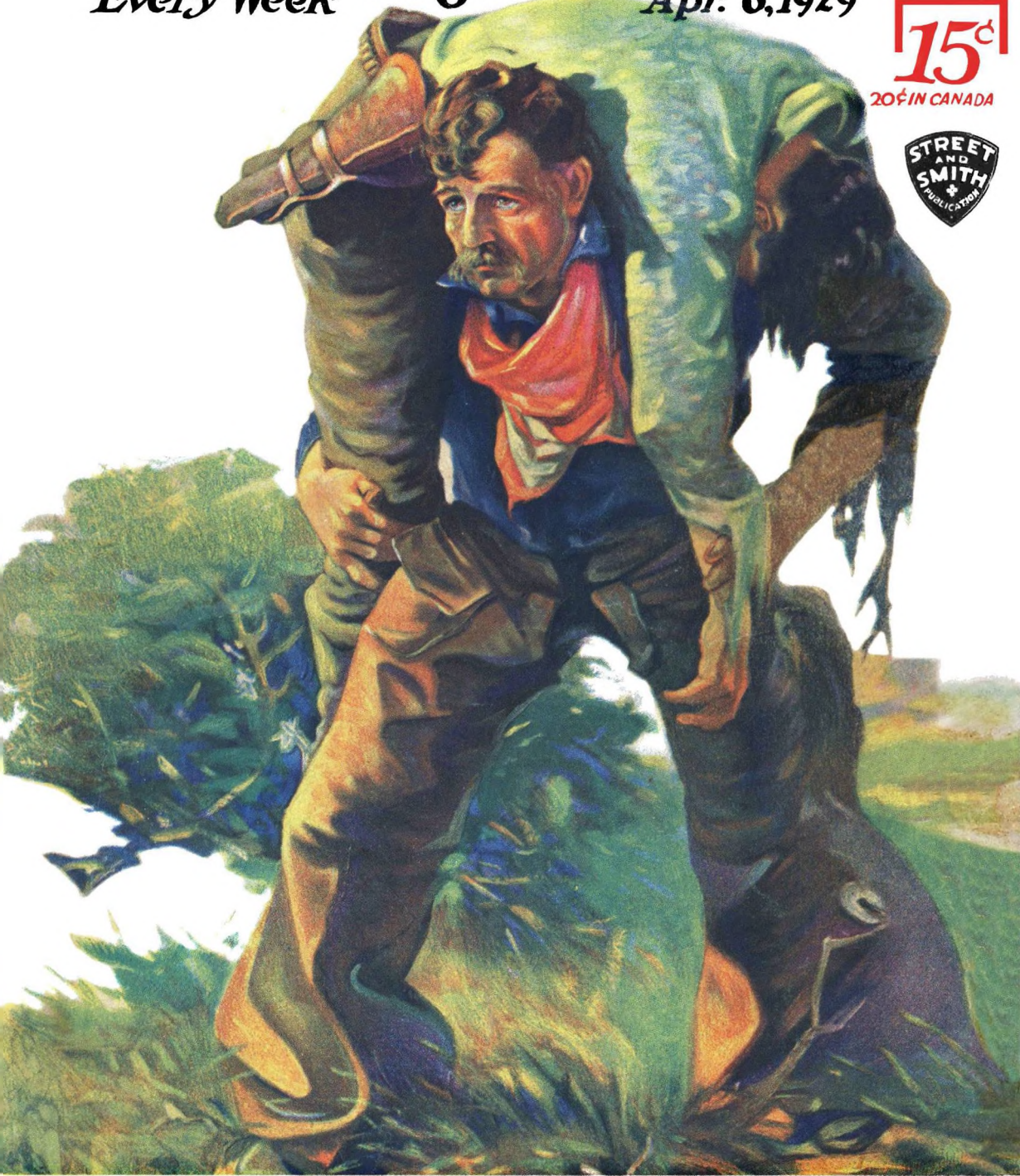


Western Story

Every Week Magazine Apr. 6, 1929

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Vol. LXXXV

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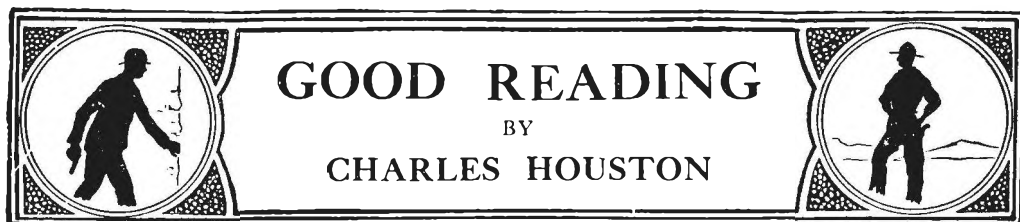
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"Colorless"—that served to describe Carleton adequately. "The trouble with Carleton," said one of his executives, "is that he has no imagination, no fire. He can't seem to grasp situations. If he would ever let his mind play around a bit, you might see something."

And then Carleton fell ill, and one day in the long convalescence which followed, a friend brought in a book. For the first time in his life, Carleton let his mind play.

It's an old-enough saying, but it's still eternally true—that about all work and no play and the dullness of Jack. And it's as true of mental dullness as of physical.

Carleton made this discovery. He discovered that reading can be downright fun. Hitherto, he had read to some "purpose." Technical books, "success" books, books that had for their objects the making of more money—all very good in their way. But now he was finding that they were not enough.

It was a plain case of malnutrition of imagination. His fancy had been

starved. Fiction was a diet as essential to the rounding out of the man as calories and vitamins.

Carleton read fiction and more fiction. He exulted in his release from the humdrum world. He came out of the hospital a very different sort of Carleton.

No, I'm not going to tell you that by reading good fiction, you will immediately get to be president of the company. That didn't happen to Carleton. It doesn't happen in real life. And this is a true story.

All I want to do is to point out that in Carleton's case—as in the case of so many others who have gone on and up—the exercise of the imagination which follows the reading of fiction was mighty beneficial.

After such an exercise, one comes back to the job mentally set up. For a little while, fancy has been foot-free and there has been a fascinating holiday for the mind amidst the most thrilling surroundings.

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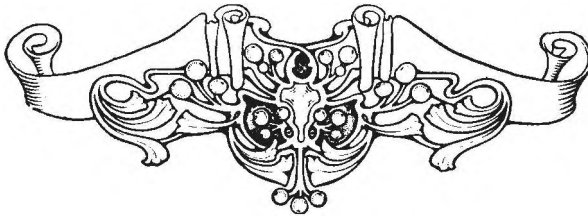


WHITE WOLF'S LAW, a Western Story, by Hal Dunning. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

Mr. Dunning's loyal army of readers took so kindly to his hard-hitting story about Jim-twin Allen in "The Outlaw Sheriff" that the author has practically written this "by request." And incidentally this follow-up of the doings of that remarkable character has all the fire of the original yarn.

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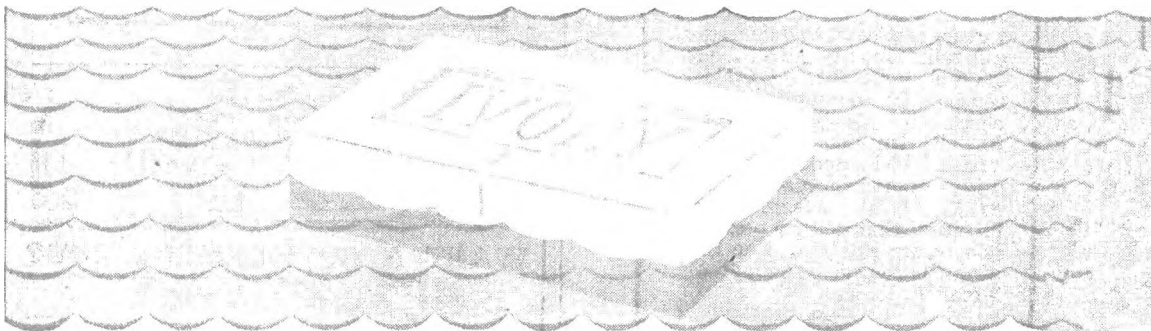
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APRIL 6, 1929

No. 6



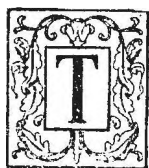
T Bone's Treasure

by Robert Ormond Case

Author of "Tamed by Dynamite," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AN EMPIRE BUILDER.



THE career of Peter Mar, empire builder, formed a stirring paragraph on a crowded page of frontier history.

Seeking free range, he came North from California before the Piute War, bringing with him three hundred cattle, a saddle string, boundless ambition, and a trusted buckaroo, "T Bone." After passing Stein Mountain, in the Oregon range country, Peter Mar paused on a high ridge that commanded a view of Blitzen Valley, and

while the cattle browsed among the twisted underbrush that clothed the slope, he rolled many cigarettes as he contemplated the scene below. Finally he turned to the gaunt, silent buckaroo at his side.

"Look 'er over, T Bone," he said, quietly. "That's my valley."

Blitzen was twenty-five miles long by ten miles in width. A tule lake extending like a fat, glistening serpent along its middle was bordered by marshes, and these marshes, in turn, were flanked by a vast sweep of natural meadow that reached to the foothills. They made camp that night beside the outlet of the lake, a small stream slid-

ing over smooth boulders and flanked by buck brush.

Twenty years later, on the meadow and slope that surrounded this first camp ground spread the vast buildings and corrals of the Mar Ranch, greatest cattle barony of the Northwest. One hundred and sixty thousand acres of valley land was under fence—the whole of Blitzen. The range controlled by this prodigious unit was measured in square miles. Eighty thousand cattle bore the Mar brand; and after the fall round-up when the prime stuff had been shipped to market and the vast herds were wintering in the valley, there were foregathered at the ranch headquarters more than fourscore buckaroos, wranglers, and fence riders. On this huge pay roll—referred to genially for two hundred miles in all directions as “Mar’s Army”—was T Bone. He was not a general in the army; he held no position of command; but he took orders from no one but Peter Mar. Where the empire builder rode, he rode; when there was danger to be faced, T Bone was at his side.

What species of attachment existed between the pair was a mystery. They were not intellectual equals. Peter Mar, small of stature, was a mental giant of boundless ambition, breadth of vision, and of limitless determination. T Bone was of single-track mind, elemental in code and outlook. Yet in moments of stress, when crises arose on the empire, Peter Mar turned for counsel to T Bone. They would ride alone, Peter Mar talking, T Bone listening, saying nothing. It is doubtful whether T Bone could follow the intricacies of the discourse; it is equally open to question that Peter Mar expected, on these occasions, anything from the gaunt buckaroo but the dictates of an unerring “hunch”; but when the two courses of action had been outlined and the empire builder would turn deep-set, tolerant eyes upon the other and question,

smilingly, “Which trail, T Bone?” the gaunt one would reply without hesitation: “This a way, Boss.”

When the trail of the renegade Piutes led toward Blitzen, T Bone was one of the seventeen picked men who rode with Peter Mar to the pass, where history was written during a lurid guerilla campaign. It was T Bone’s rifle that silenced a flanking renegade on the high rim rock whose first bullet had shattered Peter Mar’s shoulder. It was Peter Mar’s splendid horse that carried double when T Bone’s mount was down; and after the last rifle shot had reëchoed into silence that sweltering afternoon, after the renegades, beaten back, had swung west and north away from Blitzen, when the victors reassembled, and counted their dead, wounded, and missing, it was found that only seven of the seventeen were on their feet.

This number of survivors was swelled to nine that night when T Bone appeared, striding through the gloom with the unconscious form of Peter Mar slung across his shoulder. The gaunt one would tell nothing of what had transpired; Peter Mar, recovering, could remember nothing; but from Piute chiefs, when the trail of uprising came to naught in the far-off Idahos, the story came filtering back—of a lone white man, in the battle at Blitzen on foot and burdened with a wounded comrade, making a desperate stand in the rimrock before which all the cunning of the copper-hued marksmen availed nothing.

There were tragedies in Peter Mar’s life that only T Bone knew. Coming North from California in his eager youth, with frontier worlds to be conquered, the empire builder had left a wife behind him. She was not of the pioneer breed, and had refused to brave the Oregon wilds in search of new range and new opportunity. But T Bone knew toward what dream Peter Mar was building in those first lonely

years in Blitzen. Together, they marked out the foundations for a range mansion on the southern slopes; together, they watched it grow. With his own hands T Bone planted the California poplars that in later years pointed spirelike toward the sky. When Peter Mar went South to bring his wife to the home he had prepared for her, it was the only time in their association that the gaunt one did not accompany him.

T Bone met him when he returned alone. Together, they boarded up the windows and placed padlocks upon the doors. No one dared to question the empire builder as to why the great house stood unused from that day forth, the dust gathering on the massive furniture in the silent rooms, the pack rats scurrying through the darkened halls, and knowing its futility no one thought to question T Bone.

T Bone was, in short, from the rise to the fall of the empire, over a period of twenty-six years, Peter Mar's first and last buckaroo. For when the builder died and human vultures swooped upon the crumbling domain; when the mighty herds had dissipated, the army had disbanded, and the great buildings and corrals of the home ranch loomed empty and deserted, T Bone stayed on.

A clause in Peter Mar's will bequeathed T Bone a life lease in his cabin near the vast, empty house. In a further attempt to safeguard the welfare of his faithful and now aged retainer, the will stipulated that after certain property administrations had been made, a trust fund should be created whose proceeds should keep T Bone in the few simple comforts he required until his death. But sardonic fate, carrying out the ancient dogma that those who share the labors of the great may not reap the rewards, decreed that crafty attorneys should find ways to avoid the stipulations of the trust-fund clause. They could not eject him from

the premises, for the life lease was specific; but when the mighty assets of the empire were distributed among the vultures, and to the lady in far-off California who had refused to share the labors and dangers of the empire builder, T Bone, grown old, was cut off without recourse or resource save the privilege of occupying the tiny cabin in the shadow of the spirelike poplars.

If there was injustice in these proceedings, T Bone was not aware of it. He lived in the past. His interest in life—those things that caused others to toil and sweat, dream dreams, pursue profitless ambitions—had ceased with the passing of Peter Mar. His cabin was comfortable and warm. In the vastness and emptiness of the empire headquarters, among the great buildings and far-flung corrals whose stout palings were slowly bowing to time and decay, he kept a garden plot irrigated and green. This plot kept him in vegetables. There were a few maverick remnants of the mighty herd still in the hills; and these supplied him with meat. As a magnificent gesture, the city corporation that had purchased the lands of the empire allowed him a small remittance per month as caretaker of the deserted premises. This kept T Bone in his few extra necessities of clothing and food. Once a month he saddled his black colt and rode to Somerange, three miles distant across a corner of a valley field, to receive this remittance and purchase supplies.

There were old-timers of the region, persons of land and substance who had built up their holdings through the vision of Peter Mar, who were troubled when they spoke among themselves of T Bone. They would gladly have placed the aged buckaroo on a pension, taken him into their own homes, or done whatever was necessary to insure the comfort of his declining years. But T Bone did not know this. When they had

broached the subject to him diffidently, as such subjects must be broached to those who have led assaults upon the wilderness and ridden free range, he had shaken his head without comprehension. He belonged on the empire. It was more than a simple, childlike faith that blinded him to the facts of existence; it was more than a creed; it was as though, in so far as his dim thought processes centered on his own problems, throughout his life he had known no other bulwark than Peter Mar, and even in death the empire builder would see him through.

Thus he lived on among the ruins, which were no ruins, but peopled with the imagery of his dreams. It was not a ghostly solitude of sagging barn and weather-beaten corral through which he moved, but the roaring headquarters of the ancient empire. Buckaroo called to buckaroo across the sagging chutes; cattle milled in the empty corrals; and in the great breaking pens, long since abandoned, wild horses of the rough string pitched and squealed.

T Bone had his horse, his garden plot, his cabin, and his dreams. He also had another treasure. It hung on the wall where the light was brightest through the long days and where the bracket lamp could shine upon it in the long evenings. It was a crayon portrait of Peter Mar. As the only existing likeness of the empire builder, the estate had sought to claim it. But T Bone had refused to give it up, and since among administrators and heirs there was no sentiment involved, he had been allowed to keep it.

Somehow, from the ancient tintype, the artist, in making the enlargement, had caught with startling exactness the sad, whimsical, penetrating, kindly expression that was a characteristic of the deep-set eyes of Peter Mar. This was conceded by the few old-timers who had seen T Bone's jealously guarded treasure. But to T Bone it was more than

a likeness. It was almost as though Peter Mar himself looked down from the wall upon him—tolerantly, compassionately, soothing his fears, apprehensions, and vague troubled wonderings, with a glance, as of old.

When, on occasion, his dreams failed; when the sky was overcast and distant boards rattled hollowly to the northeast wind; when he saw himself, in a flash of dim and terrible understanding, moving, insectlike, through a vast and crumbling solitude, T Bone would flee, trembling, to the cabin. There, with four walls about him, he would sit in his rawhide, upholstered chair, puffing at his pipe, his face upturned to the portrait on the wall, and his trembling would cease. Untroubled, confident, and serene, those unchanging eyes looked down upon him. Almost, as his dreams strengthened again about him, he could hear the voice of the empire builder, tolerant, compassionate, reassuring: "Tired, cowboy? Afraid? Grown old? Well, well, T Bone——"

CHAPTER II.

THE CITY DUDE.

ON an autumn day when withered leaves were whipping by, and tumbleweeds marched like a ghostly army before the eternal wind, T Bone, looking out across the flats, saw a buckboard approaching from the direction of Somerange.

He studied the distant equipment with a vague curiosity. Visitors were rare at the ranch headquarters. There had been none since three weeks past, when a representative of a corporation had arrived to make a brief survey of the ancient buildings, to determine their salvage value.

Two persons were in the vehicle, one gaunt and high-shouldered; the other more bulky. He recognized the team now. Buckskins from the Barnett livery stable in Burns, the county seat.

The driver then, the gaunt one with the sombrero, must be "Slim" Harris, son of a pioneer beyond the Narrows. The other was a city man, with a black derby, and a black, fur-lapeled greatcoat buttoned closely around his throat.

As the equipment rolled to a stop in the semicircle before the ancient blacksmith shop, T Bone stepped forth from the towering poplars. Slim, the driver, nodded a genial greeting as he dismounted. Groaning, the stranger alighted stiffly, swinging his arms to restore the circulation. He was a round-featured man, with a silken mustache, an expansive smile, and keen, piercing eyes set rather too closely together beneath heavy-lensed glasses.

"T Bone," said Slim. "This here is Hollingshead. Mister Hollingshead," he corrected himself, somewhat dryly. "From California. He had me drive him out here to——"

"To look over this immense ranch," cut in Hollingshead. He smiled, revealing teeth in which many gold fillings gleamed, drew off his glove, and extended a white, soft hand. "Greetings, T Bone. I hope you won't object to showing me over the premises. I'll make it worth your while, of course. Gad, what a place! Frontier atmosphere, what? Fairly reeks of it, by Jove!"

T Bone shook the proffered hand briefly.

"Heard about the ranch clean down to Californy, huh?" he queried in a mild voice, rubbing his calloused palm on his faded overalls.

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed," responded Hollingshead. "I used to know Mrs. Mar quite well. Peter Mar's widow, you know. Belonged to the same set in Frisco. Her taste and Mar's didn't run along the same lines, of course. She preferred to remain in the South. Can't say that I blame her, at that. Interesting region, of course. But depressing as a regular diet. Personally,

I'm a sort of a globe-trotter. Like to poke about a bit in odd places off the beaten highways. But come!" he snapped his fingers. "Let's look around, eh?"

T Bone turned his faded eyes on Slim, who grimaced meaningly behind the stranger's back. It was obvious that in the trip from the Narrows the down-right youth had acquired an active dislike for the voluble one. But T Bone, who had lived long and seen much, merely nodded passively in answer to the stranger's impatience, and turned away.

In the lead, with the stranger at his elbow, and Slim sauntering in the rear, the aged buckaroo seemed stooped, almost frail in physique. He slouched forward, gnarled hands hanging loosely, and much daylight showed between his knees. The stranger studied him with a guarded but narrow appraisal as they proceeded. T Bone, aware of this and somewhat ill at ease, hunched his shoulders sheepishly.

"Well," he said, clearing his throat. "There she lays. This here was the cook house. And in them shacks from there to yonder was where the crew bunked."

"Wait," cut in Hollingshead. "How big was this farm, anyway?"

"The ranch?" said T Bone vaguely. "Oh, a couple of hundred sections under fence, I reckon."

"Immense! Immense," breathed the other. "That man Mar was a genius, eh? It doesn't seem reasonable he could have created so much in a lifetime. What did the country look like when he came here?"

"Nothing," said T Bone. "When we come here, there was nothing but bunch grass and tules on the flats bordering the lake."

"Lake? I didn't see any lake."

"He drained it," explained T Bone. "Built a canal sixteen miles long. Took him four years, and cost him eighty

thousand dollars. But it fetched in another hundred sections of bottom land. Coming across the flats, you passed the canal, under that there bridge."

"That river?" breathed the other. "Immense. Simply immense."

From his pocket, T Bone drew forth the makings, and rolled a cigarette with slow, unhurried motions.

"Over yonder," he indicated, "are the cutting-out pens and corrals. If you crave to give it a look, you can climb up on that chute. Forty acres of 'em. Clean over to them willows."

"I'll take your word for it," said the other. "Forty acres? Wonderful!"

"And this here," said T Bone, "is one of the main feed barns. Biggest one in the county. Hundred and eighty feet long. We hauled them logs from up on Stein Mountain."

"Wonderful!" chortled Hollingshead. "And what's that round building yonder?"

"That's an inside breaking pen." A mild spark of interest shone in T Bone's faded eyes. "We'll give it a look. They was four-five hundred horses in the remuda. So, all winter long, when they wasn't much for the hands to do but hay the critters in the flats, the wranglers worked over the rough string."

The great doors swung outward, creaking. The three men stepped into a circular arena beneath a vaulted roof. The high shadows were gloomy here in late afternoon. Pale streamers of sunlight angled down into the ancient dust. Great posts loomed shoulder-to-shoulder about the circle; and from the tops of these posts platforms extended back to the walls, forming a kind of primitive gallery.

Slim, who was of the range country, could well imagine the elemental conflicts that had raged within these pillared walls in days gone by. To T Bone, its impressiveness was that of an amphitheater. He himself, as a gladiator, had stirred the echoes of this

arena, tasted its bitter dust when the outlaws screamed; squatted, grinning, in the crowded gallery as other reckless, seasoned youths had matched their strength and pride against the untamed demons of the rough string.

The stranger sniffed, and stirred the dust with a fastidious toe.

"Kind of musty, what? A gloomy hole. Why are those posts so scarred and splintered?"

"Well," said T Bone, "some of them hosses was pretty wild. They kind of chewed things up."

"Imagine!" the stranger shuddered. "I wouldn't fancy getting too close to brutes like that. Mighty interesting." He turned away restlessly, rubbing his hands. "Very. But let us proceed, eh? Gad, the ramifications of this ranch; A colossal project. What a dreamer Mar was! What a builder! A monument should be raised to him. His memory should be perpetuated——"

"Speakin' of hosses," said Slim. "How's yore colt comin', T Bone?"

"Fine," said T Bone. A slow grin wrinkled his deeply scored features. Momentarily, his faded eyes lighted. "There's a reg'lar colt. We'll give him the once-over. He's loafin' in that shed yonder, out of the wind."

"Not now," the stranger demurred. "If you don't mind, T Bone, let's hurry on. Horses are interesting, of course but——"

"We're goin' right by the critter," said Slim bluntly. "There he is now. Son of a gun, T Bone, that colt's filled out some since I seen him last! Got him gentled, huh? Is he as smart as ol' Black Comet? And as fast?"

"Dang near as smart," T Bone nodded complacently. "Dang near as fast. Not quite."

In the lee of the shed the black horse loomed like a statuesque, molded fragment of glistening shadow. His head was upflung toward them; his sensitive nostrils quivered. Sinuous, yet muscu-

lar, he was a specimen of horseflesh for connoisseurs to appraise with envy. He was of utter black, save for one white stocking.

"He ain't quite so heavy," said T Bone, "but his stride's dang near the same. He's got plenty of heart, too, and——"

"Pardon," interrupted the stranger, buttoning his greatcoat closer about him and flailing his arms. "Let's go. It's getting late." He scowled meaningly at Slim. "There is a matter of more importance ahead of us than this lengthy and unprofitable discussion."

"That colt," said Slim pointedly, as they turned away, "comes down direct from Black Comet, which was Peter Mar's particular an' unbeatable saddle hoss."

"So?" said the stranger with belated interest. "I didn't understand that. Wasn't this Black Comet the horse that Mar rode when he saved you from the Piutes?"

T Bone nodded briefly, eying the other with a species of guarded puzzlement.

"The Boss rode him for ten years," he said. "Now, over yonder where you see that heavy corral was the bull pens. An' them low-hung sheds by the swale was for the hawks——"

It had been apparent from the beginning, even to T Bone's sluggish sensibilities, that the stranger's interest in the affairs of the empire was synthetic and studied. The aged buckaroo was vaguely troubled by this knowledge. What had brought this plump, self-assured city man so far off the beaten trail? It was a long way from California. It was a long ride from Burns in the jolting buckboard, a two-day trip. That he was conversant with the history of the ranch and the facts of Peter Mar's life was also apparent. It seemed, almost, that the stranger had undertaken a tour of the ranch headquarters merely for the purpose of ingratiating himself in his, T Bone's, esteem. He

had lauded Peter Mar highly, knowing that he praised another's hero, but for what purpose?

T Bone did not ponder long over this problem. The stranger's point of view was a matter of indifference to him. He was not of his world. He only wished, somewhat vaguely, that the other would speedily satisfy whatever species of curiosity had brought him to the empire, and be on his way. He felt uncomfortable in his presence, as in the presence of something alien to his understanding.

Thus it was with a feeling akin to relief that he obeyed the stranger's gesture, and turned back toward the circle of poplars.

"I've seen enough," Hollingshead explained, "to convince me that one could spend days here exploring this fascinating establishment. But I must be on my way. T Bone, old fellow, this chap Mar was considerable of a man, wasn't he?"

"Mr. Mar," said T Bone, "was one good man."

It was the first time his passive voice had revealed even a suggestion of vague irritation, and the stranger eyed him somewhat doubtfully. Slim, watching, grinned behind his hand.

Arriving at the buckboard, the stranger evinced no hurry to depart. T Bone waited, saying nothing. Slim's sardonic gaze was fixed on his employer. Hollingshead turned up his coat collar, drew on his gloves, pulled them off again, and thrust his hand deep into his pocket. With T Bone's mild eyes upon him, he turned his back to the wind, and shivered.

"Gad, it's cold!" he announced. "It'll be colder yet after sundown. It'll be hours before we get back to the Narrows. That's where we stop to-night, eh, Slim? It would be pleasant if we warmed up a bit before we started."

"You can come into the shack for a spell," offered T Bone. "I'll throw some

wood on the fire. It's a mite nippy, at that."

The stranger agreed readily to this suggestion, beaming.

"We'll accept your hospitality, T Bone, old fellow," he chuckled, beaming. "Slim, fetch my hand bag with you, like a good lad."

CHAPTER III.

THE CONVIVIAL GESTURE.

THE cabin was well-lighted and comfortable after a crude fashion. A low bunk was built against the wall. There was a heavy table and some rough chairs. A bear-skin rug was on the floor. A rifle hung in a suspended scabbard, and an ancient, but spotless six-shooter in a worn holster.

The shadows that follow sundown were gathering, so T Bone lighted the oil lamp on the wall before he methodically but swiftly kindled a fire in the pot-bellied heater. The stranger, meanwhile, moved curiously about the establishment, examining objects with unabashed interest. He had thrown aside his greatcoat upon entering. From his breast pocket he had extracted a choice perfecto, which he had unwrapped and placed between his teeth. With this cigar tilted at a rakish angle, hands in pockets, he now stood before a crayon portrait hanging on the wall. It was of a somewhat frail gentleman, dark of hair and drooping mustache, with deep-set, kindly eyes and a square, unyielding jaw.

T Bone, stooping over the heater, was aware of the stranger's scrutiny.

"Sit down," he invited, "sit down an' make yoreself to home."

"This is it, eh?" queried Hollingshead genially, jerking a thumb toward the portrait.

"This is what?" said the old buckaroo.

"The only existing likeness of Peter Mar?"

"I reckon," said T Bone. "Drag up a chair, mister. We'll have some heat here pronto."

Hollingshead drew up a chair and seated himself, pink palms outspread toward the heater. The aged buckaroo was already in his rawhide, upholstered rocker, and with an unconscious movement born of long habit, his gnarled hand reached for pipe and tobacco pouch upon the window sill. Slim entered at this point, bearing a bulging, black, hand bag. This he deposited beside the stranger's chair, and moved into the corner behind the stove, where he leaned against the wall and drew forth the makings.

"T Bone, old fellow," said Hollingshead, mouthing his cigar, "I know considerable about you, and this ranch, and this chap Mar. I'm a bit of a sleuth, you know, along lines that interest me. I made a point of it to acquire a lot of data on this whole situation long before I arrived here to-day."

"I could see that," T Bone nodded.

"You could, eh?" said Hollingshead tolerantly. "And just how, old fellow?"

"Well," said T Bone. "When you asked me how big the ranch was and all, an' I told you, you wasn't flabbergasted a-tall. You knew about Black Comet an' that jamboree with the Piutes. You didn't take the trouble to climb up on the chute to see how far he corrals went."

"Gad," chuckled Hollingshead, "you're something of a sleuth yourself, eh?" But his eyes narrowed; and Slim, looming in the shadow beyond the stove, blew a cloud of smoke upward and grinned.

Hollingshead puffed at his cigar, studying his man. Then he leaned forward confidentially. "I'll tell you who I am, T Bone. You're probably a bit curious, eh? I'll tell you why I have interested myself in this immense farm, in this chap Mar's history, and in you.

You're wondering why I came all this way into the wilderness when I already was in possession of the facts."

"It don't make no difference to me," said T Bone apologetically. "We're gettin' plenty heat now, ain't we?"

"I'm something of an amateur historian," said Hollingshead. "And my hobby in particular is collecting objects of historical value connected with our western frontiers. In my home at Huntington Beach, for example, to name only a few, I have the finest existing collection of carbines taken from the battlefield at Custer's Last Stand. I have the canteen used by Lieutenant Lewis of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Sitting Bull's saddle blanket, Geronimo's scalping knife, the belt that Davie Crockett wore when he fell at the Alamo——"

"Kind of a buzzard that a way," put in Slim with a grin. "Other folks make history an' then he comes swoopin' in regardless."

"Young man," said Hollingshead sternly, "keep out of this discussion, if you please. In short, T Bone, old fellow, I am building up a priceless museum of things Western, taken from the fabric of the frontier. It is my hobby, my avocation. Having the means at my disposal, I pursue it tirelessly. No effort is too great to secure a relic that I want. That's why I'm here, T Bone. This immense ranch is unique in our entire Western range country. I have come here especially to secure some memento closely associated with this chap Mar—which I propose to add to my collection."

"Yeah?" said T Bone, without great interest. "One of them souvenir hunters, huh? Seems like the buzzards have picked the ranch pretty clean already, mister. Ain't even a branding iron left."

Hollingshead eyed him intently, mouthing his cigar. In the shadow, Slim loomed, motionless. Only the aged

buckaroo seemed unaware of approaching drama.

"There is something left, T Bone," said Hollingshead. "For my purposes the most valuable of all, in that it is unique, the only memento of its kind." He gestured with his cigar.

T Bone's gaze lifted to the portrait on the wall. He glanced at Hollingshead and back again, puzzled. Then comprehension came. His deeply scored features did not exhibit astonished rage, or pained surprise. Only in his faded eyes, for a fleeting instant, new depths were revealed. It was as though, momentarily arisen from a by-gone day, another personality peered forth that was neither old nor impotent. He shook his head.

"I reckon not."

"Let's discuss it——" began Hollingshead.

"No debate," said T Bone mildly. "It's final. I ain't an inhospitable cuss, but when you're warmed sufficient you can get to blazes off the premises."

"No offense," soothed Hollingshead, with an ingratiating grin. But certain truculent bulges marred his plump cheeks. "Let's forget it, T Bone, old fellow. I might have known you wouldn't consider it. I can see, too, that when you've made up your mind there's no more room for argument. Sorry. Well, Slim, we'd better toddle along shortly. But first"—he dragged the black hand bag forward and stooped over it—"just to show there's no hard feelings, old scout, and to warm ourselves internally before we start on that miserable trip to the Narrows, let us have——"

He threw the bag open, revealing several dark bottles.

"Thanks," said T Bone. "But I ain't a drinkin' man."

"It's only beer," grinned Hollingshead. "That's something else I found out about you, T Bone. Back at Burns, among the old-timers. You aren't a

drinking man, but you have a weakness for beer. So I came prepared."

"You big monument," Slim accused. "Had that loot in the buckboard all the way from Burns, huh? That shows what a large-hearted, open-handed lobo you are. An' me spittin' dust an' my tongue hangin' out a foot!"

"Slim, my lad," said Hollingshead patronizingly, "these refreshments were destined for a worthier purpose than to while away the monotonous hours in your company. You have access to beer at any time in Burns. But T Bone, living in this remote place, has no such advantage. He has cheerfully given us his time and attention, furthermore, and should be rewarded."

"An' that's another thing," said Slim, glaring. "I'm beginnin' to see your fine Eyetalian hand, mister. What I told you comin' out, about you not bein' able to do business with T Bone, didn't mean that you could sneak up on his good judgment with a dozen bottles of beer. That's a foul holt that really ought to be barred by any self-respectin' gent."

"Sh-h!" warned Hollingshead. "You have entirely too great an interest in world affairs, my boy. If he happens to develop a more mellow mood before we leave, that's his business and mine. To speak bluntly, I hired you along with the horses at the livery stable. You are part of a transportation system, not a social secretary or family adviser. Do I make myself plain?"

"Just the same," said Slim darkly, "if there's any scullduggery afoot I'll gamble it's yore hide an' not T Bone's that'll be stretched on the fence. If this loot turns him into a roarin' lion, don't you come squawkin' to me to back yore play. I'm placin' my bets with the squarest gent of the two—an' he ain't any lily-fingered; bulgin' four-flusher for whom no holts is barred. My moral support goes to the real beef. Do I make myself plain?"

"Will you keep out of it?" demanded Hollingshead between his teeth.

"Shoot the works," growled Slim. "I'll set back an' watch 'em fall."

T Bone had not marked this last interchange, having been prowling among the meager kitchen equipment in the rear of the cabin. He now came forth, bearing a tin dipper, a jelly glass, and a heavy crockery cup with the handle missing.

"I ain't got a reg'lar outfit no more," he apologized, placing these varied drinking utensils upon the table. "They kind of got busted on me. Just so it's understood, mister"—he eyed the bottles, licking his lips—"I ain't in yore debt none whatsoever."

"It's all right, T Bone, old fellow." Hollingshead airily brushed the matter aside. "Merely a convivial gesture so we'll part good friends."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRAWLING COYOTE.

NOW Hollingshead knew, through his careful preparation for his assault on T Bone's treasure, that the aged Buckaroo, in his reactions to the flowing bowl, was of a type familiar to drinking men. He was not an habitual tippler. Throughout his life, it was only on periodic excursions to town with "the boys" that he had had brief but sometimes spectacular encounters with Demon Rum. On these occasions his lean and hard-bitten physique, product of a harsh environment and Titanic toil, could withstand the explosive impact of high-proof liquor and still enable him to navigate, in a manner of speaking, when other seasoned sailors were down.

But beer, also in the parlance of the region, was a horse of another color. It was as though, under its insidious and mellow influence, inner fortifications crumbled, ancient inhibitions gave way. Barriers of reserve and judicious reasoning, which would have emerged

unscathed from more fiery onslaughts, became as structures built on shifting sands.

Hollingshead knew that T Bone was of this type. Slim knew it, and sat back in the shadows, glowering over the tin dipper. Only T Bone, fondly blowing the foam from the brimming jelly glass, his faded eyes alight with memories of other years and other occasions where good fellows had foregathered, seemed unaware that hostile circumstances were closing in.

With a technique worthy of a more exalted cause, Hollingshead avoided the subject around which his ruthless purpose centered. He spurred genially along far, conversational trails, illustrating his varied themes with dramatic anecdotes and eloquent gestures. Even the watchful Slim, who was a poker player of alibity and a student of men and motives of no mean caliber, was at first led astray by the effervescent good cheer that radiated from the bulky one. It seemed almost, that he had forgotten his nefarious designs. T Bone, taciturn even in his cups, merely listened and drank, saying nothing, his mild eyes fixed on the orator.

Thus an hour passed, and another, while twilight deepened into darkness, and darkness gave way to a pale, silvery light as a high moon rose beyond the eastern pinnacles. The walls shook beneath the impact of the wind, and the trio grinned upon one another as they listened. How the wind could blow in Blitzen! But let it blow, so their mellow mood decreed; let it moan about the caves and scream in the leafless poplars, roll on in chill tides across the lifeless flats and rocky barrens. It was comfortable in the cabin. The red-bellied heater roared. The air was blue with tobacco smoke, radiant with good cheer; and "dead soldiers" stood in lengthening column upon the window sill.

Subtly, under Hollingshead's deft

touch, the atmosphere changed. In complete harmony and sympathetic understanding, a more wistful, poignant, thoughtful mood descended upon them. From the trivial froth of superficial things the conversation swung to deeper currents. Life passed in review, its barrenness, its futility, its tears and laughter. Almost imperceptibly, and without prejudice or rebuke, the theme centered on Peter Mar, and T Bone.

In a voice vibrant with feeling, the bulky one extolled the greatness of the empire builder, his achievements, his chivalrous personality and creed. It was tribute that warmed T Bone's lonely heart, soothed the ache of bitter years. Mesmerized, he gazed upon the bulky one, in gratitude and awe; for these words of praise, beyond his own poor ability to express even in thought, were as offerings at a shrine. But the master builder, Hollingshead pointed out, was gone. The empire, like Rome, had fallen, and the Vandals were at the gates. With the passing of the empire, Peter Mar's memory would pass. He would soon be forgotten. Such was the way of life. T Bone's mild eyes lifted to the portrait on the wall, which was blurred now and indistinct, and nodded, blinking. It was the way of life.

But what of T Bone? Hollingshead's voice was husky as he carried the assault to the last barrier. Did T Bone know that the vultures had decided to dismember the empire, split it forthwith into a thousand farms, wreck the ancient buildings? He, Hollingshead, had found this out in Portland, headquarters of the vulture corporation. This would mean that T Bone's sole resource, his last bulwark against stark, absolute want in his brief remaining days, would be cut off. His pittance as caretaker would no longer be forthcoming. He could have no tobacco as solace through the lonely hours, for storekeepers were pitiless to those who were aged and helpless. Should his last cup be broken, he

could not replace it. He would die in want.

"T Bone, old fellow," Hollingshead's voice was shaken with emotion. "this wasn't the way Mar planned it. His heart was big. Not only in life, but in death, he sought to care for those he loved. No one dependent on him ever went hungry or cold. He took care of them, eh?"

"He looked out for 'em all," T Bone nodded, "never thinkin' of himself. We was caught out in the hills once, in a storm. Me an' the Boss. Too cold to sleep. But when I woke up in the mornin' his blanket was on me, an' he was settin', shiverin', by the fire."

"His heart was big," Hollingshead repeated. "Always thinking of others. He never planned it like this. Throughout his life, he always took care of you, his friend, his man Friday, his slave. Dying, he still made plans for you. He left this cabin, which should keep you warm and protect you from the elements. He left money to be spent for you when you were, like you are tonight, grown old. But human vultures who have no heart stole the money he left for you. The corporation has no soul. T Bone, old fellow," he leaned forward and whispered the words hoarsely, "what will become of you now?"

T Bone cowered beneath his gaze. His bony shoulders hunched. His head sunk on his chest. "I dunno," he muttered almost inaudibly. "I dunno."

"Sho!" came Slim's youthful, energetic voice from the shadows beyond the stove. "It's all right, T Bone. They's plenty old-timers in these parts——"

But he was halted by a gesture from Hollingshead, accompanied by a look so piercing, so ferocious and pleading, that he subsided, muttering.

"T Bone, old fellow"—Hollingshead hitched his chair closer and laid a hand on the bowed one's shoulder—"when I first arrived here this afternoon, you

didn't like me. You were prejudiced against me. Don't deny it, old fellow. You thought I was a stranger who knew nothing of your problems, was not really interested in you, or Peter Mar, or this great ranch. You thought I didn't understand. But I did, T Bone, better than you can realize. I am your friend. All the while we were walking about, looking at the buildings, I knew you needed help. I knew what the corporation was going to do to you. I knew you were going to starve, to die in misery and want. It hurt me, T Bone. I was tortured by the knowledge. And I resolved to help you.

"Look!" From the black hand bag, he drew forth a small canvas sack that was heavy, and bulged with circular contours. "Take this, T Bone. Empty it on the table."

With clumsy fingers, T Bone did as he was bid. The contents cascaded upon the table. They were gold coins, fresh and gleaming from the mint, a score or more.

"Do you know how much money that is, T Bone? Three hundred dollars. Thirty ten-dollar gold pieces. That's how much you would have received from the corporation for the next five years, if they hadn't cut you off the pay roll and thrown you aside. Take 'it, T Bone, old fellow. It's yours."

"Mine?" T Bone whispered, blinking at the gold.

"Listen, T Bone, do you know what that gold means? It means tobacco that will comfort you in those terrible melancholy moments that crowd in upon you. It means coffee, and flour, and beans, the food you must have to live. It means that in the winter time you can buy oats for your horse. Winter is almost here, T Bone. Do you hear that wind? It's cold—cold."

"But I don't savvy," T Bone muttered, clasping and unclasping his bony hands. "That gold ain't mine."

"It is, T Bone. It's yours! If you'll

sell me"—Hollingshead hesitated, sensing that the time was not yet ripe.

"T Bone, old fellow"—he spoke softly—"where is Peter Mar now? We know so little of life and death, you and I. To-day we are here. To-morrow we are gone. Whither? No one knows—not even the wisest of men. But you can depend on it that wherever Peter Mar is, he is building a great ranch. Far greater than this one, T Bone. More broad, more vast. The cold wind never blows on that ranch, T Bone. No storms. No frost. No sweltering days. The flowers are always blooming, the birds singing in the sun-drenched hills. Peter Mar is waiting for you there, T Bone—waiting for you to come and ride at his side and never leave him any more. There will be no parting there, T Bone, nor loneliness, nor heart-ache. Long days, long nights. Have you thought of these things, old fellow?"

"I've figgered on it," muttered T Bone, "more than once. Gosh, if I could rate a break like that!"

"Up on the Big Ranch, T Bone," said Hollingshead, "I can see Peter Mar. He's smiling. His expression is sad and wistful, and he's shaking his head. I can hear him say: 'It seems like a long time, T Bone. Eh, cowboy? But it isn't, really. A few months—maybe a year or so. Then we'll chuckle as we ride together over the sunlit trails. But take care of yourself, T Bone. Don't be hungry or cold. It hurts me to see you suffer. I'm not there to help you, but do what you can. If there's anything of mine that has value, sell it, T Bone. These earthly things don't matter.'"

"But I haven't got anything to sell," muttered T Bone. "They's nothing left."

"Yes——" Hollingshead drew a deep breath. "There's the picture, T Bone. He'd understand."

T Bone raised his swimming eyes to

the portrait, looked long and with pathetic intentness at Hollingshead, and back at the gold.

"You—sure?" he whispered.

"Sure," said Hollingshead. "Of course, T Bone. Keep the gold. It's only a picture, old fellow. He wouldn't care. He'd rather you sold the picture than to see you suffer. It would hurt him to see you suffer."

For a long moment, during which the blustering of the wind against the cabin wall seemed unnaturally loud, the aged buckaroo slumped in his chair, his gnarled hands limp upon the table beside the gold. Hollingshead sat immobile, his heavy features glistening. In the shadows, Slim loomed statuesque and rigid, his cigarette motionless athwart his reckless lip. Thus, seconds ticked by; and what dim and terrific emotions warred in T Bone's soul, what conflicting doubts, loyalties, and fears, in the tortured interval, roared upon ancient strongholds within him, could only be surmised.

"Eh, T Bone?"

T Bone nodded, his chin sinking lower on his chest.

But as Hollingshead arose in a businesslike manner and approached the portrait on the wall, T Bone leaped up suddenly and laid hold on his arm with a grasp of steel.

"You sure?" he entreated.

"Why, of course," Hollingshead said soothingly. "It's only a picture, T Bone."

T Bone released him and stood back, swaying. Hollingshead removed the portrait from the wall. He placed it in the black bag, which he snapped shut. Breathing heavily, the bulky one placed his derby on his head, thrust trembling arms into his greatcoat.

"Let's go," he said to Slim beneath his breath. "Hurry!"

"You blasted polecat——" muttered Slim.

Pushing Slim before him, Hollings-

head backed toward the door, keeping an alert eye upon the aged buckaroo. But T Bone's gaze, like one mesmerized, followed the black bag until the swinging door shut him from view.

"Let's get started, Slim," directed Hollingshead. "Move fast. Don't stop. That simple yokel is apt to change his mind."

"You crawlin', cringin' coyote," breathed Slim, with a species of awe. "You're so blasted low——"

"That's enough," said Hollingshead. "Do your talking later. Let's travel along."

That there were grounds for the bulky one's appraisal of T Bone's emotional turmoil was proved ere the careening buckboard had swung around the circle. The door of the cabin flung open and T Bone charged upon them, covering the ground at ungainly but prodigious speed.

"Wait," he pleaded. His hoarse, quavering voice was raised to a strident key. "Wait a second, mister!"

"Drive on," said Hollingshead; but Slim pulled up.

"Gimme it back, mister," T Bone implored. His shaking hand extended the canvas bag. "Here's your money. Gimme it back. The shack is empty an' lonesome when he ain't lookin' down at me that a way. I could stand it to be hungry an' cold. I could die without sayin' a word to nobody. If he was there——"

"Bah!" said Hollingshead. "Do you think I'm a doddering imbecile? You've got the money. I've got the picture. The deal's finished." Stooping, he seized the whip from the dash and struck the horses a savage blow. The restive animals leaped forward.

It was as though the lash had also bitten deep into T Bone's soul. He stood as one stricken, while the buckboard leaped through the skeleton shadows of the poplars, and so into the long lane that led across the flats.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOCAL SUPERSTITION.

AS the swaying buckboard slowed to a more moderate pace along the four-mile lane that led from the empire headquarters across the valley of the Blitzen, Hollingshead produced a cigar and, after several ineffectual efforts, lighted it. He settled himself more comfortably, thrust gloved hands deep into his pockets, and beamed upon his companion. Slim sat rigid, jaw set, sparks trailing from his cigarette.

"Cowboy," said Hollingshead genially, "you've just witnessed an excellent example of diplomacy, finesse, salesmanship, or what have you. It's a habit of mine to get what I go after. You'll pardon me if, in the exuberance of the moment, I remind you that you had predicted defeat. But a dozen bottles of beer, a dash of sentiment, a little judicious forensics and presto, we bring home the bacon! Rather good, what?"

"Hollingshead," said Slim, "it comes over me that I don't like yore looks. I don't like yore eyes. They're set too close together, which riles me. Yore ears had ought to be trimmed. For two copper cents, plus a side bet of one plugged nickel, I'd forget I was only a spectator to these proceedings an' work you-over so yore own maw would yell for the police if she seen you comin'. So, if you ain't got a cravin' to go whoopin' into the hereafter, or are the least pernickety in regard to where you're buried, let's not have too many wise cracks, mister. I'm plumb irritated an' hostile."

"Tut, tut," Hollingshead reproved. "It would require more than a bottle or two of beer to warp your judgment to that extent, Slim, my lad. As I remarked before, your interest in world affairs is far too keen. My bargain with T Bone was consummated according to the best legal formulæ. I paid him his price; he delivered the goods.

Any court with legal jurisdiction would uphold the transaction."

"This man's country," growled Slim, "struggled along an' kept its feet on the ground long before they was any such luxuries as courts. If this dirty deal you just pulled was put up to some of the easy-goin' citizens in these parts, there wouldn't be much parleyin', mister. They wouldn't even be a vote on it. They'd say: 'Take this polecat 'way out yonder where they ain't much travel, pick out a tree which we won't have to use again for no self-respectin' hoss thief, an' turn yore faces away when you hang him.' Yeah, the committee would borrow gloves for the chore, mister, an' use a cast-off rope."

"So?" Hollingshead stifled a yawn. "But those primitive days are past, my boy. Enlightenment has come even to this uncouth community."

"I dunno about that," Slim muttered. "They's still a few uncouth bozos in these parts with tufts on their ears an' thumbs on their feet who can't seem to get used to these modern conveniences. Ol' T Bone, for instance. When he come to Blitzen, Judge Colt was settin' on the bench. Yeah, an' for long-distance disputes, ol' Justice Winchester was on the job. When T Bone snaps out of it an' figgers you've hornswoggled him out of something which in his lowly ideas is worth more than the whole blasted world, do you reckon he'll listen to yore high-falutin' talk about law?"

"Bah!" said Hollingshead irritably. "T Bone's a victim of senile decay, softening of the brain, and rickets. Let's forget that elderly and indigent buckaroo."

"Mister," said Slim, "ten-fifteen years ago, if T Bone had come runnin' out of his shack like a gent that had lost his hope of salvation that a way an' you'd cut him off short like you done when we left, he'd have grasped you by the face an' made you snap like a whip.

They'd have picked you up in pieces, a nose here an' an ear there, an' yore false teeth hangin' on a limb. Yeah, it'd been a massacre an' no mistake. It's only because he's old an' busted-down that you're settin' here right this minute, all swelled up an' blinkin' that a way like a blasted toad. An' still you got the crust to chuckle an' pat yoreself on the back like you'd done an ace-high an' plumb noble stroke of business!" He glowered at his companion. "You're a thick-skinned maverick, Hollingshead, I've insulted you plenty, an' danged if you don't act like you like it!"

"I don't mind at all," Hollingshead grinned. "Your downright ideas help to relieve the monotony of the journey."

They had turned from the flats to the high road that paralleled Blitzen. They were heading North, into the teeth of the wind. The valley lay at their right, spreading out, gaining in shimmering dimensions beneath the cold moon as they mounted higher. Hollingshead pulled his derby lower over his eyes, and turned up his coat lapels about his heavy features so that only his glowing cigar projected at a dominant, somewhat rakish angle.

"The thing that burns me up," Slim complained, "is the way you didn't stop at nothin' to get what you wanted. Even T Bone's hopes of the hereafter, by gravy! I dang' near blubbered myself when you was talkin' about that Big Ranch that Peter Mar was buildin', where the birds was singin', an' the flowers was bloomin', an' everything was jake that a way. Just like a pore jasper like T Bone would dream about. An' you didn't mean a word of it! Just sneakin' up an' crawlin' up on the idea that Peter Mar would figger it O. K. if T Bone was to sell the picture. Don't it mean nothin' to you that the pore ol' lonely bozo believed every word you said, just like his ol' boss was whisperin' in his ear?"

"Why, of course," chuckled Hollings-

head. "That was dramatic technique, if I do say it myself. Most effective, what?"

"Hollingshead"—Slim eyed his companion with gloomy awe—"ain't you got no feelings a-tall? I'm only a lowly cowboy without none of this said polish an' education, but it does seem to me they's something wrong with the scheme of things which'll let a citizen like you struggle along. Can't you picture ol' T Bone right this minnit? He's settin' in his shack an' the scales has fallen from his eyes. He's all alone that a way, an' the wind is howlin' around the caves. The likker's gone and the spell of yore blasted eloquence has done wore off. He's scairt, Hollingshead. Scairt to look at the wall, which is empty now. You remember what he told you when we was leavin'? It tore me in two, but it didn't seem to have no effect on a hyena-hearted sidewinder like you. He could stand bein' hungry an' cold, an' he could pass out without sayin' a word, if only the Boss was there. Don't you see what he's up against now? He knows you double crossed him. He ain't sure about the hereafter no more. There prob'ly ain't any Big Ranch, an' mebbe the Boss ain't waitin'. He don't know, an' meanwhile the shack's empty. He's hungry an' cold, inside——"

"Slim, my lad," cut in Hollingshead, "can't you whip up the horses a bit? It's a long way to the Narrows, you know."

Slim ground his teeth and shook the lines.

They were skirting a high promontory that overlooked the valley. Far to the north it extended in the silvery light, like a motionless lake. Slim twisted in his seat to look back. He continued to look until Hollingshead stirred and peered owlshly in his direction.

"What do you see?" he quickly demanded.

"Nothin'," said Slim, hastily. "Ain't the valley a sight for sore eyes in the

moonlight? Purty as a picture, by gravy!"

"Desolate expanse," Hollingshead grunted. "Howling wilderness."

They proceeded for a space in silence, descending into hollows, scaling bleak ridges where the wind pressed upon them like an icy current. Hollingshead puffed at his cigar, wrapped in genial reflections.

"It's a great country," said Slim at length. His voice was more cheerful and matter of fact. They were rattling down into a gloomy glade where an unseen rivulet chuckled. "Kind of creepy for strangers, mebbe. Particularly at night. For instance, it was right down in this draw that the Piutes scalped a lowly Chinaman who was a cook in a cow camp up yonder at the spring. When them Injuns rushed the camp, you know what that benighted chink done? Instead of makin' a run for it, he dropped his gun an' crawled into this culvert——" Slim pointed down with his whip, as the equipment rolled hollowly over the stone-arched waterway. "Clean down in the valley folks heard him yell when them savages pulled him out. But they couldn't do nothin' for him——"

"Why are you stopping?" demanded Hollingshead, apprehensively. "Hurry on. Gad, what a place!"

"Sho," Slim grinned, shaking the lines. "I was just goin' to give you a li'l demonstration. Folks say if you get down an' holler into the culvert, the echoes sound just like a feller scream-in' when death's got holt of his heels."

"Don't stop for such nonsense," Hollingshead directed. "I'm not the least interested in your local superstitions." Nevertheless, he sat more erect and turned his head somewhat furtively, for the first time aware that the world about him was etched in vivid silhouette as in a kind of silvery dawn, that strange noises were abroad, and ghostly tides marched in serried ranks across water-

less lakes glistening in the far expanse of the strange valley below; and all about them in stunted jack pine and rasping sage the wind sighed and moaned in sibilant whisper.

"Gad!" he shivered. "It's cold. Let's hurry, Slim."

"Over there"—Slim pointed as they mounted again toward the sky—"see that big juniper on the ridge, all alone? That black maverick with the big limb pointin' south? That's where they hung Jim Rorer, an onscrupulous citizen who stole a colt from a nester down in the hollow. He was a hefty, flabby jasper like you, an' the first rope busted before his feet was off the ground. He belated so much they gagged him an' used a new rope. He hung there for a considerable spell. Folks passin' this a way could hear his bones rattlin' when the wind blew, till a preacher come along, an' cut 'em down, an' buried 'em. They's some dead limbs up in that there juniper, an' if the wind was swingin' in a little more from the east you'd hear a kind of raspin' sound——"

"Shut up!" said Hollingshead in a shaken voice. "You talk too much, Slim. Your brainless conversation isn't amusing any more."

"Excuse it, please," murmured Slim, his face turned toward the valley. "I figgered you was interested in them historical things. An', by the way, mister," he said in lower tones, "you carryin' a gun?"

