The Tree.

Alabama miss wants a home.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like to get in touch with a family or elderly couple who want a girl to stay with them. I am twenty-six, and quite alone. I would like to find a home in the country, if possible. I do not wish any wages, but just a place to call home.

DIXIE.

Care of The Tree.

Make this Montana Gangster welcome, folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I wonder if The Hollow Tree Gangsters have room for a college girl? There is always something to say about the town of Butte, and a great deal more to be said about Montana. Although I haven't all the time in the world for writing, I can use a typewriter, which makes it easy for me to answer many letters in a short space of time. I'll do my best if you don't all write at once, girls.

MISS M. C.

Care of The Tree.

Derbyshire, England.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm going to hit the trail one of these days and make a "grand tour," picking up a pal in Australia on the way. He's acting as nurse to somebody's cows out there at the present time. He's a good buddy. I've also met quite a number of top-notch boxers, wrestlers, swimmers, and strong men, and if any one cares to write and extend the paw of pen palship, I fancy I can keep them interested. So, roll up, everybody, whether from city or ranch. You are all welcome.

LESLIE SAYERS FARNSWORTH.

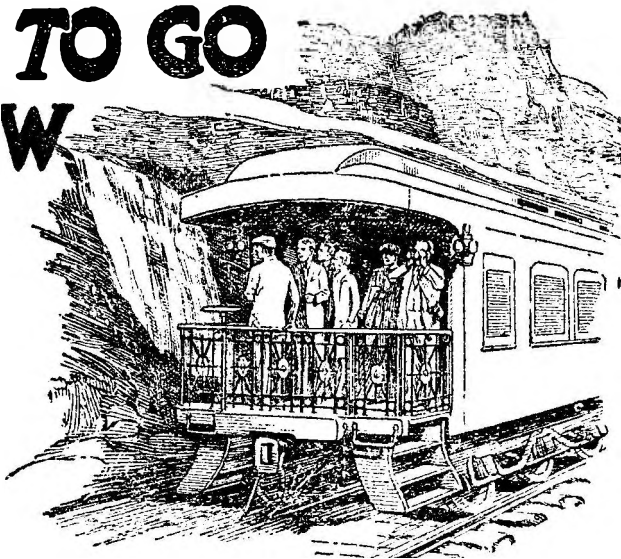
Wirksworth, Derbyshire, England.

"I live in Warren, a small town in the northern part of New Hampshire," says fifteen-year-old Marion Weeks, Box 94, Warren, New Hampshire. This Gangster is fond of hiking, snowshoeing, and horseback riding. She would like to hear from the juniors of the Gang.

"My intentions are to start for the West just as soon as I can," says S. Hewitt, 2314535, Royal Corps of Signalists, Hugh Rose Bks., Jubulpore, C. P., India. This Gangster is twenty-three, and is serving with a cavalry regiment in India.

# 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.**

**T**HIS surely is the time of year when most everybody gets a fit of the wanderlust, I reckon. At least, it seems that way, judging from the letters that are pouring in from all over the map. Some folks are taking their vacations, now that spring is here, while others are starting out on exploring trips, trying to locate the right place to settle down for keeps. John W., of Chattanooga, Tennessee, belongs to the latter crowd.

"I'm one of those hombres who is always picking up stakes and kicking around from one town to another, Mr. North," says this citizen of the Big Ben State. "But I've decided that it's time to quit that foolishness. Soon I'm going to trek westward, and I'm looking around for just the right town before I start, because I want this move to be the last one. My desire is to settle down for good now and have a shack of my own where I can hang

up my hat and call it home. Do you get me? I've heard some mighty interesting things about Minot, North Dakota. Folks tell me that it's good country out that way, and that Minot is an up-and-coming place. Now, I'd like to have all the facts you can give me, Mr. North, about this town."

Well, John hasn't been misinformed. Minot is the largest, fastest-growing, and most enterprising city in the western part of North Dakota. She has practically doubled her population in the last ten years, her citizens now numbering over ten thousand. This city is the headquarters of the rich Mouse River Loop and the county seat of Ward County, one of the largest counties of North Dakota. This splendid agricultural area claims the high proportion of ninety-eight per cent of tillable land. Diversified farming is largely practiced, while the number of hogs and milk cows has increased rap-



idly in the last few years. Flax is one of the county's most important crops.

Minot is up and coming all right. It is a commercial center and distributing point for northwest North Dakota, with a trading territory extending into Montana on the west and the Canadian Province of Saskatchewan sixty miles to the north. The city is an important division point on the Great Northern Railway. Company shops are located here and large stock-feeding yards maintained. Minot is the wholesale headquarters for the surrounding territory, with several large wholesale establishments, two flour mills, creameries, elevators, and warehouses. Near by are vast beds of lignite coal, furnishing an inexhaustible supply of cheap fuel.