"A gun?" Hollingshead breathed. "No. Why do you ask?"

"When we left the Narrows this morning," said Slim with a studied casualness of manner, "I didn't figger we'd stay so long at T Bone's. I didn't fetch my artillery neither. I don't cotton to trailin' by night alongside Blitzen without bein' heeled. It ain't done."

"What do you mean?"

"They hide out in the hills by day," said Slim. "They ride in the valley by night. It's shorter than the road, you

understand. They can get from here to yonder as the crow flies——"

"Who?" demanded Hollingshead. "You're gibbering, man. What are you talking about?"

"Road agents," said Slim. "Hold-up men. Cutthroats."

"Bah!" said Hollingshead. "You're trying to frighten me——"

"Yeah?" Slim drawled. He pulled up suddenly, so that the horses slid to a stop. His extended arm pointed toward the valley. "Look!"

Hollingshead twisted to look past his shoulder, and a gasp hissed through his clenched teeth.

Below in the vividness of the valley floor, insectlike in the shimmering dimensions about him, a lone rider undulated. He was heading north, paralleling their course, his sombrero flattened against the wind. There was something ghostlike about this galloping figure, something unreal, yet sinister—the splendid horse reaching out like a greyhound in full flight, the rider bowed in the saddle; and such was the force and direction of the wind that no slightest sound of his progress was borne up to the watchers on the ridge, no beating of hoofs or creaking of leather.

"Gad!" whispered Hollingshead.

"We'd best sit tight for a minnit," Slim counseled. "If he's headin' us off, he can outrun us. If he ain't seen us yet, they's no use to attract his attention. Son of a gun, look at that bozo ride!"

The lone horseman drew abreast the ridge, looking neither to the right nor the left, drifted on in his silent flight, and so was lost to view beyond a jutting promontory ahead. Hollingshead relaxed, his vast bulk trembling.

"Fellow," said Slim, as he rolled a cigarette. "That lobo we just seen ain't any ghost. We may not be the particular meat he's after, but wherever he's goin', he means business—an' is travelin' thither posthaste!"

"What shall we do?" quavered Hollingshead.

"Do?" echoed Slim. "We got to push on. No use turnin' back. If he's after us, he'd come slopin' back an' run us down. But don't you get skittish now, mister. Pull in yore quiverin' ears. We got to just drag along an' take our chances that he ain't waitin' for us."

"Man!" breathed Hollingshead. "I never saw anything so positively—sinister. Just like a bloodhound that's sighted its victim. If—if he's a hold-up man, Slim, he wouldn't do anything more than take our valuables, eh?"

"Depends on what mood he's in," said Slim grimly. "Some of those lobos would shoot a gent for the gold in his teeth." He chuckled. "So if he pops out on us an' makes hostile signs, you'd best keep yore mouth shut, mister. And, on the other hand, don't you get too excited. I don't crave to have you pass out on me, an' you right in yore prime this a way. This may be a false alarm. They's lots of bozos ride in the flats by choice. Easier on their critters. That might have been some lonely buzzard headin' for home."

This obvious attempt at reassurance failed utterly of its purpose. Hollingshead's bulk quivered visibly as they forged ahead down the winding road, whose every shadow seemed fairly to bristle with nameless menace. A circumstance adding to his apprehension was that their next glimpse of the valley revealed the glistening expanse to be devoid of life as of old. The horseman was gone. This, Slim explained, might be because the mysterious one had cut across the flat to some eastern point, or had swerved off to a short cut over the hills. But Hollingshead merely waited in an agony of suspense, his teeth clamped on his lifeless cigar.

As they entered a gloomy hollow where black thickets bordered the road and great boulders loomed, the horses flinched back suddenly, snorting. Some-

thing like a moan escaped Hollingshead. A man, having detached himself without sound from the shadows, stood before them in a curiously tense and watchful attitude, and the muzzle of a six-shooter peered at them like a round, unwavering eye.

"Stick 'em up," ordered this one briefly. There was a dry, sardonic quality in his voice that was infinitely more menacing than bluster or spoken threat. "Slide down, snakes, while I count yore rattles."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST LAUGH.

HURRIEDLY Hollingshead clambered from the vehicle and stood, knees shaking, his breath whistling between his teeth. Slim stood beside him, hands upraised.

"That's right," the outlaw approved, drawing closer. "Reach for the stars. No funny moves, gents. Not any. What th——" Confronting Hollingshead, the outlaw appraised the bulky one from head to foot. Above a bandanna that muffled the lower part of his features, his eyes seemed to glisten in the shadow. "A city dude? Feller, you're a long ways from home."

"L-listen," stuttered Hollingshead. "I haven't got m-much. You're w-welcome——"

"Fat that a way," mused the other. "Like a stall-fed yearlin'. Pink cheeks. Knees shakin'. Hard-boiled citizen, ain't yuh, friend? Cowboy——" His sinister, masked face turned toward Slim but the muzzle of his weapon remained pressed against Hollingshead's bulging mid-section. "You look like you belong in these parts. But how come you're ridin' herd on a critter like this?"

"I'm a workin' man," Slim grinned. "I didn't get a good look at him before we started out. I aim to live it down if you don't tell it on me, mister."

The contemptuous query and genial

retort plunged Hollingshead deeper into abysmal fear. These two spoke the same language; they were of the region, a part of the savage environment that suddenly had risen up to hem him in. He alone was an outsider, an alien, quaking figure in a ruthless world.

He all but collapsed when the outlaw extended a hand and brusquely ripped open his greatcoat. Fingers explored his person for concealed weapons, deft, terrible fingers; then the outlaw stepped back.

"You're next, cowboy. Turn around, an' keep yore hands on the roof. Got to check off yore artillery. Dude, stay put."

As Slim was being searched, muttered words passed between the pair. Hollingshead heard the youth chuckle. The hair rose on the city man's scalp and more horrible apprehensions shook him. After all, he knew nothing of Slim. Was it possible that the reckless youth was in league with this desperado and had arranged the meeting at this remote spot in the wilderness? Slim's animosity toward him, Hollingshead, was plain. To what lengths might such a ruthless pair go?

Turning from the search of Slim, the outlaw's attention was attracted by the black bag in the buckboard.

"Whose loot?" he inquired.

Slim jerked a thumb toward Hollingshead.

"Fine," said the outlaw. "Dude, get that gadget. Open it up."

Hollingshead lurched toward the buckboard, dragged forth the bag and with trembling fingers opened it.

"All right," the outlaw directed. "Shell out, stranger. That there pack sack had ought to hold all the filthy lucre with which you're undoubtedly loaded."

With almost ludicrous haste, Hollingshead produced his wallet and tossed it into the bag. A silver pencil followed, a gold fountain pen, and a plati-

num watch. He emptied each of his pockets in turn, and when it was obvious that all his personal effects had been disgorged, his shaking hands still continued their exploration, as though some overlooked item might further appease the menacing one before him.

"That's plenty," the outlaw directed. "If you wasn't so spineless, I'd figger you was holdin' out on me. Cowboy, loosen up."

But when the youth had tossed his plug of tobacco into the bag, the outlaw halted him with curt gesture.

"It ain't in me to fatten off a lowly workin' man," he opined. "I reckon I've made expenses. Close up that gadget, dude, an' back away. All right, citizens, climb into yore buckboard. But don't be in no hurry about travelin'. Sit tight a couple of minnits." Stooping, he slowly picked up the bag. "Gents—adios."

Almost unbelievably, from his seat in the buckboard, Hollingshead saw the outlaw back away. He merged into the gloom of the thicket. Immediately, a blacker segment of shadow moved forth. The outlaw was mounted, his gun in its holster, the bag in hand. With a sardonic gesture of farewell the horseman wheeled. Sparks flew from steel-shod hoofs. The echo of drumming feet came down with the wind.

"Gad!" quavered Hollingshead, wiping his glistening face. "He's gone."

"Shut up!" admonished Slim in a stage whisper. "He might change his mind an' come back after them gold fillings."

During an interval that seemed all too short to the quaking Hollingshead, they sat in silence. Then Slim clucked to the horses and they moved forward.

"Are you sure the two minutes are up yet, Slim?" questioned the bulky one anxiously.

"He's a couple miles away by now," said Slim.

Hollingshead breathed easier when

they emerged from the hollow and mounted a moonlit slope.

"My word!" he muttered, peering at his companion like one awakening from a dream. "We've been held up!"

"Yeah," agreed Slim dryly. "So we have, mister."

At the crest of the ridge, the horses shied away from a black object reposing in the center of the road. They circled it warily, the buckboard jolting among the boulders.

"Pull up, Slim, pull up!" cried Hollingshead excitedly. "It's my bag!"

"So it is," quoth Slim. "Well I'm danged!"

Hollingshead leaped to the ground, seized upon the bag, opened it. Crouching beside it, his hand groped in the interior. His clawing movements, rapid at first, became slower, then stopped. Slim pushed back his hat, crossed his legs, and stared down intently as he rolled a cigarette.

"My word!" breathed Hollingshead in abject amazement. "What's the meaning of this? My wallet's here. My watch is here. Everything's here—except the picture!"

"No!" murmured Slim. He lighted his cigarette, flipped the match away. "Son of a gun!"

Squatting thus like some huge toad, Hollingshead peered up at Slim, blinking.

"Why did he take the picture? If he was a hold-up man, why did he return my valuables?"

Slim merely grinned, sparks trailing from his cigarette. Hollingshead delved again in the bag, and a startled oath escaped him. He held up another object, and as he gazed upon it, his mystification deepened. It was a small canvas sack, heavy and bulging in rounded contours.

"The gold!" he whispered.

"Yeah," Slim nodded. "Looks like the Judas money you give T Bone."

Hollingshead leaped up suddenly, his

amazement changing to dawning rage and chagrin. "I see it all now," he cried, jaw outthrust. "T Bone's in cahoots with this outlaw. Probably harbors him on the ranch. He persuaded this cutthroat to hold us up, recover the picture, and return the money——"

"Bah!" said Slim pityingly. "Don't tell me you're that dumb, mister. Ain't you got no eyes a-tall? Was you so scairt you didn't see nothin'? That hoss, for instance, which this hold-up feller was ridin'. Ever see that hoss before, Hollingshead?"

"What do you mean?"

"The critter was right smack in front of us a spell ago," said Slim. "All black, but one white stocking. Black Comet strain. You seen him back on the ranch."

"You mean this desperado was riding T Bone's horse?"

"Sho!" said Slim, enjoying himself hugely. "An' didn't the said desperado look a mite familiar, even with that bandanna around his chin? Them patched overalls, for instance. An' he only has one pair of boots which even an onobservin' gent would recall was plumb wore out. Yeah, an' you had plenty of time to give his gun an' belt the once-over when the said artillery was hangin' on the cabin wall——"

"Gad!" breathed Hollingshead, like one stunned. "It was T Bone himself!"

"Great!" Slim applauded. "You're there, mister. Now the ol' bean's workin'!"

For a space Hollingshead stood, staring at the grinning youth, his features slowly swelling with wrath.

"It couldn't be!" he muttered. "Why, his voice wasn't the same. He talked like a cutthroat who meant business."

"Which he shorely did," Slim chortled. "That soothin' sirup changed him into a roarin' lion for a spell. Yeah, an' the memory of his wrongs. I had a hunch that after we left him an' he got to broodin' over the way you horn-

swoggled him, he'd take note of his gun hangin' on the wall. When I seen him come, it was final. An' man, how he come! That there's a reg'lar colt. An' the hombre in the saddle wasn't pore ol' T Bone on whom you pulled a dirty deal, but a gaunt ol' lobo risen up from ten-fifteen years ago. For a minnit he's forgotten he's old an' busted down. The wind's whistlin' in his hackles, an' he's bellerin' for blood."

His features livid, Hollingshead gave way to his rage.

"The doddering old imbecile!" he snarled, jamming his hat lower over his eyes. "Does he think he can get by with a bluff like that? I bought that picture. I paid for it. It's mine. We'll go back and get it."

"Yeah?" queried Slim. "An' how'll you make yore bluff stick, mister? You're forgettin' that T Bone, with that same ol' six-gun which made yore backbone rattle a spell ago, could shoot out yore eyeteeth at thirty paces, offhand. An' happy to oblige if you come projectin' around his premises again."

"I'll have the law on him!" Hollingshead raged. "You were a witness to the transaction."

"I'd make a hay-wire witness, mister," stated Slim bluntly. "You'd be surprised."

"You were in league with him from the first," Hollingshead accused, all but beside himself with baffled fury and chagrin.

"Nothin' of the kind," Slim denied tolerantly. "I was just a spectator to these li'l proceedings."

"You were, too," Hollingshead insisted in a shaken voice, realizing the futility of argument. "You knew it was he all the time. When he searched you, you talked and I heard you laugh."

"Oh, that!" Slim grinned. "That didn't amount to nothin'. He asked me if he should drill you while he was at

it; I told him no, leave you struggle along. You was a buzzard that had done made the mistake of swoopin' in too soon, I told him, but you'd done learnt yore lesson. So he said if it was O. K. with me, he'd keep my plug of tobacco. Claimed he craved a chew."

Hollingshead stared at him a moment longer. Then he stooped sullenly, snapped the bag shut, and tossed it into the buckboard. He climbed in and slumped beside Slim, his chin sunk on his chest.

But Slim did not immediately depart. He was staring down into the depths below.

"Look——" he said softly. "T Bone's circled and hit the valley again. He's on his way. Look at that critter ride! Like a weary lobo slopin' for the tall timber. Like a lonely wild cat headin' for home."

Once more, across the shimmering vastness, a lone horseman undulated. This time he was heading south, traveling with the storm. There was nothing sinister or ghostlike now in his silent flight; there was, rather, a species of joyous abandon, a prodigal, rollicking swing to the furious pace of the splendid horse; and the pose of the rider, bending low in the saddle and looking neither to the right nor the left, was that of one who bears treasure.

As they watched, the horseman grew smaller, undulating in flight. He was tiny and frail now beneath the wavering glory of the high moon. Momentarily, he crawled, insectlike, across the face of vast and splendid dimensions; then was gone.

"Let's go along," muttered Hollingshead.

"It is a mite nippy, at that, ain't it?" chortled Slim; and as he shook the lines he blew out his cheeks in his best imitation of the other's manner, "Gad, but it's cold!"



Dad Simms Makes the Fur Fly

By Frank Richardson Pierce

Author of "Talking Turkey," etc.



As his partner read the letter, Al Sneed's eyes glittered. He could see opportunity within reach, but he did not exactly know how to grasp it. "Read that letter again, Bullman," he pleaded, "the last part about the beaver." Sneed's bony hands opened and closed as he waited for his partner to find the place. Those hands had closed on a lot of money in their time, and let go of mighty little.

Bullman, massive, a slow thinker, but strong as a bull, read:

"I have got it straight that the Alaska Game Commission is going to declare a closed season on beaver next year. The trappers have taken heavy toll and the commission believes the beaver should be given a chance to build up their numbers. Otherwise, it may take years if the beaver is entirely wiped out of certain areas."

For several minutes, Sneed was silent, his tiny eyes glittering as he be-

gan to see light. "You know what it means, Bullman? It means that beaver will go sky high as soon as this gets out."

"Yeah! And it means the trappers will put up their price as soon as they hear. They've got to get a higher price, for this year's catch will have to supply 'em with grub for the next two years at least."

"We know it, and they don't," said Sneed, grinning. "All we've got to do is to beat the news into one of the big beaver districts, buy up their fur, and get out. If we start before the commission announces the closed season, they can't accuse us of knowing. We've got a cinch on the trappers. We know, and they don't. We've got a cinch on our rivals because we can pay more than they'll pay. I ask you, how can we lose? And, what's more, how can anybody beat us?"

Bullman shook his head sadly. "Something will happen!"

"What can happen? Besides, if we put it over this year, we'll drive out the last of our competitors and have the whole country tied up. Then those trappers will have to take what we give 'em. Any more objections?" asked Sneed gruffly.

"What district are you going after?" inquired Bullman.

"Beaver Lake country. It's the best district in the North!"

Bullman groaned. "I thought so! And to get there we have to go through Cold Deck. 'Flapjack' Meehan, 'Tubby' Willows and 'Dad' Simms live there. It seems like all they have to do is to spoil good schemes that'll net a man a little money. Oh, I know 'em from experience! The instant the news comes out, Flapjack will smell a rat. In fact, he'll smell a rat as soon as he sees you."

"Are you suggesting that I'm a rat?" demanded Sneed, flaring up.

"No, but Flapjack knows you are crook——"

"Don't say it! Don't say that word 'crooked.' How I hate it! Say I'm a shrewd business man, it sounds better."

"Well, when he smells a rat he won't stop sniffing until he finds where it is. He'll find out soon enough when that notice comes that no beaver can be trapped next season."

"Then what?"

"He'll hitch up his dog team—which is the fastest in the North—and go into the Beaver Lake country and tell his friends."

"No, he won't," Sneed retorted, "because I'm going to hire that dog team myself. Besides, Flapjack ain't at Cold Deck. He's in the States with the Cold Deck Rodeo, and Dad Simms is with him. They've left Tubby Willows to take care of their mines and the New Deal Café. Tubby will be so busy he won't have time to say more than 'Hello!' The whole proposition is made for us."

"If the trappers don't get big prices

this year, they're going to have a tough time a year from now," Bullman said.

"We should worry about a lot of trappers! Besides, miners and trappers are never supposed to have anything but hard luck anyway—that's why they get mine and trap. Even when they get rich, they stay right at it. Are you with me or against me?"

"I'm with you, but I'm betting we don't get away with it." Bullman had not forgotten the time he salted a claim and sold it to Flapjack Meehan. He never did find out just what happened, but he knew he still owned that claim, having bought it back at a price that netted Flapjack five thousand dollars.

"You're thinking about that claim, Bullman," Sneed said suddenly. "Huh! You didn't have a clever pardner like me to help you out. Now, I'm with you."

"When do we sail for Alaska?" was Bullman's reply. With Flapjack out of the country, it did look like a chance to clean up big.

"Heh! Heh!"

Bullman groaned. "Did you hear that laugh?" he demanded in a hoarse whisper. "I'd know it anywhere."

"Yeah," Sneed answered, "Dad Simms has just come aboard the boat. But what of it? He's only an old fool with one foot in the grave and the other slipping."

"That's what he was a couple of years ago. Then he went Outside and found there was plenty to live for. He's been living ever since." Bullman peered cautiously from his stateroom window.

Dad Simms, garbed like a Hollywood sheik, was standing on deck, talking to a roughly dressed old sour dough.

"Kinda surprised to find you going North so early, Dad," the sour dough observed. "You're all dressed up like a plush horse."

"Yeah! But before I show up at

Cold Deck I'll be dressed regular," Dad answered, "I don't want to be mobbed when I arrive at Cold Deck. Yep, I'm going in early this year. I'm a fur buyer."

"Guess you can judge fur as well as the next one, Dad."

"I've seen a couple of pelts in my time," Dad admitted. "But it's this way. I've been pricing fur around Hollywood. When I found what the girls have to pay for a good pelt and remember what the trapper gets for it, I got all stirred up. I organized a little company down there and now I'm heading North to pick up a few bales of prime skin."

"Any particular kind?"

"Nope—a little of everything. The early bird catches the worm, and I figure to be out with the early birds. But I'm going to pay the boys real prices for my worms. I've run a trap line myself and I ain't forgotten those days, either. Well, see you later. I'm going to see who I've got for a roommate on the trip North."

Bullman and Sneed, who had remained within earshot, exchanged glances. "Now look what we're up against!" Bullman groaned.

"Nothing at all! If I can't put it all over Simms, I'll quit the fur business," Sneed declared. "That's a genuine promise."

"If Simms gets his idea to working, you'll have to quit the fur business," Bullman answered.

Sneed hastily scribbled a cablegram, wrapped a ten-dollar bill around it, and rang for a steward.

"File that," he directed, "and keep the change."

The cable read:

TUBBY WILLOWS,

Cold Deck, Alaska.

Will pay usual rate for your dog team to Beaver Lake country. Wire answer.

SNEED.

The answer came three days later, when the steamer was nearing Juneau. It read:

SNEED: Don't rent team unless I drive them. Will drive you in.

TUBBY WILLOWS.

Sneed immediately answered, stating that Tubby, as a driver, would be satisfactory.

"But the deal will be off when he hears Dad Simms is coming. They're thicker than thieves," Bullman growled.

"Tubby Willows keeps his bargains," Sneed retorted.

"He won't when he finds out what we're up to," said the gloomy Bullman.

"He won't know. And when word reaches us that beaver is sky high, we'll be as surprised as he is. He'll think we got a lucky break. Now that's settled, we'll forget it."

Nevertheless, knowing that Dad Simms was in the fur business also, they remained in their room, walking the deck in the evening when Dad had retired, and taking their meals in their stateroom.

Luck was with them, for Dad stopped over a day in Seward, while they caught the first train to Anchorage and the interior. At the end of steel a dog team picked them up, and in due time they arrived in Cold Deck.

There was a strange absence of dogs. "Stampede?" Sneed inquired of Tubby Willows. One could usually tell whether there was a stampede on by the number and price of dogs in almost any Northern camp.

"A little one," Tubby answered. "Then, too, a lot of the boys are freight-ing in their supplies before the break-up. Mine's the only good team left in camp. I wouldn't have taken this time off only I happen to know that the boys in the Beaver Lake country are needing money. They've got some fur, mostly beaver, of course."

"Beaver's down," Sneed said.

"I know it is," Tubby answered. "It's too bad. The Territory has been permitting beaver to be trapped so as to give the miners grubstake for summer prospecting." He glanced at the pair. "In a bit early, aren't you?"

"Competition is kinda keen," Sneed answered. "We figure that prices won't change much and we might as well be first and get the cream. Of course, prices may go up or down while we're out of touch with market reports, but that's a chance we've got to take."

A bearded man in worn moccasins entered and dropped a pack on the floor. "Heard you was in town, Sneed. I've got some beaver here. You can have it for twenty dollars a pelt. It's prime stuff and big. It's from the Beaver Lake country. Take a look."

"Beaver's cheap," Sneed said, as he examined the fur. He wanted these pelts badly, but, above all, he desired to create an impression of his complete ignorance of the future of the beaver market. "And it's getting cheaper," he added.

"Fifteen dollars a skin, Sneed?" the man offered.

"Wait'll we come back. The market may go up, and you'll get a better price."

Tubby Willows almost jeered. "If you thought the price was going up, Sneed, you'd grab that lot in a minute. You figure the price to drop!"

"I do," Sneed admitted.

The trio arranged about their departure on the spot. Sneed was for starting that afternoon, for he was frantic lest news of the commission's action reach Cold Deck before he could get away. However, Tubby Willows had a number of matters to attend to. The start was set for two days later.

Sneed and Bullman retired to their room. "That's a big load off my mind," Bullman said. "Willows hasn't heard that Simms is coming. I suppose Dad

figured to surprise him. But, Sneed, you had a chance to pick up twenty beaver at fifteen dollars a pelt. That's dirt cheap. You'll pay forty for 'em when you come out."

"Exactly," admitted Sneed smoothly, "and when most of Beaver Lake is yelling that we are a pair of thieves, Tubby Willows will be ready to tell 'em that he saw us turn down a chance like that. And what Tubby Willows says in this country, other men believe."

"Rough" Rhodes pulled up in front of the New Deal Café with a load of mail. "Got a package for you on the sled, Tubby," he announced, "come out and get it."

Tubby hurried out, then howled with joy. "Dad Simms, you old pirate!"

Dad Simms, deep in robes, grinned from the sled, then hurriedly climbed out.

"Kinda surprised you, eh, Tubby?" They shook hands warmly. "Got another surprise, too. I'm a fur buyer. What's more, I'm in the market for your team, Tubby."

Tubby looked dumfounded. "Gosh, Dad, that's tough! If you'd only let me know, I'd have held it for you. But I've already contracted to take Sneed and Bullman into Beaver Lake country."

"What're those jaspers doing up here so early?" Dad demanded.

"Same reason you are, I guess," Tubby answered; "they want to get the best of the catch."

Silence fell between the old friends. "Then it's a race between us, eh?" Dad said.

"That's about the size of it," Tubby admitted. "And the best man wins. Gosh, Dad, I hate to be competing against you, but——"

"A contract is a contract," Dad interrupted. "I'll have to step some to beat you, and I'll expect you to give Sneed and Bullman the best you've got."

"You can expect just that," Tubby said with a grin.

Sneed had been listening in on the conversation. He whispered to Bullman. "Light out and hire the few Malemutes and huskies left in camp. so Simms can't use 'em. I'll keep an eye on things here."

As Sneed gave this order, the trapper who had offered fur at fifteen dollars a pelt and been refused, entered. He shook hands with Dad.

"Just heard you're buying fur, Dad. It's prime beaver I've got. You can have it for twenty dollars a pelt."

"Now, Jim," Dad answered kindly, "if you say it's prime, it's prime. And if it's prime, it's worth twenty-five dollars. Take the fur up to my room. I'll pay you just as soon as I can get settled."

"Twenty-five dollars when he could have picked 'em up for fifteen," Bullman groaned. "That's what we're up against!"

"But it won't make any difference if we can keep the old coot out of Beaver Lake country," Sneed answered. "Get out and hire those dogs."

Dad Simms was up against it.

"Might have known it," he grumbled, "that cuss has rented every dog in Cold Deck worth having. He's even sent a team away on a wild-geese chase so I can't do business. I've certainly got to get on my toes if I expect to beat him. But how?" Dad pondered deeply. "What's the use of a man living to be as old as I am if he can't use his experience to get out of a mess like this?" he muttered. "You danged old-timer, use your head!"

Dad paced the floor of the New Deal Café without arriving at any solution of his problem. At length, he spotted his old familiar chair by the stove. In the days when he had believed himself old enough to die, he had dreamed and thought a lot in that chair. Now he

dropped into it. "Fits just like it ever did," he mused, "now, maybe I can think straight. Of course, I can pick up some scrub dogs down to the Indian village. But I know what that means. I'll always be banging 'em on the nose with a frying pan to stop a fight; or else watching to keep from being chewed up. Even with a scrub team I could get to Beaver Lake and do some business—but not enough."

From his chair, Dad could see little Freddie Grant playing out on the street. "Gosh, how that kid's grown in the last year," Dad muttered, "and how that dog has grown!" Dad got up and walked over to the window. Freddie had hitched the dog to a small sled and was enjoying life. Occasionally he would yell, "Mush!" "Gee!" or "Haw!" depending on which way he desired to go. The dog responded instantly. "Heh! Heh!" chuckled Dad. "It's great to be a kid and have a dog. When I was—— Wow! So help me Hanner, I got an idea!"

Two years previous, Dad Simms had watched a boy struggle with a Malemute dog, and lose the struggle. The dog bolted, taking the sled with it, and presently the sled was smashed against a stump. The boy had burst into a torrent of tears. Whereupon, Dad had announced to the world in general that it was high time somebody brought dogs into Cold Deck that children could play with. The Malemutes and huskies were generally too big and rough. A pup might be, and as a rule was, a fine playmate, but pups grow up. Dad had sent Outside for a dozen collies, which as every one knew, were ideal companions for children. The dozen children in Cold Deck in due time received a half-grown collie each.

"A long time ago," Dad mused, "I had a collie. Being up against it for dogs, I put him into the team. Later, I won a race by putting him in as a lead dog. 'Jake, the Musher,' used to

speed up his mail team the same way—putting a collie in to set the pace. They're not as strong or heavy as the Malemutes, but they're faster. Mmmmmmm!"

Dad pulled on his parka and stepped into the open for an interview with young Freddie Grant. "Hello, Fred!" he called.

"Hello, Dad! When you was in Hollywood did you see Tom Mix, Strongheart, and Charlie Chaplin?" Freddie, childlike, got to the point at once.

"Sure did," Dad answered, and was obliged to spend a half hour telling Freddie about Hollywood before he could bring up his own matter. "That's a good dog, Freddie. How much will you take for him?"

"Won't sell him," Freddie answered, "but I'll loan him to you, Dad! I was talking with the fellers the other day and we said Dad Simms could have anything we had except our dogs—and we'd loan him them."

Dad was touched. He swallowed a couple of times at this youthful appreciation of his thoughtfulness, then said: "Freddie, you get the boys here, I want to talk to 'em. Will your dogs work together?"

"Yeah, except mine and Joe Black's Slim. Both of 'em want to be leaders." Freddie licked his lips. "So we fixed that by my Growler being the real leader, and Joe's Slim being a loose leader. Slim keeps on the go; Growler tries to catch up, and we sure do make time, Dad."

"Well, then, suppose you make time getting your gang together," Dad suggested.

Freddie Grant was off, his collie snaking the sled over the hard-packed trail at a swift pace. The boy had trained the dog and had done a good job of it, as Dad could see at a glance. The dog had developed amazingly. His shoulders were stronger than that of the

collie one sees in the South. His legs were more powerful, but the speed was there.

"If the boys will lend me their dogs, I'll give Tubby Willows and Sneed a great old race. Still——" Doubt assailed Dad. "No," he declared, "I'll find another way. I'm hanged if I'll deprive these boys of their trusty dogs. There's only a few more months of snow left."

An hour later, there appeared to be a dog race on. One-dog-power sleds pulled up at the New Deal Café, and each had a youth at the gee pole. The demand for Dad Simms was loud and insistent. As the old-timer appeared, a cheer greeted him. It was the youngsters' tribute to the man who had made collie companionship possible. Each dog seemed to be regarding Dad with favor.

"Here they are, Dad, if you want 'em," Freddie Grant announced. The others confirmed this with shouts and nods.

"I've decided to get along some other way," Dad explained.

Freddie grinned. "We've wanted to do something for you," he explained, "and this is our chance. Besides, my uncle says you're out to beat Sneed. My uncle's a trapper, and so I know all about Sneed."

"I'll beat him some way," Dad promised.

Freddie grinned again. The whole gang seemed to be in on a secret. "I'll bet you, you take 'em, Dad," he offered. "A fresh shipment of candy is in from the Outside. I'll bet you twelve pounds of candy, that's a pound for each kid, that you take 'em."

"Heh! Heh!" Dad chuckled. "If I lose, you get the candy! And if I win, you know I'll give it to you because my works won't stand much candy. I'll take the bet."

"Listen to this!" Young Freddie's face became serious. "My uncle's part-

ner just came in from Seward, left three days behind you, and took the short cut over Glacier Pass. He says beaver will be high. The Alaska Game Commission has ordered trapping stopped. At the Seattle Fur Exchange it's already gone up five dollars a skin. He thinks Sneed knows all about it. That's why he's in so early this year."

Dad's eyes flashed. "Come on over, boys, I'll buy you that candy," he cried. "Now I've got to beat him. Those collies are the only dogs that can do it." Dad dug into his pocket and produced a roll of bills. "This is going to be businesslike and regular," he said. "I'm paying each boy the usual rate, and here's a month's money in advance. I've got to see every trapper in the country and see him before Sneed does. The sled runners will be cutting grass before I get out of that country."

"Just a minute, boys!" a heavy voice broke in unexpectedly.

Dad Simms turned. "Bullman!" he exclaimed. "I thought you were with Tubby Willows and Sneed!"

"I'm not! I'm back here to hire a good dog team."

"You're back here to stop me," Dad cut in. "Well, try and do it!"

Bullman beamed on the group of boys. "You look like good, sensible youngsters to me," he said smoothly, "and you're old enough to know that money is what counts in this world. I want your collies, and I'll outbid Simms to get them."

"You can't outbid Dad," Freddie answered, "not with this gang. The collies are his."

It was several moments before Bullman believed what he had heard. Slowly he walked away. He had one card left, that was to send a native runner to Sneed with a note. Interior Indians, descendants of natives who had been runners for generations, were always to be found in Cold Deck. This day was no exception. An hour later, a slim,

powerful youth was on his way with a note to Sneed, which read:

SNEED: Simms has learned about the beaver. Price climbing already. Simms is coming in with team of collies, and they are plenty fast. I've done all I can, but owners would not listen to reason. BULLMAN.

The Indian had his instructions. Several days later, when Tubby Willows was not looking, the native stepped from the brush, handed Sneed the note, and as silently vanished. Sneed read it carefully, then destroyed it. He looked anxiously behind, then at Tubby Willows.

"Say, Willows! Is there any short cut into the Beaver Lake country," he asked.

"Yeah, one! It's through Cut-off Pass! I think Rough Rhodes is the only man to get through it alive."

"Then Dad Simms can't make it that way?"

"Dad's not fool enough to try it. Why?"

"He's bound to beat me if he can. Willows, if you put me in ahead of Simms there's a big bonus for you."

Tubby scowled. "Money don't mean a thing to me, Sneed, and you should know it. But keeping a deal means a lot. If it's humanly possible, I'll beat Dad Simms. Now, don't bring up the matter again."

"Cut-off Pass!"

Dad Simms stopped his collies and looked at the notch. It was a beautiful sight, yet Dad knew exactly the danger that lay between the twin peaks that seemed to stand on guard. "Rough Rhodes made it," he muttered, "and I know a dozen fellows that were beaten back—skookum men, too! Rhodes nearly died and there were several I remember who did die that time of the stampede into Beaver Lake."

Dad recalled the stories. The country beyond was the mouth of a mighty

funnel; the pass the outlet. No man could walk against the icy blast that howled through the pass. Rhodes had crawled, almost dragging his team with him; fighting every inch of the way; making a foot at a time. And Rhodes was a strong, young man. There, tiny particles of ice, flung at a speed of eighty and ninety miles an hour, cut one's face and clothing to bits. Rhodes' dogs had been blind for days afterward. Rhodes had tackled the pass during a mild winter, and this was the coldest winter Dad could remember. Again he looked at the peaks. Glaciers clung dangerously to mighty ledges. The cold sunlight sent flashes of green and blue from their crevasses. How clear the sky was; how delicately carved the peaks appeared to be against the blue of the sky!

Dad heaved a sigh and came to a decision. "If I can get through I'll be on even terms with Sneed—if I can get through! Mush, boys, we're going to tackle Cut-off Pass. That'll be something for you to tell the Malemutes and huskies about when they start boasting how good they are."

It was three days later that two other men were looking at Cut-off Pass. But they were looking from the opposite side.

"The pass," Tubby Willows wisely observed, "looks better from the valley. And it don't make any difference which side you look at it."

"Yeah," nervously answered Sneed. "But we'd better keep moving. If I can get to McMurtry's Post ahead of Simms, I won't mind so much. The cream of the business is there."

How well Tubby Willows knew this. A dozen trap lines spread, like spokes of a wheel, from McMurtry's Post. At one time it had been quite a trading center. Now it had dwindled to a cluster of log structures and a small trading post. As it was at the head of Beaver Lake, most of the fur was

brought to this point. Here the fur buyers gathered each year. Naturally, the man who arrived first helped himself generously to the best.

"Sneed, you give me a pain," Tubby said impatiently. "I said I'd beat Simms there if I could. I think I can!" Privately Tubby was certain he could, and it hurt him all over.

Sneed, standing on a ridge, studied the icy country behind him through a pair of binoculars. "No sign of him," he breathed, "and I can see almost a day's travel behind. It takes time to come up this slope."

Tubby nodded. He saw Sneed swing around and look at the pass—as if he could enjoy the sight now that Simms was not immediately in the running. For a moment, Sneed looked at the peaks, then at the notch marking the pass, then along a hogback leading down to the bench on which they were standing. Suddenly he grew tense. Tubby thought for a moment he was going to thrust the binoculars into his eyes.

"Look!" Sneed cried. "Look! A dog team! But no driver! What has become of him?"

Tubby Willows thrilled all over. Was it possible that Dad had sent somebody in his place; some superman who had smashed his way through the pass? But the absence of a driver looked serious. Tubby adjusted the binoculars again.

"Can't place that team!" he mused. "I know that sled. Somebody's on it, riding! By the great horned spoon!" he cried. "I've got it now. Somebody's collected the collies in camp and got through. If you want speed, drive collies!" Again he looked at the figure on the sled. The figure, as if obeying some silent plea, suddenly got up and took his place at the gee pole. "Sufferin' Malemutes!" exclaimed Tubby. "A miracle has happened. Another man got through Cut-off Pass, and it's Dad Simms!" He turned to the team.

"Mush, you Malemutes, mush, or you're going to take a trimming."

"You'd better make 'em mush," Sneed said unpleasantly; "we could have gone through that pass if you'd wanted to. You're helping Dad Simms to win this race."

Smack!

That was Tubby Willows' fist against Sneed's jaw. Sneed folded up like a tent. Tubby picked him up and tossed him on top of the load, then he set off at top speed. In time, Sneed regained consciousness. "If you can walk Sneed," Tubby suggested, "you'd better walk and lighten the load. But every time you say or even look like you think I'm throwing this race, I'm going to pop you one."

Sneed rolled off, got to his feet, and swung in behind.

As they gained more open country and the two outfits converged, Tubby's team was a half mile ahead. Snow began to fly half an hour later. Sneed grinned. He was getting a break, for the heavier Malemutes could make better time in the rough going than the lighter collies. He and Tubby saw Dad Simms swing into the trail they were breaking to ease the strain on himself and dogs. Sneed lost his grin. "The old crook," he growled, "taking advantage of the trail we've made!"

But even with this advantage, the pace was growing too strong for the old-timer. Wind whipped snow into the trail almost before he could close in. Grieving inwardly, Tubby Willows increased the pace. It was mid-afternoon, slightly down grade, when Dad made his bid. They saw him coming, running behind his light sled, clinging to the handles to help his progress. Collies for speed! They were making it now, swiftly overhauling the heavy Malemutes.

Swinging in behind Tubby so the honest old sour dough could not see what he was doing, Sneed unrolled a

small package containing balls of fresh moose meat. He dropped one of the balls, and a hundred yards on he dropped another. Altogether, he dropped six.

Glancing back, Sneed saw Dad's loose leader snap up something. He grinned.

"He missed the first ball and got the second. Missed the third, too. Hello, the leader got the third! That's two dogs done for."

An hour later, Dad Simms came abreast of Sneed and Tubby. His face was drawn from his efforts. He was on the verge of exhaustion, but sticking to the race on sheer nerve. He gained a fifty-yard lead, then a hundred. The leader went into a drift that filled a two-mile-wide valley.

Now it was where strength counted. The heavy Malemutes slowed down to a mile-an-hour pace; digging in their powerful legs and pulling until their bellies dragged in the snow, but always moving ahead.

"He's losing!" Sneed cried. "He's shot his bolt! He's losing."

Tubby Willows said nothing. It was not the sort of a race he cared to win. Any man who could go through Cut-off Pass was entitled to victory. Old Dad Simms out on his feet and this man jeering instead of cheering him! It was hard for Tubby to bear. It was snowing more heavily, making it tougher for the lighter team. Darkness came suddenly. Tubby pulled into a sheltered spot and made camp. Occasionally, he looked into the gloom. Somewhere Dad Simms was struggling against the elements. "He's licked," Tubby muttered, "but he won't give up."

Two hours later, Dad Simms came into camp. Tubby thumped him on the back and gave him a drink of hot tea. Then he helped Dad unharness the team. This he could do without affecting the final outcome of the race.

"My two leaders ate suthin' that knocked 'em out," Dad remarked;

"they're ridin' on the sled instead of pullin' with the others. I dosed 'em up a bit. But even if they live, they won't be worth much for a week. Sneed, it looks like you'd beat us into McMurtry's."

Tubby Willows examined the dogs and gave Dad a curious look. Dad gave no sign that he caught Tubby's meaning, which was, "Looks like these dogs have been poisoned." Presently he did say, "Why did you tackle Cut-off Pass?"

"For two reasons, Tubby," Dad answered. "When it's blowin' up there, you can see a cloud of snow flyin' off the pass! I looked up and there wasn't any snow flyin', so I knew it wasn't windy. Next, I figured my light collies could travel on top of the crust. They did! They made good time, and I rode. Even at that, there was enough wind to blow us back a hundred yards two or three times. It's gusty up there! Guess I'll turn in. He glanced at Sneed. The buyer was reading copies of the Cold Deck *Nugget*, a daily paper published at Cold Deck. "Why're you taking so many papers in, Sneed?" asked Dad.

The buyer gave him a curious glance in which there was a mixture of contempt. "The trappers will pay a dollar apiece for them," he growled.

Dad shrugged. He usually gave his papers away. "Let me have one to start a fire with," he said. "As soon as I get my load thawed out, I'll replace it. I've got several I was taking in for the boys."

Sneed handed him a paper and Dad moved over to another sheltered spot. Here he started a fire, removed the lashings from his load, found a paper, and returned with it. This he placed with Sneed's papers, while Tubby regarded him with amazement.

"Say, Dad," said Tubby at last, "you could just as well have slept by our fire to-night."

"Sneed and I are after a small for-

tune in fur, Tubby, and we ain't got much use for each other, so maybe it's just as well I don't help myself to Sneed's fire. S'long, see you in the morning."

It was snowing when the two camps awakened. Dad's sick dogs were better, but they would have to ride. The snow was deeper. Again, the powerful Malemutes showed the way. For three hours Dad Simms made an effort to keep pace, then suddenly he turned aside.

Sneed clutched Tubby's arm. "We've won!" he cried. "We've won! Simms is turning toward the north arm of Beaver Lake. That means he's given up beating us to McMurtry, and seventy per cent of the fur catch is there."

Tubby nodded, strangely silent. Dad Simms had evidently quit the race for the bigger prize and was contenting himself with the catch of the scattered trappers down the lake. On its smooth surface, his dogs would make fast time. He studied Sneed's face. It was difficult to read the man's thoughts. Not knowing that beaver trapping had been stopped, Tubby could not realize that Sneed planned to buy quickly, using the prices quoted in the Cold Deck *Nugget*, and then get out with the catch before the news could reach McMurtry that beaver had gone up nearly a hundred per cent. That news would reach the camp when Dad returned.

As for Dad, he seemed to have quit entirely. On the shore of the lake, he made camp and gave himself two days' rest. The sick dogs were nursed back to health.

"Growler," said Dad to the leader, "Sneed didn't fool me none. He gave you enough poison to make you sick, knowing I'd pack you on the sled and not leave you. If he'd killed you outright it might have looked suspicious, and I wouldn't have had the extra weight to pack around. Feelin' better, eh? That's good. Sneed's a pretty slick cuss,

but I've seen a lot of slick cusses come and go in my time. To-morrow we mush down the lake."

By easy stages, Dad moved from cabin to cabin, giving the latest news, paying the highest prices, and generally enjoying himself. "I'm coming in every year, boys," he announced; "figure to run Sneed out of the country. Yeah, the game commission has stopped trapping beaver and the price is going high. Better hang onto your money or put it into grub."

But even with easy mushing Dad Simms was on the verge of exhaustion as he neared McMurtry's. A huge pile of fur was stored in the old trading post. The air was heavy with tobacco smoke as bearded trappers stood around exchanging the latest news. They were enjoying themselves.

"Gentlemen," Sneed was pleading, "I'll give you twenty dollars a pelt for the lot. That's the biggest price that's ever been offered this far from the market. Twenty dollars a pelt; take it or leave it. That's my last offer."

"We'll wait until Simms shows up," a trapper remarked. "He might better that."

"He can't better it! No man can better it. When Simms comes, my price goes down."

"We'll wait," said the men.

Sneed looked as if he were going to cry. He dare not go higher for fear the trappers would become suspicious. He was not supposed to go higher than the market quotations in the old papers he had brought.

Suddenly, the trappers left the room. Sneed followed. A tremendous cheer went up. Dad Simms was coming toward them. He was so tired he was reeling. His dogs, tails dragging and heads down, were pulling a sled loaded with fur. Dad let go of the gee pole long enough to wave his hand in response to their cheering. The next instant, he had pitched forward in the

snow. Tubby Willows run forward to pick him up.

Dad got slowly to his feet. "Dang yuh!" he snorted, "don't touch me! I said I'd beat Sneed without any help, and I aim to do it. Leave me alone. I can make it."

And make it he did!

A cup of hot tea was handed him. He gulped it down. "Gents, I'm ready to bid for your fur. I bid twenty dollars a pelt."

"Twenty-five!" shouted Sneed.

"Twenty-six!" yelled Dad.

"Twenty-seven," offered Sneed, glaring.

"Twenty-eight," countered Dad.

"Thirty!" growled Sneed.

"I won't go higher than twenty-eight," Dad announced. "Believe me, boys, it's going to cost plenty to freight this stuff out."

"Then I get it for thirty," cried Sneed.

"You don't get it at any price," a trapper growled. "Dad Simms gets the fur at twenty-eight dollars a pelt."

Sneed appeared to be stunned. "I can't see why you held off for Simms. Tubby Willows didn't tell you he was coming. How did you know he'd go so high—fur's never sold this high before?"

"Heh! Heh!" Dad Simms chuckled. "When you dropped doped meat for my dogs, Sneed, I decided to pull a fast one. I had to or get licked. I knew I couldn't beat you to McMurtry. I knew that Tubby Willows would play fair with you, and that he wouldn't tell the boys I was coming. Well—Remember the bunch of papers you brought along and sold the boys at a dollar each? Well, I sneaked a copy of the Cold Deck *Nugget* into the pile. That copy was printed an hour before I left, and it contained some mighty interesting news. Read that!"

Dad handed the would-be-buyer a duplicate copy of the paper he had

slipped into Sneed's bundle that night. The item read:

BEAVER SOARS.

The price of beaver took a sharp upward turn at the Seattle Fur Exchange when the Alaska Game Commission announced a closed season on beaver. Dad Simms left to-day for the Beaver Lake country. He announces he will pay the new scale of prices for beaver—something no fur buyer has done in years.

"Heh! Heh! Heh!" Dad's chuckle was prolonged. "That's one bet you overlooked, Sneed! You only got a dollar for that paper. It was worth thousands to the boys. Heh! Heh! Heh! Well, boys, guess I'll turn in and get a little sleep. I don't seem to be able to stand the gaff like I used to."

And Dad wondered why everybody laughed.



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Brown Thrasher

(*Toxostoma Rufum*)

ANY garden harboring a brown thrasher, or brown thrush, as it is usually called, is a lively and cheer-inspiring spot, for this speckled brown bird pours forth a song which is remarkable for its wide variety and clearness of note. Many of us remember the poem we learned in our schoolroom days, either in whole or in part, which went like this:

There's a merry brown thrush sitting up in the tree;
He's singing to me! He's singing to me!
And what does he say, little girl, little boy?
"Oh, the world's running over with joy!
Don't you hear? Don't you see?
Hush! Look in my tree!
For I am as happy as can be."
And the brown thrush keeps singing: "A nest do you see?
And five eggs had by me in the juniper tree?
Don't meddle, don't touch, little girl, little boy,
Or the world will lose some of its joy.
Now I'm glad! Now I'm free!
And I always shall be,
If you never bring sorrow to me."

The brown thrasher is often spoken of as the mocking bird of the North. Upon arriving from the South, he floods the morning air with his song.

The nest of the brown thrasher is rather a bulky structure, built of dead twigs, with a lining of rootlets, and placed in a bush or thick cluster of vines. The eggs, which are usually four or five in number, are thickly covered with tiny brown dots. The thrashers' greatest enemy is the house cat since the bird likes to be near the domestic dooryard and the nest is often placed in easy reach of felines. When destruction does come through this avenue, the birds are pitifully dejected and utter low and mournful notes.

The baby birds are fed constantly all day long for about two weeks. They and the parents consume immense quantities of worms and grubs, thus ridding the garden of obnoxious insects. Careful observations by government bird experts have disclosed the fact that the brown thrush eats little grain and that is largely waste kernels scattered in harvesting or hauling along the roads, and the fruit eaten is mostly from wild shrubs, so that this happy family of birds is a decided benefit to any community.



Loophole of Saddleback

By Robert J. Horton

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

HIS ability to wriggle out of any difficulty has earned for Charley Adams the name of "Loophole." Indecision is the youth's chief fault.

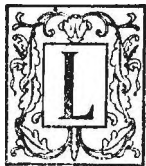
Raymond loves Loophole's sister, Bess, and is approved by old Sherman Adams. Bess laughs at Raymond's threat that he will make Loophole a brother-in-law to be proud of.

Loophole pals with one Emmet, after his father has angrily expressed the wish that he would decide to be something. The two shoot up The Mint. There is general confusion and a fire. Emmet, using Loophole's injured pride to further his own ends, steals the gold from the crap tables.

Emmet and Loophole escape, aided, curiously enough, by Raymond. They are pursued, while one Bemis, who has previously held up Loophole, is again seen riding off.

CHAPTER VI.

CORRALLED!



LOOPIHOLE" and Emmet climbed steadily, rested their horses frequently because of the steepness of the trail. The great butte was bare of trees, the only vegetation being grass and buckbrush. But no sounds of pursuit came from below, and Loophole wondered if Raymond had misdirected the posse. For a posse was certain to be formed: an effort would surely be made to follow them. Raymond! Butting in again. Loophole thought he knew the reason. Raymond would boast to Bess Adams that he had helped

her brother to get away. Loophole snorted.

They reached the deep depression in the summit of the butte and there they dismounted. Arching over them were the starry folds of sky; below, the flowing prairie was dim in shadow. They could see the lights of Saddleback, but there was no glare of flames. The fire in The Mint had been extinguished.

"The reason I came up here," said Loophole Adams, "was that we can spot anybody following us. If they come one way, we go the other. I'm thinkin' they'd never figure we'd try this stunt an' stay so close."

"Sounds all right," Emmet grunted. "I'm leavin' this get-away to you. You know the country."

"Maybe so," Loophole growled; "but I've never been chased before."

"Don't you know anywhere to hide?" Emmett asked in surprise.

"Yes, but there's others know the same places. Sheriff McCall will be on this job. He's not so easy. But there's one thing I'm hanking on. They may take after those three who passed us when we were in the trees down there. I heard 'em comin', which is why I hid. Do you know who was leadin' that outfit?"

"No," Emmett replied sharply.

"Well, it was Bemis," Loophole declared. "I'd know him in the saddle a mile away. Now don't it seem funny to you, Emmett, that Bemis an' a couple of his pals should be beatin' it just at this time?"

"Why—can't say that it does," Emmett answered, hesitating.

Loophole turned on him, trying to search his face in the starlight. "Where was you before you called me?" he demanded. "I mean where was you when I was havin' that scuffle in the dark in front of the office door?"

"I was in it," Emmett replied laconically. "Where'd you suppose I was?"

"Well, how does it come so many men was mixed up there an' then all beat it so sudden?" Loophole persisted.

"For Pete's sake!" Emmett ejaculated. "We was hittin' 'em right an' left, wasn't we?"

"I suppose so," said Loophole dubiously. "Did you get into the safe durin' the scuffle?"

"Great snakes! I didn't get into the safe! What give you that fool idea?"

"Well, then where did you get all this money?" asked the puzzled Loophole.

"From the craps table, an' the wheel, an' the table drawers," Emmett explained in a weary voice. "Looks to me like this is a queer time to be goin' into a lot of details about what's already happened. What we ought to be figur-

ing out right now is what's goin' to happen next, an' how we're goin' to get clean away. I don't want any fancy rope tricks in mine."

Loophole did not answer this, but he was not satisfied. He could not be considered any too keen a thinker, but there was, to his notion, something queer about the whole business. Those men fighting in the office—fighting him; they were not making that disturbance for nothing. How did they get there to begin with? And there was that in Emmett's manner, and in the nature of his replies, which did not satisfy, either. He was sorry he had become implicated with Emmett, but there was no way out of it now.

"Robbery ain't my line," he muttered. "Not any, a-tall."

"Oh, stop whining!" said Emmett in disgust. "It's in your line now. What you've just said would make a fine excuse before a jury, wouldn't it? They'd laugh their heads off an' soak you all the harder. I think we ought to get going an' I think we ought to head north. The border line is up there somewheres. You ought to know where."

"You talk as if you'd had experience," said Loophole sarcastically.

"Well, if you want to know it, I have," Emmett declared hotly. "I've had just enough experience to know that we're in a tight hole. If you want to know just how tight I think it is, I'll tell you this much: You can dilly an' dally as much as you please, an' if they close in on us you can give up an' depend on your dad to get you out of it. I haven't got anybody to depend on, an' if they get close to me, I'm just naturally goin' to start workin' my old smoke-wagon. I'll drop just as many of 'em as I can, an' they won't be able to tell whether I did all of it, or whether you didn't do some of it. I'll carry you with me, that's what!"

"You'll carry me nowhere!" cried

Loophole. "We've got to use our heads instead of our guns. You'd have a fat chance against McCall an' the kind of a crowd he'd pick to ride with him. You're a—— Listen!"

Although they had not realized it, their angry voices had risen to a high pitch. In the stillness of a prairie night, voices carry a long distance, especially when coming from an elevation. Now there were other sounds on the night air, sounds which were not voices. They were wafted up from below in a dull, throbbing rhythm. Loophole recognized the muffled hoofbeats in an instant.

He flung himself into his saddle. He whirled his horse, then hesitated. Emmett was mounting also. But Loophole was listening to other sounds, and these came from above—the honking of wild geese. His heart seemed to bound into his throat. He shook his head as if throwing off some restraining force. Then his voice came, wildly exultant.

"They're after us, Emmett! Now—you've shot your mouth off so much—let's see you ride!"

His horse felt the sharp, galling rake of the steel and leaped across the saddle of the butte. Down the trail it plunged; an inarticulate cry coming from its rider's lips. Slipping, sliding, lunging—Loophole rode with utter, reckless abandon. Clouds were racing down from the north on a wind which had sprung into being as if at a signal. Emmett wanted to ride north, did he? Very well, they would ride north. Behind and above him, he could hear Emmett's horse tearing after. Stones came showering down. Emmett, the chump, was shouting. Loophole's heart sang with glee. Going to carry him along! Let them follow. Loophole's horse stumbled, nearly throwing him. Loophole merely yelled and shook the reins out free. More steel, a last heartless pitch, and they straightened out on the plain.

Loophole looked back and saw Emmett's mount plunge down the final slope. They started northward. Loophole was speedily aware of the fact that Emmett was mounted on no ordinary range horse. Loophole's own mount was the pick of the Half-Circle A string, fast, sure, enduring. Few horses on the north range could equal the animal's performance. But Emmett caught up with him, nevertheless, and Loophole noted that the horse he rode was a magnificent bay, fully as good looking an animal as he rode himself. This amazed and puzzled him. How did it come that a drifter owned a horse like that?

His conjectures were cut short immediately. Emmett shouted and pointed off to the right. Loophole looked and saw swift shadows moving. In a flash, he realized the seriousness of their situation. It had all been too easy. Of course, they had been observed climbing the butte. The Saddleback deputy had sent men to surround the butte; then he had started a small party up the butte to drive the fugitives down. Now they were in for it.

Hardly had this realization struck home when there came a spurt of flame from the shadows racing around the right side of the butte.

"Here we get it!" yelled Emmett.

"*Ride, you loon!*" shouted Loophole.

But, as they struck off to the left, something that had been wild and exultant and daring within Loophole seemed to die, leaving him cold, uncertain, wavering. He drove in his spurs, clenching his teeth. There it was again!—the old feeling of hesitancy, the readiness to give up, to seek an easy way out. He leaned forward in the saddle and fought with the demon that was consuming his courage, or his initiative. What was it? He kept asking himself over and over, to the pounding of his horse's hoofs.