This North Dakota town is good to look at, too, with well-built brick and stone structures and attractive homes and public buildings. If John likes the out-of-doors, he will delight in the two hundred acres of public parks, including one of the largest swimming pools in the Northwest. There are also zoological gardens, athletic fields, playgrounds, and woodland drives.

It's mighty hard to advise the other chap as to what he should do, but Minot certainly sounds like a good bet to me.

Now, Tom J., of Providence, Rhode Island, is one of those canny Yankees who aren't taking any chances. "I'm planning on going away on my vacation soon, Mr. North," writes this New Englander, "and Alaska is the place I've chosen to spend it. I've been saving up money for this trip for some time, and, needless to say, I'm surely looking forward to the expedition with much pleasure. At the same time I'm not going just for fun, because if I like that part of the world, I'm counting on settling up there. I'm particularly interested in the Tanana Valley. Can you tell me anything about the

agricultural possibilities of that section? Is the climate the main difficulty to be encountered? What can be grown? What do you know about the Alaskan reindeer industry?"

We have asked A. A. S., of Pacific Grove, California, who has had considerable to say in this department about Alaska, to answer Tom's letter. This hombre lived for four years in that very region, so he is well qualified to hand out some firsthand facts that I think you will all be interested in hearing.

"The main portion of the Tanana Valley is on the right ascending the river of that name," says A. A. S. "This valley is about forty miles wide on that side. On the other side, the mountains come down close to the banks. In length, the valley stretches from the Yukon to the McKinley Range of mountains on the south. The valley has a rise in elevation toward this range of about the same as the river. There is just enough roughness in the valley to furnish good drainage to cleared land. A scattered growth of trees is found all over this region, with a fine stand of spruce along the larger streams, especially along the Tanana itself.

"The main difficulty in opening up this territory is not the climate, but the thick, heavy growth of moss which prevents drainage and thawing of the land. Even in favored, sunny situations where this natural growth of moss is undisturbed, the ground will not thaw more than twelve to eighteen inches during the summer. The moss acts as an insulator. Yet where all this moss has been removed I have seen the ground thaw to a depth of eighteen feet during the summer. Joint brown top grass grows six feet tall and if cut and dried at the proper time, makes a fine hay-forage this grass feed.

"It is to be remembered that where

I was stationed at Tanana there are about the same number of hours of growing daylight weather, with higher temperatures than are found where I live now in Pacific Grove, California, and more hours of daylight between the last frost in the spring and the first frost in the fall. Nearly all the small grains, as well as the early garden vegetables, are raised successfully in the Tanana Valley. Almost all the small berries also grow wild there and in abundance. The flavor of these is far more delicious than that of any grown on the west coast of the United States or even in the East.

"The soil about where I was is a rich sandy loam, none better in the world. There is no danger of drought. There are few, if any, weeds. There are no house flies or fleas. The mosquitoes are very bad where the moss is, but where the land has been cleared and drained there are none. Flax is

grown in that region. I have seen flax grown at Rampart, a post a few miles up the Yukon, which was as fine as any grown anywhere in the world. In fact, the time will come one day when the whole Tanana Valley will be fully settled with a happy, prosperous people.

"The reindeer industry of Alaska is becoming of vast importance, not only to the natives and people of Alaska, but to the whole people of the United States.

"There are now more than five hundred thousand reindeer owned by the nation and under government control, besides nearly one hundred thousand under private ownership. The surplus deer are far more than can now be marketed in Alaska. The government has awakened to the importance and necessity of finding a market for this surplus, and plans are being worked out to that end."

#### IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

### **The Hooded Buckaroo**

**By SETH RANGER**

This hooded rider successfully keeps his identity hidden from the reader and rouses his eager curiosity. The best story Seth Ranger ever wrote.

### **Three On The Trail**

**By MAX BRAND**

Geraldi is one of those gay boys who spend life on the wing, and spend it fast and furious. And there are those who fly before and after him.

### **Musky, The Mighty**

**By KENNETH GILBERT**

The gray wolf cloud swept threateningly forward on the broken band of musk oxen. A tale of battle in the wild.

**Also Stories by**

**ROLAND KREBS  
HOWARD E. MORGAN**

**GEORGE OWEN BAXTER  
RAY HUMPHREYS**

**15c a Copy**

**At All News Stands**

# MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in **DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE** and **WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE**, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice fill a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

**WARNING.**—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," or letters, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

**EDDIE.**—Do you remember Salt Creek at Perducky Ranch? Please write to Arolge, care of this magazine.

**NORTHROP JOHN W.**—Forty-five years old. A sign painter. Last heard from in Memphis, Tennessee, about fourteen years ago. Mother feeble and brother dead. Information appreciated by his uncle, George W. Johnson, 217 Leath Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

**KYLE, T. O.**—Last heard from in Paris, Texas, about fifteen years ago. Information appreciated by Iloy Anderson, Brownwood, Texas.