But his thoughts were speedily cut

short. The business was more serious than he had suspected. For riders now appeared on the left—to westward. There were more red flashes in the night. Emmett raised his gun and fired twice.

"Stop it!" shouted Loophole, as Emmett's horse shied.

He now knew the secret of the splendid mount Emmett rode. The animal was afraid of gunfire from the saddle, and had probably been bought for a song.

"We've got to go straight north!" yelled Loophole. "That's ahead of us. Run for it!"

But it was too late to run for it. The little diversion afforded by Emmett and his gun-shy horse had been sufficient to allow the pursuers from both left and right—east and west—to surge ahead. They were about to converge at a point directly in front to head the fugitives off. Loophole saw it and swung to the left.

"Take the right," he shouted; "if one, or both of us gets through, it's luck!"

He drove in his spurs, but Emmett was with him in a minute.

"We're taking the same road, old chappie," he yelled; "we're in this thing together."

It was neck and neck; but the posse on the left had seen the move. They bore down on the two riders like a whirlwind. Their escape to the west was cut off. To turn back to the butte meant certain capture. The riders from the right now had turned back, too. They were caught just like rats in a trap!

"We must split!" shouted Loophole, a terrible fear throbbing in his throat. "Then one of us has a chance."

"There'll be no splitting with me!" sang Emmett.

At that moment shots from both the riders on the left and those sweeping down on the right whistled past the

fugitives' ears. Emmett returned the fire.

Loophole saw that they were fairly caught. He gulped, then whirled in his saddle. His gun blazed and Emmett was sent hurtling from his mount, which went down with a bullet through the shoulders. After a few moments Emmett twisted in on the ground and sent three shots at Loophole, who had checked his horse. They missed, and, with the third, a figure came flying from a charging horse with the left faction. It landed squarely on Emmett and his gun was stilled.

"Drop it!" said this man, and Emmett let the gun fall from his fingers with a short laugh.

The man was Raymond.

Meanwhile, Loophole sat his horse as both factions of riders bore down upon him and surrounded him. He still held his gun; held it drooping in his right hand, his reins in his left, and looked up at the scuttling clouds with a curious gaze.

"I reckon you might as well let me have it," said a quiet, drawling voice.

Loophole started, looked down, and without hesitation handed his weapon to the speaker.

"An' now I suppose we might as well drift back into town," drawled Sheriff McCall.

CHAPTER VII.

JAILED.

ON the ride back to Saddleback with the posse, Loophole Charley Adams said not a word. He had not once spoken to the sheriff or to Raymond. Toward the latter he was bitter to the point of hatred. He believed that Raymond had framed him for the second time, but he could not see how Raymond was to turn this second treacherous play to his own advantage, except that it might put him in right with the sheriff. But Raymond could not go back to the Half Circle A to boast to

Bess that he had helped capture her brother and still expect to win her favor. It must have been he, too, had planned this ruse to effect the capture, for he certainly had seen the escaping pair go up the butte. As for that other thing—his own hesitancy to fight it out at the last moment—Loophole continually shook his head in bewilderment.

It was Emmett who did the talking on that ride back to town. He had cursed fearfully when Raymond had captured him; he had cursed frequently since. And his profane remarks were not addressed to Raymond, or the other members of the posse; they were all directed at Loophole.

"Shot my horse, the crawling coward! Afraid to make a run for it! You bet, I'll tell what I know about this, an' I'll tell plenty. His daddy'll have a sweet time getting him out of this mess by the time I'm through. I'll show him I'm no come-on. This was his idea from the start. He came to me in *The Dirty Rat* an' asked me to go in with him. He started the play, an' everybody in *The Mint* heard him an' saw him do it. He promised me he'd be able to get us away, an' he quit like a skunk!"

Loophole did not even wince at the things Emmett said about him or the names he called him. He was puzzling his brain, wondering at the feeling of fierce exultation which the sound of the wild geese overhead had given him. For a short space a new spirit had surged within him. Where was it now? He could not blame everything on Emmett: it would sound silly to say he had not thought to rob the place where he had started the trouble. It seemed as if this very thought was in Emmett's mind also.

"Maybe he can tell his daddy how he happens to have his share of the loot in his pockets," Emmett jeered. "Sweet boy, that. Shooting down my horse,

the double crosser! That piece of work will make a big hit with the jury. They like chicken-hearted double crossers in this kind of a country! Sure, they like 'em about ten years' worth in the pen. If the jury's at all fair about it, he'll get more'n *I* will, the——"

"Oh, close your trap!" Sheriff McCall commanded sharply. "You're sure talking like a welcher yourself. You've done nothing but shoot off your mouth against your pal since we got you. It won't get you anything, an' maybe he didn't shoot your horse a-tall. There was some others of us workin' guns aroun' there."

"I saw him do it!" Emmett flashed. "He hasn't even got nerve enough to deny it!"

"I'll close that trap of yours with the butt of this quirt if you open it again!" the sheriff threatened, edging his horse in close to the animal which had been secured for the prisoner.

Emmett, seeing that the sheriff meant what he said, desisted in his tirade. But his eyes flashed fire and his thoughts raced. Cunningly enough, he saw that the fact that Loophole's father was one of the most influential and powerful cattlemen on the north range would, in a manner, react to his own advantage. Sherman Adams might even bail him out and tell him to beat it. This would give him a chance to get his son off. Emmett's eyes now smiled. Why, sure enough!—that would be the way of it. His was the most important evidence that could be given against Loophole. They would certainly want him out of the way. Emmett's spirits soared. He would most likely get out of this thing, with money into the bargain.

But he began to have his doubts when he reached the Saddleback jail. There, after being searched, and having the money and his other possessions taken from him, he was thrust into a cell, while Loophole was held in the

sheriff's private office. Would they bail Loophole out and leave him in? he wondered. But no attempt was being made to bail Loophole out, as yet.

Sheriff McCall was an elderly man, ruddy, and with gray mustache. He had a slow, kindly manner, and mild, blue eyes which could harden on occasion. He looked over the pile of bills and gold on his desk at Loophole with a quizzical expression. They were alone, and Loophole was twisting his hat and scowling darkly at the money.

"You know, Charley," said the sheriff in his soft, drawling voice, "there was a time in this county when a man rode in from the range an' took his first drink off his horse."

"Some do it yet," Loophole said laconically.

"They try to do it," the sheriff corrected. "It ain't exactly looked upon with favor nowadays. It was done along about the same time as when boisterous cowboys used to whip out their six-guns and shoot glasses off the bar an' pepper the lights. That ain't looked upon with favor any more, either."

"I suppose you'll say next that times have changed," said Loophole, with the trace of a sneer in his words. He was bristling against what he expected was coming.

The sheriff stroked his mustache, nodding. "Yes, Charley, times have sure changed. Now, that stunt you pulled last night showed powerful on-reasonableness on your part. I don't know if it was your idea or Emmett's, but you had reason to start something because of the little trouble you had with Dave Parker the night before."

"Wish to thunder I had finished it!" Loophole blurted.

"You come might' near it," the sheriff observed in a sterner tone. "I've got a wounded man an'——"

"I didn't shoot at anybody!" Loophole broke in hotly.

"That's right. You shot down Emmett's horse. You stopped him from wounding or killing some more of my men. Now why did you do that, Charley?"

"Because I got cold feet, I reckon," Loophole replied in disgust. "It's always the way with me, dang it—I never finish!"

"Well, in this case, it was *you* who would have been finished. You didn't have a chance from the start. But I thought maybe you saw you'd made a mistake an' wanted to stop this Emmett from doin' a lot of damage. I figured you savvied at the last minute that you wasn't an outlaw after all. I don't think you've got the makin's of one, Charley."

"Doesn't seem as if I've got the makin's of anything," said Loophole sourly. "An' say, sheriff, how did this double crosser of a Raymond get into this thing?"

"I deputized him," replied McCall. "Why?"

"Because——" Loophole bit off his words. If Raymond had had to join in the chase, that was different. Loophole decided to hold his tongue. "Just wonderin'," he evaded. "He hangs aroun' the ranch a good deal."

Sheriff McCall nodded. "Now I guess you can see you're in a tight hole, Charley, an' you can make it a lot easier for yourself an' that other fellow inside if you come clean and tell all."

"Oh, everybody knows we did it," said Loophole impatiently. "What's the use denying anything?" He bit his lip, for here he was giving in again.

"That's the right way to look at it," said the sheriff approvingly. "But I want you to answer a question, Charley." He pointed to the pile of bills on his desk. "Where's the rest of the money, Charley?"

Loopholes' eyes widened. "The rest of what money?" he demanded in sur-

prise. "Didn't you get what Emmett had on him?"

"Yes," said the sheriff, nodding. "But there's only about three thousand dollars here."

"Well, it's all I know anything about." Loophole's mind was working fast. Was Emmett double crossing him in some way? He frowned at the thought that in some way Emmett might be making him the goat. "All I know is that he stuffed a thick wad of bills in my pocket. I don't even know how much it was."

"Who stuffed them in your pocket?" asked the sheriff.

"Emmett," Loophole harked angrily.

Sheriff McCall shook his head sadly. "Won't hold, Charley. There was forty thousand dollars taken from the safe."

"Forty thousand!" Loophole's hat dropped to the floor and he half rose. "Forty thousand?" Then he remembered the mêlée in front of the office after the lights had been shot out and the flames were licking at the furniture and the floor. He remembered the forms that had flitted before the dim light of the office window. But where had Emmett been all this time? Probably it was true he had been rifling the table drawers. But——

Loophole leaned on the desk and looked the sheriff squarely in the eyes. "Do you think I'm lyin' when I say that all I know about is the money Emmett stuffed into my pocket?" he asked evenly.

"Charley, I'm the sheriff of this county, an' forty thousand dollars was taken from Dave Parker's safe," replied McCall. "I have Dave Parker's word for it, an' Dave Parker's word is good."

Loophole leaped to his feet, his eyes blazing. "You'd try to hang a forty-thousand-dollar robbery on me?" he cried, pounding the desk.

"I'm asking you here an' now to tell

me all you know about it," the sheriff returned sternly. "Forty-some thousand dollars has been stolen. You an' Emmett were caught with some of it, an' you've confessed where it came from. I want the rest!"

Loophole sat down, his eyes snapping. That stirring feeling he had experienced before and after the trouble had returned tenfold. He was fighting mad. In crisp sentences he told the sheriff everything that had happened from the time he left the ranch until he had been captured. And he particularly stressed the commotion in front of the office, the forms within and their sudden retreat. He withheld only two features of the escapade. One of these was Raymond's meeting them when they first fled. The other he now proceeded to tell the sheriff, who had listened attentively without once interrupting him.

"How does it come, sheriff, that this hanger-on of a Bemis, an' two of his cronies, should slope out of town so suddenlike while the fire was on?"

"Why, I don't know," replied the puzzled official. "Fact is, I didn't know they'd gone. An' I don't know much about 'em, tell truth."

"All right, listen to this." Loophole then proceeded to explain his early morning experience and the attempted holdup.

"Why didn't you report it?" scowled the sheriff.

"Yeah, an' he laughed at," replied Loophole scornfully. "An' what could I prove? I think straight out that Raymond framed it. An' here's something about this business to-night that might be interesting. Raymond saw us make our first break an' practically told us to hurry up. Next thing, when we were hidin' in the trees at the foot of the coulee trail up the butte, Bemis and two others rode out of town, headin' east, on the upper trail. Next thing I know, here's the posse on us' an' Ray-

mond's with the bunch chasin' us. Looks mighty funny to me, dog-gone if it don't!"

The sheriff had leaned forward, intensely interested. Now he asked a few pointed questions about the trouble in front of the office and the swift departure of Bemis and his two companions. Then he leaned back in his chair.

"You say you don't know where Emmett was while this was going on?"

"I asked him an' he said he was in the fight himself."

"Couldn't he have got into that safe without you knowing it, an' then have cached the most of the money without you knowing it, either, intending to hold out on you?"

"He only had one chance to cache it, an' that was when he went into the barn alone to get his horse," said Loophole. "He could have thrown it away on the trail, but what would have been the sense of that?"

Sheriff McCall was studying Loophole carefully. "Well, I've got to lock you up," he said finally. "I've got a hunch I can believe your story. I suppose they'll let you have bail, an' your dad'll be along to get you out just as soon as he hears of it," he added not unkindly.

"I'll never send word to him," Loophole flashed. He recalled his father's declaration that he wished he had been something, even if it were a train robber. Well, he had his wish. "An' since you're goin' to lock me up, I wish you'd lock me up with that Emmett, so I can make him eat some of the stuff he's been spillin' an' like it in the bargain."

"Perhaps it can be arranged," said the sheriff blandly, as they went out of the little office.

Loophole looked around for Raymond in the group in the main office but did not see him.

At that moment Raymond was riding like the wind for the Half Circle A.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE FINISH.

ON the north range they still talk about the fight in the Saddleback jail. Sheriff McCall hinted that the turnkey had put Loophole in with Emmett by mistake. The turnkey had nothing to say. But the spectators who crowded in from the main office had plenty to say, and more adjectives were used in the description of that battle than had ever been used in cattle country before.

The subtle something which had stirred within Loophole's breast and caused his eyes to flash dangerously in the sheriff's office, still was there when the cell door clanged behind him and Emmett slouched up to him puffing a cigarette.

"Been tellin' his nibs all about it, eh?" he sneered.

Loophole sat down on the bench in the center of the cell. "I told him everything I knew, same as you was tellin' him what you thought you knew all the way down here," he said slowly. "Funny you'd leave out that item of the forty thousand dollars."

"Yeah? What forty thousand was that? We didn't get any forty thousand that I know of. It wouldn't amount to that much."

"I know I didn't get any forty thousand," said Loophole quietly.

"Well, if you didn't, who did get any forty thousand?" Emmett demanded.

"That's what I'm wondering," Loophole answered. "There was forty thousand taken from the safe."

"Rats!" snorted Emmett. "Forty thousand rats—an' you're one of 'em. They're——"

He got no further. The new-born something in Loophole's spirit burst into flame. He leaped from the bench like a tiger.

"You're goin' to eat that!" he cried.

"Here's once where I finish, an' here's the starter!"

His straight right knocked the cigarette into Emmett's throat. Emmett choked, dodged a second blow, coughed, and leaped to the attack.

Several men, hearing the loud, angry voices, came in from the office. For the next ten minutes or so they were held spellbound. Apparently, no one thought to interfere and it would have taken all of them to quell the pair in the cell. Then, too, they all knew Loophole, but no one of them had ever seen him in a real fight. Nor had any of them ever seen the terrible look that was now on his face—the burning fierceness of his eyes. It was this change of manner that held them fascinated, motionless, breathless. And Emmett was no mean opponent. He possessed more skill than Loophole, was quicker on his feet; he landed three blows to Loophole's one, but they were not as hard. And the blows rolled off Loophole without having any apparent effect, save to bring blood, discolor his eyes, and cut him.

Emmett danced about, and Loophole had difficulty in hitting him. Loophole did not want to box; he wanted to fight. "Fight, you pretty boy!" he cried derisively, and took an uppercut in return.

Loophole leaped back, and seemed to drop his hands as if stunned. Emmett swung for a knockout, and swung with such force that when his opponent ducked the blow the force behind it sent him staggering. Loophole was on him instantly, landing a terrific left behind the ear. Emmett was knocked clear over the bench, and fell sprawling. But he was not knocked out. He grasped the bench and rose, using it as a shield.

Loophole's hoarse laugh carried clear to the street.

"Dance with it," he jeered, his eyes flashing blue fire from a red-stained face. "Dance with it, hug it, put it

down an' sit on it, but you're not through!"

Emmett, now recovered, threw the bench aside and leaped in. The spectators gasped, open-mouthed, as for what seemed minutes the two stood toe to toe in the very center of the cell and exchanged blow for blow. Blood spurted until the hard floor was slippery. Loophole slipped and fell on one hand. Emmett kicked him full in the face.

With a roar, Loophole lunged and caught his adversary about the legs. Emmett went down. The two rolled over and over, striving for a hold. Loophole got it. He twisted Emmett's right hand behind his back.

"Now!" he panted. "You—go in' to get up an'—fight? If you want to rastle, I'm goin' to break your arm!"

A look of genuine terror came into Emmett's eyes. "Fight," he managed to gasp.

Loophole released his hold and was on his feet like a cat. Emmett sprang back as he rose. He was about spent. Loophole knew it, but he had not forgotten that brutal kick in the face when he was down. He was on Emmett like an unleashed fury. And now there was no dancing and agile dodging of his blows. Three of them went home, and Emmett went to the floor in a heap. The key was rattling in the cell door. Loophole dragged him to his feet, pushed him off with his right hand, and sent his left crashing to the jaw. Emmett went hurtling the length of the cell and down and out for good.

Strong hands grasped Loophole, literally dragging him out of that cell and into another. There he sank upon a bench and nodded gravely.

"That's once I finished," he mumbled through cut and and swollen lips.

Sheriff McCall stood over him with a queer light in his eyes. "You shore did," he said grimly. "Now I'll get the doctor to patch you two up. Bring

some water in here." he ordered as he went out.

Loophole sat on the bench, his bruised hands on his knees. Yes, for once he had started and finished; but, now that it was over, that strange, new feeling within him seemed to have fled. Would it return in another time of stress? Loophole sat and wondered.

The dawn of a cheerless day had come. The skies were cold and slaty; the prairies were gray. Sherman Adams sat again before the fire in his living room. He was not smoking. Not once had he taken his eyes from Raymond's face as the latter had recited the events of the night before. Neither knew of the fight, for Raymond had left town for the ranch when the sheriff had taken Loophole into his office. Now Raymond was finished.

For some little time there was silence. The old stockman's face was inscrutable as he gazed into the fire. But when he raised his head, his eyes were clear and searching.

"What got into him?" he asked.

Raymond shrugged. "There was that trouble the night before, you know. That was enough to get under any man's skin."

"I know," said Adams, his brow wrinkling. "But robbery——" He shook his head. "I'd never thought Charley would get such an idea in his head. It doesn't run in the family. Funny he'd break loose that way. I'll have to square it with Dave. I'll have to drive in right away." He rose and went to the dining-room door. "Bess," he called. "Bess! Tell Joe I want the buckboard and the gray team." He went back to the fire.

The girl came to the door. "Father, where are you going? It's cold today and there's a raw wind. Looks like a storm."

The old man gripped the arms of his chair. "Tell Joe I want the buckboard

and the grays!" he said in a voice that echoed through the house. "Or, I'll tell him myself." He started to rise.

"Never mind, I'll tell him," the girl hastened to say. But there was a catch in her voice.

"I made a move thinking to help 'em get away," said Raymond. "But the sheriff out-guessed 'em, an' me, too. He deputized me on the spot."

"Who is this Emmett?" asked the rancher.

"That I'm not sure of—yet," replied Raymond. "I haven't paid much attention to him. He's just hung around quiet. But he's bad medicine—I'd lay to that."

Sherman Adams shook his massive head. "Something queer about this," he muttered. "No boy of mine is a thief. I'll have him out pronto."

"I was wondering how it would work to leave him in about three days," Raymond suggested boldly.

The cattleman started and his eyes flashed. "No Adams stays in jail a minute longer than I can help!" he thundered. "Charley comes out, an' he comes out to-day, if I have to put up my whole ranch!"

Raymond was silent, but admiration slumbered in his eyes.

After a time, Adams got up and went into his little private office which opened off the living room. Raymond could hear the soft clink of the combination of the safe. He heard, too, the opening of the roll-top desk. He rose and went out into the dining room. He found Bess there. He had suspected she would be there and he had purposely talked to her father in as low a voice as possible. She grasped his arm.

"What has happened to Charley?" she asked anxiously.

"He's——" Raymond hesitated. "He's in trouble," he confessed.

"What kind of trouble?" she persisted. "I heard father say something

about jail and getting him out. And he's going into town in this wind. Is it true that Charley's in jail?"

"It isn't fair to ask me that question," said Raymond frowning. "An' it wouldn't be my place to answer it, don't you see? You should ask your father, Bess."

"Don't call me Bess!" she exclaimed angrily. "I suppose this is the start of your noble scheme to do something for my brother. I know he's in jail by the way you act. I'll ask father, and—I hate you!"

Raymond's face had gone white through its tan. "Some of these fine days, you'll understand," he said in a tense voice. "I didn't come out here to talk about your brother, or say anything about him. I came out to say hello an' ask how you were. It isn't fair to blame me for something—anything—unless you can prove it. Why is it, Bess, that we can't get along lately? You mustn't get these queer ideas in your head."

"Men I get along with must be men I can trust," she replied slowly. "And I'm going to town with father."

"You're doin' nothing of the sort!" declared Sherman Adams, looming in the doorway. "You're stayin' home where you belong, an' when the business I've got in hand is attended to, maybe I'll tell you about it—an' maybe I won't."

Bess Adams looked up at her father with the tears starting in her eyes. But she did not speak.

"There now," he said kindly, patting her on the shoulder.

"It's Charley," she said in a choked voice. "An' you won't tell me. I—it isn't right!" She broke away from him and hurried upstairs.

Sherman Adams started after her, then stopped, frowning and shaking his head. "I can't tell her now," he said. "Come, Raymond, we'll get going."

They went out to the barn, where

the grays were hitched to the buckboard. Adams got out a big buffalo coat and put it on. He clambered into the buckboard and took up the lines, beckoning to Raymond. They drove away at a fast clip.

When they had disappeared up the bench road, Bess Adams came downstairs dressed in a riding habit and carrying a quirt. She went to the back door and called curtly to the barnman to saddle her horse.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO MEN.

THE wind freshened and grew colder as Sherman Adams and Raymond drove the longer way to Saddleback by road. They could have cut their time by more than an hour if they could have followed the trail. They could have made it in two hours less by speeding on saddle horses. Thus it was that Bess Adams reached town well in advance of her father and his companion.

She turned her mount over to the liveryman and proceeded without hesitation to The Mint. Her face was pale, but her eyes held the fire of determination, and her lips were tightly pressed. She had delivered messages once or twice to her father's old friend, Dave Parker, and her appearance there might not seem strange; but in this instance she wondered if it would not be best to go to his house and talk with Nina Parker. No, Nina would not know what she wanted to know. Dave Parker told his daughter as little as possible.

Bess opened the door and walked boldly in. She halted just within the room and stared in surprise at what she saw. Men were working on the floor and the place was in general disorder. But Dave Parker saw her immediately and came hurrying toward her.

"Come into the office, Bess, where

it's quiet," he invited, and led her to the little office in the rear and closed the door.

"I suppose Sherman has sent me a message," he said cheerfully, placing a chair for her. There was nothing in Parker's manner to indicate that he was worrying over the happenings of the night before.

Bess Adams sat down, but some of her confidence had evaporated. "No, Dave, I've no message, and if father knew I was here he'd be pretty mad," she said truthfully. "But I couldn't stand it; if I had stayed home I'd have gone crazy! So I came to you, since you are an old friend of ours. Father and Mr. Raymond are driving in in the buckboard. But they won't be here for an hour or more. Oh, Dave, something has happened to Charley! You know he's my brother and you can understand how I feel. What has happened?"

She was on the verge of tears, and now the old gambler did show a touch of worry.

"Why, I don't know, Bess girl," he said with a disparaging gesture. "I suppose—what makes you think something has happened?"

"Because Raymond came full tilt from town early this morning and told father something. When I came downstairs I heard father say something about an Adams in jail, and about getting him out, and Raymond said why not let him stay in——" She paused, and her eyes hardened. "Who is this Raymond?" she demanded.

"Ray's all right," Parker countered.

"Why is he all right?" the girl asked sharply. "He's been around all summer and out to our house quite a lot. I liked him well enough until he—until he got smart about my brother, and I just know he's got something to do with this trouble. I asked him point-blank what was wrong with Charley, and he hedged. Dad got all excited,

and here he is riding into town in this cold wind and him just the same as sick." Again she struggled to keep back the tears.

Dave Parker now was visibly upset; moreover, he was confronted with the problem of quieting the girl, evading her questions, and getting her out of his office before her father arrived. For he knew Sherman Adams would come straight to him as soon as he reached town.

"Listen, girlie," he said kindly, patting her knee, "you're all upset. Maybe you shouldn't have come rearin' in like this. If Charley's in any trouble, why, your dad'll take care of that in no time. It would be a poor young blood off a range like this who couldn't get himself into trouble once in a while. Now, isn't that so? They all do it. And Raymond is all right; you can take that from me, an' you know I wouldn't lie to you. Now, I tell you what you do—you run over to my house an' Nina will give you some dinner. An' maybe you can get back home without your dad knowin' you've even been here. Now, do that." He rose as if he was certain she would comply.

Instead, the tears came into her eyes and she bit her lip to keep back the sobs. "I know—I know—something awful has happened to Charley," she managed to get out. "You're all keeping it from me, and I'm entitled to know." Her voice grew stronger and the tears stopped. "Dave Parker, you know everything that goes on in this town, an' if you don't tell me what's happened to Charley, I'll go to the sheriff!"

"That wouldn't do any good," said Parker, shaking his head. "If the sheriff has got anything to do with it, your dad will be there before you could find out, anyway. He might come here, too. You wouldn't want him to find you here, would you? It would upset

him pretty bad, an' maybe that wouldn't be good for him. Even if he finds you in town, you've got a good excuse if you go over to Nina. You can say you was worried to death, an' Nina's the nearest girl friend you've got, an' you rode in. Now you go an'——" Parker's agitation was increasing rapidly. "Tell you what I'll do, Bess," he said with sudden inspiration; "you go over to Nina's and I'll find out about this business an' let you know. How's that?"

"Are you sure?" Bess asked dubiously. "Do you promise?"

"I promise," he assured her.

"Well, Dave, I guess your promise is good," she decided, rising. "I'll go over. But I don't care whether you tell dad I was here or not."

He led her out the front door and watched her walk in the direction of his little house, which was well out of the way. Then he went back to his office with a troubled look on his face. Sherman Adams was coming in. He would come directly to him. But in what kind of a mood—in what state of mind toward him? The boy had been a fool—yet he believed the story he had told the sheriff. The sheriff had repeated that story to him. But Parker looked at the safe. Forty thousand dollars was forty thousand dollars. He and Sherman Adams had been friends for forty years. If any one offered him a thousand dollars a year for that friendship, with the memories it involved, would he accept it? Dave Parker smiled and lighted a long, slim cigar.

It was an hour and a half before the front door opened and framed the big form of Sherman Adams. He looked about swiftly, noted the repairs being made as a result of the fire, saw a man on duty behind the bar as usual, and joined the few customers there. He took one drink, lighted a fat cigar, and strolled back to Dave Parker's of-

fice, with the eyes of all in the place focused upon him.

"'Lo, Dave," he said mildly, taking a chair.

"'Lo, Sherman," said Parker in about the same tone of voice. "How's everything at the ranch?"

"Makin' her tight for the winter," said the stockman. "'Nother small shipment an' we're all set, I reckon. Know anything much?"

"Yes, I had a little fire last night," Parker replied without hesitation, "an' I've got the boys makin' some repairs. Nothing much."

"Say, Dave," said Adams in a more energetic tone, "what's this I hear about Charley having a big fight over there in the jail last night?"

"I don't know what you've heard, but it appears that he indulged in an altercation," drawled Parker.

"They tell me it was quite warm at spells, as if he meant it," said Adams eagerly, fishing for details.

Dave Parker took his cigar out of his mouth and raised his brows. "Well, Sherman, after they locked up that pair of brons last night, I strolled over. Just curiosity, you know. As I drew near, I heard sounds which made me wonder whether they were makin' over the inside or something. There wasn't anybody in the office, so I sauntered back where the cells are—the door bein' open. It seems the sheriff or somebody had made a mistake."

He paused, nodding his head, while Sherman Adams leaned forward in an unusually attentive attitude.

"The mistake he made was this," Parker continued impressively. "He put those young brons in the same cell—er—room." Here he winked and Adams grinned. "Well, it appears that your young bronc had taken exception to some speech made by the other bronc, and, so far as I could make out, he was trying to break out of jail by smashing it to pieces with the other

bronc. An', by the snakes, he came near doin' it!"

"Was it as bad as all that?" said Adams, unable to keep the pleased note out of his voice.

"It was worse than that," Parker declared. "I've seen some entanglements in my day, but that scrap had most of the others I've witnessed looking like games of tag. It took five pails of water, the doctor, and a pint of my best brandy to bring that fellow Emmett out of it. And Charley was still mad."

"I don't know what's got into Charley," said Adams wonderingly.

"I should say the mischief's got into him," drawled Parker.

"I never taught him to fight," said Adams vaguely.

"Well, whoever did teach him to fight made a mighty good job of it," Parker declared.

"I mean I never encouraged him to get into brawls. He—he hasn't been that kind."

"Don't worry, he hasn't gone against his bringin' up," Parker assured him. "This wasn't a brawl. What happened last night came under the heading of a rip-snortin', red-splashin', tooth-scatterin', jaw-smashin' fight. That is, if I'm any judge."

Sherman Adams was actually grinning, and Parker noticed it.

"Don't come in here tellin' me what you taught an' didn't teach Charley," he said with mock severity. "Why, you old porcupine, you're tickled to death, an' you know it. I sort of enjoyed seein' Charley step myself, but I reckon you'd have given a flock of steers to have been in the audience!"

The stockman stiffened, noticed his cigar was out, lighted it with a trembling hand, and then spoke in a serious tone.

"This other business last night, Dave. Raymond rode to the ranch an' told me about it this mornin', an' I happened

across McCall up near the barn. I'll pay the damages. Dave, of course, but——"

"There'll be no damages to pay," Parker interrupted. "These little things come up in a business like this. We expect 'em an' allow for them. You won't pay me a cent."

"But the—the robbery," said Adams. "It——"

"Oh, the sheriff has a bunch of money for me," said Parker with a wave of the hand.

"But there's forty thousand dollars he hasn't got," said Adams sternly.

Dave Parker looked at him and smiled. "Sherman, whoever got that I don't know, although I can't say I don't care. But there's one thing sure, I refuse to prosecute."

"Well, it'll be different with the county attorney," Adams pointed out. "Smock isn't so soft as to overlook a forty-thousand-dollar robbery and a man wounded. You can't say you didn't lose the money because you've already told 'em how much it was, an' you——"

"That was before I knew they caught Charley an' that Emmett with any on 'em," Parker interposed.

Adams eyed the old gambler steadily. "Dave, do you think Charley took that money?"

"No!" exclaimed Parker, bringing a fist down on the arm of his chair. "An' I'm not sure that other fellow took it. Seemed to me there was a lot of 'em buzzin' aroun' here. I ran out because of the fire, an' left the safe open."

For some little time there was silence, then Adams spoke. "I stand good for that forty thousand, Dave. No, don't fly off the handle. That's a lot of money. I stand good for it. I can afford it."

"I can afford it myself," said Parker stoutly. "I'm better fixed than you think I am, Sherman. Besides, I don't think Charley ever got a finger on a

penny of it, an' I don't think he knows who did or where it is."

"Well——" Adam's wrinkled his brow. "Have you got any ideas as to how it disappeared?"

Parker shook his head. "Last night I couldn't seem to think. This mornin' I've been doin' a lot of thinking an' gettin' nowhere. I'm an old man an' too much hard thinkin' keeps me awake, an' I need my sleep. From this on I'm goin' to let the sheriff an' Raymond do the thinkin', an' I don't want to be bothered about it."

"Well," said Adams in a tone of resignation, "I'm goin' up to see Smock an' get that pair out of jail." He rose.

"You goin' to get Emmett out, too," Parker asked in surprise.

"Of course," said Adams; "why not? Charley was in it as much as him, wasn't he?"

"Well, maybe," said Parker; "but I've got a sneakin' idea that Emmett is most to blame. You see——"

"There'll be no tryin' to hang it on the other fellow," said Adams sternly. "I won't stand for it. So long, Dave."

"Oh, I'm trailin' along with you, Sherman," said Parker, taking out a fresh cigar. "I never miss a chance to go to the county attorney's office, it seems."

They went out together.

CHAPTER X.

RELEASED.

AS the two men entered his office, Frank Smock looked up quickly. He had been expecting Sherman Adams, and he was not surprised to see the old gambler with him. Now he rose and held out his hand with a cordial smile, for the stockman. Adams was a power in the county.

"I sort of expected you'd be in, Mr. Adams," he said. "I guess we can fix things up—that is, if I've got the right hunch concerning your visit."

Adams took the hand held out to him without enthusiasm. "I suppose you have," he said gruffly. "Of course you know Charley got into trouble last night?" He sat down and Dave Parker did likewise.

"Yes—of course," said the county attorney, sitting down himself and fussing with some papers on his desk. He looked at his principal visitor gravely. "Not so good, Mr. Adams."

"No?" For a moment a worried look appeared on the rancher's face. Then, "I've come to bail Charley out," he said briskly.

"That can be arranged," said Smock. "I'm willing to release him on bail. I don't think he would leave the county."

"I believe I can guarantee that," snapped Adams. "How much?"

"Ordinarily, in a case of this kind, the bail is in excess of the—ah—amount of money involved," said Smock impressively.

"I said 'how much?'" Adams repeated, frowning. "I guess I can make it. I've got one herd that's worth more than what was stolen, if that's what you're driving at. Or you can have a check which will bring you the cash in short order."

Smock held up a hand. "You didn't give me time to finish," he explained. "I was going to say that in your case I do not think this will be necessary. I'm making it five thousand, and you can sign a bond or a check, just as you wish. I don't think Charley Adams would run away on his dad for five dollars, let alone five thousand."

"Well, that's white of you, Smock," said Adams, drawing out his check book and reaching for pen and ink.

Smock's face brightened. It was good policy to stand well with such a citizen as Sherman Adams. He lighted a cigar while Adams was writing his check, then took the proffered paper and glanced at it. He looked at it more closely.

"This is for ten thousand, Mr. Adams. I said five would be enough."

"Oh, I'm takin' 'em both out," said the rancher. "Can't take Charley out an' leave the other fellow in. Wouldn't feel right about it, anyway."

But Smock was shaking his head and pushing the slip of paper across the desk. "Can't do it, Mr. Adams," he explained firmly.

"What's the matter?" asked Adams, surprised. "Is Emmett's bail higher? I don't see why it should be."

"I cannot accept bail in Emmett's case," said Smock. "Just make a check for five thousand and Charley will go out at once. Emmett stays."

"Well, it won't look good," growled Adams. "Folks'll say Emmett was in with Charley an' I let him stay in jail. What's wrong?"

"I'll correct any such impression by letting it be known I refused bail for Emmett," said Smock. "For that's just what I'm doing. I know Charley Adams and his father. I don't know Emmett. I have certain reasons why I don't want him released—at this time, especially. I'll see that he hears that you offered to bail him, however, and he'll learn quick enough why I refused. He'd probably slope out of here within twenty-four hours, anyway."

Adams considered this. "I don't know him, either, so I don't suppose I could be responsible for his showing up when the time comes," he said doubtfully.

"Not unless you took him down to your ranch and tied him up or locked him in somewhere," smiled the county attorney. "And that's what we've got jails for. No, Mr. Adams, you just write out the five-thousand-dollar check, take Charley home, and let me attend to the other. Emmett is under the doctor's care, anyway."

Adams looked up and saw Smock's eyes twinkling. "Humph," he said. "I suppose that was enough of an affair

last night to put another charge against Charley."

"Not exactly," laughed Smock. "You see, no one saw it start."

When they went out, Adams turned to Dave Parker. "Dave, you go down an' get Charley. I don't want him to feel embarrassed, as he might if I was there. I'll go up to the hotel and wait, an' make it as casual as you can. I'm not going to jump on the boy."

"Which is exactly why I came along," said Parker. "I was goin' to suggest that very thing if you hadn't. What's more, I'm goin' to take him over to the house where he can sort of get himself brushed up an' one thing an' another, and he'll be in better spirits when he meets you. Goin' to take him along in the buckboard. I suppose."

"Yes. Raymond can bring down his horse later. Raymond has to go down after his own horse, anyway, an' he can ride Charley's down. Ah, this is all pretty good of you, Dave, an' I reckon you know I appreciate it; but don't forget I'm going good for that—that other."

"If I was you, I'd take a drink when I got up to the hotel," Parker retorted dryly. "You're certain' an sure too sober to talk sense. So long."

The wind seemed to have doubled in velocity and clouds were flying in the sky. Parker looked northward with some concern as he hurried down the street. At the jail he spoke a few words to the sheriff. McCall nodded and gave an order to the turnkey. In a short space the turnkey returned with Loop-hole Charley Adams. The marks of battle were all too plain on Loop-hole's face. One ear was bandaged, as were both his hands, and there were many patches of tape. But his eyes glowed defiantly as he looked from Parker to the sheriff.

"You're to go along with Dave, Charley," said the sheriff. "He'll tell you what to do."

Loop-hole scowled as best he could.

Parker must have some scheme in getting him out. Oh, getting in tighter with the old man, of course! Well, Loophole had had enough of jail and didn't care who got him out.

"The gold pieces in my pockets were mine," he told the sheriff.

"So I understand," said the sheriff, handing him a bag. "They're in there with your watch an' some other things, an' here's your gun."

Loophole grunted, buckled on the gun belt, grasped the bag. "Nice place you've got here, sheriff," he said sarcastically, turning to go.

"Yes, we do quite a bit of entertaining here," said the sheriff pleasantly.

"Is that why you let me get at that rat last night?" Loophole asked. "For entertainment?"

"No, Charley," said the sheriff soberly. "I thought it would do you good, one way or the other."

Loophole followed Parker out without replying to this, although it annoyed him. As they went into the street the wind hit him. He breathed deep. Liberty again! And that strange new spirit still was with him. He had started and finished—he had finished! He knew it; they all must know it. Maybe that was why Parker had come over and got him out. Well, there was one thing about it: Parker would not have done it if he had thought he, Loophole, had taken any forty thousand dollars. That was some consolation. They could think what they wanted, but he had an idea or two of his own, and a plan. Still, his thoughts were a bit confused to-day.

They turned off the main street and when Loophole saw where they were going, he stopped dead in his tracks. "Not to your house!" he blurted.

"Why, of course," said Parker. "If you had any idea how you look you wouldn't want to be parading around town till you got fixed up a bit. Come along."

"But what'll Nina say?"

"Nina's your friend," Parker replied, starting on.

Loophole followed him reluctantly. There did not seem to be anything else to do. Yes, he owed it to Parker to do as he said. Oh, well, Nina was not such a bad sort. Loophole liked her. She probably knew everything anyway. As a matter of fact, Nina knew very little. Her father had not mentioned Loophole's connection with the affair at The Mint. And she had not been out that day. A neighbor or two had dropped in and there had been some vague talk about a terrific fight between Loophole and another man, which Loophole had won, but no one had seen fit to worry her with any further details. She was, in fact, waiting to ask her father some questions. Thus she had been able to give Bess Adams scant information. Bess, too, was waiting for Dave Parker to come and keep his promise.

When Parker let Loophole into the house by the rear door, it happened that both girls were in the kitchen. They stared as though they saw an apparition, and it was Nina who was the first to speak.

"Loop—Charley!" she cried. "What has happened?"

The real concern in her tone caused Dave Parker's eyes to sparkle. "There now, girls, Charley's been circulating aroun' a bit." He looked at Bess, who still stood thunderstruck. "I told you I would find out what was the matter and let you know. Well, Charley's been in a fight. That's nothing new in these rough parts, if theres' anything in a man at all. An' that's why your dad was talkin' jail an' all. So you've had all your worry for nothing." He looked around and saw that Charley Adams was staring at his sister in astonishment.

"Your dad heard about this business this morning an' started for town," he

explained. "Bess, here, overheard some of the conversation an' it got her all upset. So she started for her nearest girl friend an' that happened to be Nina. Which is the sum of it. Now, Nina, rustle some good, hot grub for this gladiator an' I'm goin' to fix him a bath an' dig up some clean things for him, so he'll look a darn sight more presentable to ride home with his dad."

"Dad's here?" said Loophole in a vague voice.

"Sure as night," replied Dave. "Started the minute he heard about it. Wouldn't you think he would?"

"Then it was him who—who——"

Dave nodded, knowing that the youth referred to his hail. "I would have attended to it myself but I knew he wouldn't like it. Now c'mon an' get cleaned up; but don't look in the glass first."

With a choking cry. Bess put her arms tenderly about her brother's neck and kissed him. "Charley—I was afraid—— Oh, I don't know what I thought! How did it happen?"

Loophole drew away. "We'll wait till we get home for that. Nina, is there some hot coffee, girlie?"

Dave Parker caught the manner of her nod, and the look she gave him, and turned away. His own eyes were lighted with a gleam of satisfaction. Any one who had looked into them at that moment would have known his secret. His motherless girl was his one prized possession. He had had more than one reason for turning Loophole away from his tables. He had hoped it would bring the boy to himself. It had made him mad and had accomplished results, at that.

Sherman Adams could not have been more delighted over the start and finish Loophole had made the night before, than was Dave Parker. Why, the boy already was changed! The laggard was gone; there was a new look in his eyes. The very way in which

he asked Nina to take off his hat as his arms were a bit stiff seemed to show a new development of character. Not for a quarter of a second did Dave Parker believe Loophole had planned the robbery—now. As for the forty thousand dollars, Dave nearly laughed outright. He always had liked Loophole, and he always had figured that the stuff of which an Adams was made would crop out some time in this youth. Loophole was a splendid specimen of physical manhood, he was not stupid; it was his spirit which had to be awakened. Dave Parker believed the awakening had begun. Now—— His eyes clouded momentarily with doubt. Then they shone hopefully again. It may as well be put down here that Dave wanted the son of his old friend for a son-in-law of his own.

Loophole finished his coffee and then he went with Dave. Soon he was bathed and dressed in clean linen and a new pair of trousers which Dave had been careful to provide. He sat down to his meal and ate silently. Dave had cautioned the girls to leave him alone. Loophole's manner showed that he was thinking harder than he ever had in his life. At times his eyes flashed. When he had finished, he rose at once.

"Where's dad?" he asked.

"He had a little business to attend to, but I guess he's at the hotel," Dave replied.

"All right," said Loophole crisply, "let's go. Thanks, Nina. Bess, you'd better trail along with us when we start home."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MEETING.

AS they went up the street toward the hotel, Loophole strode at a rapid pace. He was scowling, and paid no attention to the cheery salutations called to him. His mind was working fast, and the crisp wind in his face, carrying vagrant flakes of snow, stimulated

that feeling which seemed to have come to stay.

"Reckon you hadn't better say anything about Bess bein' here," Dave Parker suggested. "She doesn't want your dad to know—yet."

Loophole did not answer. But as they neared the hotel, he eased his pace. "Suppose there'll be a crowd in there," he said gruffly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Dave casually. "An' it doesn't matter much, do you think? I guess everybody aroun' here is your friend, Charley."

Loophole favored him with a queer look. He did not quite understand Parker's part in the affair, or what he thought; but he did not intend to give him the satisfaction of asking.

"Well," he decided. "I'm not afraid to go in. No, it wouldn't matter much. But it wouldn't make the Old Man feel any too good to see me in there the way I look, with everybody starin' at us. I know this crowd. I'll meet him in the barn."

He turned off the street abruptly to make his way to the livery. Dave Parker went on to the hotel.

Loophole sat down on the bunk in the little front office. The barnman was busy with his duties outside. Loophole did not have long to wait. His father strolled in shortly.

"'Lo, Charley," he greeted in a commonplace voice. He seemed not to notice the youth's appearance. "Reckon we'd better mosey on home."

Loophole eyed his father with suspicion. "I've got a horse here," he said, almost belligerently.

"Well, you might as well ride home with me in the buckboard," said his father. "I don't hanker to drive back alone. I'll have the team hitched up."

"Suppose you've heard everything, of course," said Loophole. "I'm wonderin' why you sent Dave Parker to look after the—the business."

"Oh, I've heard some things," said

Sherman Adams with a depreciating wave of his hand; "but I don't always believe everything I hear. I'll let you tell me what you want to, an' I'll believe that." He looked kindly at his son. "You can depend on me being behind you," he added, with the ring of sincerity in his voice.

Loophole hesitated. Then, "How about this Emmett," he asked; "is he out, too?"

His father shook his head. "Nope. He's still in," he answered.

"Well," said Loophole, shrugging his shoulders. "After all, don't you think we'd better get him out? Not that I want anything to do with him," he added hastily.

Sherman Adams' eyes shone with admiration. Here was the true Adams' spirit of fair play cropping out in his son in this emergency. "I tried it," he said; "but Smock wouldn't let me bail him. Said he had his reasons for wanting to keep him inside for a while."

Loophole considered this. "Funny he'd let me out an' keep him," he said, as if to himself. Then, looking straight at his father, "I guess it's because he hasn't got any relations aroun' here that can swing a bunch of votes."

Adams shook his head. "No, Charley," he said soberly; "it's because he can't be sure this Emmett will be aroun' when he wants him. With you, it's different. You live here, see?"

"I suppose so," Loophole growled. "But even if I do live here; how does he know I'll be around?"

"I told him you would," said his father quietly.

For some moments Loophole was silent. Then he looked up suddenly. "Do you think I had anything to do with that forty thousand dollars?" he demanded with a scowl.

"Nope. An' neither does Dave Parker. I don't believe you had anything to do with this money business in the beginning at all."

"Well," Loophole observed. "I reckon we won't be blamin' it on anybody else—yet."

Again the stockman's eyes shone. "That's right," he agreed. "An' now I guess we better be starting. Don't forget, Charley, the old man is right at your back." He thought better of an impulse to say something about the battle of the night before. As for Loophole, he wondered what his father thought of it, but he, too, refrained from mentioning it.

"There's something I'd like to have you do for me," he said slowly.

"What is it, Charley?" his father asked quickly.

"I'd like to have every man in our outfit who can be spared for a few days. I mean, I want 'em for a purpose of my own, an' I'll tell 'em just what to do an' lead 'em where they're goin'."

His father looked at him with a puzzled expression. "It hasn't got anything to do with town, has it, Charley?" he asked with concern.

"Not as I know of," Loophole replied.

"You can have 'em," his father promised. "I guess maybe we can muster twenty-five or thirty." That Loophole had some project in mind connected with the robbery, he did not doubt. Nor did he distrust his son's ability to carry out this project. He had detected the change in Loophole; and it had given him his first thrill in months. "Yes, Charley, you can have 'em," he repeated. "Now, I reckon we better be starting."

He went out and Loophole heard him ordering the team. Then the youth suddenly remembered the presence of Bess in town and Dave Parker's suggestion that he say nothing about her being there. Loophole shrugged. If she wanted to keep her whereabouts a secret, that was her business. Anyway, maybe it was just as well that they

should not be bothered with her. Some dance on, probably.

While they had been talking, Dave Parker had been closeted with Raymond in an upstairs room in the hotel. Now, as the pair saw Loophole drive away with his father, they started for Parker's house.

The wind was blowing stronger and the flakes were gathering. A solid cloud-bank obscured the mountain peaks. Raymond looked at the weather signals and told Parker he would get the horses and then go to the house. So Parker proceeded alone.

When Raymond finally arrived at the house, he found Parker and the two girls in the kitchen. Bess Adams' eyes widened and her head went up as she saw him.

"'Lo, Bess. 'Lo, Nina," greeted Raymond in a casual voice. "Looks like we might have a spell of weather."

"Did you come here to talk about the weather?" asked Bess scornfully.

"Won't you have a cup of coffee?" asked Nina.

"No, thanks," said Raymond. Then to Bess: "I didn't come to talk about the weather, exactly. Don't you think we'd better be starting home?"

"We!" exclaimed Bess. "Since when has it been 'we'?" She was unable to rid herself of the impression that Raymond had in some way been responsible for the trouble of the night before.

"Oh, don't be unreasonable, Bess," he said, displaying some slight irritation. "As long as we're both goin' to the Half Circle A, we might as well ride together."

"I came up here without your assistance and I guess I can go back without it," said the girl defiantly.

"You may not find it so easy goin' back," he said soberly.

"No? What do you mean?"

"The wind's pretty strong, Bess, an' it looks to me as if some snow might

come along on a stiff blow. Your brother has gone home with your father in the buckboard, and I don't think it would be safe for you to go home alone."

"Then I'll stay here!" she retorted.

"I don't think that would be advisable, for your father would be worried. If a blizzard was to come on, he wouldn't know whether you had stayed or started for the ranch. It would worry him, don't you see?"

"Raymond is right," Dave Parker put in. "I think you ought to go home."

"Oh, you always side with him," said Bess impatiently.

Raymond stepped to the door and looked out. The north wind was bearing down with increased ferocity, hurling before it fine flakes of snow—harbingers of what was to come. In the northwest, the great clouds had dissolved into a mist, and a thin white veil was creeping down the plain. Raymond turned and beckoned to Bess.

"Come, take a look," he invited in a sober voice.

Bess bit her lip and shook her head; nevertheless, she obeyed, and looking over his shoulder saw the blizzard's signal. She knew that the storm might last for a week and she did not want to stay at the Parkers so long. It would

be something of an imposition since she now had the opportunity to go home while there still was time. And the weather signals did look ominous.

"You see," said Raymond: "we're goin' to get it an' there can be no mistake about that. We'd better go, Miss Bess."

"I suppose so," she conceded in a tone of regret. "Dave, will you have them send my horse?"

Raymond laughed outright. "Do you think I would come for you an' not bring your horse?" he asked. "The horses are here."

His laugh so irritated Bess that she stamped her foot. "You think you're smart!" she cried, and then repented this foolish break. "I suppose I've simply got to ride with you; but, remember, I'm not asking your company. You'd probably follow me, anyway."

"I sure would," Raymond returned cheerfully as she went for her wraps, accompanied by Nina.

Raymond and Dave Parker talked in low tones until the girls appeared. Bess shook hands with Dave and kissed Nina good-by. Then she went out without glancing at the waiting Raymond, her cheeks flushed. A few minutes later they rode away, with the Parkers waving to them.

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



A DECREASE IN THE NEED FOR DOG SHOES

ONE of the many interesting outgrowths of airplane service in the North is the fact that boots for dogs are no longer in great demand by the war department. Until the last few years, part of the duty of the quartermaster's department was to send several hundred pairs of tiny moose-skin boots to the military outposts of the Far North. This was a yearly performance.

The boots were laced on the feet of the Eskimo dogs that hauled the mail and supply sledges, for they kept snow and ice from wedging between the animals' toes. But, now that airplanes have taken to journeying across the frozen wastes of Alaska, the demand for these picturesque little boots has lessened.



The Shotgun Shell Game

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Shrimp, Shorthorn Puncher," etc.



OORAY! I'm a heiress!" yelled "Red" Johns, throwing the letter he'd been reading up to the ceiling of the R Bar R bunk house.

"How much did you inherit?" asked "Biffalo" Bull after we'd all stared at Red's Indian dance steps for a while.

"I can't say exactly," Red laughed, "but it's bound to be a big bundle."

"Who kicked the—uh—who passed away?" "Hungry" Hosford inquired.

"My uncle, Nicholas Lovejoy," Red explained joyfully. Then he made a more serious face—almost a sad face. "Too bad, ain't it? Uncle Nick was a pretty good old coot in his way. Nice of him to remember his nephew whom he ain't seen in years and years, ain't it?"

"Sure you ain't counting your eggs before they're hatched, Red?" Biffalo asked cautiously.

"Not a chance!" Red told him. "That letter was from Uncle Nick's lawyers.

They informed me that I inherited the bulk of the old boy's estate, him being an old bachelor, and that my share would be sent to me as quickly as they could arrange it."

"Rich old gent, your uncle?" I asked the elated cow-puncher.

"Piles of it! Heaps of it!" he whooped. "Inherited everything from his father, who made about a million out of fire-clay products. Nice old gentleman, too, as I recall him. Loved good food, good shows, nice girls. I don't think he ever did a tap of work in his life. Uncle Nicholas loved to hunt and to fish. Gay sort of a party. He was well named—Lovejoy. He sure loved joy."

That sounded pretty good and reliable and so all us boys of the R Bar R shook hands with Red Johns and congratulated him on his good fortune, while at the same time sympathizing with him because of his unexpected bereavement.

At about the time this little formality

was over, our foreman, "Bucky" Durbin, came into the bunk house with a sorrowful pan.

"Fellows," he said, "we're really going to have company from the East again."

Everybody, including the boss, groaned. We've been bothered quite a bit by Eastern friends of the owner—old Mr. Roger Rockwood—coming out here to Montana, expecting to shoot grizzly bears and sell their lives dearly to bloodthirsty Flathead Indian tribesmen.

"Who's it this time, boss?" Slim Evers inquired.

"Another ladylike gent, I'm afraid," Bucky sighed. "It's a doctor—Doctor Eustace Pepper, of Philadelphia. He's some kind of a cousin or other to Mr. Rockwood, and an elderly old gent. His practice got so big on him, because he's such a good doctor, that he's had a nervous breakdown and now he has to rest. He asked the big boss if he could vacation out here and do some hunting and Mr. Rockwood told him he could. The big boss told me the doc's not a bad sort. He's just got peculiar Eastern ideas, never having been west of Pittsburgh."

"I guess you boys will be about as nice to him as you can be expected to be," Bucky finished up.

We promised. Both Bucky and Mr. Rockwood are the kind of bosses you want to do all you can for, including up to and taking in relatives of theirs.

A week slipped by, and then the tidings that Red's inheritance was waiting for him at the express office in town and that Doctor Eustace Pepper was due arrived at the same time. Red was nominated to go to town and pick up the both of them.

"What's the idea of sending your inheritance to the express office?" Biffalo asked. "What do you reckon it is—a grand piano or something?"

"Haven't you ever heard of express

company money orders, 'Simple'?" Red scoffed.

"Oh," was all Biffalo could think of saying.

Whistling happily, Red jumped into a flivver and started for town. He was smiling from ear to ear.

Gee! When he came home two hours later, it was a different story entirely. Not a whistle. Not a smile. He looked like a guy who's just buried his last friend and had to pay for the funeral besides.

From the bunk house we saw him first let an old gent—Doctor Pepper, that is—out of the flivver at the ranch house. Then he drove gloomily down to the bunk house and got out of the machine with a sigh.

"Uh—how much was it?" Hungry Hosford inquired.

"Not a dime!" Red grunted. "It's a sad story, mates. Remember me telling you that Uncle Nicholas Lovejoy really did love joy? Well, he went through his father's estate like a prairie fire. There was a line of creditors after his funeral, so the lawyers write me, ten times as long as the procession of mourners. Here's my estate. Take a look at it."

Red reached into the rear of the flivver and produced a silk hat, a minnow bucket, a pair of opera glasses, and an old-fashioned shotgun with two, big, curlicue hammers on it.

"That's all that's left of Uncle Nick's estate," he announced. "His creditors grabbed everything. The only reason they never grabbed this junk is that they wouldn't know what to do with it."

Biffalo Bull started to fumble over the estate.

"Unless somebody starts up a smart set in these parts," he said, "I don't know what good this silk skimmer is. The minnow bucket is rusted through at the bottom and ready for the ash barrel. That lets it out. The opera glasses ain't worth a hang, because we

never have no opera out here. That brings us to the scatter gun."

Old Biff examined the shotgun carefully.

"In its day, it was one of the finest guns made," he said. "But then, in its day, the how and arrow was the nuts, too. This here is a Belgian gun, .12 gauge, made out of twisted horseshoe nails. It's got a half-cock safety on each hammer, but it's one of the dangerousest guns on earth. More hunters have been killed dragging these guns through barbed-wire fences than is been killed by wood alcohol—and the last is a staggering and also blinding number.

"Besides, alongside of the modern hammerless, this gun ain't worth a half of two whoops. What's more, it's rusted outside, and the fouling ain't been cleaned out of the inside for easy ten years. That's a nice gun to buy in a antique shop to hang over a fireplace in a big city apartment. It's absolutely useless. Son, you better let the heir business alone and stick to cow-punching. It'll give you a better living."

Shaking his head and denouncing his uncle for being a reckless old spendthrift, Red took his estate into the shack and stuffed it under his bed.

"What kind of a dude is this old bone-cracker from Philly?" I asked finally, after Red had cussed out lawyers and creditors till he was breathless.

"He's about the best we've had out here yet," Red snorted. "He's crazy to go hunting. He's been planning to go hunting for forty years and never got the chance, because he was so busy. Now that a vacation is been forced on him, he's aiming to hunt plenty.

"He's going to be a hot hunter, if you ask me. He's come out here with equipment to hunt quail, squirrels, rabbits, foxes, skunk, 'possum, 'coon, antelope, caribou, moose, and Polar bears.

"Mr. Johns," he said to me, "it's going to be a treat to knock about in the open air undisturbed for a while. A

physician has little time that he may call his own. He must be ready at all times to answer emergency calls from his patients. He dare not venture far from his home or his telephone. Why, do you know, sir, that second to reading my chief diversion has been tinkering?"

"You mean he mends kettles and pots for fun?" "Shrimp" Nolan inquired.

"No; he plays around like a kid with a tool chest," Red explained. "He said he had a little workbench in his study, where he takes old alarm clocks apart and puts them together again, fixes broken toys for the kids of the neighborhood, and just plays around with mechanical things generally."

We all voted him a kind of a old nut then, but next day when the doc appeared to go hunting for rabbits with us, why, we were sure he was just a little bit eccentric. He was wearing a very elaborate set of hunting togs and every one of them still had the price tags on them, which showed he wasn't fooling when he said he didn't get out into the open much.

Doctor Pepper had a regulation canvas hunting cap, a canvas coat with lots of big pockets for his kills, canvas breeches with slits and pockets for knives, hand axes and flash lights, and a big pair of leather boots.

The doctor was carrying a brand-new automatic shotgun, which he held awkwardly, like if it was red hot or something.

"I—uh—wonder if one of you gentlemen would load this weapon for me," he said. "I don't fully understand them and believe they're quite dangerous if not handled just so."

Hungry Hosford, who, with Red Johns and me, was going hunting with Doctor Pepper, frowned and studied when he heard the Easterner say that. Then Hungry grinned broadly. He motioned Red and me to one side.

"Red, I think we got a customer here for your Uncle Nick's old blunderbuss,"

Hungry laughed. "What gun were you aiming to take along?"

"My automatic," Red answered. "Why?"

"Don't you do it; take Uncle Nick's cannon," Hungry advised. "I got a swell scheme. You noticed how afraid the old pill-slinger is of modern shot-guns? Well, my automatic and Al's double-barreled scatter gun are both very modern. We'll have lots of accidents, me and Al will, and you, with your old junk, won't have one. If I'm a good judge, the old croaker will take a liking to your gun, and then you reluctantly sell it to him."

"What kind of accidents are we supposed to have?" I asked.

"Our guns will be going off accidentally all the time," Hungry laughed. "Every time we go through a wire fence or stumble we'll take them off 'safe' and fire them and then cuss them out for being no good and dangerous. We'll have the doctor so skittish he'll be afraid of hammerless shotguns all his life."

"Dog-gone! That's a peach of a idea!" Red said.

He ducked back into the bunk house and got his old two-hammered double-barreled shotgun instead of his automatic.

"Are—uh—are those guns—uh—loaded?" Doctor Pepper asked nervously, after Hungry had purposely pointed his piece at the Philadelphian, making it appear unintentional.

"Oh, sure," I told him.

"Have you got them—uh—secured?"

"Yeah—but it don't mean much," Hungry grunted. "These darned safety catches don't always work. The one on this automatic of mine ain't reliable. Al Crews here has the same trouble with his double-barreled gun."

"Why don't you have a gunsmith examine them?" Doctor Pepper suggested.

"We done that already," Hungry said. "The gunsmith says he can't fix

anything because nothing's out of place. It's just the way the gun's made.

"It's a darned shame, too, that the manufacturers put out imperfect firearms like that. Hundreds of hunters kill each other every year on that account."

"Do you suppose this shotgun I've bought here is—ummm—also faulty?" Doc Pep put in.

"It's a different make than ours, but let's see it," Hungry invited, taking the automatic.

"Perhaps you'd better point it out toward that field," the medicine man urged the cow-punch.

Hungry pointed it up and out and slipped the safety catch forward and back under the trigger guard a couple of times. As he did so, he pressed the trigger slyly.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The doctor went pale.

"My word! It's positively dangerous!" he busted loose. "And the sporting-goods salesman assured me it was entirely safe."

"Oh, they're all right if you keep 'em pointed up in the air or down to the ground on your left," I said.

"I told you dudes you were making a mistake when you bought these crazy, up-to-date guns," Red Johns said to Hungry and me, as he fingered his old heirloom affectionately.

"Have you some other type of arm, Mr. Johns?" the doc asked, perking up his ears.

"Yes, siree! Belgian gun with hammers so's you can see what you're doing. With a hammerless, you can't see what's doing inside, same's with the works of a watch. But, when these hammers here are on half-cock you can see it and know that you're safe. See here!"

Red took his revolver out of its holster and used the butt to hit both hammers and show that the shells wouldn't be discharged.

"And this gun is absolutely safe, Mr. Johns?"

"Positively! The only way it could kill you is to drag it through a wire fence and let one strand pull back the hammers as you go through. A man that ain't got sense enough to lay the gun on the other side of the fence and then crawl after it ain't got any business carrying a gun."

"That's the sort of a gun I'd like to have," Doc Pepper told us.

"They ain't made any more," Red informed him. "It's almost impossible to get them from any dealer."

Well, we started out, the doctor eying us and our guns every once in a while to be sure none was pointing at him.

We hadn't got three hundred yards from the ranch house before Hungry, walking in a skirmish line, jumped a rabbit. He fired, and the bunny dropped without another kick. Then he fired three more shots.

"Why did you shoot him four times, Mr. Hosford?" Doc Pep asked, puzzled. "The first shot got him."

"I couldn't get it to quit firing," Hungry mumbled, cussing the gun as he monkeyed with the mechanism. "The safety latch or something got jammed."

"Heavens!" muttered the doctor.

A few minutes later another rabbit jumped and as he ran Red managed to bring him down with his uncle's howitzer.

"Ever see a prettier-shootin' gun, doctor?" he asked, reloading.

"I certainly do like that type of gun," the old croaker said.

When the physician wasn't looking, Red removed both shells from his cannon just to be doubly sure it wouldn't go off accidentally.

A little while later, I faked a fall over a log and fired both barrels. The doc nearly dropped.

Then Hungry pretended to be unbalanced by stepping into a hole and fired three shots, cussing out his gun.

"Look at the ammunition it wastes!" he growled.

"Yes, but, man, look at the toll of human life such an arm can take in the hands of some one—uh—less cautious than you are!"

From then on, it sounded like a battle was being fought out here in Montana. It was a continuous *bang, bang, bang, bang, banging!*

The doctor was pretty well stove up as a result and after we'd bagged about a dozen rabbits, why, he was ready to quit and go home.

When we got back to the ranch house, Doc Pepper thanked us for taking him out and went on inside without saying a word about buying Red's ancient gun.

"Shucks! I guess we spread it on a little too thick and got the old weasel so's he don't want to ever see a scatter gun of any kind again," Red sighed.

About a hour later, though, Bucky Durbin, our foreman, came into the bunk house and said, "Doctor Pepper wants to see you boys about buying a shotgun."

"Ah! There we are!" Red laughed. "I'll go right in."

"Wait a minute, Red," Bucky put in. "The doc didn't say he wanted to see you. He wants to talk to Hungry and Al."

"Yeah, but Red owns the gun the old guy was interested in," I said.

"Well, you two fellows talk to him and find out just what he does want," Bucky advised us.

Hungry and me liked to pitched to the floor when we saw the old croaker.

"Boys," he said, "I suppose you can imagine how a man of medicine, interested in saving human life, permits his work to become almost a mania with him. This passion often leads a physician outside the precincts of medicine and surgery.

"What I'm leading up to is that in this short experience to-day I have come to regard the modern shotgun as a de-

cided menace to human life. Some steps toward correction should be taken.

"Would you gentlemen mind telling me what you paid for these nervous shotguns of yours?"

"I paid \$39.50 for my double-barreled gun," I informed him.

"My automatic stood me \$55.75," Hungry announced.

"Could you be induced to part with them at a ten-dollar profit each—ten dollars for your trouble in replacing the arm?" Doc Pepper inquired, getting out his wallet.

Me and Hungry stared at each other.

"Yeah, but, doctor, you can get the same kind of guns anywheres and save twenty bucks," I pointed out. "Anyway, I thought you didn't like these hammerless fellows."

"I don't like them," the doc went on lunatically. "Perhaps Mr. Johns told you that my hobby in pastimes is tinkering with mechanical devices. I want to take these two guns apart and study them. I am confident I can improve upon them to the extent that they will not be going off unexpectedly and killing numberless hunters year after year.

"My reason for not wanting to experiment with new ones is that I suppose they are somewhat like new automobiles. A new motor car is tight and quiet. When it's been used for a while it usually develops rattles and looseness. I dare say these shotguns are safe when they're new. I want to find out why they do not remain so."

Well, sir, we were in a hole. To refuse to sell would have made it necessary to explain to the old coot that we

were kidding him, which wouldn't have set well. Besides, he was very rich and could afford to drop a double sawbuck. We sold him our guns.

"Thanks, fellows," Doctor Pepper told us, beaming. "And, by the way, congratulate Mr. Johns for me upon having such a fine, safe shotgun."

"Say, what kind of shotguns did you two fellows sell to Doctor Pepper when he was here," Mr. Rockford asked me and Hungry a few weeks later as he held a letter in his hands.

"Darned good guns, boss," Hungry said. "Why?"

"Mrs. Pepper writes and says that the doctor got two guns from two of my men and that he has been tinkering with them and thus far has shot a desk lamp to bits, blown the leg off a table, and twice shot out windowpanes."

"He bought 'em to improve 'em," Hungry explained.

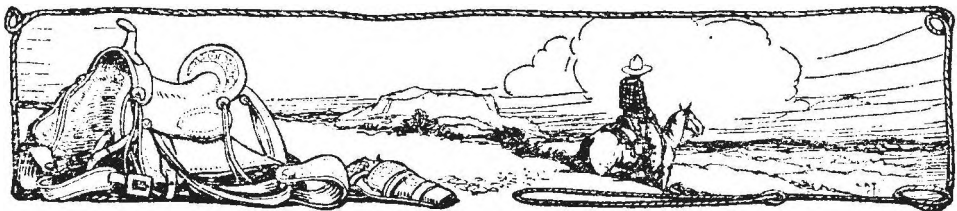
"Oh!" the boss said. "He tried to improve my alarm clock while he was here. It has quit for good."

"Gosh! I hope he don't kill anybody," I remarked.

"Don't worry," the boss laughed. "Mrs. Pepper took them away from him. He's back at fixing clocks and scales and things." The boss rubbed his chin and grinned. "I take it you didn't get trimmed in the deal?"

"Rest easy, Mr. Rockwood," Red Johns piped up. "A man hasn't got a chance with these two shell-game artists. If Doc Pepper can't prove it, I can."

Do you know anybody that wants to buy a shotgun—a perfectly safe one?





The Lost Anthill Mine

by Arthur Preston Hankins

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

THE search for the lost Anthill Mine, indicated on a map left by the old Spanish *padres*, is attempted by Esau Badger; his nephew, Radford Karval; his adopted daughter, Merry Roane, and some helpers. Their first attempt is thwarted by Badger's ancient enemy, Tom File, and his gang, and a band of murderous Yaquis.

While Badger's party wait at Sidewinder to reorganize their forces, a fresh clew to the mine is given by an old Indian, Mad Owl. Radford and Merry, hoping to decoy Badger from the camp where he is waiting to fulfill his threat of killing File, start alone on the search. They follow Mad Owl, unobserved, to his cabin, and later find themselves at the edge of a deep and apparently bottomless pool near the anthill formation.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SEVEN HORSEMEN.



THE following morning the actual search for the lost Anthill Mine began. "Merry" Roane and Rad Karval had camped for the night close to the bottomless well, but early in the morning they moved to a less conspicuous place. They discovered the spring indicated on the map. It was farther around on the southern side of the anthill, and was a mere spoonful of water compared with the gigantic well that they had come upon the night before.

They had little need for the Span-

iards' map, now that they were in the neighborhood of the lost vein of gold. But there remained the directions to be studied and deciphered, and these proved rather cryptogrammic. However, after a day of study and search they arrived at the rather startling conclusion that the mine was located somewhere in the immediate vicinity of what they had come to call "The Bottomless Pit."

This was startling, because there were no evidences of any ledge, or anything that looked like a gold-bearing formation in that locality. Rad was puzzled. Being a thorough son of the outdoor West, he knew something about ore formations and deposits; and he realized

that the outcroppings of rock that showed on the slopes of the ant hill would not cause an experienced prospector to give them a second look.

However, the formation might be different beneath the surface. There was no "float" at the base of the ant hill to indicate this, but, unless the map and the directions were entirely spurious, the gold-bearing quartz must be there.

Then the real search began.

Up and down the steep slopes Rad and his sturdy companion worked their way. The climbing was difficult, for the sand slipped under their feet, and often they sank into it ankle-deep. Rad carried a pick, Merry a shovel. Here and there they delved, wherever outcroppings showed, from the bottomless pit to the summit of the ant hill. But the soft, rotten character of the rock gave Rad no grain of hope.

They sat down to rest near the top, and Rad's glance roved off over the plateau in all directions. Suddenly, to the northwest, he saw a movement. One might say that it was merely the shadow of a movement, far away among the giant cacti and the yuccas. He estimated that it was close to the spot where Merry and he had abandoned "Mad Owl's" trail on the previous evening.

He notified his companion immediately, and they crouched down behind a couple of rocks. Rad raised the binoculars and kept them trained on the distant spot, but for a long time he saw nothing more.

"Just the shadow of a floating cloud, perhaps," he finally stated.

"That theory might do but for the fact that there isn't a cloud in the sky," said Merry. "More likely a coyote, or an antelope."

She had barely ceased speaking when, for an instant, a horse and rider stood out boldly against the lenses. They vanished as quickly as they had appeared.

"Man on horseback," Rad briefly announced.

"It's Daddy Badger," cried Merry, with a glad ring in her voice. "I hardly expected him so soon. It makes me feel better, Rad. My conscience has been troubling me not a little over the trick we played on him."

"Three horsemen," was Rad's brutal return. "Wait a minute! Four—five—six horsemen!"

Merry Roane was silent for a time. That announcement had dashed her hopes.

"Seven!" came Rad's rapid addition. "Say, this is getting interesting!"

"What do they look like, Rad?"

"For the life of me I can't determine. They're on the move, and they're so far away. If they'd stop a moment I could — Wait a minute! They *have* stopped! Now they're wheeling their horses and turning back. Ah!"

He lowered the glasses suddenly and looked seriously at Merry Roane.

"Well?" she demanded. "You look sort of troubled."

"Merry, those men are Yaqui Indians," he told her solemnly. "There's positively no mistake about it. I doubted all along if it could be Uncle Esau. He knows the direct way to the ant hill. He'd have no reason for being over in that part of the plateau."

"Then what's the answer, Rad?"

"Those fellows were trailing us and Mad Owl," he said decisively. "They came suddenly in sight of Mad Owl's adobe, as we did, and retreated to keep from being seen."

"Then they may pick up our trail from that point to the ant hill," Merry said gloomily. "Rad, are they after us? Is Tom File leading them?"

He shook his head. "Too far away for me to see whether or not one of them is File. But I fear the worst. Let's get down from here and be ready to leave the vicinity of the hill if we see 'em coming this way. Better still,

let one of us go down, break camp, and get things ready for a move. And let the other stay up here with the glasses and watch their movements."

"That's best," she said.

"I'll go down and do the hard work," he returned. "You keep watch. And if you see that they're coming this way, slide down the southern slope of the ant hill and join me."

Their hands touched as he passed her the binoculars. Her warm fingers grasped his for a moment, and she looked into his eyes with a courageous smile.

"We're not going to worry about this at all, are we, Rad?" she said.

He squeezed her fingers reassuringly and rose to his feet.

Half an hour later, with the mules packed and the saddle horses in readiness, Rad was pacing back and forth in the sand, tingling to be off. Often he cast his glance up the ant hill to the summit, but caught no glimpse of Merry Roane. He tightened Pharos' cinch, and five minutes later loosened it. He was growing desperately nervous and tried again and again to laugh it off. Then once more he glanced aloft. Merry was still invisible.

He could not see across the plateau in the direction in which the band of Indians had appeared. He was too far around on the southern side of the ant hill. Surely, by this time, Merry should know whether or not the Yaquis were coming their way. Then why didn't she put in an appearance?

An hour passed. Then half an hour more. The strain was growing unbearable. Granted that the Indians would travel rather slowly, if they were following Merry and Rad's trail toward the ant hill, something definite should have developed for the girl to see long before this.

Rad could stand it no longer. Leaving the animals where they stood, he ran to the base of the hill, wormed his

way in and out among the huge stones that lay at its base, and began climbing rapidly toward the summit.

After a long, breathless struggle he reached the top. But he could not at once locate the spot where he had left the girl. He began calling her softly, raising his voice at every repetition until he was fairly shouting. He was frightened. What could have happened to her? He began running about in circles, like a bird dog, calling ceaselessly.

Then suddenly there came an answer, and Rad's heart leaped with relief and joy. Merry's voice floated to him from close at hand, and Rad was almost sure that he had run a circle about her position at least three times.

Her call came again, so that he was able to locate her definitely. Panting through the heavy sand, without one thought of being seen by the Yaquis that may have been approaching, he lumbered toward the hidden girl.

Presently, he almost stumbled over her, secreted behind a large stone.

"Oh, Lord!" he gasped. "You scared me stiff, Merry! Why didn't you come down? Why didn't you answer when I first called?"

"Hush!" she said guardedly, a finger laid against her lips. "Something strange has happened. I couldn't come down—I couldn't call till just a moment ago."

He squatted by her side. "What's the mystery?" he demanded.

For answer, she handed him the binoculars. Immediately, he trained them to the northwest. Almost instantly the strong lenses picked up a cavalcade of horsemen slowly approaching the ant hill, and not more than a mile away at that. He counted seven riders, and one of them unquestionably was Tom File. There was no mistaking that long, lank figure, with the lizard hips, the drooping black mustachios, and the small head under its enormous black Stetson hat.

"Merry," he gasped, "you've allowed them to come right up on us! Why didn't you beat it down the hill?"

"I couldn't," she replied mysteriously. "Something else held me fascinated. There's plenty of time, isn't there? They're coming ever so slowly."

He roughly grasped her arm and shook her. "Look here," he demanded, "what has hypnotized you? You could have answered my calls long ago, and——"

"No, Rad, I didn't dare to. When you were up here with me we were so interested in looking for the Indians that we paid no attention to any other part of the plateau. But all that time old Mad Owl was making his way toward us on foot, coming from his adobe in the cottonwoods. I didn't see him until after you had left."

"Well, that explains very little," he complained.

"I know, Rad. I'm terribly excited, and I guess I'm hardly talking coherently. But listen, boy: Mad Owl came to the edge of the bottomless pit. He had almost reached it, in fact, before I saw him. He was there for a long time, eating his lunch and moving about. Then he took a short nap. All that took time."

He gazed at her. "But you didn't have to watch him, did you?"

"Yes. I was sure he was on the point of unknowingly revealing to me the whereabouts of the lost mine. Then, just about the time you began calling, he became interestingly active. He stripped himself of everything but a breechcloth and stood looking down into that deep well. All the time you were yelling, but I didn't dare answer, even though Mad Owl didn't seem to hear you. But I was much nearer to him, and was afraid to lift my squeaky voice in reply."

Rad glanced apprehensively in the direction of the approaching horsemen. They were coming ahead faster now,

as evidenced by the cloud of sand that billowed behind them.

"Merry," he said nervously, "we must be getting out of here. Don't forget that they can trail us around the ant hill as well as they are now trailing us to the bottomless pit."

"But, Rad, I can't leave until I've solved the mystery of Mad Owl's unbelievable act, until I know what has become of him. Rad, he dived into the bottomless pit at least five minutes ago, and I've seen nothing of him since!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TRAGEDY.

RADFORD KARVAL stared at his companion. It seemed to him that the heat and the excitement had caused her to lose her senses.

Again he shook her by the arm. "Do you mean to tell me that Mad Owl dived into that well without a bottom, and that he's still way down there under water?"

Merry nodded her head emphatically. "He's still under the water," she replied, "or else he came up on the hill side of the well, out of my range of vision."

Rad breathed easier. "That's the answer, of course," he said. "And that being the case, let's beat it pronto. Things don't look any too good to me around here just now. File and his renegades are drawing uncomfortably close. We'll have to crawl, as it is, because we've wasted so much precious time."

"But, Rad, I don't believe Mad Owl has come to the top on any side of the well," the girl protested. "Look down at the surface of the water. Even with the naked eye, you can see that it is as smooth as glass. After Mad Owl took his dive, little wavelets danced about all over it. Then they subsided, rather quickly because of the draw of the water running out, I suppose. After

that, the surface became as smooth as you see it now."

"Well?"

"If Mad Owl had come up in any part of the pool," she explained, "that smoothness would have been destroyed, and I would have noted it. I tell you, Radford Karval, that old Indian is still down there under the water. And he's been under now for at least six minutes, and maybe seven."

Rad shook his head. "Can't be done," he said decisively. "Something around four minutes is a record for the most experienced divers. If that old coot is still under in the bottomless pit, he's a good Indian because he's a dead Indian. Let's be on the move."

"Rad," she returned solemnly, "our business here is to discover the lost Anthill Mine, isn't it? Mad Owl holds the secret, and if we are patient he may reveal it to us any moment now."

"But, Merry, we're risking our lives!"

"We risked our lives when we set out from Carpenter on this business months ago," she reminded him. "Can it be possible that you're—scared?"

"No, not in the least. Merely sensible and cautious. You know Tom File. He's more dangerous now, with those six Yaqui Indians at his back, than when we encountered him leading a gang of white men through the mountains. Therefore, we must——"

She clutched his arm, and her slim fingers bit into the flesh until he winced. "Look!" she whispered excitedly. "The surface of the water is troubled again. Mad Owl has come up from his dive, but as yet we can't see him because—— Yes, there he goes, swimming across the pool!"

Momentarily, Radford Karval lost all thought of the oncoming band of horsemen. For down there, in the clear, cold, alkali water, Mad Owl was swimming with the grace of a frog toward the western rim of the well. His brown fingers touched the rim and

grasped a mass of roots. With much difficulty, he pulled himself up the perpendicular side and then squatted on dry land.

Now the rapt watchers noted that there was something fastened about his lean waist, just above the breechcloth.

He reposed there in that bent position for a little, and the girl, who had the binoculars, told Rad that she could see his breast heaving spasmodically.

But of a sudden he turned his head, gazed off over the plain, and then threw himself prone in the sand, with one ear to the ground. Next moment, he flopped to his feet, dived into his scanty clothes, and began sneaking stealthily away, half bent, with the secretiveness of a slinking coyote.

"He heard the hoofbeats of File's outfit!" cried Rad, suddenly remembering the menace that was drawing nearer and nearer over the broad plateau.

He glanced into the northwest again, and groaned as he saw the Indians, led by the melancholy File, bearing down upon the pool at a sand-sifting gallop.

"They'll get him, Rad!" moaned the girl. "Oh, they'll get him, sure! But—but where on earth is he?"

Rad, realizing that this was no time to start creeping toward the southern side of the ant hill, because of the position of File and his Yaquis, trained his glance on the place where he had last seen Mad Owl.

The old Indian had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him.

And indeed this was just what had occurred. For shortly after File and the Yaquis had reached the bottomless pit, and their horses were drinking eagerly in the overflow, Merry's binoculars picked up a slight movement in the sand a short distance off. She watched it, fascinated, reminded of a mole working its way along under the surface of the ground.

Then suddenly Mad Owl's head ap-

peared—his head, and nothing more. It turned, so that he could look toward the well, and then it disappeared again. Mad Owl had buried it, with the rest of his body, in the soft sand of the plateau.

"He should have been named 'Horned Toad' instead of Mad Owl," Merry told Radford, with a tremulous laugh of relief, when she had explained to him.

The hidden spectators immediately forgot the buried Indian, believing that he was entirely safe, and gave their undivided attention to the horsemen beside the well.

The glasses showed that Tom File, with the aid of an interpreter—a low-browed, long-haired renegade with a red sash about his saddle—was listening to what one of the Yaquis had to say about the bottomless pit. The weary horses of the party were standing with hanging heads beside the overflow, occasionally drinking more water. Now, a Yaqui was darting about hither and thither near the pool, frequently pointing to the ground.

"He's picking out the tracks," Rad explained. "There'll be the marks of Mad Owl's bare feet among our footprints, and that may puzzle him a bit. I guess it's time for us to get out of here, Merry. They won't be able to see us as easily now as a moment ago, when they were drawing close to the ant hill. Even if we should happen to get to our horses by the time they take up our trail again, we won't have much the start of them."

"But our animals are all fresh, and theirs are fagged," Merry pointed out. "Just look at them lolling there—they're all in."

"But our mules. We don't dare run away from them."

Merry Roane sighed. "Anyway," she admitted, "the drama is over for the present. I guess you're wise. But which way shall we go? I'm getting

back to normal again, you see, and realize that we're in a desperate situation."

"We'll head into the south," Rad told her. "Going down the southern side of the ant hill, I noticed quite a forest of live oaks off in that direction. Perhaps we can lose File in there. Now let's back away and——"

"Oh, Rad!" she interrupted in a piteous voice. "Look! That trailer is following Mad Owl's footprints through the sand!"

Rad turned his head. Merry had spoken the truth. The Yaqui who had been nosing about over the various imprints in the moist ground near the pool was now trotting off on Mad Owl's trail, which must have been quite plain in the desert sand.

The young millionaire gripped the butt of his six-shooter and had pulled it halfway from the holster before he realized that he was helpless. Then, as the horrified spectators looked, they saw Mad Owl's head rise from the sand, followed immediately by his entire body.

Buried in the earth as he had been, his keen ears had easily detected the soft footsteps of his trailer as he came on and on.

Next moment he was fleeing in a southwesterly direction, and fleeing swiftly for all his years.

A yell of triumph floated up to the two behind the hilltop stones. Down below, the Yaquis and Tom File were flinging themselves into their saddles, and in almost no time they were in hot pursuit. They passed the Yaqui who was chasing Mad Owl on foot. They bore down swiftly on the aged native, yelling like demons.

Rad clinched his fingers until the nails bit the flesh. Merry Roane was as white as a ghost, and her dark eyes swam in tears.

Smoke and fire flashed. Mad Owl stumbled, pitched forward on his face, and lay there twitching in the sand. The

report of the rifle shot crashed against the ear drums of the watchers.

There came another flash, another report, and Mad Owl lay without a move. And now Tom File had raced his horse to the side of the Yaqui who had fired the shots, and was beating him over the head unmercifully with the butt of his six-gun. The offending Indian pitched from the saddle, and File wheeled his horse about and deliberately ran over his prone, quivering body.

Then more Yaquis were out of their saddles, bending over Mad Owl. They picked him up, but he hung limp in their arms.

File galloped his horse into their midst, striking right and left with the gun-butt, scattering them in all directions. He hrew himself from the saddle and bent over the dead Mad Owl, for it was quite apparent to Rad and Merry that the old spendthrift had breathed his last.

Tom File's terrible curses floated even to the watchers' ears. The Yaqui that File had knocked from the saddle had perhaps killed the goose that laid the golden egg, and the outlaw's regrets were voiced in rabid profanity.

Rad's hand touched Merry's. "Time to sneak," he said.

A sob welled up in Merry's throat as she grasped his hand.

They backed away from the stone that had shielded them and, crawling on hands and knees, made for the southern slope of the ant hill.

At last it was safe for them to rise and run. Rad lifted Merry to his side and, still holding her hand, urged her on through the clinging sand.

"Faster! Faster, if you can," he kept telling her. "Any moment they'll take up our trail now."

Still sobbing heartbrokenly over the hideous tragedy that she had witnessed, the girl put forth every effort.

On and on they ran, the hungry sands tripping them, causing them to slip and

stumble, gnawing ceaselessly at their struggling feet.

CHAPTER XL.

THE LABYRINTH.

DESPITE the broken arm that had not yet fully mended, Rad Karval had done a good job of packing. For when Merry Roane and he reached their outfit and swung into the saddles, they were able to lead the two mules across the plateau at a smart gallop.

But long before they were near the sheltering grove of live oaks, a backward glance showed Rad that File and his Yaquis had sighted them and were in pursuit.

The fresher animals of the pursued, however, drew farther and farther away from the others at every leap. They reached the live-oak grove while File and his band were still mere specks of black in the distance.

Once among the trees, they discovered that the surface of the land had a different formation. It was less sandy than the level plain they had been traveling across, and this meant that it would be more difficult for File to trail them. But the most peculiar aspect of this part of the forgotten plateau was the covering of rocks with which the land was strewn.

These rocks were of a reddish tinge and were oddly similar in shape and size. They were roundish, and varied from three feet to five feet in diameter. They were scattered over the earth like grains of wheat sown by the hand of a giant agriculturist. Between them grew the live oaks, together with low cactus plants and sage bushes that were sometimes as tall as the rocks.

In short, the district was a veritable monkey-puzzle. The fleeing pair would travel among the rocks in single file for twenty yards or more, and then find their way completely blocked. They would manage to turn and ride back

until they came upon another promising avenue. But before following the new route for many paces they found themselves unable to go one step farther unless they left the animals behind them.

"There's one thing certain," Rad told the girl, after numerous failures to penetrate this weird garden of oaks and stones: "That is, that File and his murderous Indians will have as much difficulty in getting on in here as we are having. I'm for going back to the edge of the grove and working along under cover of the trees to the north. Maybe somewhere in that direction we can find a way to get to the heart of the patch. And in the meantime, File and the Yaquis will find themselves up against it, as we have been."

Merry agreeing to this, they turned about and hastened back until only the outpost trees stood between them and the enemy. Then, keeping just within the grove, they found that they could work the outfit ahead at a brisk trot in a northerly direction.

The hoofs of the animals struck fire from the small stones that covered the ground. "Flint," Rad decided with satisfaction. And the surface of the land was literally covered with them.

"Fine job they'll have trailing us over this stuff," Rad jerked out between the jolts that his trotting horse was giving him. "I don't say it can't be done, for I imagine these Yaquis are hears at tracking. But it'll be a slow process at best, nosing about for scars left by horseshoes on this flint. We've the edge on them from the very start."

They continued north for perhaps half a mile. Then, on their right, Rad descried a wide opening in the garden of boulders and live-oak trees, and decided to make a try at it.

At a gallop they entered the opening, but soon discovered that it was narrowing gradually. And finally they were face to face again with the problem of

finding a way toward the center of the strange formation by working in and out among the rocks.

This time, however, they were more fortunate. After several false leads, they returned to the starting point for another try. And their hopes rose gloriously as, winding this way and that, they found themselves traveling steadily on past all obstructions.

Just the same, the inevitable eventually occurred. They were effectually blocked again, though they had penetrated the labyrinth for quite a distance. However, they were pocketed now. Ahead of them lay three large boulders, a twisted live oak growing among them. On their right were more rocks and trees, and on their left a jungle of cacti and sage that nothing larger than a jack rabbit might enter.

But Rad's quick eyes showed him that the central boulder that stood in their path was not imbedded solidly in the earth. A huge live-oak root had undermined it and lifted it free of the ground at one side. Instantly, he had a plan.

He swung from the saddle and hastily removed his lariat. Commanding Merry to follow his example, without stopping to explain, he laid the noose of his rope about the top of the central boulder. Then he placed the noose of Merry's rope on top of his own.

The girl understood now, and they mounted together, taking half-hitches about their saddle horns. Both horses were range bred, and knew how to throw their weight on a taut lariat. Next moment, both animals were straining with all their might. And presently the rock rolled over with a crash, and the gateway lay open before them.

The explorers gathered up their lariats and rode through, pulling the naules behind them. It looked as if the avenue that they had entered would allow them to travel for some distance farther into the monkey-puzzle.

Rad had started to lead the way, when suddenly he reined in.

"I wonder," he said, "if we couldn't close the gate as well as open it. It's worth a try, to say the least, and we won't have lost much time even if we fail."

So once more, on the other side, the tough lariats went taut between the gateway stone and the saddle horns, and the rock plopped back in place between its companions, where it wedged itself in as tightly as before it had been disturbed.

Rad chuckled at this strategy. But his thoughts became grave again as he remembered that, even though they were able to hide themselves from the File outfit in that weird garden, it was doubtful if they would be able to find water in such a dry, desolate place as this seemed to be.

But their canteens were full, and there was at least five gallon in the pack of one of the mules. This would last them for some time, in a pinch, provided they could keep in the shade. Their object was to hold off File and his renegades until Esau Badger might come to their aid. But Rad became more downcast still when he remembered that, long before this, they had expected Esau Badger to join them.

And would he have anybody with him to help them out when he did come? This was a bothering question. Somehow or other, File had discovered that Merry and Rad had gone to the forgotten plateau to resume the quest. Then, would Esau Badger find out that File had mustered his band of cutthroat Yaquis and go after them?

If he did find this out, he undoubtedly would get together a posse of men and be fully prepared to handle File. But would he think of making investigations concerning Tom File's whereabouts before starting? Or would he, in his customary impulsive manner, strike out alone, not knowing that his

foster daughter and his nephew were in desperate straits?

All this ran through Rad's thoughts as his horse twisted this way and that among the stones, nosing out a route for his followers. But he did not let Merry know how his mind was occupied.

Suddenly, his horse stopped short. And this time Nature's no-thoroughfare sign was out in earnest. A regular wall of rocks, twisted live oaks, and a larger variety of cactus plants, stood before the nose of the lead horse. Without a moment's hesitation, Rad left the saddle and threw stirrup and *rosadero* over the seat in order to reach the cinch.

"We're stuck," he told the girl, who was looking at him, wide-eyed. "Gotta unsaddle, take as much of the pack as we can handle on our backs, leave the critters here, and get past this obstruction on Shanks' mares."

"But, Rad, if they trail us to this point, they'll find the mules and horses and——"

"Of course. That's to be expected. But they mustn't find us."

As the girl obediently dismounted, there floated to their ears, from far behind, a weird yell of triumph.

"Guess that trailer of File's has discovered something we left behind us," Rad grimly muttered. "Well, he's only learned part of his lesson, at that. There are worse problems near the middle of the book. And it'll take time to solve 'em. Time! That's what we crave!"

CHAPTER XLI.

DAWN.

THE pursued couple had reached what they considered the center of the labyrinth, judging by their view of it from the top of the ant hill earlier that day. Night was close at hand. They were at least half a mile from the spot where they had left the mules and horses to their fate.

They had made two trips between their camping place and the outfit, returning both times with all that they could carry on their backs. All of the water had been transported to their retreat, and a great deal of the grub. They were prepared now for a lengthy siege, provided that was to be forced upon them.

Their stronghold was a cluster of rocks so interesting that Merry could scarcely cease studying it. It was a veritable nest of huge boulders, some of them as large as an ordinary outland cabin. They stood up like the turrets of a medieval castle, with here and there a stunted live oak growing, its roots twisted into the rock veins in search of plant food. Centuries later, perhaps, the persistent trees might conquer and reduce the stones to sand, and eventually to soil. But the boulders had the best of it so far in nature's mysterious scheme of things.

A coyote howled somewhere in the desert of stones and oaks. Rad kindled a small fire of sagebrush, knowing that the darkness of the night would hide the smoke, and they cooked a slender meal. Then, worn out from the exciting adventures of the day, they wrapped themselves in their blankets and immediately fell asleep. For they were confident that, with that vast waste of stones about them, even File's Yaqui trailer would not be able to find them until the sun was scorching the land once more.

Rad was awakened by the stunning report of a heavy-caliber rifle. He sat up in his blankets, blinking. Merry Roane hurried from the nook that she had chosen as a sleeping place. Rad rubbed the sleep from his eyes and shook himself like a dog coming from a swim.

"Rad, what was that?" Merry asked wonderingly.

"A shot—a rifle shot, if I'm not mistaken. And close, too. It sounded like the crack of doom in this vast quietude."

The light of dawn was just stealing into the sky. The gaunt rocks loomed monsterlike in the uncertain lumination.

"Who could have fired, Rad? And why?"

He shook his head and stood listening. Not a sound came to his straining ears. With a deep sigh of relaxation, he turned to the girl again.

"I can't fathom it," he told her. "Why File or any of his Indians should fire a shot at this hour of the morning is a puzzle. We weren't fired at, that's certain. But whoever pulled that trigger is uncomfortably close."

He picked up his Winchester, noted that the chamber was loaded and that the magazine was full of cartridges. Then he examined his six-shooter, well knowing that it needed no examination. He clinched his teeth in vexation, realizing that he was nervous. He pulled himself together and smiled at Merry.

"Cold breakfast for ours," he told her. "Don't dare light a fire after that shot. Suppose you see what you can find to eat. I'll crawl out to the edge of the rocks and keep my eyes open."

His companion nodded silently and went to the pile of provisions, while Rad took up his self-appointed task.

Secreted between two large stones on the outskirts of the cluster, he listened intently. Who could have fired that shot, and why? An accident, he decided. A trigger caught in the brush, or a stumble and fall by the holder of the rifle. Or perhaps—

His thoughts were suddenly arrested. Off on his left, he had heard a slight sound. A prowling animal might have caused it, but it put his nerves on edge.

Then it came again—a rustling of bushes. And a moment later, across a little clearing that separated the rock cluster from the remainder of the jungle, a swarthy face appeared. Long black hair hung to the shoulders below that face. There was a wide band of red about the forehead, holding the hair

in place. The small black eyes, visible in the increasing light, looked like the eyes of a bear.

Radford raised his Winchester and, because he could not see the body of the Yaqui, aimed just below the wrinkled brown face. He wanted to put a bullet between the aboriginal's eyes, but he knew his stuff. In that quivering half-light he would fire above the Indian's head if he were to aim directly at the target.

He closed one eye, drew a bead, hesitated. After all, this wild man was a human being, and to shoot him down in cold blood, even though his own life depend upon it, seemed cruel and unsportsmanlike.

Should he call to the fellow in Spanish? Did he understand that language? But why make his whereabouts known? There was the bare chance that the newcomer might not make an attempt to investigate within the rock shelter. A slim chance indeed.

Then a second brown face appeared, close to the first but farther to the left. Next instant three squat Yaquis, rifles in hand, slipped into the open spot.

"Halt!" called Rad in Spanish, as the trio started slinking directly toward him, short-barreled rifles at the "slope."

The three Yaquis straightened. One of them pointed at the rifle barrel protruding from the rocks. He uttered a low grunt of warning. They all turned tail and fled to cover again.

Merry was at Rad's side, her bosom heaving. "Rad, I heard you! What is it?"

"Three Yaquis came in sight out there. I halted them. I could have dropped all three, but—but I didn't."

"I understand, Rad. You couldn't, of course. They would have shot you down had they been in your place, but—but that's what civilization does for a fellow."

All was silence again. The day came on apace. Merry returned to her break-

fast preparations; Rad remained on guard.

Then from somewhere in the surrounding chaparral came a soft drawl, but no speaker was in sight.

"So yeh thought yeh'd make a go of it, hidin' in here, did yeh? Yeh oughta been wise enough to savvy that these here Yaquis know this country from one end to the other. Minute yeh drifted into this field o' boulders, my interp-ter told me that, if yeh sighted that there clump o' rocks in the middle, yeh'd bed down there. Guess yeh know who's talkin', kid?"

"Why, hello, File!" Rad called back, without a tremor in his voice. He might as well make the best of it, he thought. "What can I do for you this morning?"

"Same ole thing, kid. Come acrost with the map an' the directions how to find the Anthill Mine. Don't know's I need the map, now, either. Jest the paper tellin' how to locate the ledge. That's all. Shove 'er out, and we'll go 'way and leave yeh be."

"How do I know that?" asked Rad, merely because there seemed little else to say. "This country is becoming settled, Tom. There are a few people at Sidewinder who are for law and order. Their number is growing. Even if I gave you the paper, it wouldn't be difficult to show them that you had taken it from me by force. So you couldn't realize on the find, after all. You know that as well as I do. And so, even if I gave you what you want, you wouldn't let us out of here alive. Dead men tell no tales, you know. And we saw you shoot down old Mad Owl like a jack rabbit yesterday."

"I didn't, no sich thing!" came File's quick protest. "It was one o' these Yacks that done it. I beat 'im up fer it, too—half killed 'im. I don't approve of a thing like that."

"Of course not, File. But you might have approved of it after you had caught him and tortured him into tell-

ing you the secret that you think he held."

"No, no, kid! Nothin' o' the kind. I ain't like that. Now, listen: I'm a peaceable man. I ain't any killer. I defend myself, o' course, but I ain't bad. I jest want what's rightfully mine. Esau Badger beat me outa them papers, and then, jest here lately, he tried to smoke me up at Sidewinder. I jest went into that saloon, and he ups and tries to pot me. But I got nothin' pertickeler against you. Honest, I'll take the Yacks away and we'll leave yeh and the gal plumb alone if yeh'll come acrost."

"File, you're a blundering liar. You tried your best, when you were at the head of the old gang, to kill Badger, Miss Roane, old Pard, Bartolo De-Larra, and me. You're a cold-blooded murderer. I simply can't trust you."

"All right. Then what yeh gonta do?"

"Blast you the moment you show your sneaking face."

"Oh! But maybe I won't show it. Kid, yeh're up again' it. They ain't no gettin' out fer you two now. We got yeh where we want yeh. Yeh might hold us off fer a time, but we c'n starve yeh out. We found yer mules and hosses. We know jest about how much grub and water yeh got in there. All we gotta do is set down and wait till yeh give in—or make a feed for the buzzards. We'll wear yeh down in less'n three days. Be reasonable, kid!"

"Nothing doing," Rad told him crisply. "We'll stick it out. Esau Badger and a party from Sidewinder will be looking us up to-day. They know just where to find us. You'd better make yourself scarce before Badger comes. He's sworn to kill you, and you know Esau Badger."

Tom File's laugh was sarcastic. "Purty neat lyin' fer an amatoor," was his opinion. "But it happens that I know Esau Badger don't savvy what has become o' you two. And there wasn't

anythin' mentioned in the note about a party."

"What's that? What note?"

"Ah-hah! Got under yer shirt that crack, didn't I, kid? The note that Badger's gal wrote to that sinful ole gamboleer. Yes, kid, I got that note and tore her up. And one o' my Yacks is guardin' that red-headed hash-slinger right now. She didn't git to Badge with the note at all. We nailed her when she was aimin' to deliver it, and took her off an' hid her."

"No, kid, yer bluff don't work. Badger ain't got any idear what's become o' you two. He'd never think yeh'd do a fool thing like comin' out here alone. And that note never said nothin' atall about any posse. Think that over, while I git me a bite to eat. Got plenty grub, we have, and we c'n git to the spring. You two can't. Think hard; I'll be back fer my answer in half an hour."

Merry Roane's trembling fingers settled on Rad's shoulder. "Oh, Rad!" she moaned. "I heard it all. What on earth can we do if—if Daddy Badger doesn't know where we've gone?"

In a low voice Rad told her to call to File and tell him they would give his proposal consideration.

"But, Rad, why should I call?"

"Do so," he commanded. "I want to concentrate."

Obediently, she lifted her voice, and there was an unmistakable tremble in her tones.

"We'll think it over, File!" she called.

Rad's fingers tightened on the pistol grip of his rifle. He was like a steel spring drawn taut as he waited for File's answer.

Then it came:

"Yeh're showin' good sense, ma'am. And I wanta tell yeh——"

But at this instant Rad pressed the trigger. He was aiming in the direction from whence came the voice. Merry screamed in surprise as the stun-

ning report rang out on the early morning air. They waited, breathless.

"Well, well, well!" came File's melancholy drawl, pregnant with derision. "I thought maybe yeh'd be tryin' that. But yeh can't shoot words, kid. And I'm behind a rock as big as yourn. I'm too old a hand at this game to think a bullet can't go through bresh. Back in half an hour, folks. S'long!"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ATTACK.

THREE days and three nights had passed over the field of boulders and twisted live oaks. Merry and Rad had not slept a wink during that long, nerve-straining period. They were "dead on their feet," but still defiant. They believed that, so long as they kept awake and watchful, they had the advantage over their enemies.

Two or three times a day Tom File's voice would drift to them from the surrounding thicket, demanding whether or not they were ready to give in. Invariably, the answer that went back was no. The beleaguered pair had seen nothing of File or any of his cutthroat band since the first morning at dawn. But they realized that they were surrounded, and that, unless something intervened, their situation was hopeless.

But they held on grimly, though food and water were getting low. It seemed that never in their lives had they craved water as they did now, for during the day the sun beat down unmercifully on the gaunt rocks about them. Besides, at least a gallon of water had been accidentally spilled.

"We won't give up, Rad," Merry kept repeating in feverish tones. "We'll die, anyway, even if we hand out the papers, so we may as well die fighting."

Then Rad would squeeze her hand and echo: "We won't give up. Life's a fight, anyway, and we may as well make it a grand fight. Neither of us

cares so much for the lost Anthill Mine and the gold it may contain, but we come of stubborn stock. File started this thing. Let's see him finish it."

"Oh, if only Daddy Badger were here!" moaned the girl. "Surely he'll come, Rad. Surely he'll deduce what we've done, and come out here to help us."

"Of course he will," said Rad.

But in his heart he believed no such thing. His uncle, he had decided, was still waiting at Sidewinder for an opportunity to kill Tom File. He and Merry very naturally had not kept in close touch with each other while she was acting as waitress in West's restaurant and he was dealing poker at The Morning Glory. So for days, perhaps, he might go on about his regular business and not know that she was not still employed in the restaurant.

Then Rad remembered that Merry had taken the saddles and other equipment from Badger's cabin. He would have missed these, of course, and would accordingly look up the man who had been taking care of the mules and horses for him. This thought gave Rad some little hope.

But would Esau be convinced, even though he knew his foster daughter had ridden away with Rad, that the two had embraced the wild idea of searching for the lost mine without him? He would never believe them disloyal, of course. And he would not be able to understand that they had done this crazy thing simply to lure him back into the quest, in the hope that he would forget his burning desire to shoot it out with File.

Then what would he think had become of them? Was he scouring the country for them now? He knew the trail to the ant hill. Surely he would take that trail eventually, if he was searching for them.

And Austin West! What about West? Certainly, he and Esau Badger would get together on this thing when

West learned that Merry Roane had deserted his restaurant.

Suddenly, Rad struck his thigh a resounding clap. "I've been a fool, Merry," he said in a low, dry voice. "Uncle Esau is unquestionably hunting for us. And it's as certain that he would travel to the ant hill some time during that search. But how could he find us in here? Maybe he's out there now, somewhere on the plateau, looking for our tracks, which the wind-blown sand must have covered long since. How can we expect him to find us if we don't let him know where we're hidden?"

"A signal of distress!" cried Merry instantly, her eyes lighting miraculously.

"Of course," Rad returned, and immediately set about collecting leaves and uprooting sagebrush.

Soon they had a fire burning briskly, and on it they heaped green live-oak leaves to make dense smoke. The atmosphere, fortunately, was windless that day, and the smoke streamed straight aloft.

Five minutes after the smoke signal was lifting toward the sky, Rad, on watch at the edge of the rocks, heard File's voice.

"Little signal, eh?" he taunted. "Wonder yeh didn't think of it before. But 'twon't do yeh no good whatever, kid. If Badge happened to be out there on the plateau—which he ain't—the Yacks I got stationed at the edge o' the grove would 'a' seen 'im and reported to me. And if he started this way, we'd jest naturally ramble in and end the thing right now. But they ain't no need fer us to do that, seein' he ain't out there. All we gotta do is wait and be patient. I'm patient, myself. How's the grub and water holdin' out?"

Rad made no retort, but, turning to Merry, he said cheerfully: "Heap on more oak leaves. We'll ring the bell eventually."

The words were scarcely out of his

mouth when, from far off across the plateau, there came six rapid shots. A pause, and then six more reports floated to their eager ears.

"Oh, Rad! Rad!" cried Merry joyously. "It's an answer to our signal! It's Daddy Badger!"

She ran toward him, tears of relief and gladness streaming from her dark eyes. Next moment, somehow or other, she was in his arms, and he was raining kisses on her lips.

"Tell me! Tell me," he commanded fiercely, "that you don't love Austin West! Tell me I'm the man you love! Quick—while you're excited!"

"I—I—— Yes, yes, yes! You're the man I love! O Rad!"

He kissed her again, then leaped away from her and leveled his rifle through the rocks. "They'll be coming now, maybe," he said hoarsely. "File and the Yaquis. I believe Uncle Esau has been out there for some time, and that File has known all about it. Yes, they'll be coming in after us now. Look out! Get your gun up and watch the other side. Shoot to kill! There's no other way out for us now."

He pulled the trigger as the last word came from his lips. A Yaqui darting across the clearing toward the cluster of rocks threw up both arms, spun around, and dropped in his tracks. There came a blood-curdling yell—the Yaqui battle cry. Merry Roane's six-shooter barked on the other side of the stronghold. The battle was on at last, and Esau Badger, if it was he who had fired the two sets of shots, was still far away on the broad plateau, with the monkey-puzzle of rocks and trees between him and the two he loved.

Everything was silent once more. Not a brown face was in sight.

"Watch out for a sudden rush!" Rad called to Merry. "They'll come at us from both sides, perhaps!"

The report of her six-shooter was his answer. He was about to turn and run

over to her aid, when three Yaquis, yelling fiendishly, came darting straight toward him. They ran close together, half-stooped, their carbines ready.

It was a ticklish moment for Radford Karval. No time for buck fever. If he ran to help Merry, whose weapon was now barking regularly, the oncoming trio would enter the cluster of rocks. It was a time for a quick decision, and Rad made it on the instant.

He kept his post. With steady nerves he drew a bead on the central figure of the running trio. He pressed the trigger slowly, almost affectionately. As the heavy rifle kicked back, he saw the Yaqui pitch forward on his face.

Grimly, he pumped another cartridge into the chamber and leveled the weapon again. A stunning report, the swift kick of his rifle, and the Yaqui on the right went spinning around, head dropped forward, as if he were looking for something on the ground. Then he slumped gradually, fell flat, rolled over on one side, and lay immovable.

But the third, still yelling at the top of his voice, came lunging on. Rad could not but admire his courage in the face of what had happened to his two companions, even though he realized that this courage was fanaticism, or fatalism, or the wild insanity that attacks primitive warriors when the battle is on.

Just before Rad pressed the trigger for his third shot, the aboriginal unexpectedly dropped flat on his face. He had timed the act just right, and Rad's bullet went whistling over his head. The man crawled forward over the flinty stones, wriggling like a snake, but making surprising speed. Merry's revolver was now silent, and Rad believed that she must have emptied her gun. She was helpless, then. So it was her plight that caused him to lose control of himself. He pumped the lever furiously, hoping swiftly to end the battle on his side by putting a bullet through

the monkeylike brown man crawling toward him.

The mistreated mechanism of his rifle refused to work properly, and the bullet jammed.

Springing to his feet, he discarded the useless rifle and went for his six-gun. But before he could get it out the Yaqui had darted into the cluster of rocks and was upon him.

Just in time, Rad ducked. The bullet flattened itself on a stone at his back, and his nostrils were stinging with powder smoke. Through the smoke, half bent, he leaped at the Yaqui. They came together with a grunt, and Rad experienced a sharp twinge in his mending arm. The Yaqui enfolded him in a fierce embrace, and his rifle clattered on the ground. Rad saw the flash of a knife above his head, dodged, bringing the native to earth on top of him.

His left arm was useless. With his right, he was grabbing desperately for his six-shooter, but could not seem to get it out. Brown fingers were twined cruelly about his windpipe. Rad's fist shot up and caught the brown man on the point of the jaw, but the blow seemed not to harm him.

The knife flashed again. Then a heavy-caliber weapon roared in Rad's ears, and the Yaqui went limp above him. With the death grunt of a stricken animal, he fell forward upon Rad's body, and for an instant they lay there face to face, the Indian's eyes rolling wildly.

Next moment, the limp figure was dragged from Rad's prostrate form, and two strong hands were helping him to his feet. Half-stunned from his fall—for the back of his head had struck the hard stone floor—he blinked dazedly into the eyes of Bill Noxie.

"Bill!" he cried.

But Bill wheeled away from him, leveled a six-shooter, and sent a stream of orange fire lashing between the rocks. The report was followed by a cry of

agony, and then Bill Noxie spun about again, grasped Rad's arm, and shook him.

"Come out of it!" he bawled. "Only four of 'em down, and Tom File is still at large. Get busy. You ain't hurt bad."

"Merry! Where's Merry?" cried Rad.

"Safe," answered Bill. "Fondle that smoke iron, boy. This thing ain't over yet."

Then Rad realized that Bill had not come alone. He saw other figures darting about in the cluster of stones. A rifle barked on the other side.

"Got 'im!" came a shout in a familiar voice, the voice of old Phil Pardee.

"That makes five," said Bill, taking up the position that Rad had vacated when the Yaqui pounced upon him. "Only two left—File and another Yaqui. Will you get busy, kid?"

Rad shook his head, even though it made it ache, to drive away the cobwebs. He hauled out his six-shooter, gripped the handle. He stole to Bill's side, crouched there, almost himself again.

"We've got 'em surrounded," confided Bill. "Any moment now yeh'll hear smoke irons talkin'."

"Yes, yes, Bill! But Merry Roane!"

"Pard drug her back and hid her behind the rocks," said Bill. "They ain't a scratch on her, Rad. Man, she was shootin' like all git-out, and I think she winged a Yack, the way he was weavin' 'round when I took that crack at 'im. The one I jest dropped. Listen! Here they come. Git ready, Rad! Yer uncle an' the rest of 'em are herdin' 'em in to us!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

TREASURES.

THERE was a frantic crashing in the brush beyond the clearing that surrounded the cluster of rocks. Hoarse shouts came. A rifle spoke. Then two

figures, evidently hard pressed, dashed into the open space, panting, running with all their might.

One of them was Gaspar Lopez, kidnaper of red-headed waitresses, and the other was the lizard-hipped Tom File.

Bill Noxie leveled his rifle, and instantly a report rang out. Gaspar Lopez clapped a hand to his breast, uttered a piercing cry, and went staggering about like a drunken man, finally pitching forward on his face. He lay there twisting about grotesquely, knees close to his chin. And in this undignified position he suddenly became still, the fingers of one hand clutching the small flinty stones in death.

Meantime, an entirely different happening was taking place. Tom File, still running blindly like a jack rabbit pursued by hounds, was making long, desperate leaps to reach the opposite side of the opening in the rocks. But suddenly, from close at hand, a sharp voice hailed him:

"Hey, you, Tom File! Stop a second!"