**FISCHER, PAUL HELGE.**—Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Anna Fischer, 625 Centre Street, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts.

**SHERLOCK, McNALLY, or GILE, OLLIE.**—Twenty-three years old. A blonde from Kentucky. Last heard from in Illinois. Information appreciated by David C. Gile, care Western and Southern Life Insurance Co., 152 South Burdick Street, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

**BRAY, MRS. ETHEL.**—Last heard from at the Willik Mendocino Co., in California. Please write to C., care of this magazine.

**SMYTH, JACK.**—Sixteen years old. Brown hair, gray eyes, pug nose, and sallow complexion. Left home January 30, 1928. Believed to be a cowboy. You will not have to come home, but please write to your worried mother, Mrs. Mary Smyth, Route 1, Box 168, Stockton, California.

**SUPRY, L. D.**—Forgive me, Baby Elaine walks and calls for daddy. She is with mamma. Please write to Mrs. W. T. Lovelady, 1905 Holly Street, Austin, Texas.

**HOLBROOK, WAYNE.**—A telegraph operator. Have news for him. Information appreciated by P. G. Fash, 4920 Polk Avenue, Houston, Texas.

**HILDA JEAN C.**—If you want me to write to you, please send your address to J. W. V., care of this magazine.

**RUHL, LILLIAN.**—Please send your address to Vic, care of this magazine.

**GUTHRIE, P. M.**—Last heard from in 1907, when he left Eldorado, Oklahoma, for Comanche, Texas. Information appreciated by an old friend, L., care of this magazine.

**SMITH, JACOB WESLEY.**—Fifty-six years old. A widower with two children. Last heard from in 1909, in Danville, Illinois. Your sister, Lura Elena, died in May, 1927. Please write to your niece, Blanche, care of this magazine.

**CORRETT, MARGARET ANNE.**—Am worried about you. I still care and always will. Please write to B. T. M., care of this magazine.

**ATTENTION.**—Would like to hear from any who served under Captain Rumer in the Seventeenth Field Artillery, Batteries E and F, from 1918 to 1921, at Camp Travis, Texas. John Harrington, 68½ East Fourth Street, Oswego, New York.

**HARRIS, CHARLEY or IDA.**—Would like one of Billy's photographs. Please write to Ethel Budwill, Box 311, Holdenville, Oklahoma.

**SKATCH, or CATCH, M.**—Information appreciated by your Slovak friends, Edward A. Zoman, Mulberry, Florida.

**WILLIAMS, GEORGE.**—Formerly of the Thompson organization. Please write to G. J. Edwards, Battery D, Fifth Field Artillery, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

**MADSEN, CHRISTIAN.**—Last heard from in Scoley, Montana, about nine years ago, when he separated from his wife. Information appreciated by his daughter, who is married Mrs. Eleanor Torney, care of Jordan's Cafe, Kalispell, Montana.

**A. E. C.**—Have news, Billie, Mel, and Hazel III. Please write to your mother, Mrs. T. J. Carlsale, 1200 East Ninth Street, Little Rock, Arkansas.

**FULLER, JENNIE.**—Twenty-four years old. Left her home in Smock, Pennsylvania, two years ago. Information appreciated by her brother, Charles Jessie Fuller, U. S. S. "Islerwood," 284, care Postmaster, New York City.

**HARMON, AMES.**—Last heard from in California, five years ago. Good news for him. Please write to your daughter, Mrs. Leona New, Victorville, California.

**MAYS, FRANK R.**—Information appreciated by Clyde H. Nell, 635 South Twenty-fifth Street, New Castle, Indiana.

**MOMPHER, DONALD E.**—Nineteen years old. An automobile mechanic. Left Hammond, Indiana, in September, 1927. Father not well and mother worried. Please write to Mrs. Eva Mompheer, 235 Findlay Street, Fostons, Ohio.

**CARL.**—Many thanks for your letter. A letter now and then will take the place of your daily calls. Your true and lonely friend, H. M. T., care of this magazine.

**JACKSON, MELVIN C.**—Do you remember meeting me on the night of December 4, 1927? Did you mean what you said in the letter? Please write to T. S., same address.

**MAUDE.**—Let byrones be hygonas. Worried not to have heard from you and my darling baby. Please write to your broken-hearted husband, Henry Deaveny, 1601 Bellevue Street, Kansas City, Missouri.

**GLODO, MARTIN THORN.**—Last heard from in Manchester, Tennessee, where he lived with a man named Shelton. Information appreciated by L. G., care of this magazine.

**GRAHAM, IDA, neo STORY.**—Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri, about nineteen years ago. Information concerning her or her relatives appreciated by Mrs. Stella Hutton, 118 Chouteau Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.