Rad had brought up his six-shooter, but Bill Noxie dragged the barrel down.

"Let 'em have it out," he said. "Yer uncle made us promise it'd be that way. Lay off!"

And now Rad saw the tall, spare figure of his uncle walking toward the center of the clearing. His close-clipped, silvery hair glistened in the bright sunshine. His waxen face was lined and stern, and, though Rad could not see his eyes, he knew that they were cold and hard, green-black and venomous. His long, white hands hung at his sides, empty. But there was a six-gun at his hip.

"Tom!" he called again. "There isn't any use to run. My men have you completely surrounded. A dozen bullets could pierce you before you reached the other side. But I'm going to give you a chance. Come, shoot it out with me. And if you win, old-timer, I've

given instructions for you to be set free. That's my word, and you know Esau Badger!"

Tom File had ceased running, and as Uncle Esau finished his speech he turned quickly and faced him.

"Get your breath," said Badger, his hands still hanging at his sides. "I want to be fair, Tom."

File stood watching his old enemy, his pigeon breast heaving spasmodically. There was not a sound in the monkey-puzzle, as the hidden watchers looked out upon these strange proceedings.

"Gun loaded?" asked Badger casually.

Tom File shook his head. "I done emptied every chamber, Badge," he said.

"That being the case," returned Uncle Esau, "I suppose I'll have to allow you the opportunity to refill them. You see, Tom, I want to play fair. I've always played fair. You haven't done so, but, just the same, I'm going to give you every chance.

"We might have been good friends, Tom, if things had turned out differently. There are many things I admire about you. Your indisputable courage, for one thing, even though you take advantage of your enemies when you get the chance. I admire your shooting, too, Tom. I realize that your aim with a six-shooter is as good as mine is. But I think you're a trifle slower on the draw."

"We'll see, then," retorted the watchful File.

And then, like the lunge of a hunting cat, File's right arm darted to his hip, and the six-shooter that he had said was not loaded spat a venomous stream of smoke and fire at Esau Badger.

There came an agonized scream from Merry Roane, who, white-faced, had stolen up behind Rad and Noxie. Esau Badger lay prone on the ground, chest down, head lifted.

There came a smart report, and the smoke hid Uncle Esau's face. Before

it had cleared he was on his feet, six-gun held at his waist, watching Tom File like a ferret.

Breathless with suspense, the watchers turned their eyes on File. There was a strange, weird grin on his face. His face was twisted so comically that the watchers, despite the tenseness of the moment, felt like laughing.

Then they noted that File was putting forth every effort to lift the revolver in his right hand. The hand would rise several inches, then drop back again. Then up it would come once more, while File's contorted face grew purple. Several times this happened, and then the heavy weapon dropped from the bad man's hand and thumped on the stones. His legs bent under him, and he went down in a heap.

"Pretty work! Pretty work!" muttered Bill Noxie. "I never saw the beat of it, Rad. Yer uncle knowed File was lyin' when he said his gat was empty. An' he jest stood there, hands at his sides, and waited fer File to make the move. Then he dropped a second before File throwed down on 'im. Ain't one gun-fighter in a thousan' would 'a' took that chanct."

Esau Badger was now casually walking toward the rock cluster, and Merry Roane was rushing out to meet him. She threw herself into his arms, and he lifted her and carried her back to the stronghold, while the rescue party were coming in from all directions.

"All over, my boy," said Uncle Esau brightly, as he offered a slim, well-kept hand to his nephew. "Thought you'd slip one over on the old man, did you? Well, I had my way, after all. Tom File's where I want him. Treacherous to the last, but game, by golly! Poor old Tom!"

Now Phil Purdee, Austin West, and several men whom Rad did not know, gathered round, the former pair wringing the hands of Rad and Merry. They were all talking at once, but Esau Bad-

ger stopped them and took the floor, as he usually did when he thought it expedient to exercise his commanding personality.

"You crazy kids deserved to get into trouble," he told the guilty couple. "I'd already made up my mind to let matters take their course between File and me. And I had already sent to Fort Kelsey for Bill Noxie, instructing him to come on to Sidewinder and bring Pardee with him, if he was able to travel. They came the afternoon following the night on which you ducked your nuts.

"They got lost, trying to make a short cut through the timber, which some one they met had told them about. They came upon a little cabin in the trees, with a murderous-looking Yaqui squatting in the doorway. They asked him where they were, but received only grunts for an answer. As they were about to ride away they heard a woman's scream from inside the cabin. 'Help!' she called.

"That was enough for our two heroes. They knocked the Yaqui out, when he offered resistance, went into the cabin, and found the red-headed waitress there, bound hand and foot. Hearing the voices of white men, the girl had put up a mighty struggle, and had managed to get the gag away from her mouth.

"You can imagine the rest. She told Bill and Pardee what was in the note that Merry had asked her to deliver. Oh, yes, she knew, kid!" He grinned at his daughter. "She confessed to me that she'd steamed open the envelope in the kitchen of West's restaurant. Curiosity'll kill that girl some day. But it's lucky for you two that she's built that way."

"But the shots that we heard in answer to our smoke signal, daddy?" asked Merry. "Just after we heard them, the fight began. We thought you were so far away that you'd not be able to come to our aid in time."

Austin West spoke up. "It must have been 'Dinka-daddy' who fired those shots," he said. "We left him out there taking care of our horses. We'd been in this sweltering hole for an hour before the shots were fired. Then, when we heard the shooting in here immediately afterward, we were able to find you easily."

Philip Pardee stepped up and looked at Rad, and Rad impulsively wrung the stanch old man's hand a second time. Pardee thoughtfully shook his gray head and looked at Radford with deep reproach in his devoted eyes.

"You should have been more careful, Rad," he said.

Then he sat down on a stone and relaxed, with eyes closed and head leaning back against a tree. He was still very weak, Rad's uncle explained, but had insisted on coming along when Bill Noxie read Badger's note to him.

With Austin West, Merry Roane strolled away while Rad was telling his uncle about the murder of Mad Owl and his strange dive into the bottomless pit. Badger sent one of his men to search Tom File's clothing, and the man returned with several lumps of quartz in his hands, gleaming bright with yellow metal.

"Found 'em in File's pockets," he explained.

Esau Badger nodded, and his cold eyes grew crafty. "I think I understand," was all that he had to say about the matter then.

Finally, West and Merry Roane came back. West walked straight to Rad and held out his hand.

"I lose," he said in a low tone. "I might have known, Rad. Good luck to you both—and my heartiest congratulations."

Another narrative might be written about the eventual discovery of the lost Anthill Mine and the working of the rich vein that composed it. For it was

a strange sight that Radford Karval's money brought about, out there in the wilderness away from civilization in the middle of the forgotten plateau, so bleak and dry.

Following his uncle's deductions, Rad left the country immediately after the return to Sidewinder. And when he came back he brought a deep-sea diver, with all his queer paraphernalia. A raft was thrown together, and the apparatus set up on it. The diver went down into the bright waters of the bottomless pit and was gone some time. When he finally signaled, and was hauled to the surface, he laid on the raft several lumps of pinkish quartz, deeply veined with yellow gold.

They removed his metal helmet, and he explained that, about twenty feet below the surface of the water, he had come upon a cavellike opening in the ant hill. Working his way in on hands and knees, he had climbed up an incline until he realized that he had reached a point above the waterline outside. And here he found the old workings made by the Spanish travelers, long since laid to rest in their graves.

He saw light far above him, he claimed, and thought that there was an opening somewhere in the top of the

ant hill, which permitted air to descend to the ancient under-water mine.

Thus it had been possible for Mad Owl to dive into the crystal water and come up inside the old mine, and to breathe in there while he picked off lumps of glittering quartz with which to purchase squeaky accordions and Stetson hats too large for him.

Soon the entire hill was staked out. And to-day the various claims are being worked by their various owners. Bill Noxie, Lou Dailey, and Phil Pardee share in the enormous profits of the venture. One claim is called the Mad Owl, another the Merry Roane, a third the Austin West. A fourth Esau Badger staked out as the Geofredo, in memory of his companion who was killed at El Paso. A fifth is called the Bartolo, and is being held for that amiable Spaniard pending his release from the Texas penitentiary.

Treasure galore for all of them! But Rad is interested mainly in the treasure that his wayward, match-making, old uncle planned slyly to place in his keeping—Merry Roane Karval, the tantalizing mystery girl of the photograph, with the companionable black eyes, the long, smoky lashes, and the beaded Indian shirt of many colors.

THE END.



STRAW HATS AND COWS

STRAW in its native state may be a not unwelcome part of the provender of cows. But straw in its more artificial aspects, as for instance in the straw hat, comes very far from being the diet that a right-thinking cow would choose. Nevertheless, a zealous Chicago haberdasher recently overlooked all such laws and humanitarian rights, when he sought to display a novel advertising stunt.

Lifeless dummies, portraying his fashions, did not attract enough attention to his store windows, so he put a live cow in the window and had her eat straw hats to advertise new fall headgear. The display almost blocked the traffic on State Street for two days, while the cow faithfully masticated any and every straw hat given her.

In spite, however, of the warranted purity of her diet, the cow died from indigestion at the end of the second day, the inference being that an artificial straw hat found its way into her diet along with the rest.



Wild Foes

by **Kenneth Gilbert**

Author of "Mountain Vengeance," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN-GOD OF RODERICK DILL



HE blanketed figure slumbering in the lee of a clump of greasewood there among the high hills, where the air was already bitter with late fall, was certainly unprepossessing, if not actually revolting. When shiftless Lem Tucker, the sheep-herder, had drunk too much, which happened with disheartening frequency, he was anathema to all decent folk. Tucker had many good qualities, and if it had not been for his one weakness he would have been rated as a real man; but at this moment, lying there unkempt and disheveled, head pillowed on one arm and hair frowzily rumpled, it is doubtful if even Lem's mother—had the good woman been alive and there to see—would have been moved by any motion other than disgust.

At least, it seemed so to Bart Payne, long-suffering employer of the erring

Lem, whose one-time numerous sheepbands had grazed for many miles throughout these Montana hills. As he sat there in the saddle, looking downward, the outraged Payne vowed that even a pair of buzzards, now circling far up in the leaden sky, would not have stooped earthward with sinister intent toward the whisky-soaked figure sleeping behind the greasewood. Tucker would be better off if he never awoke from his alcoholic torpor.

Dismounting, Payne shook the sleeping man roughly.

"Wake up!" he ordered. "I'm through with you; I've trusted you for the last time. Wake up, so that I can kick you off my range!" Payne's face was flushed angrily, his eyes dark with suspicion.

And few men would have taken issue with the sheep owner at that moment. Nevertheless, Payne's opinion was not shared unanimously by the world, even though it may have reflected a sentiment held by all men who knew Tucker even casually. There was one living, breath-

ing creature to whom Tucker, drunkard and wastrel though he was, appeared as a man-god, the object of an adoration which passed all bounds of understanding and which counted no cost too great in the expression of that love.

To Roderick Dhu, the great, golden-black collie who sat on a knoll a hundred yards distant from the sleeping Lem, and whose gaze alternated between the man and a band of magnificent merinos cropping in a grassy dale just below, the sodden herder seemed touched with the fire of divinity. This little world which the dog knew—a world of brown hills and grassy ranges, where mornings were chill and afternoons torrid, where there was no loneliness, but an ecstatic solitude shared with the only human being he loved—was for him literally the realization of heaven-on-earth. The incessant bleating of the sixteen hundred sheep—Bart Payne's prize band—was as celestial music to the big collie; the companionship of Lem Tucker was something so marvelous that seemingly no other dog could ever have enjoyed anything like it; and, while each day the sun seemed to come blazing out of the eastern hills and to sink in the west, this was merely an illusion—for the solar orb in reality rose and set in Lem Tucker, man-god of Roderick Dhu!

Worthless though Tucker might appear in the eyes of human beings, the dog saw through this outer husk with a keen vision which penetrated to the depths of the man's soul. From the time he was a wee pup and Tucker had rescued him from a half-breed family whose shack was overrun with starved dogs and children, Rod had learned to love the man. He had come to value the privilege of sleeping on Tucker's cast-off coat, or being carried in his arms as the herder moved the band from one grazing spot to another. Besides saving Rod from an ignoble existence with the half-breed family, Tucker had petted him, made him a confidant,

and very quickly did the highly intelligent animal—who was almost pure collie, and in whose immature brain were latent instincts from many generations of sheep dogs—come to understand man-words such as the master uttered. There was little about Tucker which was commendable but, drunk or sober, never did he mistreat Roderick Dhu. Only the kindly, patient side of his nature did the dog ever see.

For the dog very quickly came to satisfy a yearning for friendship which, in Tucker's twisted, misspent life, had been denied him. Although Tucker secretly worshiped Bart Payne as a man to whom he was under heavy obligation, and therefore deserving of loyalty such as Tucker would never have accorded anybody else, the herder sensed that there was a wide gulf between himself and his employer. Because Payne had been good to him, had overlooked the weakness which had blasted Tucker's life, the herder would have fought to the last drop of his blood for the sheep owner. Toward Rod, however, Tucker evinced a more spontaneous liking, for he felt that the dog understood him.

And because Rod loved him more than it seemed possible for a dog to love any man, and because Rod's character was stronger than that of his master, there came a time when the great, golden-black collie repaid all debts to Tucker, even as Tucker repaid those to Bart Payne. Rod made poor, worthless Lem Tucker a glamorous hero whose faults were written in sand, whose virtues were etched in rock.

Rod did it because his code was not mere fawning lip-service, an outward show of loyalty which would crumble in the first test. It is written in the Book of Destiny that mightier than words are deeds; and mightiest are those deeds forged in the clear flame of devotion which can only be quenched by death.

For twenty-four hours now, since

Tucker had departed for the settlement, and returned to sleep off his carouse. Rod had been on guard duty with the merinos. True, he napped now and then, but when he did so it was literally with one eye open. He kept the band berded throughout the day, and by night he maintained a more or less constant patrol, that no slinking coyote, or prairie wolf, or even a wandering wild cat, might have an opportunity to cut out and carry off a lamb or young ewe.

At dawn, he started the sheep grazing with the sun at their backs, as Tucker had taught him to do. Perhaps in his doggish heart, he sensed something of the reason why Tucker made these lone pilgrimages to town, and returned, unkempt and smelling of whisky, to slumber for long hours; but it is likely that these absences were more or less of a mystery to Rod. He would hardly understand why his man-god preferred the settlement, and the association of other men, to this clean life of the open, where the air was untainted and where the cool winds at night stroked the bunch grass so that it rustled with ghostly sounds, while the large vitreous-hard stars stared down cold and unwinking at the smoldering camp fire.

But even though he could not understand, in Rod's mind there was no question. Tucker left him in charge of the sheep, knowing that they would be guarded day and night. Rod felt this responsibility, gloried in it, carried out to the last detail the duties Tucker had taught him—and awaited his man-god's return.

At this moment, shifting his gaze from the sheep, he saw Bart Payne standing there over the sleeping Tucker; but Rod recognized the sheep owner as one whom the master had taught him to respect. Had a stranger stood thus over Tucker, the collie would have turned into a raging attacker, but it was apparent that he trusted Payne.

Nevertheless, his mild, brown eyes

clouded slightly with anxiety, for there was something almost menacing in Payne's attitude. Rod stiffened slightly, as he saw the sheep owner proceed to shake Tucker into wakefulness; but as the herder sat up without voicing resentment, the dog concluded that perhaps Payne had intended no harm. Clearly to the dog came the voices of the men; the exasperated Payne fairly shouting, the herder weakly protesting. Rod turned back to scan the merinos.

He saw that the band had become more broken up than is desirable in the best sheep-herding practice, as he understood it. With a flick of his fluffy tail, he set off toward them, to round up the stragglers, and by his presence remind them that they were under surveillance. And because he was compelled to put the knoll between himself and the two men, he was unaware of what followed.

Bart Payne had paused for breath, after running out of expletives. He was curiously white about the lips, and in his eyes there was a peculiar glint which Lem Tucker had never seen there before. Payne was dangerously angered.

"But it isn't the fact that you get drunk and make your dog do the work that brings me here to-day," he went on at last. "I've got something more important on my mind. I've come up here to find out if what I've heard is true, that you're figuring on running that band of prize merinos across the mountains before the snow sets in, and selling 'em to Slade on the other side!

"Is it true?"

Tucker fixed a bleary gaze on the sheep owner. The herder's age could not be guessed easily; undoubtedly, he was younger in years than he appeared to be. There was a premature grayness in the stubble on his chin and his wispy, scraggly mustache; and the lids of his weak, blue eyes were inflamed. His

frame was gaunt from his dissipations, for he never touched food when he was on a spree. The most generous-minded beholder would have decided that Lem Tucker was beyond hope of salvage. Yet there was an indefinable quality about him, some lingering mark of refinement, some hint of pride, which suggested that perhaps he had not always been what he was at this moment. In fact, there had been rumors that Lem Tucker was not his real name; that he could, if he desired, lay rightful claim to proud ancestry, but, for reasons which he alone understood, he preferred to be known merely as Lem Tucker, sheep-herder.

For one thing, he rode a horse with consummate skill, yet in a style which he had never learned on the range; rather, it suggested the polo player. With horses, even as with dogs, he had a way which few men understood. But in late years he seldom rode, preferring to use the two horses allotted him merely as pack animals. Nevertheless, these horses loved him, obeyed him as though he talked to them in their own language, which he probably did. But with the establishment of a bigger base-camp for Payne's flocks, the necessity for Tucker's using horses was eliminated. He preferred to graze the band of merinos not far from the base camp, where the other herders gathered, and he took with him only a light outfit such as could be back-packed easily. He chose only the company of the golden-black collie, Roderick Dhu, and the merinos, which, even in their own foolish, sheepish way, seemed to have a peculiar understanding of the man who looked after them. In other words, there was an inherent bond between worthless Lem Tucker and the kingdom of dumb animals which no human could understand but which the animals themselves recognized instantly. Perhaps one man in ten thousand has the gift as Tucker had it.

But now, facing the accusation of his

wrathful employer, Tucker stiffened slightly, and seemed to shed something of the unmanly attitude which had become habitual with him. His weak eyes actually hardened, as he returned the angry stare of Payne.

"Me—sell out?" he echoed. There was hurt, protesting disbelief in his voice.

Payne nodded grimly.

"I heard you'd been approached by Slade," the sheep owner charged. "He was buyin' you plenty of drinks, wasn't he?"

The herder's eyes dropped.

"Was he, or wasn't he?" demanded Payne impatiently.

Tucker nodded. "Reckon he was," he admitted.

"Well, what for?" Suspicion was in Payne's voice.

Tucker shrugged helplessly. "Darned if I know," he confessed. "Reckon he did it because—well, he sorta wanted to!"

Payne snorted.

"Maybe you think he did it because he enjoyed your company!" he retorted with heavy sarcasm.

Tucker reddened, for Payne's words had the bite of picric acid. The herder looked up silently.

"Well, what about it?" he demanded, with a mild show of truculence.

The color in Payne's face deepened. Suddenly, he exploded:

"What about it?" he cried. "Why, just this, you low-down, worthless, drunken sot! Here, I've fed you, clothed you, and shielded you all these years because you're a good herder when you want to be. And this is what I get for it!"

"That's the finest band of merinos in Montana, half of 'em prize animals. Slade has it in for me, and I know it. He'd buy that band of you, and make mutton out of 'em, just to ruin me. He'd——"

But Tucker was standing up now, and

his face was pallid beneath the tan and wind-burn.

"Bart," he said pleadingly, "I'm a worthless no-account, and I know it. I've always had a feeling, though, that I could straighten up and make good if I could only fight down this cursed craving for booze.

"I know sheep, Bart, better than any man in Montana. Once you told me that if I'd lay off the booze, you'd take me into partnership. You're the only man who ever told me that, Bart, and I——"

Payne broke in harshly.

"I'll finish it for you, Tucker. Because I've treated you like a white man, gave you that opportunity, you've set out to double cross me. Slade offered you enough money to keep you drunk for a month, if you'd take those merinos over the range. And you listened to him.

"That's the way you've paid me back for what I've done for you!"

Tucker's face went whiter still. In that moment he seemed to have shed the beaten, dejected manner which had become habitual with him. He straightened himself, and he looked to be very much of a man—if one could forget that he was, after all, a hopeless weakling.

"Bart," he replied with level intensity, "you lie!"

Before the astonished Payne could recover from that insult, the herder went on:

"You've been telling me something about Slade that I didn't know. He never talked to me about buying the merinos. Maybe he had it in the back of his mind, but he never said a word of it.

"Supposing, however," and a note of scorn crept into his voice, "I do just as you suggested—sell the band to Slade——"

Yet Tucker did not finish. Bart Payne, his mind flooded with memory

of the many trials and tribulations which the herder had caused him, did something he would not have done had he not been beside himself with rage. Besides, he was worried, for the rumor concerning Slade's intentions seemed authentic.

Therefore, he swung his heavy fist, and caught the unsuspecting herder full on the point of the jaw.

Tucker fell backwards so hard that his heels seemed literally to snap in air. Knocked out, cold, yet for a fraction of a second his eyes remained staringly open, an odd light of surprise, incomprehension, in them. And in that moment, Payne regretted what he had done.

But only for an instant, for on the heels of the blow there was a savage, snarling, beastlike roar, and Payne had a vision of a big, golden-black body which had appeared as though from nowhere; a long, furry head with gaping jaws, and lips wrinkled to expose ivory-white fighting fangs; a terrifying apparition which hurled itself straight for his throat!

CHAPTER II.

VENGEANCE INVOKED.

RETURNING without noise from rounding up the last of the straggling merinos, Roderick Dhu had seen that blow; and in the great collie was suddenly unleashed a demoniac lust to kill. Payne had struck down the mangod; therefore, Payne must die. Unhesitatingly the dog leaped for the sheep owner's throat.

Payne had time only to throw up his right arm, shielding himself. The dog missed, his fangs ripping through the cloth of Payne's coat as though they were knives. But like lightning Rod struck again; and Payne, still protecting himself, stepped backward quickly.

His right heel lodged against a clump of bunch grass, and he stumbled just as

the dog hit him. Over backward went Payne, his head striking a partly embedded boulder. He sprawled limply, unconscious, with the dog's muzzle against his throat.

Rod could have killed him easily, then, but the collie was no wanton murderer. Instinct told him that the man who had attacked the master was now helpless. Still growling, and with hackles erected warningly, the dog stood over the fallen Payne for a long moment; then, with a whine of anxiety, turned back to Tucker, who was stirring uneasily.

The collie nuzzled Tucker's face, and the herder's eyes opened. Presently Tucker sat up, bewildered; but directly his eyes fell upon the recumbent form of his employer. He scowled.

Unsteadily, he got to his feet, bent over Payne; then drew back, an odd expression on his face. Tucker understood what had happened, and had noted that there were no marks of teeth on Payne's throat. He stroked Rod's head in gratitude. The dog had not killed Payne.

Then Tucker examined the wound on the back of his employer's head. For fully five minutes he sat there, wrapped in deep thought. But at last decision came into his eyes.

It was twelve hours later when Bart Payne returned to consciousness. He found himself at the base camp, the object of rough but kindly solicitude on the part of his men. Out of the daze of his recollections, there came presently a realization of what had happened up to the point of his accident. He remembered losing his temper and striking Lem Tucker; he distinctly remembered, too, the quick vengeance of Tucker's dog.

"How did I get hurt?" he demanded at last of his chief herder, Bill Foster. "And how did I get here?" He strove to sit up on the pile of blankets beside

the chuck wagon, where he had been made as comfortable as possible.

"Easy there, boss," Foster counseled him. "Don't go settin' up just yet. You had a powerful bad crack on the head. We're startin' for the ranch house right away."

"How'd I get here?" persisted Payne. Foster spoke soothingly.

"Lem Tucker brung you in," said the chief herder. "He said you fell and struck your head on a rock, and got knocked out. He draped you over the saddle of your horse, and fetched you here."

Payne's mind grappled painfully with this recitation of facts. He remembered falling, when the sheep dog leaped for his throat. There had been a sudden, blinding shock, and then blackness. Undoubtedly, the thing had happened just that way. Curiously, he felt his neck, wondering if the dog had torn him, but he was unhurt save for the goose-egg welt on the back of his head, where he had struck the rock.

Probably Tucker had recovered in time to prevent the dog from doing murder. Recollection of that attack stirred Payne to sudden anger. No dog could attack him and live afterward. And as for the dog's master——

"Where's Tucker, anyway?"

Foster looked around.

"Waal, I dunno," he replied after a moment. "Seems like I ain't seen him since he brung you in. Thought most likely he'd stick around, but neither him nor the merinos seem to be in sight."

Payne flew into a new rage.

"Wherever he is, he's fired!" the sheep owner announced. "And that isn't all. I want a good man to take his place. Get somebody out to find him, and bring the band in."

Foster nodded, but looked somewhat doubtful.

"What's he done, boss?" he asked. Foster was an old employee, and accustomed to asking frank questions.

Payne told him. Foster shook his head.

"I'll admit that Lem's a no-account wuthless cuss as regards everything except handlin' sheep," he remarked. "But even if he is a drunken sot, he's the best herder I've ever known. If Lem wasn't so all-fired irresponsible I'd be worried that he'd take my job away from me—he knows this game just that well.

"He's got a way with sheep, Lem has, the same as he has a way with all dumb critters. Some men are born that way.

"Me, I don't believe Lem ever figured on sellin' out to Slade. He thinks too much of them sheep to see 'em butchered!"

Payne whirled on him angrily.

"Who asked what you think?" he demanded. "I'm tellin' you something. Find that band of merinos, and chase Lem Tucker off the range! Chances are he's heading for Slade's right now, with the intention of selling out! You'll have to hurry!"

Foster looked unconvinced, but shrugged acquiescence.

"You're the boss, of course," he agreed. "We'll find Lem!"

He cast a weather-wise eye on the sky.

"Reckon we'll have a storm," he decided. "Probably snowin' up in the mountains now. There was snow on the higher peaks this mornin'. Meanwhile, boss, I reckon we'd better get you back where a doctor can have a look at that wound of yours. Got a nasty cut in your scalp. If you can ride, I'll send one of the boys back with you, on another horse. Can't always tell; you might have a faintin' spell."

Payne shook himself.

"I can ride," he announced. "I'm leavin' it to you to find Lem Tucker, and fire him. I'm plumb through with him. All these years I've stood between him and the wrath of decent people whom he's offended, and I haven't complained.

But there's no room on my range for a double crosser!"

"One other thing. Shoot that dog of his! He's dangerous—nearly killed me!"

Foster's eyes widened in disbelief and unwillingness.

"Shoot Rod?" he asked incredulously. "Why, that's the best sheep dog in the West, bar none! I'd rather shoot Lem, if you ask me. Anyway, I reckon I'd have to shoot Lem first—or directly afterward. He thinks more of his dog than he does of himself, which means more than it sounds."

Payne reddened in exasperation. Still dizzy from his wound, and worried over what he regarded as a deliberate attempt to betray him, the sheep owner was in no mood to bandy words.

"Listen, Foster," he gritted. "I'm giving orders, not asking for advice. I'll repeat those orders. Find Lem Tucker, fire him, and shoot that dog! And, when you've carried out my instructions, report to me. Understand?"

Foster colored under the rebuke.

"All right," he agreed shortly. "You're the boss."

Then Payne, in company with a herder, set out for home and a doctor to dress his wound.

Foster watched him go and pondered the orders Payne had given him. Presently, he grinned.

"He's still goofy from that crack on the head," the chief herder decided. "When he feels better, he'll regret havin' fired Lem. And, as for shootin' the dog—why, he'd be the last man on earth to expect me to carry out an order like that!"

"I'll wait until to-morrow, anyway. Chances are, he'll send word back to forget what he told me."

And, late that night, the herder who had accompanied Payne to the ranch returned, as Foster had expected. True to Foster's prediction, the man brought back word concerning Lem Tucker and

the sheep dog, Roderick Dhu. But it was a somewhat different message from the one Foster had counted upon. Brief and to the point, it ran:

If you haven't fired Tucker and killed that dog by to-morrow night, you can look for another job.

Thoroughly angered and alarmed, Foster expressed himself in sulphurous language. He decided that by daylight he would be on the trail of Tucker and the band of merinos. Come what might, he would carry out Bart Payne's orders to the letter. Yet, when the time came, Foster found himself balked.

Lem Tucker and his collie, as well as the prize band of merinos, had unaccountably vanished. Their going had been cloaked by the first storm which, reaching down out of the mountains, covered the lowlands with a white blanket and hid all trails.

Search as Foster did—and he spread his herders out in all directions—no trace was to be found of Tucker and the sheep band. After twenty-four hours of it, Foster could only conclude that the missing herder had deliberately struck into the hills, and had been trapped by the blizzard.

Foster rode over to the ranch house, to tell Bart Payne about it. He found the sheep owner convalescing, and in an angry mood. When Foster had finished making his report, Payne lifted a clenched fist.

"Then I was right!" he cried. "Tucker is headed for the pass, with the intention of selling the sheep to Slade!"

Still, Foster shook his head in disbelief.

"If that's what he's aimin' at, he won't get through," the chief herder decided. "The mountains are blocked right now, and are going to stay that way until spring. Slade will have to wait for his sheep."

Payne, however, was not convinced.

"You'll have to follow Tucker," he

told the chief herder. "Meanwhile, I'll have a watch kept on Slade, on the other side. You may think that Tucker can't get through, but he knows trails that the rest of us never heard about. He's doin' this to get square with me, and he'll get through, somehow. Find him, Foster. And when you get the sheep back again, shoot that dog! Understand?"

Foster shrugged hopelessly.

"Easier said than done, but I'll try," he replied. "Looks like more snow is comin'. We'll be outta luck if we get caught up there in the hills."

Payne regarded him witheringly.

"Lem Tucker's up there, isn't he?" the sheep owner demanded. "If Lem Tucker can stand it, the rest of you should be able to. I ought to fire you, as I threatened!"

Foster went out, muttering to himself. A few hours later, the hunt for the missing band of merinos, as well as their herder, was under way.

CHAPTER III.

WHERE THE STORM-GODS WALK.

BUT it was a futile task, as Foster quickly found; nor did the fact that Payne, whose previous tolerance of Lem Tucker had turned into vindictive rage, threatened dire consequences if the missing herder and sheep band were not located, spur the hunt. Tucker and the merinos were gone, and that was all there was to it.

There was no doubt in Payne's mind as to what had happened. The activities of his hated enemy, Slade, added fuel to his suspicions. Slade had been shipping mutton, and Payne was convinced that some of it represented the herd of valuable merinos, even though the latter were prized for their wool-producing qualities rather than for meat. It would be Slade's way, however, to "get square" with Payne in their fancied feud, and the very fact that the rival

sheep owner chose to be mysterious as to the source of the mutton removed the last doubt from Payne's mind.

Finally, it was apparent to the impatient Payne that nothing more could be done until spring. The mountains were locked tight in winter bondage, and if Tucker had not actually got through the first storm and sold the sheep to Slade, it seemed certain that the herder and the band of merinos had perished up there in the high hills. From whichever angle Payne looked at it, it seemed that he was out an extremely valuable band of sheep, while Lem Tucker had taken revenge in his own fashion.

So Payne composed himself to waiting, as best he could. Once the snow was gone, he would solve the mystery of what had happened to Lem Tucker. If the herder still lived, there were ways of visiting judgment upon him. In a country given over almost wholly to sheep raising, a convicted sheep thief would get the same short shrift accorded a horse thief in the days before the woolly flocks came. For years, Payne had befriended Tucker, and now that the sheep owner was convinced that the herder was a traitor, all his wrath was directed against the missing man. Death would be Lem Tucker's portion when spring came—if the blizzards of winter had not already killed him. And, after that, Payne would settle with Slade.

Yet, in the high hills at that moment, a curious drama was being enacted. Roderick Dhu, the great golden-black collie, for the hundredth time that day made the circuit of his flock, as if uneasy that some of them would wander away, now that Lem Tucker had disappeared. Snow lay a foot deep in the valley where the band was pocketed, yet the air was, oddly enough, balmy and mild. Throughout the summer, this spot had been luxuriant with rich for-

age, for it was within a deep, cliff-sided valley where there were many hot springs. These springs not only assured plenty of moisture for the grasses during the dry season, but they also tended now to keep the temperature mild, so that despite the fact that the first snowfall had been heavy, the drifts were rapidly vanishing under the unusual warmth.

This, then, was the spot where Roderick Dhu found himself with the herd of merinos. It was the one spot where the band had the ghost of a chance for survival during the winter, for elsewhere in these hills the drifts would become ten to fifteen feet deep. Here, the warmth would serve to keep the snow shallow enough for the sheep to graze, and they would likewise be sheltered from the bitter chill of winter nights. If Lem Tucker had only been there, too, the collie would have asked no more.

But Tucker had disappeared. There was no trace of where he had gone. There was, indeed, no indication that Roderick Dhu knew where Tucker was; yet there seemed to be fear in the dog's eyes, as from memory of some recent happening, and the actions of the intelligent animal showed plainly that its mind was clouded with disturbing thoughts.

It is probable that Rod understood the situation better than it would have seemed possible for any dog to understand it. For Lem Tucker had done much to humanize the dog; the long association of the two, Tucker's habit of talking to Rod as he would to a man—these had served to develop the dog's mind beyond average limits. Therefore, the memory of sudden, startling gunshots, glimpses of men riding swiftly, the stampede of the terrified sheep and, above all, the shouted commands of Tucker, even now kept fear alive in the dog's heart, where there had been no fear before. Fear and dread; and

Tucker, the man-god of Roderick Dhu, was no longer there, but his last injunction—"Run 'em, boy!"—lived on in the dog's psychology.

Obedying that order, Rod had "run 'em!" Swiftly, he hazed them ahead, but the sheep needed little urging, for they were badly frightened anyway. And, having done so, Rod had waited for Tucker to come up and praise him for good work skillfully accomplished. But Tucker had not come.

An ordinary dog would have left the merinos to their fate, while he set out in search of his absent master. Not Roderick Dhu, however, for Tucker had taught him that the sheep band came first, and never must protection for the woolly charges be relaxed. And so, while the collie's heart was big with yearning for his missing man-god, there was never a thought of deserting the sheep.

Nevertheless, the dog would pause in his work many times a day to look long and earnestly off into the southeast, while he raised his nose, sniffing, as though hopeful of winnowing some message from the breeze. Rod and the sheep band had come from the southeast, and it was in that direction he had last seen Tucker.

But now the trail over which they had come was blocked with deep drifts, which would remain impassable until spring. Here, in this remote valley, among the high hills where the storm-god walked, Rod and the merinos would remain throughout the long and cold winter.

Many things had happened since the day when the dog had attacked Payne in defense of Lem Tucker. With Payne unconscious, Rod had stood by while Tucker revived, and then watched his man-god as the latter examined the quiet form of the sheep owner. At last, however, Tucker had loaded Payne on his horse, and had set out for the base

camp, with only a cautioning word to the dog to "Watch 'em."

After many long hours, Tucker had returned, looking gloomy and preoccupied but determined. Hastily, he gathered his meager outfit, and then, much to Rod's surprise, started the sheep back into the hills from which the band had lately come. Rod, who possessed almost an uncanny human understanding of how sheep were handled, could not, however, comprehend why Tucker was taking the sheep back to the land of blizzards, instead of keeping them on the grazing ground in the lower valley. And, although Tucker surely must have noticed the mystification which the dog felt, the man did not attempt to explain to his canine confidant. He seemed to cherish some secret plan of his own.

But it was not until two days later that matters came to a climax.

Tucker had been moving the band rapidly into the hills, for what purpose only he knew; but there was an air of grim determination about his actions. And on the second day the blizzard struck.

At the first intimation of the storm, the herder, instead of finding some near-by sheltered spot to await calmer weather, had hazed the band along more rapidly than ever, as if trying to reach a certain objective. That was when the blizzard was spitting but a few flakes of snow, before the fall began in earnest. The way grew rougher; the band, under Tucker's directions, communicated to the big collie, was compelled at times to move along comparatively narrow ledges—a hazardous undertaking, for there was every danger that some of the more fearful of the merinos would stampede and hurl others to the rocks below. But Tucker knew his flock, and, aided by the firm yet not too driving control of the dog, he brought the sheep past these danger spots. And then, out of the growing murk to the left, had appeared three riders, all armed.

Rod had watched the newcomers anxiously, for there was something in their attitude which he did not like. He saw them at last spur their horses toward the band of sheep, firing six-shooters and yelling at the top of their voices as they came on. He saw, too, that Lem Tucker, who carried a short-barreled carbine, as was customary, had dropped behind a rock, and was firing rapidly. And then the sheep, terrified by the noise and shooting, had taken it into their heads to bolt.

"Run 'em, boy!"

That was the command Tucker had shouted at Rod just before the stampede began. Rod knew what was meant. He understood that the sheep were not to be allowed to whirl about and race away in the direction they had come, but that they were to be "run" in the direction they had been going. With threatening snarl, Rod leaped toward the leaders, who had that moment got into their foolish heads the idea of flight. The dog's jaws clashed menacingly at the throat of one ram—a magnificent feint, for Rod would not have harmed a single member of the band—and the rout was effectually checked. Barking loudly, Rod hurled himself at the others and, in a twinkling, the sheep band was running in the direction in which Rod wanted them to go.

This was done despite the efforts of the three horsemen to divert the sheep. Along a comparatively narrow path which cut across the face of a rock slide went the band, with Rod after it, while the angered horsemen shouted curses and emptied their guns at him in their disappointment. Rod heard the whine of bullets, saw one young ram, struck by a stray shot, fall out and lie there kicking feebly. But he hazed the others, and they vanished from sight in a bend of the trail.

Behind him came the rattle of gunshots, intermittent firing which pres-

ently ceased. Still, Rod held the band to its pace, as though he was fearful of pursuit.

Indeed, it seemed to the dog now that he understood what Tucker had demanded. And that is why Rod at last turned the band into a narrow defile which emptied into the sheltered valley—a spot which only the dog and Tucker knew. Here was an abundance of forage, and here, no doubt, would Tucker overtake him. With the sheep nearly exhausted by their hard run, Rod let them rest at last, while he squatted on his haunches, waiting for his man-god to come up.

The snowfall became thicker, and soon the bitter wind moaned out of the hills, as the blizzard got under way. Huddled together, the sheep were in no immediate danger, for their coats were wonderfully thick and warm. Plenty of food was at hand—and presently Tucker would come.

But Tucker did not come; nor had he arrived when daylight broke after what seemed an almost interminable night.

Nor did Tucker show up throughout the long day. Another night came and went; and then it became apparent to Rod that he was in for a long wait.

Something had happened to Tucker, of that the dog was convinced. The conviction gave Rod a sense of foreboding. Yet he could not desert the band while he hunted for his lost man-god. He must wait; and perhaps Tucker would come to him at last. Rod had a feeling that he had saved the band from the fate which was threatened by the horsemen, but why the men wished to stampede the sheep was something he could not understand.

A week passed, and no sign of Tucker. The valley was now walled in by snow, and would remain so until spring. No one—not even Tucker—could get into it, and certainly Rod and the merinos could not get out. There

was nothing to do but settle down to wait.

It was a lean and hungry collic—for Rod had touched no food since he last saw Tucker—who set himself to a task which required patience.

CHAPTER IV.

FOES OF THE NIGHT.

INDEED, it was the question of food which most troubled the dog. True, there were the sheep, and he could kill one of them with ease, and gorge himself; but it is possible that Rod would have starved before he committed that murder. Seemingly, however, starvation would be his portion unless he chose the distasteful alternative. But before the decision was necessary, fortune showed the way.

For the wolves came. With the advent of winter, a famine season for the marauders, they had been gathering for their own protection. In the work cut out for them—long patrols and occasionally a daring raid—safety and success lay in numbers. In the low lands were vast bands of sheep, guarded more closely than ever; yet it was not beyond the realms of possibility for astute campaigners such as the wolves to make a foray now and then which resulted in meat for the pack. In return, the wolves were hunted relentlessly by men on horses who left poisoned carcasses of sheep here and there, hoping that the urge of hunger would overcome the natural caution of the gray-furred hunters of the flocks. In a few instances, these efforts were successful; wolves were poisoned, and writhed in their death agony on the snow; but the result was that the survivors became more wary than ever. It was next to impossible to trap them, and they learned to avoid all meat not of their own killing.

So the sheepmen, who contended with this same problem each winter, merely

took to guarding their flocks more closely.

This resulted in the wolves covering more ground in their hunting range; and so it was that they discovered the sheep band, protected only by one dog, hidden away in the hills. One moonlit night, after the pack had run far and fast without making a kill, a pack of four gray hunters paused at the rim of a high cliff to look down on the amazing sight of the huddled merinos, with the golden-black collic guarding them. A vagrant air had brought to the nostrils of the wolves the unmistakable scent of sheep.

For a long moment, the tall leader of the pack surveyed the situation. He saw that it would not be so easy to get at the sheep as might be supposed. With incredible cunning, the dog had herded the band into a veritable pocket of the valley, which could only be reached by means of a rather narrow ledge. During the daylight hours, Rod took them down into the lower valley, where they found plenty of forage; but with the coming of night, he carefully herded them back to the sanctuary beyond the ledge.

However, this situation presented no insurmountable difficulty, in the mind of the wolf leader. All that was necessary was to slip down the cliff side, and, working along the ledge, come upon the band before the dog was aware of what was going on. The leader turned away, the rest of the pack following him.

That particular day had been an unusually trying one for Rod. He was gaunt with starvation, and weak from his arduous labors of guarding the sheep. True to the custom he had formed, he had grazed them that day in the valley and, with infinite patience and skill, had managed to herd them back along the ledge to the sanctuary above.

It was plain that if he did not secure

food within a short time, he would die. Already, he was near the point of total exhaustion. Hungrily, he regarded his woolly charges, but it seemed that he could not bring himself to slay one of them so that he might survive and extend protection to the rest. He must wait on, hopefully, and perhaps Tucker would find him, and bring food.

Bedded down there in a sheltered nook, the sheep seemed as contented as though they were in their home corral. They had no thought of danger, for they had learned to rely upon the watchfulness of their canine guardian. With the moon riding high above the valley, and the night breathlessly silent, it seemed that nothing but peace brooded over the world.

Indeed, it seemed that way to Rod, for he drowsed at intervals, only to come awake sharply at some movement among the sheep, who stirred now and then while settling themselves more comfortably. A light puff of wind came down from the high summits.

Suddenly, Rod was wide awake. There had been no sound to arouse him, yet his sensitive nostrils, made doubly keen by long training, had brought him an unmistakable warning.

Wolves!

He tensed, while his hackles rose ominously; and then he stood on his forefeet while, with nose held high, he sought to fix the direction of the enemy.

They were above him, that much was certain; yet just where, he had no means of knowing at first. Then he caught sight of a shadowy form moving behind some rocks a hundred yards away. The wolves had discovered the ledge, and were coming down it!

Probably an analysis of Rod's sensations at that moment would have revealed fear. No wild animal, or human being, either, is ever born free of that dread premonition, and Rod was no exception. Yet true courage is to know fear but to proceed regardless of it;

and of such stuff the golden-black collie was made. Therefore, he moved noiselessly around the sheep until he reached a position where the ledge narrowed, and there he waited.

He did not have long to wait. The air was now rank with the wolf smell, and Rod trembled despite himself, but did not relax his tense attitude of watchfulness. Suddenly, then, around a shoulder of rock came the leader of the pack, and stopped, as though in surprise at sight of the dog waiting there.

A whining growl bubbled in Rod's throat, but the wolf made no sound. It is not wolf nature to snarl in preparing to attack; this characteristic of voicing warning marks the dog. Therefore, while Rod declared his intentions, the wolf remained silent; then, with the quickness of an uncoiling spring, the gray killer leaped forward.

His hope was to take the dog unawares, and in this he nearly succeeded. Just in time, Rod gave ground, so that the fangs of the wolf merely clicked harmlessly in the soft fur of the dog's throat. But with a counter-move so incredibly rapid that it defied the eye to follow, Rod struck in return—his long, punishing jaw opening the wolf's throat and laying bare the great jugular. A serious wound, yet not a fatal one.

Astonished, the wolf leaped back before Rod could strike again. For a second, there was a fateful pause, while the cunning brain of the wolf seemed to weigh and analyze the situation. Then, like lightning, he lunged for the dog's throat, with the in-and-out slash of his kind. Although Rod flinched, taking the brunt of the blow on his shoulder, he was cut to the bone. The next instant, with a bulldog hold, he had flung the wolf off balance.

The gray killer's long claws scratched frantically at the rock which the wind had swept free of snow. Vainly, he struggled, then plunged downward to the base of the ledge, fully fifty feet

below. Almost was the dog pulled over after him, but he released his hold just in time. He could only leap back into his fighting post once more, when the three other wolves flung themselves upon him.

But their number hampered them on the narrow ledge, while it was the style of attack which best suited the dog. Half squatted, in a defensive pose, he could trade slash for slash with them. In Rod at that moment there had come uppermost all the age-old lore of a breed which came directly down the centuries from the wolf clan. His clicking fangs scarred the muzzles and breasts of his attackers; they got in each other's way, as they sought to bear him down by sheer weight of numbers. But in their anxiety to get at him, they overdid themselves. Another wolf slipped over the ledge; and now there were but two wolves left, although Rod was bleeding from a dozen wounds. Yet, summoning the last of his strength, he flung himself at the throat of one foeman.

And it seemed that the destiny which broods over the wild gave strength to him in that instant, for he slashed the jugular of the wolf as neatly as though with a knife. Nevertheless, the wolf lamed him with a dying snap, the cruel teeth meeting through the dog's left shoulder. But with the enemy down, Rod felt no pain; he hurled himself at the fourth wolf.

None of the wolves were large; they were prairie wolves, scarcely more than coyotes, and the last member of the pack was the smallest. Cowardly in the face of what happened, the wolf abruptly decided that he had enough, for he turned tail and fled, the vengeful dog, berserk now with fighting rage, pursuing him a short distance along the ledge before remembering the unguarded sheep.

Then, suddenly, Rod became aware that he was victor, incredible though the thing appeared. He did not know it, of

course, but the advantage had rested wholly with him. If the wolves could have had him in the open, where they could close in on him from all points, he would have died instantly. But his size, the thickness of his coat, his utter savagery and fighting prowess in defense of the flock—and, most important of all, the fact that he stood on the ledge where not more than one could get at him at a time—these had combined in his favor. Never could it happen again just that way; but that it had happened, there was abundant evidence.

Rod returned, to snarl hatred of the wolf who was already stiffening on the ledge. Sorely wounded, and sick with pain, the dog had no thought then but to reassure himself of the safety of the sheep. He returned to his post of vigil, while the terrified merinos shied away from him in alarm at the smell of wolf and blood about him.

But after a time they quieted themselves, and Rod fell to licking his wounds, which were many and grievous. An ordinary dog would have died from the numerous slashes, but not the collie, whose hardy life had given him vitality beyond that usually enjoyed by his kind. Quickly enough, his healthy flesh would heal; and he was aided by the determination to live, the necessity for it if the flock were to survive and he to rejoin his man-god.

Throughout the night, he lay guarding the huddled band. And when dawn came, his sickness had passed, although he was still stiff and sore from the terrific mauling he had received.

Moreover, he was hungry; ravenous, in fact. There was no food, save the wolf he had killed in fair combat, back there on the ledge. At the bottom of the cliff, too, were the bodies of two other wolves.

After all, to the victor belong the spoils. For a time, therefore, Roderick Dhu, the great collie who would not kill sheep, need not go hungry. With a

greenish hunger-light in his eyes, he limped toward his late foeman on the ledge.

CHAPTER V.

THE SURVIVAL.

THE sun had wheeled across the heavens and vanished behind the western hills. Darkness had come unusually early, so that the sky was overcast and murky; there was, in fact, another blizzard on the way.

Roderick Dhu, however, had passed a turning point in his struggle for existence. True, he was terribly lame from his battle with the wolves the previous night, yet he was still able to handle the sheep. At dawn, therefore, he had taken them down to the lower valley to graze. Down there, too, were bubbling springs which never froze; and while Tucker, of course, had never taught the dog that snow is not good for sheep, the collie seemed to understand the necessity of water. All the operations of herding sheep during the summer depended upon the location of water holes, and this fact had become absorbed in the dog's working psychology.

That day passed uneventfully enough. Rod had eaten his fill of meat, nor had he any compunction against dining off his late foemen; hunger had wiped out all squeamishness he would have ordinarily felt. He would not kill sheep, not though he was starving, but wolves were different.

When the sun dipped behind the hills, Rod took the band once more to the sanctuary of the pocket reached only by the ledge.

The band was in excellent condition, despite the fact that it was subject to more or less hardship. The thick coat of the merinos was growing thicker; by spring, the sheep would be as inured to cold as are musk oxen. Forage was at hand, and there was also water; besides, they were under the protection of the dog, upon whom they had long since

learned to rely. The merinos were content.

Not so the collie. Throughout his vigil, which he maintained day and night, sleeping only in fitful cat naps, after the fashion of a wild animal, Rod faced now and then toward the direction where he had last seen Tucker. To the dog, it was inexplicable that the man should remain away so long; but he was too loyal to question Tucker's actions. Rod was concerned solely with the thought that he had been left behind to guard the band; and nothing could shake his determination in that respect.

With the dropping of the sun, however, the air became warmer, although the valley was never bitterly cold, due to the sheltering effect of the high cliffs on every hand. By midnight, a real blizzard was whooping down out of the higher peaks.

The sheep huddled for greater warmth. Rod would have liked to crawl off some place by himself and sleep the storm through, so weary was he with incessant watching and the soreness of his wounded body. Yet he remembered what Tucker had taught him about huddling sheep; and at intervals the dog broke up the flock, thereby saving the smaller and weaker ones from suffocation due to the massing of many woolly bodies.

The night passed, without sign of the storm abating. Rod was hungry, but he did not leave the sheep in order to make his way down to the foot of the cliff where the bodies of the dead wolves lay. The third foeman, who had died on the ledge, had been reduced to carefully picked bones; but to reach the others below would require rather a long and roundabout trip, with the sheep unguarded in the meantime. So Rod stayed on by the band, keeping them together, yet breaking them up now and then, and always letting them understand that they had not been left to

their own devices. It was on the third day that the storm ended, and the sun shone down from a fleckless sky. But only for a brief time, however, before it sank behind the hills.

There had not been time to herd the sheep down to the lower valley before darkness, but Rod would do so the following morning. By daylight, the band would be out in the snow foraging for the luscious bunch grass which grew everywhere in the valley. The sheep were hungry, and so was the dog.

In fact, Rod was so hungry that he could scarcely bear it any longer, and he bethought himself of the dead wolves at the foot of the ledge. Making sure that the sheep would be all right for a time, now that the storm had passed, the dog limped along the ledge and carefully made his way to the rocks below. He was searching for the bodies of the wolves, now covered by snow, when he observed a movement among the drifts not far from him.

Instantly, the dog was on guard. The nature of the thing he had seen he could not make out at first; it seemed to be of shadowy, ghostly outlines. But it was alive, whatever it was, for as he came nearer, he saw it move, and then to his ears came a warning, catlike hiss.

It was a great bird, as he now saw! Moreover, there were others thereabout, a dozen or more of them. Rod had never before seen an arctic owl—that snowy wanderer who sometimes follows in the wake of a blizzard out of the North—but instinct whispered caution to the dog. As Rod paused, the owl who had first attracted his attention made a snapping sound with its beak; then, as though the dog had been properly intimidated, it fell to tearing at something gripped in its talons.

There were hoarse, hissing sounds from the other owls, and more suggestive snapping of beaks; and then the other birds clustered about the first one, and likewise began tearing at something

in the snow. Awed for a moment, Rod watched them—and then the truth dawned on him. They were eating the wolf meat upon which he had relied!

Realization of it roused him to anger, and he rose from the half-crouch he had assumed at first sight of the owls, and began moving slowly toward them, head held low to guard his unprotected throat.

Instantly, they left off feeding, and ruffled their feathers warningly, while their strong beaks clicked like castanets, their moonlike eyes glowing with rage. Rod hesitated an instant, then began advancing as before. When he was within five yards of the nearest owl, the dog charged.

With a yelp of fury, the big bird clung tenaciously to the meat for a moment; then his buffeting wings beat about the dog's head. The other owls joined in the fray, for they were hungry, and their savage temper had been whetted to a keen edge. Rod had the sensation of being flailed by many cudgels, while scythelike talons and beaks scored him, opening old wounds and inflicting new ones. Had he been of cowardly breed, he would have turned tail in ignominious flight, but a dog who once has courage enough to face four wolves, was not to be whipped by a flock of owls, however large.

Therefore, he struck right and left, his long fangs clashing through the thick-downed bodies of the great birds. Feathers filled his mouth, and constantly he was on guard to keep the birds away from his eyes, their sole objective, but he continued to spread havoc in the flock.

Then, suddenly, the owls were gone, the fight having become too hot for them, yet three of them remained to flutter helplessly about on the snow. These, the dog mercifully dispatched; and then, even as he had done in the case of the wolves, he gorged himself on the enemies he had slain.

The hot meat, though rank, sent new blood coursing through his veins. There was little left of the dead wolves, for the work of the hungry owls had been rapid and thorough. But the big sheep dog had exacted full payment for the meat the thieves had stolen. In a rushing of mighty wings the owls had gone, leaving him victor of the field. He had eaten one bird, and was debating the question of eating another, when from the pocket along the ledge above there came to his ears the terrified bleating of sheep.

Only for a second did Rod hesitate; then, food forgotten in the face of danger which threatened the sheep, he was hurriedly making his way toward the ledge.

As Rod raced along the ledge at last, the bleating grew to a full-throated volume, for the sheep were in mortal fear at that moment. Indeed, some of them had started out of the pocket, and these he met face to face on the ledge, and drove them back with fierce snarls. He charged into the flock, and saw the foes who were attacking the sheep.

The same flock of arctic owls which he had worsted in the valley below had spied the sheep huddled there, as they winged out of the place. Accustomed to attacking animals even as large as caribou fawns, the ravenous birds, emboldened by number, had swooped down upon the flock. Intuitively, they struck for the smallest and weakest sheep, slashing viciously at the eyes and throats of the animals. Two young ewes were already down, their jugulars gashed, when the collie arrived like a whirlwind.

Leaping in air, he struck again at the ghostly figures who hovered over the flock, ready for an instant swoop and strike. His fangs ripped their padded thighs; two of the owls he pulled from dying sheep and promptly killed with a quick shake of his head. The fury of his attack was such that the owls soon gave up, and went winging off through

the night in search of less dangerous prey.

Then Rod took the merinos in charge, rounded them up, quieted them. Loathing as they did the smell of blood, the sheep were difficult to handle in the presence of their dead or dying fellows, but Rod accomplished it somehow. This done, he fell to taking stock of his wounds, and to easing the pain as best he could with solicitous dabs of his tongue.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GRIZZLED ASSASSIN.

NO more owls came that winter, for the southward flight ended after that first big blizzard. Nor did roving wolf packs find the sheep huddled there in the sheltered valley. Day and night, Rod remained on guard, and the very fact that no danger appeared to threaten the merinos, may have lulled him into a false sense of security. But the weeks passed uneventfully, while his wounds healed, and the sheep continued to fare very well under his protection.