**QUINTRELL, CLAUDE.**—I need you. Please write to one of your nearest and dearest relatives, G. B. Q., care of this magazine.

**PENDER, MR. and MRS. O. G.**—Last heard from in Orange, Texas. Please write to your old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Elton E. Taylor, Central, Louisiana.

**KELLEY, TED.**—Twenty-three years old. A mechanic. Worked with him in Kansas two years ago. Information appreciated by Shorty, care of this magazine.

**GOULD, WILLIAM EDDY.**—A barber. Last heard from in South Bend, Indiana, in 1914-15. Information appreciated by Mrs. John Mengel, 314 West Fourth Street, St. Paul, Minnesota.

**QUESNELL, C.**—Came to the United States from France when a young man. Last heard from when he was in the hardware business in Alabama. At this time he was eighty years old. Had a brother, E. L. Quesnell. His cousin is anxious to hear from him or any of his family. Please write to Mrs. Iona Quesnell Attention, Box 37, Unadilla, Florida.

**BARBER, CLAYTON, or LEE LEDMAN.**—Last heard from in April, 1927, in Buck Creek, Indiana. Valuable information awaits him. Please write to his mother, Mrs. Minnie Beckman, 606 East Fourteenth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

**ALLEN, MRS. HATTIE.**—My mother. Last heard from in Davenport, Iowa, in 1908. Believed to have relatives in Montecello, Iowa. Please write to your anxious daughter, Mrs. Ouel Boland, R. M. C., Box 243, Rock Island, Illinois.

**NOTICE.**—Would like to hear from old friends and relatives from the New England States and elsewhere. A veteran showman, James Livingston, Lytle Hotel, Warren, Pennsylvania.

**TODD, JESSE PLUMMER.**—Thirty-six years old. Left Newport, Arkansas, in 1924. Information appreciated by his brother, Thomas J. Todd, 417 East Front Street, Muscatine, Iowa.

**TODD, ALEX F.**—Forty-six years old. Last heard from in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1925. Dark hair and left eye out. Information appreciated by his brother, Thomas J. Todd, 417 East Front Street, Muscatine, Iowa.

**CAULMAN, PAUL ELROY, or ALBERT COLEMAN.**—About seventy-two years old. Often worked in hotels as a second cook or dishwasher. A painter. Last heard from in Rearden, Washington, in 1911. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Lillian Cutter, 5915 Sixty-seventh Street, S. E., Portland, Oregon.

**NOTICE.**—Would like to hear from any of those who picked berries on Ferguson's ranch, in Sumner, Washington, in 1924. Eleanor Nelson, 8342 Dibble Avenue, N. W., Seattle, Washington.

**ATTENTION.**—Would like to hear from any who remember me when I served at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Fort Grant, Arizona, in the Fourteenth Cavalry and six years in the Fifth Cavalry, at Fort Huachuca, Arizona; Fort Apache, Arizona; and Fort Wingate, New Mexico, and in Honolulu, from April 10, 1901, to May 17, 1910. Fred A. Morris, Route 1, Box 15, Tucson, Arizona.

**BOYDE, FRANK, BELLE, and children.**—Last heard from in Batavia, Illinois. Please write to your cousin, Adolma S. Knowlen, 2440 Pomeroy Street, Los Angeles, California.

**NOTICE.**—I was born August 12, 1908, and placed in an orphan's home in Houston, Texas. Was adopted in 1907 by Harry and Ida Bradton. Am anxious to find my real parents. Information appreciated by Anna Mae Bradton, 2620 Avenue E, Galveston, Texas.

**CROCKETT, WILL.**—Last heard from five years ago in Arkansas. Please write to your brother, Jim Crockett, 9529 Victoria Avenue, Home Gardens, California.

**BRAUN, MILDRED.**—Formerly of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Last heard from in Orlando, Florida, in 1925. Information appreciated by Fritz, care of this magazine.

**JOHNSON, WYNN.**—Please write to me regardless of where you are or what has happened. Beryl, care of this magazine.

**McINTOSH, SAMUEL J.**—About forty-four years old. Formerly of Jackson, Kentucky. Was in the Philippine Islands with Company C, Twentieth Infantry, in 1903. Last heard from in Presidio, California, in July, 1909. Have not forgotten you. Please write to Irene, care of this magazine.

**JENKINS, LACY.**—About thirty-two years old. Born in Lester, West Virginia. Last heard from at Fort Casey, Washington, where he was with the Eleventh Infantry, in 1921. Information appreciated by his brother, Charles Jenkins, Box 14, Howe, Idaho.

**ROBERT TODD L.**—Please send me a line to let me know that you are all right. Mother Lilley of Jersey City.

**GERBER, JUANITA.**—Twenty-one years old. Black hair and eyes. Formerly of Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by Morris Havens, 2557 San Pablo Street, Oakland, California.

**LITTLE, SILAS.**—Please write to your daughter, Vera Little, R. F. D., Thermal, California.

**CAMPBELL, F. W.**—About fifty-eight years old. Believed to be in Arkansas. Slightly lame. Information appreciated by his son, Ray Campbell, General Delivery, Pampa, Texas.

**OLIVER, SLIM.**—Last seen on the night of August 14, 1918, at Montaucon. I hated to leave you there alone, but I was plucked the next day and never knew your fate. Hope you are alive and well. Information concerning you or any of the seven others appreciated by Jesse Palace, 305 East 175th Street, New York City.

**BROWNIE.**—We miss you and are worried. Please write to Ed and Rose from Woolley, care of this magazine.

**JONES, MASON.**—I love you and trust you. Cannot live without you. Please write to May Jones, care of this magazine.

**FINLEY, BILL.**—Left Lark, Utah, in 1910. Last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Has one brother and three sisters. Mother in Texas. Please write to your brother, Lee Finley, 601 North Street, Sacramento, California.

**ATKINS, CECIL J.**—Do you remember the U. S. S. "Cleveland," Jerome Dean, Sylvia, and Merla? Last heard from in Oregon, in 1924. Please write to your old shipmate, Tex Williams, care of "Billboard," Kansas City, Missouri.

**DAVIS, MRS. RAY.**—Last heard from in Oklahoma, in 1926. Information appreciated by a friend, Billie Allen, Box 301, Emerson, Arkansas.

**CUMMINGS, O. M.**—Forty years old. Scar over one eye and under the other and across left hand. Forefinger on left hand partly taken off. Last heard from a year ago in Canada. Believed to have gone to Alaska. A contractor and in the winter dealt in furs. Wife and six children anxious. Information appreciated by Mrs. O. M. Cummings, Box 2, Vergas, Minnesota.

**FERRIER, WESSIE.**—About thirty-three years old. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, at the Waldorf Apartments, in 1910. Information appreciated by her old friend, Stewart Clay, care of John H. Gregory, 143 Penfield Road, Rochester, New York.

**WARD, GEORGE D.**—I had nothing to do with your separation. Dad and I would like to see you. Netta Baldwin, 2542 East Archer Street, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**STEPHENSON, or STEPPERSON, WIN.**—Formerly lived in Tennessee. Last heard from near Dallas, Texas. Information concerning him or his family appreciated by J. V. W., care of this magazine.

**FOSTER, LEON H.**—Last heard from in Charlotstown, Nevada. Information appreciated by his anxious mother, Mrs. C. C. Foster, Powell Butte, Oregon.

**M. D.**—Please write to your friend of 1927. R. D., care of this magazine.

**STONE, NORMA C.**—Last heard from in 1873, when he was a railroad conductor between Grand Island and North Platte, Nebraska. Information appreciated by Alvin C. Hasty, The Honeystead Farm, Kalona, Iowa.

**DOTY, STEVE W.**—Thirty-one years old. Dark hair and eyes. Last heard from in North Dakota. Information appreciated by his sister, Florence, care of this magazine.

**STOHL, MRS. N. V.**—Last heard from in Denver, Colorado, in October, 1927. My last letter returned. Please write to Brother Frank, 1209 Harrison Street, Missouri. Montana.

**NEWBY, or JOHNSON, BESSIE.**—My mother. Last heard from in July, 1927. Has a five-year-old boy with her who is my son. Information appreciated by Mrs. Edna Crawford, Box 155, Starke, Florida.

**CUNNINGHAM, MORRIS.**—About fifty years old. Formerly of Galway, Ireland. Last heard from in 1905, when he was on the New York police force. Information appreciated by Waller, care of this magazine.

**CURRAN, PATRICK.**—Left Galway, Ireland, about twenty years ago. Believed to be in Panama. Forty years old. Information appreciated by Waller, care of this magazine.

**WHITE, R. W.**—Twenty-nine years old. Left Higgins, Texas, December 16, 1927. I love you and have nothing to live for since you left. If you are not coming back please let me know. Your wife, Mrs. R. W. White, Higgins, Texas.

**MAYNARD, VIOLA, RAYMOND, and MIROS.**—Information appreciated by J. M., care of this magazine.

**BURY, H. H.**—Left Toledo, Ohio, in 1910. Please write to your brother, Pete, 4807 Lee Avenue, Downers Grove, Illinois.

**BUCHANAN, THOS.**—Forty-one years old. Information appreciated by Mrs. Alice Buchanan, 14 South Jardin Street, Shenandale, Pennsylvania.

**FIELD, ZYLPHA, PEARL, and JOHN.**—Children of R. O. and Dora Leonard Field of Coryell County, Texas. Moved to the State of Washington in 1889. Please write to your uncle, R. L. Leonard, R. F. D. 1, Osage, Texas.