But for the dog, it was one, long, heart-breaking ordeal, with the specter of famine staring him in the face. Such meat as he had taken in his clashes with foes was very quickly eaten; and there remained the frozen bodies of the sheep which had been killed, but these he would not touch.

Instead, he took to making short hunts in the vicinity of the sheep band, while the latter grazed on the tops of the bunch grass. The valley, being warm, was the winter range of many snowshoe hares, and Rod managed, by dint of the greatest patience and perseverance, to kill one now and then.

The hares quickly learned that the sheep band was harmless, and would approach quite closely, hopping about on the snow with vast confidence, while the sheep grazed near. And Rod soon learned to utilize the sheep as a sort of stalking horse. That is, he would work

his way through them and leap out at the unsuspecting hare before the latter could get away. Not once in twenty times would this ruse work, but when it did, the dog knew a period of feasting.

Again, the sheltered valley became in the dead of winter the home of sage hens, heavy-bodied birds which could not rise quickly from the snow, and which Rod found that he could stalk with comparative ease. The only drawback was that the sage hens were few in number, yet they supplied him with many a meal.

The big thing, however, was that he was surviving in the face of seemingly insurmountable difficulties; he was literally living off an inhospitable land at its leanest time. Yet he was managing it, although his frame was as gaunt as that of a wolf, but his coat was thick, glossy and fine, and able to turn the bitterest wind. The sheep were coming through the winter in splendid shape, too, and never would they produce again such a crop of wool as that which they grew there among the peaks. All in all, Rod was acquitting himself in a fashion which deserved unstinted praise; yet he was not ready to discharge his stewardship of the flock. Fate waited, however, until the first thaw came, to settle the snow in the valley and start the ledges dripping. And it was a harder test than any Rod had yet faced.

The thing happened at night, a soft, spring night which suggested that in the lowlands; the hold of winter had been broken, although it was still chilly here in the hills. All that day, between guarding the flock and rounding up stragglers, Rod had investigated the valley, and particularly the snowed-in canyon through which he had driven the flock the previous fall. Throughout the winter, this canyon had been impassable because of drifts twenty and thirty feet deep, and while there were times when this snow had become so crusted that it might have borne the

weight of the dog, it would never have carried the heavy merinos. Now, however, the warmth of the valley and the growing strength of the sun had lowered these drifts until it seemed possible that the sheep could get through. Another day of it, and they could escape from the place. So the dog had herded them back early that evening to the pocket beyond the ledge, with the intention of driving the band out of the valley as soon as he decided that they could get through the canyon.

There was no moon that night, although the white bowl of the valley was lighted by faint starshine. The sheep were bedded down contentedly, and alternately Rod watched them and thought of the vanished Tucker.

Presently he drowsed, for he had learned to take advantage of every situation which offered him a chance to rest. He was sleeping thus when turmoil broke out among the sheep. With the feeling that another pack of wolves had entered the valley and was attacking the sheep, Rod sprang up and went charging into the midst of the band which, by this time, had broken wildly, the sheep scattering in every direction. Suddenly, he came face to face with a creature the like of which he had never seen before.

In bulk and weight it was inferior to him, but its short legs, thick neck, and squat body gave evidence of enormous strength and power. It resembled a small bear, with its grizzled fur, and yet it suggested a weasel, to which family it belonged. Yet it had the strength and fighting courage of a thousand weasels; and, as it crouched there over the body of a ewe whose throat it had torn out, the thing was the embodiment of savagery and killing lust. Although Rod could not identify the creature, instinct told him that here was a foeman vastly more dangerous than any lone prairie wolf, for the wolverene, or "Injun devil" as he is sometimes called, is

the most powerful animal for its size on earth. Without an instant's hesitation, however, the big collie sprang forward for the in-and-out slash which marks the fighting style of a dog wolfish forbears. Snarling, the wolverene did not flinch.

The cutting incisors of the sheep dog ripped through the flesh of the wolverene's shoulder, just missing the throat, while in return the great weasel struck straight for the dog's neck. By the tiniest fraction of an inch, the wolverene's teeth missed the hold, which would have meant quick death for the dog. Voicing its battle cry, the wolverene followed up the advantage so suddenly that Rod only saved himself by an adroit side-step. Again the wolverene charged him.

This was the fighting style of the biggest of the weasels, which recked of no danger but drives straight for the throat of an enemy, without attempt at artifice or feint. The wolverene would face a cougar as cheerfully as it would face a porcupine, upon which it feeds during the famine season of winter. Rod, dismayed by this reckless blood-thirstiness of the wolverene, gave ground. Yet the slashing strokes of his punishing jaws took toll time and again of his foe.

In its abrupt descent upon the merinos, the wolverene had managed to kill but one before the others scattered, and before he found himself challenged by the sheep dog. Now, the fierce beast gladly forgot the prey which it had brought down, in the face of this new combatant. Left to its own devices, it would kill the dog at its ease, and then it would take such victims as it chose from among the sheep. No three dogs could withstand the wolverene, yet Rod was fighting in defense of the sheep band, the trust which Tucker had bestowed upon him. If necessary, Rod would die, but he would not forsake the responsibility with which nature and training had endowed him. The wolver-

ene was an enemy, and, therefore, it was to be killed. Slash for slash the sheep dog traded with the grim Nemesis which sought constantly to close with him; yet it was a one-sided battle at that.

The wolverene steadily drove the sheep dog back, until there was no way to turn, for Rod found himself cornered in a pocket of rock. This was near the narrow ledge, and it was plain that the sheep dog must chance all in one magnificent bid for freedom, or go down before the cruel onslaught of the wolverene. After all, however, it was the panic-stricken sheep which came to his rescue.

For the merinos were maddened by the sounds of strife, the smell of blood, and the taint of the wolverene's presence, a heavy scent which permeated the air. Madness was upon them and, the guidance of their protector removed, they did the natural thing—they stampeded.

One sheep, or even a dozen, would offer no menace under the circumstances, but more than fifteen hundred of the sharp-hoofed animals were something to be reckoned with. They were panicky, and without the dog to think for them, they literally went mad. Their sole desire was to get out of the narrow pocket, and away from the smell of the wolverene, the proximity of strife. Therefore, they charged compactly for the narrow ledge whereon Rod and the grizzled assassin were fighting a battle to the death.

A solid mass of woolly bodies, they drove forward. Some of them were crowded off the ledge, to die upon the rocks below, but the rest of them tenaciously kept their footing. The thing happened just as the wolverene, having backed Rod to a point where the dog could no longer retreat, leaped for the deadly threshold. Before the wolverene reached it, however, the sheep arrived.

They were crazed, tormented with fear, and they recked not of what they were doing. The grim slayer, absorbed in his work, scarcely knew what was happening. Five hundred, a thousand, fifteen hundred hoofs struck him, trampled him and, although his terrible fangs exacted vengeance, the maddened sheep bore him down. Only by flattening himself against the cliff wall did Rod escape the pounding of their hoofs. With a clattering rumble, as they raced across the rocky ledge, they beat down the enemy who had determined to slay them. Yet at the last, the wolverene made one determined effort.

With no thought now of trying to fend off the sheep who were crushing him, their sharp hoofs cutting him as though with knives, the wolverene turned on the foe who had already been marked for death. Given an instant's respite from that knife-edged avalanche which had all but crushed the life from him already, the wolverene launched itself straight for Rod's throat.

The dog saw the move, anticipated it. Summoning all his strength, he took the brunt of the attack on his right fore-shoulder, while his own long fangs explored the throat of the enemy, seeking the deathhold. Suddenly, they locked in grizzled fur.

Victory or defeat was balanced on a knife edge. If the dog missed the hold, the dying wolverene would kill him with one short snap of its muscled jaws. In a supreme effort, the dog's fangs met, while at the same time he felt those groping jaws trying for his own throat.

CHAPTER VII.

VINDICATION.

SPRING lay over the lowlands, and at the base camp preparations were being made for the summer's work of herding Bart Payne's bands. The sheep owner himself, recovered from his experience the previous fall when he had

sought to mete out justice to Lem Tucker, was making life miserable for Bill Foster. Never, throughout the winter, had Payne failed to remind the chief herder of his inability to find Lem Tucker and the missing band. Foster had about reached the end of his endurance, when a miracle happened.

Lem Tucker, pale and unsteady on his feet, but with a new light of determination in his eyes, walked into the base camp!

It happened on the balmiest spring night of the season, when a moon rode high over the Montana hills, and the air was redolent with the smell of freshly turned soil as countless millions of grass shoots on the range lifted their heads above the moist earth. At a fire before the camp wagon was Payne himself, with Foster and two other herders. And Tucker walked into camp.

There was a long moment of astonishment while Payne regarded the man whom he had believed to be dead. Questions leaped to the sheep owner's tongue, and he felt the first flush of revived wrath. Tucker had betrayed him, sold the band to Slade— Before Payne could speak, however, the returned herder lifted his hand, commanding silence.

"I know what you're thinkin', boss," he said, addressing Payne. "But you're wrong, dead wrong.

"After I brought you to camp that day, I was plumb sore, and I'll admit it. I was tempted to carry out the plan just as you had suggested it. But, after all, Bart, I've tried to be loyal to you, and I was loyal that day. I'd decided to take the merinos back into the hills again, to throw a scare into you, while I thought things over. I hadn't got far, however, with a blizzard comin' up, when Slade and his men jumped me.

"Reckon they'd planned to wipe out the merinos, figurin' that I couldn't be bribed after all. Maybe they intended to kill me, too. Anyway I went into

action with 'em. I told Rod to 'run' the sheep, to get 'em out of the way. And he did it.

"Slade's men shot it out with me. Reckon they thought they'd killed me, for they left me there unconscious. When I came to, Slade and his men were gone, and so was Rod and the sheep.

"I don't know what happened after that. Maybe you can tell me. For myself, however, I managed to crawl through the storm until I reached the shack of Pete Sims, on Bitter Creek. Sims was runnin' a trap line, and he happened to be at his cabin when I reached it. I had one leg broken, and a couple of bullets in my shoulders.

"Sims took care of me. He told me later that I came near cashin' in, but I managed to pull through. We were snowed in for the winter, and I just got through to-day, after the thaw.

"And I'll tell you this, Bart. I'm through with liquor, forever. A winter up in the hills without a chance to get a drink, and the sickness that I went through, sort of straightened me out, made me think. I'm off booze for life.

"But that makes no neverminds. What I want to know is: What happened to the sheep? And where is my dog?"

Payne looked at him for a long moment, an inscrutable expression on his face. Inscrutable, yes, although Bill Foster could read the expression clearly enough. Payne did not believe a word of what Tucker had told him. Tucker had sold the sheep to Slade, and had taken this means to lie out of it. In fact, Payne's eyes were already forming the words of denunciation, when a curious thing happened.

In the near-by flocks, a curious commotion broke out. There were excited bleatings and disturbed milling among

the bands gathered there at the base camp. Then one of the dogs barked, and was answered from somewhere in the darkness! One of the herders cried out:

"Sheep comin'!"

But Tucker had already cupped his hands to his mouth:

"Rod!" he cried joyfully, instinctively. "*Rod!*"

A frenzied bark was his answer, and a few moments later there limped into the circle of firelight the golden-black collie, his magnificent coat stained with blood, his neck and chest scored with many wounds.

"Rod!" cried Tucker again, and then the two were reunited, while even Payne, whose throat had tightened strangely, looked on. Tucker had not lied after all; the merinos, in gloriously heavy coats, and almost as numerous as when they had vanished the previous fall, had returned.

Suddenly, Tucker, his face dark with emotion, turned on Payne.

"There's your sheep!" he cried. "We've wintered 'em—or, rather Rod did—and now we've brought 'em back.

"And now I'm through, Payne. I quit, and take my dog——"

But the sheep owner, having regained his voice, held up his hand.

"Forget it, Lem," he said to the herder. "You say that you're off the booze; and I believe you. That partnership offer is still open. I need you, Lem, and I need your dog. I don't know what he did, or how he did it; but I do know that he bought those sheep through the winter better than if we'd kept 'em in a corral. He tried to kill me once, but it was on account of you.

"Fact is, you owe that dog more than you'll ever be able to repay. I owe him plenty, too. Let's stick together, and see if we can't square ourselves!"





Grandpa Cracks His Whip

By **Ray Humphreys**

Author of "Too Many Herds," etc.



HE star six-mule-hitch driver for the Como Stage Lines, "Grandpa" McMeel, stooped, picked up the horseshoe from the dusty road, and deliberately tossed it over his shoulder. Then he went trudging on up to the superintendent's office, satisfied that he had taken the right precaution to enjoy good luck that day. He found no one in the office, so he glanced casually over Superintendent Dea's desk to see if he had left any message as to his whereabouts or his probable time of return.

"Gee whiskers!" ejaculated Grandpa, a second later, as his sharp old eyes scanned, almost unconsciously, a letter that rested on the desk. It was typewritten, brief, and so conspicuous there on top of the superintendent's pile of correspondence that Grandpa had read it all before he was aware of it. He started as he realized that he had read somebody else's mail, and he turned away guiltily, but the letter stood out in his brain in letters of fire—words that burnt into his mind!

The general manager of the stage lines had written the Como superintendent as follows:

We are sending up a secret investigator to make an investigation of the running time of the outfits on the Como branch, due to some complaints that mail and passenger schedules have been late in some instances. Our man will make a thorough check of the alleged delays. You will hold this matter confidential.

Grandpa stalked to the door and looked out. There was no one in sight. He regretted that he had inadvertently read that letter, but, as he considered the matter his feeling of remorse gradually gave away to an angry reaction. So the Denver officials of the stage company were sending up a detective, a pussy-footer, a stool pigeon, to spy on the Como drivers, eh? The Denver headquarters, snug in warm offices, had listened to the unwarranted complaints of trouble makers, and, regardless of storms, bad roads, detours, zero weather, and other hindrances that might have delayed the stages, were dispatching a sleuth to catch the hard-working stage drivers off guard and off schedule,

were they? Well! Grandpa rubbed his hands together.

"I ain't never throwed a hoss-shoe over the proper shoulder in the approved manner, without it bringin' me good luck," he exulted grimly, "an' I reckon this time ain't no exception! Jus' figger me findin' the supe out, an' unintentionally—an' without hardly knowin' it until I had did it—me readin' that comfounded letter an' gettin' hep to that danged informer they's sendin' up here! Ef that ain't a fool's luck, what is it? Waal—all I got to say is this: no smart-Aleck detective is goin' to ketch me late on schedule, ef I has to git out an' help my mules drag the coach!"

Grandpa slammed out of the empty office. He was plenty hot under the collar, and rightly so. In all the years he had driven one of the big mountain stages on the Como-Fairplay section of the line, he had never been late through any fault of his own. He had the reputation of being the fastest mule skinner on the line. He had carefully picked, trained, and cherished the speediest hitch of mules—all black—in the State of Colorado. Washed-out bridges, ice-glazed roads, landslides and snowslides, forest fires, and raging blizzards had all held him back at times—but these were, of course, all beyond his control. He knew, too, that the other drivers on the line were as conscientious about schedules as he was. It hurt him to think of that investigator coming up.

"Like as not, he's here by this time, snoopin' an' nosin'," grunted Grandpa, as he looked at his watch, and hurried toward the stage barns. "Waal, ef he is, I'll spot him! An' ef he comes sniffin' an' snuffin' around me I'm like as not to mistake him for a prowlin' coyote an' let him have a taste o' the black-snake whip! Ef some o' those Denver officials came up here an' tried to put six mules an' a heavy load over some o' these roads, they'd be a week doin' a

regular day's trip! Secret investigator—bah!"

Grandpa was in no pleasant frame of mind, therefore, when he reached the barns. It was a chilly day. The clumsy-fingered barnmen, shivering, were just harnessing up Grandpa's black six-hitch. The old stage driver looked at his watch again with impatience.

"Waal, don't be all day!" snapped Grandpa peevishly. "Git 'em hitched, git 'em hitched! It's almost time fer me to start."

"Yuh started crabbin' ahead o' time, seems," remarked a hostler surlily. "Yuh ain't got no passengers booked to-day. I sees by the board, so yuh should worry about startin' time."

"I got U. S. mail," snapped Grandpa heatedly, "an' that's more important than passengers, yuh lunkhairs! Git them mules ready! It won't surprise me none to come out here some day an' find the mules harnessin' yuh barnmen up to the stage."

The barnmen muttered low retorts, which Grandpa chose to disregard. He was up on the driver's seat shortly, and he gathered up the ribbons and spoke in fatherly tones to his six blacks. The big stage rolled. A minute later it stopped in front of the stage depot, and there an attendant loaded on the mail.

"No passengers!" said the man.

"Giddap, thar, yuh mules!" whooped Grandpa loudly. "Yuh got a light load, an' a nice cold day, an' we oughter make some time! Hey yuh, Blackie! Yuh, Pitch!" The lead mules tossed their heads in answer. "Yuh, Darky! An' yuh, Tar Baby!" The heavier swing team tightened the traces. "Yuh Satan! Yuh Night!" The wheelers lunged forward. Grandpa shifted his chewing tobacco from cheek to cheek and prepared for a lonesome but fast trip to Fairplay.

"Hi, wait a minnit!" came a sudden shout.

A short man in dark clothes came

dashing around the end of the stage depot, waving a hand at the stage. Grandpa pulled up with a muttered protest and a screeching of the brake. The tardy passenger climbed aboard and seated himself alongside the driver. Then the stage was off again, with the six black mules at a trot.

"Almost missed yuh!" gasped the newcomer, as he recovered his breath. "Yuh suppose yuh'll make connections with the Salida stage at Fairplay this afternoon? Yuh generally on time, ol' man?"

Grandpa started as if he had heard a rattlesnake's warning. He turned sharp eyes on the stranger. The man had a queer look about him. Grandpa sized him up in a glance—absolute stranger, store clothes, shifty eyes, an excited manner. Yes, here, right on his stage, no doubt, was the smart-Aleck Denver detective sent to check up on the Como section schedules. Grandpa laughed softly.

"Ho ho, an' haw haw, mister!" exclaimed Grandpa sarcastically. "Am I generally on time, yuh asks? Will we make connections with that Salida stage, yuh wants to know? Waal, lissen, brother—yuh see that black off leader thar, yuh see him?"

"Yep," said the stranger, staring where Grandpa pointed.

"Waal, I got that mule from a fox farm up on Genessee Mountain," said Grandpa boastfully. "He was borned an' raised thar. Yuh know what foxes are used for over in the ol' countries, don't yuh? They're used to chase. They chase 'em with hosses, an' dawgs, an' fellers in red coats blowin' horns an' jumpin' over fences! Waal, that mule was educated with the young foxes. He kin outrun any fox in the whole State o' Colorado. He thinks he's a fox an' he just runs, an' the rest o' the team figgers they're pooches an' they runs after him! We're never late nowhar, brother—git that straight!"

The lone passenger frowned. "I don't want to miss that stage," he said gruffly.

"Stranger up here?" asked Grandpa pointedly.

"Yes."

"Business?" suggested Grandpa hopefully.

"My own," answered the stranger sharply, "an' yuh attend to yuhrs, ol' man! Let's see how good yuhr braggin' is! It'll be jus' too bad ef I don't make that stage outta Salida!"

Grandpa McMeel was dumfounded and angered beyond words. The nerve of this stranger to talk back to him like that! But it was to be expected from a sneaking spy, Grandpa figured. Had to get the Salida stage out, did he? That was a stall! Grandpa saw red. For a moment, he considered calling the stranger's bluff right then. But a craftier plan entered his head. No, he'd humor the man. He'd get him to Fairplay so fast that the fellow would be in a state of mental and physical collapse when he got there. He'd show him speed—great, big, thrilling, terrible gobs of speed!

"Hey yuh, Blackie thar, yuh ol' fox!" yelled Grandpa, and he made the long whip sing a threat out over the heads of the nimble black leaders. "Shake a laig thar, Blackie, shake a laig! We got a rush order aboard ter-day, so let's go! Flatten out now, Blackie, kain't yuh hear the huntin' horn? Ef yuh wanta jump a coupla fences, yuh kin! The rest o' the hitch will be right on yuhr tail! Yuh, Pitch, wake up now! Don't let Blackie run away with yuh!"

The black leaders plunged into the collars with a vengeance. The swing team followed suit. The wheelers quickened their gait. The big coach took the first turn out of Como on two wheels. It thundered across the bridge over the Bear River. It went down the long slope beyond with the speed of a well-greased thunderbolt.

"Fast enough fer yuh, hombre?" asked Grandpa maliciously, as he turned to look at the stranger. "Think we'll git thar?"

"We better," said the man, apparently entirely unmoved by the exhibition so far. "Keep them lazy mules movin'!"

Grandpa gasped in consternation. Keep the lazy mules moving! Why, confound it, his mules weren't lazy, and they were moving. They were at a fast trot. His white whiskers seemed to bristle angrily.

"That near leader, that Pitch mule," whooped Grandpa, hotly. "His father was the grandson o' the fastest mule they had in the Fourteenth Iowa Volunteer Artillery in the Civil War, mister! He's the fastest thing on four laigs in Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, South an' North Dakota——"

"Ef yuh'd keep that big mouth o' yuhrs closed," said the stranger "mebbe thar would be less resistance to the breeze an' we'd got along faster. Use yuhr whip—that's what it's fer!"

The old driver was almost ready to use his whip—on his snippy passenger, but he restrained himself. It was just like a snooping sleuth from Denver to use such language, he reasoned. If he wanted more speed—well, he could have it!

"Yuh mules!" sang out Grandpa, and this time the whip snapped with a series of pistol-like reports out over the heads of the four foremost mules. "Let's go! Yuh, Blackie! Yuh, Pitch! Yuh, Darky, and yuh, Tar Baby, an' yuh, Night, an' yuh, Satan! Whoopee, limber up thar, babies! Here we goes!"

The leaders broke into a gallop. The swing team began to run. The wheelers had to scramble to keep from letting the big coach run over them! The stage whisked along at a dangerous rate, considering the sharp turns in the alpine road. Grandpa held his breath and stole an exultant glance at the detective. That individual was still as cool as the

well-known cucumber. Grandpa grunted in disgust and shook out the reins again.

"They ain't a better set o' mules in the West than my six blacks," volunteered Grandpa, anxious to give the spy something to put down in his report to headquarters that would make good reading. "We've never been late on schedule exceptin' when snow blocked the road, bridges were washed away, or ice made fast goin' too slippery fer safety. We got a proud record here——"

"Think we'll be on time ter-day, Whiskers?" asked the man.

That question floored Grandpa McMeel. He could not answer it. He could hardly keep himself from dropping the ribbons, leaping up, leaning up, leaning over, and getting his bare fingers on the stranger's windpipe. The impudent scoundrel! The nerry, insulting snooper! The old stage driver gritted his teeth. He snatched up the whip again, and despite the fact that the stage was going too fast now down a grade he cracked the black snake and let out an Apache yell.

"Whoopee, yuh Blackie an' Pitch!" he howled, and the surprised leaders let out another notch of speed. "Git a move on thar, yuh Darky an' Tar Baby! Let's go, Satan! Flatten out thar, Night! This ain't no picnic! Run, dang ye, run! Let's see how fast we kin go to—to Fairplay or blazes! Ef we run off th' road, we won't mind none! Wowie, stretch, yuh babies, stretch!"

The big coach swayed and groaned in the sudden wrenchings.

But the detective from Denver—if he was such—remained outwardly calm. He did not protest when the speeding stage almost turned over at O'Leary's ranch. He did not suggest a slackening of gait when the six black mules ran all the way down Murphy Hill, with the coach threatening to run over the whole six at every jump. He never batted an eye when the stage began to swish

around like a whale's tail in the loose sand in Gun Gulch. Grandpa, waiting for the stranger to weaken, was visibly disappointed.

"Heck," he told himself, "the son o' a gun has nerve!"

The realization that speed would not terrify the Denver spy came as a blow to Grandpa McMeel. He ceased to urge the mules to greater efforts. He was satisfied now to let them drop to a steadier gait. He began to grow more suspicious than ever. The passenger sleuth had said nothing except to urge speed during the whole wild drive. It dawned on Grandpa that perhaps the man was demanding haste in the hope that a mule would go lame, a wheel drop off, or some other mishap occur that would tie the stage up and make it late despite all his efforts. It was a sobering thought, indeed. It was not past a company spy to plan such a thing, Grandpa decided with sinking heart.

But there was small chance that anything would go wrong. The road was in fairly good shape. The mules were all in excellent form. The stage itself was in tiptop condition, as Grandpa always demanded. The old driver thought again of the lucky horseshoe he had found and tossed over his shoulder, according to tradition. It had stood him in good stead so far, and probably would continue to do so. But, for fear that a dizzy speed might spell trouble, the old man made up his mind that he would do no more reckless speeding. He would just maintain an extra good gait and get the spy, as indeed the fellow must me, into Fairplay a full twenty minutes ahead of the regular schedule. He could write that in his little report!

So Grandpa laid aside the whip. He put a precautionary foot on the brake and held the ribbons alertly. He would take no chances. He spoke again to the mules, in a more sedate manner than heretofore. He turned a deaf ear to

the remarks of the lone passenger, who was still clamoring for greater haste. He would get the man in ahead of time, yes, but there was no use in running the wheels off the coach in a vain effort to scare the fellow if the fellow wouldn't scare worth a dime. The more the man ranted on hurry, the deafer Grandpa became. He simply refused to answer the stranger's questions or remarks. The stage sailed along at an even rate and on a smoother keel now that the racing was over. Uphill and down, across valley and creek, around curves and along straightaways went the six black mules at a steady, brisk gait.

The miles slipped away in the dust beneath the outfit.

Grandpa sulked in silence. He resented the presence of the spy on his stage. He resented the action of company heads in permitting such an outrage. Yet his hands were tied. He dared not make any remarks that might reveal to the stranger the fact that he suspected him for what he was. Such a revelation would be foolish, for the detective could then claim that Grandpa was on time into Fairplay simply because he had recognized his passenger as one checking up on him. That would never do. Grandpa, therefore, held his tongue.

But halfway over Floyd Hill, Grandpa found his voice.

"Now, what in heck!" he exploded excitedly.

There was a man out in the road, bobbing up and down in a most peculiar manner. Grandpa's first thought was of a robber, but the fellow ahead appeared to have no gun. As the stage swept closer to the man, Grandpa recognized him. It was old Tom Hartsell, the prospector from Chimney Gulch. It was evident that Tom wanted to stop the coach for no ordinary reason. Grandpa hauled in on the lines, while the stranger eyed the man in the road curiously.

"What is he wantin'?" he asked Grandpa.

"I ain't no dog-gone mind reader!" snapped Grandpa, between shouts of "Whoa, now!" to the mules. The six blacks were willing enough to slow down and come to a halt. The old prospector legged it up to Grandpa's side of the stage in a big hurry.

"Hullo, Grandpa," gasped Hartsell excitedly! "I was scared I'd never git up here in time to stop ye. I heard ye comin' afore I expected ye. Yuh're a few minnits airly! Say, I found a hurt man back in the gulch an' I reckon ef he kain't git to a doctor's in Fairplay in a jiffy he'll jus' naturally curl up an' die!"

"We ain't got no time fer that," put in the passenger.

"What's the matter with the guy?" asked Grandpa grimly.

"He fell offen a cliff, it 'pears," said Hartsell. "I jus' now found him by chance. It looks like he slipped down the side o' Squaw Mountain fer a considerable distance. He's unconscious, too. He's a big bird an' I couldn't budge him along without draggin' him, which I didn't keer to do, so I beat it up here to flag yuh down."

Grandpa's heart missed a beat. Of all the luck, to have a thing like this happen on such a day as this—when he was carrying a blamed spy on his stage! He asked another quick question.

"Tom, whar is this injured hombre?"

"Up the gulch about two mile," said Hartsell. "It'll take a little time to fetch him down here—but three o' us kin do it——"

"Not me!" spoke up the passenger promptly, with a snarl. "I'm in a hurry to git to Fairplay. Ol' 'Santa Whiskers' says his coach is never late thar. Waal, it ain't gonna be ter-day!"

Hartsell stared at the stranger in astonishment, and then he looked at Grandpa, expecting to see the fiery old stager stand up and swing a hefty one

off the passenger's chin. But Hartsell had another shock coming.

Grandpa, his leathery old face twitching, asked a question—a peculiar question for him:

"Tom, don't yuh reckon yuh could kinda watch over that hurt feller until the up stage comes along an'—waaal, yuh see, I am in a hurry ter-day. Got to git to Fairplay—early——"

The prospector's mouth dropped open.

"Why, Grandpa McMeel, I never——" he began, but the passenger cut in on Tom's explosion.

"Drive on," he said curtly. "We're wastin' time!"

Grandpa gulped. He was in a quandary now, sure enough. If he waited to help Tom Hartsell carry the injured man out of the gulch, he would lose plenty of time. He would not make Fairplay on schedule. He had already lost five minutes of his twenty-minute lead. It would take fully a half hour, at the least, to walk up the rough, rocky gulch and carry the injured man back down to the stage. That would put the stage fifteen minutes behind schedule. There could be no fast driving with a gravely hurt man aboard. The fifteen minutes could not be made up. It was probable that the stage would even lose a few minutes in addition to the fifteen. And if the stage was late into Fairplay, and the stranger were a company sleuth, there would be a nice black mark for Grandpa McMeel—and Grandpa desired no such blot on his record.

It was really the stranger who decided matters, however.

"Button up that loose mouth o' yuhr's," he told Grandpa unkindly, "an' let's go. This ain't no ambulance yuh're runnin', is it? Yuh ain't never late, eh? That was all blah, blah, wasn't it? Waal, yuh ol' mattress chin, yuh pick up that whip and' them lines——"

Grandpa did pick up the whip—with alacrity.

"Yuh long-nosed, flappin'-eared coyote!" whooped Grandpa, and he raised the whip angrily. "I don't keer what or who yuh are, an' yuh kin report me to everybody in Denver fer all I gives a snap o' my fingers! Yuh may think yuh're a smart detective, but yuh ain't callin' me no fancy names an' gettin' away from it. I reckon yuh got a gun on yuh, too, yuh snooper. Waal, better not reach fer it, because when I'm mad I'm good an' mad. We're goin' after that hurt man an' no yowlin' from yuh will stop us. Git off the stage!"

The stranger got off. There was nothing else to do, seeing Grandpa had the whip hand and there was fire in his eyes. Once the man was on the ground, Grandpa whooped another order.

"Turn around, yuh, an' stand still!"

There was still the menace of the cutting black snake. The man, with an oath, turned around, his back to Grandpa and Tom Hartsell. The next minute, the deft stage driver had removed a rod from the stranger's hip pocket and stuck it in his own.

"Yuh git that back later, snooper!" said Grandpa hotly. "I'm runnin' no chances luggin' no hurt man when yuh're luggin' a gat. Now, Tom, we'll git down thar to that man quick. Don't want to lose too much time. The mules will wait, ef I turn the leaders off the road. Thar, now, let's start—we gotta hurry!"

The three men made good time up the gulch. The passenger grumbled considerable, but he seemed mollified either by Grandpa's remark that they would not lose a great deal of time or by the fact that the wrathful old stage driver was so aroused as to be dangerous with that whip. They found the injured man. He seemed to have a broken leg, or two, and perhaps internal injuries. But he was conscious.

"I fell offn the cliff," he groaned wretchedly. "I was tryin' to git ahead—o' the stage—to cut in on it. I—

slipped an' fell. The sheriff—was comin'—a robber——"

Grandpa looked significantly at Tom Hartsell.

"We'll take yuh to Fairplay, hombre," said Grandpa, very coldly, as he fished a gun from the injured man's pocket. "An' while we're goin' thar, it might pay yuh to figger that crime never pays, they say, an' stage robbery, an' runnin' off from sheriffs, ain't perzactly a nice business fer a young feller."

The man groaned again in pain.

"Git me—a doctor—quick!" he mumbled.

They got him back to the stage, finally, using as a stretcher the old piece of canvas that Grandpa had thoughtfully fetched up the gulch for that purpose. The man was unconscious now. They arranged him as comfortably as they could inside the coach, and then Grandpa paused to shake hands with Tom Hartsell.

"I reckon I'll be blackmarked fer bein' late inter Fairplay," said the old stager, looking at the fuming stranger, "but Tom, I don't keer. Like as not, thar's a reward up fer stage robbers, an' ef this bunged-up bird wasn't talkin' delirious like, I reckon yuh an' me will split any reward that may be on his haid. Yuh heard what he said about the sheriff bein' after him an' him bein' a robber?"

Tom Hartsell nodded.

"The gun he had kinda proves that," said the prospector.

"Say," spoke up the stranger suddenly, "ef we're goin' at all, let's go now! Ef—waaal—under the circumstances, ol' man, ef yuh should make up some time by some real drivin' now, I'll—I could—waaal, kinda see that any black marks yuh're worryin' about might be overlooked, seein' yuh've helped this injured guy."

Grandpa's eyes lit up at that.

"Yuh're on!" he cried enthusiastically.

cally. "Git up on that stage an' I'll show yuh some drivin'! Mebbe yuh ain't such a hard-hearted snooper after all. So long, Tom, see yuh later. All right thar, Blackie, Pitch, Darky, Tar Baby——"

The mules began to move as Grandpa shook out the reins.

"Hey!" came a mighty shout above the clatter of hoofs and the rumble of wheels. Grandpa glanced back to see a half-dozen mounted men closing in on the stage from the rear. There was Sheriff Wade Mountfortt of Como, and several other fellows he knew. The sheriff was waving Grandpa to a halt with a gun.

"Whoa!" cried Grandpa, and the brake screeched.

"Waal, yuh ol' racin' billy-goat!" exploded Sheriff Mountfortt peevishly. "Yuh've led us a merry chase, yuh has! What do yuh feed those mules—greased lightnin'? We want a gent yuh has aboard—a robber."

"He's inside!" said Grandpa calmly.

"Like heck he is!" cried another member of the little posse. "That's him right up thar beside yuh! Don't yuh try no monkeyshines, yuh Jim Langer, or we'll puncture yuh proper, yuh crook! Reach up yuhr hands—an' don't go fer yuhr gun!"

In a second, it seemed to the dazed Grandpa, several men had climbed up on the stage and fallen upon his lone passenger, the man he had presumed to be a company detective. There was a brief struggle. Handcuffs clicked. The man was dragged down, swearing. Grandpa followed. He offered the sheriff a pair of guns.

"I took one offn the feller yuh jus' grabbed," said Grandpa, in awed tones. "An' I took the other offn the guy we has inside the coach—he said he was a robber. This gent that was ridin' with me is a detective——"

The posse rider who had first spotted the man on the stage top and had led

the attack on him shook his head energetically.

"Naw," he said, "I know Jim Langer when I sees him! Yuh may have a robber inside yuhr coach, ol'-timer, but yuh also had another up on the driver's seat with yuh! I'm Sheriff Ralph Baird o' Wagon Wheel Gap. I've been chasin' Langer since yesterday—with every available man in my district—I hadn't many, an' I didn't know which way Langer had fled—so we scattered. I went to Como an' found out that a feller had caught yuhr stage out at the last minute, so we shagged here."

Grandpa looked dazed indeed.

"Waal," he objected, "the man inside——"

"Why," exploded the Wagon Wheel Gap sheriff, after one look at the injured man inside the coach, "I know him; that's Mart Tuttle—he was helpin' me in the chase. I left him at the Conifer crossroads, tellin' him to cut across country an' try to head off this stage ef I didn't git inter Como in time to stop it or overtake it. Mart's a ol' friend o' mine who's been checkin' up on stage-company matters this section. He's a detective from Denver, an'——"

"Good grief!" exploded Grandpa McMeel, and he yanked out his watch. "I'll be a hour late inter town. I—an' he—I——"

The injured detective opened his eyes. He had heard the argument, it seemed. He smiled grimly as he saw his friend, the sheriff.

"Hullo, Ralph! I—I guess I'm hurt," he said. "I tried to cut in on the stage—slipped off a cliff—an'——"

The injured detective's eyes strayed to Grandpa McMeel.

"As fer yuh, stage driver," he added weakly, "I'm sure much obliged fer what yuh done fer me. It's too bad yuh're late—this late business has got to cease on our lines. Ef yuh want to stand high with the company, driver, yuh—yuh should try to foller the ex-

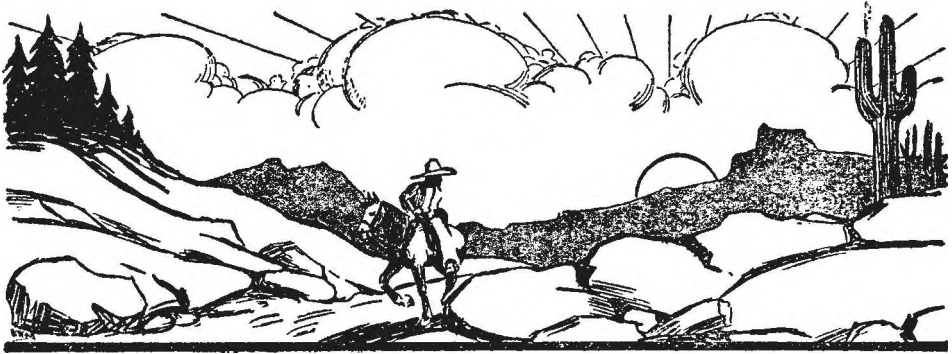
ample o' a driver named Grandpa McMeel, over on the Como branch o' the line. He's never late—I checked him an' his record las' week—never late—good record——”

The detective's mumble lapsed into silence. He had slipped back into unconsciousness.

“He's kinda delirious,” explained Sheriff Baird. “He didn't recognize yuh, Grandpa—I guess he didn't realize what he was sayin'. We'd better be movin' along now.”

Grandpa McMeel sighed in great relief.

“A hoss-shoe is sure good luck,” he said emphatically, to the group on the road. “Don't let nobody ever tell yuh it ain't! An' say, I don't keer whether that pore feller knowed what he was sayin' or not jus' now, but I sure hopes he writ down what he said about me in his report las' week. I guess he's a danged good detective an' a mighty nice feller, too! But—waal—that was a mighty swell hoss-shoe, too, I'm sayin'!”



THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE INDIAN

THE Indian has figured most attractively in the news from abroad on more than one occasion this summer, but possibly never under circumstances so diametrically opposed as those which were reported—curiously enough, in adjoining columns—in a recent issue of a metropolitan daily.

To relate first the one most redounding to the credit and generosity of this noble race. This is the announcement of a contribution of fifteen hundred dollars by the Quillayotte tribe of American Indians to the Swedish Cancer Fund, which, by the way, was begun as a birthday tribute to the king of that country. A member of the Swedish royal family was made “Chief Lone Eagle” of this tribe when he recently visited the United States.

This may be said to represent material assistance. The other instance of Indian help was less substantial, and rather ridiculous. A London woman was brought to an English police court on the charge of fortune telling, her medium being, it was said, “a big white Indian chief” of the Sioux tribe who lived four hundred years ago. The case was taken very seriously by those interested in spiritualism, for and against, but the irreverent layman is chiefly impressed by the imagination of the medium in selecting a messenger who lived so far away and so very long ago. Possibly, it seemed to her that distance lent enchantment to the Sioux! At all events, the two reports make an interesting account of the practical and “spiritual” help rendered by the Indian far from his native land.



Chester

MILD enough for anybody



What a cigarette meant there

Forty hours in the wireless room, sending, sending, sending... till help for a helpless ship is drawn across hundreds of miles of storm-wrecked ocean. And afterward, only one comment: "Good thing we had plenty of cigarettes!"

What a cigarette means here

Forty hours at the curing-barn—the most anxious hours in all the tobacco season.

The last wagon in from the fields, the barn full, the fires lighted—now the delicate work of curing commences. Day and night, day and night, watching thermometers, tending fires, adjusting ventilators—with loss of a year's work the penalty of carelessness, with loss of flavor the result of haste.

Vastly important, of course, are the later ageing and blending—but to this tireless vigil at the curing-barns you owe no small part of Chesterfield's flavorful and satisfying mildness.

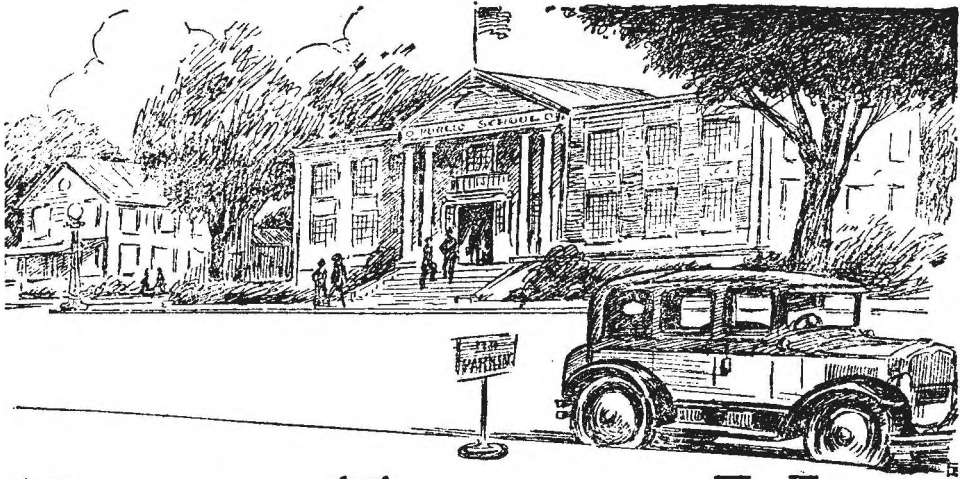
Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.



From 800 to 1,000 pounds of tobacco can be cured in 'his barn at each "firing."

field

.... and yet **THEY SATISFY**



Pioneer Towns *of the West* (Cleburne, Texas) *By* Duane Clark

IN 1867, Cleburne was merely a surveyed tract of land. It belonged to Colonel B. J. Chambers, and Nat Q. Henderson, and was donated to the community under the condition that it be the county seat. In honor of General Pat Cleburne the settlement was given his name.

Now, Cleburne, the county seat of Johnson County, has a population of twenty thousand. It is located almost in the center of Texas, on the main line of the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad and the Trinity & Brazos Valley Railroad. Interurban service to Fort Worth and Dallas is supplied by the Tarrant County Traction Co. Cleburne is in what is known as the Texas Common Point territory, with adequate transportation service to all parts of the United States.

Those who are interested in climatic conditions will find Cleburne healthful, rising as it does seven hundred and fifty-eight feet in altitude. The temperature varies from fifty degrees in the winter to one hundred degrees in the summer. There is an average of

two hundred and three clear days yearly. The city water, which is secured from deep wells, is pure and abundant.

One of the best school systems of the South is located at Cleburne. Besides five brick ward school buildings, a modern three-story junior high and an imposing four-story senior high school give to the coming citizens of Cleburne a solid foundation of learning. The residents have reason to be proud of these schools, which have an enrollment of approximately four thousand. Cleburne boasts of a rather unique distinction, and that is that the city has more boys and girls in colleges than any other city of its size in America.

Cleburne is constantly making plans for future enlargement. Its public utilities are sufficiently ample to care for increased growth. The water and sewerage systems are municipally owned. Power and light is furnished by the Texas Power & Light Co., while natural gas is produced by the Municipal Gas Co. Two ice factories sup-

ply the city and county, having a capacity of one hundred and thirty tons daily. Reasonable rates bring these commodities within the reach of all.

Liberty Hotel is the newest addition to Cleburne's means of accommodating visitors. The fine four-story brick building contains seventy guest rooms, which are up to date in every respect. Then, of course, there are smaller and less pretentious hotels.

Approximately fifteen hundred men are employed by the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railroad, which has its main shops at Cleburne. Their pay roll amounts to over three hundred thousand dollars monthly. Besides railroad interests, Cleburne has cotton gins, an iron foundry, cotton compress, mattress, candy, and broom factories; creameries, an ice-cream factory, bottling works, several wholesale houses, and a great many other smaller enterprises.

Any industry seeking a location would do well to decide upon Cleburne, since it has a reasonable tax rate, cheap industrial acreage, fair rates for power and light, natural gas, and water, besides an excellent location for distribution of products. Native labor is also plentiful.

Cleburne calls itself "The Friendly City." Its churches, schools, amusements, and other ideal living conditions offer satisfaction to the homemaker and builder. There are four hundred retail mercantile establishments. It is especially noted for its beautiful residential sections, its well-

kept lawns and homes in which every owner takes a pride, and the profusion of trees, shrubs, and flowers.

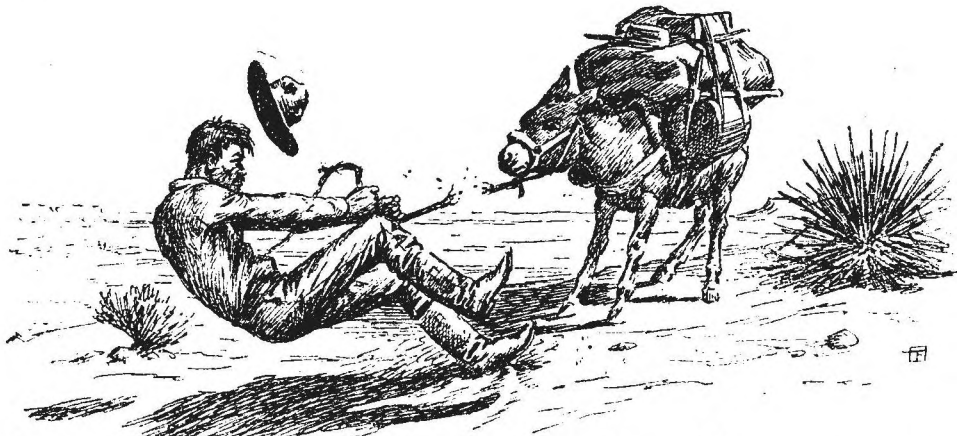
Cleburne has its own Carnegie library, a fine building set off to good advantage by wide terraces. The library contains sixteen thousand volumes. There are three hospitals and sanitariums, three banks, two business colleges, and two daily papers. Fraternal organizations include Rotary and Lions' Clubs and many local societies, besides a splendid Young Men's Christian Association. Another means for social contact is the Cleburne Country Club.

The form of government is aldermanic, with a mayor and four aldermen. The average rainfall in Cleburne is thirty-five inches. The streets are for the most part laid out with wide, paved roadways, terraced or broad lawns spreading between the houses and sidewalks.

Eighty-five per cent of Johnson County's four hundred and sixty-four thousand acres is under cultivation. Here is the home of diversified farming. Cotton, corn, oats, wheat, fruit, and vegetables are all raised in abundance.

Johnson County is noted for its herds of pure-bred Jersey cattle, as well as beef cattle and fine hogs. To facilitate handling the export of these products, there are over two hundred miles of hard-surfaced and good gravel roads throughout that section, radiating from Cleburne, which is located in the center of the county.





Don't Fool With the Desert

By Austin Hall

Author of "The Gold Mine in the Sky," etc.



AR out on the burning plain "Big" Harms could discern a tiny dot flitting and bobbing about like a cork on a sea of diamonds. But what it really was, he could not make out.

Nevertheless, there was life around that moving speck, and just at that moment, life and living meant everything in the world to the villainous Harms. For three days he had wandered, drifting aimlessly through a maze of canyons and puzzling draws, until in the end he and if it were a man he would be sure of hour before he had consumed his last drop of water. Here would be a man; and if it was a man he would be sure of a drink.

So Big Harms sat down. In the first place, he was tired; and in the second place, the moving dot was heading straight for the bottom of the ridge on which he was watching. Wherefore, he humped his huge body in the shade of a rock and waited.

"I sure hope he's got some water and plenty tuh eat," he mumbled greedily. "And I could use tobacco, too. And

this here bozo will know whereat we're at, and how tuh get out intuh God's country. And if I ever get loose and where there's a railroad, it will be me for the wet lands. Hello! there's two of 'em. Most likely it's one of these prospectors. No one else would be traveling like that. I wonder!"

Sure enough, the dot had suddenly divided; and now that the range of vision had been shortened, the tiny thing assumed a magnitude of some proportions. It seemed to dance into the air, shimmer into space, and spread out into the phantasy of a grotesque mirage; then, like a thing of magic, Big Harms watched it resolve into the plodding shapes of a man and a burro. Slowly, the two dots approached over the scintillating plain; the man trudging ahead; the donkey following like a big dog. And as they advanced, Big Harms noticed the donkey's staggering gait. The animal appeared to be working hard, moving as though he were lugging an enormous load; but at first glance, the significance of this was lost on Big Harms; he was so thirsty that he could scarcely breathe. And now that the man and the burro

were close to his lookout, he headed down for a drink. And two minutes later, he was enjoying the contents of a desert water bag.

After that, Big Harms thought it fitting to bestow his attention on the two arrivals. And he almost laughed. For here was a man who weighed not more than a hundred pounds at the most; who was so spare, in fact, that he appeared to be a mere wraith; with a skin sundried and brown like that of a mummy; but with eyes of red-hot coal, and an alertness that was almost catlike. The little fellow was holding the lead string of the burro in one hand, and a pipe in the other. Big Harms heard his squeaky voice.

"By golly!" the little man was saying. "Mebbe I got here just in time. Eh, mister? It's an awful place if yuh run out of water, and no man a-living kin last more'n a few hours. But just the same, yuh don't want tuh drink too much all tuh oncet. It ain't healthy; leastways, not out here in the dry lands. Yuh see, I've lived out here for going on twenty year now a-lookin' fer gold, and I ought tuh know. If I was you, I'd lay off a while; we kin camp here, and after a while you can fill up tuh capacity."

Had the man been a lumbering giant like himself, Big Harms might have listened; but advice from one so diminutive was almost an insult. Besides, Big Harms could do things in the line of drinking that were simply astonishing. So this time he lifted the sack and drained its contents, holding it up while the last drop fell into his cavernous mouth and then tossing it back with an insulting gesture.

"Huh!" he barked harshly. "Yuh dried-up little shrimp. W'at do yuh mean by telling me w'at I kin do? Don't yuh know that I'm Big Harms. Yeh! And they ain't no man on earth kin tell me nothin'. Why, say, I could take yuh between my thumb and little finger.

Huh! And I've a notion tuh do it. Just like that! See? There, I pretty near broke your wizened little neck, didn't I? Huh! But it didn't hurt me a bit, did it? Well, anyway, that's tuh let yuh know that from now on, I'm the boss of this here outfit. See? But I'm glad yuh come along, though, because I'm in need of a man like you. Yuh know the way out, and I'll make yuh guide me. Either that, or I'll just break yuh in two and feed yuh tuh the buzzards. Savvy?"

The words were brutal and spoken brutally; but the little man made no answer. The sun was just past the meridian and the place was blazing hot. Big Harms kicked the water bag with his foot, and then he turned to notice the burro. The patient little animal, burro wise, had squatted upon the sand to gain even a moment's rest; but as the man approached, it began heaving itself up on its legs. Whereat Big Harms caught hold of its halter. He gave it a jerk.

"Stand up, you lazy little beast," he barked. "I want tuh take a look at your load. Hey! There now, wait till I take a look intuh this here pack. Hey?"

But not a thought was he giving to the little man; nor did it occur to him that this small, silent desert rat might possess the means of more than equalizing their stature. For Harms was obsessed with the confidence of the born bully; and he had the muscle, and the bones, and a proportionate villainy. As for fear of the law—well, Big Harms was afraid of no law that could not see him. Just now his fingers were clawing at the ropes of the pack, unslipping the knots, and tossing them back. Then he beheld a bag of leather, tied securely, and laced across the top; in fact, there were two of them, one on each side of the animal's back. And when he tested them, their weight made him gasp. In another instant, he was pulling the first one open, only to discover other pokes, smaller and of tougher material, inside.

Suddenly, Harms knew what he could expect. He had never mined a day in his life; but he realized what the pokes were for.

Gold!

A fortune here on this burro's back; no doubt of it. And here he was, out in the desert, where no man would know. There would be a buzzard flight, and, after that, the shrewdest detective in the world would be unable to unsolve the riddle. Ten minutes before, Harms would have given his right arm for a mere drink of water; and now his villain's instinct was proclaiming him a rich man.

Big Harms was almost dizzy at the prospect. He had cut into a poke and stood looking at a store of yellow treasure; but he was seeing straight through it at the world beyond. He was gazing at wine, rich food, pleasure; with gluttony at its peak and unending sprees.

All his!

Eagerly, he ran his fingers into the nuggets, selecting the largest and sifting them into his huge palm. A fortune! Wealth beyond his wildest dreams! All to be had for the mere taking; a single blow, and the work would be done. He could take the burro, and lead him back to civilization, where it would be the easiest thing in the world to concoct a story. He could say that he had been out prospecting for months and had finally struck it rich. Men had done it before; so there would be no one to suspect him. After that, he could board the train for the big city, where he would be lost forevermore.

But there was one thing that troubled him.

Big Harms had just come through a rather tough experience; the desert was vast, and it took more than gold and muscle to find the way out. He had had his experience of thirst and it had been more than sufficient. The thought came to him suddenly—he would have to compromise; this lean little prospector

must be placated until such time as he had learned the secret of getting through the dry lands. After all, it would all be easy. There was no particular hurry.

"Yeh," he said, turning around, "yuh sure struck it rich, didn't yuh? Gosh o' fishhook! Yuh been almighty lucky. It certainly makes a man crazy just tuh look at it. Yeh! But I guess I was crazier a minute ago. I was so thirsty w'en I come down that I didn't have a lick of sense. The desert makes a man loco, doesn't it? Yuh get just so hot, and then yuh drink too' much, and your old mind goes over complete. I guess I spoke rough, eh? But now—well, most like it's the water, I seem tuh have my senses again. See? No doubt you're aiming tuh leave the desert? A man with that much gold ought tuh, anyway. And I don't mind telling yuh that I'd like tuh go with yuh. Mebbe we kin strike up some sort of a bargain. How about it?"

When Big Harms wished to be nice, he was the softest-speaking man on earth. His words were so reassuring that the little man readily accepted them; and, like all desert rats, he relished any opportunity to get into conversation. And once he was started, his flow of speech went on. Big Harms had only to listen.

"Why, of course, yuh kin go with me," came the hearty answer. "And I don't mind saying that I'm glad that yuh ain't as bad as yuh said, because yuh're that big that yuh could kill me with your fingers. I certainly thought yuh was mad at first. But most likely it was the thirst. I know how it is. And on top of that I didn't have a gun tuh even things up. I used up my last ammunition months ago. I'm—I'm sure enough glad."

Big Harms went on listening. The little fellow had opened a sack and brought out something to eat. And eating was Big Harms' middle name. He gulped the food eagerly, working his

huge jaws; but never for a second did he fail to keep his ears open for the required information.

"Yessir," the wizened prospector was saying. "I know this here particular desert better than anybody else in the world. They ain't nary a soul who knows her half so well. That's why I hung on until I found this here gold. I knew there was a strike in store for me somewhere; and I certainly found it. Over that brown range at the lower end of this here plain. Yellow Skin Mountain they call it. They's ravines up there with a little water running through them and, in one of 'em I found the gold. Yessir! Almost pure stuff. A miner's own dream. A big pocket. And I stayed with her until I had it all cleaned out. It was sure lucky that I had my old burro. He was just big enough tuh pack out my whole clean-up. But we've been traveling slowly because I didn't want him tuh give out. Yep!"

And still Big Harms went on stuffing himself. The little man brought out another water bag; but this time Harms did not drink so greedily. However, the water turned the conversation.

"Yep!" the little fellow went on. "They's lots of men who've tried tuh work this old desert. But it takes years before yuh know how. No matter what yuh set out tuh do, it all depends on water. Yuh've got tuh savvy that, or else yuh're a dead one. This particular desert, fer instance, has took many a life, and it'll get a lot more. It's almost forty mile this way without a drop of water, and we ain't halfway through. And even w'en yuh get up tuh the upper end of this here valley, it's almost as bad. In fact, it's worse, because in that range up tuh the north of us there is the strangest assortment of springs that yuh ever heard tell of. They's water in all of 'em, yuh see, but most all of 'em is pure poison. So they have tuh keep 'em labeled. Those that are bad is marked

'poison.' And the good ones is staked with signs just like the others."

Big Harms had stopped eating; he had hoped to acquire this information by some manner of shrewd questioning; but here it was all coming voluntarily. There was just one more question that he wanted to ask. He looked up.

"Yeh," he said, with his mouth full of food. "I sure got reasons tuh know she's a daisy. I was lost two whole days myself. But how do yuh find your way out? Where do yuh run across them there springs? Eh? I ain't never seen——"

"No," came the answer. "Mebbe yuh ain't; because they's only one way, and yuh know it, w'en yuh find it. Yuh see that big peak tuh the north—the one with the cone top like a volcano? Well, that's where yuh aim for. Yuh can't lose a mountain like that, yuh see. But w'en yuh get up close yuh find that the mountain is still many miles away, but right there in front of yuh is a range of low, rolling hills. Then yuh come tuh a canyon cut out of walls of crystallized gypsum. Yuh can't miss it, because it looks like a doorway cut out of pure glass, especially when the sun hits it, which is almost any time in the daylight. All yuh've got tuh do is tuh go in, and it will lead yuh straight on. Pretty soon, yuh're on a trail heading off to the northwest. And yuh're allus working out of the country. And they's springs ever so far apart. Always in twos, or threes, or fours. That's the funny part of it; and it's an oddity that's tuh be found only in certain deserts. Most likely it's because of the peculiar formation; because they's arsenic and all kinds of deadly mineral up there. But all yuh've got tuh do is tuh keep on, taking care tuh follow the right trail and use your noodle. They ain't a bit of danger if yuh do that. But yuh've got tuh head northwest. Yuh——"

Big Harms had heard every word;

and he was thinking hard. Here was the information that he had been prepared to wait for, coming freely. And it was all so simple. Any man could follow it. Straight to the cone peak sticking out of the blue, and after that to the gateway at the mouth of the canyon.

Why not?

But still he hesitated; the loneliness of the vast desert was not to be faced lightly; perhaps it would be better to retain this man for a companion until he had crossed the terrible distance between. But that thought was driven out of his head almost immediately. There was always the possibility of some one chancing along in the same manner as he himself had done, and, in that case, all hope of acquiring the loot might be ruined; whereas, were he in sole possession, he would be the apparent and legal owner. Big Harms was that much of a thinker.

So why wait?

Why indeed? The little man was not more than three paces away, and he could put him out very easily. And Big Harms did just that. He stepped over as if to approach the donkey, and as he passed his victim, he side-swiped him with his hamlike fist. Then, as the prospector sank, he swung a rabbit punch with the edge of his hand, catching the poor fellow behind the neck and driving him, face down, on the sand.

It was the work of an instant. The prospector lay like a dead man, and there was no sound but the villain's breathing.

"Huh!" grunted the big man. "It had tuh be done, sooner or later; and now it's finished. Anybody who is that big a fool deserves just what he got. Kin yuh imagine him telling me the way out like that? And him with all that gold. Huh!"

To a man like Big Harms the incident was almost laughable; and it was all the more so when he thought of how diffi-

cult it would have been to acquire that much loot in the city. He kept repeating:

"All I had tuh do was tuh take it. Nothing tuh it. I know the way out, and when I get tuh civilization, no one will suspect. Harms, old boy, yuh're sure in luck!"

Ten minutes later, he had the donkey ready to resume the journey; but before he started he turned his victim over.

"Yeh!" he gloated. "Well, the buzzards will get yuh. Anybody w'at gets a rabbit punch from Big Harms don't go far. So long, yuh poor nut. So long!"

Then he headed straight north to where the conelike tip hung above the horizon, trudging away, and musing over the pleasant prospects before him. The gold would represent a fortune; but he did not know how much, and he could only calculate. He began adding:

"Gold is worth how much? Let's see? Sixteen tuh twenty dollars an ounce. And they's twelve ounces tuh a gold pound. Or is it sixteen. That would make one pound worth two hundred and forty dollars, wouldn't it? And that burro has got all he kin pack. Some money! And she's mine—every bit of it."

And, all the while, Big Harms was plodding along, with the patient little animal staggering under the heavy load. The peak began to grow nearer; and toward sundown he could see the mouth of the canyon not so far ahead. And in the dying light it looked just like the little prospector had said—a crystal gate, looming out of the edge of the plain. However, it was farther ahead than Big Harms had realized; he had forgotten the clear air of the desert and the fact that six miles in such an atmosphere might look as one.

Also, the poor burro was beginning to wear out. Its laboring steps became slower and slower, and finally almost

ceased. This was not at all to the big man's liking. So he seized the brute by the halter and began to pull. And right there his troubles began. The burro was a burro, and once it had made up its mind that it had had enough, neither heaven nor earth could budge it. And Harms found that out. He was almost strong enough to pick the animal off its feet; but the stubborn little fellow had four hoofs with which to brace itself in the sand, and Harms had only two.

"Come on!" he yelled. "Come on, yuh brute! Yuh ain't a-goin' tuh quit now. Not if I have tuh kill yuh. Come on!"

But still the animal hung back, until the halter broke under Harms' grasp, and he shot backward into the sand. And that seemed to drive him into a frenzy. When he regained his feet, he advanced like a fury, his fist swinging recklessly straight at the little animal's head. But once again the man met with discomfiture. The beast turned to look at him, and Harms' fist landed squarely between the burro's eyes. Right on the bone. The terrible impact seemed to drive the villain's knuckles clean up into his shoulders; but the donkey merely blinked. A howl of pain came from the big man's throat. He jumped around, holding his wrist. The world reeled in dizzy madness, and his knees weakened, but at length his strength began to return.

"Yuh! Yuh!" he began shouting. "I'll kill yuh fer that. Yuh little son of the mischief! Yuh——"

And then Big Harms saw something lying on the sand—a piece of dry juniper that had come to the place heaven only knew how. But that did not matter to Big Harms. It was a club, and it was just the thing with which to brain the stubborn brute. He caught hold of it and swung it upon the creature's head, and the burro went down, even as the miner had gone two hours before.

Harms grunted savagely.

"Yeh!" he gloated. "Well, yuh don't monkey with Harms. Anything that does that is a dead one. And I don't mean mebbe neither."

But even a man like Harms must have some elements of reason. Ten minutes later, when the pain in his hand began to wear off, he realized what he had done. Henceforth, he would be compelled to carry the gold upon his own back. But as long as it was gold, that did not worry him.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Mebbe I was a fool. Oh, well, I guess I kin helt it. And if I can't, it will be the first load that I couldn't shoulder."

However, Harms had never handled gold ore in his life; and consequently he was never so deceived. The load was small in bulk, but exceedingly heavy; so much so that when he endeavored to sling the bags upon his shoulders, he almost staggered. But the grip of covetousness finally enabled him to lift it.

"Huh!" he explained. "Well, I ain't a-going tuh leave none of it. It's worth twenty dollars an ounce, and I sure need the twenties."

But, like all loads, once he had shifted it on his shoulders, it was not so heavy; and when he started out he was making considerable progress. The sun sank, and evening began to come on, and before he knew it, the north star was shining above the cone behind the gateway. Also, his load began to grow heavy; but now, thanks to the night's coolness, he had forgotten his thirst. For an hour he trudged on, shifting his load to ease it, and then plodding forward. Heavier and heavier grew the load; until, all at once, he remembered something. He uttered an exclamation of anger. He halted in his tracks and swore. In his anger at the burro and his haste in taking up the load, he had forgotten the water bag!

Here was a problem indeed!

Ahead of him was the gateway, with

the springs just beyond; and behind him was the distance to the prostrate burro. Harms began thinking it out. After all, there was no great amount of liquid in the water bag; and, in order to get it, he would be compelled to make the trip twice and still be no farther. But it was a problem, nevertheless, and he was not so sure. And now that he was without water, he suddenly became very thirsty. Likewise, the fear of the desert began to get under his skin; it was too lonely, too terrible. He hated the thought of taking the trip back, and he wanted to get to town as soon as possible; so, in the end, he struck out for the gateway.

But, from that moment, he began to pay his toll to the dry lands. The air of the desert draws the moisture from the body, and unless it is replenished continually, the body collapses. Harms was finding it out. Besides, the worst thirst in the world comes from panic. Now that Big Harms was without water, he thought of nothing else. He must hurry on. And as he stumbled along, the load became a triple burden; until there was no way but to sit down and rest. And that, again, brought another problem. It was one thing to keep going; but it was still another to lift his heavy burden from the ground. When he tried to rise, he discovered that he could not make it; and on top of that, his wrist bothered him whenever he gripped at the sack. Twice and three times he tried it; and then he began to think the matter out.

The gold was too heavy; he would have to unload some of it on the sand. The thought was cutting, because he had made up his mind to take it all; and he could not get away from that idea of twenty dollars an ounce. Each pound was worth a good deal of money. However, there was no hope for it; so he unpacked the precious pokes until he was able to regain his feet; after which he reached down and pulled up one or two

of them with his hands. Once again he started.

And this time he did not stop. The night grew darker, and presently a string of pearllike flame began to rim the eastern mountains. Next came the moon, and presently, to his great joy, the gypsum gate loomed in front of him. With a heavy load and a light heart, Big Harms entered and began walking up the graveled canyon, until a *schirr* of wings and a scattering of small game told him that he was somewhere near water.

"Yeh!" he mumbled. "It ain't so far ahead. Can't be. All that life hangs around the springs. Just around the bend, most likely. Yeah. Here she is. Gosh, but I'm thirsty!"

Then he recalled the prospector's words. Some of the springs were poison. So it behooved him to be careful. There, in the moonlight, he beheld three pools; each under a big rock, and each one labeled with a sign; but it was not until he had struck a match that he was able to read them. The two on the side were marked poison; and the center spring bore the legend:

PURE WATER. DRINK!

And Big Harms drank. When he had had his fill, he shifted his burden and lay down to sleep. The hours went by and before he knew it, morning was streaking the heavens. And then like a flash the blazing sun tipped the horizon; in ten minutes the gypsum formation about him was sizzling like an oven. Big Harms ate; then he squatted down at the spring's edge and gulped up every drop of water that he could hold. When he stood up, he chuckled; an evil thought had come to his pernicious mind.

"Eh?" he said. "Wouldn't it be a joke if a man should come along and drink out of the wrong spring. Eh? And then lay here and ache? Ha ha! Why not? I'll just fix it so's the next

baby who heads this way will do just that. Sure! And it will cover up what I've done tuh a fare-ye-well. Nobody kin come in without getting poisoned; and they can't go out, neither. This here pass through the hills will be as good as closed."

It was only the work of an instant to transpose the pure-water sign for one of the poison ones. Big Harms laughed again. Then he turned to his pack and began shouldering his load. But here he met with trouble. His right wrist had swollen during the night and was almost useless; consequently, when he began clutching the bags, he could only employ half his strength. Time and again he attempted to lift the burden, but each trial was the same. Once again, there was no way out but to leave something. At first he thought of the food bag, but that was impossible. He would have to eat. And so in the end, he pulled out more gold.

This time he made it. Slowly and carefully, he began walking up the narrow canyon, laughing at his work, and dreaming of the glorious sprees that lay in the future. But his elation was soon ended. The canyon was narrow, cut out of gypsum walls, and the air was like a slow fire. The sun blazed down and there was no breeze. Perspiration oozed out of his every pore; so that, in no time, Big Harms was in the grip of another unmerciful thirst. And with no water conveyance, there was nothing to do but go staggering on until he came to the next hole. But that meant weakness, and exhaustion, and many rests. And at each stop, it became necessary to lessen his load. But at length he reached the springs and filled up again. When he had rested, he shifted the signs around and went on.

Three times that forenoon, Big Harms managed to stagger up to the watering places and drink; but all through the morning his load kept growing smaller. And when the after-

noon came, he was a very tired man; also, a frightened one. But he realized that the end could not be so very far ahead; and that, as long as he kept bearing to the left, he was safe. However, on the last lap, he was not so lucky. He had entered a shallow canyon that kept turning and twisting until there was no way of telling his direction. Neither was there any indication of water. And by this time his gold treasure had diminished to a small man's load; only, somehow, he had ceased to care.

He wanted water!

Water was golden; water was everything; water was life! And yet, water was not to be had. Big Harms stumbled on; and as he lurched ahead, he cursed his folly for leaving the water bag. He had been a fool. But it was too late now. He had to go on. The prospector had said that that was the only thing to do—until he reached the next spring.

But, somehow, the water did not materialize. His strength waned; and blackness set in; his lips became thick, and his tongue swollen. On and on went Big Harms. He simply had to reach water.

And at last he did. One minute he was between glaring rocks, and the next he was gazing at the liquid pools. And he read the signs; he had sight enough for that, and no more. It was all he wanted. Next instant, he was plunging his face into the water.

And he drank and drank. Crazed as he was, he paid no attention to the common adage of the desert. He had a constitution of iron and he could defy all rules of drinking. But there was one rule that he could not hold in defiance; he could not master poison!

Big Harms began to feel queer; he straightened up and looked about him. A strange nausea had gripped him in the stomach. Something warned him. Then he beheld an object in the sand.

A gold poke!

And it was the very poke that he had left at the first spring, in the morning. The sight terrified him; and his thoughts came rushing. How could it be? The wrong spring! He had been too weakened and blinded to notice closely; and he had drunk from the very pool that he had labeled with the pure-water sign. He had poisoned himself! Like a knife thrust, a gripping sensation twisted his vitals. He moaned aloud and lifted his huge fists to the sky; but he had drunk too much. Blackness came suddenly; and numbness. And after that, Big Harms was done!

Two hours later an old man and a donkey approached the pool and walked over to the body. For a moment they paused there, and then the man turned to the signs.

"Huh!" he said grimly. "Some one changed the reading on the springs. eh? I wonder! Looks tuh me like he drank out of the wrong one. Let's sec. How did it happen? Mebbe he did it himself, and then came back. We kin easy tell that by the trails."

Sure enough, there was evidence in plenty to show what had happened.

First, there were traces where he had gone ahead, and then the other tracks down the side canyon leading all the way back.

"Huh!" exclaimed the old man. "That's just where he overreached himself. I told him tuh keep bearing tuh his left; but he didn't let me finish my story. At the last spring, yuh keep right ahead, and leave the west trail. But, of course, he took the other, and that brought him around through the side country to the first spring where he had swapped the sign so as to poison them that followed. But when he got here, he drank his own medicine. Yep! And, most like, he dropped the gold all along the trail. So I'll just follow his route, load the gold back on the burro, fix up the signs, and go tuh town. Seems like his plans muddled all the way through. Thought he could kill me with a rabbit punch; but I was too tough. And he'd ought tuh have known that yuh've got tuh have an ax tuh finish a burro. And that water bag he forgot helped us along nicely. Yep! Well, that's what he gets fer fooling with the desert!"



THE THEFT OF A FARM

TWO years ago John Livingston and his family were happily situated on their farm along the Missouri. The adjacent village was Elk Point, and the State South Dakota. At the time, the farm comprised eighty well-watered acres. In fact, the land was almost too well irrigated for, in the course of the year the river went on an unexpectedly violent rampage and swallowed twenty of Mr. Livingston's acres.

This prank on the part of the Missouri was regarded as not completely devastating for, after such unprecedented activity, the river would presumably stay within its normal confines for a time. The water, however, contrary to expectation, continued to be high. And, during the past year, forty more acres were engulfed.

Recently, when it became apparent that their whole farm was about to be destroyed, the Livingstons moved into town. At the time of their moving, the house and barn, which had once been an appreciable distance from the river, were on the very brink of the turgid flood. And now only twenty pitiful acres of the farm remain.



Guns For Brains

By John Briggs

Author of "The Killing Streak," etc.



TRouble commenced between big, easy-going Dan Barthlow and "Chick" Gault when the two were still in their teens. Chick Gault, of a secretly cruel nature, had been mercilessly beating a horse about the head, when he was stopped by Dan. A fight instantly followed, in which young Gault tried to hit Dan with the club which he had been using upon the horse. Spectators tried to separate the youths. But Dan Barthlow speedily demonstrated that he needed no aid. Naturally, the sympathy of the onlookers was with Dan, for he was younger than his opponent. He was applauded for the thrashing which he gave the older youth. And Chick Gault was ridiculed for his unmanly attempt to strike with a club.

This affair was never forgotten by Gault. His hatred of Dan Barthlow deepened as time went on. Given a

start, intense hatred sometimes develops between two individuals merely because of their opposing characters.

Some men acquire discretion early in life; others never possess it. Chick Gault fell heir to his father's ranch, and it took him a surprisingly short while to run through the comfortable fortune which had been left to him. Yet, gambling and drinking did not deter him from maintaining a certain dandified appearance and a bold manner calculated to offset his air of dissipation.

Nor, for eight years, did Gault ever miss an opportunity to flaunt his hatred of Dan Barthlow. Steady-going Dan was not easily stirred to anger, but he had a willing champion in his younger brother, Ned. Gault had discovered that it was easier to distress Dan by direct attacks upon the impulsive Ned.

Also left upon their own resources, the Barthlow brother acted in a manner quite different to that which Chick

Gault adopted. Dan and Ned had a small herd of cattle to start with, yet in six years' time they had increased it to nearly two thousand head of range stock.

The circumstance which gave rise to Chick Gault's final stroke of vengeance against his rival resulted from the fact that numbers of prime beeves began to disappear mysteriously from the range. These losses continued for several seasons, and most of the cattlemen in the Modoc and Madelene range sections were affected. Apparently, the Barthlow brothers were the only ones who had suffered no loss by the range leak. Gault took advantage of this fact to stir up suspicion against the Barthlows—particularly against Ned.

For it was Ned who was now practically in full charge of the ranging Bar B herds. Dan Barthlow had a preference for ranching, and he was glad to let his younger brother superintend the herding. Ned had become familiar with every valley and mountainous section of the open range, comprising sections of three counties—although county borders were not very well defined in that open country. Ned was almost continuously riding herd on the Bar B brand, while other ranchers were in the habit of letting their cattle roam almost at will between round-up seasons.

It was not unusual for Ned to make a week's ride, carrying his camp outfit by pack horse. Consequently, he became well acquainted with many of the ranchers within a large area. Frequently he reported to other cattle owners the location and condition of their various herds. Halting at a ranch, at noon or at night, he was always a welcome guest. Although impulsive and quick to take offense, Ned possessed a likable disposition. In his rides, he avoided encounters with Chick Gault as much as possible. But this was only because he had promised Dan that he would always do so.

In the meantime, Gault had begun to retrieve his standing with the neighborhood at large. To some extent, he had even replaced his misspent fortune. Under the guise of employees, he had gathered about him a reckless gang whose apparent business was that of trapping and breaking wild horses.

If there was one ranch which Ned scrupulously avoided, there was another at which he found frequent occasion to stop. There was a reason for his frequent visits to Sam Kempton's ranch. It was Kempton's daughter, Mary. The young lady was not adverse to having him call. By Kempton himself, Ned had always been well received, until a day when the blunt-spoken rancher made it plain that his presence was no longer desired. The cause for his dismissal was a sly rumor originated by Chick Gault.

The rumor suggested that if any one knew what was happening to the beeves which were missing mysteriously from the range it should be Ned Barthlow, whose frequent absences might thus be explained.

As one familiar with the greatest portion of the free range, Ned had often been consulted about the unaccountable cattle losses. Parts of the great lava-strewn plateau region, split up by rugged mountain ranges, constituted a little-known territory to many of the ranchers. If Ned had private theories as to what was happening to the missing cattle, he never voiced them. In fact, he had more than a theory, and he had a special reason for keeping it to himself. Yet on several occasions, when asked, he had let it be known that no cattle thief had found it healthy to molest the Bar B brand. Perhaps he was just a little boastful—which could have easily been forgiven on account of his youth. But the fact made it all the easier for public suspicion to be very easily inflamed against him.

Ned was bluntly reminded of this, by the outspoken Sam Kempton, whose own recent losses had been unusually large. The rancher was all the more indignant because his hasty conclusions led him to believe that Ned had had the audacity to court his daughter while at the same time he was stealing his cattle.

Having these accusations fired at him, Ned was so amazed that his effort to make a retort resulted in the rushing of blood to his face.

Kempton ended by declaring that he would head a posse of ranchers to run the guilty parties to earth, and that Ned could take his warning to leave the country, if he did not want to swing with the rest of his gang.

At this, Ned managed to voice a question.

"I reckon Chick Gault'll be helpin' out with the hangin's, won't he?"

"I ain't arguin'!" Kempton stormed. "We'll have enough rope fer the parties that needs it! If yuh can prove you ain't been mixed up in this, I'll apologize. But if you ain't guilty, seems to me yuh oughta have some idea who is. You've been ridin' this range from the Madelenes to the Granite Range, an' across the Sierras on the other side. You ain't lost no cattle—so yuh claim. Still yuh say you've got no idea where there's a leak goin' out!"

"Maybe I have!" Ned returned, anger flaming to his dark eyes. "But I don't go 'round accusin' folks without I know for sure what I'm talkin' about. Yuh—yuh're apt to wanta eat your words, Kempton. So long, now. But, remember this—I'm comin' back. An' when I do—you'll eat outa my hand! I know who's put you up to this, all right!" he added, as he leaped onto his horse and spurred away.

Ned rode directly home and gathered up his pack outfit. Dan, busily mowing hay, had no inkling of what his brother was doing until he came in from work

and found Ned already packed for a trip.

"What's your idea startin' off at sundown, broth?" he demanded.

Ned, who fairly idolized his big, kindly brother, resorted to evasion, for the first time in his life.

Dan, watching him depart, was vaguely worried by an intuition that Ned's story about going to look for some straying white-faces was not a sufficient cause for his brother's haste.

Soon after leaving the ranch, Ned went in a direction almost opposite to that which he had allowed Dan to believe he had taken. He rode southeast across the broad table-lands, the bright moonlight as his guide.

He knew much more of the manner in which cattle had been disappearing from the range than he had ever hinted to any one. Already he had traced the leak to a little-known valley which was hidden away among the bleak dikes and canyons of the Devil's Claw Lavas. Thence, he was certain, the stolen cattle were being conveyed across the Nevada State line. Thus far, he had been extremely cautious with his private investigations; yet he feared that the rustlers had already suspected his movements. He had no positive evidence that Chick Gault and his outfit were lifting the cattle from the home range. He felt that information given out too soon would only serve to arouse the ranchers and permit the thieves to cover their tracks.

Moreover, Ned wished to obtain evidence against Gault by his own efforts. He believed himself capable of doing it. He was almost certain that one of the rustlers had been stationed in the vicinity of the hidden valley as a lookout. Ned hoped to locate the camp and to take the man by surprise. He realized that the task might require days of stealthy searching. In case of a face-to-face encounter with his quarry, he was taking a daring risk. Ned had

a good deal of recklessness in his make-up. He knew that his quest might result in a gun battle. The only thought which troubled him was due to the fact that he had been obliged to deceive Dan in order to make the attempt. But his youthful optimism led him to picture only the success of his venture, when he would dispel the shadow of suspicion which had fallen upon him by getting evidence against Chick Gault.

At about midnight, Ned entered a low range of hills and crossed them by a route which he had previously discovered. Until daybreak, he traveled south along the base of the hills, bordering a barren, sage-dotted flat. Before sunrise, he camped under some twisted junipers, in a small canyon watered by a spring. Another night's traveling carried him into the desolate confusion of misshapen ridges, potholes, and peaks known as The Devil's Claw Lavas.

Unhappily for his errand, Ned had been watched from the moment that he had left the Fall River settlement. His stealth had revealed his object to the parties most interested in it. Chick Gault had been expecting Ned to make such a move, for Ned had not accomplished his former visits to the hidden valley without being observed. Thereafter his movements had been covertly watched by Gault's spies. One of Gault's men quickly reported the apparent object of Ned's present excursion. He received instructions to follow Ned into the lavas, and there to make him prisoner, if possible.

Gault immediately visited Sam Kempton, whose confidence he had already succeeded in winning. With a little clever guidance, he made the honest but quick-tempered rancher believe that Ned Barthlow had gone to warn his confederates of the impending crusade of the ranchers. Kempton had much influence among his neighbors. With utmost haste, he organized a

posse, with the object of shadowing Ned until that unsuspecting young man should lead them to certain evidence of his guilt. The ranchers did not incur any delay in seeking the sheriff's aid. The party which rode forth at daybreak numbered eleven men. Gault explained to them that he had instructed his man to follow Ned and to mark the trail.

It did not occur to the pursuers that Gault's rider might easily mark the way to the hidden valley because of his familiarity with it. They had no difficulty in picking up the signs which the man had left—particularly as one of their party knew where to look for them. That member of the posse was Gault himself.

Chick Gault was playing a clever though desperate game. His scheme involved fastening his own guilt upon Ned Barthlow. It also depended upon making it impossible for Ned ever to speak for himself. But that was not all that Gault hoped to accomplish. His plan included the working of a lasting revenge upon Dan Barthlow, whom he particularly hated. He hated Dan not only because of their boyhood feud, but because Dan had won a position of esteem in the country, which he himself lacked. Needless to say, he had not tried to turn public suspicion directly against Dan. Rather, he had cleverly implied his belief that Dan Barthlow had no knowledge of his brother's doings. He knew that popular sentiment would be very slow to turn against open-hearted, easy-going Dan.

Shortly after they entered the lava runs, the mounted party met Gault's scout who, supposedly, had been flagging the route which Ned Barthlow had taken. The rider was a cadaverous six-footer, with keen, deep-set eyes and nervous, bony hands. His long, prehensile fingers kept beating a tattoo on the saddle horn as he talked. He declared that it had not been safe for

him to continue any farther alone on Ned's trail. He expressed himself as certain that young Barthlow was ahead of him, and he indicated the route which he was convinced Ned had taken. Also, he stated it as his belief that there were cattle somewhere ahead in the network of canyons. He had discovered signs. Unnecessarily, he called attention to the fact that no cattle had strayed into this barren region of their own accord.

Chick Gault watched his man's fingers nervously drumming upon the saddle horn, therein finding much secret satisfaction. By that signal he read that Ned Barthlow had been caught, and that his further instructions had been successfully carried out.

The man hunters rode on into a labyrinth of lava mesas and ridges. With unexpected abruptness, they came upon the rim of a hidden valley, the existence of which had been unknown to all of them but Gault and his useful employee, Ike Belcher. The riders, looking down into an extensive depression in the surrounding bad lands, saw not one valley, but a series of small, irregular valleys separated by a maze of lava dikes, sharp spurs, and peaks.

To avoid suspicion, Gault and Ike Belcher both took false leads in trying to locate the entrance. A trail which showed signs of recent use was at last found by another member of the party. No doubt now remained in the minds of the ranchers as to Ned Barthlow's connection with the recent cattle thefts. They followed plain horse tracks into the valley. They did not know that another man had ridden in Ned's saddle, and that Ned, wounded by a gun shot, had been carried in, bound, on his pack horse.

Upon rounding a turn in what appeared to be the main lead of the valley, they came abruptly upon a small herd of prime beeves. Brands and earmarks had been altered, but there was

evidence enough that the herd was made up of stolen cattle. The steers took fright; yet it seemed so very obvious that they had been recently herded together for the purpose of being driven out.

Gault and his man Ike had done a little adroit piloting to lead the party to the steers. Presently, one of the scouting party discovered Ned Barthlow's saddle horse and his pack horse. Both appeared to have been hastily abandoned. A consultation among the ranchers resulted in the theory that Ned had been alone, and that he had come to the valley to drive out the stolen beeves.

It was decided that the party should split up into threes, as they came to branching sections of the valley. Chick Gault, accompanied by Ike Belcher and Sam Kempton turned into the first tributary branch of the valley which seemed extensive enough to warrant search for another outlet by which Ned or his accomplices might have escaped. The other members of the posse continued up the main valley, every one understanding that the sound of a shot would be the signal to bring them all together.

Gault and Belcher, of course, knew what they would find. Belcher had been able to surprise Ned Barthlow and to take him captive. Ned was now being guarded by the member of their gang who was always posted at their hide out. However, Chick Gault and Ike kept up their pretense of making a search. A ten-minute ride brought them to where this prong of the valley narrowed to a canyon which rose steeply toward the base of a round peak that seemed to form the hub of the branching ridges.

"We took a blind lead," Kempton declared, tracing by a glance the irregular cleft of the gorge which they would have to ascend to reach the ridge summit.

"But there's been horse travel this

way," Ike Belcher put in. "This might be another way out."

"Don't look like it," Kempton grumbled.

But to Chick's suggestion that they continue as far as possible, the rancher agreed. He became more interested as the steep passage showed signs of use. In places the trickling stream which had glazed the smooth bed rock made the footing dangerous. Frequently they dismounted and led their horses. Panting from exertion, they finally reached the base of the round peak and saw that they had made an exit from the valley of many channels. An area of ridges and canyons surrounded them; but it was evident that they were following a route which might lead them out of the lavas.

Suddenly, Gault halted to stare up at a narrow, jagged crack which seemed to split the pinnacle peak from top to bottom. The floor of the water-carved gash extended upward in a series of steps which, near the summit, sank into a dark cleft through which the sky was visible.

"Looks like there might be an old crater, up in there," Gault announced. "If anybody was to hide out in there, he'd be hard to get. Feller might climb up that dry spillway. That seems to be the only place where there's footin' clear to the top."

The three searchers rode to the foot of the gash and examined the dry sand which had been deposited by winter freshets.

"Somebody's been tryin' tuh cover his tracks here!" Ike Belcher exclaimed.

In places, the sand had been freshly disturbed.

"Say, I'm goin' to climb up in there an' look-see," Gault declared, lowering his voice. "You fellers stand watch. 'Case some uh the gang is up there, it wouldn't do for us all to get potted."

"Yuh're takin' chances," Ike objected, thus keeping up his share of acting.

"Looks like one man in there could hold off uh mob."

"He's right," Kempton put in. "We'd better all stick t'gether, Chick."

"Yuh'd have uh better chance to do some shootin' from where yuh are," Gault replied, as he dismounted and hitched his gun forward. "Besides, one of yuh can fire the alarm, in case I run onto somethin'. Course, there ain't much chance."

His pretended logic, assisted by Ike's agreement, overruled Kempton's objection. With apparent caution, Gault climbed the steep, serrated water channel. He was still within sight of the watchers when he reached the shelf where the deep cleft extended back into the bowl of a small, extinct crater. There he halted and waved reassuringly to his companions below.

Meanwhile, the second actor in Gault's little scheme had watched the approach of the three horsemen from the upper rim of their lookout station.

As Gault waved to the men below, he was visible to the watcher who had taken up his position at the inner opening of the entrance crevice. The latter drew his revolver and fired a harmless shot.

At the sound, Gault jerked his gun and ducked from the view of the men below him. In the tunnellike gloom of the steep-walled fissure, he rose to his feet and fired twice at the narrow strip of sky line high overhead. Thus progressed the little play of which he was the author.

Striding boldly into the sunlit bowl of the small crater, he met a swarthy, bandy-legged individual dressed in blue jeans and jumper.

"Hello, Chinto!" he greeted. "Where've yuh got young Barthlow?"

With a grin, the Mexican pointed to a natural, terracelike elevation near the entrance.

"He ees spread out—like what you call—the eagle in the sun," Chinto re-

plied. "But he ees already to go loco een the head. He ees no shot ver' bad, but he lose blood. An' eet ees hot een the sun!"

"Good!" said Gault. "Go get Barthlow's hat an' h'ist it up jest enough, out front there, so's that hombre with Ike can see it. If yuh have to do some shootin', don't do any more than wing him—remember?"

Knowing that his instructions would be perfectly carried out, Gault climbed to the bench which Chinto had indicated. He found his victim tied down in the manner which the Mexican had described. Ned Barthlow opened his eyes from which he tried to blink away the feverish film.

Gault knelt and unknotted the handkerchief with which Ned had been gagged.

"Well," he commented, "wanta get loose an' fight it out with me, now?"

Ned's only response was a parched cough intended for a curse, as recognition of his tormentor dawned in his expression.

"Yeh," Gault continued mockingly, "pretty soon, I'll give yuh your gun, an' we'll fight it out—see?"

Ned stared blankly.

"You're goin' to fight it out with me!" Chick repeated. "I'll let yuh have your gun. We'll shoot it out! Remember that, now. When the time comes, we'll shoot it out!"

Ned Barthlow gave a choked grunt. The repeated statement had registered its meaning upon his dazed brain. Comprehension flashed in his eyes—comprehension and hatred.

Chick Gault went to a steep-sided pool, in the center of the crater bowl. He lowered a bucket by a rope. Returning, he placed the bucket of cool, fresh water between Ned's side and his right arm, which was extended and fastened to a stake.

Sensing his enemy's intention to torture him, Ned lay rigid, glaring into

the leering face bending over him. At last, his fever mastering him, he tried to lift his head. The position permitted him to gaze into the clear, cooling contents of the bucket. For a moment he struggled until his face purpled and he sank back with a hoarse groan. His reason was tottering.

The sound of a pistol shot near the entrance attracted Gault to where Chinto was holding forth. The Mexican exhibited two neat holes which a bullet had bored through the crown of Ned Barthlow's hat. Kempton, waiting while Ike Belcher had gone to summon the others, was evidently fuming at the delay. His marksmanship evinced the fact that he was keeping a sharp eye on the entrance through which he undoubtedly believed that Chick Gault had disappeared.

Gault waited with Chinto until a clatter of hoofs informed him that the posse had responded to Ike's summons. Chick directed the Mexican to tie his hands behind him. At a shout from below, he instructed Chinto to hoist a handkerchief on the muzzle of his gun.

"All right!" came the response to the signal. "Come out an' talk, Barthlow! Behave yourself, an' we'll listen!"

Chick Gault stepped to the edge of the shelf from which the abrupt drop began.

"It's me boys," he announced, looking down upon the astonished party of mounted men. "But there's uh gun three feet from my back!" he added.

The effect of his declaration, combined with the fact that his hands were bound behind him, was all that he could have asked for.

"Who's got yuh, Chick?" Sam Kempton bellowed.

"Ned Barthlow, o' course," Gault answered smoothly. "He ain't trustin' you—so he's makin' me do his talkin'. He wants yuh to send for his brother. Says he'll let Dan come in here and talk with him. He tells me

he's not the man we're lookin' for; but he'll come out peaceable, if he can talk with Dan first."

A parley followed, in which Gault pretended to convey messages from his supposed captor. He explained his situation as that of a hostage, pointing out that Ned seemed to be alone in the stronghold, but was prepared to withstand a siege.

"All right, Chick—we'll send for Dan," Kempton agreed at last. "He prob'ly won't like hearin' about this, though. Dan's uh straight boy. It'll take coupla days to get him here. Sorry fer you!"

For a moment Gault stood watching the men draw together for a consultation. Presently a cowboy named "Bunt" Rennels was dispatched with the message to Dan Barthlow. To avoid answering the further questions which were volleyed at him, Gault backed away, conveying the impression that he was compelled to terminate the interview.

He beckoned his henchman to follow him. They entered the crater bowl.

"Now, get this straight, Chinto," he instructed. "When Dan Barthlow comes in, you'll be hid up there!"

He pointed to a narrow ledge protruding from the inner wall of the bowl. It was about fifteen feet above the floor and near the entrance crevice. A sharp-pointed, upright slab of rock, just above the ledge, had many times served the Mexican as a rope anchorage in his climbs to the rim of the crater. Behind the ledge was a small fissure in which a man might easily lie concealed.

"I'll have Barthlow fightin' mad, by the time his brother gets here," Gault continued. "We'll fix it so's he'll be ready to shoot the lights outa me, when he sees me comin' in through that notch. Only it won't be me—it'll be Dan. He won't be expectin' Dan, and one man looks like another in the shadow, yonder. I'm goin' to keep drillin' it into

his head that him an' me is goin' to shoot it out—sabe?"

Chinto nodded and grinned.

"I fooled these other hombres," Chick explained. "But that story about Ned havin' me cornered in here won't go over so good with Dan. He won't b'lieve Ned's been liftin' cattle—see? When he does come in here, he'll be expectin' uh trick. When Ned starts shootin' at him—well, he won't be able to see Ned any too good, neither. Ned'll be in the shadow, too, but there'll be enough of him showin' to make uh good target. If Dan's shootin' don't happen to get him, that's where you come in. You help Dan out uh little. You know how one shot in here echoes around till it sounds like a half a dozen, anyway. I'll have you tie me up, so's it'll look like Ned done it. You'll stay hid till everybody goes away. When they find me, I'll explain that Ned jest naturally went crazy, that's all. Crazy, because he got cornered with the goods on him! I'll explain that I give him that shoulder wound he's got now. Dan'll be so cut up over killin' his own brother that he won't be able to think of nothin' else. Only, he'll hafta think Ned was guilty. Have yuh got that all straight?"

"I theenk so—si, señor," Chinto replied. "But mebbly thees Ned weel keel hees brother Dan, w'en he theenk he ees shoot at you!"

"Can't be helped," said Gault. "I'd rather have Dan live, knowin' he's killed his own brother. Of course, you'll see that Ned gets his, anyway."

"But eef thees theeng go w'at you call—crooked," Chinto declared slowly, "I keel thees Dan, too. Then, mebbly I keel you. Bec'ose mebbly you make thees rancheros to theenk that you not know me, an' that I am the man weeth thees Ned who steal cattle!"

Gault stared at his man, and finding the keen, brutal gaze of the eyes which returned his look to be fully as threat-

ening as his own, he shrugged and turned away.

Chinto crept back to guard the entrance.

Gault carried Ned Barthlow to a small grotto, where supplies were kept, directly opposite the entrance. He placed Ned on blankets, washed his wound, and gave him water sparingly. He was not doing this for kindness, but because his captive had become delirious and there was danger that he would not be in a condition to fulfill his part in the tragic drama which Gault was planning.

Thus he kept his victim in a condition bordering on feverish madness. In Ned's lucid moments, he was given to understand, by constant repetition, that he was to have a chance to shoot out the long-enduring feud which existed between his brother and Chick Gault.

Late in the afternoon of the following day, Chinto, who had climbed to the rim of the crater, joined Gault at the entrance and announced that Dan Barthlow was ascending the gorge. Presently a shout informed the waiting pair that Dan had joined the several ranchers who had remained on guard below.

Duplicating his performance of the previous day, Gault stepped out on the shelf and informed Dan that his brother was waiting to see him.

Suspiciously, Dan demanded why Ned was not willing to show himself.

Ned's hat was thrust forward by Chinto, and Gault gave it a thrust with his foot which sent it sailing down.

"That's your brother's hat," he declared. "He wants yuh to see what the boys did to it yesterday. He ain't trustin' anybody but yuh, he says."

"All right," Dan replied resignedly. "You ought to know better than to try any tricks, Gault. These men'll make it hot for yuh, if you do."

Deliberately, he started to climb.

Gault and Chinto darted back into

the crater. At a sheltered spot already selected, the Mexican bound Gault's legs. The object of this bit of duplicity was to lead the posse members to believe that he had thus been rendered helpless by Ned Barthlow. With his final instructions, Chinto ran to the small grotto where Ned lay bound. He spoke, as he quickly removed the ropes from the sufferer's arms. Ned was still feverish; yet he was able to grasp the meaning of Chinto's instructions.

"Señor—the boss say he all ready to shoot the—the duel weeth you. You un'stan' me?"

Ned grunted in the affirmative.

"Then, you listen to me—queeck!" Chinto proceeded. "He theenk you no have any chance weeth heem, be'cose w'en you stand up, he shoot queeck, an' you not know so soon where to look for heem. But, me, I tell you—un'stan'? I no like the boss. You look straight to the open crack wheech come into thees place. Eet ees een the shadow, jus' across from here. An' w'en you see heem, you shoot queeck—before he theenk you see heem—— Un'stan'?"

Again Ned grunted.

"I put your gun here," Chinto continued, backing to the lip of the grotto and depositing the weapon. "Eet ees all een loads. He ees gone to look out, now. We'en he come een, you shoot queeck. Then you remembare your frien', Chinto—no?"

Ned, with a frenzied effort to regain the use of his benumbed limbs, squirmed weakly to a resting position on his elbow. Befuddled and dizzy, he had no time in which to reason why the Mexican should have sought to befriend him; nor why Chick Gault should seek to murder him under the preposterous guise of giving him a chance. As the dizzy throbbing left his head slightly, he crawled forward and grasped his gun. A little of his confidence returned with the familiar pressure of its stock against his palm. Un-

der normal conditions, Ned would have been willing to test the speed and accuracy of his aim with Chick Gault or with almost any of the purported gunmen.

The question flashed into his reeling brain whether Chinto had really sought to give him the advantage of Gault. But no other motive for the man's avowed friendliness occurred to him. Naturally, he had no knowledge of the fact that Dan had been sent for.

Suffering agonies of pain, he lifted himself to his knees. Still he was unable to see into the crevice directly opposite his position in the crater bowl. With a final desperate effort, he rose reeling to his feet. The sheer walls of the bowl seemed to writhe about him. He strained his gaze into the shadowed opening through which he expected his enemy to appear.

In a moment, he became convinced of a vague movement there in the semi-darkness. Steeling his jumping nerves, he waited another second. Suddenly swinging his hand upward, he fired. The crashing report of his Colt reverberated against the walls of the small crater.

The man in the shadow had fallen, or had ducked, without answering the fire. The sixth sense of the experienced marksmen informed Ned that he had not been sure of his aim. He held his gun tense. He was alert. The firing had cleared his head. From the corner of his eye, he glimpsed a stealthy movement over the ledge above the entrance. Danger flashed to him with instant intuition. His hand jerked upward and he fired with the instinctiveness of long practice. He had aimed like a flash at a face which had lifted slightly above the ledge. The glint of sunlight on metal had been his warrant. A revolver slipped over the ledge and clattered down upon the floor of the crater.

Chinto had been impatiently waiting to make certain whether Dan Barthlow

had been killed, or whether he was going to return the fire.

Suddenly it occurred to Ned that Gault had tricked him—had tried to kill him by lying concealed back of the ledge. In which case, he presumed that it had been Chinto who had attracted his firing.

"Come on outa there, an' show yuhrself—yuh sneakin' hound!" he yelled madly.

"Ne-Ned?" came a voice. "Ned! It's me—Dan——"

Ned's knees failed him suddenly. He sank to the ground with a broken moan.

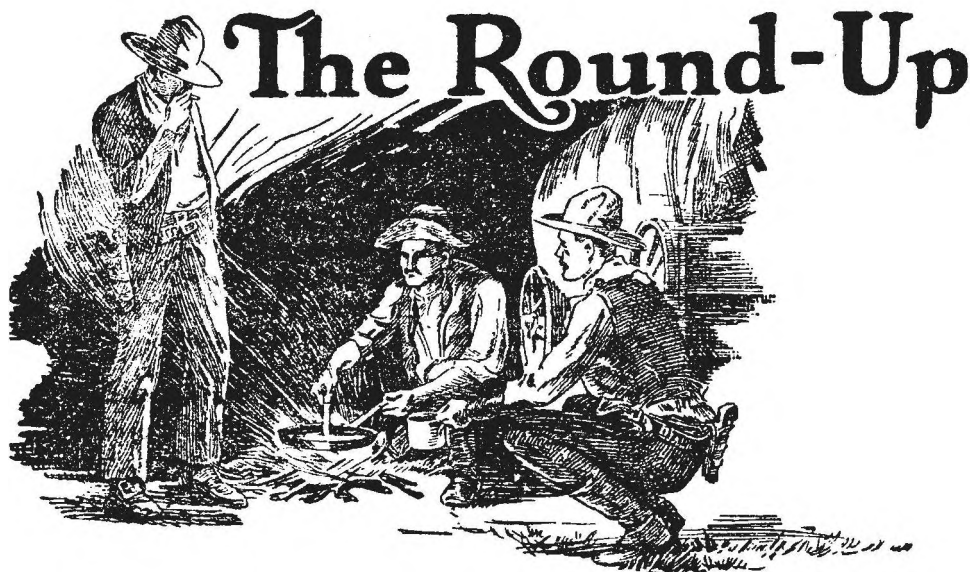
In that position Dan found him, a moment later.

It was some time before Ned was able to talk lucidly. Then in broken gasps, he told his brother what had happened. Dan began to construct an idea of the plot which had been laid to kill him. Then it flashed into his mind that the killing had been planned the other way about—or both ways. Seeing the treacherous scheme in its true light at last, it occurred to him that Chick Gault should still be hidden close by. He picked up Ned's gun, fingered it oddly, then laid it down.

After a few minutes' search, he found Chick Gault, bound and helpless, as he had been left by Chinto in order to disguise his hand in the scheme to kill Ned.

But Gault's scheme had gone askew, and as Dan gazed down at him disgustedly, he returned a glare of cowed hatred.

"Reckon yuhr little game is up, Chick," Dan remarked slowly. "Good thing you had yuhrself roped well! It'll be less trouble for us to take yuh in hand. You made uh pretty mean play, this time, Gault. But it fell through. You thought I'd do some shootin' when I got cornered—didn't yuh? That's the trouble with you gunmen. Yuh're gun-minded. You can't think outside o' six-shooters. I never carry one!"



FOLKS, comes first this evening, Henry Miller, R. F. D. 2, Box 55, Twin Lake, Michigan. Henry is going to ask a question, and we are going to do our best to answer it. Now, folks, if you don't like the way we answer Henry, or if you've got any suggestions to make, please do speak up.

Here's Henry:

"**BOSS AND FOLKS:** I am a subscriber to the **WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE**, so I don't have to tell you that I like it. I should like to get some advice, but not from those fine ladies, Spanish bit, et cetera. I have a German police dog, one year and a half old. He is a fine big fellow and I surely do love him, but he makes friends with everybody. Now I do not want a mean dog, but I'd like him to be a one-man dog. I got this dog when he was six weeks old."

Henry, you've got us on a subject that we're a little hipped on. Ever since we were little boys, our family has said that we were touched in the head when it came to dogs. You know, it has been our experience in life to discover that, when a person is especially fond of

something, others, who have not that particular enthusiasm, maintain that he is crazy about the subject. Just as when, for instance, a man becomes very much attached to a woman, they say he is crazy about her.

Now to get to your question. Certain breeds of dogs are apt to be one-man dogs. You have a dog that has that general reputation. Airdales have that reputation, too. But that doesn't mean that all police dogs are one-man dogs, or that Airdales are. Besides, your dog is only eighteen months old. Now a dog is still a pup until he is eighteen months, and it is very, very likely, indeed, that your dog will change his friendly, hail-all-fellow-men ways as he grows older, just as people do. On the other hand, he may be just that kind of dog. In many ways it is a nice trait, just as it is a nice trait in human beings to like other living things, to be pleasant, congenial with them: You will find, if you develop a one-man dog, that he will be apt to be mean with others than yourself.

We owned a one-man dog who used to sleep in the same room with us from the time that he was five or six months

old. When we were sick one time, he wouldn't let any one come in the room or even so much as touch us. Later on he got so bad that we had to send him away to a man who lived out in the country. Strangely enough, he killed this man, although he became very much attached to him. It happened in this way: The dog was kept in the yard that surrounded the house. When this man drank too much, his voice became very thick, quite different from his usual speaking tone. He came home one night, and, as he opened the gate, he spoke to the dog. The dog didn't recognize him by scent quickly enough and had him by the throat and finished, before he found out his mistake.

Of course, you can have a one-man dog which will not be fierce. We've got one now, a female Llewellyn setter. This dog never looks at anybody else but us. If we should call on you, she would lie down at our feet so she could keep an eye on every move we made. If other people speak to her or pat her, she gives them no more response than an iron dog would.

Really, we are largely inclined to feel that it is in the nature of dogs, just as it is in the nature of persons, to be one-man or otherwise. But we do know of a man who broke a dog to be a one-man dog in this way: Starting when the dog was a pup, he always carried a small switch on his walks or whenever he was in company with the dog. If he stopped to talk to any one, or if any one came to see him and started to pet the dog, he would ask him if he would mind striking the dog, not very hard, you understand. In this way the dog felt that every one was turned against him except his master. The man always fed the dog himself, and he broke him from taking food from others by getting them to hand the dog food with a dose of red pepper on it, the dog thus learning that no one but his master gave him food that was palatable. This last, in

some ways, was a great protection to the dog, in case he should ever be in danger of eating anything that was poisoned, either by design or accident. We have often wondered what will happen to that dog when his master dies. We suppose, in time, nature will conquer and he will eat.

Hope we haven't bored you with this long talk, but since you got us on a subject that we're obviously hipped on, you are lucky to have us stop so soon.

A mother, Mrs. Eva Drum, Box 842, Canyon, Texas, speaks:

"BOYS AND FOLKS: I've just finished reading my WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE—the best magazine I know—and, in reading the Missing Department, I notice there are so many mothers asking for word of their missing boys. Oh, the pity of it.

"Boys, stop a minute and look back down the road of life. Think of that little mother when she first started out, just a girl, on the untried journey of life. She knew so little of the trials and sorrows ahead, but with courage, hope, and faith, she walked by the side of her mate with one strong ambition: to build a home, and be a true wife and a wise, loving mother. When you, my boy, were laid in her arms, a tiny, helpless baby, her cup of happiness was filled to overflowing. She was never too busy to listen to your problems; she was never too tired, but that she was up and at your side, if you called. Maybe times were hard and money scarce and she had to sacrifice many things she needed in order to provide for you: but she never gave that a thought. If she could see you healthy and happy and, at night, could tuck you in bed, she felt her day had been well spent."

"Naturally, she wanted you to be honest and brave, all that a man should be, and hoped you'd be successful. If you are, there is no one so glad as she.

"But listen, son, if life has gone hard with you, if you have made mistakes, have lost courage and begun to drift, even if others have cast you out, she will be, oh, so glad to welcome you home. You may be old in experience, you may have lost faith in your friends, for, when adversity comes, friends usually go; but to your mother you are still just her boy, and the lower you go, the more she will stay by you. Or, if you are very successful and have wealth and lots of friends, you may feel that you are not in need of mother's care or attention. But be careful, my boy, for, through your neglect, you are wounding the gentlest and truest heart that ever beat for you."

And now for song. Bust out good and strong and hearty, every one of you:

FOREMAN MONROE

Come all you brave young shanty boys, and
list to while I relate
Concerning a young shanty boy and his un-
timely fate;

Concerning a young river man, so manly,
true and brave;
'Twas on a jam at Gerry's Rock he met his
watery grave;

'Twas on a Sunday morning as you will
quickly hear,
Our logs were piled up mountain high, we
could not keep them clear.

Our foreman said, "Come on, brave boys, with
hearts devoid of fear,
We'll break the jam on Gerry's Rock and
for Agonstown we'll steer."

Now, some of them were willing, while others
they were not.

All for to work on Sunday they did not think
they ought;

But six of our brave shanty boys had volun-
teered to go

And break the jam on Gerry's Rock with
their foreman, young Monroe.

They had not rolled off many logs 'til they
heard his clear voice say,

"I'd have you boys be on your guard, for
the jam will soon give way."

These words he'd scarcely spoken when the
jam did break and go,
Taking with it six of those brave boys and
their foreman, young Monroe.

Now when those other shanty boys this sad
news came to hear,

In search of their dead comrades to the river
they did steer;

Six of their mangled bodies a-floating down
did go,

While crushed and bleeding near the banks
lay the foreman, young Monroe.

They took him from his watery grave,
brushed back his raven hair;

There was a fair form among them whose
cries did rend the air;

There was a fair form among them, a girl
from Saginaw town,

Whose cries rose to the skies for her lover
who'd gone down.

Fair Clara was a noble girl, the river man's
true friend;

She and her widowed mother lived at the
river's bend;

And the wages of her own true love the boss
to her did pay,

But the shanty boys for her made up a gen-
erous sum next day.

They buried him quite decently; 'twas on the
first of May;

Come all you brave young shanty boys and
for your comrade pray.

Engraved upon the hemlock tree that by the
grave does grow

Is the aged date and the sad fate of the fore-
man, young Monroe.

Fair Clara did not long survive, her heart
broke with her grief;

And less than three months afterward Death
came to her relief;

And when the time had come and she was
called to go,

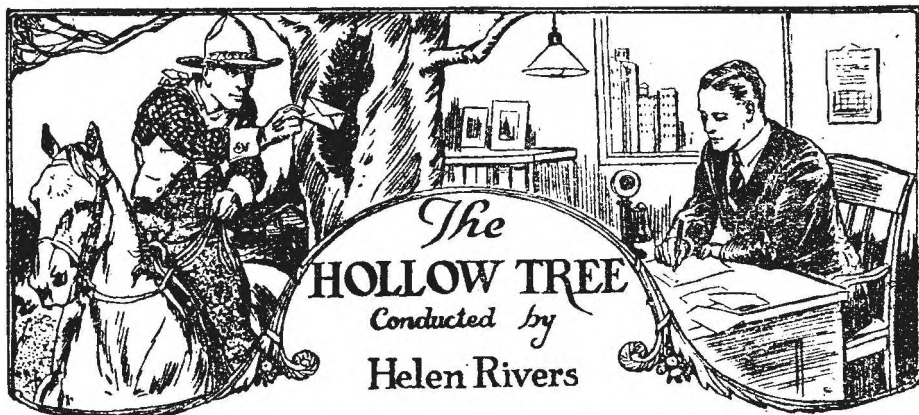
Her last request was granted, to be laid by
young Monroe.

Come all you brave shanty boys, I'd have you
call and see

Two 'green graves by the river side where
grows a hemlock tree;

The shanty boys cut off the wood where lay
those lovers low—

'Tis the handsome Clara Vernon and her true
love, Jack Monroe.



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.

WEST of the Colorado plains is the high rangeland of the Rockies. In the foothills of the Sawatch, west of the Arkansas Valley, the rangeland begins to climb. Here the Colorado cowboys ride.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Back here among the mountains of Colorado, where the sun sets between the ranch and town, is my rangeland. And it's pretty high rangeland, too, for a good deal of this section of the country runs to over eight thousand feet above sea level. Yep, this is where the foothills climb to the Sawatch Range. To the east of us is the Arkansas Valley, and the famous Park Range. And to the west and south of us are the Elk Mountains, and the Sierra San Juan.

No, folks, I haven't always stayed close to these ranges. My old fuzztail hoss and I have strayed through pretty nearly every State in the Union, and we've done some rodeo riding, too. I broke and trained fuzztail when he was three years old, and I'll say, folks, there never was a better cow pony. When we went East, we played the fairs, giving exhibitions in front of the grand stands.

Folks, if you-all are interested in a rangy cowboy, aged twenty-four, who has neither kith nor kin, just drop a letter pronto.

BUCK.

Care of The Tree.