**HETHCOAT, JAMES WILSON.**—Formerly of Austin, Texas. Information concerning him or his relatives appreciated by B. B. S., 629 Third Avenue, Dallas, Texas.

**NANGLE, JOHN GAMBLE.**—Lived at 325 East Fourteenth Street, North, Portland, Oregon, three years ago. Information appreciated by Tom Thompson, 52 Church Street, Flemington, Victoria, Australia.

**GOSKIE.**—Would like to hear from any one who has this name. Mrs. John Goskie, 312 Convent Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

**NOTICE.**—On March 15, 1907, a baby girl with red hair and blue eyes was left at Judge Paris' Nursery, Brownwood, Tennessee, and was taken away on August 3, 1907. Information concerning this child appreciated by Jesse C. Purvis, Box 141, Paris, Tennessee.

**COLLINS, FAY.**—Formerly a captain in the cavalry at Fort Bliss, Texas. Information regarding him appreciated by J. C. Tombaugh, R. D. 2, Eighty-four, Pennsylvania.

**DUNKIN, DAVID B.**—Sixty years old. Crippled in right leg. A carpenter. Last heard from at Medford, Oregon, in December, 1927. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ed. Malone, Hamilton, Montana.

**SCHAFER, MRS. ESTHER,** nee TYLER.—My mother, last heard from in Detroit, twelve years ago. Information appreciated by her daughter, Caroline Schafer, 6018 Bormaine Street, Hollywood, California.

**SKIPWORTH, JAMES EARL.**—Last heard from in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1925. Please write to your old pal, Leo Miller, Company H, Twenty-second Infantry, Fort McPherson, Georgia.

**PRATT, GLADYS ELIZABETH.**—About twenty-seven years old. Believed to be married. Formerly of Lexington Street, Charleston, Massachusetts. Last heard from in Quincy, Massachusetts. Information appreciated by W. T. N., care of this magazine.

**LYDA, ROSE.**—Went to school with her near Centralia, Washington. Last heard from in Olympia, Washington. Believed to be in Seattle, Washington. Information appreciated by Mrs. Ruby Moore, 216 Magnolia Street, Bellingham, Washington.

**CAPE, REGINALD.**—Forty-five years old. Formerly of California. Information appreciated by Margaret, care of this magazine.

**BANKERT, JOHN.**—Was in Baldy, New Mexico, in winter and spring of 1926 and 1927. Please write to your friend, Walker B. Tyler, Box 703, Hawarden, Iowa.

**SCOTT, LIZZIE MAY.**—Believed to be in California. Please come home or write to your lonely sister, Mrs. Alice Scott Hawkins, Route 2, Jackson, Michigan.

**CAMPBELL, ROBERT, JOHNNIE, and JIMMIE.**—Last seen when they left for the World War. Information appreciated by their mother, Mrs. Mary Campbell, care of J. B. Coleman, Route 2, Rockingham, North Carolina.

**CLAW, JACK.**—Left home in May, 1927. Information appreciated by his worried mother, Mrs. Laura Mizer, 627 North Robinson Street, Springfield, Missouri.

**COCHRAN, CHARLES ROBERT.**—Twenty-five years old. Dead in one ear. Left home August 15, 1926. Last heard from at the fair in Lancaster, Ohio, in the fall of 1926, when he was with a traveling show. Information appreciated by his widowed mother, Mrs. Maude Cochran, 81 Jefferson Street, Newark, Ohio.

**MEERS, BERTHA and IRA J.**—They were adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Foster of Memphis, Tennessee, in March, 1907. They would be twenty-four and twenty-two years old, respectively. Information appreciated by their broken-hearted mother, Mrs. Dora Lonsford, Leadville, Arkansas.

**GRAHAM, WONEMA or DEAN.**—Seventeen years old. Last heard from in 1921, when she was living with her father, Jesse Graham, at Nevada, Missouri. Information appreciated by her mother, Mrs. Nellie M. Graham, 8790 South Broadway, Los Angeles, California.

**DURFORD, JAMES L.**—Last heard from in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1927. Sad news about little Hazel. She never forgot you. Am heartbroken. Please write to Hazel Durford, 1427 East Jefferson Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

**HUGGINS, ERNEST.**—Was with A Battery, First Field Artillery, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Please write to Floyd Parsons, Route 21, Parkersburg, West Virginia.

**HEIDEN, GEORGE and ASA.**—Formerly of Iowa. Were with A Battery, First Field Artillery, Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Please write to Floyd Parsons, Route 21, Parkersburg, West Virginia.

**TITUS, H. C.**—Formerly of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Believed to be in Baltimore, Maryland. Information appreciated by an old friend, F. J. L., care of this magazine.

**JACKSON, ROBERT.**—Colored. Forty-eight years old. Last heard from in Detroit, Michigan, about twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by A. L. Jackson, 2180 East Ninety-third Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

**BOWYER, JOHN.**—About fifty years old. Left Sunninghill, Berkshires, England, about thirty-five years ago. Lived near Cowansville, Quebec, on a farm, for some time, then went to Texas and Massachusetts. Believed to be in Canada or the United States. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Christian Collis, Dryden, Ontario, Canada.

**JACKSON, RAYMOND.**—Colored. Formerly of Oklahoma. Last heard from in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Have valuable information for him. W. J. Ryan, Holdenville, Oklahoma.

**ADAMSKI, KAZMERE.**—Sixteen years old. Five feet nine inches tall. Brown eyes, and olive complexion. Has a scar on the back of his head. Left home January 25, 1928. Always wanted to go to Arizona, Texas, or California. Information appreciated by his worried mother, Mrs. Charles Adamski, 16 West Ridge Street, Nanticoke, Pennsylvania.

**MADISON, NELS P.**—Of Moline, Illinois. Do you remember Fannie of Oklahoma City? I still think of you and would like to hear from you. Please write to M. F. W., care of this magazine.

**SPRINGER, LEO.**—Last heard from in Galesburg, Illinois. Please write to your old buddy, Paul Larson, care U. S. A. "New Mexico," care Postmaster, San Francisco, California.

**LYNCH, JIMMY.**—E. and I have separated. Big D. is to be married soon. Little D. and I will be alone. I need you. Remember your promise of four feet on a fender? Please write to Maude, care of this magazine.

**KOON, THOMAS HILL.**—Left his home in Hallsville, Texas, in July, 1927. Last heard from in Childress, Texas. Information appreciated by his mother and brother, B. C. Koon, Box 1718, Westwood, California.

**MARTESEN, MARTIN.**—Seventy years old. Thick gray hair. Last heard from in Sulphur Springs, Florida. Information appreciated by Jack Carstensen, care Carstensen Ranch, Phillip, South Dakota.

**NELSON, EDGAR, and MRS. D. D.**—Last heard from in New York City, in 1913. Information appreciated by Mary News, 953 West Forty-fifth Street, Los Angeles, California.

**BURRELL, WILLIAM.**—Formerly of Ogdensburg, New York. Worked for the Great Lakes Dock and Dredge Co., at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1918. Please write to an old friend, Culver E., care of this magazine.

**MADISON, EDWARD.**—Worked for the Great Lakes Dock and Dredge Co., on Dredge 2. Spent his winters in Cleveland, Ohio. Information appreciated by an old buddy, Culver E., care of this magazine.

**LIRETTE, PETER.**—Last heard from in Glasgow, Scotland. Was a corporal with the Canadian army in the World War. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Alice Lirette Arms, Penley Hill, Mexico, Maine.

**MILLER, GORDON.**—Twenty-one years old. Left home with his father when a small child. Last heard from in Bland, Missouri. His mother, brother, and two sisters are anxious to hear from him. Please write to Mrs. Mellie Louden, R. R. 1, Granite City, Illinois.

**EVERETTE D.**—Am heartbroken since you left. Please write to Elizabeth E., care of this magazine.

**DUSTER, or STALLSWORTH, JOHN.**—Twenty-two years old. Last heard from in Oroville, California, in 1922. Your mother will come to you wherever you are. Please write to your cousin, Mrs. Frank Campbell, Kingsdown, Kansas.

**L. I. E.**—Who advertised for G. L. E. We are holding important letters for you at this office. Please send your address.

**BUNN, MYRTLE HELEN.**—Answered your ad, but letter returned. Yearning for you. Please send correct address to Mother, care of this magazine.

**WALTER, ROSIE.**—Thirteen years old. Come home if you wish. We do not blame you. Please write to your worried mother, Mrs. Ada Walter, Box 152, Edwardsville, Illinois.

**WATTS, EARL.**—Last heard from nineteen years ago. Thirty-nine years old. His father, R. B., is not well and would like to hear from him. Information appreciated by his half sister, Mrs. Maud McNutt, care of this magazine.

**REMES, THEODORE.**—Was a cigarmaker in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1914. Died in Boston. A daughter by his first marriage is anxious to hear from any of the children by his second marriage. Address, Sister Marie Thomas, Dixon Hotel, Jackson, Michigan.



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**SPEARMINT**  
THE PERFECT GUM  
MINT LEAF FLAVOR

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**3 SHIRTS FREE** and \$7.00 an hour. New plan. Amazing Values. Fashion Wear Shirts, Dept. 52, Cincinnati, Ohio.

**YOUR OWN BUSINESS!** \$100 weekly cure. Novel Suction Ash Receiver. Sells on sight. Used in auto, home, office. Quick sales. Send for details, or 30c. for attractive sample with four selling plans. Gordon Co., 110 E. 23rd St., Dept. CT-880, New York.