Old-time stock man.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I used to ride the Wyoming range when I was a boy, and I'd like to hear from some of the Wyoming Gang. I think that Texas, Arizona, and Montana have the leading cattle ranges now. I've been in eastern Oregon in the stock business for the last twenty-five years, but I want to say that the cattle range in Oregon has been given over to the sheep. We run mostly sheep here in eastern Oregon now, and I believe that this is about the best climate that I know of for the sheepmen. I've been pretty much all over the Northwest, and I figure that any one who wants to go in for stock raising of that sort can't go wrong on this here range.

Now, folks, all you hombres who are interested in good stock, let me hear from you. I'm an old-time stockman, and I'd like to have a few words with you-all.

OTIS CORK.

Monument, Grant County, Oregon.

Range country.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Everybody seems to want to know where to go to find good range country. I can tell you-all where there is plenty of range country, and that is in good old Wyoming. Come to central Wyoming—Fremont and Natrona Counties—and you'll find plenty of good rangeland here.

GEORGE CLARKE.

Moneta, Wyoming.

Cow poke.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Have you ever seen a lonely cow poke on a fruit ranch? Well, it's a funny sight to see! A cowboy who's on a ranch where there are no critters—well, he's very much off his range. Yep, I'm a-hankering after a trip into the wild and windy West. Maybe there's a pard who'll hit the trail with me? A. B.

Care of The Tree.

Nova Scotia lumberjack.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a lumberjack, twenty-seven, and I've held every job that it's possible for a lumberjack to have—from road monkey to foreman. I can tell some firsthand facts about this part of the country up here. I intend to migrate in the direction of Montana some time this spring, and I'd like to hear from some of the hombres down that way. Guess I don't have to tell you folks that I'm a lover of the great outdoors, and big-game hunting.

Now, pals, let 'em roll in. I can handle 'em all. LUMBERJACK.

214 East Grand Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan.

The Saskatchewan wheat fields.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: The Gang has asked about the great Saskatchewan wheat fields—so here goes. I suppose a lot of you will ask me what I know about harvesting wheat. Nothing! And that explains why I had so much fun last fall while I put in my twelve hours of hard work every day.

The first few weeks we were "shocking" the grain, or whatever you want to call it. Anyway, it's a back-breaking job. The binders are usually drawn by four, eight, or more horses, and mow down the wheat and at the same time bind it up into fairly large shocks. Four or five men follow the binder around the field, and as the binder throws the bundles to the ground, we pick them up and put about ten or fifteen in a shock, with the butts on the ground and the heads together, so that they will shed the water when it rains. After all the fields are shocked up and the grain is ripe, then comes the real work—thrashing. We are called at four o'clock to take care of the horses. Breakfast is usually at five, and we are out in the field at six, starting the day's work. Each of us had a bundle team, and it was our job to go out in the field and load our team and drive the load to the thrashing machine. While

working in the field a number of incidents happened that I will long remember. One of them I will tell you—all.

We were out in the field, and we noticed that there was a good deal of smoke to the north. It wasn't five minutes later that a fellow came dashing over the field on horseback and said that a prairie fire had got started and that all the help that was available was asked to stop work and fight the fire. There was a very high wind, and the fire covered a strip eight miles long and four wide. Well, it was a pretty tough fight, and eight of us fellows were fighting on one section of the field when we noticed that the fire was closing in on us. We dropped everything and ran. The wind was blowing such a gale that the flames seemed to keep right up with us, and we reached the opening with about twelve feet to spare! That was the only time that I had to run for my life.

As this is my first visit to The Tree, I'll not stay too long. I'll be anxious to hear from some of you folks.

ORRIN P. BARSTOW.

58 Lyle Street, Malden, Massachusetts.



East or west of the Rockies, friendship is the same. If you are wearing a Hollow Tree badge, that means you are looking for friends.

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.

A prospecting trip into the Southwest.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I would like to prospect and trap in the Southwest for a year or more, probably starting quite soon this spring. I've decided that I would like to have a pard. I've had experience in both prospecting and trapping—we'd very likely trap for bounties. Now, folks, any one who is interested, whether experienced or not, is invited to drop a line, muy pronto. Letters from New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, or California will be appreciated a lot.

T. T. LEE.

New London, Iowa.

Would-be ranchers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: My husband and I are planning to start a cattle ranch out West. We'd like to know whether or not there is available homestead land. We want to know something about the drawbacks and the advantages of a homestead for ranching. Will some of the stockmen and homesteaders write to us?

MRS. C. J. K.

Care of The Tree.

A young nomad.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have hitch-hiked the highway as far South as El Paso. I've been on my own hook for a year and a half, and I get tired wandering around. I want to find a place to call home ranch. I'm a freckle-faced kid of sixteen years, and I want a chance to make good on a ranch somewhere in the Southwest—Texas, New Mexico, or Arizona. I've been in that part of the country twice, but I couldn't find anybody who'd give me a chance.

I can ride and can rope a little, and am always willing to learn what I don't know. If there's any of you folks down that way who's willing to give a kid a chance, let me know, and I'll come a-running.

JIMMY BUCKLEY.

552 Willis Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio.

West Texan.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am a Texan, but am planning to homestead a piece of land in New Mexico. I would like a little information, folks. Where is the best government land in New Mexico? What would it cost to file on the land, and what improvements must be made? I want the New Mexico homesteaders to speak up, please.

BERNARD L. RUDD.

Southland, Texas.

Trick riding.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a young girl, going on twenty, a native of Switzerland, where my father raised horses for the cavalry. I came to this country about four years ago, and, unfortunately, very little of my time is spent in the country, as I teach French to city children. However, I have broken a few colts for the farmers in this locality, and some day I hope to have a little log-cabin homestead somewhere in the West for myself and my mother. I can do a bit of trick riding, although I don't get very much of a chance to ride, here in the city. I can also spin a rope a little.

Now you know why I want to get acquainted with some of the ranch girls out West. I want to know a few folks who speak my language—the language of the great outdoors.

MARGUERITE LORMAR.

2785 Edgehill Road, Cleveland, Ohio.

A Westward trek.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have a grubstake that will take me West or Northwest, and I want to get onto a ranch or in the big woods somewhere and enjoy life in the open. I want a little advice as to what part of the country to head for. Will some of you Western folks help me to make a decision? Any one who is looking for a pard will find me there pronto. I am willing to do my day's work for a square and a bunk. I'm twenty-four, folks.

EUGENE NEUBECKER.

961 East Twenty-third Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Canadian Gangsters, please come forward.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have made a number of friends through the old Holla, and I am hoping to corral a few from up Canada way—British Columbia and Alberta. I intend to make my home in that part of the country in the near future, and I want to call some folks from up that way "friends."

BEN F. PAPE.

5203 South Wall Street, Los Angeles, California.

Trekking West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I'm a lonesome boy of nineteen, looking for a pal to trek the Western trails with me. I have a grubstake that will take me into the West, and a car to make the trip in. Now I want a pal, one who will enter into the spirit of the trip in a fifty-fifty manner. We will probably work our way to the coast. Pals who are interested, please write pronto, for we want to be on our way.

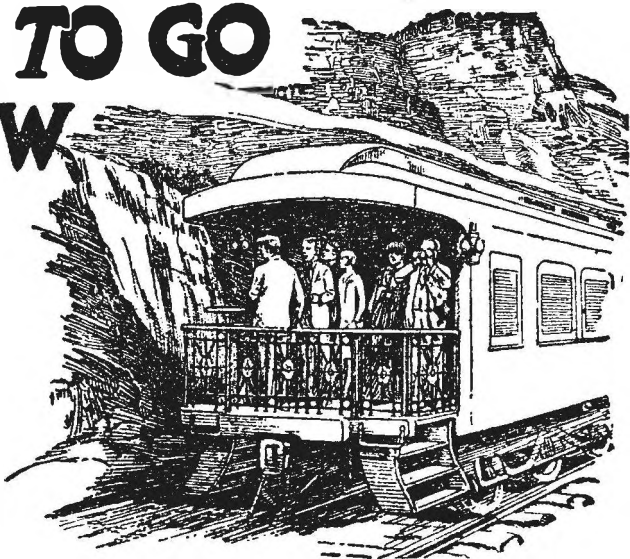
RUSSELL GENNARIA.

332 Summer Street, Royersford, Pennsylvania.

"I would like to have a full mail bag, so, hombres, start pushing the pen. You'll get a letter for a letter, and muy pronto! This Gangster is Private Lucian Blalock, Howitzer Co., Twentieth United States Infantry, Fort Benning, Georgia.

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.

A REAL Indian celebration is hard to find, as Dave G., of Washington, D. C. realizes. He writes: "I've heard some thrilling reports about an inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial which is held somewhere down in the Southwest. Can you tell me, Mr. North, just where this takes place, when, and what the program consists of as I'd like to see the redskins in some of their native dances and games? I've always been mighty interested in the Indian, but have never had a chance to see him in his native habitat, and would like to arrange my vacation so that I can take in this powwow."

Dave G. has certainly hit upon a subject for which we share his enthusiasm, and we are glad to pass on all the information in our possession on this topic. The Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial, which is held annually toward the end of the summer in Gallup, New Mexico, is one of the most fascinating events to be seen anywhere in

America. It is in a class by itself, being for, of, and by the Indian.

Gallup is in the very heart of the Indian country of the Southwest, and into this town every year the red men come to exhibit their native handicrafts, to prove their skill, to contest in sports, and to dance their tribal dances. We are willing to wager that Dave will get the thrill of his life as he views such typical native dances as the "Buffalo," "Fire," and "Bear" by the flickering glow of camp fires. It makes regular shivers run up a hombre's spine when the gallant braves, decorated with beads, skins, and feathers, sway in faultless rhythm to the throbbing beat of the log drum accompanied by strange, savage chants.

Nor is this the only exciting part of the celebration, for sports and contests also figure largely on the program. They include races on fleet Indian ponies, short and long-distance foot races, chicken pulls, stone and stick

races, and archery contests. Dave will see wild desert horses that have never worn a saddle broken in by the true horseman of the world, the American Indian. He will also marvel at the interesting exhibits of the Indian in such crafts as blanket weaving, silverware, pottery, basketry, and bead work.

We get so excited whenever we talk about this event that we never know when to stop, but we're going to call a halt right here, and send Dave an address from which he can get additional information if he wants it. Any other Indian fans who want this address can have it for the asking.

Talking about Indians reminds one naturally enough of hunting and fishing, those favorite sports of the redskins. Fred F., of Cincinnati, Ohio, is planning to settle in the Northwest, and wants to pick out a section where he will be able to indulge in these to his heart's content. "Can you tell me Mr. North," asks Fred, "whether the Yakima Valley is a favorable section for the sportsman? I'm going to trek out that way soon and would like all the information I can get. What about upland game-birds, duck shooting, and trout fishing, also please tell me about big-game hunting?"

We can tell Fred plenty about Yakima Valley. He will find there well-stocked game preserves and a range and variety of hunting not excelled in the Pacific Northwest. If he's not willing to take my word for it, we can offer as conclusive proof the fact that more than ten thousand sportsmen trek out that way every year for the privilege of shooting in that section. In the open season for hunting upland game-birds, thousands are in the field, and Yakima is a Mecca for hunters from all over. This country is well-stocked with Chinese pheasants and Hungarian partridges. Duck shooting in the valley is another of the sportsman's opportunities, for these birds are

found in great numbers along the rivers and lowlands.

If Fred is keener about the rod than the gun, he will not be disappointed in this section. Yakima streams are well stocked with fish, and the range and variety of the sport from lower river to upper valley points makes the fishing season one of the best in the Northwest. In Yakima River and its tributaries the salmon run is a feature. Here are the spawning beds of the Royal Chinook, and they return by millions. Mountain streams and lakes within easy distance from Yakima provide sport for those who enjoy taking the gamy trout. Such species as rainbow, eastern, steelheads, and silver trout flourish in this section.

Yakima Valley also offers sport for the big-game hunter, as bear and deer can be had in season in the headwaters of the upper valley streams. An elk herd planted there a few seasons ago is multiplying so rapidly that an open season for that animal is being agitated. Deer shooting at the present time is limited to one buck to a hunter.

While we're talking about the Northwest, we had better answer the query of Tom S., of Louisville, Kentucky. "I have a friend in the Puget Sound Country who wants me to spend my vacation with him on Silver Creek. Just where is this stream located, Mr. North, and how does one reach it? I'd like to know more about it before I decide to go."

Silver Creek is located north of Mount Ranier in the White River watershed, and may be reached by auto from Puget Sound. It is one of the many clear, transparent streams that sparkle into the drab and milky waters of White River, the dull color of which is due to glacial grindings on the northeast side of Mount Ranier. This stream is a mighty picturesque one, as it tumbles over the rocks in a steep little canyon surrounded by a cedar and hem-

lock grove. At the mouth of the stream between the highway and river, a forest camp has been set off where people may stop for lunch or a picnic on their way to the national park. On the benches above the roadway and out of sight, some sites for summer homes or cabins have been surveyed. The Chinook Pass Highway, now finished only to Ranier National Park from the west side, makes this region accessible from Tacoma and Seattle.

Being a good scout, we never like to finish up our department without doing a good turn for somebody. To-day we're going to satisfy this craving by publishing the letter of Bill B., of Petersburg, Virginia, who wants a little friendly cooperation on a pet scheme of his.

"I have been a reader of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE for some time and

feel that I could not get along without it," writes Bill, graciously. "Mr. North, I am an old ex-tuberculosis patient, with three brothers who were soldiers in the World War. We want to homestead land either in Arizona or California, more for our health's sake than anything else. Can you give us some information about these places? I have had some experience in camping and hunting and should like to get in touch with some one who hunts in one of the above States and wants a pard. I surely would be glad to hear from some prospective partners and will guarantee to answer all letters promptly."

Here's a chance for some of you hombres who are looking for a partner for a hunting trip. Send your letters along and we'll see that Bill gets them speedily.



FIRE FROM A HORSE'S HOOF

EVEN the horse, it develops, is a source of danger to heavily forested areas. In California, for instance, more than two thousand acres of forest land were recently swept by fire, the blaze having been started by sparks from a horse's hoofs. It is said that other blazes have had their origin in this manner, although there is no verified record of them.

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE OF WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

The Trail to Manhood

By MAX BRAND

"The West ain't dead, and it ain't never gunna die, and I could tell you why, too," said the old-timer. But it's your favorite writer, Max Brand, who tells it, after all.

The One Man Lode

By KENNETH PERKINS

Since the previous day the population of Old Paint had grown from seventy-five to five hundred. The reason? Gold!

Peg Leg Shelves the Horsewhip

By F. R. BUCKLEY

Mr. Peg Leg Garfield is still able to take care of himself, thank you.

Also Features by

ROBERT HORTON
KENNETH GILBERT

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE
And others

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 till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that these persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

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," at others, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

MONTGOMERY, E. LYNN.—Five feet, six inches tall, dark hair, and blue eyes. Weighs about one hundred and twenty pounds. When last heard from, in May, 1928, was training race horses at Ozone Park, Long Island, New York. Information appreciated by his brother, R. P. Montgomery, Fort Sumner, New Mexico.

W. S. G.—Cannot understand why my letter to your Mansfield address was not answered. Please write to T., care of this magazine.

BENDER, MYRTLE.—Last known address was, in 1921, 719 North Third Street, Martinsburg, West Virginia. Last heard from in Ohio. Please write to Friend, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, JEAN.—Very important. Please write to K. L. S., care of this magazine.

LARRY.—Everything is O. K. here. If working, please send address. If not, come home. Want to hear from you. Alice, care of this magazine.

WATERS, HARRY.—Last heard from in Grant, New Mexico. Please write to John Hicklin, Mountain View, Arkansas.

HASTINGS, GLADYS.—Twenty years old. Last heard from in Houston, Texas. Please write to Annie Hicklin, Mountain View, Arkansas.

HICKLIN or BENT.—My great-grandfather was territorial governor of New Mexico. My grandmother was his only child. She was last heard of in Trinidad, Colorado. My grandfather Bent was killed by Indians. Information concerning the descendants of these people appreciated by John L. Hicklin, Rushing, Arkansas.

WATSON, ARCH.—Last heard from in Beggs, Oklahoma, May 1, 1928. Jimmie wants your address. No one else will know it. Please write to E. A. Hicks, 1705 Cavalry Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

ROY W., or TOFFEY.—Please let me know where you are. If you do not want S. to know I will not tell. Am worried. Please write to your mother, Mrs. R. R., care of this magazine.

NEWMAN, LUTHER CLAYTON.—Eighteen years old. Dark hair and eyes and weighed one hundred and sixty pounds when he left home July 24, 1926. Last heard from in Millans, North Carolina, where he was working for a road contractor by the name of W. G. Landon. Believed to have gone to Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Please write to your worried and heartbroken mother, Mrs. W. T. Newman, R. F. C. 85, Eatonton, Georgia.

LANG, ALICE CARLETON.—Last heard from in Waltham, Massachusetts, where she was employed by a watch company. In 1910-11. She had one daughter. Information appreciated by her friend, C. B. F., care of this magazine.

SHORE, FLORENCE.—Last heard from in 1925, when she was living at Shawnee, Ohio. Please write to your old friend George, care of this magazine.

TRUGLIAN, LEONA and JACK.—Lost your last address. Mail returned from Mason. Please write to Lois V., care Hotel Beebe, Elmira, New York.

KELLY, WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Los Angeles, California, about two years ago. Would like to hear from you. Tom, Daisy and Wilhelmina Reeves, 219 West One Hundred and Twentieth Street, New York City.

LEIGHTON, GERALD.—Twenty-nine years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, gray eyes, auburn hair and has a scar on his cheek. He was with Brown & Dyer Shows in 1925. Last heard from in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1927. Information appreciated by his sister, J. Lois Leighton, 438 South Union Drive, Los Angeles, California.

FEATHERBY, GUY ELMER.—Fifty-six years old. Blond. Letters G. E. F. tattooed on forearm. Last heard from in Butte, Montana, in 1923. Information concerning him, dead or alive, appreciated by his sister, Winnie Elliot, 522 Valley Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

FRANK.—Jack has forgiven all. Am anxious to hear from you. Please write to Mother, "Chatsworth," West Seventy-second Street, New York City.

MAYS, CHARLES J..—Please write to Sis H., 236½ South Idaho Street, Butte, Montana.

HALL, A. F., JR..—His mother, who has been under a doctor's treatment for over a year, would like to see or hear from him. Nelson lives in Ocala, Florida. Much has happened since you left. Mother, care of this magazine.

HAINES, SAMUEL ENOCH.—Information concerning his location or his address appreciated by Haines Art Service, Box 241, Greenfield, Ohio.

FORSBERRY, HARRY and JAMES.—Left England for America. Last heard from when living on Ocean Avenue, Brooklyn, New York. A son of their brother Joseph would like to correspond with them. James Forsberry, 78 Millgate, Newark, Noh, England.

WRIGHT, JOE.—Five feet, four inches tall, brown eyes, gray hair and dark complexion. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Allie Nix, Enid, Oklahoma.

HALL, VICTOR E..—Please write to Evelyn, care of this magazine.

HAMPTON, GEORGE.—Disappeared in 1915. Important. Would like to hear from him. George Baker, 30 Prince Street, Manchester, New Hampshire.

EDWARD, T..—Am loyal. Please write to Mother, 230 West Center Street, Fayetteville, Arkansas.

ELLERY, TUCK.—Can't forget you or forgive myself. My heart has always been yours. Please write to L. R., Oakland, California.

JULIAN, M..—My father. Last heard from in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1922. Has relatives in Newark, New Jersey. Was separated from my mother twenty years ago. I was born in Philadelphia, December, 1806. Information appreciated by George F. Julian, 2508 South Watts Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

GALLAGHER, PETE.—Was a landscape gardener in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Please write to your friend, Norman Whitehouse, Hotel Lafayette, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

GILLILAND, HARRINGTON.—Sad news about brother Charlie and Tom. Am alone, but own my home. Important that you write to your mother, Frances Redman, 129 South Klamath Street, Denver, Colorado.

JACK.—Am worried. Please write to Myrtle M., 412 Monson Street, Peoria, Illinois.

H. T. S..—Born on Friday, September 12, 1901. Five feet, ten inches tall, medium-brown curly hair, and blue-gray eyes. Very important. Please write to hertha, care of this magazine.

DECKER, MRS. VIOLA.—Lived in one of the big saw-mill towns in the State of Wisconsin. Information appreciated by C., care of this magazine.

WRIGHT, WALTER LEE.—Son of Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Wright. Left home about twenty-one years ago. Parents are anxious to have you come home or write. Information appreciated by a friend of your parents, Mrs. H. B. Hamilton, R. B. 3, Fort Madison, Iowa.

ARTHUR.—When do we lift the propeller for Honolulu? Would like to see you. Watching for a message. Pauline, care of this magazine.

VAN TAUSK, GEOFFREY VICTOR.—Born in New Zealand. Formerly a British army officer and latterly a high-school instructor. Last heard from in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Information appreciated by his old friend and pal, A. B. Ward, Box 183, Williamson, Iowa.

WILHELMS, RACHEL.—Lived with us at one time and left to go to Fort Towson, Oklahoma. Am married now and have three children. Please write to your friend, Mrs. Ida Harris Gerry, South Route, Ralls, Texas.

DICKIE.—Everything is O. K. I love you and miss you. Mother, dad and I worried. Please come home or write to your wife, Jane, care of this magazine.

DAWSON, BENNIE.—Last heard from in Washington, Utah, in January, 1928. Nora wants you. Please write to F. C. M., 291 North Water Street, Idaho Falls, Idaho.

ALLEN, JESSE E.—A railroad worker. Last heard from in Tucson, Arizona, in 1924. May have gone to Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by Florence M. Moore, Box 64, Lakeside, Washington.

FRANK, DAVID.—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Am worried. Both babies are well. Little Helen calls for her daddy. Please come home, for you and my babies are all I have and love. Your wife, Mrs. David Frank, care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, HAROLD.—Have been thinking about you all this time. Am more broad-minded now. Have moved, since you took the trip, from Rockford to Chicago. Please write to Bertha, care of this magazine.

SWARTY, BRYON WILBER or SAMMY.—Mother would like to see you or hear from you. Mrs. Phillis Swarty, Box 120, Jacksonville, Oregon.

MAK or MARS, BILLY.—Left St. Louis in spring of 1928, en route to Texas. Has two fingers and thumb off of right hand. A mechanic. Mother worried. Ruth and I would like to see you. Please write to Dottie, Box 882, Abilene, Texas.

WINDERS, MRS. FRANK L. or BURT.—Last heard from when living in a suburb of Chicago. Important that we know your address, on account of Mother Mack. Information appreciated by Dottie, Box 882, Abilene, Texas.

CLOUGH, EDWARD.—About twenty-three years old. Last heard from in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in Franklin County Hospital, eight years ago. Please write to your friend, who was only ten years old at that time. Dorothy Leighton, R. F. D. 2, Washington, Massachusetts.

McKENZIE, JOHN A., WILLIAM B., and HERBERT D.—Thirty, twenty-four and twenty-two years old, respectively. Last heard from in the vicinity of New York or New Jersey. Information appreciated by their mother, Mrs. Annie McKenzie, 26 Darlington Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts.

BANTA, WILLIS EDGAR.—About thirty-two years old. Son of John and Lilly Banta, who separated. Believed to be in California. Your half sister, who is now twenty-six years old, and whom you have never seen, is anxious to hear from you, as she has news concerning your father and younger sister. Please write to Mrs. Sharkey Banta Slack, Box 126, Bonanza, Oregon.

ANDERSON, ALFRED JOSEPH.—Dark complexion, five feet, six inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. A logging engineer and a tugboat skipper. Last heard from in Seattle, Washington, in the spring of 1928. Information appreciated by Leonard Dimock, R. R. 1, Box 107, Cashmere, Washington.

SMITH, EDWARD BURGE.—Twenty-eight years old. Blue eyes, brown hair, and weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Was at one time in the navy. Last heard from in Philadelphia, in June, 1928. Please write to your mother, Lilly Smith, Box 215, Portland, Arkansas.

PETERSON, JOHNNIE.—Irish. Last heard from in Butte, Montana. Please write to your sister, Olive Elizabeth Peterson, 831 Cayuga Street, Iron River, Michigan.

HAUTHORN, FRANK.—Last known address was King Jack Hotel, Treacy, Kansas. Please write to Roy Linam, Box 2, Lansing, Kansas.

JONES, RUSH W.—Last heard from in Nashville, Tennessee, in April, 1928. Was then working with C. M. Woody. At one time worked with Professor D. E. Williamson, at Houston, Texas. Information appreciated by his sister, Susie Stokes, Route 2, Marshall, Texas.

PARKER, SLIM.—Formerly employed at the Lazy L Ranch, Homestead, Oklahoma. Would like to know where Jesse is. Please write to L. R., care of this magazine.

WHEELER, JESSE.—Formerly employed at the Double Bar Ranch, Homestead, Oklahoma. Do you remember the girl who wrote to you in B. Ohio? Sorry I did not answer your last letter. Please write to L. R., care of this magazine.

MILLS, MRS. CHARLES, nee RUBY SMITH.—Formerly of Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee. Had a brother, Raymond. Information appreciated by Mrs. E. J. B., care of this magazine.

HAMMACK, STEVE, SAM and JOHN.—Please write to your sister, A., care of this magazine.

MANNING, K. F. O.—Please get in touch with your wife and children at once. They need you. No one knows that I am doing this. Address, Sister, care of this magazine.

MATTISON, AL and ROWLAND.—Al was in Los Angeles, California, when last heard from. Rowland was on the U. S. S. "Denver," at San Francisco, but has since been discharged. They are believed to be in Kansas. Information appreciated by their father, Art L. Mattison, 2405 Bryan Street, Dallas, Texas.

CROW, KATHERINE.—Last heard from in 1892, at Iron Mountain, Michigan. Information appreciated by her nephew, J. Hayes, 710 West Seventeenth Street, Los Angeles, California.

ACKERMAN, LEONARD.—Remember Marshfield? Last heard from in 1917, when he was leaving Antigo, Wisconsin, for St. Albans, Vermont. Please write to your old pal, Charles Martin, Box 183, Stanton, Michigan.

ALTRINGER, LOUIS.—Formerly of Aurora, Illinois. Last heard from in Scooby, Montana. Information appreciated by Brother, care of this magazine.

SIBOLE, ROY L.—Received your letter from St. Louis, in March, 1928. I answered at once, but my letter was returned. Am still single. Please write to Ora, care of this magazine.

BRADDOCK, CHARLES, and wife, FLORENCE, and daughter, MABEL.—Do you remember Iola, from Auburn, Maine? It will be safe to write to Iola P. Burton, Bingham, Maine.

G. P. J. or G. P. G.—I have the papers we always wanted. Came back, but couldn't find you. Have been looking for you ever since. Please write to A. G. G., care of this magazine.

GRISWOLD, EARL.—Formerly of Montana. Worked for the R. Lazy S Ranch, Jackson, Wyoming. Information appreciated by a relative, C. B., care of this magazine.

BROWN, OTIS.—Thirty-five years old. Worked for A. C. Sairdage, in Indianapolis, Indiana, during the spring and summer of 1920, with "Bomine" and Chester got a tool maker. Information appreciated by Box 163, Colfax, Illinois.

LEWIS, ANTHONY.—Born at Ottumwa, Iowa, on July 14, 1902. Last heard from at Glenwood, Iowa, in 1922. Father is ill and we all want to see you. Please come home or write to your sister, Mrs. Frank Miller, Route 1, Perry, Kansas.

HOWARD, HARRY.—Have good news for you. Please write to the same address, or to Lillian, care of this magazine.

WOLCOTT, PAYNE.—Formerly of Deerfield, Illinois. Last heard from in Biloxi, Mississippi. Information appreciated by E. B., care of this magazine.

KEESTER, DELLA.—Forty-eight years old. Formerly of Newport, Virginia. Information appreciated by J. H. R., care of this magazine.

OLIVER, ROBERT.—Left West Virginia nineteen years ago. Last heard from in South Dakota. Information appreciated by Guy Cooper, Box 128, Salem, Ohio.

GUM, JOE.—Last heard from in Kentucky. Information appreciated by his nephew, Guy Cooper, Box 128, Salem, Ohio.

WILKIE, M. H.—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, six inches tall, dark hair and weighs about one hundred and fifty-five pounds. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. J. R. Wilkie, Box 188, Orillia, Ontario, Canada.

BRANDT, PAUL E.—Five feet, eight inches tall, brown curly hair and gray eyes. Weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds. Left Nokomis, Saskatchewan, in 1912. Last heard from in Washington, D. C., in 1914. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Julius Felske, Simpson, Saskatchewan, Canada.

OLIVER, ELL.—Left Paducah, Kentucky, in 1920. Please write to your brother, Clyde Oliver, Sesser, Illinois.

LEE, JACK and HENRY KERMAN.—Have important news for you. Am sick and worried. Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

THOMPSON, CLIFFORD, or VERNE OTT.—Care enough for you. Please forgive me. Will come to you if you want me. Please write to your friend, Madonna Bluff, care of this magazine.

ALLEN, B. B.—Formerly of Hartford, Connecticut. What has happened to you? My last letter was returned unclaimed. I have good news for you. I am in Pennsylvania, you know the address. Or please write to Mabel and Boots of Hartford, care of this magazine.

McCLAIN, JERRY.—Last heard from in Washington, some years ago. Information concerning him, dead or alive, appreciated by his nephew, Thomas M. McClair, Box 365, Eau Claire, Michigan.

SMITH, CHARLES F.—Please write to H. R. Russell, Hartley, Texas.

GEORGE and HENRY.—Important. Will be confidential if you wish. Please write at once to Elma, 1521 O., Sacramento, California.

KALBLINGER, NETTIE BELL.—I never forgot you. Love you still. Please forget the past, and write to Will, care of this magazine.

TURNER, BRYAN D.—My letters to Florence returned. Wire your address at once to Mario, South Dakota.

DOHERTY, EDWARD.—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, ten inches tall, blue eyes, dark-brown hair and weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Please write to your sister, Mary, 908 Third Street, La Grand, Oregon.

DOBBIN, WALTER.—Was sergeant at Fort D. H. Russell, Cheyenne, Wyoming. Information appreciated by W. W., Box 113, Cokeville, Wyoming.

SPEARS, WILL.—Worked on the railroad in California. Married Nettie Dobbin or Crougham. She died in Arizona in 1922. Information appreciated by W. W., Box 113, Cokeville, Wyoming.

IRWIN or IRVING, JAMES WILLIAM.—Spanish-American War veteran. Married Mary Zoeller, November, 1898. Information appreciated by M. J. Irwin, 34 Railroad Avenue, Babylon, Long Island, New York.

BEZWODA, HARRY MILLER.—Your mother and your cousin, Charles Wehnmann, would like to hear from you. Please write to Mother, care of Mrs. C. Risley, Old Forge, New York.

LENDERMAN, ROY.—Last heard from in Phoenix, Oregon. Information appreciated by N., care of this magazine.

FULLER, J. F.—Forty years old. Dark hair, left eye missing, scar on right cheek, and weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Last heard from in Eastland, Texas, March, 1928. Information appreciated by his wife, Mrs. J. F. Fuller, R. R. 1, Roby, Texas.

FAZENDO, JACKIE, or ENGLISH MIKE.—Please write to your pal, C. M. Doubleday, S. S. "Maine," care of Marine Department, Room 810, 39 Cortlandt Street, New York City.

EGAN, JAMES.—Lived at one time on Bedford Street, New York City. Last heard from in Wichita, Kansas. Please write to your cousin, Jean Egan McCarthy, 6827 111st Terrace, Brooklyn, New York.

LEWALLEN, MAGGIE.—Father's name was Jim Lewallen and mother's name was Martha. She was born in Madison County, Arkansas, and last heard from in Oregon. Information appreciated by her niece, Mrs. Lula Jordan, Gilbert, Arizona.

PRESSON, "WOLF."—Last heard from in Rockford, Indiana. Everything forgotten. Please write to Grace, 1908 Austin Street, Apartment 2, Houston, Texas.

HUTCHINSON.—Information concerning any relatives of Hamilton, Lincoln, or John Hutchinson, appreciated by Mrs. H. E. Nodine, Denver, Colorado.

ALLEN, LUTHER B.—Left Antelope, Oregon, for Portland, Oregon, in 1913. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. H. E. Nodine, Denver, Colorado.

NODINE, STELLA JEANNETTE.—Twenty-four years old. Was adopted from the State Home in Denver, Colorado, about 1911. Information appreciated by her brother, H. E. Nodine, Denver, Colorado.

NODINE, GEORGE.—Sixty years old. Six feet, three inches tall, dark complexion, and weighed about two hundred pounds. Left Denver in 1916. Last heard from in Bakersfield, California. Information appreciated by his son, H. E. Nodine, Denver, Colorado.

WOLFE, HENRY.—Married Gertrude Major about nineteen years ago. When last heard from was working on a railroad near Ballhart, Texas. Information appreciated by his daughter, Vivian Cornett, 1615 Dillman Street, Los Angeles, California.

CANUTE or WEST, IVY.—Left Hamilton, Ontario, in 1927. When last heard from was working in Buffalo, New York. Information appreciated by her husband, Turnbull Canute, 309 Hunter Street, West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

LEE, GLADYS.—Last heard from in Glacier Park and Kellsell, Montana. Information appreciated by R. L. E., care of this magazine.

O'BRIAN, JOSEPH.—A World War veteran. Formerly of 19 Wayne Street, Providence, Rhode Island. Please write to an old friend, M. H., care of this magazine.

DOC.—I received your letter and answered R. My letter was returned. Please write to C. H., 3 Park Place, Cincinnati, Ohio.

COX, JOE and WILL.—Left Duncan, Oklahoma, eighteen years ago. Mother died in 1919. Please write to your half brother, George Cox, Cordell, Oklahoma.

GIDSON, FRANK.—No. 3039962, C. E. F., 4th Infantry. Was born in Plyden, Sussex, England, August 19, 1896. Last known address was, in October, 1926, 816 San Pedro Street, Los Angeles, California. Important news. Please write to your brother, Samuel, care of this magazine.

WHARTON, HERBERT L.—Served two years at Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii, on the R. 8, with Jean Harland. I have good news for you. Please write to Mrs. Earl Applegate, 6037 Olive Avenue, North Long Beach, California.

COLLINS, WALTER.—Forty years old. An electrician. Last heard from in New York City. Information appreciated by an old friend, Jimmie Downes, 3970 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, California.

DOWNES, JACK.—Had two brothers, Lawrence and James. Last heard from in Providence, Rhode Island, where his father lived until a few years ago. Mother's maiden name was Winifred Glynn. Information appreciated by Jimmie Downes, 3970 South Figueroa Street, Los Angeles, California.

BRADLEY, JIMMIE.—Last heard from in Novar, Ontario, fifteen years ago. Please write to your Aunt, care of this magazine.

KINKAID, THOMAS W.—Twenty-seven years old. Last heard from at St. Maries, Idaho, in July, 1928. Information appreciated by his mother, Ida M. Kinkaid, Box 85, Geyser, Montana.

HICKEY, ANN.—Visited Limerick, Ireland, accompanied by her nephew, over forty years ago. Last heard from in Texas. Information appreciated by J. O'C., care of this magazine.

TROY, PATRICK, and sister, NORA.—Born in Newport, Limerick, Ireland. Last heard from in Texas. Information appreciated by J. O'C., care of this magazine.

PIERCE, R. D.—Dad is getting old and wants to see you. Please write to Mrs. B. C. Peterson, 1719 Brainard Street, Portland, Oregon.

PERRY, WILLIAM TURNER.—Last heard from in Missouri, about forty years ago. Please write to D., care of this magazine.

SAVAGE, ODAS and ALMA.—Lived in El Centro and Bradley, California. Last heard from in New Mexico. Information appreciated by Nora McGuigan, 400 North Marguerita Street, Alhambra, California.

GASSER.—My father's name was John Jacob Gasser and he was born in Switzerland. Information concerning his relatives appreciated by Mrs. Roy Joeffer, Sunburst, Montana.

SHECK, THOMAS.—Last seen in July, 1919. Please write to your son, Carl Sheck, "A" Troop, 7th Cavalry, Fort Bliss, Texas.

GIBERSON, MARIE.—Twenty-two years old. Last heard from in Alloway, New Jersey. Believed to be in Philadelphia. Information appreciated by Cyrus Land, Sw. Company, 27th Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

HEMENANY, ALBERT.—Last heard from on the U. S. S. "Maryland." Information appreciated by his brother, Ben, care of this magazine.

BROWN, VILLO F. or JACK CLARK.—Last seen in October, 1912. Your mother is very anxious to hear from you. Please write to Mrs. Anna Brown McGrath, 533 Broadway, St. Paul, Minnesota.

COPELAND, JACK.—Once a member of the French & Roucher Shows. Last heard from in Portland. Please write to Rena, same address, or care of this magazine.

McGOWAN, HAROLD.—Everything O. K. Please write to mother, she has good news for you. F. M. O., care of this magazine.

THOMAS, JAMES K.—Last heard from in Washington, ten years ago. Please write to your sister, Mrs. George M. Smith, Route 4, Box 27, Morgantown, West Virginia.

BUNKER, EARL, WILLIAM, MARSHAL, HARRY SHULER and CLARK RUBY.—Please write to your old friend Dick, U. S. I. S. Border Patrol, Westby, Montana.

ZOLLINGER, AGNES.—Have something very important to ask you. Please write to P. B. Hawkins, 902 Park Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

CAYOWETTE, PHILIP.—Thirty-two years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, and has brown eyes. Was in the navy hospital at Boston, Massachusetts. Mother very anxious to hear from him. Information appreciated by Mrs. Albertine Belanger, 559 Bridge Street, Holyoke, Massachusetts.

McBURNEY, SAMUEL.—Was a steel worker in Warren, Ohio. Made a trip through Illinois in 1921. Please write to Puddle Jumper, care of this magazine.

WEINKAUF, RUDOLPH G. C., and ADAM W. P.—Last heard from in Lewistown, Montana. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Bruce S. Phillips, Box 126, Snoqualmie Falls, Washington.

EDWARDS, B. J.—Please write to Johnnie, care of this magazine.

BIAGGIO, NICCOLO.—Twenty-one years old. Five feet, eight inches tall, black hair and brown eyes. Formerly of Jersey City, New Jersey. Last heard from with the 25th Bombing Squadron, France Field, Canal Zone, Panama. Information appreciated by a friend, J. A. Pentz, 418 McKinney Avenue, Houston, Texas.

TULLER, ALBERT P.—Last heard from in Virginia, in 1925. Please write to C. W. Sherwood, 23 Bromley Avenue, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada.

*... and so to bed ... late ... too much supper ... wish
I could get to sleep ... bad dreams ... business worries ...
dog barks ... baby cries ... time to get up ... jangled nerves
... irritable skin.*

—then is the time your skin
needs the comfort of a fresh Gillette Blade



THE NEW FIFTY-BOX

Fifty fresh double-edged Gillette Blades (10 Packets of five) in a colorful chest that will serve you afterward as a sturdy button box, cigarette box or jewel case... Ideal as a gift, too. Five dollars at your dealer's.

THERE are mornings when a fresh Gillette Blade is better than any pick-me-up you can name.

And there are mornings when your beard is as tough and blue as your state of mind; when the hot water faucet runs cold and your shaving cream is

down to the last squeeze and you scarcely have time to lather anyway; mornings when all the cards seem stacked against your Gillette. But slip in a fresh blade. Enjoy the same smooth, clean shave that you get on the finest morning.

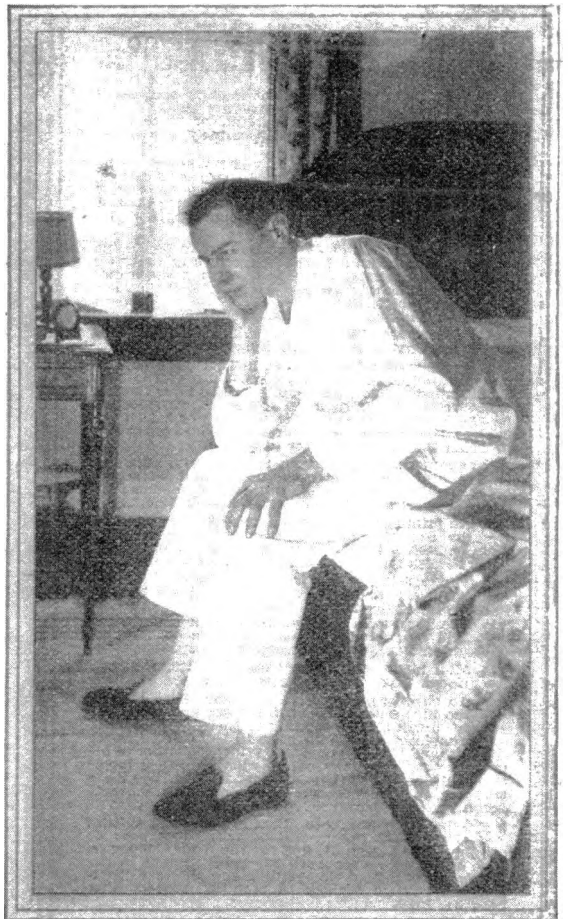
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EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY *Announces*

\$30,000

Read these simple conditions:

1 Any resident of the United States and its dependencies or any resident of the Dominion of Canada is eligible, excepting individuals and families of individuals engaged, either directly or indirectly, in the manufacture, sale, commercial finishing or professional use of photographic goods. This contest is strictly for the amateur. Contest starts March 1, closes May 31, 1929.

2 Any Kodak, Brownie, Hawk-Eye, or other camera producing negatives not larger than $3\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (postcard size) and any brand of film, chemicals and papers may be used in making pictures for this contest. A contestant need not own the camera. The finishing, of course, may be done by his dealer.

3 Both ordinary contact prints, and enlargements not to exceed 7 inches in the long dimension, are eligible; but,

4 In the Special Enlargement Competition, prints having a long dimension of not less than 9 inches or more than 17 inches are eligible. Entries in the Enlargement Competition are eligible for Special Enlargement Prizes only.

5 Prints shall be unmounted, but an entry blank shall be enclosed. Use the accompanying blank, obtain others from dealers; copy the form, or write Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

6 An entrant may submit as many pictures as he pleases and at as many different times as he pleases, provided that the pictures have been made on or after March 1, 1929, and that they reach the Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., by the specified closing date.

7 Entries in the Child Picture Contest to be eligible for the March award shall be received at the Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y., by midnight of March 31, 1929; and for the April award by midnight of April 30, 1929. The child in the picture shall not have passed the twelfth birthday.

8 A picture that is to be considered in the Child Picture Contest must be so designated on the back.

In the case of other pictures, however, the entrant need not, unless he wishes to, specify into which of the classifications his pictures should go. The Prize Contest Office reserves the right to change a classification for the benefit of the entrant. If not classified on the back by the entrant, the pictures will go into the classes in which they are most likely to win.

9 Each prize-winning picture, together with the negative, and the rights to the use thereof for advertising, publication, or exhibition in any manner, becomes the property of the Eastman Kodak Company.

10 No prints can be returned, except that will be returned upon request. All mailings are at owner's risk. Do not send negatives until they are requested.

11 The decision of the judges will be final. In the event of a tie, the advertised award will be paid to each of the tying contestants.

12 All pictures will be judged 50% on subject interest; 25% on composition and arrangement; 25% on photographic excellence (correctness of exposure, etc.).

13 Mail pictures to Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

14 An entrant may receive only one prize. In case the judges select any entrant for more than one award, he will receive the largest thereof. If he wins, for example, a \$100 state prize in the Child Picture Contest, and if either the same print or another of his prints in the General Contest wins an award larger than \$100, he will receive the larger amount. The Eastman Kodak Company will consider the purchase of desirable pictures even though not prize winners.

15 Winners of the state prizes in the Child Picture Contest for March will be notified as soon as possible after March 31, and for the April Contest as soon as possible after April 30, 1929; winners in the Special Enlargement Competition and all other classifications will be notified as soon as possible after May 31, 1929.

Grand Prize \$2,500 . . . 11 Prizes of \$500 each . . . 11 Prizes of \$250 each . . . 125 Prizes of \$100 each . . . 1,223 Money Prizes in All . . . for snapshots, time-exposures, enlargements . . . only strictly amateur photographers may compete . . . Every picture-taker has an equal chance to win!



THIS is a contest for everyone. It is easy to enter—and there are 1,223 money prizes. Perhaps you have not taken more than a half-dozen pictures in all your life—you may never before have held a camera in your hands—yet your entry may please the judges most. And regardless of the make of camera you use—from an inexpensive Kodak, Brownie or Hawk-Eye on up to a camera of the costliest kind—your chance to win is just as good.

This prize money will not be awarded for technical skill alone. You do not need to be an experienced picture maker to win. The bulk of this \$30,000 will go to those who send in the most interesting pictures in each of 10 different classifications. Now is the time to get your camera into action. The opportunity to win a cash prize of anywhere from \$2,500 down is knocking at your door.

Here is the way in which the \$30,000 prize money is to be distributed. You may enter for each and all of the classes. Send in as many entries as you like. The more pictures you submit in this contest the better is your chance of being numbered among the 1,223 fortunate ones to win.

GRAND PRIZE—For the Best Picture of Any Type—The best picture of all of those submitted in the following classifications will be awarded a grand prize of \$2,500.

STATE PRIZES—For Child and Baby Pictures—\$11,400 will be awarded for the pictures showing the most interesting children . . . in both March and April \$100 will be given for the best child picture from each state of the United States and each province of Canada,* making 114 prizes in all.

*District of Columbia counts as one state; Hawaii, Alaska, and all other U. S. dependencies combined count as one state; the Maritime provinces of Canada count as one province. British Columbia and the Yukon count as one province.

Snap as many youngsters as you want, from babies to boys and girls who are beginning to think of themselves as young men and women. Maybe there's a baby right in your own family that could help you win first prize by a big margin. Not necessarily a beautiful child, but one with personality, character, "IT"—in eyes and smile and dimples. Maybe there's such a youngster next door, or next street, but no matter whose baby it is, get the kind of picture that shows it at its best.

Every picture of children that you submit stands a chance of winning the Grand Prize; or any of the 103 prizes in each of four other awards. And even if you don't come in for a share of the prize money, you will, at least, have made an attractive picture to add to your collection. With a little patience, however, you can almost surely get a picture good enough to win. A striking

the Largest Prize Contest in Photographic History in Cash Awards for Amateur Picture-Takers Only

close-up of a boy or girl; a group at play; youngsters laughing, sleeping; in every-day clothes, rompers, overalls or fancy costume. Anything goes as long as it is a picture of children, and if it has the least spark of interest in it, don't fail to send it in. What looks to you like a "flop" may look like a "wow" to the judges.

This award gives you 106 chances to win: (1) You can enter the March contest for the best child picture from each state, (2) You can enter the April contest for the best child picture from each state, (3) The pictures that you have entered for the state contest during either of these months and pictures that reach Rochester during May are all eligible for the Grand Prize of \$2,500 or for any of the one hundred three prizes in Awards No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, or No. 10.

AWARD NO. 1—Scenics—For the best picture of any city or country outdoor scene . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each. Here's your chance to capitalize your ability to spot an interesting outdoor subject. Landscapes and marines, distant and nearby views, mountains and water, nearby bits of nature composition, travel subjects and street scenes.

AWARD NO. 2—Informal Portraits—Pictures made at from, say two to ten feet distance, for the purpose of showing a person's features . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 3—Story-Telling Pictures—For the pictures telling the most interesting story . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

Take a picture in which children, adults or animals do something—anything except looking at the camera. For instance, a puppy pulling at a baby's sleeve; children in any form of play; father proudly exhibiting the new car to a friend. There are any number of opportunities for you to take pictures like these.

AWARD NO. 4—Sport Pictures—For the best pictures of sports and games . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each. It may be skating or coasting or skiing—or baseball, tennis, golf. Hiking, too . . . and boating, archery, polo riding—all serve as opportunities to make prize winning pictures.

AWARD NO. 5—Animal Pictures—For the best pictures of pets, live stock, wild animals either at large or in zoos . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 6—Nature Study Pictures—For the best pictures of flowers, birds, butterflies, leaves, rocks, spiderwebs, any nature subject . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 7—Buildings and Architectural Detail—For the best exteriors of homes, churches, schools, offices, libraries, other buildings, or portions thereof . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 8—Interior Pictures—For the best inside views of rooms, corridors, staircases, or other portions of homes or other buildings . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 9—Still Life Studies—For the best pictures of art objects, curios, cut flowers, any still-life subjects in artistic arrangement . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

AWARD NO. 10—Unusual Photographs—For the best pictures made at night; pictures of fires, lightning, storms, silhouettes; or any pictures that are unusual either as to topic or as to photographic

treatment . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 each and 75 prizes of \$5 each.

Special Prizes for Enlargements—\$1,350—Any picture is a better picture when enlarged. For the best enlargements from negatives made on or after March 1, 1929 . . . a first prize of \$500; a second of \$250; a third of \$100; 25 prizes of \$10 and 50 prizes of \$5 each. Your film dealer or photo-finisher will be glad to help you choose a picture likely to win. (See Conditions Nos. 2 and 4.)

Each of these big cash prizes will have to be won by somebody . . . why not you! Aim at the big money and you stand an excellent chance of winning it or of coming in for one of the smaller prizes. Don't miss this chance of winning a share of the big prize money. There is always the certainty of being rewarded with some excellent pictures you might otherwise fail to get.

THESE ARE THE JUDGES. Observe how diversified are their interests and how broad are their viewpoints and experience. You must admit that no fairer Board of Judges could be assembled than that represented here:

Madame Galli-Curci, internationally known singer; Miss Ethel Barrymore, leading actress; Howard Chandler Christy, noted artist; Clare Briggs, famous cartoonist; James R. Quirk, publisher, Photoplay magazine; Rudolf Eickemeyer, distinguished photographer, Medalist Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; Hector Charlesworth, author, critic, editor "Toronto Saturday Night"; Kenneth Wilson Williams, editor "Kodakery" and photographic expert.

For the two Monthly Child Picture Contests, the following will be judges: James R. Quirk, Rudolf Eickemeyer, Kenneth Wilson Williams.

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Name _____
(Please Print)

Street Address _____

Town and State _____

Make of Camera _____ Make of Film _____

Enclose this blank with your entry and mail to Prize Contest Office, Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, N. Y.

Do not place your name on either the front or the back of any picture. Be sure that each entry in the State Child Picture Contest is so designated on the back.

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Classified Advertising

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At the first sign of dandruff, you simply douse Listerine on the scalp full strength, and with the fingers, massage the scalp vigorously forward and backward, then up and down. Keep it up systematically.

In a surprisingly short time you will be delighted with results. We have hundreds of unsolicited letters testifying to the success of Listerine in checking dandruff.

You can understand Listerine's success when you realize that dandruff is a germ disease, and that full strength Listerine, while safe in action

and healing in effect, possesses at the same time, great germicidal power.

Even such stubborn germs as the B. Typhosus (typhoid) and M. Aureus (pus) are destroyed by it in 15 seconds—200,000,000 of them in each test. A strong statement this—and we could not make it unless we were prepared to prove it to the satisfaction of both the U. S. Government and the medical profession.

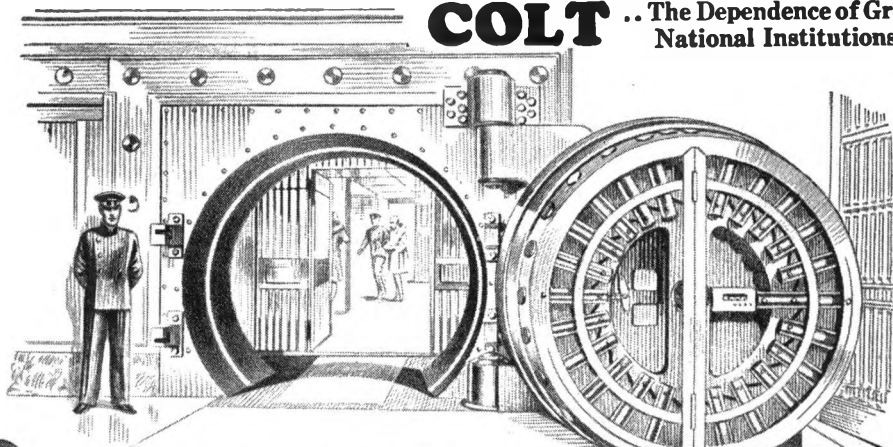
Remember that dandruff yields to antiseptic treatment and massage, and use Listerine regularly. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

LISTERINE

THE SAFE AND SOOTHING ANTISEPTIC

kills 200,000,000 germs in 15 seconds

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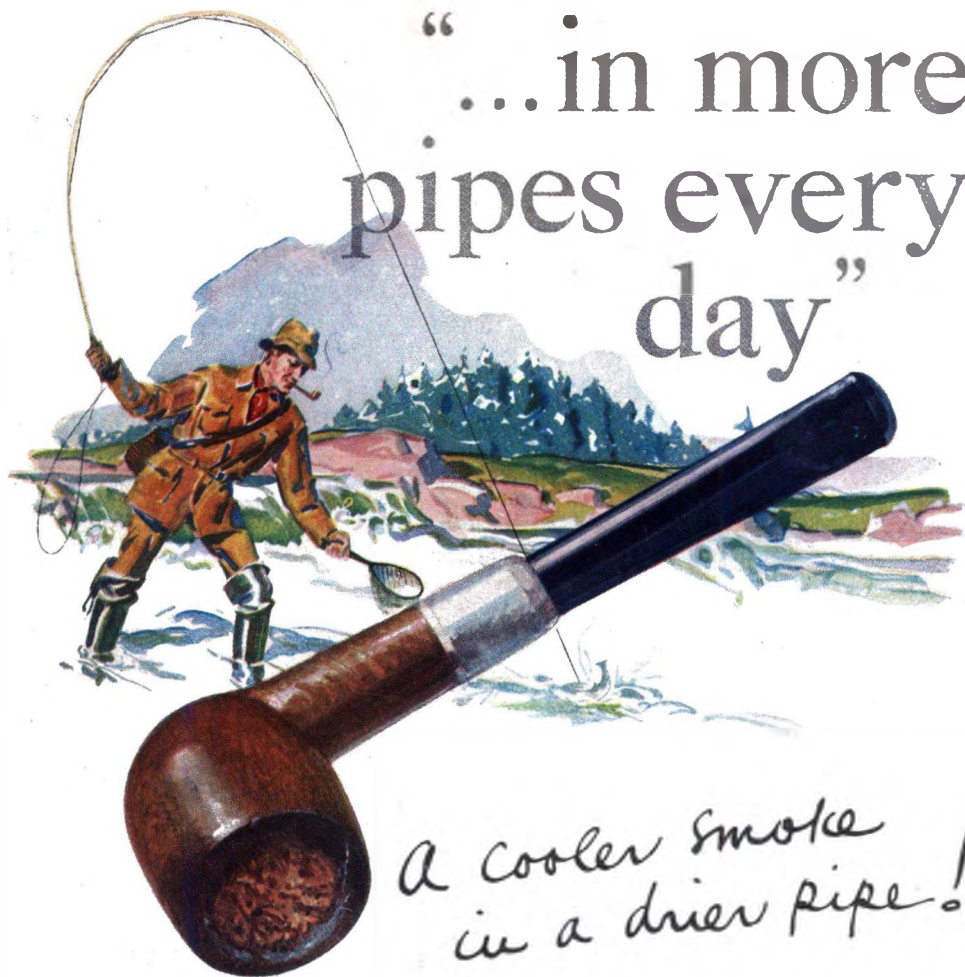
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