## Help Wanted—Female

**HOMEWORK:** Women wanting obtain reliable funds write for information. Enclose stamp. Eller Co., 296-T Broadway, New York.

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## Help Wanted—Instructions

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**FOREST RANGER POSITIONS** pay \$125-\$200 month; nice cabin. Hunt, trap, patrol. Get free list Nat'l Forests immediately. Rayson Insd., Dept. A-10, Denver, Colo.

**LET MR. OZMENT HELP YOU GET A Government Job.** \$95-\$250 month. Write, Ogment Instruction Bureau, 308, St. Louis, Mo.

## Help Wanted—Male

**FOREIGN POSITIONS—Men** interested working beautiful, sunny South America write South American Service Bureau, 11,600 Aboua, Detroit, Mich.

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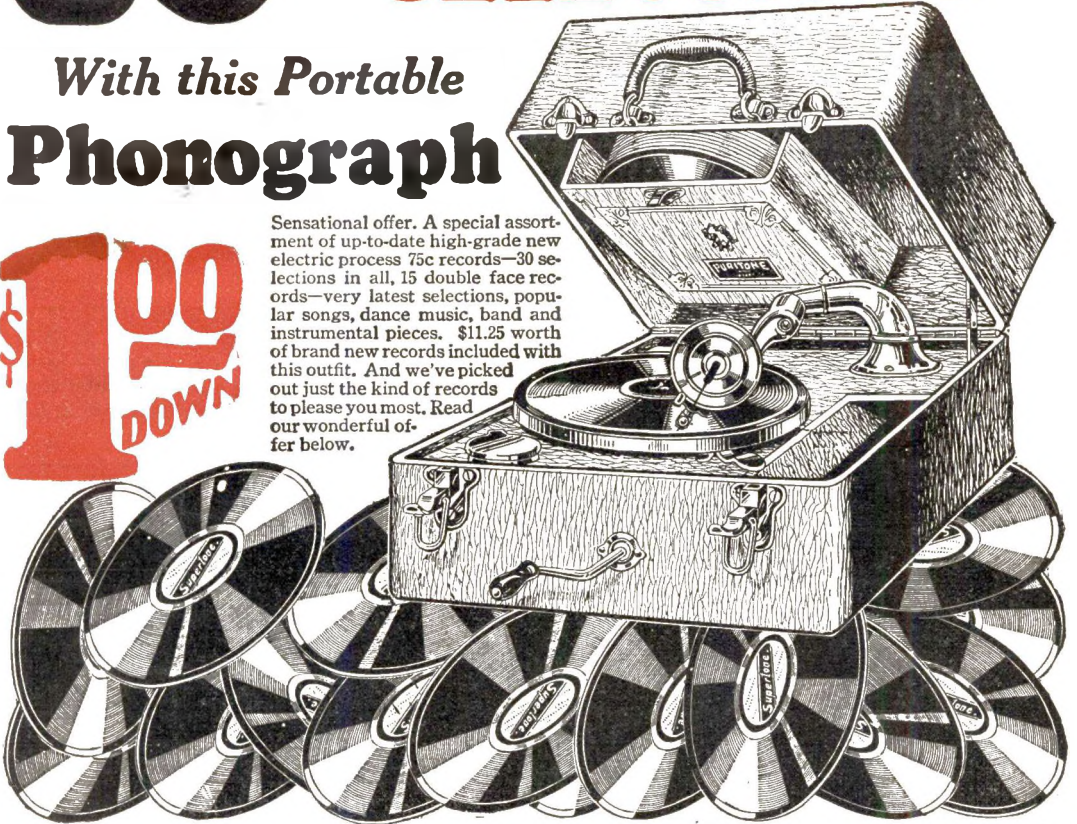


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**This Portable Phonograph** plays any make of 10-inch disc records including Edison and plays two ten-inch records with one winding. Weighs only 17 pounds. Comes in waterproof imitation leather case with hinged lid, closes up like a small suitcase with snap locks and carrying handle (see illustration.) Measures 14½ x 7½ inches. Records are placed inside of lid and secured so they will not rattle or break. Holds 15 records. Has quiet spring motor, tone arm and reproducer with indestructible diaphragm and wide throat for full sound volume. Reproducer is reversible for Edison records. Outfit includes 15 double face 75c New Electric Process records—30 selections. A complete record library without buying a single one! Shpg. weight, packed about 25 lbs.

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**Straus & Schram, Dept. 3985 Chicago, Ill.**

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Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strength—from any drug or department store and a few applications should show you how easy it is to rid yourself of the homely freckles and get a beautiful complexion. Barely is more than one ounce needed for the worst cases.

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If you, or any member of your family have the slightest evidence of dandruff, we urge you to try this treatment, which has benefited thousands:—

Simply douse Listerine, full strength, on the hair. Vigorously massage the scalp forward, backward, up and down. Keep up this treatment systematically for several days, using

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